

thetriangle

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SAVING THE LIVES OF DESPERATE TEENS ISN'T EASY.

illustration by lillyanne pham

a dab of unknown: the awareness on wax culture

WAX IS MADE, SOLD AND USED BY LOCAL STUDENTS. THE COMMUNITY LACKS THE RESOURCES TO RESPOND TO TEENAGERS' PERSPECTIVE ON A NEW STONER CULTURE.



NOTE FROM PRINCIPAL CLARK

"I can't confirm or deny that (Sherman selling in school). The federal law is called FERPA (Federal Right of Privacy Act). I can't confirm whether they were kicked out of school or not. It is to their right of privacy, so we have to protect that. You're talking to a self-professed drug user/dealer, how reliable or integrity that person has, I don't know. For us, I can't confirm if it did or didn't happen because we didn't see it happen. It is a safe place here at Columbus North High School. I would hope you would agree with that. Obviously, like many high schools across the country things can happen. Things do happen, kids do take things they shouldn't. The bottom line is you're going to be as safe at school than you're gonna be anywhere else. The administration cares. We always are on the look out. If something does happen at school, we are very quick to respond or at home you may not have that same advantage. I can't deny things don't happen with the high school — that things aren't always the best. But, I can tell you that we care and we do love our kids. We will treat them like they're like our own kids. We will try to do what's best for them as quickly as we can."



MEET TYLER SHERMAN

"I WAS STILL smoking while on probation," CN'15 Tyler Sherman said. "They should have drug tested me more. I was on probation for four months. I only got drug tested one time and it was the initial drug test."

During his senior year, Sherman was expelled and had his second arrest. He entered class while high on THC (the psychoactive chemical in marijuana). His backpack carried a herbal grinder and a distinct smell of weed.

"I was really confident that I didn't have anything on me. I was like, 'Look in my pockets. I don't have anything.' Then they checked my back pocket and they found \$1,870 in cash."

The arrest was for drug paraphernalia, which is any object or material intended for the production, use or processing of a controlled substance.

"That was still in my trap days. I was still dealing. I remember this day very clearly," Sherman said. "Those were the days you go to bed stoned and you wake up stoned. It was just a haze waking up."

His clientele consisted of local high school students who constantly wanted marijuana.

"I would work two hours, then go on break and check my phone. There would be like 18 messages from different people. Or two messages from the same person."

His part-time job was not enough for Sherman. Both of his parents had recently lost their jobs. He needed money fast and his solution was dealing marijuana.

"They (the school administration) used to leave the doors unlocked and I used to go between periods. I'd sell to kids at school," Sherman said. "Then the locking of the doors, I made it past that. The school did everything they could. I was so determined to keep getting the money and money and money."

His wealth was made of illegal money that had to be cautiously spent. The plan was to spend it on expensive drugs.

"I would binge on something for week, then I'd move on. MDMA. Meth for a week.

I wouldn't be full-on addicted."

One night, he was strung on meth and then took Xanax and two hits of acid. His parents called the police and Sherman was hospitalized for five days. After regaining consciousness, he learned news about a close friend.

"My mom told me Nick died. That was the first thing I heard after I came out of a coma."

CN'14 Nick Zacharias died at 2:30 p.m. Feb. 18 at his home.

"Whenever I did that week of meth I did a lot of it with Nick. I smoked meth with Nick."

Sherman stopped the weeks of abusing artificial, illegal substances, but the level of his drug usage was difficult to overcome. He believes recovery happens under specific circumstances.

"It took Nick to die for me to realize that there was no justifiable reason for me to be doing any of that stuff. You have to lose something big to snap you out of the honeymoon phase of trying a drug."

He explained his transition from the "honeymoon" phase into the "just don't care" phase that includes lack of self-awareness of smoking too much.

"What you have to start doing to support that weed habit is to start stealing or dealing. I started to deal. Then you start meeting new people. What do new people have? They have new drugs," Sherman said. "They're doing cocaine in the bathroom and having a good time and you're wanting to buy it. Then you start doing those drugs and sell those drugs. Years go by and you're not conscious. That's what I've seen happen to so many other people."

Despite his self-analysis, Sherman continues to be involved in illegal drugs, specifically non-artificial substances.

"I am a firm believer in natural stuff like mushrooms and marijuana," he said.

To reach the highest level of THC, Sherman smokes wax.

"The wax I buy are specifically for medical patients. The stuff I am buying is crafted, like made professionally. There's no corners cut."

WHAT IS WAX?

