

## Kids Vow to be Drug-Free

by **Moina Noor**



12 year-old Genesis, left, works on her letter to Ginger Katz, right.

Photo credit: *Thomas Cain*

Genesis, 12, made a vow to be drug-free Thursday night in front of 200 people at West Rocks Middle School. Seventeen other Norwalk elementary and middle school students joined Genesis on stage, as part of the sixth annual “Empowering Youth to be Drug Free” family night sponsored by the Courage to Speak Foundation. “I learned how bad drugs are and that something really horrible can happen if you take them,” said Genesis. “My parents have never taken drugs and I look up to them.”

Ginger Katz, Founder of Courage to Speak, says the family night is about one thing, “parent and children talking honestly about drugs.” Katz lost her son, Ian, to drugs when he was only 20 years old. Since that heartbreaking tragedy a decade ago, Katz has told Ian’s story to more than a million young children and parents in Connecticut and across the nation. Only one in three parents talk to their children about the dangers of drugs, says Katz.

Angie, a mother who attended the event with her 13-year-old Ponus Ridge Middle School student, said she talks to her kids constantly. “You need to keep tabs on them and it’s important that they feel comfortable talking to you.”

The Norwalk Police Department was at the event with information about “Operation Medicine Drop”, a new prescription drug disposal program. “Many young people’s first experience with drugs comes from what is found in the medicine cabinet,” said Harry Rilling, Norwalk Chief of Police.

The event was an all-evening affair that began with dinner. Several local politicians, school leaders and law enforcement officials were present to reinforce Katz’s message. State Senator Toni Boucher said it’s never too early to start talking to your kids about drugs. “I tell my young grandkids, ‘Drugs are like kryptonite.’”