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### **Historical Public Policy: D.A.R.E Program**

Throughout the decades of the 1970s and 1980s increasing concerns developed about drug usage in the United States. Of particular concern was the usage of drugs by our youth. Studies were conducted and policies were developed to address this problem by providing preventative measures which would not only attack the emerging crisis, but prevent young people from experimenting or becoming involved with drugs. D.A.R.E. was one of the early programs that dealt with this issue. Although the federal support for this program eventually diminished, the D.A.R.E. program developed enough support to sustain itself and it continues to operate successfully today. D.A.R.E. programs also opened the door for other law enforcement programs which also deal with drug use issues. The federal government continues to formulate policies to deal with the problem, but the problem is far from being resolved.

In response to the growing drug epidemic, in 1979 the federal government established and approved the "Drug Abuse Prevention, Treatment, and Rehabilitation Act of 1979." This Act provided federal funds for drug abuse prevention. The National Institute on Drug Abuse, (NIDA), was required to devote not less than 7% of their Community Programs budget in fiscal year 1980 and 10% in fiscal year 1981 to be spent on drug prevention as well as employee assistance programs.<sup>1</sup> A decade later the "Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988" was passed which established the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) in the Executive Office of the President. This policy authorized funds for Federal, state and local drug enforcement activities, school-based drug prevention efforts and drug abuse treatment

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<sup>1</sup> Data obtained from NIDA Web site at <http://www.nida.nih.gov/about/legislation/Chronology.html>.

programs.<sup>2</sup> The original D.A.R.E. programs were financed primarily through grants as a result of many of these federal programs.<sup>3</sup>

The D.A.R.E. (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) program was established in 1983 by former Chief Daryl Gates, of the Los Angeles Police Department. D.A.R.E. currently operates in about 80 percent of all school districts across the United States and in numerous foreign countries.<sup>4</sup> It is an educational program designed to be taught in schools by uniformed police officers. The early programs were heavily criticized for the methodology used in the curriculum. The current D.A.R.E. programs have changed over the years and now provide a better means of delivering the message about drugs and drug usage.

One of the key issues involved in the D.A.R.E. program was to be successful in reducing drug usage in young people. That issue has been evaluated extensively throughout the past two decades. Research has provided a multitude of positively based results as well as negatively based results regarding D.A.R.E. programs. The evaluations conducted in the 1990s were more consistently critical of D.A.R.E. programs. More recent evaluations have proven to be more positive. The dedication of the individuals involved in D.A.R.E. as well as the adjustments made to the program has resulted with increased effectiveness compared to the methodology of the early programs.<sup>5</sup>

An interesting perspective about D.A.R.E. is that even though federal funding has been minimized over the years, it has developed enough support within law enforcement as well as the community to survive and sustain its existence. The current program is a non-profit organization which is funded through City budgets, school budgets, service groups, fundraising events and private donations.<sup>6</sup> D.A.R.E.'s primary mission is to provide children with the information and skills they need

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<sup>2</sup> Data obtained from NIDA Web site at <http://www.nida.nih.gov/about/legislation/Chronology.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Data obtained from DARE America Web site at <http://www.DARE.com>.

<sup>4</sup> Data obtained from DARE America Web site at <http://www.DARE.com> and information released by the University of Akron Institute for Health and Social Policy.

<sup>5</sup> Data obtained from DARE America Web site at <http://www.DARE.com>.

<sup>6</sup> Data obtained from DARE America Web site at <http://www.DARE.com>.

to live drug and violence free lives through programs at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. It is usually introduced to children in the fifth or sixth grade level.<sup>7</sup>

In terms of the key players involved with the D.A.R.E. program, I believe that law enforcement as a whole would be considered as one of them. Most police agencies have historically provided either juvenile divisions, school officers or at least some commitment to the schools in their community. When D.A.R.E. programs were first established they fit in very well with police agency goals especially in reference to preventive measures against juvenile delinquency. Also, in the 1980s and 1990s, concepts of Community Policing were developed and D.A.R.E. programs certainly fit well into that emphasis. The other key party involved with D.A.R.E. is the federal government. The federal government provided a majority of funding for the initial D.A.R.E. programs. Its primary focus was to prevent drug usage in our youth. The federal government was additionally concerned about the best means of addressing and combating the “War on Drugs”, especially emphasizing an effort with young people.

