

The Invisible Menace

The classless society of ups and downs

Courtesy of New York Times
By DIANE ZIMMERMAN
Fourth of a series

With drug abuse, as with other ailments prevention beats cure a hundred to one. It is strange, then, that until recently, very little public money was devoted to helping young people stay away from drugs. In 1970, for example, the federal government spent less than \$4 million to alert American youth to the dangers of chemical killers such as amphetamines, barbiturates and heroin.

Finally, however, the gap is being filled. In the coming year Washington will pour more than \$70 million into preventive educational campaigns. The states and cities of the country are also unbuttoning. New York State, acutely aware of the menace, has been prompt and unstinting in responding.

In the school year ended, about \$20 million of the state's Youthful Drug Abuser Program funds put into every elementary, junior and senior high school of New York City what Addiction Services Agency Commissioner Graham Finney calls "The nation's only large and coordinated drug prevention program."

The state, through its Narcotic Addiction Control Commission, also staffs 17 prevention centers, produces educational materials, and sponsors a network of Narcotic Guidance Councils. The NGCs began in 1970. They are basically community-based volunteer operations which counsel kids about drug abuse, conduct education programs for adults, and bring together youth and adults to evaluate and plan for the drug needs in their own locale. Outside New York City, most NGCs work closely with schools. Today, there are 468 of them.

We're the leaders
"We're the leaders in this field," says NACC's Ben Lemon wryly. "But there's no pride in that; we're also the leader in the problem."

At the same time, such diverse and unlikely communities as Los Alamos, N.M., and Dubuque, Iowa, are also getting into the drug prevention business. Storefront, drop-in type youth centers are cropping up here and in cities across the U.S. to offer a loose collection of activities—often just a place to rap—as an alternative lure to the forbidden fruits of drugs.

And "drugs are dumb" in a hundred flavors is served up to each man, woman and child of us from TV screens, subway ads, store windows and magazine pages.

If time, energy and the rapid injection of millions in cash can cure anything, drug abuse should stop dead in its tracks.

Instead, some experts are beginning to worry that much of this information explosion has been an ill-aimed blast.

In the first place, kids who are going to fool with drugs often begin by junior high school. Yet very few of the films and booklets aim for the best target: the primary school child.

Secondly, scare tactics and phony information have fouled the lines in some programs and widened the credibility gap. "Kids," says New York drug expert Dr. James Cadden, "aren't as gullible as some parents and teachers would have us believe. If you make a lot of misstatements about things they know about, they won't believe you when you say that goofballs can give them convulsions or that speed can make them paranoid."

For every kid scared off of drugs by heavy-handed and hysterical lectures on the "certain" dangers of pot or the "proven" tie-in between LSD and birth defects,

several more get turned off on the prevention. Wipe-out-drugs programs are fraught with perils, even when the adults do their best to keep them honest.

Take, for instance, the use of ex-addicts to rap with kids. Studies have shown that students are more likely to listen when the info comes straight, so to speak, from the horse's mouth.

Yet the Ford Foundation report, "Dealing with Drug Abuse," cautions: "Although (ex-addicts) are popular with students for telling it like it is, there is justifiable fear that providing them with an aura of prestige may lead significant numbers of students to believe that they can and should try drugs themselves."

And Dr. Frederick Flach, a Cornell psychiatrist, raises another interesting point: "Does the presence of an addict who has conquered his addiction give kids the message that drug habits can be conquered, and are less of a problem than students thought they were?"

Finally, programs and materials may be pumped into communities and schools so fast and furiously that they can blow the drug scene entirely out of perspective, like a whale afloat in a bathtub.

Counselors in some New York treatment centers worry about that. Al Ballard at Manhattan's West Side Rehabilitation is one: "All the programs in the schools aim at kids on drugs," he says, "so we find others trying to be addicts just to get a little of the attention for themselves."

In a related experience, Columbia doctors mounted a super, round-the-clock offensive against drugs with incoming freshmen a couple years back. After it was over, says psychiatrist Dr. John Milici, "We don't think we accomplished a thing. If anything, the drug traffic went up!"

Teaching aids, too, have come in for their share of knuckle raps. Dr. Cadden contends, and others agree, that lots of them—movies, ads and pamphlets alike—produced for kids are "little better than a how-to directory: how to mainline, how to snort, how to recognize new pills."

Or, as Richard Jordan, a spokesman for the President's Special Action Office for Drug Abuse, puts it, "There can easily be too much information communication about drugs."

The Special Action Office, therefore, will now subject all government-prepared film strips and booklets to a "media pre-test and preview evaluation" before they are printed and sent out. Will the materials entice rather than inform? Do they work with the group they are aimed at?

