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What Kids Tell Us

Thomas A. Kirk, Jr., Ph.D.
 Commissioner

The facts are clear: one of the most powerful deterrents for alcohol and other drug use is simply talking with our youngsters. Though we think they may not be listening, we have to keep doing it. An innovative and effective way to reach youth was recently celebrated in Norwalk at the West Rocks Middle School Auditorium. The event was the *Courage To Speak Foundation* Family Night. There was a full house – families, youngsters, teachers, and local education, public safety and legislative leaders.

Ginger Katz started the *Foundation* after the death of her 20 year old son in 1996 to a drug overdose. Ian was every parent's dream child - bright, athletic, handsome and personable. It was a tragic loss, but she has turned her personal loss into something positive by visiting schools and telling Ian's story to large audiences of kids, teachers and parents. She gets to them. They listen, and they learn. The quotes below are from many of the letters she receives from school children attesting to this fact. They get what she is saying.

"I now know that drugs are deadly, they aren't a joke and the fact that regular people die from them is a reality."

~7th grader from Nathan Hale Middle School

"Every friend wants to keep a secret for another friend, but when the secret involves another person's life, tell."

~7th grader from Ponus Ridge Middle School

"You should have at least two adults you trust and you can say anything to them. I was shocked on how his [Ian's] friends didn't say anything to you."

~7th grader from Ponus Ridge Middle School

"You taught me that I can be safe from drugs and keep my body away from being in danger. . . .Without You, I could be in a lot of trouble."

~4th grader from Brookside Elementary School

"When I was reading Sunny's story [a book about Ian's life written from his dog, Sunny's, perspective] it gave me hope to tell other children to stop doing drugs."

~6th grader from Bearsley Elementary School

"You should think about your life and people you care about before you use anything. This makes me think, if I do drugs, the more I would be hurting myself and everyone else around me."

~6th grader from Beardsley Elementary School

Recent Family Night Student Speakers

Brookside Elementary

Jenifer Rojas
 Elijah Rose
 Allen Hersey

Nathan Hale Middle School

Marissa Noonan
 Jack Patterson

Ponus Ridge Middle School

Andrea Barros
 Jenna Pellegrino
 Sharina Jimenez

Roton Middle School

Lucy Liljegren
 Heather Leigh Gordon

Side by Side Community School

Morgan Henry
 Alayne Martinez
 Sierra Delrios
 Krysten Marsh

West Rocks Middle School

Roberto Jimenez
 Aubrianna Mann
 Gavin Schuerch

Bearsley Elementary School

Jinahe Bennett
 Stephany Melendez

We can't stand by and watch this ongoing problem. We must not wait until it is too late. Talk to your kids. Go to the website for Partnership for Drug Free America, www.drugfree.org for help about how to talk with them about alcohol and other drugs. For more information on the Courage to Speak Foundation go to www.couragetospeak.org, email Mrs. Katz at gkcourage@aol.com, or call 1-877-431-3295. Ask about her Courageous Parenting 101 curriculum and *Sunny's Story*. Make the effort. It is your responsibility. Every youngster we reach may be a life saved.

Your comments are welcome at Thomas.Kirk@po.state.ct.us.