Wax is made from a solvent, hash oil and pressurized heat. Hash oil is extracted from a marijuana leaf. It is also known as butane hash oil (BHO), dabs, budder and numerous other nicknames. One student remembered being surprised by the level of potency.

"I tried it (wax) sometime last year. It was definitely a huge difference from like the regular weed," an anonymous senior boy said.

The oil has concentrated THC, which can exceed 80 percent. In comparison, normal weed has THC levels of roughly 20 percent. Specific community individuals like Foundation for Youth's Director of Communities That Care, Harry Cooper, have been informed about the drug.

"It's been trending probably since 2012-2013. The science is out there because that's how they extract

the nicotine to make the nicotine gum," Cooper said. "Then they started applying that science to marijuana to extract the THC from it, making it more potent."

Two years ago, Cooper attended a conference that informed him on the drug's effects and characteristics. His active role in the community allowed him to stay updated on teen substance abuse.

"That conference was the catalyst for the other information. Now I am alert and aware. When I hear it, when I see it, when I come back to Columbus, I'm like, 'OK, this is what's going on.'"

Other community leaders like Cooper catch up with the culture, especially the Columbus Police Department (CPD). Public relations officer Sgt. Matt Harris said the CPD started seeing wax in the community within the last year, but sightings of it are far more infrequent than common weed.

THROUGH THE EYES OF AN EMPLOYEE OF WAX

CHANNING HENSON, A STORE MANAGER AT A CANNABIS DISPENSARY IN COLORADO CALLED THE GRASS STATION.

- +concentrated marijuana
- +people with a higher tolerance want something stronger, so they try wax
- +very popular
- +gained the last 2 years in popularity
- +mostly younger generations who are interested, teens to early 20's
- +retail sell a lot
- +more carbon than regular marijuana
- +more plant, less amount (substance)
- +more of a demand now
- +more expensive

compiled bykarli reynolds

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PART OF A CULTURE

"When (I first bought wax) I was 14, I'm only 16 right now. I paid for it with the money my mom gave me," an anonymous junior boy said. "I've gotten high with my par-

ents since I was 12. My dad doesn't smoke because of his job, but my mom does smoke."

After the student tried wax, he now smokes it on a daily basis.

"I haven't bought weed in months. All I smoke is wax."

The drug's additional qualities keep the student satisfied. It comes in different physical forms by manipulating the hash oil during production. Moreover, the drug has a variety of flavors that root from a specific strain of marijuana. The stoner culture relies on this system to base their preferences on strains. Each has its own effects. Within the category, marijuana farmers breed their own unique strain. The student buys from a specific brand of wax much in the same manner. These brands are sold by a local adult who has made this drug available in the community.

"There's this big wax connect in Columbus where all the people basically get it from."

A local store reportedly supports the supplier by

displaying his accessories that facilitate the wax experience.

"He has products at Karma like wax stuff, like mats that are nonstick. There are some they sell at Karma that have his name on it."

Another anonymous 19-year-old male claimed that he buys "budder boxes" from the same store. Expensive brands keep their product in personalized glass containers. However, dealers usually put wax in plastic bags.

"I bought mine for four bucks at Karma. I don't want to ruin their reputation, but, if you use the lingo, they'll know."

Stores can provide goods that are legal, but are not responsible for the consumer's usage of the product.

"I think they advertise them as earring containers, but they are definitely not for earrings. Why would an earring container say 'sky high' on it?"

Karma Records declined to comment about customers using the products sold in store for wax usage.

During Cooper's attendance at the conference, he gained skills to spot locations that involved activities related to the drug.

"One way I would know is to go by Karma 'record store.' Whenever you see a large concentration of butane lighters, it is an indication that this is here," Cooper said. "Anybody with good sense would say, 'They are a record store, but they don't sell that many records.'"

Although the culture is growing, a student who also uses wax feels more detached from the trend.

"I just feel like I hear more about it. I feel like it is becoming easier to buy. I don't buy it. I just do it when my friends have it," anonymous senior boy said.



TRUTH TEST

BCSC STUDENT ASSISTANCE CORDINATOR LARRY PERKINSON EXPLAINS THE REASONING AND PROCESS BEHIND RANDOM DRUG TESTING.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE DRUG TESTS?

The drug testing policy is a proactive measure that sends a clear message of our expectations and one that also helps undermine the effects of peer pressure. During the first year of testing, our schools saw a 25 percent drop in the number of substance abuse violations, and we have continued to see fewer violations despite the availability of substances in our community.

What are the rates of actually finding a student positive for drugs?

When the random testing was initiated, the national data said that five percent of the participants might fail. In the random process 270 students a year are tested, but three percent is the highest we have seen and that occurred the past three years.

