

IN OUR OWN BACKYARD:

A Community Dialogue about Heroin and Substance Abuse in Hoosick for Parents, Youth, And All Concerned Community Members



Attend an important

TOWN HALL MEETING

WHEN: *Wednesday, April 23, 2014 at 7:00pm*

WHERE: *At The HAYC3 Armory
80 Church Street, Hoosick Falls, NY*

IT'S TIME TO HAVE A TALK

A Community Conversation about Heroin And Other Drugs

The Hoosick Community and the surrounding area is currently experiencing an extremely dangerous epidemic of heroin and prescription drug abuse by teens. This forum is intended to provide concrete, helpful, and useful information in order to proactively confront this situation together and help stop the epidemic now.

The discussion is open to parents, students, community members and leaders. Speakers will be on hand to address issues of community law enforcement, treatment and recovery as well as to offer prevention tools and discuss ways in which our community can work to protect and assist our youth.



PARTICIPANTS WILL:

- Understand the drug problem in our community.
- Gain a working knowledge of the signs and symptoms of drug use and abuse.
- Learn to create an open dialogue with children about drug use and its impact.

PRESENTERS:

James Baker

Chief of Police, Rutland City, VT

- *The regional approach from the law enforcement point of view*
- *Efforts underway in Rutland, VT*
- *The need for leadership in the community to rally non-traditional partners into a collaborative effort*
- *Drugs and the entire community's quality of life*

Harold McClellan

Assistant Chief of Police, HF, NY

- *The State of our Community*
- *How You Can be Part of the Change*
- *What to do with unwanted prescriptions*

Chris Sherman

Licensed Mental Health Counselor

- *Creating Effective, Positive Individual, Family and Community Models*
- *Recreational and Social Use of Alcohol and Its Connection to Drug Abuse*

Brian Bushner

Social Media Strategist

- *The "invisible" social networks kids are using beyond Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram*
- *Ways networks are used to foster drug deals and other negative behaviors*
- *How to monitor your children's social engagement*

SPONSORED BY THE HAYC3 COMMUNITY COALITION

For more information, please call 518.686.9050, or email contacthayc3@gmail.org. Or visit our website: <http://hayc3.org>

IT CAN HAPPEN TO ANYONE

Please read this letter from a heartbroken mother who's young son recently died from a drug overdose.

Dear Friends,

It's been almost one month since we lost our Danny. I vowed his death will not be just another drug related casualty and yet I don't have the strength to use my voice to reach out to others. I thought of starting a blog but can't get it going. I have a message to parents and young people about what we learned so the best way to get it out is for everyone who reads this post to share it and hopefully our experience can save another life. Here is what we learned:

1. This can happen to anyone. No socioeconomic barriers exist. Every time you smoke weed, or use what is perceived as recreational drug, there is a chance that it is tainted with a substance that can kill.

2. The drug dealer is not always the creepy inner city guy or some bad kid from town; it could be your next door neighbor, a father of children your kids' ages.

3. Most teens don't think anything bad will ever happen to them. They often think they are in control of the situation and are just "partying". Parents don't think it will happen in their family. Drugs and my kid "never"! WAKE UP EVERYONE; what was considered recreational drug use just a few years ago is completely different now. Coke, Molly, Xanax, Shrooms, Acid, Weed and any form of pain killers are the NORM. Don't worry so much about locking up your liquor cabinet; lock your medicine cabinet first. We spoke to many of Danny's friends after his death to try to make sense of what happened. Kids today speak a different language regarding what is normal. We were in shock at how blatantly they talked about using these drugs as if they were having a pizza. It is a different world today. My older kids were as shocked as we are. One is 29 the other is 27. What is normal now was considered crossing the line when they were in college! Danny wasn't out of high school a year before he died.

4. You can have the best environment and the happiest of families. Your child could be abusing or addicted drugs and you might not even know it. Danny came from a very happy home; parents who are married over 30 years and still love each other as we did 30 years ago. He had an older brother and sister who adored him and watched over him like a parent. Grandmothers, aunts, uncles, cousins. A very tight, happy and loving family. We can't wrap our heads around this; you think there has to be some type of family drama or problem that would cause your child to start using any type of drug. It doesn't! If drugs grab hold of your child, it is a demon you may not even be aware of until something drastic occurs.

5. You can talk to your kids about drugs, schools can educate them; it usually doesn't help or work in most cases. You're lucky if your kid learned something from the education process. Danny had all the lectures, education and information from school, his family, his siblings, his cousins and from families we know with kids with drug abuse problems. There are many families who are experiencing the in and out of rehab hell; a hell we would gladly visit if we were given the chance. Unfortunately, most of you know what happened to him. Go re-read lessons 1 and 2. We talked constantly about what was going on out there from our limited knowledge base. That is one of the problems; as parents most of us don't even know what to look for when you would never put the words drugs and your kid in the same sentence. Remember, Danny didn't start smoking weed alone. I am sure he didn't experiment with other substances alone either. Your kid may be trying different party drugs and you wouldn't even know it.

