

Vigil for Lost Promise: Remembering Those Who Have Died From Drugs



Linda Surks, who works for NJPN's Middlesex County affiliate, the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence (NCADD) of Middlesex County, helped organize the event. She lost her son Jason to a prescription drug overdose in December 2003.

More committed than ever to preventing drug abuse and saving other families from the tragedy she's been through, she has been active on both the local and national level, sharing her story and raising awareness about the dangers of prescription drug abuse and how easy it is to access the drugs without a prescription, over the Internet.

Eight families who lost their children to drugs organized a vigil at the U.S. Department of Justice's Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Headquarters in Arlington, Virginia on June 8, 2006. The families joined together to plan a remembrance for those who have died, and to illuminate how pervasive and dangerous drugs are in today's society.

Over the years, parents and friends have found ways to remember their loved ones, but until now, there hasn't been a national event to bring people together to call attention to the extent and nature of the drug problem.

The DEA, the National Institute on Drug Abuse, the Partnership for a Drug-Free America, Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America, Drug Free Kids: America's Challenge, and National Families in Action supported this effort and joined these families to raise awareness about the terrible toll that drugs take on families, friends and society.

Linda Surks standing by Memorial Wall next to her son Jason's picture



"The whole process of planning the event was an awesome experience," said Surks. "I have friends from all over the country who share my pain, but also share my hope that we have shined a light on a problem that the country needs to see."

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NJPN Enhances WISE Prevention Program Geared Towards Older Adults

Abuse of alcohol and prescribed and over-the-counter drugs is currently a serious problem among senior citizens in America, affecting up to 17 percent of adults aged 60 or older (approximately eight million adults) according to the Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (1998).

A growing type of abuser is the “late-onset alcoholic,” a person who shows no sign of alcoholism until a major life change, such as health problems, death of a spouse, financial worries, depression or sleeplessness, which triggers drinking after age 50.



Approximately eight million adults, aged 60 or older, abuse alcohol and/or prescribed and over-the-counter drugs

According to some forecasts, the current number of substance dependent and abusing adults over age 50, 1.7 million, will rise to 4.4 million by 2020.

NJPN’s Wellness Initiative for Senior Education (WISE) Program, a prevention program targeting older adults, is designed to address this growing problem.

While the WISE Program has been offered since 1996, the program has undergone substantial changes in the last few years. The program has been updated and streamlined, and outside evaluators have been hired to help us determine how effective the program is at achieving the goals we have established.

As a result of our efforts, WISE was recently accepted into the Northeast Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies’ (CAPT) Service to Science Academy. In May, NJPN representatives traveled to Newton, Massachusetts to participate in a three-day training and technical assistance program designed to help elevate prevention programs like WISE to the next level.

The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP) and many states, including New Jersey, have placed increasing emphasis on the use of evidence-based programs. Therefore, CSAP established a Service to Science initiative as a vehicle for helping organizations like NJPN become more experienced with program evaluation by offering free technical assistance on evaluation and related program planning issues.

A pilot program with a rigorous evaluation process is currently being implemented locally by NJPN’s member agencies in Hudson, Ocean, Passaic and Somerset counties. With help from the staff from the Northeast CAPT and our evaluator, the Office of Professional Development and Research at Rutgers School of Social Work, we developed numerous evaluation tools and a detailed evaluation process to determine how effective WISE is at achieving its program goals.

About the WISE Program...

NJPN developed the WISE Program in 1996 in response to reports of high drinking levels in senior housing developments.

The program provides valuable educational services to older adults on topics including nutrition and exercise, medication use, stress management, grief and loss, depression and substance abuse.

Vigil

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“I am so grateful to the DEA Demand Reduction Unit for making this event possible,” said Surks

More than 500 people attended the vigil, and similar vigils were held in towns across the country as well.

Among those attending the vigil in Virginia were staff from NJPN and several of our affiliates, showing

support for Linda and her family. The group wore T-shirts with Jason’s picture on them.

The keynote speaker was Dr. Lonise Bias, who lost her son to a cocaine overdose in 1986.

A wall of remembrance, with pictures of loved ones as well as many others lost to drugs, was displayed next to the stage. This memorial wall will become part of the traveling display of the DEA Museum, visiting cities across the country.