How are students selected for drug testing?

Students involved in extra- and co-curricular activities are required to sign a consent form. A student is in the testing pool for the semester the form is turned in and also for the following semester if still enrolled. The testing company places the student name and the student ID number in a program that is designed to meet legal requirements for a random selection process. Fifteen ID numbers are selected each month at each high school, and those students are tested.

What happens with the information you get from the drug tests?

Parents and guardians are informed of the results either by a letter or a phone call. If there is a positive result, a school administrator is informed and the consequences put in place.

interview by chris case

MINDS ON WAX

THE TRIANGLE SURVEYED 196 STUDENTS ON AUG. 24 ABOUT THEIR STATUS IN THE CULTURE.

state your grade level.

freshman 30%

sophomore 31%

junior 19%

senior 20%

have you used illegal substances?

yes
no

73%

27%

rate your knowledge on wax.

zero 127 out of 196

heard from source 26 out of 196

seen it being used 4 out of 196

used it...

knowing what it was 19 out of 196

not knowing what it was 20 out of 196

DANGER OF IGNORANCE

Even states like Washington and Colorado, where hash oil is legal, have banned the amateur production of wax because their explosion rates have increased due to the oil extraction. The product is cheap to make and expensive to buy. In these situations, the required solvent is butane fuel, which can leak into the air and ignite with the smallest spark like gas.

"The process can be flammable, there are incidents. We've not had any that we've been informed of in Columbus," Sgt. Harris said. "Elsewhere there's been explosions that are similar to the manufacturing of methamphetamine."

In a May 23 USA Today report, Kevin Wong of the Rocky Mountain High Intensity Drug Area said that Colorado had 32 confirmed hash oil extraction explosions and 30 injuries during last year. The damages are similar in other states. The Seattle Times reported Feb. 8, 2014 that 17 victims landed in Southern California burn centers and another 27 victims were treated by a burn unit in northern California. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) sent out an alert in 2013 noting that many explosions were misidentified as meth-lab mishaps. Wax production differs from meth's because the components are easier to locate. However, both productions have similar characteristics in damages. A student explains his first and last attempt of extracting hash oil and the ease in which he found information on the process.

"I learned how to make it by watching a YouTube video. It was 10 minutes long," an anonymous junior boy said.

With first-hand experience, Sherman states that dealers selling homemade wax want money and do not care if users "cough up a lung." He has even dealt with the side-effects, such as hallucinations.

"The dabs you get in Indiana, made here, it's gross. It looks like literal poopie or maple syrup mixed with snot. It's so impure," Sherman said. "I've dabbed out before and I've seen colors."

Professional facilities that legally extract hash oil prefer to use carbon dioxide or ethanol as a solvent rather than butane, which is explosive and

toxic.

From a professional view, Dr. David Porter, a family physician, said there are multiple negative impacts of wax usage.

"First, I would be concerned that the butane wasn't totally evaporated from the THC 'paste' and would either be a fire hazard when used or another potential health hazard when ingested into the lungs," Dr. Porter said. "Second, the THC itself is in a 'highly concentrated form', which would enhance the effects of the THC on your system, especially your brain."

He said recent news reports found wax can produce "almost schizophrenic symptoms (paranoia/delusions/hallucinations)."

"Pot has become more powerful with higher levels of THC over the years, which is likely the goal of producers/users, but the negatives of the drug are becoming more pronounced."

Dr. Porter states that marijuana is extremely demotivating, but the long-term effects on the human brain continues to be an unknown. He believes that doctors will find out by monitoring over time.

"You can decide if you want to be a guinea pig in this experiment about the long term effects of THC on the brain," Dr. Porter said.

Currently, North's health educators have not reached the unit on drugs. They have yet to prepare for the unit's syllabus.

"In the Health curriculum, we try to stay current with trends for teen abuse with drugs, alcohol and tobacco," health teacher Jennifer Hester said. "One of the ways we do this is having guest speakers. For example, we usually have an officer come in and talk about what he sees currently as problems."

One student athlete said his lack of knowledge led to his first experience using wax.

"I went over to one of my friends' house for a party and a guy just came up to me with a blowtorch and a bong and told me to take a hit. I've only done it once and it was out of curiosity," the anonymous senior said. "I had never done it before and just thought 'why not?'" **A** by lillyanne pham

COMMUNITY EFFORTS

HERE ARE LOCAL INDIVIDUALS WHO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE HELPING OTHERS FIND A SUCCESSFUL PATH.

