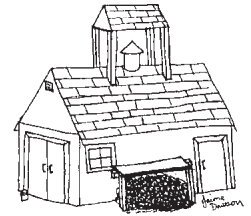


THE GUILFORD GAZETTE



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Misunderstood Teens

BY CHELSEA OGDEN

My name is Chelsea Ogden. I go to Guilford Central Middle School in Guilford Vermont, and I am a teenager. Please stop and think about that word, "teenager."

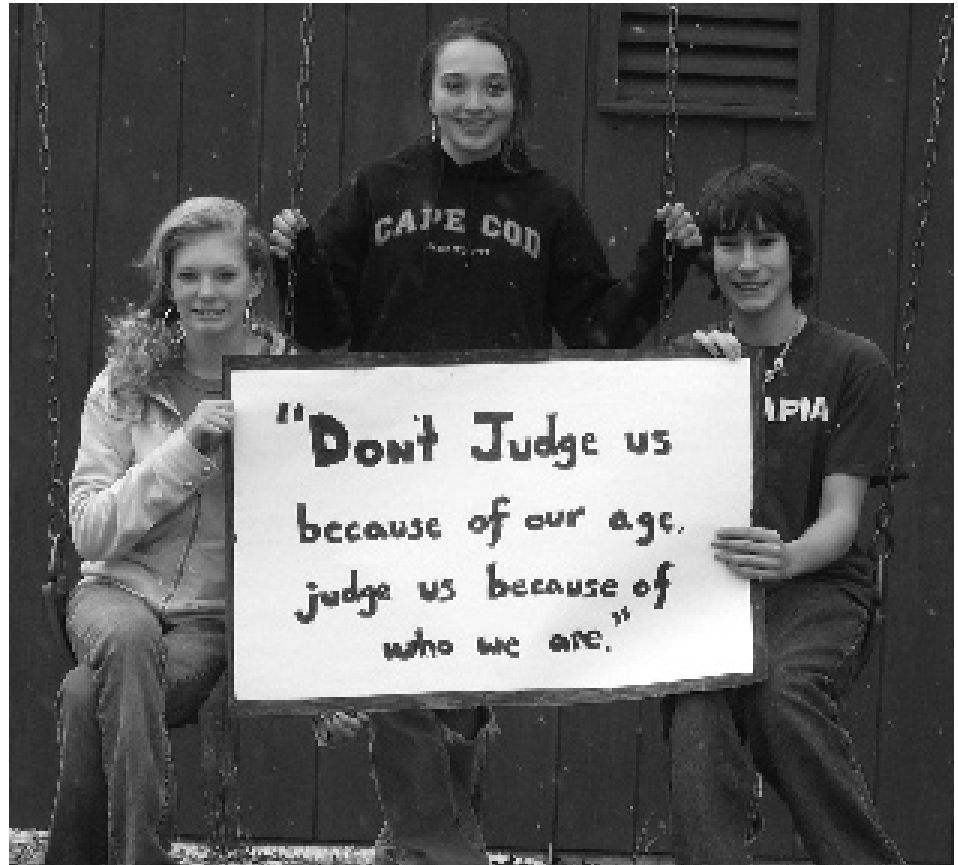
When many of you think about that word you think about inconsiderate, rude young people. Others will remember their past, when they were teenagers. And some will think of today's youth, and the reputation many teenagers have gotten for themselves as druggies, gangsters, and altogether bad people.

There are millions of adolescents in the U.S. alone. We all have lives, priorities, and certain things that make us unique. Drugs and alcohol are among the many things that seem to divide teenagers from adults. I would like to take you through the world of teen drug abuse.

Recent studies of high school and middle school students show that the majority of teenagers do not use illegal drugs. However drug abuse is still prevalent throughout the country. Recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice show the percentage of teenagers who have used drugs during a thirty-day period.

Drug	%
Alcohol:	48%
Marijuana:	19.9%
Cocaine:	2.3%
Steroids:	1.6%
Inhalants:	1.5%
Heroin	0.5%

The use of "hard drugs" such as: cocaine and heroin has declined since the 1960s and 1970s. Sadly, the use of marijuana has increased about 8% for high schoolers (12% in 1992 to 20% at the present time). For eighth graders it has increased from 4% in 1992 to 6% at the present time.



Chelsea Ogden, Ariel Kane and Jacob White pose with a sign that they made.

Recent statistics from the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, show higher numbers when teenagers are asked about use over the course of a year:

Drug	%
Alcohol:	70.6%
Marijuana:	34.3%
Cocaine:	5.3%
Steroids:	2.5%
Inhalants:	4.2%
Heroin:	0.9%

Drug use is also in our hometown. Vermont, Windham County, and Guilford are not strangers to teenage drug abuse. Our

numbers are not as high as other towns, counties, and states, but they are still high enough to be dangerous. Recent statistics from the 2005 Vermont Youth Risk Behavior Survey (8-12th grade) show drug use by teenagers in Windham County are as follows:

Drug	%
Alcohol (30 day period):	49%
Marijuana (30 day period):	57%
Cocaine (30 day period):	17%
Heroin (during lifetime):	14%
Injected drugs (during lifetime):	12%

These numbers can be disturbing. However, just because people do bad things doesn't

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make them bad people. Would you consider someone who steals food for his or her starving family a bad person? And would you consider a teenager who doesn't know better, who feels they have no place on this planet, and who has been influenced while vulnerable, to be a bad person because they do drugs?

To be a teenager is to be a young person who has undergone puberty, but has not reached full maturity. It's a very dramatic time in one's life. It feels like every decision made will eventually affect us in the future. Life sometimes feels like thousands of pounds we are carrying every second of the day. And, unfortunately, "little things" like the decision to smoke or drink seem like they don't really matter.

Teenagers get caught in the wave of drugs because family and friends, songs, television, movies, and clothing that supports the use of alcohol and drugs influence them. Depression also can cause teens to turn to drugs. When something is wrong at home or school, or when the teen feels lost, upset, and depressed, they are most vulnerable to peer pressure and gangs. Teenagers party, fight, deal, and smoke, sometimes just because they feel they have nothing better to do.

Most of us don't know it, but if we all worked together we could stop the majority of drug abusers. If we took the time to stop and get to know teens, talk to them, and influence them to say "NO" to drugs, our world might just be a bit of a better place.

When asked about teen drug abuse, this is what people had to say:

Mallory Peters: "I think it's horrible and we should put a stop to it."

Anonymous High school student: "It's nothing new. It's everywhere. We are all vulnerable to something and for some kids it's drugs."

Ashley Helander: "We should teach people to say NO to drugs. Talk to peers and family. Everybody needs support."

People turn on the TV and watch the news every day. They see stories about gangs of teens being arrested for selling illegal drugs. These things happen a lot. Does this mean all teens deal drugs on the streets or at school? Are we all influenced by music and television? Do we all listen to people that offer us drugs? And do we all smoke marijuana, or do cocaine and heroin? No, we don't. Believe it or not, most teenagers have the brains to realize how dangerous drugs are. "Do not judge a book by its cover before you read its pages." So please, don't give in to negative views of teenagers. Don't judge us because of our age; judge us because of who we are.

Gazette in Need of Donations

BY ELLA MCDAID

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