

Growing Problem: Teens Buying Drugs on Internet

Narcotics Detective Investigates Dangerous Drug Trends

by Andrea Warren

In an age when buying, selling, and bartering goods has become routine to many computer users, it's no surprise that teens interested in experimenting with illegal drugs are turning to the Internet.

But what is a surprise to many parents and educators is how easy it is for even young teens to not only find out anything they want to know about drugs, but also to purchase online whatever they want to try.

According to Glen Stanley, a narcotics detective with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department, the Internet has become a highway for drug sales and information and a law enforcement nightmare. While growing numbers of Americans are ordering prescription drugs from other countries, they're also ordering illegal drugs from foreign sources—easy to do since the Internet is not policed. Teens are doing their share of the buying.



Information on what to buy, where to order it, and how to use it is readily available at many websites. "We have an element in society that believes all drugs should be legal and that you have a right to put whatever you want into your body," Stanley said. "Some of them make their views known on the web under the guise of offering 'helpful' information. If you ask teens about these websites, some honestly think that because the information appears on the Internet, it must be true. They don't question it."

One popular pro-drug site, Erowid.org, is attractive, well-designed and easy-to-use, purporting to offer legitimate education on drugs, including tobacco and alcohol. But it also includes information on very dangerous drugs, including doses and what to expect when you use them—always with a disclaimer. According to Stanley, kids have died using the recommended doses of certain drugs on these kinds of websites. There's no information on how toxic they are, and no recommended adjustment for body types or individual health conditions. The information is based on input from drug users, not from medical sources.

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In addition, many teens interested in drug experimentation visit chat rooms, bulletin boards, and blogs on the Internet where they can learn how to buy legal chemicals to produce illegal drugs. They can also find readily available "recipes" and sites where they can order glassware or other drug paraphernalia.

One of the newest drug schemes Stanley has encountered is the selling of illegal drugs on Myspace.com, a site where teens can get to know each other, and on Craigslist.com—a popular website where people can buy, sell, and barter goods and services. "We've already set up deals to purchase pounds of meth through Craigslist," he said. "This is new to us but we're starting to do some training around it."



How Teens Buy Drugs



To buy drugs from the Internet, young teens simply need access to a credit card. Some use their parents' cards, while others find older teens who have cards and will order for them. Drugs cost anywhere from \$15 to \$25 to hundreds of dollars. Teens can be quite resourceful in using the address of a friend or an unoccupied house, then tracking the delivery online so they're present when the package arrives via Fed-X or UPS.

Yet another problem with the Internet, noted Stanley, is that when teens visit drug websites, they often find themselves connected to pornography sites as well. Sexual predators sometimes lurk in chat rooms and start friendly conversations under the guise of a shared interest in drugs. "Parents really need to pay attention

to what their sons and daughters are doing on the Internet," he said. "Most of them have no idea what's out there. They would be horrified."

Another area for parental concern is what their children might be doing with ordinary household chemicals. Aerosol cans are especially popular. Pop the top, find a straw, or just inhale. Wizard air freshener and Axe and Tag body sprays are especially popular right now, but, Stanley noted, an ordinary can of hairspray will do. While overall drug usage seems to be down some, inhalant use is up.

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Narcotics Detective

Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department

Making Progress

He feels some of the hard-hitting commercials currently on the air are having an effect. "When I was a teen, they showed us the picture of the two fried eggs and told us this was our brain on drugs, like that would scare us. Today they don't pull any punches," he said. "My son hates the one that shows the girl melted on the couch after she's used drugs. There's another where the user is covered with scabs. Instead of trying to scare kids by saying you're going to die—which of course you might but no kid thinks he will—it's showing you what you'll look and feel like if you use drugs. That seems to be having some impact. We're finding that kids don't think it's as cool to use drugs as they used to."

One of only a handful of experts on emerging drug trends, Stanley notes that a concerted effort by law enforcement agencies and governments world wide is needed to stop international drug traffic. Currently that effort is hit or miss. In the United States, the Drug Enforcement Administration has shut down some American sources for illegal chemicals and supplies, but the process is long and costly. There is little they can do about legal drugs available for sale, nor can American agencies police foreign pharmaceutical businesses. Since 9/11 and concern about terrorism, funding for drug enforcement has lagged, in spite of increased awareness of the need for more drug enforcement.

A more realistic goal is for educators, medical personnel, social services, and law enforcement to come together to pool resources and put drug dealers out of business. With that still far from reality, Stanley feels education is the best deterrent to help young people stay away from drugs. He praises websites like drugfree.org and abovetheinfluence.com, and cites school programs like Project ALERT as the most effective way to impact adolescent drug use.

