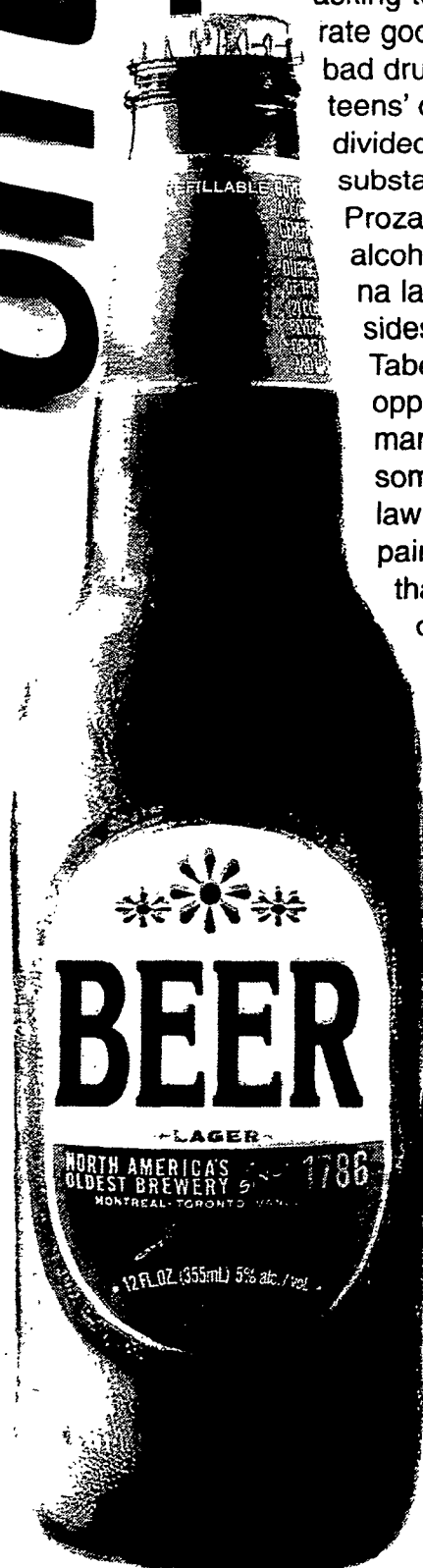


MOVE

on the

Story by
Mike Latona



Getting to the root of addictions

Which drugs are good and which are bad? Can one be both good *and* bad?

At what point does a user become an abuser?

How do you battle an addiction?

Teens took on these challenging questions during two workshops on drug and alcohol addiction Aug. 4, during the Diocesan Youth Convention at SUNY Geneseo. Approximately 50 youths crammed into a small meeting room for each workshop, and several more were turned away.

"I think it really attests to the presence of drugs and alcohol in society and kids seeking answers for themselves, friends," presenter Marge Taber said.

Many who attended the workshop, Taber said, are likely battling an addiction or are affected by a family member's or friend's addiction.

Taber and her co-presenter, Carmen Raindancer, are employed by Unity Health System — Taber as a senior counselor for adolescent services, and Raindancer as chemical-dependency counselor.

Raindancer, formerly Carmen Quinones, is a past youth minister in the diocese.

They began the workshop by

asking teens to separate good drugs from bad drugs. But the teens' opinions were divided, with such substances as Prozac, Ritalin, alcohol and marijuana landing on both sides of the fence.

Taber, while saying she opposes the legalization of marijuana, also noted that some forms of the drug are permitted by law for people with cancer and chronic pain. On the other hand, Taber also said that some people drink NyQuil, an over-the-counter cough and cold medicine containing alcohol, to get drunk.

