Takeways from the Municipal Drug Strategy Session held at Gananoque Intermediate Secondary School April 5, 2018

The 2.5 hour MDS session at GISS was very informative. Highlights which I picked up:

- Dr. Paula Hunter, the Medical Officer of Health in L-G &L, highlighted the goal of the Health Unit and of this session which was to promote healthy living lifestyles and reduce harm. Other strategies include: building on individual and community assets; using health promotion strategies; supporting developmental assets and resiliency; early recognition, intervention and support are key.

- The use of cannabis in Leeds-Grenville & Lanark is very common and wide-spread among all age groups. For example, 23% of population reported using cannabis at least once in the past year. One in six in the over 65 age group use cannabis. Use is more prevalent in rural versus urban areas.

- Starting cannabis use early (prior to mid-20s in age), while the brain is still developing, may lead to more lasting problems.

- Drug use increased as students advance from Grade 7 – Grade 12 (2% to 36.9%). Alcohol use from students in Gr. 7 – 12 ranged from 10.5% - 68.3 %.1% of students in Grades 7 -12 use cannabis daily. One in eight used cannabis and alcohol on the same occasion at least once per year. These statistics are from the CAMH (Centre for Alcohol and Mental Health) which conducted the Ontario Youth Drug Study. See link below.


- There are numerous reasons why people use cannabis and one is anxiety and stress reduction. Unfortunately, the opposite effect sometimes occurs leading to psychosis and schizophrenia.

- Though drugs were the focus of this session, there are equal or more serious implications for the use and abuse of alcohol.
The major factor in the use of drugs is the potential harm to the human brain which continues to develop into the mid 20’s.

There is definitely insufficient data and research to determine the safe levels of drug use.

How best to address the issue with kids? Heather D’Alessio, a student at Algonquin and an Executive Board member for CSSDP (the Canadian Students For Sensible Drug Policy) had an “in” and “out” list of actions. For example, lecturing, stigmatizing, shocking, etc. were out. Really “in” was having student-lead, peer to peer conversations, evidence-based opportunities, going beyond the facts and non-judgmental discussions. In other words, DON’T SAY NO, JUST SAY KNOW.

Michael DeVillaer, an Associate Professor at McMaster University, focused on the complexity of the new cannabis legislation. Of particular interest was the trend in product development and marketing to normalize drug use. Why are there so many flavoured vodkas? To attract new customers. Will the same occur with cannabis which can be used in so many ways.

Implications for school boards: How do we deal with this? Do the boards’ alcohol and substance abuse policies really address the issue?

The municipalities of the Town of Gananoque, the Township of Leeds and the 1000 Island and the Township of Rideau Lakes are to be commended for initiating this information session and their leadership under Mayors Baptista, Demchuk and Holman.

Where next?

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