

Addiction could destroy anyone

Updated: 09/18/2009 05:17:57 PM EDT

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On September 10, 1996, I lost my 20-year-old son, Ian James to a drug overdose just before he was going into a rehabilitation program the next day. Ian had used tobacco, marijuana and alcohol in high school.

At one point he was picked up by an officer at Cranbury Park in Norwalk. He was scolded and told to go home. The officer said "If I ever find you in this town again with any drugs, I will arrest you, now go home."

I insisted that Ian go into counseling at that point. I had such high hopes for Ian; I thought we had caught a potential addiction early. I thought it all went away, until I received the phone call from his biological Dad stating he was snorting heroin in college. My breath was taken away. My life changed. My friends knew there was something different about me.

At first, I was ashamed of his problem. I didn't want to tell anyone about his problem when he came home from college. He was going to a day treatment program and we thought his problem was being fixed. He didn't want me to tell his friends in Norwalk who did not know. The ugly truth is, the problem wasn't fixed. I found him in the morning just before I was going to meet my friend at six am for our morning run. Ian died in his sleep. Neighbors told me my cries for help to 911 that morning were heard two blocks away.

Addiction does not discriminate. It doesn't matter who you are, it doesn't matter what race you are, how financially sound you

are, if you're homeless or if you have a family who loves you dearly. It can happen to anyone.

Drug addiction not only destroys the person who is using; it also destroys the family. Addiction robs you of your money, it robs you of your spirit, and finally, when you have nothing else left to give"it robs you of your soul. My son Ian was a good kind person who suffered from a terrible disease and we miss him everyday of our lives.

I founded the Courage to Speak Foundation a non-profit 501-c3 organization in 1996 the following months after Ian died. My community as well as others wanted me to speak out. The organization was formed to help reduce the drug use among young people and to encourage parents to learn everything our children will be exposed to. Even if you think your child will never do drugs you must find out what they will we exposed to. My husband and I have given over 1000 presentations nationally, sharing our message with students in elementary, middle and high schools, colleges and parents as well as other forums to prevent this tragedy from happening to another family.

We also developed a new program for parents called Courage to Speak -- Courageous Parenting 101. The program is a free five-session (once a week) substance abuse education and prevention course for parents wishing to arm themselves with the knowledge of how to keep their children safe and you can sign up for the course at the presentation or call 203-874-7691.

I will be presenting the Courage to Speak presentation at the Milford Hospital at 7 p.m. on September 23rd. All children (ages 10 and up), parents, grandparents, community leaders, law enforcement, school administrators, teachers and any other concerned citizens are invited to attend the presentation.

The program is sponsored by the Milford Prevention Council and the United Way of Milford. For more information call the United Way at 203 874-6791 or e-mail milfordpreventioncouncil@gmail.com and visit www.couragetospeak.org

Ginger Katz

Norwalk