

It's an escape but

Heroin's worse than any of the problems, former addict declares

BY HELEN CORNELL
STAR EDITOR

Is your child a doper?
How can you tell?

These questions were put to Dr. George Stavros, medical doctor working with CODAC, community organization formed to combat drug abuse, during a panel discussion at Starlight Park School last week.

"The telltale signs are sometimes obvious, sometimes subtle. But most of the time they will be there. The young people will do something, leave something. It's almost a plea to be discovered," Dr. Stavros told an audience of some 60 people.

Drugs alter personalities -- but in young people, there may be many personality changes. One telltale sign is incense, used to "cover" the smell of marijuana. If young people do begin to act "different," however, that in itself should be a clue there is a problem, Dr. Stavros said.

Dr. Stavros was one of four adults on the panel sponsored by the Starlight Park Community Association.

Others were the Rev. Miguel Valencia, pastor of St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church; Larry Richmond, young attorney; Jerry McCoy, assistant superintendent of Cartwright District. Moderator was Mrs. Jean Woodward, association president.

The youth panelists were John Barnhardt, college student; Charles Beasley, high school; Kim Lockhart, high school; Hank Cookinboo, Radio Station KCAC and Maverick House, rehabilitation house for drug abusers; and Jack Sellnar, two-time loser, imprisoned for heroin addiction, paroled, returned to prison for parole violation. Sellnar is now state director of Narconon, a program for drug abusers similar to Alcoholics Anonymous in former addicts helping each other kick the habit and stay off drugs.

The second question was directed to Sellnar. "Do you know why he (your child) turned to drugs?"

The young man began to answer the question by relating his own background, through his arrest for five counts of possession of drugs, his first felony. He was out for the second time in 1967, and then active in Narconon.

A cricket chirped just outside the classroom door, as Dellnar talked, and the sound was loud in the stillness of the room as the audience listened to the young man speak.

"I began looking at the possibilities of maybe using drugs for the rest of my life . . . if I gave myself a break and didn't overdose . . . with the constant prospect of going back to prison. His sandy-blond hair was moderately long, combed back smoothly to curl slightly under his ears. He wore a striped tunic style tee shirt, leather belt with a metal ring-like harness strap, rather than conventional buckle.

He could have, and did, relate to both sides of the alleged "generation gap."

His awareness of the problem at hand put down any barriers.

Sellnar has been out of prison 28 months, 14 of which he has handled Narconon as a volunteer, at his own expense, he said. Because the Narconon groups he has taken part in, in prison,

"put-it-together" effectively he is permitted back inside the prison, regularly, to keep the meetings going.

Why did he turn to drugs? "I had no responsibility, only to my habit." At one point he was shooting \$80 a day in heroin into his arm. "I was only willing to do my thing and keep it going. That's a lot of money to put into your arm," he added.

Sellnar gets calls day and night from young people, who generally "have no one else to talk to."

"It's a long way from taking the first tablet and ending up in the joint . . . with a little thought on your part, you might put it together before you end up in the joint," he told young people present.

Sellnar later told TheStar he turned on with heroin as an escape -- until he discovered the escape was becoming a worse situation than any of the problems he was trying to escape.

"It is an escape," he said quietly. He had to find his way by trying to resolve the problems one at a time, he said. The "solution," heroin addiction, had become worse than any of them, in expense, fear of overdose, fear of prison, physical addiction to an \$80 a day habit.

Cookinboo told parents "Don't preach!" at their youngsters, if they are on dope, but get some help. Also a former drug abuser, he urged parents to join a group like Creative Living, to learn how to reach the children, communicate with them, get them to talk openly about the marijuana or drugs. "Get in touch with TERROS or Creative Living to have someone their own age try to communicate with them," Cookinboo said.

Richmond urged parents to tell it to their kids straight drug abuse is against the law, and they are breaking a law to use it, or possess it, and can be arrested. Not all juvenile records are completely erased, either, he said. Tell the young people "You either are or are not responsible. If you break the law, you are irresponsible," he urged.

Father Valencia declared, "The problem is with adults. They have blown the whole thing sky-high." Dope was there, when he was in high school, but few young

people touched it, he said.

Parents nowadays do not have enough time for their children, he said. "They're too busy earning the almighty dollar." They go to church on Sunday, but do not acknowledge Almighty God, and are not honest in their approach to Him, he declared. Parents have authority, a responsibility for their children from Almighty God. "If we don't stand up for what we believe . . . Let's knock off this double standard, do as I tell you, not as I do," he asserted.

"We're an imperfect society . . . we don't know who we are or where we're going. We have to realize our religion is an honest thing between ourselves and God -- or drug abuse won't be our only problem."

Richmond at one point said he gets the feeling kids are afraid of what's around the corner, afraid of putting a foot around the corner. Barnhardt picked that up, declaring, "Something that bothers me is total oblivion." He quit reading the papers, because when he did read the papers, he got the impression there was not a whole lot left in the world, Barnhardt said. "I take things as they come to me now," he said.

Miss Lockhart said she had seen too many friends "drop off -- not really human beings anymore" from using drugs. She has to find something to be glad about every day. "If I got up one day, decided it was a bad day, and tripped out -- that would be bad" she said. "It would be a bad thing, because think of all the good things that could happen that day."

The teenagers said drugs are available just about everywhere, anyone can get them.

McCoy commented on the problem in schools, citing one example recently when 13 students were arrested for smoking marijuana. The schools are working to educate the children about drugs, he said.

Sellnar (Narconon) can be reached at 252-9285, and Cookinboo (Maverick House) at 254-4582.

Coe School PTA and St. Andrew's Episcopal Junior High Group have both had speakers from Maverick House in recent weeks.