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Drug education

ARF says effect of program still unknown

Officials of Addiction Research Foundation—Halton Region, say they're still about two or three years away from knowing if their Preventive Education Teacher Training program is having a corrective effect on alcohol and drug abusers in Halton schools.

"All we're trying to do right now is make sure that the education system is in place," says Halton ARF community consultant Marlene Swarbrick. "Then we'll see if it's having an effect on students. And the final stage is, if they've learned anything, does it affect their behavior."

Halton ARF sold Halton Board of Education on the value of PETT last year, after a survey conducted at

Oakville-Trafalgar High School revealed that 80 per cent of students from grades 9 to 13 had used alcohol in the past year and 46 per cent had used marijuana. One-quarter of the students who took part in the survey said they used alcohol regularly.

"The Halton board is the most progressive board in the province in dealing with alcohol and drugs," says Dick O'Brien, who's just completed a two-year stint of training over 400 board teachers and staff.

Former director of education Emerson Lavender endorsed the PETT program and his successor Wally Beevor has supported it "1,000 per cent," Mr. O'Brien says.

The drug education program, outlined in a

set of lesson plans for Halton teachers, was designed to build on information presented the year before. Teachers are gradually acquainting students with the dangers of a wider range of substances.

Recognizing that most kids go through a stage when they want to experiment with drugs and alcohol, Mr. O'Brien stresses that it's important to delay that experimentation stage.

"If that stage can be put off to Grade 10, say, instead of Grade 7, it completely changes the likelihood of the person developing a problem," he points out.

A major goal of the education program is that adolescents be encouraged to develop a

personal plan about alcohol and drug use and that it not become a major part of their lives.

An added component of the work Mr. O'Brien and Ms. Swarbrick have been doing with the Halton board is the problem of what to do about students already using drugs and alcohol heavily—the ones who are coming to class stoned. Part of their job is to refer people to ADAPT (Alcohol And Drug Program), a Halton treatment agency based in Oakville.

Mr. O'Brien says ADAPT has the expertise to treat people with alcohol and drug problems right here in Halton at a cost of about \$400 a year. If the person were to spend just three days in a hospital, the cost would be beyond that.

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