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## Parents the first line of defense in preventing teen alcohol/drug abuse, READI experts say

By Karen Billing

Parents at the Teen Volunteers in Action luncheon Jan. 19 received a crash course in drug and alcohol trends among teens in North County (see event photos, page 34). The mother-son community service organization hosted guest speakers Joseph Olesky and Tiffany Findell from the San Dieguito High School District READI program (Recovery Education and Alcohol/Drug Instruction) and some of the information about what children are getting into these days came as a shock to the mothers in attendance. "We're not trying to scare you," Findell said. "We're not saying every kid in the school district does these things, but 90 percent have been exposed to everything we'll be discussing."

Findell said the top three drug trends among North County teenagers is alcohol, marijuana and prescription drugs. While alcohol and marijuana are the constants, the third drug always alternates, she said. Lately teenagers — and adults — in this country are getting deeper into trouble abusing prescription drugs.

With alcohol, Olesky and Findell say they are hearing that at least once a week teenagers are binge drinking after school. Findell said they know what time their parents get home from work and will drink as much as they can before mom or dad comes home and then pretend to be tired. Findell said 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. is a critical time, when teenagers are often alone. It's important to get them involved in activities so they don't have time to get into trouble.

On Friday and Saturdays, the teens often have "sleepovers," which Olesky said means going over to a friend's house whose parent is not home to drink, use drugs or sometimes go to Long Beach or Los Angeles to party. "Sleepovers mean bad," Olesky said. "They are hurting themselves, getting into accidents and, unfortunately, some of them are dying."

New trends for parents to look for with alcohol are energy drinks spiked with alcohol. Some energy drinks actually do have a high alcohol content, but it is very hard to tell them from regular drinks. Parents need to pay attention to the labels, Findell said.

Another trend are "pocket shots," little packets of liquor that look similar to energy gel packs that runners use. School janitors are reporting finding them in campus trash.

With marijuana, Findell cautions that it is not the same drug as it used to be. Fifteen years ago the government made a super-powerful brand, intended for medical use for cancer and AIDS patients. The level of THC in pot 15 or more years ago was about 4 percent. The kind kids are smoking these days is about 40 percent.

Findell said the teenagers are using this kind of pot and they are smoking about four to six times a day.

The prescription drugs are the most troubling for Olesky and Findell.

"Kids aren't afraid to use prescriptions," said Olesky. "Pills are not scary to kids and they are easy to hide."

They have seen kids abusing Ritalin and Adderall, drugs prescribed to children with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. Teens will double up doses or mash it up and snort it like cocaine.

They will move onto drugs such as Vicodin, Percocet, Xanax, Xanax Klonopin, medicines that can be found in their parents' medicine cabinets. Oxycontin is another drug teenagers are abusing. A high pain medication, they are taking off the time release, snorting it or smoking it off tin foil.

The high is very similar to heroin and Olesky said often teens will move on to using heroin as it is cheaper— Oxycontin is \$50 a pill, a gram of heroin is \$15.

"This (heroin) is in our neighborhood," said Olesky, who said he hates this

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"nasty" drug the most as it has claimed the lives of four family members. The school district and READI will host a special parent seminar on prescription drug use on Feb. 6 at Torrey Pines High School at 6 p.m. The guest speaker will be Rocky Herron from the Drug Enforcement Administration.

To keep teenagers safe, it's important for parents to be involved, Olesky said. Parents are the first line of defense.

Many parents remarked that the signs that teenagers are on drugs are very similar to normal teenage behavior, things like mood swings, sleeping a lot, loss of appetite or a large appetite. Olesky said the signs do look like normal teenage behavior but to the nth degree—especially if they are increasingly secretive, lose interest in all activities and exhibit poor hygiene. He said it's a good idea to set and enforce rules, "don't wait for them to trip up" and occasionally check their rooms, vehicles and text messages. Another option is drug testing. The READI program offers drug testing kits on its website for \$3.

"Tell them I'm doing this because I want you to have a reason to say no," Findell said. "It helps them sometimes to have an out. When someone asks them if they want to do drugs they can say 'No, my parents test me.'" Olesky said they also need to put a stop to what he calls "party parents," parents who allow teens to drink or do drugs in their home, often when they are home.

"If you're seeing these things in your community, you have to report it," said Olesky. "It is not acceptable."

Both Olesky and Findell said they are always available to answer questions for district and non-district parents. Parents can contact them at (760) 753-1121 ext. 5304 or visiting their website at <http://teachers.sduhsd.net/READI/>.