The conflict between the primary participants in this program was how to best deliver the message to young people. The negative evaluations of D.A.R.E. in the 1990s suggested there was a need to attack the problem in another method. However, the D.A.R.E. organizations made changes in their programs and in spite of the negative reviews, developed positive community relations which in turn gained support to continue the program. When governmental financial support was minimized, D.A.R.E. programs continued. D.A.R.E. programs eventually became engrained within the law enforcement community and have been sustained through numerous financial resources including grants, donations as well as being absorbed in numerous individual police agency budgets.

One of the most comprehensive evaluations conducted on D.A.R.E. programs was by the United States Accounting Office in GAO-03-172R. The subject was “Youth Illicit Drug Use Prevention: DARE Long-Term Evaluations and Federal Efforts to Identify Effective Programs” and it was completed in 2003. That reports stated that from 1996 through 2002, more than 30% of tenth and twelfth grade

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<sup>7</sup> GAO-03-172R Youth Illicit Drug Use Prevention.

students used marijuana during the year. It also reported that in fiscal year 2000, the federal government spent over \$2.1 billion on illicit drug use prevention programs for youth. That figure was obtained from the Office of National Drug Control Policy. Many programs were used including those implemented in school, family, and community settings. The most prevalent of programs were the school-based prevention programs because they provide easy access to children and adolescents. According to this report, the most widely used school-based substance abuse prevention program in the United States was the D.A.R.E. program.<sup>8</sup> This report addressed (1) the results of the evaluations of the long-term effectiveness of the D.A.R.E. elementary school curriculum in preventing illicit drug use among children and (2) federal efforts to identify programs that are effective in preventing illicit drug use among children.

The D.A.R.E. programs studied were from elementary schools, with curriculum of 17 lessons, taught by D.A.R.E. trained uniformed police officers, that focused on providing students with decision-making skills, showing them how to resist peer pressure, and teaching alternatives to illicit drug use and violence. The majority of studies evaluating DARE focused on the elementary school curriculum in effect before 1994. According to researchers, in 1994, modest changes were made to the elementary school curriculum, including revisions to the content and sequencing of the D.A.R.E. lessons.<sup>9</sup>

In fiscal year 2000, the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, which supports various substance abuse prevention programs for youth, provided about \$2 million for D.A.R.E. regional training centers to support the training of new police officers that help deliver the D.A.R.E. program lessons. Also, in fiscal year 2000, Education provided states about \$439 million in grants for schools and communities under the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) of 1994.<sup>10</sup> It is possible that some of the funds could have been used to support D.A.R.E.; however, Education has no estimate of the amount of SDFSCA fiscal year 2000 state grant funds that were used for D.A.R.E.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> GAO-03-172R Youth Illicit Drug Use Prevention.

<sup>9</sup> GAO-03-172R Youth Illicit Drug Use Prevention.

<sup>10</sup> Pub. L. No. 103-382, § 101, 108 STAT.3518, 3672-3690 (classified to 20 U.S.C. §§ 7101-7144 (2000)).

<sup>11</sup> GAO-03-172R Youth Illicit Drug Use Prevention.

The GAO report looked at six evaluations of the long-term effectiveness of the D.A.R.E. elementary school curriculum and found no statistically significant differences in illicit drug use between students who received D.A.R.E. lessons in the fifth or sixth grade and those who did not, the control groups. There were three locations selected: Lexington, Kentucky; Colorado Springs, Colorado; and Chicago, Illinois. These studies questioned individuals about their lifetime, the past year, and past month marijuana, alcohol, or cigarette use. They were also asked about their attitudes towards drugs, peer pressure resistance, and self-esteem. Three of the six evaluations reported that the control groups of students that did not receive D.A.R.E. were provided other drug use prevention education. Each of the six evaluations was conducted at intervals ranging from 2 to 10 years after the fifth or sixth grade students were initially surveyed. These evaluations suggested that D.A.R.E. had no statistically significant long-term effect on preventing illicit drug abuse.<sup>12</sup> Five of the evaluations also reported on student's attitudes about illicit drug use and other nonbehavioral measures and found no significant differences between the D.A.R.E. and non-D.A.R.E. students over the long term.

