

Group gets federal grant to spread 'Sunny's Story'

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NORWALK - The Courage to Speak Foundation started out with a simple mission - to spread the word about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse.

The small organization, founded in 1996 by Norwalk resident Ginger Katz and her husband, Larry, after their 20-year-old son, Ian, died of a heroin overdose, is growing, and recently received its largest grant yet - \$446,500 from the U.S. Department of Justice.

The grant will be used over 18 months to help expand the substance abuse prevention and education program throughout Fairfield County and other Connecticut communities.

Katz said the money also will let her hire a staff member to help her run the foundation and free her to do what she does best: educate kids.

A few years ago, Katz expanded the drug-prevention program, which originally reached seventh- and ninth-graders, to elementary schools, writing "Sunny's Story," a self-published children's book about her son's battle with addiction.

This year, Katz launched Courageous Parenting 101, a free seminar for parents. A dozen adults, including four from other states, also have been trained as facilitators, and can teach other parents.

"All this takes a lot of coordination," Katz said. "Now this funding will give us the opportunity to do things the right way. I can't possibly do this all by myself."

Katz is also looking to make her program a national one, and will use some of the federal funds for a professional evaluation.

But Katz still prefers to give her educational program a personal touch.

Katz said she would like to be available to make her school presentations in communities in Connecticut and New York, such as the "Empowering Youth to be Drug Free Family Night," held last Monday at West Rocks Middle School.

"I need to be out there speaking," Katz said. "If kids want me to go up and be there with them because they read 'Sunny's Story,' that's what I should do."