

Former teen drug addict opens eyes of students



AS IT IS: Garry Whyte speaks of his \$300 a day drug addiction at the age of 15 and the years he spent in a federal penitentiary as a result of trying to support his habit. He tells students as it is and hopes they can learn from him. (Staff Photo by Holly Lake)

By HOLLY LAKE

Reformer staff writer

WATERFORD—There's no beating around the bush with Garry Whyte. He tells it as it is. He's been there, done that and paid the price.

Whyte spoke to students at Waterford District High School Thursday and it wasn't the typical 'don't do drugs' presentation.

He told students about his \$300 a day drug habit at the age of 15. He spoke of how he ended up in a federal penitentiary for five years. He told students he reached a point as a teen when his drug of choice became anything he could get in a needle to stick in his veins.

He started using drugs and alcohol at the age of 13 and eventually dropped out of school.

"I hate the word 'experiment' when people talk about drugs," he told students. "Because for me that experiment turned into a 10-year research project."

Whyte is now a youth preacher in London and has been speaking on the issue since 1989.

His presentation at times resembles a stand-up comedy routine as he acts out situations he's been in and tells jokes. He uses slides of car wrecks and pictures of the victims. News clips and videos of people who have lost loved ones in impaired driving accidents are also used to further make his point, but he lets them do the talking.

Information is power, Whyte said. Over and over in

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Garry Whyte

his presentation he said, "I wish someone had told me..."

"I know there are a lot of brilliant people in this generation and if they have the right information presented to them, they will make the right choices."

His approach seems to have an effect.

Jill Proctor, 18, attends North Park Collegiate in Brantford and is the regional rep for Ontario Students Against Impaired Driving (OSAID), the organizer of Thursday's presentation.

"Just from watching the faces of students I think they really picked up on what he was saying. It's because Garry doesn't hit you over the head with it."

Lis Smit, 18, is WDHS's OSAID president. She said students she spoke with really liked Whyte's approach, particularly how he started

out with a comedic routine.

"He talked to them, not at them," said Smit.

"I think students need to see that real people do go through this. A lot of teens think they're invincible. I think he shows them they're not."

Whyte said he felt that way as a teen.

"Teenagers think they're indestructible," he told the group. "Well, there are wheelchairs, hospitals and graveyards full of teens who thought they were indestructible."

Smit said it was a unique experience for WDHS.

"I think this is one of our best assemblies. Usually students aren't too into it, but with the way this was presented, they listened intently."