"Project ALERT is an impressive program with updated information," he said. "It offers what I think are the two best tools we can give students: factual knowledge to make intelligent decisions, and the behavioral skills to resist peer pressure—which, in my experience, is the biggest obstacle to drug-proofing kids. When we give them the information, and then teach them how to confidently say no and still have friends, we see drug use go down."





Wanting to Know More

Stanley joined the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department in 1985 and spent his first four years as a deputy working in the jail system. More than once he encountered someone he knew in high school who was in trouble with the law because of drugs.

"Like a lot of guys, they started out using alcohol and marijuana, then moved on to heavy drugs, which turned them into criminals."

Stanley grew up in the Los Angeles area and remembers skipping school to spend time at the beach. "Lots of my friends smoked cigarettes and there were always alcohol and marijuana at parties. Hard drugs weren't being used in the open, but we knew a few guys who were into cocaine."

Stanley kept his distance. "Some of it was fear. My dad was a cop and a former Marine Corps drill instructor, and the last thing I wanted was to have his face in my face yelling at me. I figured if I tried anything, he'd find out."

"But there was another reason. I didn't like what drugs did to people, the way they made them act. They became lazy and indifferent. All they cared about was their next high."

When he worked in the jails as a deputy, Stanley noted that newly arrested suspects sometimes appeared drunk, but weren't. He wondered what kinds of drugs were involved. He also realized that many prisoners, while arrested for a variety of crimes, also had drug-related charges. When he searched prisoner cells, he was surprised at the quantity and variety of drugs he found.

"We deputies knew about marijuana and cocaine, but there was so much we knew nothing about," he said. "We were at least five years behind what was actually happening."

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Developing Expertise

Convinced that drugs played a more central role in criminal activity than previously thought, he wanted to learn more. "We needed to develop some expertise, and I decided to start with myself," he said.

He studied the records of offenders, interviewed ones with a history of drug use, and observed how drugs affected them psychologically. When he became a patrol deputy in 1989, assigned to one of the worst sections of the Los Angeles area, he saw the prevalence of drug use, particularly its involvement in the hard-partying scene known as "raves" that became popular with young people in the 1990's.

"We were increasingly aware that young adults—not hardened criminals—were dying at these parties after using drugs we didn't even recognize. I already knew more than most police officers, but it still wasn't enough," he said.

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Whenever possible, Stanley went to treatment centers and jail cells to interview users. When he saw groups of young people hanging out on the streets, he stopped to talk to them. He arrested drunk drivers and searched their cars, often finding drugs. He also attended raves, working undercover, talking to party-goers about the drugs they were using. The more he learned, the more there was to learn. At his station—one of 24 in Los Angeles County—he was soon the "go to" person about drugs. "Based on their behavior and appearance, I became an expert on recognizing what someone was using," he said.



Early on, he encountered Rohypnol, sometimes called the date rape drug. "We began seeing it in the mid 1990's. A lot of people were using it, yet no one knew anything about it," Stanley said.

Another was the blunt, which started in south central Los Angeles with users hollowing out a cigar, filling it with marijuana, and then smoking it. Next came PCP, in either liquid or crystal form. That was followed by ecstasy, then dextromethorphan, which is a narcotic found in some cough medicines. Law enforcement scrambled to keep up with what was going on.

Becoming a Certified Expert

Stanley took classes through the Los Angeles Police Department and became a certified drug recognition expert. In 1994 he was asked to be an instructor and help educate other law enforcement officers. He was reluctant because he didn't feel comfortable talking to groups, but once he started doing it, he enjoyed it. He began getting requests to address parent, medical, and student groups about drugs and did so when his schedule permitted.

Most daunting was speaking to young people.

Stanley remembers the "reefer madness" scare when he was a teen and how "cops warned us that drugs would make us go crazy and then we'd die. We knew that wasn't true so we'd blow them off. Now I was the one in front of a group of kids. I wanted them to hear me. I knew I couldn't intimidate them by saying we'd arrest them if they used drugs. I experimented with whether or not to wear my uniform and whether I got more attention if I had a beard or let my hair grow out.

"Finally I stopped worrying about my appearance and started talking to them very truthfully about drugs. When they realized that I knew what I was talking about, they gave me their full attention. I

always made sure my information was up-to-date. You can't have a cop standing there referring to meth as crank, a term that went out a couple of decades ago. They'll immediately stop listening."

