

Addiction

West Hartford Students Urged To Avoid Drugs, Alcohol

By VANESSA DE LA TORRE | The Hartford Courant
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WEST HARTFORD — - A mother who lost her 20-year-old son to heroin addiction asked Hall High School students on Tuesday not to inflict the same pain on their families.

"Part of addiction is hiding and deceiving," Ginger Katz said. Her son, Ian, tried cocaine as a freshman at the [University of Hartford](#), then went to snorting heroin five times a day in his sophomore year, while still managing to make honors.

Only after Ian's death from a heroin overdose in September 1996 — his mother found him in their home basement, with blood on his mouth — did Katz discover that Ian had been doing drugs regularly as a high-schooler in Norwalk. He was an athletic, popular boy who played lacrosse and used PCP and marijuana, all while fooling his family into believing he was clean.

"He made a bad decision," Katz told the teens. "The decisions you make are going to affect you and your families for the rest of your lives."

Katz formed the nonprofit Courage to Speak Foundation soon after Ian died. This year, she has taken her message to students in Bridgeport, Norwalk, [Stamford](#), [Cheshire](#), [Westport](#), Darien and to schools in [New York](#).

Tuesday's presentation was organized by school officials and [West Hartford](#)'s Community of Concern chapter, a parent group that aims to educate families about alcohol and drug use. Conard High School students will hear Katz's talk on Thursday. Tonight at 7 p.m. at Hall High School, psychotherapist Liz Jorgensen will give a public workshop for parents called "Delay Your Gray: How to Keep Your Teenager Safe and Yourself Sane."

Ronit Shoham, a co-chairwoman for the local Community of Concern and a mother of three, said "a lot of parents are in denial" over what their kids may be doing behind their backs, which is why adults should learn about youth substance abuse.

According to a school survey of Hall students taken in September 2007, 15 percent reported smoking marijuana at least once in the past month; 10 percent noted that they had used or were currently using steroids; and 25 percent said they drank alcohol at weekend parties in the past month.

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