Short-term effects were also evaluated by two of the groups; Kentucky and Illinois. These evaluations found no significant differences in illicit drug use between the intervention and control groups within a year after completing D.A.R.E. lessons. They also found that D.A.R.E. students showed stronger negative attitudes about illicit drug use and improved peer pressure resistance skills and self-esteem about illicit drug use about 1 year after the intervention. However, these positive effects did diminish over time.<sup>13</sup>

The GOA report acknowledges that their findings should not be necessarily applied to the future D.A.R.E. program. There is an evaluation of D.A.R.E. middle and high school programs curricula currently being conducted under a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation research grant, by researchers from the University of Akron in cooperation with D.A.R.E. America Foundation officials. It will be released in the next few months. According to the Akron researchers, the revised middle school

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<sup>12</sup> GAO-03-172R Youth Illicit Drug Use Prevention.

<sup>13</sup> GAO-03-172R Youth Illicit Drug Use Prevention.

curricula places more emphasis on and devotes more time to three prevention program areas: (1) normative beliefs about drug use, (2) consequences of drug and alcohol use, and (3) drug use resistance skills. The curriculum also includes more interaction among students through small group discussions and role play. The study also examines using police officers as facilitators rather than instructors.<sup>14</sup>

The GOA report is typical of the numerous negative evaluations of the D.A.R.E. program. However, a simple search conducted on the D.A.R.E. website currently reveals 10 evaluations of a positive nature that were conducted throughout the United States.<sup>15</sup> I contacted Dale Brown who is the Northern California Regional Director of D.A.R.E. America. Mr. Brown is a former Chief of Police at Long Beach and has been involved in the program since the 1980s. He addressed the University of Akron study referred to in the GAO report. He said that it is a five year longitudinal study to evaluate the effectiveness of the new D.A.R.E. programs. The preliminary results that he has been made aware of are regarding the impact of the normative beliefs of the student. Research has indicated that students no longer think that drug usage is acceptable; they have increased refusal skills (saying “no”); and they consider consequences involved with drug usage. Mr. Brown indicated that additional criteria suggests that D.A.R.E. Officers do as good a job or better than professional teachers do when delivering drug education to students.

Mr. Brown is one of many individuals I contacted who are involved in the D.A.R.E. program. Many of them are former police officers, now retired and working in the D.A.R.E. organization. The consensus of opinion from these individuals is that D.A.R.E. has made some important improvements over the years and that it is a successful program. One of the primary changes that they made was to change the method of instruction. In the early days of the program, Officers lectured students in scare tactic strategies. They have learned that those methods were ineffective so they devised a system that is more of a facilitator based program which engages the students and they take a more active part in

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<sup>14</sup> GAO-03-172R Youth Illicit Drug Use Prevention.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.dare.com/home/Resources/Story1eb3.asp?N=Resources&M=16&S=43>.

the class. There is also a focus on decision making and how to make decisions about drugs. The newer programs get the students involved in the curriculum and provide more realistic approaches that the students can identify with.

One of the interesting unanticipated outcomes of the D.A.R.E. programs is the positive impact they have made between police and the community. In addition to providing education about drugs and decision making, a positive police image is presented in these classes. For many students, especially from depressed neighborhoods, the resulting impact made by the police officer in the classroom is something that not only changes their ideas about drugs; it changes their paradigm about the police in a favorable way. Although studies regarding D.A.R.E. have focused primarily on whether or not students ever used drugs after the D.A.R.E. instruction, there have been no studies done to determine any resulting positive effects on the students beyond drug usage. It would be interesting to evaluate how many of the D.A.R.E. students became law abiding citizens attributable to a positive police officer contact established during a D.A.R.E. program. I have been in law enforcement for over twenty-seven years and it is amazing how much of an impact law enforcement can make when it focuses an effort in schools. The D.A.R.E. officials that I spoke with all have had similar experiences.

