

Mother breaks the silence surrounding teen drug abuse

By JASON VALLEE , Staff Writer

NEWINGTON -- When Ginger Katz lost her son to a drug overdose, she found the courage to look beyond her depression and guilt to protect other families from suffering the same tragedy. Ten years later, she has become one of the nation's most active anti-drug advocates and continues to pass her courage on to thousands of children and families every day.

On Tuesday, Katz and her husband Larry traveled to the John Wallace and Martin Kellogg middle schools, where students listened to her presentation and heard the story of her son, Ian Eaccarino. "Silence is what killed my son," Katz said. "We need to teach kids to speak out. It's important for them to talk about their problems, not place them under a rug. They need talk or the silence will continue to harm and kill people."

Katz lost her son on Sept. 10, 1996, when he died from an overdose of heroin. Just six months later, Katz formed the Courage to Speak Foundation, an organization dedicated to fulfilling a promise Katz made to her son; to do everything in her power to prevent this tragedy from happening to another family.

Since that time, Katz has established a program called "Breaking the Code of Silence." The program is designed to help teach parents the importance of being able to talk with their kids about drugs and drug abuse.

"The number one key to prevention is parents who talk with their kids about substance abuse," Katz said.

"It should not be a one-time lecture, but an on-going dialog.

"Studies show that when kids have a steady dialog with their parents, they stand a 57 percent better chance of staying drug-free."

Katz told her audience on Tuesday that drugs are a prevalent part of today's society and are a concern for all of America's children.

According to statistics from the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, the drug industry has grown to a \$4 billion a year industry and the major targets for new users are teenagers and college students.

In many cases when these kids become users, they develop a dependency on their friends to help cover up their habits.

In doing so, these friends are often pressured into aiding the user and are involved in the drug abuse, even when they do not use the substances themselves.

"I am not only concerned with the kids that use drugs, but I am even more concerned about those who don't," Katz said.

"Users are in denial and ask their friends to help them cover it up, which enables them to use more.

The right choices aren't always the easiest ones, so we need to reach those kids who don't use drugs, not just those who do."

By teaching today's youth how to make the right decisions, Katz believes we are enabling them to not only say no to drugs, but to save their friends as well.

Using anti-drug discussions instead of lectures allows parents and educators to show kids they have someone to turn to and allows children to develop the courage to come forward and get help for those who are in denial.

Katz also explained the importance of avoiding all drugs, not just those that are considered hard drugs.

Her son's addiction began with what many people believe are harmless drugs, marijuana and alcohol.

While the two drugs can have an addictive effect on anyone, Katz noted that users who begin during their adolescence are far more likely to develop an addiction.

"There is no such thing as a safe drug," Katz told her audience.

"More kids are in rehab for marijuana than all other drugs except for alcohol combined. It opened up the flood gates for my lan."

Jason Vallee can be reached At jvallee@newbritainherald.com or by calling (860) 225-4601, Ext. 236.