

Booze made her feel like adult

By Mary Lou Callaway
special writer

A pretty, 22-year-old woman who calls herself Kathy nervously tells of starting on booze "when I was 11 years old."

"It made me feel like a grown-up. I went to school high on pot and booze. I nearly overdosed at 13 and attempted suicide at 15," she said.

Kathy, now an Alcoholics Anonymous member who goes to meetings six or seven times per week, was one of the panelists at the alcohol abuse seminar at West Bloomfield's Orchard Lake Middle School last week.

More than 150 people attended the program moderated by WJR radio's Mike Whorf. Co-sponsors are the Birmingham Junior League, West Bloomfield Youth Assistance and Maple Grove, Henry Ford Hospital's West Bloomfield Alcohol Treatment Center on Maple Road.

There was pain on many faces in the audience whether they were — as many admitted — alcoholics, friends and relatives of alcoholics, or seeking help for themselves or those they care about.

"I hated myself and everyone else. I couldn't stop drinking. I hung around bars. I was arrested. My life was a

nightmare, a hell hole. I barely existed. I was afraid of people, places and things," Kathy explained.

AFTER I SIGNED into Maplegrove, I was able to get in touch with my feelings. Going to AA meetings taught me how to live and love," Kathy told the audience.

Returning to her seat at the panel, she hugged her Maplegrove therapist, Dr. Suzanne Parker, as the audience applauded her courage.

Parker spoke of chemical dependency to more than just liquor, including mood altering prescription and non-prescription drugs from cough syrups to valium, the number one tranquilizer on the market today.

"The recovering alcoholic cannot take any mood altering chemicals. Diagnosis of alcoholism is not an accusation. I tell patients 'You are not responsible for the disease, but you are for the recovery.' We present them with the consequences of their behavior," Parker said.

Maplegrove family therapist Jim Cichon explained alcoholism as a family disease. Family members become co-dependents out of love, care and concern in rescuing the alcoholic.

"The old man comes home bombed, throws up on the living room rug. The

family cleans it up," Cichon graphically explained. "They (family members) put themselves between the person and the consequences. They call the boss and tell him the person with the hangover has the flu. They make excuses, buying into the alibi system."

It takes tough love on the family's part. Alcoholism is the third biggest killer. "Co-dependency can be a killer too. Co-dependents deserve treatment," Cichon said.

"THERE ARE 600 people who would have been alive in Michigan in 1980 except for this disease," added West Bloomfield youth office Tom Nelson, referring to the number of traffic deaths last year attributed to drinking.

Nelson described how difficult it is and the reaction of police when they

have to go to the home of a dead teenager to tell the parents.

Paul, a middle-aged recovering alcoholic who started drinking at 13, said "your value system slides. You don't even know why you can't quit. I first went to treatment for the wrong reason — to get my family off my back. After three months, I took one drink and blacked out."

Dry now for 10 years, Paul said "It's learning to like yourself. It took me eight months in treatment just to stop shaking."

Education is the key, according to Mary Carol Melton, a West Bloomfield member of the Junior League Alcohol Awareness Project.

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