In the examination of the policies relating to the support of D.A.R.E. programs, I believe that a consideration of the expectations of the program needs to be addressed. Was it really fair to expect that D.A.R.E. programs would all by themselves solve the drug program for our youth. I do not necessarily think that this was a fair expectation. However, the resulting federal policies lessened support for D.A.R.E. programs and directed funds for other organizations. The decision to use drugs by young people is effected by a multitude of influences. A person's family, environment, peers, social status and many other factors effect whether he/she will ever consider using drugs. It is a much bigger problem than a schoolroom class should have been expected to resolve.

In terms of anticipated and actual outcomes of the D.A.R.E. program, it was anticipated that D.A.R.E. would have a positive impact on illicit drug usage by students attending D.A.R.E. classes. As the early evaluations determined, that was not necessarily the case. The federal government limited

the resources they provided for D.A.R.E. as a result. The policies involved with reducing illicit drug usage have looked at various programs in order to determine which ones to support. Although the successes of the D.A.R.E. program have been questioned through numerous evaluations, the program has been a success and has achieved a life of its own beyond the initial grants provided by the federal government.

The advent of D.A.R.E. programs in schools has had other positive outcomes that were probably not anticipated. The dynamic of having uniformed police officers in schools was initiated to a large degree by D.A.R.E. programs. Many police programs associated with youth problems have been developed since D.A.R.E. was established. These programs incorporate D.A.R.E. concepts within their curricula. Two examples of such programs are the G.R.E.A.T. (Gang Resistance Education And Training) and the S.R.O. (School Resource Officer) programs. Each program deals with juvenile problems including drug prevention.<sup>16</sup> There are also a multitude of other police programs, many of which have been customized to suit individual departmental needs. An example of one is the P.I.S.T.O.L. (Police In Schools To Offer Life) program at San Pablo Police Department. All of these programs have a common theme based upon D.A.R.E. concepts and methodology.

What is also interesting regarding current drug prevention programs and D.A.R.E is that some of the newer programs are once again using graphic, scare tactics to deliver the message against drug usage. The "Montana Meth Project" is one of those. Their goal is to significantly reduce the prevalence of first-time methamphetamine use in Montana. They are active in conducting public service messages, public policy and community action. They coordinate closely with local, state, and federal agencies, including the U.S. Congress, office of the Governor, the Attorney General, law enforcement, the federal Drug Enforcement Agency, and the Department of Health and Human Services.<sup>17</sup> There are several video clips on the web page which depict young people in scenarios where a decision to use meth was

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<sup>16</sup> G.R.E.A.T. website at [www.great-online.org/](http://www.great-online.org/).

<sup>17</sup> Data from Montana Meth Project at [www.montanameth.org/](http://www.montanameth.org/).

made. The primary message is never to start using meth, “not even once.”<sup>18</sup> The strategies of the early D.A.R.E. programs which were poorly evaluated appear to be the direction for some of the newer programs.

The drug problem in America is one that has been very difficult to overcome. The federal government anticipated that the drug prevention programs for our youth would be successful and that they would help eliminate the problem decades ago. However, the drug problem has not been eliminated even though there have been numerous attempts through various programs to combat the problem. Governmental policy has attempted to fund the most productive programs, but unfortunately, the problem involves much more of a solution than can be found in the classroom alone. The formulation of governmental policies against drug abuse is a problem that must be attacked not only in the schools, but also in the home, in communities and society as a whole.

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<sup>18</sup> Data from Montana Meth Project at [www.montanameth.org/](http://www.montanameth.org/).

## **RESOURCES**

1. D.A.R.E. America web site, located at [www.DARE.com](http://www.DARE.com).
2. United States General Accounting Office, GAO-03-172R Youth Illicit Drug Use Prevention, located at [www.gao.gov/new.items/d03172r.pdf](http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d03172r.pdf).
3. G.R.E.A.T. web site, located at [www.great-online.org](http://www.great-online.org).
4. Montana Meth Project web site, located at [www.montanameth.org](http://www.montanameth.org).
5. National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) web site, located at [www.nida.nih.gov/about/legislation/Chronology](http://www.nida.nih.gov/about/legislation/Chronology).