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Pierce, Diekhoff to speak at narcotic overdose prevention vigil Oct. 27

Mother of woman who died from overdose working for bill that would set procedures for involuntary commitments

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Hundreds of luminaries will turn darkness into light during the Narcotic Overdose Prevention and Education Candle Light Vigil at 6 p.m. Oct. 27 at the Fairview United Methodist Church, 600 W. Sixth St.

The purpose of the second annual NOPE event, which last year drew nearly 400 people, is to remember loved ones lost to substance abuse, as well as those still struggling with addictions to alcohol or drugs.

“The vigil is a safe place where people can come and remember the loss of a loved one who died due to an often-stigmatized disease called addiction,” said Sharon Blair, spokeswoman for the event and the mother of a daughter who died at age 29 from an accidental drug overdose. “They can come to express their grief and love for the person they lost in a loving and accepting environment. Last year’s vigil was very moving, powerful and healing.”

Blair said the event is also intended to create greater awareness of substance abuse, and how the community can better respond to those suffering from addictions. She said one thing the community needs is a detox unit, particularly one that can help people who are high on such things as heroine or prescription medications.

Linda Grove-Paul, Centerstone’s director of addiction and forensic services, agrees with Blair that Bloomington could benefit from a detox unit.

“The need is there,” she said. “People are dying from drug and alcohol overdoses. But there aren’t enough funds for addiction treatments in general, and there are few if any funds for detox. Most people with addictions don’t have insurance, so paying for detox is a serious issue.”

State Rep. Matt Pierce and Monroe County Circuit Court Judge Mary Ellen Diekhoff will be the keynote speakers at the event, which will also feature live music, refreshments, and information tables.

Blair said people can bring photos of their loved ones that can be put on display boards. They can also reserve a luminaria for their loved one by calling Alyson Winter at 812-337-2424, and add their story and loved one's photo to the Memorial Wall at www.nopetaskforce.org.

Blair has been working with Indiana state legislators to introduce a bill she put together — named the Jennifer Act in honor of her deceased daughter — that would provide procedures for the involuntary commitment of a person due to alcohol or drug abuse.

“We hope to redraft it in November and introduce it in January, most likely by Sen. Vi Simpson,” she said. “We hope to expand the existing commitment law in Indiana to include the Jennifer Act.”

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