

## **Youth Advocacy Story**

### **Authoy Das**

My name is Authoy Das and I am currently a college student who has seen first-hand how the over-the-counter diet pills and muscle-building supplements industry reach youth in a way that is not only dangerous, but also predatory.

As a freshman and sophomore in high school, I was a member of my school's track and field team. During that time, I witnessed firsthand the dangerous and deceptive marketing tactics used by this industry to target youth.

One of my teammates was sponsored by one of these supplement companies to sell their products, and he heavily marketed them on social media, even promoting them throughout our team. This is particularly concerning as it is especially dangerous that young teens and high school students are sponsored by the underregulated supplements industry.

Some of my teammates were lured in by the promises of quick and easy results, without understanding the potential risks of these products. They were often purchased without any parental supervision through online vendors and local GNCs. This made me feel very uncomfortable and it was hard for me to see my teammates putting their health at risk for the sake of a shortcut.

Like so many young people today, I see these products advertised heavily through social media by gym influencers on my Instagram and TikTok feed. Many of them have a sizable following with young people who I know look up to them. These influencers on social media, promoting these products for industry, are spreading disinformation, giving young people the idea that these products are safe and necessary for success in sports. I also see these products advertised everywhere online, on websites and on YouTube, which makes it easy for youth to access and purchase these products without any understanding of the potential risks and without their parents knowing.

It is especially concerning that often the dangerous chemicals found in these products, like steroids or prescription drugs, are not even listed on the bottle, making it difficult for teens to understand what ingredients are actually inside of them. This lack of transparency further highlights the need for regulations in the supplement industry.

This industry feeds off of youth insecurities. Due to the pandemic, mental health issues have been on a rise, thus leaving young people to look for quick and easy solutions to insecurities. More young people started being sponsored by the industry after my time on the track team during the pandemic because of this. And due to this, I have seen that more young people and

friends around me at that time started using these products, especially in amounts that are way too dangerous.

These products are not only dangerous in the immediate sense, but they can also lead young people down a path to eating disorders and steroid use. They are marketed towards youth in a very dangerous way, and it is imperative that we take legislative action to protect young people from buying these products. It is important that the industry is held accountable for its dangerous products and marketing tactics.