

# Honest Education—A Key To Drug Abuse Crisis

(Fifth of six articles.)

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The County Office of Education and a flock of dedicated laymen are leading a determined drive to educate young people on the perils of drug misuse.

The drive is not inspired by a belief that young people are the prime offenders. Many engaged in the drive believe deeply, for example, that it is the adult, not the young person, who has created the current crisis.

But educators are aware that many of the life styles in the county today create pressures upon young people which are difficult to withstand.

The thinking is that if the young people are told honestly the facts of drugs, the probabilities of addiction, the possibilities of damaging their bodies and lives through drug misuse, and the prospects their lives will be happier if they learn to cope with problems rather than seek escape from them, then they will make intelligent and informed decisions.

Guidelines for teaching students the perils of drug misuse have been developed by the Drug Education Committee of the Elementary Curriculum Council of Santa Cruz County. Chairman is Betty Ekstrand.

To develop the guidelines, the committee screened a wealth of material on drugs so that when teachers discuss drugs with students they are in a position to level with them in all particulars.

Honesty with the student is essential, Mrs. Ekstrand said. Today's young person is no dummy. Through study he has learned to separate fact from fiction, bias from objectivity.

This ability to discriminate between fact and nonsense was demonstrated last spring in San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District when high school students held panel discussions with adults under auspices of the SLV Drug Abuse Study Group.

Adults found it impossible to convince the students that alcohol abuse is more defensible than marijuana use. The stu-

dents politely but firmly shot holes in the contention of some obviously misinformed adults that marijuana is addictive in the sense alcohol can be.

The fact is that the National Institute for Mental Health does not support the contention marijuana is an addictive drug.

In a report on the subject the following statement is made:

"Authorities now think in terms of drug 'dependence' rather than 'addiction.' Marijuana does not cause physical dependence like heroin or other narcotics. This means that the body does not become dependent on continuing use of the drug. Withdrawal from marijuana does not cause physical sickness.

"A number of scientists think the drug can cause psychological dependence, however, if its users take it readily. All agree that more knowledge of the physical, personal and social consequences of marijuana use is needed before factual statements can be made."

## Drugs In SC County — Part 5

It is information such as this — factual, dispassionate, concise — that is being incorporated into the county drug abuse education program.

The students are alerted to the fact that marijuana use is undesirable, but factual reasons are given, not nonsense.

The unwisdom of alcohol use and smoking is detailed, as well.

The education program developed by Mrs. Ekstrand and her committee is for students in classes ranging from kindergarten through grade nine.

Kindergarten students are taught for example to establish the habit of asking parents or other responsible adults before eating of drinking anything new. They are helped to become aware that some everyday items may be harmful if used improperly.

At the grade nine level the students are given solid information on uses and abuses of narcotics. They are given information about alcohol, smoking, even legal penalties for misuse of narcotics.

In another phase of the program, Mrs. Ekstrand and the committee have arranged for in-service training of teachers for all school districts which wish to participate.

The County Office of Education also conducts classes in the Sunshine School for drug dependent minors on Emeline Avenue. Students referred to the school were those who had been expelled from regular school for drug related problems or arrested on drug charges, or suspected of having drug problems or those who had "dropped out."

Seven pupils were enrolled initially in the program in March of 1970 according to Douglas Eidsmore, project coordinator. By the end of June two were able to qualify for grade eight diplomas and two for high school diplomas. Since then the school has graduated still another student.

The educational program includes class social studies and individual instruction prescribed for each student, this being built

around his academic needs. Additionally there are therapeutic rap sessions, educational therapy and considerable counseling.

Other efforts to attack drug abuse through education are being led in SLV Unified School District by a committee composed of school trustees, administrators, faculty and laymen, under chairmanship of Mrs. Dawn Badger.

The district, at the urging of trustee Robert Ludlow Jr., has adopted a drug abuse education program in principle and there are plans to hire a youth counselor to work on drug problems of students and other youths in the community.

But at the present time in the worsening drug scene in the county, some of the prime causes of drug problems are being overlooked educationally: the parents.

Dr. Donald Seapy of Scotts Valley believes strongly that most of the drug problems of young people are created in the home.

"Drug use is a symptom of many things wrong, not just one thing," Seapy said. "Youth is looking for meaning outside the family, meaning in group

experience as a substitute for family experience and the emotional sense of belonging to the family, as a substitute for family experiences. Group experience is a substitute for personal feelings and identity. The child today adopts a life style or a group, whereas in the past he sought personal identity. Many do not ask what am I, who am I. Some of these go to the group, become hippies, use drugs.

"Much of the failure is parental failure to make the kids face problems, the permissive parent who is afraid to say no or to demand responsibility, the parent who does not give of himself in time or love. A child of four is taken to the TV to be entertained instead of to the sandbox to be creative. At ten years old the child is already bored but gets cookies and TV. At 14 he is given \$5 to go to the movies. All along he has not learned to solve small problems when small and so he cannot solve larger problems when he is larger. Parents are afraid to discipline their children, unaware that a show of love and concern are necessary and wanted.

"The only realistic approach to the total drug problem must include parent training and education in child raising, discipline, and the concept of the developing and growing personality of the child."

Dr. Seapy believes strongly that most young people are okay, and he thinks they should be told they are okay. He points out that of those who try drugs, from 80 to 90 per cent are experimental users, that from 15 to 30 per cent go on to sporadic use, that only about 1 to 5 per cent turn out "bad."

"We should concentrate our efforts on the 95 per cent or more, rather than blow up the 1 to 5 per cent," Seapy suggested.

Dr. Richard Svihus, county health officer, and Dr. L. J. Ruschin, director of General Hospital, join Seapy in saying that the primary cause of drug abuse in young and adults alike is the desire to escape from problems.

The medical problems involved in drug misuse, they say, are much easier to cope with than the psychological inability to face problems, to deal with life as it is.

## County Drug Education Unit

## Hear Pacific