

# Kids learn what happens to the brain when attacked by drug and alcohol abuse

The School Committee of SAFE's PRIDE Coalition sponsored a visit by Dr. Stephen Dewey, a neurologist and neuroscientist, on Friday, Jan 10. He spoke to a packed assembly at Finley Middle School of sixth, seventh and eighth graders on "The Teen Brain: Still Under Construction," which delved into how alcohol and drug use affect the developing adolescent and adult brain. The information he shared appeared to stun the middle school students who were, for the most part, silent for most of the assembly and totally engaged in the presentation.

"Heroin is now cheap and we've seen use of it go up more than any other drug," Dewey said. "In 2013 we saw more kids die from heroin than alcohol. This has never happened before."

Dewey works at North Shore Hospital in Manhasset where he conducts studies on the brain. He brought along a Power Point presentation that included many slides from PET scans of the brain which helped to visually give credence to what he was sharing with the students.

"I'm not here to say no to drugs," he said. "I'm here to talk about what I see everyday."

Some interesting facts shared by Dewey included:

If you don't use drugs by age 22 there is less than a 1 percent chance you will become addicted to a drug.

Marijuana is now being laced with methamphetamine.

The number one cause of seeking out drugs is the environment.

When you use drugs your brain will become activated. But the feeling you get from taking drugs does not last as long as the way it affects your brain.

Dewey said his purpose in speaking to middle school students was to arm them with the facts before they make the mistake of getting involved in taking drugs. His hope is if younger students see how drugs and alcohol affect the brain they will not even try them.

"When you get drunk from alcohol it takes your brain four to five days to go back to normal," Dewey said. "At some point when you drink your brain will not go back to normal."

The only way to get it back to normal would be to drink like an alcoholic does. They don't drink to get drunk, just to feel normal."

He told students that chronic marijuana smoking changes the blood flow in specific brain areas. "Smoking pot is the number one cause of injuries for athletes and for household accidents like falling down the stairs," Dewey said. "The brain changes dramatically, and these changes are permanent."

Students had plenty of questions for Dewey and talked amongst themselves as they exited the assembly, no doubt sharing what they had heard. It's one thing reading about drugs and alcohol, but another much more powerful lesson to see what drug and alcohol abuse can do to your brain.

The Coalition's School Committee is Chaired by Denise Kiernan, Director of Health, Physical Education and Athletics for the Glen Cove School District. Dr. Sharon Harris and Councilman Tony Gallo Co-Chair the Coalition. For further information on any SAFE, Inc. PRIDE Project Coalition and their initiatives contact Coalition Coordinator Aimee Abraham at (516) 676-2008. SAFE Inc. is a not for profit tax exempt substance abuse education and prevention agency located in Glen Cove. Visit our website at [HYPERLINK "http://www.safeglen-cove.org"](http://www.safeglen-cove.org) [www.safeglen-cove.org](http://www.safeglen-cove.org) and follow us on Facebook at [HYPERLINK "http://www.facebook.com/GlenCovePrideCoalition"](http://www.facebook.com/GlenCovePrideCoalition) [www.facebook.com/GlenCovePrideCoalition](http://www.facebook.com/GlenCovePrideCoalition).

*Finley Middle School Principal Nelson Iocolano, left, speaker Dr. Stephen Dewey, SAFE Executive Director Dr. Sharon Harris and SAFE Board Director Ann Marie Gailius at a recent assembly where information was shared regarding the affects of drug and alcohol abuse on the adolescent brain.*

