

The Hour

TALK IS NOT CHEAP. IT TAKES COURAGE !

by Ginger Katz

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My husband and I present our story many times to many school children, their parents and teachers. Our deepest satisfaction comes from the grateful feedback we get that tells us our program is working.

Few speak more eloquently of the importance of having "The Courage To Speak" than this E-Mail we recently received from a young girl:

"Dear Mr. and Mrs. Katz,

I am a high school student and was blessed to be able to hear the both of you speak today. What you said means more to me than words can explain, but I will try my best to do so.

In school, I am a straight-A student, a member of the national honors society, a member of the Spanish national honors society, a member of a community service program called key club, an all-patriot division softball player, and currently ranked 5th in my graduating class. It seems as though I have life all planned out, but along with all my achievements, I also have a record. Earlier this year I was arrested for throwing a party and possession of alcohol. In many ways, I feel a lot like Ian. He had a lot going for him, but he had one problem that hurt all of that.

Since the day I got arrested, I have felt nothing but pure embarrassment for my decisions. I have been in and out of the court system, I was grounded for almost two months, and I was luckily let off with 100 hours of community service that I do everyday that I'm not working my job. All the stress and pain I experienced was enough to make me never want to touch alcohol or drugs ever again. But, my friends didn't experience this same revelation. In fact, the weekend after I got arrested, one of my close friends threw a party at his house with both alcohol and drugs. I said to myself, "Haven't they learned anything at all?", but it seems that no one did.

I walked out of the room after hearing the speech you gave today hysterically crying. Kids were coming up to me left and right asking what was wrong but I didn't think that they would understand. But, after having time to think I realize why I felt so terrible. First, I felt guilty. Everyday, teenagers everywhere smoke pot, or snort coke, or drink alcohol. And somewhere, everyday, someone dies from it. Yet every weekend, my friends and I would do the same thing. What about those kids who died? What about their families? Do I really deserve to be here in their place? It kills me to think that it could have been anyone of us who overdosed, but you have to experience the pain of our dumb

decisions. The second reason I was upset is because everything that you said today is my reality. My friends make bad decisions like this everyday. I have friends who snort painkillers, and do lines of coke, and take ecstasy, and up until this point I have stood back and let them do so, but today I witnessed the pain that these rash decisions caused to you. I truly felt a connection to your words and it made me realize that its not worth it. I don't care what my friends say about me, but I can't let this behavior go on. Through your story I found the courage to speak and I thank you for that.

You made me realize that it takes one person to make a difference. I don't know how I could ever thank you. Good luck sharing your story with the rest of the world. I hope it has the same effect on them as it did on me.”

We'll be happy to share this life-saving story with you at our 2nd Annual Courage To Speak Family Night on Tuesday, March 7th at Norwalk's West Rocks Middle School. Dinner and display of student's anti-drug posters is at 5:30 P.M. Program beginning at 6:30 includes the Courage To Speak Presentation, Recognition and Leadership Awards, appearances by Mayor Richard Moccia, School Superintendent Sal Corda, Deputy Police Chief Palmer and other special guests. State Representative Larry Cafero will M.C. Try not to miss this evening and its important family message. Admission is free to parents and children.

Norwalk Resident Ginger Katz is president of the Courage To Speak Foundation, Inc, started in 1996 and target students, parents and communities with knowledge and tolls to encourage children and parents to talk openly and honesty about he dangers of drugs and empower our children to live drug free lives. For more information call 877 431 3295 and visit www.couragetospeak.org © Ginger Katz 2006