

# Drug Store Project's message continues to be relevant

By Kathryn Reed

Prevention can save lives, especially when it comes to drug use and school violence.

Once a year sixth-graders on the South Shore participate in the Drug Store Project. Today is that day.

It's one of the few proactive educational pieces left for Lake Tahoe Unified School District students to participate in.

"Regardless of what is out there, it's illegal for them. We are trying to demonstrate the reasons why. Their bodies and brains are growing," Lisa Huard told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This is the 15th year Huard has been organizing the event. It is staged at Lake Tahoe Community College, with hundreds of students going through the same scenario. It's a party, one kid says yes to taking something illicit and it goes bad from there.

The people involved are not actors – they are law enforcement, district attorney's employees, court officials, even a mortician. It takes 220 volunteers and 47 agencies to pull it off.

It's powerful.

The unfortunate thing is Drug Store Project is not open to the public because more than just this age group could use this sobering dose of reality.

Huard said the curriculum could easily be taught at younger grade levels. The drug problem is that prevalent at an early age.

New this year will be a component with Greg Bergner, a doctor with Barton Health, who will present a segment about marijuana and the adolescent.

Countless studies have shown how the brain continues to develop until age 26. The effects of marijuana on those younger than 26 can be detrimental. Taking cannabis in any form before then can stunt one's cognitive development. In other words, you won't be as smart as you could be if you use marijuana as a young person.

With medicinal and recreational marijuana now the norm, it makes the message even harder to convey. Kids see older siblings, their parents and other adults partaking in pot and other drugs. They don't understand why it's bad for them.

Alcohol is still a major issue as well for youth.

"There are more children today who do not know how to deal with stressors," Huard said. "They see others self-medicate. This just compounds the problems. We don't have the resources for people, especially in this community."

Huard believes beside just telling kids drugs are bad, it's important to find out why they are using and how they are getting the product. They need to understand why they want to feel whatever change the drug brings them. Then, perhaps, it's possible to get to the root of what led them to consume whatever they are taking.

With more parents using, the message through the years has changed from people who do drugs are bad people to the drugs are bad. This eliminates the conflict of mom and/or dad are bad people because of their habits.

"We need to make it clear to kids that drug usage is bad behavior on people's parts," Huard said. "There needs to be awareness about what goes in their body."

Drug use is known to lead to other bad decisions. There so many consequences, and often they aren't good.

Drug Store Project is about teaching kids that they have choices.

For those who advocate schools should just be about academic learning, Huard said phooey and then some.

"It's been the three R's for the last seven years and look where we are at. There is no consistency in the school district," Huard said.