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Bennet students hear mom's take on drug death

By Christine McCluskey , Journal Inquirer

MANCHESTER - Ginger Katz told Bennet Middle School's seventh- and eighth-graders Thursday about how, on the night before her son Ian's funeral 10 years ago, she decided she was going to "speak out" and be honest with others about how he died.

Since then, she has given over 600 presentations in schools and before other groups where she explains how her son became addicted to drugs and died of an accidental heroin overdose.

Merrill Kidd and Vice President Cheryl Scribner saw it at a recent convention and decided to invite Katz to Manchester.

Katz spoke to Illing Middle School students on Monday.

On Thursday, she told the Bennet students about her son as pictures of him flashed behind her.

He was a talented athlete whose charisma earned him many friends at Norwalk High School, Katz said.

When he was in eighth grade, he started smoking cigarettes and marijuana.

The marijuana "opened up the floodgates for Ian," his mother said. She told the students that adolescents get addicted to drugs faster than adults.

Over the next few years, the trust between Katz and her son disintegrated as he started using more drugs and lying to her about it.

Along the way, Ian's habits were enabled by those who gave him extra chances, such as the police officer who let him and his friend off the hook without arresting them after they were caught smoking marijuana in a park, Katz said.

Things got progressively worse for Ian as he went through high school. One night, the family woke up to find his Jeep engulfed in flames because someone who was mad at him had used beer bottles filled with gasoline to set it on fire.

Once he began college at the University of Hartford, Ian started using cocaine and heroin. He went in and out of counseling programs. At one point, after she found \$300 and a big stash of marijuana in his room, Katz threw him out of the house. She knew

then that he had started selling drugs.

A few days later, they met with a counselor and he agreed to enter a rehabilitation program again. After that, he started doing better.

One night in September 1996, after a relapse, Ian told his mother that he would see a doctor the next morning. He apologized for what he'd done, and then, after she went up to bed, he took heroin again and died.

For a long time after that, his friends would stop by the house and talk to Katz. She said some of them seemed to feel guilty about his death.

"All I did was sit there and listen," Katz said.

She found out much more about Ian's drug use from his friends than she had known before his death.

Katz urged the students at Bennet to talk to an adult if they or a friend are in trouble.

"Get three to five adults in your lives that you can say anything to. Get your secrets out," Katz said.

She said that once drug users are addicted, though, they must struggle with their problem for the rest of their lives, and "this is one spot your parents can't get you out of."

The students talked about Katz's presentation in their classes after the assembly.

Right after the presentation ended, eighth-grader Megan Godwin said she thought it had affected many of the students.

"It was kind of touching, actually," Godwin said.

Seventh-grader Natasha Gomes said it's hard to prevent drug use, though.

"You can't just stop kids from doing drugs," Gomes said.

Eighth-grader James Medynski said there are a lot of students at Bennet who know people who use drugs or who have been affected by drug use in some way.

"I thought it was pretty inspiring," Medynski said of the presentation.

And eighth-grader Eric Farrell said Katz's approach to the issue, from the point of view of a parent, was effective.

"Since it's a real story, it makes you think about it more," Farrell said. Visit www.couragetospeak.org

