

Mother's anti-drug message hits home

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By Joshua Larkin Times Argus Staff

CABOT – Ginger Katz knows something about denial and enabling, two factors that contributed to her son's death by heroin overdose nine years ago. Since that time, she's dealt with the disaster by speaking out to kids, parents and whomever will listen about her son's killer.

Sunday night, Katz brought her presentation to the Cabot School before a crowd of about 100 students and parents. The 58-year-old Norwalk, Conn., mother spun a heart-wrenching tale that detailed her son Ian Eaccarino's introduction to the drugs that ended his life on Sept. 10, 1996.

Eaccarino started in eighth grade with cigarettes, she explained. One year later, he was into marijuana, which landed him in the police station when was caught smoking pot in the park with friends. Katz recalled picking up her son at the station that day.

"The officer takes a look at us and a few seconds later, he said to Ian, 'you know what Ian, I'm gonna let you go home, but if I ever see you with any drugs, including alcohol, I'm going to arrest you. Now go home,'" she said. "That's called enabling: allowing behavior to continue without consequences."

On the ride home, Katz's son told her he didn't like marijuana and that the drug wasn't his, she said.

"And guess what? I believed him," she said. "And that's called denial on my part and denial on his part."

Katz described the next six years of her son's life while a slide show in back of her depicted images of Ian. The photos spanned his boyhood years to just days before his death. A baseball and lacrosse player, a black belt in karate and student with solid grades at a Connecticut university, Eaccarino did not fit the archetype of drug addict. But that's what he was, Katz told the crowd, explaining in

graphic detail his use of PCP, marijuana and heroin over the course of his life.

After her son passed away she decided she needed to do something to help others, Katz said before the presentation. Within months of his death, she founded the nonprofit organization, The Courage to Speak Foundation Inc., and has since used the organization as a means to tell Ian's story and the scourge of drugs. To date, she said, she's told the story more than 600 times all across the country.

Her organization, on the web at www.couragetospeak.org, also creates curriculum for use in the classroom.

The Cabot Coalition, a community group focused on reducing substance abuse by youths, arranged for Katz to speak at the school. Lori Augustyniak, coordinator of the Cabot Coalition, said a few adult and youth members of the coalition heard Katz speak in Washington D.C. last January. Those members, she said, were responsible for spreading the word that Katz's message needed to be heard in Cabot.

Sofia Belenky, a 16-year-old junior at the school, was one of the school kids who had seen Katz speak before. She said Katz's presentation made a big impact on her when she saw it last winter.

"It was really realistic, it wasn't glazed over," Belenky said. "It made me realize that this can happen to anyone."

On Sunday, Katz implored the crowd to learn about the dangers of drugs and how easy it is for any kid to get hooked. Children today, she said, are exposed to more powerful and more dangerous drugs than ever before. Part of the solution to the problem, she said, is communication.

"Have the courage to speak," she said to the children, "and parents, have the courage to listen."

After the presentation, parent and Cabot resident Rosa Jacques said Katz talk was moving. As a recent transplant from Connecticut, Jacques said the story was moving and important for the town of

Cabot to hear.

"It was amazing," she said. "I pray to God it reaches a lot of hearts here."

Katz will speak at the Cabot School again today at 9 a.m.