

# Drug Store Project – 10 years of anti-drug message

*Publisher's note: This is first of a few articles about the Drug Store Project. This marks the 10-year anniversary of the program. This year's event will be April 2 at Lake Tahoe Community College. For more info about volunteering, donating or if you have questions, email Lisa Huard at [lhuard@ymail.com](mailto:lhuard@ymail.com).*

**By Lisa Huard**

The Drug Store Project is a reality-based depiction produced each year for the sixth-graders in the South Lake Tahoe area. We strive to show our youth the possible consequences one can experience with drug and alcohol use.

The research out there is mind-boggling even for those of us who regularly use it. There are endless studies and just as many interpretations of the data, but one thing continues to stand out amongst all the information; the sooner we can deter a youth from experimenting with drugs and alcohol, the better the chance they will not use drugs as an adult.



It's not real in this scene from Drug Store Project –

but the consequences of drug use and abuse could result in death. Photo/LTN file

Going from childhood to adolescence is the tightrope our kids walk every day and learning “who they are” and “what they believe to be true about themselves” is their individual challenge.

Yes we can teach them the information, providing we’ve taken the time to understand it ourselves. But when the rubber hits the road it will be the individual themselves who makes the final decision.

“Choices, what are yours” is a reminder to our kids that they are truly the one making decisions about their health and future.

This day-long event isn’t the answer, but it is an opportunity for all involved to learn factual information and to step out of the “me zone” and learn about how our behaviors affect all of those who love and care for us. Tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and other drug use/abuse has an enormous negative ripple effect on family members, friends, communities, and our nation. It costs us in lives and it’s financially costing our nation more and more.

The National Institute on Drug Abuse conducts a yearly survey that focuses on the nation’s eighth-, 10th-, and 12th-grade students from 395 public and private schools accounting for approximately 50,000 students. Students are surveyed as teenagers and followed subsequently for many years on an individual basis. The 2012 Monitoring the Future survey is comprehensive and one conclusion drawn shows a continued high use of marijuana by our kids.

Our local California Healthy Kids Survey mirrors that concern. The survey also showed that teens’ perception of marijuana’s

harmfulness is on the decline; they believe that it's not such a big deal. This in itself could be the reason of increased experimentation/use of marijuana use amongst our youth.

NIDA sites a 38-year funded study which was published this year in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences which showed a significant drop in IQ (8-points) between the ages of 13 and 38 of people who were cannabis dependent. Those using cannabis heavily before age 18 showed impaired mental abilities even after they stopped using. Their findings, as many others, show a link between prolonged marijuana use and cognitive impairment.

I'd love to say that our educational system provided for drug prevention and violence prevention education beginning in grade K and throughout a child's learning career, but it doesn't. If it did, if the money and time were spent, I do believe our children would do better as students, be more successful meandering through adolescence, and would be happier and more thriving adults. I also venture to say that with consistent and accurate information in school and at home, we'd have less of a demand for drugs therefore we'd see less deaths, less health issues, less health costs, and more productive citizens.

As I indicated earlier, the Drug Store Project isn't a cure, but it does provide all involved with information to consider and a platform to begin the discussion. We can all do our part by becoming more knowledgeable, more aware, and more approachable in speaking and supporting our youth.

If you'd like to see a bit more about our program, go online.

*Lisa Huard is a safe schools consultant who lives in South Lake Tahoe.*