

HEALTH & WELLNESS

CASA's Red Ribbon Week: "Above the Influence"

By Nicole Kiprilov

Each year, Manhasset CASA's Red Ribbon Week has reached out to hundreds of teens in the Manhasset community. This year was CASA's first Above the Influence Day, which took place on October 18th. The purpose of Red Ribbon Week and this particular day is to convey an important message to youth about living a life that is "above the influence." Members of Manhasset CASA strive to convey important information about drugs and alcohol and to stress the importance of making smart choices and being strong enough to say no when needed. On this day, Dr. Stephen Dewey came to the High School to talk about the effects of drug and alcohol on the teenage brain. His presentation was called, "The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction." Dr. Stephen Dewey conducts research at the Feinstein Institute for Medical Research at North Shore LIJ Hospital. Dr. Dewey's presentation was absolutely incredible. The information that he provided was valuable, important, and completely alarming. He provided a very in-depth perspective on the issue and he supported his perspective with statistics that most teens are not aware of. Dr. Dewey came to the Manhasset Student Senate meeting to have a casual discussion with students who represent the entire student body. His formal presentation was followed by a question and answer session with the students. Dr. Dewey is a parent who has a lot of experience with the teenage High School experience. He has conducted drug abuse studies for over 30 years. His drug abuse research is mainly focused on caffeine, cocaine, heroin, ecstasy, methamphetamine, marijuana, nicotine, amphetamines, alcohol, and solvents. The presentation started off with some pertinent information about alcohol. Up until last year, alcohol was the number one killer of High School

teenagers on Long Island. The reason why overconsumption of alcohol leads to death is because the brain grows until the age of 21. Teenagers begin to mess around with alcohol during important developmental years. The brain develops at a rate of 25% a year, which means that the younger a person is when he/she abuses alcohol, the more damage is inflicted upon the brain. Dr. Dewey stated that if alcoholism has not been acquired by the age of 21, the chance of it occurring after that is very minimal. Alcoholics typically have a history of substance abuse during their developmental stages. However, there is a genetic predisposition to alcoholism. About one third of alcoholics have a parent who was an alcoholic. More than 92% of High Schoolers report being drunk at least once before graduation. Dr. Dewey also talked about the experiences of elementary school students with substance abuse, particularly the use of inhalants. Little kids often inhale glue and rubber cement. It became a trend for girls to use white-out to paint their nails, backpacks, and clothes. The fact that these kids are unknowingly huffing solvents and getting high is terrible, but what is even worse is the fact that the use of inhalants in elementary school gradually leads to the use of cocaine and marijuana in high school. This period of progression is a very sensitive time for teenagers. That led into the second part of his discussion, which was mainly about the use of Adderall among High School and college students. Adderall is a drug that is typically taken by individuals with A.D.H.D. When it is taken for A.D.H.D., Adderall is very safe and not addictive. However, addiction is 3-5 times higher if Adderall is taken by an individual who does not have A.D.H.D. Adderall speeds up the heart and respiration, and interferes with hor-

mone regulation. The effects are mainly age-dependent. What college students, in particular, do not realize is that Adderall helps with

the study process, but it does not help retain information. Therefore, kids abuse more than one substance in order to relieve stress, study, and earn good grades at the same time. What's worse is that alcohol, on top of all that, magnifies the effect of any drug about 10-12 times. Dr. Dewey showed some pictures of PET scans that portray the dramatic change of the brain after binge drinking. He also shared some of the experiences he has had with students trying to ingest alcohol through different methods. It was simply frightening to listen to examples of teenagers who have lost their lives because they have not made the right choice. Many of those teenagers were not aware of the information that was provided by Dr. Dewey that night, but many teenagers also did not receive support from their community, home environment, and school. We are extremely lucky to be living in such a community, where teachers and administrators are striving to influence their students in a positive way. The Manhasset community provides a safe and enjoyable environment for all of its residents and students. CASA has partnered with many organizations to ensure that Red Ribbon Week is a week filled with motivation and support when it comes to creating a lifestyle that is "above the influence." ■

