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*School's Out at Centennial High School
photo by Chris Johnson*

Drugs in Our School? One School's Solution

By Wendy Crooks

THE STUDENTS AT CENTENNIAL HIGH SCHOOL in Frisco would like to keep talk of their drug activities on the "DL," which for those of us who are older than 25 or simply don't get out much, means "down low." They want to be discreet and quiet about their many dealings. The principals at the school, however, have implemented a plan called TIPSS, which is designed to get students talking. They want to bring these activities out in the open and possibly thwart them from occurring on their campus.

TIPSS, which stands for Titans Investing in the Promotion of Safe Schools, is a program that each campus principal can choose whether to implement or not. The premise of the program is that a student may be

paid money for good leads that pan out with regard to drugs or any other unsafe activity that happens on campus. According to the Frisco Independent School District (FISD) Communications Department, the program is being funded by the Activity Fund at each school, which comes from profits from the vending machines. While Randy Spain, principal of Centennial High School has decided to give the program a try; it looks like he will have his work cut out for him.

After talking with a young lady from Centennial who wishes to remain anonymous, I learned so much more about the tremendous problem that drugs have become for many of our teens. "Jane Doe," a junior, said that if kids aren't doing drugs, they're talking

about when and where they can meet to get some. "On campus," said Jane, "it is common to overhear someone in the cafeteria talking about when and where they will meet to get a bag of weed. Just the other day, I overheard someone telling someone else about how this major dealer was coming to town and that he'd have all sorts of stuff – and cheap!"

Like many of you who grew up in the 80s, we always had kids that we referred to as "the druggies." The students were automatically broken into four categories: the popular or the "in crowd," the jocks, the brains and the druggies. "The druggies" always seemed to be the misfits of the group looking for a place where they could fit in and doing drugs was what

they thought would work. I wondered exactly what kind of teen was using drugs these days. Jane quickly told me that it wasn't like that anymore. She informed me that nowadays all classes of kids do drugs. "Popular kids are now doing them as well as jocks, druggies, and of course the 'Goth' crowd is doing drugs," she said. She added that she's also noticed more girls using in the last few years.

WHERE IS TEEN DRUG ACTIVITY?

How many parents think that dropping the kids off at the mall to "hangout" or go to the movies is a harmless thing to do? It appears that many of the drug and money exchanges are happening right there in this seemingly harmless environment. Instead of catching a movie, the kids are going to catch their next high. Jane further explained that while the mall is a great place to meet for drug dealing, many deals take place at parties and even in dark alleys; basically anywhere you probably won't find police.

When I asked her what she and her friends thought about the TIPSS program, Jane said that the students really weren't taking it seriously. She said they often mock it by saying, as they're watching their peers do or buy drugs, "We know what you're doing. We're going to turn you in and make some money." It appears to be a big joke among the kids because no one seems to really want to rat out their friends. Besides not wanting to look like a sissy or something worse, some of the students fear what might happen to them if it was learned that they were the ones to tell on a fellow student.

Mr. Spain offers a different story though. On the Titan News TV website, which is produced by students at Centennial High School, Mr. Spain explained that "students have already gone to administrators voluntarily and given information for the good of the school." Possibly in a utopian society these leads would continue to come and the drugs would disappear.

A BETTER SOLUTION?

Jane believes that while it probably won't work at Centennial, the program might be best suited for middle school



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kids. She said that they would probably be quicker to rat on their friends and not smart enough to be afraid of the consequences in doing so. She said that when she was at Clark Middle School she knew of plenty of kids who did drugs. Perhaps a program like this should start there.

I wondered out loud if the students don't think TIPSS will work, what the solution for Centennial might be. "One of the biggest problems," Jane said, "is that hardly any of the students have jobs but yet they have tons of money in this area of town and drugs are what they're spending it on." She explained that ironically most of the parents are the ones giving them the money for these activities and are oblivious as to what they're spending the money on. She also believes that some parents know that their kids are spending their money on weed or other drugs but just turn their heads because they don't care. She added, "Either way, the money keeps coming."

I asked her what she thought about an undercover student/cop as a way to help identify the kids. She thought that would be a good idea saying, "It would be easy to find them." While she assured me that she doesn't do drugs, Jane said that if she ever wanted to, it wouldn't be hard at all to get some.

Jane said that despite all of the drug activity, the school does have pretty strict policies. It seems to her that the parents and teachers both are starting to become more aware of the problem. A police officer, who is referred to as the Resource Officer, is on campus each day, all day, for safety purposes. The teachers and administrators are working pretty closely with the Resource Officer when they see any signs of drug usage and refer the student or students to him for further investigation.

Whether they ultimately catch the bad guys or not, it does seem that the TIPSS program is at least boosting awareness. Staff, students and parents alike are becoming more aware of the problem of drugs but the end result remains to be seen.

Wendy Crooks is a freelance writer living in Plano.