

Foundation gets big bucks to speak out

By Jill Bodash

The Courage to Speak Foundation received a \$446,500 grant from the U.S. Department of Justice to expand its substance abuse prevention and education programs in Fairfield County schools and other Connecticut communities.

It is the largest grant the nonprofit has received in its 11-year history.

"It's, by far, the largest grant we've ever received," said Ginger Katz, founder of Courage to Speak. "After doing this for 11 years in my little office in my house, Ian's bedroom, it is so wonderful to receive this support because, let me tell you, we need it."

When Katz first started Courage to Speak, she funded the start-up with her own money. The first donation she received was for \$750 — a donation she initially refused.

"When the woman handed it to me I didn't want to accept it at first, but she told me that if I didn't take the money that I wouldn't be able to afford the program in the long run," Katz said. "She told me to go buy a computer for Courage to Speak, so I did."

Since then, Katz and Courage to Speak have received funding from organizations like the Fairfield County Community Foundation and the Norwalk Police Department's asset forfeiture fund, but the success of the program dictated even more help, Katz said.

The current annual budget for the Courage to Speak Foundation is \$160,000. Raising that amount piece-meal was getting more and more difficult, Katz said.

"I can't tell you how much we need this right now," Katz said. "We are growing so much that I need help because I do want to be in it for the long run, but I can't do it myself anymore."

The funding will be used over 18 months to enhance and deepen the impact of Courage to Speak substance abuse prevention curricula in Fairfield County schools and in other communities in Connecticut.

In addition to expanding the curriculum the DOJ funding will allow her hire a staff person to help her execute and manage the various programs offered by Courage to Speak.

"I really expect us to grow pretty rapidly," Katz said. The funding will also allow Katz to have the Courage to Speak programs professionally evaluated.

"We know they work because we've heard it first-hand, but I want to know if there is anything we can do to make the programs even better and what we need to do in order to make Courage to Speak a national model for other communities," Katz said.

The Courage to Speak Foundation was founded in 1996 by Ginger and Larry Katz after they lost their son, Ian, to a drug overdose. Courage to Speak encourages children and parents to talk openly and honestly about the dangers of drugs and to empower children to live drug-free lives by working collaboratively with school administrators, teachers, and substance abuse prevention experts to develop its programs.

The organization also trains teachers to deliver school-based curricula and coordinates community events that raise awareness and commitment to prevention.

During the past six years, the Courage to Speak Foundation has developed **substance abuse prevention and education health curricula for children and youth in elementary, middle and high schools.**

In addition, the foundation has launched a five-session parent substance abuse education and prevention program called **Courageous Parenting 101 in 2008** in collaboration with area schools, churches and organizations. Last year, participants from New York, Michigan and Massachusetts attended the training sessions. Visit www.couragetospeak.org