Prescription Drug Abuse Gains National Attention

On Wednesday, July 26, 2006, a Congressional hearing entitled “Prescription Drug Abuse: What is Being Done to Address This New Drug Epidemic?” was held in Washington, DC. The hearing was conducted by the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy, and Human Resources, in the Committee on Government Reform, U.S. House of Representatives.

Two panels of witnesses testified, addressing a variety of issues related to the problem of prescription drug abuse. Witnesses included representatives from government agencies, private enterprise, the medical community, non-profit organizations, and private citizens - parents who know firsthand of this problem, having lost a child to prescription drug abuse. Linda Surks, from NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc. was one of those parents. *(See Page One)*

“I know that Jason believed he was being safe,” said Surks in her testimony.

“He was a pre-pharmacy major at Rutgers University, and he used the Internet to research the safety of certain drugs and how they react with others.” The Internet was a main focus of the hearing, being identified by most witnesses as an easy way for kids to get these drugs.

There are millions of websites offering prescription drugs such as Vicodin, Xanax and Oxycodone to Internet users. Many sites claim you don’t need a doctor’s prescription to buy these powerful drugs.



According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, almost six million people are currently abusing prescription drugs.

The problem is most acute among young people. When it comes to the powerful painkiller oxycodone, NIDA figures show abuse among 12th graders has increased 40 percent in the past four years.

The Subcommittee will make recommendations concerning potential legislation based upon the information they received at the hearing.

The Internet Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act counters the growing sale of prescription drugs over the Internet without a valid prescription by (1) providing new disclosure standards for Internet pharmacies; (2) barring Internet sites from selling or dispensing prescription drugs to consumers who are provided a prescription solely on the basis of an online questionnaire; and (3) allowing state attorneys general to go to federal court to shut down rogue sites.



Prevention pieces

Upcoming events in your community...

CAPE MAY COUNTY

6th Annual Girl Power Conference

Cape Assist's *6th Annual Girl Power Conference* is Saturday, October 7th at the Cape May Technical High School (188 Crest Haven Road, Cape May Court House, NJ). Registration begins at 8:30 a.m. The conference is free and open to girls 9-14 years old. Officer Kelly Peterson will serve as the guest speaker.

Girl Power! is a national campaign sponsored by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and is aimed towards keeping girls free from drugs, alcohol and tobacco. This conference is an opportunity for the girls to laugh, learn and to celebrate who they are. For more information, please call 609-522-5960.

MONMOUTH COUNTY

Simple Gifts: The Neuroscience of Peace & Prevention

Prevention First will present a special statewide conference on Tuesday, October 10, 2006, from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The program, *Simple Gifts: The Neuroscience of Peace & Prevention*, will feature Dr. Dennis Embry from the Paxis Institute in Tucson, Arizona. The event will take place at the Sheraton Eatontown Hotel, on Route 35, in Eatontown, New Jersey.

NJDOE Continuing Education credits, CADC/CPS renewal credits, and social work credits are available. The registration fee for the conference is \$65. For more information, visit www.preventionfirst.net or call Barbara Sprechman at 732-663-1800, extension 211.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY

Tree of Hope Event

NCADD of Middlesex County, Inc. celebrates National Recovery Month each September by awarding a "Tree of Hope" to an organization that promotes recovery within Middlesex County. The live evergreen tree serves as a symbol of the hope that recovery is always possible.

This year's ceremony dedicating the tree will take place on Wednesday, September 27, 2006, at Princeton House Behavioral Health's North Brunswick facility (1460 Livingston Avenue, North Brunswick, NJ 08902). For more information, contact Dennis Lee at 732-254-3344.

MySpace, MySickness: The Dark Side of the Popular Website

Some groups on the popular website glorify anorexia, drug abuse and self-mutilation

The wildly popular online social networking phenomenon dominated by the website MySpace.com has a little noticed underside: a sub-culture of users who gather in “groups” - or message boards - expressly focused on dangerous and sometimes illegal activities such as prescription drug abuse, self-mutilation and other types of self-harm.

Although most of the hundreds of thousands of groups on MySpace - which claims more than 90 million members, about 20 percent of them under age 18 - are built around innocuous interests such as “hobbies and crafts,” “pets and animals” and “romance and relationships,” others cultivate a less savory image.