"We've been very subjective about this so far," Jordan admits. "So we're pooling our subjectivity at this point to at least let each other know what we're doing."

A weak link—parents
Another weak link in the prevention chain that needs reinforcing (the NGCs are one way) is adult education. Parents often know less about drugs than their fourth-graders do.

To illustrate, a New York psychiatrist recently got a call from a couple of parents in a panic. They'd accidentally found a couple of marijuana joints in their son's dresser drawer and wanted to get him into a methadone maintenance program immediately.

Perhaps in the long run, the whole concept of preventive education, homing in like a guided missile on single target—drugs—needs some rethinking.

Dr. Flach for one thinks so. "In most instances," he believes,

"it only takes half an hour to inform intelligent youngsters on the facts about drugs." The whole subject should be embedded, he contends, in a total, upgraded health education program in the schools.

He doesn't mean deadly half hours each week on hygiene and body functions that we remember being delivered in a drone by half-asleep physical ed teachers.

He means health education that deals realistically with the emotional crisis of daily life. Drug abuse doesn't develop in a vacuum. "We must offer youngsters other options to handle their emotional needs," Flach says. "What we really need to teach kids is the ABCs of living."

But however we deliver this inoculation against drugs, we need to be sure it is working.

We can say the new math is good if we see that kids can add better. But drug education, because its objective is not simply to inform but to change attitudes, is harder to assess. Yet, until widespread evaluations of the proliferating prevention programs do take place, we won't really know if we're fighting drug abuse with strong medicine—or merely a placebo.

West Side School News

Open House at West Side School was held Thursday evening, Oct. 26, from 7 to 9 p.m. in observance of American Education Week.

We were especially pleased that so many parents and friends were able to attend. It was very gratifying and we hope they will visit whenever they can. We also encourage parent-teacher conferences. You can make an appointment by calling the school office or contacting the child's teacher.

Our Parent-Teacher Association is holding its membership drive. To date they have 104 members, a record number.

National School Lunch Week

was observed Oct. 9 through the 13. Children in all grades drew posters depicting the nutritional values of a good school lunch or breakfast. Prizes were given to the children who carried out this theme.

Our student teachers completed their teaching Tuesday, Oct. 31. However, they will remain until Christmas vacation to give extra help to students who are having difficulty in reading. The student teachers are as follows: Miss Susan Webb, Kdgn., Miss Susan Petrillo, first grade, Miss Nancy Nadeau, second grade, Miss Andrea Sutton, fourth grade, and Mrs. Monique Sorrell, fifth grade.



GAINING PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE in quantity cooking, students at BOCES special education center at Balmar prepare approximately 130 meals a day.



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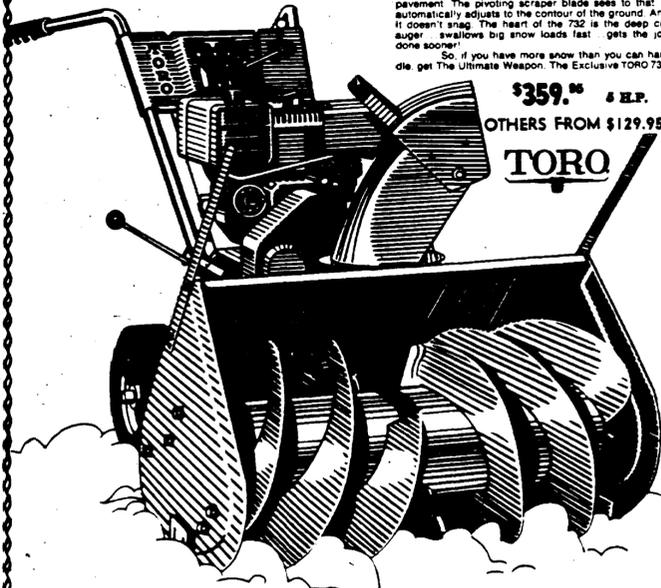
Remember the winters past? (Who can't?) The snow fell and fell, and fell. Drifts were high, backs were sore from shoveling. Well, this year TORO has really done something about winter in our neck of the woods. We've made the new 732, the biggest, widest, heaviest-duty snowthrower of them all. We call it The Ultimate Weapon. 7 big horses. Cuts a 32-inch swath. Yet, it's easy to handle, with exclusive power-drive. And it moves right out with three forward speeds. Does a clean job too, right down to the pavement. The pivoting scraper blade sees to that. It automatically adjusts to the contour of the ground. And it doesn't snag. The heart of the 732 is the deep cut auger, swallows big snow loads fast, gets the job done sooner!

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