

Study reinforces benefits of school DARE program

By HOWARD MOZEL
Special to The Champion

Police officers who teach the DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program have long relied on anecdotal evidence to measure their success.

Now a new study helps prove what they've always believed.

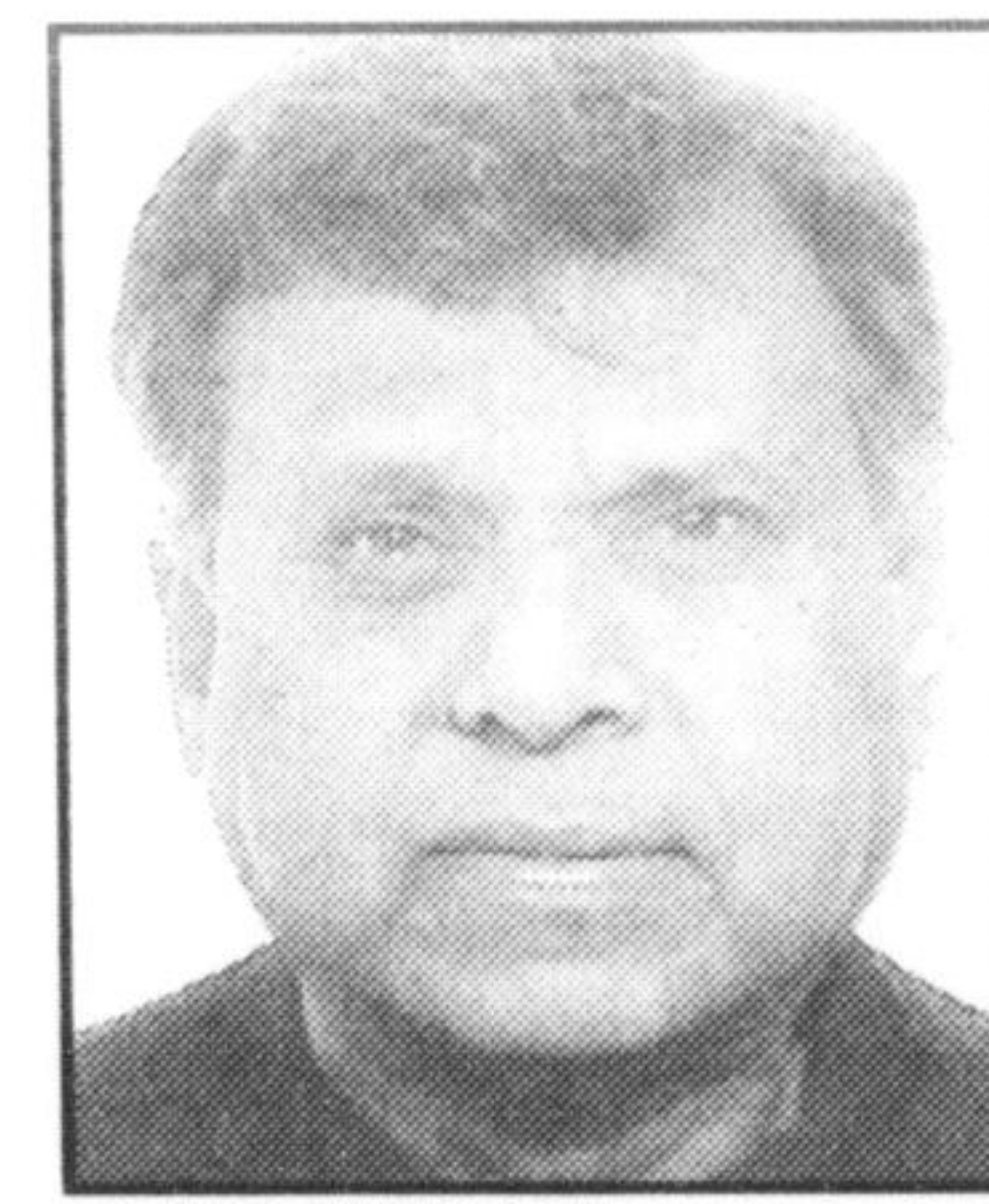
True, the report by the Washington-based Journal of the National Medical Association (NMA), focuses only on smoking, but its results still bolster the view that DARE in fact does have a positive impact on its young participants.

The study found that students, who completed the DARE program, were five times less likely to start smoking, compared to youngsters who didn't participate.

Researchers also found a direct correlation between knowledge about the risks of smoking and increases in smoking avoidance.

"This study validates what DARE instructors, DARE graduates and their parents have known for years — DARE works," said DARE America president Glenn Levant. "Through DARE's comprehensive curriculum, students

armed with the tools needed to reject destructive behaviours such as smoking, drinking and taking drugs."



Sgt. Joe Prasad

evidence will help fundraisers when they approach area service clubs and other groups for financial contributions to help keep Halton's \$500,000 DARE program up and running.

When someone asks about supporting studies — as they invariably do, says Sgt. Prasad — the NMA's smoking findings will be invaluable.

Earlier this year, the Halton public and Catholic school boards withdrew their financial support for the program citing budget restraints.

"We need to get the support behind us," said Sgt. Prasad.

Sgt. Prasad has no illusions that every child will be steered away from smoking, drugs and violence — just as driving instructors know it's impossible that none of their students will ever get into an accident.

"We hope they will have learned from this and take it through their adult life, but we have to be practical," he said.

"Still, it's incumbent on us to teach children these life skills. Society will be better for that."

The 17-week DARE program — presented to all grade 6 students from both school boards in Halton — provides young people with the self-esteem and will power to refuse offers of drugs and alcohol, options how to deal with the stress of peer pressure and means to solve problems without resorting to violence. This year alone, more than 36 million children in 55 countries were enrolled in DARE.

Quantifying the fact that the program works isn't about ego, said Halton Regional Police Education Services Co-ordinator Sgt. Joe Prasad, but is important for several very pragmatic reasons.

First, Sgt. Prasad said some hard

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