The Health, Wellness and Fitness category alone contains more than 13,500 groups - some offering support, encouragement and advice for those with various illnesses and addictions, but others glorify harmful conditions and behaviors such as anorexia, bulimia and self-mutilation, and advocate the use of steroids for bodybuilding, and prescription pills or street drugs to get high.

Anston Trinidad, medical director of inpatient services at George Washington University Hospital’s Department of Psychiatry, expressed alarm about the phenomenon, which has drawn little attention among health experts.

“It is very disturbing to me that there are many people that are writing on these websites that sound to me like they truly have true psychological distress and at the same time, they are communicating with people who are giving them advice on how to do harm to themselves,” said Trinidad.



MySpace offers a personalized platform for exchanging messages. MySpace users can create personal pages, complete with photos that express their interests along with such details as sexual preference, relationship status and schools attended. People they identify as “friends” on their pages can leave comments for others to see.

To post group messages and exchange private messages on the site, MySpace members first register, then create pages describing themselves. This gives them the option to join groups, which serve as an organized collection of messages exchanged between members. Many groups are public - open to any MySpace user; others are private and require approval by a self-appointed moderator before a member can join.

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“My parents have not seen MySpace but they do know a lot of the things I’ve done with my life but not to the full extent to which drugs I’ve taken and how many times...I don’t show them, it’s that simple.”

A 14-year-old New Jersey Boy

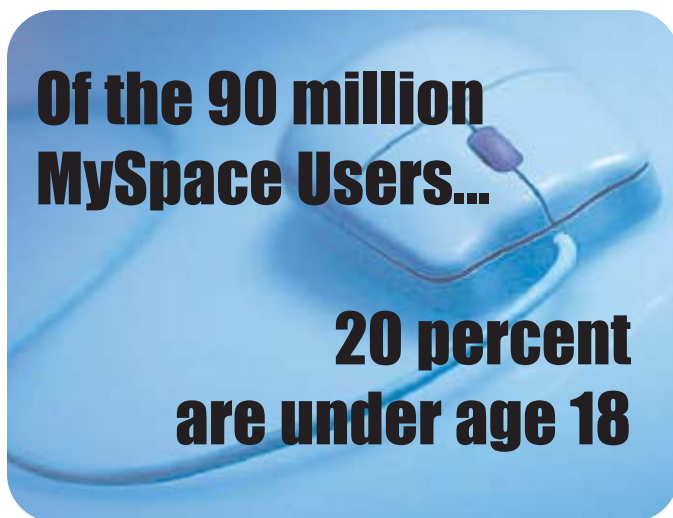
MySpace

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Many participants in these groups identify themselves as adults - but some are teens and adolescents who have joined MySpace, in some cases without their parents' knowledge. The website says users must be 14 or older but requires no proof of age.

MySpace.com executives say they limit access to groups with adult themes to people 18 and over. But many groups, including some that discuss drug use, sex and self-harm, can be accessed and read even without a MySpace account.

And many groups with content that parents might find objectionable for their children - including some that encourage drugs, sex parties and "hooking up" with other group members - are not restricted.



MySpace executives say the site does protect under-aged members. The site asks "members to let us know if the groups they set up are adult," writes Hemanshu Nagam, chief security officer of MySpace, in an e-mail interview. "The MySpace community, like any offline community, permits a wide range of self-expression...As a company, we are committed to smart health practices and social responsibility."

A 14-year-old New Jersey boy - whose MySpace page says he's 19 - belongs to groups including "Pain Pills," "The Drug Club," "Pill Poppers" and another

group called, "I like lying on my bed for hours tripping on Benadryl." He said his parents aren't aware he has a MySpace page or that he goes online to discuss drug use.

Group Interaction

In messages exchanged with a reporter through MySpace, the 14-year-old boy wrote, "My parents have not seen MySpace but they do know a lot of the things I've done with my life but not to the full extent of such things as which drugs I've taken and how many times...I don't show them, it's that simple. In these groups we discuss the newest and easiest methods of ingestion...We talk about legal highs and which pills are good and we also support those who made a change."

On a self-mutilation group called "Razorblade Kisses," which had nearly 200 members in a recent week, a message displays a "Cutting Warning Label" that warns: "before you make that first cut remember, you will enjoy this. You will find the blood and pain release addictive."

