

**Winner: Advocate of the Year**

**Ginger Katz, The Courage to Speak Foundation Inc.  
Educating students about drug abuse and saving young lives**

May 10, 2010

**Type of business:** Substance abuse and recovery education

**Connecticut employees:** 5

**Headquarters:** Norwalk

**Top Executive:** Ginger Katz, founder & CEO

**Winning category:** Nonprofit advocate of the year

“Silence is a killer when it comes to children and drug abuse,” said Ginger Katz, founder and CEO of The Courage to Speak Foundation. “If we don’t speak about this problem we’re not going to have solutions. And if we don’t have solutions, children will die.”

Katz knows this heartache. She and her husband Larry lost their 20-year-old son, Ian, in 1996 to a drug overdose. From that moment, their lives changed forever. That same year, she started The Courage to Speak foundation to educate parents and children about the dangers of drug and alcohol abuse among youths.



Students are encouraged to draw posters that reflect what they've learned from the anti-drug message Ginger Katz delivers.

“I’d give anything to have Ian back,” she said. “But I’m grateful for the opportunities and courage I’ve been given that came out of this tragedy to speak out and shed light on the disease of substance abuse among our children.”

Starting from Ian’s converted basement bedroom and eventually moving to office space in Norwalk with a staff of five, The Courage to Speak Foundation has grown in influence and recognition inside and outside of Connecticut.

“We’ve probably made at least 1,000 presentations in Connecticut over the years and I’ve presented in at least 20 states outside of Connecticut,” Katz said.

Many invitations to speak have come from school principals from across the country as a result of Katz’s presentation several years ago to the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Katz is often invited to deliver a keynote address at meetings and events around the country as a way to share her story and educate parents about the realities of substance abuse and

youth addiction. Today, the foundation continues to raise donations through individual and corporate fund raising efforts but also receives grants from the federal government, and state contributions from the Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

The foundation has expanded beyond just the personal story and advice Katz shared with high school students in the early years. Today, the foundation also offers age-appropriate curricula to school age children in the elementary, middle and 9th grade high school levels. Additionally, a curriculum called Courageous Parenting 101 is offered to parents to help strengthen their abilities to confront substance abuse issues with their children.

The grade-school curriculum was developed from a book Katz wrote several years ago, Sunny's Story. It tells Ian's story from the perspective of Sunny, the family beagle and Ian's close companion who was with him the night he died. To date, the book has sold more than 4,000 copies with little marketing, Katz said. The curriculum is in many Connecticut schools, including eight public schools in Bridgeport. The city of Bridgeport also purchased the book for every 6th grader enrolled in its schools.

"My message is a simple one," Katz said. "Don't underestimate early use of drugs by children. Parents are the single biggest influence in their children's lives. Every child will be approached and tempted. Talk to them constantly and stay close to them."

[www.couragetospeak.org](http://www.couragetospeak.org)