



News

'Hidden in plain sight' at WHA School

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There is an old saying, "Learn something new every day." In my job, new information comes my way all the time.

Looking back over this last year, I am surprised by what I've learned. The education came in the form of the Working Together Coalition in Walker, with topics ranging from underage drinking, the Zero Area Providers program and teen leadership in our community.

In October, the Working Together Coalition (WTC) organized an event called "Hidden in Plain Sight" at the Walker-Hackensack-Akeley High School, one of the many educational events they have hosted this year. Local law enforcement, the Teens Leading the Way group, and WTC members re-created a teen's bedroom in a WHA classroom.

Amid the crumpled shirts, notebooks and sports gear were 25 different pieces of drug paraphernalia. A packet of K2-synthetic marijuana hidden in a CD case. Cigarettes in socks. Items taped under the dresser drawers.

Parents were invited in the room to dig through the teen clutter and find the hidden drug-related pieces. Volunteers were on hand to lead parents if they were not comfortable digging around.

As a parent of a teenager, I found the experience humbling. I don't consider myself naive, but I am learning the drug culture evolves quickly. I wouldn't have recognized some items for what they were, only recognized the strange areas they were placed.

Watching the majority of parents come in and struggle to even go through a clean sock drawer, I realized we are all timid when it comes to going through our teen's room. I'm learning we must be bold, go forward and be the parent. You have the right to open things up, cast an inquisitive eye and dig. Look in the snowboard boots.

Parents may feel a little guilty, but realize that while you trust your child, there is the reality of high school and the availability of drugs and alcohol. It was staring me in the face at the Hidden in Plain Site event. It was in the reports of the law enforcement officers working next to me at the school.

As a community, we should talk more about drinking and drug use. About providing positive adult role models. About not providing alcohol to teens. The Working Together Coalition is here to lead us into discussions as parents, teachers, students and the community. I am learning something new every day from the Coalition members to the great group of high school students.

I will share that information with my friends, family and with the Coalition. This is one small step to help our students enjoy their high school days in a healthy way.

Want to learn more? Check out the WTC website at www.workingtogethercoalition.org or stop by one of the monthly Coalition meetings!

If you were not able to visit our Hidden in Plain Sight events at the Pine River-Backus, Walker-Hackensack-Akeley or Northland Community schools, join us at the Women's Expo March 5 from 10 a.m.

to 2 p.m. at the Northern Lights Casino. For further questions, contact Kelly Felton, Coalition coordinator, at (218) 330-8129.

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