In 1999 Stanley achieved a long-time dream and joined the narcotics division of the sheriff's department as a detective. Since then, he has focused his work on getting drug dealers off the streets, educating law enforcement officers about current drug trends, and helping to protect the public—particularly teens—from harmful drugs.

"Kids, especially teens, will always be testing the limits, trying to get away with things," he said. "They're less likely to step over the line when it comes to drugs if they realize that not only are their teachers, counselors, local law enforcement, and especially their parents, knowledgeable about drug trends, but that they're willing to talk about them.

"This tells teens loud and clear that their community and their parents care enough about them to take time to learn these things and engage in conversation about them. That's a powerful message."



Meet Detective Glen Stanley

Tall, tan, and blond, 49-year-old Glen Stanley looks like he could star in a TV series about a narcotics detective, but pleads shyness and has no such aspirations. "I don't even like to watch cops on TV," he said. "Part of it is I don't want to think about work when I'm home. Also, it's too easy to pick out the mistakes they make and it's frustrating. I prefer the History or Discovery channels."

He does, however, continue to speak across the country about drug issues, most of it on off-duty time. To respond to requests for his expertise that are not related to his work with the sheriff's department, he has a private business called Current Drug Trends Training and Consulting Services (drugtrends@cox.net). He is one of few experts on so-called designer or club drugs, and also on the Internet's role in drug abuse.

He didn't grow up planning to follow his father, uncle and grandfather into a career in law enforcement. He tried college, then security work, and then several years of construction work before he applied to the sheriff's department. His younger brother, a highway patrol trooper, convinced him to give it a try and he was quickly hooked. Initially, he was put on a waiting list while the department focused

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on hiring more women and minorities. It would have helped had he been able to speak Spanish. Stanley found his inability to master this language to be a drawback for a second time when he applied to the narcotics division. Because he was not bilingual, his transfer took several years.

"I've tried classes and books on tape and I'm just too hard-headed to get it," he laughed. "I guess there are some people, and I'm one of them, who have to learn another language when they're a kid."

Stanley's wife is an ER nurse. The couple schedule their jobs so one parent is always home with their 13-year-old son. Vacations find the family in Mexico, camping on the beach and kayaking. As for learning Spanish, Stanley still hopes to accomplish that one day. "Maybe after I retire, I'll finally get it figured out."

If he retires.

"Unfortunately, the one thing I know about this job," he noted, "is that I'll never be out of work."

Stanley can be contacted via email at: gstanle@lasd.org or at (562) 477-1180.



Detective Stanley's Tips for Parents

Even after everything he's seen, Stanley is amazed when he hears about parents who allow children to lock their bedroom doors and essentially live their own lives, doing whatever they want on their own computers. "Parents have got to wise up," he said. He has several tips that can help:

Monitor Your Child's Computer Use



Too many parents know only the most simple computer applications. Not only do they need to become computer savvy, they need to know about chat rooms, blogs, and bulletin boards. They also must have access to their child's computer and monitor what sites he or she is visiting.

It comes down to knowing what your kids are doing. You can install software that will prevent them from going to certain websites.

Assume Responsibility for Drug Education

Schools and community groups are trying, but parents should be at the forefront of their child's drug education. Start with the basics. As one example, kids need to know that if you crush a time-release pill and then take it all at once, you are getting the whole impact, and it can be lethal.

"If parents don't monitor what their kids are doing, they're inviting trouble and they just might get it," Stanley said.

Question Their Spending

Many young teens have access to credit cards. Parents who allow this often pay without questioning charges or they ignore ones that look innocent. Even if chemical items appear on a bill or arrive through the mail, students may tell parents they ordered them for a class project. It's up to the parent to find out.



Lock the Medicine Chest, Look Under the Sink

Teen favorites are Klonopin and Vicodin, widely-prescribed depressants, and Xanax, for anxiety, which taken with alcohol magnifies the "downer" effect. Teens can drink five beers and feel a buzz, or they can drink half a beer and use one of these drugs. Often parents are not aware that some of their pills are missing.

Inhalants are a real and present danger. Stanley advises parents to monitor the ones in their homes and question what their teens are buying. The more conversation around this topic, the better.

Assisting Project ALERT Keeping Information Up-To-Date

Last year Glen Stanley was invited to participate on a panel hosted by the RAND Corporation, developers of Project ALERT, to look at emerging trends in drug use among young people in order to update information shared with schools and community groups offering Project ALERT. He was there as a representative of law enforcement to share his expertise on club drugs.

