

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**“FAIRFIELD COUNTY COMMUNITY FOUNDATION FUNDS THE
COURAGE TO SPEAK ELEMENATRY SCHOOL PREVENTION
PROJECT”**

Charles Yost, Chairman of the Board of Directors, and Virginia “Ginger” Katz, Founder & President of The Courage to Speak Foundation today announced that the Fairfield County Community Foundation has awarded the agency a grant of \$18,000 to help support its pilot substance abuse prevention and education program for elementary schools.

The elementary school program is an outgrowth of middle school and high school programs developed by the Courage to Speak Foundation over the past five years. Its goals are to teach young children to follow healthy lifestyles and avoid drug use, while helping parents and teachers learn to work together to support children in avoiding drugs. The pilot program will be launched at Brookside Elementary School in Norwalk with the leadership and support of its Principal, David Hay, Robin Rockafellow, Dr. Paula Torres, and fourth grade teachers, Dottie Brown, Alison Kesney and Jeri Magrath and health class teacher, Tim Downey. A key piece of the elementary school project is a new children’s book, *Sunny’s Story*, authored by Ginger Katz.

Charles Yost said: “All of us associated with The Courage to Speak are thrilled with the generous support of the Fairfield County Community Foundation, as it provides us the resources required to bring an already established and effective intervention to children at a younger age. This grant will launch a program for elementary school children that can be replicated in other schools and communities, both here in Connecticut and around the country.”

David Hay commented: “Brookside Elementary School welcomes the opportunity to be the testing ground for what we believe will be a solid substance abuse prevention and education program for fourth graders. The children and their parents will become better prepared to choose healthy lifestyles and to avoid use of drugs.”

Ginger Katz added: “Losing my son to a drug overdose was a call to arms. It is through sharing our story that we strive to make a difference in the lives of other children and to help other parents avoid such an overwhelming loss. Out of our tragedy has evolved a comprehensive substance abuse prevention and education program focused on young people, their families, and their communities.”

She went on: “Studies in Connecticut show that 24% of Connecticut’s seventh and 29% of eighth graders are current alcohol users, well above the national average of 22% for eighth graders. We also know that 7% of seventh and eighth graders and 22% of ninth and tenth graders in Connecticut currently use marijuana. It is clear to us that drug prevention education must begin in elementary school in order to be effective.”

Project partners and advisors for the elementary school project include: Deborah Prothrow-Stith, M.D., a physician and noted expert on drug prevention education, who is professor of Public Health Practice and Associate Dean for Faculty Development at Harvard University, School of Public Health; Eileen Devries, MA, BA, J.D., Angela Vicenzia: R.N., Ed.D., Ellen Morehouse, MSW, CASAC, CPP, an expert on curriculum and program development, Dr, Sal Corda, Superintendent of Schools in Norwalk, Connecticut; and David Hay, Principal of the Brookside Elementary School. The grant also includes a parenting component.

The Fairfield County Community Foundation promotes the growth of philanthropy to strengthen local communities and the region. Since 1992, individuals and organizations have established charitable funds and contributed to existing funds that support community and economic development, children and youth, education, the environment, health and human services, and the arts. With assets approaching \$83 million, the Foundation awarded more than \$7.5 million in grants last year. In addition, the Foundation provides philanthropic advisory services and develops initiatives to address critical community issues. The Foundation is in compliance with the Council on Foundations' national standards for community foundations.

The Courage to Speak Foundation is a not-for-profit charitable organization devoted to saving lives by empowering children and youth to be drug free and by empowering parents to help their children develop lifestyles free of drugs and destructive drug-related behaviors. The organization has reached over 320,000 young people in some 800 Courage to Speak presentations in over 10 years. For information, please call 203-866-5282 and visit www.couragetospeak.org

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