Many are ‘using and abusing’ as an escape

(EDITOR’S NOTE: This week is National Alcohol Abuse Awareness Week. In conjunction with efforts to educate the public about alcohol and drug abuse, the focus is on the use and abuse of alcohol and drug abuse among teenagers. Part one deals with the problem itself as well as treatment options available. Part two will feature an interview with a recovering teen alcoholic. Names and situations have been changed to protect the people involved.)

By ANNE MCKENZIE
School Editor
Terry is going to a party. The stirrup pants are tight to a fault. The ultra-baggy sweater is hot pink, and the dangling earrings are tight.

Her hair is mussed and styled to perfection, and she’s ready for a night on the town.

She makes a quick stop in the bathroom, not to check her appearance, but to be sure her best friend is in tow for the party.

She goes nowhere without her friend. Its presence makes conversation easier. It helps her to be the life of the party. Her friend is an instant ice-breaker, regardless of the situation. She wouldn’t be caught without her best friend.

Her friend is alcohol.

Terry is 16 years old, and well on her way to becoming another number on someone’s chart of statistics. She is a teenage drunk.

Whether the chemical is alcohol, marijuana, cocaine or ‘speed’ statistics show the national trend is that fewer high school students are “using” frequently. However, those who do use find that their numbers are increasing; moreover, their reason for doing so is becoming unmanageable.

It’s a conscious decision to use alcohol — a drug that is legal and often available. However, the use of alcohol, or drugs, can lead to dependence.

Arneson said he doesn’t believe that the use of alcohol alone is the cause of the problem.

While their treatment programs may have contributed to the teen’s problem, family involvement is crucial to the teenager’s success in battling his or her dependency.

Families, at some point in a treatment program, are brought in “to feel what the teen is feeling.”

It’s not necessarily the un-sure, derachievers nor the kids from across the tracks who use. It’s quite often the bright kids, the smart ones.

And substance use and abuse is no respecter of age, person or region.

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“It’s quite often your bright kids, the smart ones,” Arneson observed. With a shrug, he added, “They can think of ways of using to rationalize what they are doing.”

Giving in to the peer pressure, they succumb to the desire to drink or smoke, all the while telling themselves that it’s okay to have the urge to use, says Arneson. Giving in to the urge times.

Once treated for a chemical dependence, institutions like CCD and others seek to break the cycle which may have contributed to the teen’s problem.

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