

Students hear the 'straight' word on dangers of drugs

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ST. PETERSBURG - First the students passed around a fried "brain."

They'd all seen the commercial, the one where an announcer shows bubbling oil and says, "This is drugs," adds an egg and says, "This is your brain on drugs" as the egg sizzles. "Get the picture?"

As the sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students at Azalea Middle School passed around a crisply fried egg, Mary Baker asked how many thought people can be scared out of trying drugs.

No one raised a hand.

"Right," said Ms. Baker, a drug counselor from Blacks Against Dangerous Drugs, a local group. "I know enough to know I can't frighten you."

She and school officials hoped the persuasion to stay away from drugs would come from Chris [REDACTED] and Shannon [REDACTED] two young people for whom experimentation became addiction. Both are now in rehabilitation at Straight Inc.

They were speaking at Azalea on Tuesday as part of the school's Awareness of Substance Abuse program.

[REDACTED] and [REDACTED] both began using drugs at age 11.

[REDACTED], now 20, said he never thought he'd use drugs. But then, as he got older, "I felt if I didn't do it, my friends would say, 'You're a wimp,' or whatever."

For [REDACTED], using drugs led to selling drugs. "I didn't stand on street corners," he said. "I sold in quantities.... I'd go out and spend \$1,000 in one night and have nothing to show the next day and still owe money to the person above me."

Crack was only a way to get quick money at first, he said. "At first I didn't use it; I just sold it. But the power of the drug makes you want more and more."

Being a drug dealer was dangerous, he said. "I remember times having guns stuffed in my face, people coming behind me and trying to pull a knife on me, getting hit over the head with bricks and stuff.... It gets real violent, a lot violent; sometimes people die."

[REDACTED] started by getting high a couple of times a week.

She gradually began using drugs heavily, rebelled against her parents and was expelled from school. She overdosed twice and attempted suicide.

She eventually left her parents' house to move in with her 22-year-old boyfriend, who is now in jail. She sometimes had sex with men who would give her drugs, she said.

"I thought people liked me, but it was only because I had drugs," she said.

When somebody tried to talk about the ill effects of drugs, she told the students, "I'd sit there and laugh like you."

Now, [REDACTED] said, talking about the bad times helps her stay away from drugs.

Being drug-free doesn't mean being fun-free, ██████ told the group.

"I don't sit at home reading the Bible 24 hours a day," she said. "I still have fun, but I don't use drugs."

[Illustration]

BLACK AND WHITE PHOTO, Tony ██████ Straight Inc.: 88; Caption: Young people from Straight talk to students at Azalea Middle School.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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