

# Students at Russellville get straight talk on drugs from ex-user and officials

By RYAN SMITH  
News Tribune

Stephen Mitchell didn't mince words with the group of Russellville tenth graders listening intently as he addressed them about the dangers of drug addiction.

"Let me tell you something, people that use drugs are selfish. When you're doing them, it's all about you. You're just selfish," said Mitchell, a former heroin addict and convict turned counselor for the Missouri Recovery Network.

Mitchell, as well as representatives of the Cole County Sheriff's Department, Prosecutor's Office, and Missouri National Guard visited Russellville High School Thursday to speak to students about the hard facts of drug and alcohol abuse as part of Red Ribbon Week.



And for many teens inundated with "Just Say No" messages, these talks seemed to be more effective than others they've heard.

"They're informative and they just give it to you straightforward, they aren't sugarcoating anything," said Jennifer Disler, a 16-year-old junior, who said drugs and alcohol are "definitely" an issue at the school.

Megan Kehr, 16, called the talks "very helpful."

"I think one of the most important things we learned is that some of the smaller mistakes you make in high school can have a lasting impact on your life," said Kehr.

In the past, Russellville has held assemblies and done other activities during Red Ribbon Week, which began Monday and is celebrated in many schools nationwide. This year, speakers talked to each class individually in four different areas in the school.

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"We thought smaller groups would be better because there is more opportunities to ask questions and to interact," said high school counselor Nancy Kruse.

Each speaker also focused on different perspectives about drug and alcohol abuse. Prosecutor Bill Tackett focused on drunk driving and drug laws, Lt. Joe Essen of the Sheriff's Department talked about searches and seizures, Staff Sgt. Scott Gardner of the National Guard spoke about the biological effects of drugs, and Mitchell shared his personal story.

For Mitchell, it's a rewarding experience to be able to do something about what he called "a problem that is crippling our communities and schools."

"I want to help people because of my lifestyle. I'm trying to give back and tell people what God did for me."

rsmith@newstribune.com