

THE GOOD 5¢ CIGAR

Candle light vigil lets students share stories

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As part of a nationwide collaboration by the Narcotics Overdose Prevention and Education (NOPE) task force, nearly twenty supporters gathered at the University of Rhode Island's candle light vigil to bring awareness to and memorialize those who lost their lives to drug addiction.

Faces of people who died of drug overdoses were displayed around the Memorial Union Atrium last night. These photographs featured people ranging from adults to infants, including one of a child looking no older than three years old.

Program Director, registered nurse and Health Educator Roger F. Jadosz, pointed to the child and said he died from an Oxycontin overdose after consuming some pills his parents left on the floor.

All attendees were given a white rose upon entrance as Elton John's "Candle in the Wind" played on loop. Despite the already somber atmosphere, Jadosz apologized for the absence of candles that would otherwise have lit the walkway to the event's entrance.

Jadosz said the vigil was important in that it would memorialize those who lost their life to addiction and help their next of kin carry out their legacy.

Jadosz became involved with the program after seeing information about NOPE at Health Services. Intrigued by the program and wanting to become involved, he contacted their task force in Florida, and because he previously worked at the Phoenix House and the Adult Correctional Institute, he had the experience needed to work with people struggling with addiction.

"Now I need to cultivate [NOPE], but I'm game," he said of the NOPE program. "We'll do this as long as the need is out there."

The three speakers of last night's event, Amy, Lindsey and Coleen, whose last names were kept anonymous, are URI students who recovered from addiction and currently attend anonymous substance-abuse meetings to help work through the recovery process. They spoke of the thoughts and actions that brought them into addiction, adding they are lucky and grateful to be alive.

Amy said the stigma associated with drug addiction makes it difficult to seek help or speak about it. She said her addiction began when she started hanging out and drinking with the wrong crowd, which eventually accelerated into heavy drug use.

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"Alcohol is a drug. My brain doesn't know the difference if its legal or not, whether inhaled, snorted, shot up, or drank," she said. "I've done things that I never thought I would do, but I'm changing my life around; there are better things in life than getting drunk."

Amy said after joining a 12-step program, going to meetings and befriending new people to help her through the process, she is grateful to be able to participate in programs like NOPE.

"When [Jadosz] asked me to speak, I couldn't say no. Because I am a survivor, I'm proof that kids can stay clean and survive," she said.

Jadosz emphasized there are options for students who are struggling with addiction. He said every semester for the past ten years he has worked at URI, there are students who ask him for help.

The NOPE task force is based out of Boca Raton, Fla., but strives to spread their mission of "diminishing the frequency and impact of overdose death through community education, family support and purposeful advocacy," across the nation, according to a pamphlet provided at the event. NOPE has held the candle light vigil nationally for five years, though this is the second year URI has participated.