"I think I was the only one of ten panelists without a PhD or MD at the end of my name. While it was intimidating, I was the one with the street experience, so I had something valuable to offer," he said. "This is another example of all of us working together to share information and find solutions to common goals."

DEA Website A Treasure Trove of Information

The Drug Enforcement Agency (www.dea.gov) website includes information about the government's efforts to curb dangerous drug traffic on the Internet, and specifics on two different operations to dismantle national and international drug rings selling controlled substances on the Internet.

According to information on the site, "the illegal use of pharmaceuticals is one of the fastest growing forms of drug abuse," and exposes consumers to risks that include purchasing products that are counterfeit or contaminated. A study by the Partnership for a Drug-Free America found that teens are now abusing prescription and over-the-counter medications—many of which can be purchased on the Internet—at the same or a slightly higher rate than illicit drugs such as cocaine/crack, ecstasy, or heroin.

Debbie Evans Balances Two Passions: Acting and Project ALERT

by Andrea Warren

Debbie Evans' skill as an actor came in handy shortly after she became a BEST Foundation program manager for Project ALERT.

Though a veteran of television and stage work, Debbie knew she needed to exude a confidence she didn't yet feel when she was asked to host a teleconference with members of Prevention First, the agency that provides drug education and professional training for the state of Illinois. With no script to follow, she did her homework, trying to be prepared for any questions that might come up. She was eager for the challenge, "but I'll admit I was intimidated," she said.

"As a program manager, I oversee Project ALERT in these varied 13 states."

**—Debbie Evans
Program Manager
Project ALERT**

Jessica Stiffler, Professional Development Resource Specialist with Prevention First, said her agency's goal that day was to help nine prevention providers who were participating in the teleconference to better understand the Project ALERT program.

"They had various concerns, including issues related to fidelity and the best way to deliver the program in their specific settings," she said. "Debbie was engaging and very well prepared, and our providers learned a lot. They appreciated the opportunity to speak to someone so well informed. Since then, Debbie has always been available to help. It's clear she wants to do a good job."

Debbie, too, thought the event was a success. "They asked me some great questions," she said. "We discussed how to get parents involved and how to make our program relevant for rural students. When we were finished, I felt like I was ready for anything that would come up."

And plenty does.

She made sure she had an understudy in the wings: Leslie Thompson Aguilar, a seasoned program manager, was also on the line in case Debbie needed a prompt. It wasn't necessary. According to the folks on the other end of the line, she gave a stellar performance.

On any given day, when she answers her phone at Project ALERT headquarters in downtown Los Angeles, she could find herself talking to someone in Oregon, Ohio, Minnesota or Wisconsin. Or it could be Montana, Kentucky, Michigan or Illinois. As a Project ALERT program manager, Debbie's day leaps across time lines and from state to state—13 of them in all, from Washington and Texas, to Tennessee, Indiana, and North Dakota. One minute she might be talking to a drug educator who has just heard about Project ALERT and wants information, and the next she's on the phone with a drug education coordinator whose district has had the program for a decade but has a question about an upcoming training session for new teachers.

That's part of the fun, and the challenge" Debbie said. "As a program manager, I oversee Project ALERT in these varied 13 states."

Off to a Smooth Start

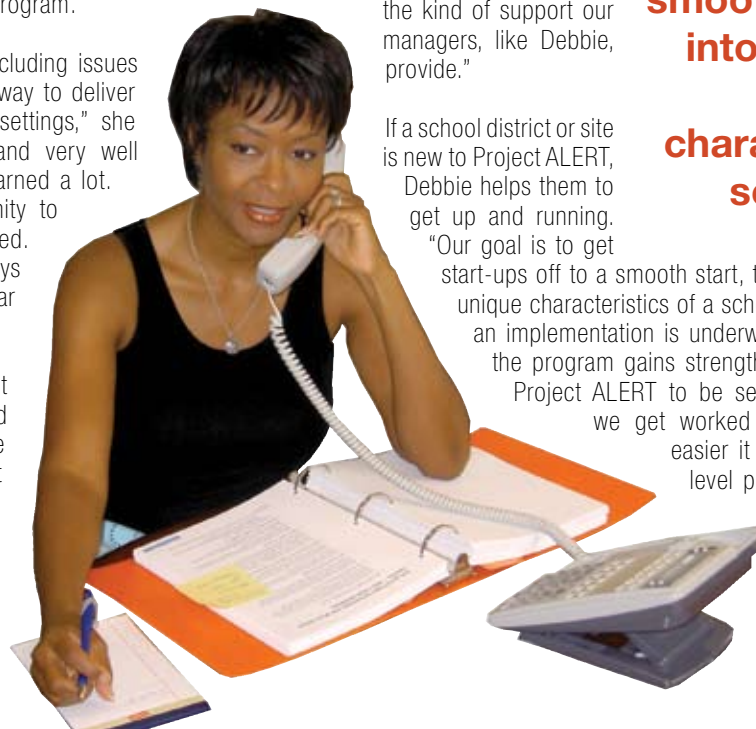
"Our staff used to spend considerable time marketing Project ALERT, but we don't do that anymore," commented Bridget Ryan, president of the BEST Foundation, which distributes Project ALERT. "We follow up with districts that express an interest in our program, and we invest the rest of our time in offering the kind of support our managers, like Debbie, provide."

