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Grade 9

Age 14

Essay: How do illegal drugs harm individuals, families, and communities? What can you do to counter illegal drugs and their harmful effects in your community?

Everybody loves a good story. It usually starts with 'Once upon a time', ends with 'and they lived happily ever after' and it has a good lesson or moral. The following story does not begin once upon a time, it begins in October 2011. As yet, the happy ending is not in sight, but many lessons have been learnt.

October 12th was a regular evening for a little girl living in Freeport. She watched her favorite television show and went to bed with not a care in the world. The following day, her world turned upside down. In the morning, her father didn't pick her up to take her to school, and her mother told her that his car had broken down. It wasn't until after school that she learnt the truth when her mother carefully explained that her father had been locked up for possession of a huge quantity of marijuana. You cannot imagine the humiliation she felt when everyone was talking about her father's arrest behind her back. How shameful it was to see

her father's picture on the front of the newspaper! She tearfully told her mother, "Every day, you scornfully look at criminals in the newspaper and then it's your dad." She was in disbelief. How could her father make such a silly mistake? She cried a river of despair, felt ashamed and humiliated. The fear of the unknown gripped her.

She couldn't look in the direction of Her Majesty's Prison when she went on a school trip to Nassau. She saw the state of the prison and couldn't bear the thought that her father was in there somewhere. She is reminded daily that she cannot contact her father. One day on the golf course she was very embarrassed when a lady asked her who her parents were. With regret, she only gave her mother's name because she was too embarrassed to give her father's name for fear that the woman would know of his crime. The situation put the family in a financial crisis and they had to completely restructure their lives. The community was affected and in disbelief because many people, young and old, relied on him. He had a responsible position in the community.

This is just one story, but thousands of people are touched by the drug culture every day. Virtually every family has a story. Someone in the family deals. Someone in the family uses. Someone in the family is a recovering addict, and the list goes on. The situation has reached epidemic proportions. It is staggering that last year, the Bahamas recorded in excess of 120 murders and the majority of these

were drug related. So many lives are destroyed by drugs and something has to be done to change the pattern of destruction which affects individuals, families and entire communities.

Consequently, the National Drug Council has made it their vision to totally eradicate illicit drug use and trafficking within the Bahamas through preventative education. You may ask what a single person can do against such a big problem. I am trying to do my part by telling this story as a warning so that a lesson can be learnt: drugs destroy individuals, families and communities. It hurts everyone involved. I know this as a fact. This story is not a fairy tale. I didn't hear this story as gossip among my friends. I didn't see it on the news. The girl in the story is me.