And, it also reads: "be prepared to withdraw from others and live in a constant state of shame...you will find yourself lying to the people you love. You will jerk back from your friends when they touch you as if their hands were dipped in poison."

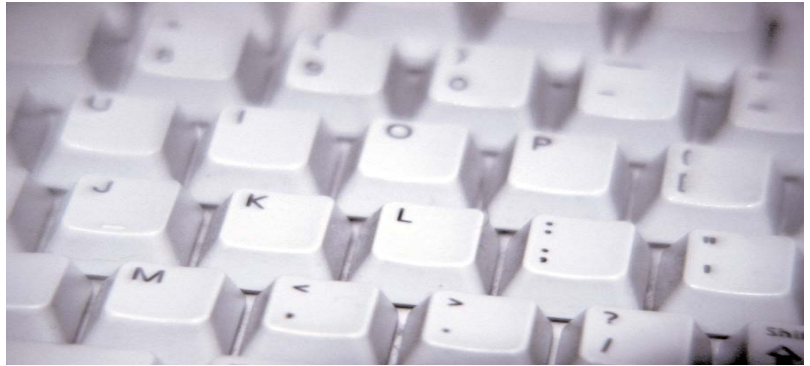
In a group called "Pill Poppers United," a user asked if it's possible to get high off the pain medication Darvocet. One reply suggested hydrocodone for a better high.

Robert Roth, coordinator of adolescent behavioral health at Montgomery General Hospital in Olney, Maryland, says kids who come into his addiction clinic talk frequently of groups on MySpace, and it seems more popular among middle school students than with high school students. The parents of teens frequenting such groups "are usually completely unaware," he says.

*Reprinted story written by January W. Payne
(Washington Post Service)*

Want to learn more about the
New Jersey
Prevention Network or our
member agencies?

Visit us online at
www.njpn.org



Member Agencies

Atlantic Prevention Resources

609-272-0101

Leg. Districts 1, 2, 3, 9

**The Center for Alcohol and
Drug Resources - Bergen County**

201-488-8680

Leg. Districts 32, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40

**Prevention Plus of Burlington
County**

609-261-0001

Leg. Districts 7, 8, 9, 30

**Camden County Council on
Alcoholism & Drug Abuse**

856-427-6553

Leg. Districts 4, 5, 6, 7

**Cape Assist - Cape May Council
on Alcoholism & Drug Abuse**

609-522-5960

Leg. District 1

Essex Prevention Resources

973-571-2324

Leg. 21, 27, 28, 29, 34, 36, 40

**The Southwest Council -
Gloucester, Salem and
Cumberland Counties**

856-794-1011

Leg. Districts 1, 3, 4, 5

**Partners in Prevention
Hudson County Inc.**

201-653-6776

Leg. Districts 31, 32, 33

Hunterdon Prevention Resources

908-782-3909

Leg. Districts 23, 24

**Mercer Council on Alcoholism &
Drug Addiction (MCADA)**

609-396-5874

Leg. Districts 12, 14, 15, 30

**NCADD of Middlesex
County, Inc.**

732-254-3344

Leg. Districts 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 22

**Prevention First -
Monmouth County**

732-663-1800

Leg. 10, 11, 12, 13, 30

Morris County Prevention is Key

973-625-1998

Leg. Districts 16, 21, 24, 25, 26

**Alcoholism and Drug Abuse
Council of Ocean (ADACO)**

732-367-5515

Leg. Districts 9, 10, 30

**Passaic County Council on
Alcoholism & Drug Abuse
Prevention**

973-473-3366

Leg. Districts 26, 34, 35, 36, 40

**Somerset Council on Alcoholism &
Drug Dependency**

908-722-4900

Leg. Districts 16, 17, 21, 22

**Center for Prevention and
Counseling - Sussex County**

973-383-4787

Leg. District 24

Prevention Links - Union County

732-381-4100

Leg. Districts 20, 21, 22, 29

**Community Prevention
Resources - Warren County**

908-835-1800

Leg. District 23

NJPN *Connections* is written for network member agencies, legislators and friends of the network. If you have any questions or comments about the newsletter, please call us at 732-367-0611.

Connections

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