



Counselors concentrate on undecided in drug talks...

By Kathy Hurley

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"Drinking is the last frontier," Brenda Conlan said about the high rate of alcohol consumption among teens. "It's the thing (students) think they can get away with."

Conlan, along with her partner Jeff Wolfsberg, of Lifestyle Risk Reduction, travel to middle and high schools around the world. They talk to students about the problems associated with drug abuse. They have visited schools in the Philippines, Thailand, China, Cairo, Norway and throughout the United States. In a question and answer session with the Eagle Eye staff, they explained that SAS is not necessarily different from any other school they have visited or worked with, particularly in substance abuse.

"I knew that (alcohol was the drug of choice) before I even got here. It's the number one most used drug amongst teenagers," Conlan said.

Students at SAS may consume alcohol in greater quantities than other schools because of Singapore's liberal drinking laws. Students are less likely to be experimenting with marijuana because of its scarcity and legal consequences. Alcohol seems to be a safer choice for substance use.

"People start with the drug that scares them the least. No one gets up in the morning, never having smoked pot or used alcohol, and says 'you know I've been thinking about crack lately. I'll give it a try.'" Wolfsberg said.

Students may feel that drinking is safest for them, because it is legal and does not show up in drug testing.

Although Singapore's policy for drug use includes long jail terms or even death, these consequences are not an effective deterrent for everyone. There are some people who will take drugs no matter what the consequences. Likewise, there are some people that will avoid drugs for personal or ethical reasons, without taking laws into account. The laws are aimed at those in the middle. A person who is thinking about experimenting with drugs might be dissuaded because of the legal penalties.

"You'll always have a population that doesn't (take drugs), as well as people who do it no matter what, Conlan said. "We're concerned with the middle people; they tend to be pretty reasonable. Hair testing makes the decision for most of them."

When talking with students, Wolfsberg and Conlan do not expect to be able to convince all of the users to suddenly get sober. Instead, they said they attempt to make those who are not taking drugs feel good about the decisions that they have made so that they continue to avoid drug use.

Conlan and Wolfsberg are both recovering addicts, and have been in recovery for many years. Wolfsberg said he initially quit using drugs because of the pain it caused. Not only was he feeling physical pain, but emotional pain as many important relationships in his life began to deteriorate. Brenda quit because she felt that all of the people who she loved no longer trusted her.

"I wanted to be honest more than I wanted to be high," Conlan said.

During her worst times, Conlan said her parents slept with their wallets in bed with them because they feared that she would steal from them to feed her addiction.

Recovering addicts stay in recovery for different reasons. Some stay sober in order to preserve relationships, others because they cannot afford the high costs of their addictions, and still others to avoid the legal consequences of drug use.

"My life is too busy right now, I don't have room for (drugs) anymore. It just doesn't fit who I am today," Wolfsberg said.