

Group uses Internet to warn students about drug abuse

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A local agency that warns parents and students about the dangers of drugs has teamed with state officials to enhance its Web site.

The enhanced site was launched last month by the Courage to Speak Foundation, a nonprofit agency that educates youths and their parents about substance abuse, and the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

The site, www.couragetospeak.org, is designed to be a resource for families affected by drugs, said Ginger Katz, who founded the Norwalk group in 1997 after her 20-year-old son, Ian, died of a drug overdose.

Katz has been talking to children and parents about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse for eight years. She developed an anti-drug school curriculum and has taken her message to government officials at the White House and Drug Enforcement Agency.

"I think it's really important that after my presentation at schools, that kids follow through and they don't stop learning," Katz said.

The Web site provides a link to substance-abuse treatment facilities and information on how parents whose children have died because of drug or alcohol abuse can join the Courage to Speak support group.

Teachers can use the resource to help students learn more about substance abuse, Katz said.

Katz also posted a "family album" link that allows visitors to learn about her son's life and how he died from a heroin overdose.

There also are links to drug prevention and information sites such as the National Institute for Drug Abuse and the federal Drug Enforcement Agency.

"She has done a good job in making it more user-friendly with helpful links for parents, schools and personnel," said Dianne Harnad, director of prevention at the state Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

The department has sponsored the Courage to Speak Foundation for a decade, Harnad said, and has given the foundation \$20,000 annually for the past few years.

"She has really brought the issue to the attention of young people in schools and also their parents," Harnad said. "I think she has done it in a passionate and powerful way."

The department eventually will include a link to the Web site on its resource list, she said.

The state's financial support has helped the foundation, Katz said.

"I don't think there's anyone going into schools from a parent's perspective and speaking to middle school, high school and parent groups. I think they see how valuable (the Web site) is that kids and parents have this as a resource," she said.

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