



# OUT OF SIGHT,

## OUT OF MIND

**Claire Myhill** discovers white-collared crime in Grahamstown from an insiders perspective

**I**n the relatively quiet suburb of Westhill residents feel safe walking the streets. One may find a mother and daughter walking around for exercise, a student making the trek to or from lectures or a child riding his plastic black "motorcycle" as his nanny walks next to him keeping both eyes firmly locked on his progress. There are birds in the trees as the wind rustles their leaves and the silence is almost a feature in itself.

On a weekend one might hear more noises, of students socialising in their digs as they sit round a braai, the smell of which wafts through gardens, over walls and down the street where you are, taking it all in.

These houses are safely secured with a variety of measures including high walls, barbed wire, electric fences and laser beams, and there is not much crime to be witnessed. As an outsider, or resident alike you may feel safe in the area if Westhill.

However, there is one crime that takes place below the radar and that goes on discretely, in the hope of not drawing your attention to its existence. White collared crime, or the selling of marijuana involves people living in these areas almost every day.

David\* has been selling the product for the last year, to people living in the area. Without divulging any specific locations, he says that 98 percent of the people who buy from him are students and about six

of his customers are lecturers. For him, it is more of a lifestyle than a "business", and selling to his friends means that he never has to buy marijuana. He makes a reasonable amount of money from it, but could hardly be considered a major player, making on average R400 each week.

The number of transactions David completes every day varies. According to him "during the week it's a bit quieter because people are busy. But on the weekend my phone rings all the time with people wanting bags."

He considers himself a 'stoner' first, having smoked for three years before he started selling. And he dislikes classifying the substance as 'drugs' because people





associate it with heavier substances out there. David says that he really enjoys smoking and feeling spaced out relaxes him. He feels that it should not be illegal: "If alcohol and cigarettes are legal then I think that pot should be too, because it's the same basic concept."

However, dealing is not always a relaxing activity and he worries about the consequences often because "it is so easy to get busted, all it takes is one person telling the wrong people that you sell and it's over." The best approach in his view is to know the people that you sell to really well.

Inspector Milanda Coetzer of the Crime Intelligence Office at the Grahamstown police station says that there is no unit dedicated to uncovering such activity. In a place like Grahamstown, where crime is a daily reality for some, the focus is necessarily more on rape, murder

and robberies and but she assures this is because the police have to balance the different types of crimes with the resources available.

She says that in terms of narcotics "we work on enquiries; we just don't have the capacity anymore." When it comes to marijuana, the focus of the police is usually on major busts such as the R1.2-million one that took place at the back of Shoprite in Market Square Mall on 27 August this year, and small-time dealers like David would only be a focus if a specific tip-off was made.

Apart from the lingering anxiety, David says that another down-side to dealing is that "people forget that you're human and that you need your sleep at one in the morning". And so the quiet suburb of Westhill that houses people of many different walks of life will remain that way, if people who sell, buy and smoke marijuana have anything to do with it.

\* Name has been changed to protect the identity of the individual.