BARTHOLOMEW CIRCUIT COURT Judge Stephen Heimann states that thousands of dollars were spent to send juveniles to George Junior Republic, which is a residential facility in Pennsylvania. They would gain skills to recover. But, they returned home and returned back into bad habits. Judge Heimann's solution was starting a program called Day Treatment.

"They go to their same school during the day. Then they go to our Youth Services Center which a lot of you call detention center," Judge Heimann said. "We have a Day Treatment center, so those kids go there after school and work on their homework and behavior modification."

This program utilized methods to prevent future juveniles; such as involvement in family structure. Parents take parenting classes for skills on how to deal with a misbehaving child.

"Not only does it help the kid who is in day treatment, but also their younger siblings. Because the parents are using the skills that they learned from the parenting classes to help not just with that child, but with the other children."

Moreover, Judge Heimann said keeping the child in their own environment is beneficial rather than a foreign environment. The program helps them accomplish face-to-face problem solving. Currently, eight are enrolled through court admittance.

"I have any number of individuals that I see who are adults who come in front of me with a substance abuse issue, who started smoking marijuana with their parents," Judge Heimann said.

His ideals are focused on advancing their lives.

"Community service is not going to help someone get off marijuana. That is just pure punishment. For youths, we are not looking for punishment. We are looking for treatment."

In court, his reasoning process is based on the given facts.

"I look at the law. What should be done under the law. My job is to judge, but not be judgmental."

He believes in giving aid and responsibility for juveniles to control their lives.

"Whether they take the opportunity that's going to be their choice. But, I am going to give them that opportunity," Judge Heimann said. "If they don't take it then you move from rehabilitation up to punishment."

Outside the law, influences like Cooper have independently launched their own programs.

"My task has been primarily to build resilience within youth, so with Party S.A.F.E. If there is no demand the supply will dry up," Cooper said. "You don't necessarily blame the supplier for providing a supply for which there is a demand."

Cooper launched Party S.A.F.E. (Substance abuse free entertainment), which is an initiative of Communities That Care and Foundation For Youth, specifically in Columbus.

"The task, mine is not to tell young people that drugs are bad, but to say that the person is good, not the drug. Once you recognize the greatness within you, the things you say 'yes' to are the things that are going to enhance your life, not the things that are going to take away."

The program identifies the risk factors like early initiation of drug abuse or poverty. Then focuses on building protective factors preventing long-term damage.

"What do we do, we ask young people to make a

decision to commit to saying "I will not use alcohol, tobacco, or other drugs before my eighteenth birthday." Once they make that pledge, now they get a card. That card offers them discounts at different businesses."

Out of their 29 partners, Orange Leaf, Yatz and Subway joined the program.

"That's when the community says when you, the young person, makes a good choice. We are there to support that choice," Cooper said. "Now every time you pull out your party safe card, it's a reminder that you did make a pledge."

Not all of those who obtain the card have followed the pledge.

"We may not eliminate it. But, if we can minimize it then that's what we'll do"

Cooper explains his perspective on the community's weakness.

"There's not really a self-referral system, so u have to be bottoming out and becoming a nuisance to society at which times suddenly there is real interest in your healing and health," Cooper said. "I believe it'd be helpful to have a self-referral system in Columbus, but the challenge is cost."

On the other hand, Party S.A.F.E and Day Treatment were invented by locals and for locals.

"The community works to put as many resources in their hand as possible. That may be where Columbus has a growing edge."

A Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) at Centerstone, Beth Gruenewald, explains about their services.

"A community mental health center exists for purposes of making sure people who have lower income can get treatment," Gruenewald, LMHC said.

Centerstone is one of the few mental health facilities in town.

"Some will come in and ask for an appointment because they want help. My clients are a vast majority of court ordered."

Gruenewald specializes in adult addiction. She states that about 98 percent of her clients started using drugs in their teen years. Once adulthood hits, they faced more serious issues.

"The treatment is focused on learning coping skills that they couldn't learn when they were teens because of substance use," Gruenewald, LMHC said. "Also, learn how to cope with regular stressors. Some cases, it's learning how to pay bills, keep their jobs, health relationships or taking care of themselves physically."

Drug dependency can affect the individual's ability to progress into improvement.

"We don't treat addiction as a bad habit or lack of willpower. It is an illness."

For teenagers seeking help, Judge Heimann has started planning a system called Safe Places. Foundations for Youth and Youth Services Center will join local businesses, who are open 24/7, to help teenagers find a secure environment.

"The people working in those businesses will be trained and will put that child in touch with family services," Judge Heimann said. "Then they will deal with the issue the child is having which may include taking them to the youth services center for a place to sleep at night." **A**

photos and design by lillyanne pham