

Faces of Pot: The recreational user

Eddie Enes was 12 years old the first time he smoked pot. By the time he was 14, he was smoking marijuana almost every day. Now 23, Enes still gets high daily.



Keith Beaty / Toronto Star Order this photo

Eddie Enes is a recreational pot smoker, who's been using marijuana since age 12.

By: Isabel Teotonio Living reporter, Published on Wed Jan 15 2014

Eddie Enes was 12 years old the first time he smoked pot.

He was hanging out at the park with the cool older kids that summer night when someone sparked a joint and offered him a hit.

He “loved it.”

By the time he was 14, he was smoking marijuana almost every day. Now 23, Enes still gets high daily.

“(Marijuana) gives me positive thoughts. When things go down, I smoke one and turn things around. Some people drink, some smoke, some do yoga. Everybody has their own way of dealing with life.”

According to a 2012 Health Canada survey 2.1 per cent of Canadians older than 15 years old — about 600,000 people — use cannabis daily or almost daily. About 12 million people (42 per cent) admit to having tried marijuana, the most commonly used illegal drug. The Star asked cannabis smokers, including lawyers, businessmen and teachers, to share their experiences, but they refused to go on-the-record, fearful the admission could jeopardize their careers.

Enes, however, is candid about his use of marijuana. The cops know and his parents know. He has nothing to hide.

When the construction worker, who’s on temporary leave recovering from a car accident, talks about Mary Jane it sounds like he’s describing a good friend.

Marijuana relieves his stress, erases his worries and eases his physical aches.

But it’s also been a source of distress. It’s caused his mom and dad a lot of grief, got him into trouble with the law, and he’s skipped payments on his cellphone bill because “when money’s tight I’d rather invest in cannabis.”

Enes started smoking cigarettes at age 9 — sneaking his uncle’s cigarette butts from the ashtray. But when he took his first toke, it was unlike anything he’d tried before. “It made me feel good and relaxed.”

Always an angry child, pot mellowed him and, for a precocious kid raised in a strict household with “old-school” immigrant parents, this act of rebellion made him feel free. It felt good to be “a badass.”

That good feeling comes from tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), the main psychoactive ingredient. It travels into the bloodstream throughout the body. When THC enters the brain, it stimulates the release of the “pleasure chemical” dopamine, causing a high, or euphoria, that can last up to three hours. Other side effects include an increased appetite — the so-called munchies — and uncontrollable laughter.

Enes found the prospect of chilling out with the older kids — among them cute girls — exciting. He was soon sneaking out to the park, where he’d smoke weed and make out.

“My parents just wanted me to go to school and come home. I wanted to have fun.” This was a “second life,” Enes says.

He would go to school early and get high in alleyways and vacant garages before class. He sold weed to other kids so he could afford it himself.

Enes hid his habit from his parents until he was 15, when he was stopped by a police officer investigating a disturbance involving firecrackers. The cop found a joint and a pot grinder in Enes’ pocket and took him home. His mother broke down crying and flushed the weed down the toilet.

It was the first of various pot related run-ins he would have with the cops.

Enes didn’t feel remorse, just a desire to run away “to smoke a fat one.” He blamed “the system” for bringing problems into his home.

Later his dad caught him smoking and threatened to kick his “druggie” son out of the house. The word stung — Enes didn’t think smoking a plant made him a druggie. Nonetheless he promised to quit. It was the first of many similar threats — and responses.

He left school in Grade 11 to work the construction trade. Unlike his student days, he doesn’t smoke pot on the job because he needs to remain sharp otherwise “you can be the next guy who goes six feet under,” he says.

But the work is gruelling and the job takes its toll.

“You break yourself, at the end of the day, for a couple of bucks. And the only thing you got is a bit of cannabis to help you eat, sleep and relax your muscle pains,” says Enes.

So instead of drinking a pint after work — alcohol puts him on a “bad buzz” — he smokes for the “better vibe.”

Last summer, he discovered another remedy: pain relief. After suffering whiplash during a car accident, marijuana has proved better at easing the back aches, neck cracks and head rushes than the pain pills prescribed by his doctor.

Nowadays, his favourite place to smoke is Vapor Central, a bring-your-own-bud lounge on a stretch of Yonge St. known as Yongsterdam because of the many cannabis-friendly shops.

He rents a glass bong, grinds up half a gram of Girl Scout Cookies, one of his favourite strains, and settles in.

Smoking pot all afternoon can get pricey, but Enes gets a good deal from his dealer, paying \$5 a gram compared with the average street price of \$10. His annual membership to Vapor Central is \$47.50, which gets him half price on bong rentals, normally \$5 to \$12.

Pot makes him “more creative, more open-minded,” he says sharing a plan to print sweaters, T-shirts and hats with WCGD, an acronym for his motto: Who Cares Get Doped. He calls it “a brand for the urban stoner.”

On this day, he’s eager to numb his aches and relish “a nice little body buzz.”

He packs the marijuana into a bowl, sets it back in the stem of the bong and wraps his lips around the mouthpiece, creating an airtight seal. He lights the weed and inhales deeply drawing the smoke through the water, producing a smooth hit.

He exhales slowly and smiles.

“I’ve still got the pain, but my mind is somewhere else I’m high.”

Pot and teens by the numbers

More Canadian children smoke marijuana than in any other western nation, according to the 2013 UNICEF survey Child well-being in rich countries. It ranked 29 countries and found 28 per cent of Canadian kids,

aged 11, 13 and 15, had used pot in the last year. Norway is the only country where the rate of use was less than 5 per cent.

The 2013 Ontario Student Drug Use and Health Survey, done by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health and released in December, paints a similar picture. A total of 10,272 students in Grades 7 through 12 from 42 school boards and 198 schools participated in the biannual OSDUHS survey. Here's what researchers found:

23

Per cent of teens who used pot in the past year.

3

Per cent who use pot daily, an estimated 25,800 students in Ontario.

3

Per cent of Grade 9 to 12 students, an estimated 20,900, who report symptoms of cannabis dependence, as measured by the Severity of Dependence Scale.

10

Per cent of Grades 10 to 12 students who reported driving within an hour of smoking pot at least once in the past year. That's an estimated 31,500 drivers.

2

Per cent of Grade 7 students who used pot in the past year.

39

Per cent of Grade 12 students who used pot in the past year.

51

Per cent of students who said it would be "fairly easy" or "very easy" to obtain marijuana.

2

Per cent of Ontario students who used synthetic cannabis in the past year, such as Spice or K2.