

Symposium helps break silence about teen drug abuse

BY PAUL R. PACE
STAFF WRITER

"We're hear to break the silence," Estralee Michaelson said.

Denying that drugs are available to teens in the area or that kids do drugs isn't going to solve the problem of chemical abuse, said the Farmington schools student services and Safe Schools director.

"It takes courage to change community norms," she said.

"This is our first of hopefully many more meetings," Michaelson said during Wednesday evening's community forum, "Drugs Kill, Are You Listening? Break the Silence" at Farmington High School.

The event was dedicated to

the memory of Farmington High student Jason Starling, who passed away in October from a heroin overdose, said his mother, Pam Starling.

In attendance were parents, high schoolers and members of several help agencies, as well as area police and fire officials serving in the community's Call to Action Coalition. An array of agencies set up displays, and representatives spoke with participants in the hallway outside the auditorium.

The Call to Action Coalition, the school district and Farmington High School coordinated the event, which featured three panelists talking about drug abuse and its impact.

Law enforcement will not solve the problem, said

Richard Isaacson, special agent with the Drug Enforcement Agency.

He explained that use of hard drugs such as heroin have been on the upswing in the past 10 years. By snorting the drug, many teens don't feel the stigma of an addict using needles. But addition through snorting is just as potent, he said.

"Club drugs are an epidemic like Ecstasy and GHB," he said. Far too often, he said drugs like Ecstasy can be laced with other dangerous chemicals the user won't know about.

He said heroin is to blame for the vast majority of overdose deaths in the country.

Jeff Jay, a professional interventionist, talked about his drug and alcohol addiction

that started with his first drink as a young teen.

Jay said alcohol, the usual first step to harder drugs, is the No. 1 cause of drug deaths, killing 100,000 people a year.

He said stereotypical images of drug addicts sleeping by dumpsters aren't real.

"They're people just like you and me here," he said. Being raised in a good family and getting excellent grades didn't stop his plunge into alcoholism and drug addiction, he said.

"By the time I was 26 I had drunk and drugged my way through college without a degree," he said.

"I had a bleeding ulcer, neuropathy in my legs. The denial and delusion is normal for dependency."

Deep into his addictions, Jay said suicide seemed the only logical way out. While he was planning his death in a flop house in California, a phone call from his father in New York was the first step to recovery.

He said it's easy for a parent to deny their child has a problem.

"We never see it in the person we love," he said.

Nan Reynolds, a family educator, said parents have a tough role in dealing with the issue.

"We want to be nice and loving," she said.

"Parents do too much rescuing and protecting."

She said parents don't need to be popular. They need to be parents.

"We're afraid to risk their disapproval," she said.

Michaelson said keeping discussion about the issue open and having parents meeting on a regular basis is a way to break the silence in the community.

"We all know we have a lot to learn and none of us is perfect," she said.

"This is a way to reach out to each other."

People wanting to talk and share information are invited to meet at the Grand Cafe next to the Civic Theater in downtown Farmington from 7-9 p.m. Wednesday, Dec. 11.

The event is sponsored by the Families in Action sector of the Call to Action Coalition.

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TRAILER

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That will mean fewer false readings.

In addition, the new trailer will record speeds measured during the time it's stationed in a neighborhood. Currently, five days of trailer time is followed by active radar patrols, and officials can't be sure whether traffic is affected by the trailer or the tickets.

Being able to measure speeds on a day-to-day basis will result in a more accurate picture.

"It will provide us with empirical data as to the effectiveness of the trailer," Goss said. "We may be able to leave it in place even longer." Because the radar unit won't be certified, officers can't

just sit by the trailer and use that number to issue a citation. Goss said in addition to certified radar units, patrol officers have access to a laser unit.

"It's a hand-held, battery-operated unit, so you never know who's holding it," he said.

An officer in plain clothes could use the laser detector while standing on a street corner, for instance, and signal a "chase car" when someone is caught speeding.

"The greatest single complaint of anyone living in the suburbs is generally related to traffic," city manager Frank Laukaitis said. "This is just an education tool - and it's a good one to have, especially in this community."

Goss said the trailer's delivery will depend on whether the unit has to be built or is ready for shipment.

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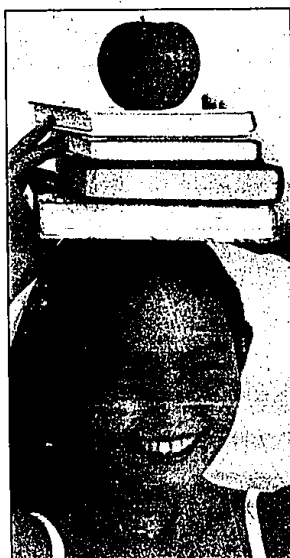
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