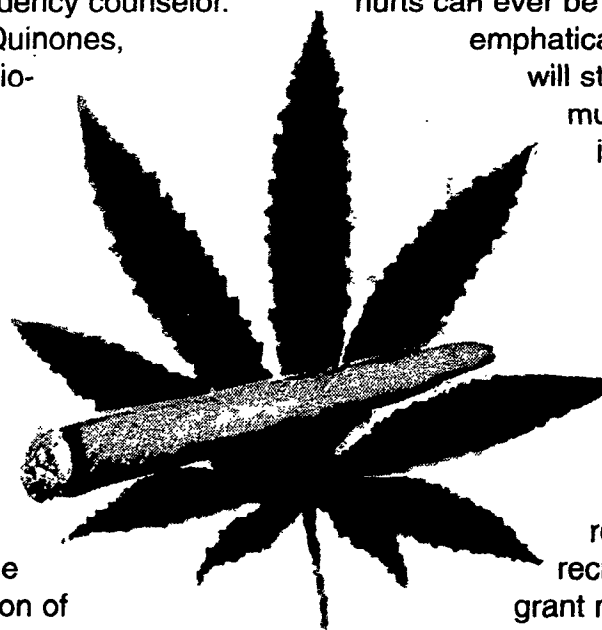
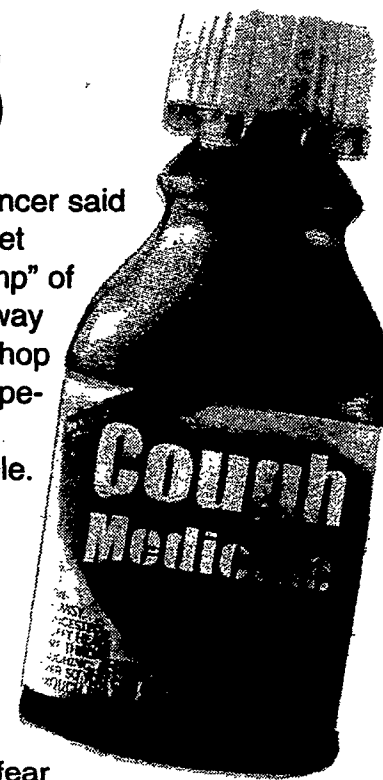
Teens also debated the safety level of Prozac, used most commonly to treat depression; and Ritalin, used by people with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). One teen noted that Ritalin can be ground up and snorted in order to get high. The group concluded that all drugs, legal or not, are dangerous if they're misused.

Next, the workshops explored the stages leading to addiction such as increased usage of a substance; withdrawal from family, friends, school and work; decline in personal hygiene; unsuccessful attempts to stop abusing; and large amounts of time spent thinking about the substance.

Taber and Raindancer said that people who get stuck in the "swamp" of addiction see no way out. Yet the workshop ended with the hopeful message that recovery is possible.

To escape the swamp and attain inner joy and peace, they said, an addict must first deal with such feelings as anger, hurt, grief, fear and guilt — feelings that may have been brought on by depression, family struggles and pressures in school.

One participant questioned whether such deep hurts can ever be overcome. Raindancer emphatically responded that "the scar will still be there, but it will feel so much better after you deal with it."



"We have a choice to walk through life with 'boulders in our backpacks,' or we can get rid of them," Taber added.

Raindancer ended the workshops by leading a meditation in which she implored teens to visualize a road to inner peace. She also recited the Serenity Prayer: "God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I can not change; the courage to

change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference."

"Hopefully they came out with a sense of hope, that there is support in communities so they're not alone," Taber said of the workshop participants. "I would also hope some of the young people will reevaluate their belief systems. What amazes me is that there seems to be this high acceptance that one can socially use marijuana or alcohol."

Taber said that she and Raindancer consciously avoided lecturing the teens, hoping instead that they'll arrive at their own conclusions about the dangers of drug and alcohol use.

"Teens go with the mind-set that it's not going to happen to them, so scare tactics won't really work," Taber said. "We wanted to identify different belief systems and get an idea of where they're coming from, maybe take a look at why (they abuse). I call it more the back-door approach."

EDITORS' NOTE: Those who need help, or wish to gain more information on adolescent substance abuse, may contact Unity Health System at 716/272-8330.

NEXT WEEK:
An 18-year-old battles her addiction

