

PRESS RELEASE

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MARIJUANA: THE MYTHS, THE ABUSE AND THE TRUTH

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JACKSON (February 11, 2009) – As the November election results were tabulated, strong opponents of the Medical Marijuana law watched in disbelief as the proposal passed by a slim margin. The proposal passed in spite of local news highlighting the legal pitfalls of two former Jackson council members as well as the known devastating long term health risks associated with marijuana.

Some community members believe this passing could be the result of a lack of education about the side effects, both short and long term, marijuana has on the body. Others feel we should be concerned about the message this new law may be sending our youth.

“The day after the election, I heard students in my class joking about going to their doctor to get a prescription for marijuana because they had a headache,” said Shelly Milligan, Program Coordinator for the Breakout Drug Education Program. “Since this proposal passed,” Milligan said, “more and more kids are viewing tobacco as far more dangerous than marijuana.” The Breakout Drug Education Program is classroom-based education, offered to all Jackson County schools, that helps youth understand the dangers associated with drugs.

Tobacco has a far greater impact on a person’s health compared to marijuana: Myth or Truth? Daily use of one to three marijuana cigarettes (“joints”) produces the same lung damage and cancer risk as smoking five times as many nicotine cigarettes. Other physical problems associated with marijuana use include toxicity in unborn babies, lower levels of testosterone and defective or nonfunctional sperm in male marijuana users, increased heart rate, and lung function problems.

Marijuana is not addictive: Myth or Truth? Physical dependence and withdrawal symptoms have been demonstrated with heavy daily use of marijuana.

Marijuana makes a person more alert and has no effect on the brain: Myth or Truth? Marijuana is referred to as a Schedule I drug and is illegal to grow, sell, buy or use in any form. It contains several psychoactive chemicals that act on the brain. According to researchers in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, new studies confirm that heavy (daily) marijuana use impairs critical skills related to attention, memory and learning. These deficits persist up to 24 hours after the user stopped feeling high.

FACTS:

By the time Jackson County youth have reached the 11th grade, approximately 42 percent of them have used marijuana.ⁱ Additionally, according to the 2006 Prevention Needs Assessment, youth first try marijuana at age 13. Eight percent of Jackson County youth have tried marijuana before the age of 13.ⁱⁱ

Marijuana, commonly known as “pot” is often referred to as a gateway drug because surveys show that regular marijuana users are more likely to experiment with other drugs. A recent study found that regular users typically combine the use of pot with alcohol, which is more hazardous than the use of either marijuana or alcohol alone. According to the 2007 Jackson City Police Department statistics, 252, or 46 percent of their

narcotic and drug arrests were for marijuana. The Department of Justice recently completed a report stating approximately 79 percent of incarcerated adults committed their crime either under the influence of a drug or had an alcohol or drug problem.

Marijuana has negative consequences to an individual's health, the safety of the community and the health care system burdened with their care.

More information about:

- *Jackson County Substance Abuse Prevention Coalition* and its activities, please contact Kelsey Winston at (517) 796-5133 or via email at kwinston@uwjackson.org
- *Breakout Drug Education Program, Shelly Milligan, (517) 787-7920.*

ⁱ 2008 Michigan Profile for Healthy Youth

ⁱⁱ 2006 Prevention Needs Assessment