

What a Difference a Dog can make

The most popular student at Crescent Heights High School is the youngest in the building. Lilo is a 2 year old Chocolate Lab who wanders the halls with her handler Constable Bryan Zens. Lilo is one half of a dynamic duo working to keep our schools Drug Free. Lilo and her counter part Fiddler, who spends most of her time at McCoy High School, are passively trained drug detecting dogs who were introduced to the students in April 2004 at only 6 weeks old. These dogs are trained to recognize the scent of 8 or 9 types of drugs. When they detect the scent they simply sit. They don't bark, they don't attack, they just sit.

Constable Bryan Zens is one of 3 school resource officers in Medicine Hat and says the grant they received from the Community Foundation of Medicine Hat and Southeastern Alberta was instrumental in implementing the new program. Together with funding from other community organizations and interested businesses they were able to purchase 2 dogs, Lilo and Fiddler, and begin their training.

Dogs for Drug Free Schools is a program started in Edmonton by Constable Doug Green and his dog Ebony. Constable Green has since retired and Medicine Hat is now the only city in Canada implementing this Pro- Active program. The goal of having these dogs in the school is not to search lockers or scare students. It's an educational program designed to teach kids the dangers of Methamphetamine and other drugs and deter them from bringing harmful substances into the school environment.

The students at Crescent Heights High School have watched Lilo grow up, and walking through the halls with her and Constable Zens, it's obvious the students love her. You can't go 10 steps without a student stopping to pet Lilo, calling her name or running up to talk to Constable Zens about their dog at home. Having the Dog at his side has also opened a lot of doors for Constable Zens. The kids now run up to talk to him and don't shy away at the sight of a uniform. Because the students are always talking with Constable Zens about Lilo they're more comfortable talking with him about other issues like bullying, harassment, abuse and other law related issues.

When we drop our children off at school we expect them to be safe. Thanks to Lilo and the Dogs for Drug Free Schools program, we're one step closer to keeping Methamphetamine's out of the schools and away from our children.

-Kelly Moore