

'One is too many and 1,000 is never enough,' says recovering addict

Drugs, alcohol destroyed a promising hockey future, man tells York Region high school students

BY STEFANIA RIZZI
Staff Writer

"My name is Jamie and I'm an alcoholic and drug addict."

With those simple yet shocking words, students stopped whispering and shuffling restlessly in their seats.

Gripped with curiosity, the more than 200 Cardinal Carter Catholic High School students wanted to hear how a man with a promising hockey career could end up with an addiction.

Standing on a makeshift stage, Jamie McGuire described how a one-time experiment with drugs turned into a near-fatal substance addiction.

McGuire, who attended high schools in Thornhill and Richmond Hill, said he was introduced to drugs in high school but it wasn't until he enrolled in university that he developed an addiction.

"It was on the table and (cocaine) was something I've never tried before," said the 30-year-old recovering alcoholic and drug addict. "Everyone was doing it."

"I started saving some for Sunday. But Sunday soon turned into Monday, Tuesday," said McGuire, who missed an opportunity to play in the Ontario Hockey League because of his substance abuse problems.

"I used every day for five years until I ended up in a hotel room, almost dead, because I used so much."

It wasn't until a friend, also a drug addict, died from an overdose that McGuire realized he had a problem.

"I didn't want to end up like him, so I phoned my wife and I went into rehab," he said.

"It all started from trying things once and not knowing how to stop."

"One is too many and 1,000 is never enough," McGuire added. "I was always trying to make myself feel better and it led to places I never wanted to go, never thought I was going."

Fortunately, McGuire was able to recover from his addiction and has been clean and sober for more than two years.



STAFF PHOTO/ROB ALARY

Recovering addict and alcoholic Jamie McGuire (centre) told students at a school assembly how drugs and liquor ruined his chance to play major junior A hockey and perhaps go on to a pro career. With him is National Hockey League vice president Mike Murphy and Mothers Against Drunk Driving President Marilyn Bobell.

McGuire, along with NHL vice-president of hockey operations Mike Murphy and York Region's Mothers Against Drunk Driving president Marilyn Bobell, spoke to students Tuesday about the dangers of experimenting with alcohol and drugs.

High schools across the country held various events throughout the week to raise awareness about alcohol and drug abuse.

A recent province-wide survey of students in Grade 7 through OAC found 25 per cent of teens consume more than five drinks at a time while 33 per cent said they experimented with drugs.

Among young teenagers, use of the rave drug, Ecstasy, is on the rise. Katie Flemming said she knows friends who have taken drugs and realizes it's an unhealthy and destructive habit.

"People get violent," said the Grade 12 student, part of Cardinal Carter's Ontario Students Against Impaired Driving committee. "They don't care about anything and start skipping classes."

Fellow student Greg Lariviere said addicts need to realize they are not alone and that their addiction can be conquered.

"It really can happen to anyone,"

said the 18-year-old. "I hope they try to get help and realize there's a way out."

Despite hearing from people who had a substance addiction, OSAID member Robin Lostracco believes teens will continue to drink or abuse drugs.

'Pay attention (to your habits) and keep your eyes open. Reality is not always perception.'

"It won't diminish people from doing it but it will raise awareness about its consequences," she said.

Addiction Services for York Region youth and family therapist Shivani Gupta said teens indulge in addictive behaviour for many reasons.

"The vulnerability of young people in the community plays a big part," said Gupta, who specializes in youth drug and alcohol abuse. "Peer pressure is huge and there's a lack of information about substance abuse and its consequences and how (the substance) can be psychologically and physically addictive."

Teens are further tempted to try alcohol or drugs when celebrities are seen drinking or when the habit occurs in the home, Gupta said.

"When it's happening close around them, especially at home when they're supposed to feel safe, kids aren't clear and they're getting mixed messages," she said, adding strong family support systems help addicts on the road to recovery. "It's challenging and they're confused as to what is the right approach."

"It's hard for a young person to say I have a problem and need help and would like to talk about it, especially when it started off with experimentation," explained Gupta, adding a booth was set up in various high schools during the week.

"It's great that we're (in the high schools) because we get to reach out to them and provide services to them rather than expecting them to reach out to us."

Although he hopes teens choose not to experiment with drugs or alcohol, McGuire stresses the importance of knowing the potential losses.

"I thought it wouldn't happen to me and that I had it under control, but I didn't," said McGuire, whose marriage suffered because of his addiction.

Info Box

• sourceSEARCH •

The reading debate

Staff writer Stefania Rizzi is delving into the debate over whether students learn to read more effectively using phonics or "whole language," the system currently used in the public school system.

If you're a parent with views on the matter you'd like to share for next week's article, contact Rizzi at srizzi@erabanner.com or call (416) 798-7284, ext. 238.

• beenTHERE •

Fire power

The skinny arms of the student were shaking all over when he looked through the .22-calibre's sight and obliterated a target less than 10 metres away.

"All 10 shots from that and a related weapon landed within seven inches of the bullseye. One shot even hit its centre."

Staff writer Gianni Colavecchia goes to the shooting range and tests his skills behind the cross-hairs. See *Been There, Done That* on page 12.

• movieREVIEWS •

Thumbs up

Seen a good movie lately? You could win movie passes simply by writing a brief description of why you liked a flick for the eGuide that appears in our Tuesday newspapers.

To submit your review, go to www.yorkregion.com and click on the movie reel on the home page.

If you see your submission chosen for publication as the eGuide's critic's pick, contact Anne Howland at ahowland@erabanner.com to arrange to pick up your movie passes. So give us your best critic's pick.

• upCOMING •

The dark side

Staff writer Patrick Mangion explores the difficult issue of teen suicide and tells the story of a teenage girl who tried to kill herself three times.

He also speaks with experts to trace the causes of suicide and what can be done to help teenagers who feel there's no alternative.

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