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D.A.R.E. I?

Dare I slam D.A.R.E.?

I daresay I do. At the risk of another late-night threatening call from the local D.A.R.E. officer (I only mention this because I am still waiting for the long-ago-promised apology for the last call, Chief Shaw), I finally will produce my long-promised commentary on the D.A.R.E. program.

According to the information I have researched, it is entirely possible that this article could be censored. It seems that the well-funded D.A.R.E. program cannot stand some honest scrutiny of its effectiveness. There are reports around the country that D.A.R.E. has bullied journalists, manipulated the facts, and intimidated government officials, news organizations, parents groups and researchers who criticize the program. D.A.R.E. students have been encouraged by D.A.R.E. officers to call outspoken opponents late at night and vandalize their property with 'drug pusher' and 'crack user' type graffiti. These crimes are then not investigated. These hardball tactics are referred to as being 'Dared.' I guess when the D.A.R.E. officer called me late at night to threaten me with a lawsuit (that never materialized) the last time I mentioned D.A.R.E., I was 'Dared.'

Its adherents support the program with almost a religious fervor. If anyone opposes it, they paint him as a drug user or worse, without a care for the truth of their statements. The program is, after all, well supported by a masterful publicity campaign which makes it quite popular to the masses.

How could it not be popular? The children who participate are bribed with D.A.R.E. paraphernalia. My own son came home with a D.A.R.E. t-shirt clad teddy bear, D.A.R.E. stickers and beverage cups and all kinds of other D.A.R.E. logoed junk that appeals to kids. Anyone who contributes to D.A.R.E. gets a free, highly complimentary plug in the local paper. Teachers and school administrators love D.A.R.E. The mandate of D.A.R.E. is so righteous. I'm not being facetious here, the publicly stated purpose of the D.A.R.E. program is honorable. Drug usage is stupid and dangerous. I do not dispute that.

What I do question is the effectiveness of this \$750 million a year program. The Los Angeles-based D.A.R.E. America boasts that D.A.R.E. is now in 70% of the nation's school districts. If it is so wide-spread, why do we not see a significant decrease in teenage substance abuse? Why does evaluation after evaluation reveal that the D.A.R.E. program does not produce any better results than no drug education program at all?

And what about the D.A.R.E. box? This is a box decorated by the children established for the purpose of encouraging them to write anonymous notes asking questions and turning in drug users. According to a University of Illinois study, an accusation is made in 59% of all D.A.R.E. classes. Wayne Gibb said in last week's paper, ". . . my job is not to take anyone to jail, including them or their parents." This columnist is hard pressed to believe that a cop isn't going to arrest someone who is reported as using or possessing drugs.

According to *Children's Express*, a newsletter "by children for everybody", when asked "What does D.A.R.E. teach kids?" 17 year-old Mary replied, "It teaches you to narc on your parents and your family and everybody else around you."

14 year-old Luke said, "It turns kids against their parents. This one kid went to D.A.R.E. and ratted on his mom and his brother. D.A.R.E. makes them think that people are going to get

help, but really they get locked up. . .” Critics claim this turns kids into informants, in much the same fashion as employed by the communists in the Soviet Union, and the Hitler Youth in Nazi Germany. This doesn’t paint a very pretty picture in freedom-loving America.

There have been numerous studies over the years on the D.A.R.E program. They have concluded that:

D.A.R.E is taking the place of and the draining resources that could be applied to more beneficial drug-use curricula

The long-term effects of D.A.R.E. in all targeted educational areas are negligible.

Students overwhelmingly reject the ‘no-use’ or zero tolerance messages as not credible.

70% of students report feeling ‘neutral’ or ‘negative’ toward D.A.R.E. instructors.

40% said the programs had ‘no impact’ on their substance abuse decisions.

Only 10% said the programs affected them a lot or completely.

With the D.A.R.E. program, politics has overridden science. It’s a clear-cut case of following the money, effectiveness be damned. It’s not about stopping kids from using drugs, it’s about \$750 million. If it were about stopping kids from using drugs, they’d use one of the more effective programs, and they wouldn’t have to terrorize their opponents into silence.

Having said my piece, will I be ‘Dared?’ If I am, I’ll be sure to let you know.