

# LOCAL REFLECTIONS

## You can't candy coat reality – Mason

By Cary Walter

The turnout would in all likelihood have been much higher had it not been for the dump of snow that rendered local schools absent of bus students on Nov. 21. However the two days of drug awareness seminars hosted by the Nawican Friendship Centre featuring Lee Mason of the Young Warriors Network still saw more than 20 young people and additional educational support staff brave the weather to attend.

Tuesday was reserved for youth and educators, with the following day open to the public. Even with the weather hindering attendance, Mason was pleased with the group of youth that attended.

"Those that did come learned a lot and I've asked them to share that with their friends," he said.

Mason's Vancouver based network focuses on encouraging youth to live drug and alcohol free lives through empowerment versus what most youth see as the stereotypical preaching methods of many adults.

"I think young kids everywhere are going through a lot of the same experiences. Young people are being exposed to way more drugs than they should be being exposed to. There are some pretty dangerous drugs floating around the community that people don't care that they're getting kids involved in," Mason said.

But Mason commented that he is seeing this on all levels right now.

"Dope dealers care about how much money is going into their pockets not how many lives they're going to destroy," he said.

You may think you'd rec-

ognize a drug dealer if you saw one. But images of greasy haired individuals with dirty, torn clothes are just movie imagery.

Today's drug dealer comes in all shapes and sizes from all walks of life. In reality many have more available income than individuals working a 60-hour week.

"There's people that hide their drug dealing activities from people they don't want to know they are dealing drugs. But in most communities everyone knows who the dealers are – they just pretend.... They don't get involved with stopping them or putting them out of busi-

ness. In some communities people don't identify the dealers publicly because they're (dealers) related to someone in power or somebody in authority and so they think 'well I don't want to lose my job'."

Mason was quick to point out his comments are general and based on his experience in various communities, and not specifically directed at anyone in Dawson Creek.

What Mason does see as consistent in the communities he visits is that nearly everyone knows where the crack houses are located, yet little is being done to stop it.

"We have a problem and people are pretending it's not there - it is there. And something has to be done to stop it. Far too many people are dying. We've got young people on the streets prostituting themselves at 12, 13 and 14 years old because they're addicted to drugs."

Mason says he has had many reports from Dawson Creek over the years and the drug problem branches into additional issues such as prostitution to support the habits being developed.

"I've see quite a bit going on here," says Mason, who has traveled through this community, frequently staying overnight on his way to other destinations.

One of things that comes with growing older is the remoteness of recognition. Many adults are unable to recognize the symptoms, lingo or signs of drug usage and addiction.

"Educating the adults as to what's really going on with their kids – educating the young people in the community about the realities of the dangers of the drugs they're dabbling in and fooling around with or thinking of fooling around with," Mason said.

He pointed specifically to what he sees as the growing issue of crystal meth in this community.

"You cannot candy coat reality with crystal meth. Crystal meth is here (Dawson Creek). I don't care who says it isn't. I spoke with

a person here last night that's a dealer of crystal meth and I could tell as soon as I saw him that he was high on meth because he's got all the symptoms – facial sores and everything else," Mason said.

Mason has seen this type of scenario before, and says that it becomes very important to begin the attack on the drug before it gets a stranglehold on the community.

"It's definitely here and it's definitely escalating and it will snowball if something isn't done about it. Personally, I challenge the RCMP to get something happening here," said Mason.

Mason added he is tired of hearing that the police are handcuffed from acting on their suspicions because of the constitution.

"People are dying as a result of what's going on and something needs to be done. Quit pretending there isn't a problem – and the mayor needs to here this too. He says there isn't a problem, yet we've had a whole bunch of people in the field here today acknowledge there definitely is a problem. Playing ostrich won't deal with the problem."

But Dawson Creek Mayor Calvin Kruk said City officials are dealing with the issue.

"I think that any time drugs are around there is a problem. And I think that we are doing what we can to counter that - we're very supportive. We've initiated Drug Free Dawson Creek, support programs are available," Kruk said, adding that if there are suggestions from the public that the City would be happy to hear them.

"If there are methods that we haven't approached the problem with, we would certainly like to hear solutions. We want to work on it.... We want to see solutions for the difficulties."

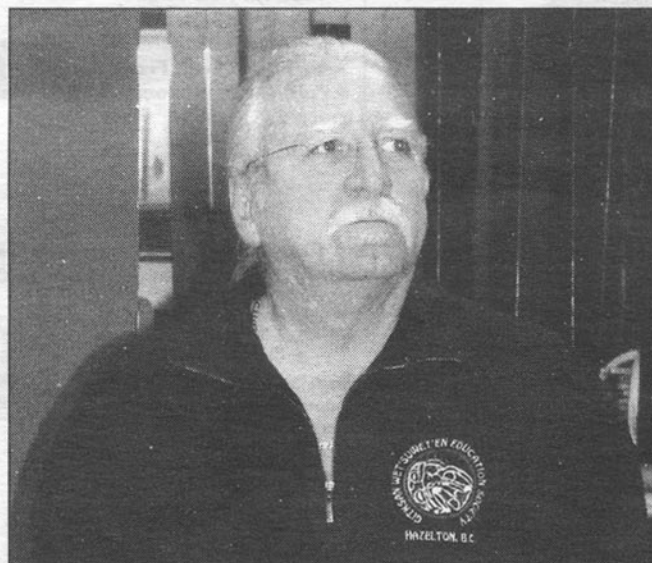
Kruk doesn't see a quick fix for any of the societal issues, stating that Dawson Creek like every other community has challenges.

"I think that if we haven't looked at a potential solution then we have to get on it."

### The 4:20 Superstore

Cary Walter photo

Many adults drive by the sign above to get their morning coffee. Do you know what it means? Lee Mason says educating adults about drugs is just as important as educating the youth.



Cary Walter photo

Lee Mason of the Young Warriors Network in Vancouver was in town giving drug awareness seminars with a focus on crystal meth.