



Pledge to live drug-free at heart of 'Family Night'

NORWALK

By LAUREN MYLO

Hour Staff Writer
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One of Ginger Katz's favorite parts of Family Night is when children read pledges to remain drug-free into the microphone in front of their community supporters.

And the heart of evening is when Ian's story is read, and the community stands together to support the children who make the pledge.

Katz, who lost her son Ian to drug overdose in 1996, is the founder and CEO of The Courage to Speak Foundation, which will host the fifth annual fifth annual Courage to Speak Empowering Youth to Be Drug-Free Family Night at West Rocks Middle School on Monday.

"The statement it takes a village to raise a child is true, I really believe it's not a cliché," said Katz. "That's why so many people from all over the map come -- it's not just a Norwalk thing. Drug use doesn't discriminate. It goes over town and state lines so you're going to find people who are coming to this event coming from all over."

Katz said the event is all about community, and everyone from students to parents to state representatives to mayors from different towns will attend.

House Minority Leader Larry Cafero, Jr. will emcee and many other local officials will be present, such as Norwalk Mayor Richard Moccia, Norwalk Police Chief Harry Rilling, Superintendent of Schools Sal Corda and special guest Dr. Thomas Kirk, Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services Commissioner.

The department has helped to fund Courage to Speak for eight years, ever since Kirk first saw Katz's presentation.

Monday evening's event will highlight and honor the students in drug prevention classes.

Katz said the foundation has trained 32 facilitators to teach Courageous Parenting 101, a prevention seminar for parents, across the state. There are 26 teachers in Bridgeport teaching the Sunny's Story curriculum, and Bridgeport officials will attend Monday's event as well.

Sunny's Story is Katz's book, the story of Ian's drug overdose told from his beagle Sunny's point of view.

The foundation ordered books for every sixth grader in Bridgeport - 1,532 books.

And the program keeps expanding.

"Someone from Cleveland called and said, 'you have it!'" said Katz. "I received a call from a person in Milford, and they said: 'We want it. We want what you have. A *Sunny's Story* curriculum and a book. We want *Courageous Parenting 101*, and we want family night.' It was like an order, you want this, you want that. And they're coming to the event."

But it all started here.

"Norwalk has been the foundation for our work and our inspiration," said Katz. "It's all the result of our programs."

Family Night, which is open to the public, begins with a pasta dinner donated by Stew Leonard's from 5:30 to 6:30 in the cafeteria, and the program begins at 6:30 in the West Rocks auditorium.

For more information, visit www.couragetospeak.org and call 1-877-431-3295.