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## Parents share painful tale of drug addiction

By: Jason Vallee , Herald Staff

NEWINGTON - Illegal drug use is more than just a crime, it is a disease and a challenge in the United States that faces all of today's youth. It sees no color, ethnicity or social status. The worst part is that it can take control of, or even end, a user's life.

Ginger Katz, one of the nation's most active anti-drug speakers and founder of The Courage to Speak Foundation, Inc., has lived through this nightmare and seen drugs at their worst. On Sept. 10, 1996, her 20-year-old son Ian Eaccarino died on a heroin overdose after suffering from a hard addiction.

On Thursday, Katz and her husband, Larry, shared their story with Newington parents and families during a presentation hosted by the Youth-Adult Council and Capitol Area Substance Abuse Council in the Council Chambers of Newington Town Hall.

"I couldn't sleep the night before Ian's funeral for thinking about what I would say to the hundreds of people who would be at the service," Katz said. "I woke my husband and told him there was no way I could get through the funeral. I was paralyzed by not wanting to reveal the truth. Then I decided to speak out."

Eaccarino was not the stereotypical drug user. He was popular, athletic, kept up with his studies and had a girlfriend he loved. A series of wrong decisions, however, and he became the victim of heroin. He was gone long before the drugs took his life, Katz said. Before his death, Katz said her son went through a change, becoming more violent, Katz explained. At one point, he even had his car blown up by a molotov cocktail and was forced to move away from his house and family.

Ian Eaccarino was the victim of being enabled and the product of denial. Enabling is the act of presenting a user with an excuse, reason or means of using drugs. In Eaccarino's case, his doctors, family, friends and even local police worked as enablers for his habit, many times without any intentions whatsoever.

Another problem that aided the use was denial. Katz said her son would often tell lies or make excuses to hide his addiction and that friends and family would be afraid to speak out. She noted that denial by family and even doctors helped Eaccarino find what he needed to continue and use.

Katz challenged parents and friends of users to be strong and take the steps to avoid denial or enabling. Most importantly, she challenged everyone to have the courage to speak up and help confront the problem before it's too late.

"A lot of parents want to be friends with their children, but they need to be a parent first," Katz said. "The role of a parent is more important and means more to a child than being their friend. Parents are the ones kids look toward for guidance and they expect to receive

it. Trying to be a friend first can cause them to misunderstand the guidance they are given."

To conclude the presentation, Katz had her husband Larry read a poem entitled "Dear Child" as a means of providing those in attendance with the courage to stand strong in one of life's most difficult roles.

"We are parent and child by the grace of God," the poem says. "In accepting it I have the obligation to perform the role of parent ... we can share many things but we are not pals. This will be hard for you to understand until you have a child of your own. Until then, trust me."