

THE BLUNT TRUTH by Shannon Albritton

Last week I coordinated a field trip to Mondo Mediaworks with a select group of students from Brattleboro Area Middle School. The students are assisting BAPC in the development of a local focused Above the Influence media campaign as part of their curriculum in the PEAK program at BAMS. Luke, Mondo Mediaworks owner, hosted the students for a media brainstorming session. I got to observe the students discuss media and the type of messaging that makes resonates with them. Let me tell you, it was enlightening and fun!

These kids were not shy and happy to share their thoughts. I think they enjoyed being part of a thoughtful conversation and receiving respect for their opinions. Luke got down on their level (literally, he sat on the floor) and simply talked with them. He asked them what kind of message would impact them and they opened up. "The feedback I heard from this group is that honesty and authenticity matter. If you want to develop a message around a serious topic like substance abuse or bullying, you need real stories from kids with real experience. That's how you connect. That's how you spread the message." The students are continuing their research and they'll be developing the media campaign through the month of March. Stay tuned for some really good stuff.

Since we're talking about the blunt truth, I can't ignore this opportunity to plug our campaign about the effects of marijuana on the developing adolescent brain. The most important part of the brain, the pre-frontal cortex, is fully developed at the age of twenty-five. Marijuana use affects the development of this part of the brain which is responsible for executive function and reasoning skills. To spread the word about this message I've been handing out rainbow-colored-brain-shaped stress relievers all over town. They're colorful and they really do relieve stress. People are going crazy for these brains. I hope they don't attract zombies! If you can get your hands on one go to TheBluntTruth.org and enter the contest to win a \$5 Bruegger's Bagels gift card or the grand prize iPod shuffle. You can grab one for yourself at Bruegger's Bagels, Brattleboro Chamber of Commerce office, Boys & Girls Club, Key Bank and People's Bank (on Main St.), Brooks Memorial Library, Turn it Up and Youth Services. BAPC staff is carrying them around everywhere they go. Ask for one if you see Beth, Cassandra or me on the street.

The politics around marijuana as a substance, medicine and fiber are complex. This campaign isn't trying to have that debate. This is just about providing information and protecting kids' brains. Marijuana use isn't a safe choice for youth during a critical stage of brain development. So now you know. Feel free to pass it on. Talk with your kids, your nieces and nephews, grandchildren about the risks of experimenting with drugs. What you do today does matter. That's the truth.