6. Teenagers are very skilled at half truths. There is a fine line between trusting your kid and becoming a maniac who is following the teens every move. My son told me everything I wanted to hear to ensure he was okay and not doing anything stupid. He even told me about an intervention his friends had after New Years for some of his buddies. I knew all about it! He left out the part that he was being intervened as well. He told me about the amount of partying his friends were doing at college when they came home for winter break and how many of them have changed. He trained us to leave him alone. As the parents of a 19 year old, we had no reason not to trust him so we gave him the freedom to act like a first year college student.

7. Right under our nose our son was using drugs. I work from home for the past 18 years. My office is two feet from his bedroom. I am home all the time. There was not one sign that could not be considered a typical teenage action. Danny went to school, he went to work at his part time job, and he had a girlfriend he adored. He ate dinner with us every night. He called home and

reached out to us whenever he was out. He called me every day on his way home from school to see what we were having for dinner. He had conversations with us when he felt like it. He told us he loved us every single day. Sounds normal right? He never took money from my purse, occasionally he would take my debit card but I could see exactly what he did; fast food and gas in his car. He got angry once in a while, what teenager doesn't? He slept late and stayed up late; typical college student behavior. Does that sound like a drug abuser? Not to us especially after having gone through the teenage years with our older kids.

8. There is tremendous shame and embarrassment felt by kids when they recognize they have a substance abuse problem. They may have done terrible things to get money to buy drugs. These feelings of shame can prevent them from seeking help from the people who love them and would do anything for them. We learned a great deal about our son after his death that I know, 100%, would cause him to be scared out of his mind to tell us. Parents know that parental love is unconditional but many kids don't understand it. It is that fear of what may happen if their parents find out that holds them back from being truthful. We thought we had an open relationship with Danny where he could tell us anything (mom and siblings especially). If he had not been given a lethal dose of homemade drugs, we most likely would have only found out if he told us, someone else told us, or if he got arrested. We found out when we broke down his bedroom door. Parents, please reinforce unconditional love to your kids. Let them know that no matter what they have done or are doing, you will be there for them. It may be disappointing and embarrassing, but you can save your kids life. We wish we had the chance to at least try.

9. The unwritten CODE OF TEENAGERS is to keep silent about anything you know that may cause you lose a friend. This is the way it is and the way it always was. We all have to learn a new code, a code that can save a life. Having a friend be mad at you is different than having a friend or their child that is dead. You only lose a friend when they are gone forever. That friend will thank you some day and their family may be spared the agony my family is living through right now. Re-read number 3. There is a new normal out there that is beyond most of our comprehension. Anyone who knows their friends are making bad choices, using drugs that are deadly or parents who know their kids are using drugs but didn't reach out to warn the parents of their friends to look out: BREAK the CODE; open up your mouth and tell their families. It wasn't until Danny died that we found out how many of his friends knew what he was doing. We also learned that one of his friends, a friend he had since age 6, was in a day rehab. His mother didn't call me and warn me to look out for my son. I would have done that for her if I was the one that found out first. Her son is now in rehab and can try to get a new start; Danny didn't get that chance. We didn't get a chance to help our son. Had someone tipped us off, it may have taken a while to process but we would at least been looking out for signs. Schools and police departments have a place in this at some point, but first and foremost, kids should have a safe method of informing so they will actually do it. Be creative, find ways within your communities to let kids know they need to BREAK the CODE and tell someone. They can save a life.

10. For those of you who are lucky enough to have the opportunity to help your child DON'T MESS IT UP!!! Get them into rehab. Do what you need to save them. If you need to move to a new area to get them away from their friends, DO IT. Help them get the support they need through groups, counseling etc. Be there for them every step of the way now and forever. We didn't get the chance to help our Danny. We can't help but be somewhat jealous of those families that can at least try. I spoke to families that are living the "in and out of rehab hell" and I swear, we would take that hell over our hell any day. Both are horrible but your kids are alive, our son is not. I can't even describe the pain my family is experiencing right now and how our lives are changed forever. If you are lucky enough to get the chance, do it right!!

Unfortunately, many kids have very short memories for a local tragedy. We saw real and true tears at Danny's funeral from many of the hundreds of kids who came. We have also learned that a few days later, many were back to business as usual waiting for the next chance to get wasted at whatever excuse there is for a party. Some kids learned a lesson, many didn't learn a thing. Please share this with everyone on your friend list and parents, please recognize it doesn't just happen to other people, it can happen to you. We thought the same thing and will now have to live with broken hearts for the rest of our lives. Please learn from our experience and hopefully help your child or friend before it is too late.

Sincerely,
Linda Lajterman