

Ashley Seneko's Story: NOPE Made Me Realize I Am Not Alone

After losing her brother to drugs, she became a NOPE volunteer in Pennsylvania committed to fighting the stigma of the disease of addiction.

Ashley Seneko lost her brother to a drug overdose a few years ago. Since then, she became active in NOPE with a mission of reaching students to prevent them from "going down the long dark road of substance abuse."

In school and parent presentations, she stresses that there is no reason to be ashamed if you have a child or loved one who needs help with substance abuse. She explains that this disease shouldn't be one that is unspoken about or dealt with behind closed doors. Asking for help is not something to be afraid of -- it does not mean the individual is weak.

Ashley Seneko tells her story here:

1) Describe how you got involved with NOPE.

Ashley Seneko: I got involved with the NOPE Task Force in January 2014, only a little over 3 months after my brother, Dennis' death as a result of a drug overdose. Dennis was such an incredible person. He was the best big brother I could've asked for. There was such a void in my life after his death.

Learning about NOPE, from the very beginning, I knew this organization was very powerful and one that could enact change in the lives of the students it came across. I was not able to save my brother from the disease he long battled, however I have made it my mission to reach just one student out there and prevent them from going down the long dark road of substance abuse.

I started volunteering for the Delaware County chapter by being a family member speaker in 2014 at school and parent presentations. As the NOPE Task Force expanded in Pennsylvania into Chester and Montgomery Counties, I continued to share Dennis' story every opportunity I could and have expanded my role by moderating presentations whenever needed. I am also the Montgomery County Family Member Coordinator and assist new family member volunteers whenever needed.

2) How has doing NOPE presentations benefited you?

Ashley Seneko: NOPE has benefited me in many ways. It has given me the opportunity to meet and work with remarkable individuals who have made me realize that I am not alone in this struggle. Each of our stories may be unique but we can relate to each other and the life-changing situations we've been through.

NOPE has allowed me a means to transform my grief and sadness into something positive. NOPE has provided an outlet for me to share my brother's story and create a life-saving legacy for him which I am so thankful for. I do not want his life to be defined by the manner in which he died. Dennis had more drive and determination than anyone else I have ever known, which is what made seeing him struggle with addiction so devastating and heart breaking. He didn't wake up one day and decide he wanted to be addicted to drugs.

3) What do you hope students will remember after hearing your story?

Ashley Seneko: I hope students realize that this disease does not discriminate and they are not immune to its affects. Their hopes, dreams, and aspirations will be unattainable if they choose to misuse drugs and alcohol just like Dennis.

Dennis was full of life and always up for a new adventure. However, Dennis did not realize the sequence of events that were set in place when he first decided to try, use, and abuse alcohol and marijuana in high school. Once Dennis was addicted to drugs and alcohol, he could not see how this disease took full control over his life and led him deeper into addiction. If wanting to stop abusing drugs and alcohol meant you could, Dennis would still be here today.

Students need to realize how strong this disease is. Asking for help is not something to be afraid of. It does not mean the individual is weak. I want students to realize their lives and the lives of the people that love them will be forever changed the moment they decide to use drugs and alcohol.

4) What advice would you give parents of teenagers as it relates to drug prevention?

Ashley Seneko: One thing I wish someone would've told me about drug prevention and addiction is that there is no reason to be ashamed if you have a child or loved one who needs help for substance abuse. Unfortunately, there has been a stigma attached to this disease, however it can affect anyone. This disease shouldn't be one that is unspoken about or dealt with behind closed doors.

Parents need to talk to their children and teach them about drugs and alcohol before they are faced with the difficult decisions at school, a party, or with friends. It is more beneficial for children to learn the real facts and dangers about drugs and alcohol from their parents or people they trust as opposed to hearing rumors from their friends and classmates tell them.

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