"Our goal is to get start-ups off to a smooth start, taking into consideration the unique characteristics of a school district."

If a school district or site is new to Project ALERT, Debbie helps them to get up and running.

"Our goal is to get start-ups off to a smooth start, taking into consideration the unique characteristics of a school district," she said. "Once an implementation is underway, I continue to help while the program gains strength and momentum. We want Project ALERT to be self-sustaining, and the more we get worked out at the beginning, the easier it is if or when there are site level personnel changes down the road."

Debbie is always pleased when she has the opportunity to speak about Project ALERT at local and regional drug education conferences.



Whenever possible, she meets with Project ALERT coordinators who are in attendance, taking advantage of the opportunity to discuss a variety of issues.

Training new teachers is often a topic. Debbie is looking forward to several open registration workshops already scheduled where teachers from different school districts will come together for training—rather than training being offered on a district by district basis.

"I hope these go well," she said. "Open registration workshops make sense for many reasons. They meet a real need, especially for small and medium sized districts."

Debbie Evans can be contacted at devans@projectalert.best.org



The acting bug didn't bite until late. Debbie left college to go into the Air Force. While in the Reserves, she was called up during Desert Storm and sent to Texas where, she said, she "filled in for people who went to Germany to fill in for people who went to Saudi Arabia."

On a couple of occasions she had the opportunity to do some modeling, which led to acting. When that happened, "I knew right away that I had found what I wanted to do." She returned to college to study acting at Ball State University. She also studied acting for a year in graduate school in Virginia, then studied in San Francisco, and finally in Los Angeles.

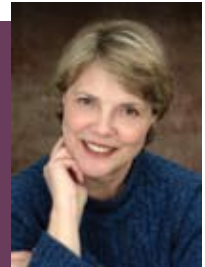
In need of a part-time job while pursuing her acting studies, she was hired in the fall of 1995 through a temp agency to be the assistant to the director of the Nancy Reagan After-School



From 1995 to 1997, Debbie Evans (right) and Lisa Cavalier (left) worked to deliver the Nancy Reagan After-School Program run by the BEST Foundation.

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Andrea Warren is a freelance journalist who lives in Kansas City. A former teacher, her award-winning nonfiction books for young readers include *Orphan Train Rider*, *One Boy's True Story*, *Surviving Hitler: A Boy in The Nazi Death Camps* and her latest book *Escape from Saigon: How a Vietnam War Orphan Became an American Boy*.



Meet Debbie Evans

Program, run by the BEST Foundation. When the three-year program drew to a close, the Foundation offered her a full time position in administration "which I gratefully and wholeheartedly accepted," she said.

Three years later she left to pursue her dream of a career in acting, feeling it was now or never. For five years she lived her dream, supporting herself with a string of part-time jobs while going to auditions. A commercial led to small parts and two years of steady work in television, theatre, and print work. "Everyone from the BEST Foundation was supportive, coming to see whatever I was in," she said.

Then, as so often happens in the mercurial world of entertainment, the phone stopped ringing.

Tired of the struggle of trying to make a living in entertainment, and about to be married, Debbie decided to re-enter the nonprofit world and let acting become an avocation. In January of 2005 she learned that Project ALERT had a part-time opening that was hers if she wanted it. Her position became full time the following September.

Today she is enjoying the opportunity to work with schools on a program that she believes in and knows makes a difference for students. She is also directing a one-woman show written by a friend.

"My challenge is to do a great job at Project ALERT and still fulfill myself as an artist," she said. "It's a balancing act that's working out very well."



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The BEST Foundation for a Drug-Free Tomorrow is a nonprofit organization committed to providing schools and their community partners with the necessary information, materials and guidance to effectively implement Project ALERT, a skills-based substance abuse prevention curriculum for middle grade students.

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