

## Going the distance: Event raises awareness against drug abuse

NORWALK

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July 26, 2009

As 16-year-old Norwalker Lindsey Russo hustled to keep her lead in a nine-mile race that began at Calf Pasture Beach early Sunday morning, she thought about the anti-drug message behind the race.

Russo placed first among females who ran the Ian James Eccarino 9-Mile Memorial Road Race and 5k Health Walk and during her run, she said she thought about Eccarino -- whose parents formed the anti-drug advocacy group "Courage to Speak Foundation" after he died of a drug overdose.

"(Ian's) story is very inspirational to me, and I wanted to go out and win it for him," she said.

The 11th annual road race was hosted by the Lightfoot Running Club and attracted approximately 250 runners. Ivan Garciasasati, 29, of Greenwich, placed first overall, finishing the race in 55 minutes.

The event marked the 11th time the race has been dedicated to Ian Eccarino and that his parents, Ginger and Larry Katz, brought their anti-drug message to the race.

"It's a different way of putting the message out there," Ginger Katz said.

Through the Courage to Speak Foundation, Ginger and Larry Katz are devoting their lives to traveling to schools, speaking with politicians and teaching parents about the danger of drugs.

Russo heard Ginger Katz speak at Norte Dame High School in Fairfield and took Katz's message to heart.

"She really serves as a role model to others," said Russo.

Russo, who runs for the cross country team at her high school, earned her fastest finishing time at Saturday's race, crossing the line one hour and five minutes after the race started.

She said older runners helped pace her during the race and cheered her on as she zoomed toward the finish line.

"They were all very excited and supportive," she said. "They really looked out for the younger generation." Visit [www.couragetospeak.org](http://www.couragetospeak.org)