

Grieving Father Describes His Pain at Anti-Drug Talks

Marty McCormick is a NOPE Task Force volunteer who talks to students about the dangers of drugs and the deep pain of losing a loved one to an overdose. The Florida father has done nearly 100 presentations since his daughter died of an overdose in 2007.

By Leon Fooksman

The life-sized photos of dead teenagers speak to Marty McCormick as he prepares to address students.

“They inspire me to make everyone feel the pain,” he said.



McCormick, 55, is one of dozens of parents who speak at Narcotic Overdose Prevention & Education (NOPE) Task Force presentations at schools, colleges and community centers in Florida, California and Indiana.

These parents, who have lost their children to drugs, share their grief to drive home the point that drugs can kill anyone, and the loss is deeply felt by families and friends for many years to come. They join police officers, judges, and other community leaders in using body bags, urns and oversized photos as props to draw students into their hour-long talks about the dangers of experimenting with drugs, even once.

Since his 22-year-old daughter Mehgen died of a heroin overdose in 2007, McCormick has crisscrossed Florida to participate in nearly 100 NOPE Task Force presentations in front of thousands of youths and their parents. He travels on his own time and money from his home on the edge of Lake Okeechobee. He does it with one goal in mind.

“If I tell Mehgen’s story and can save a life, she didn’t die for nothing,” he said.

As the nation awakens to the reality of the spreading prescription drugs abuse epidemic, it’s grieving parents like McCormick who are on the front lines in trying to change attitudes toward drugs.

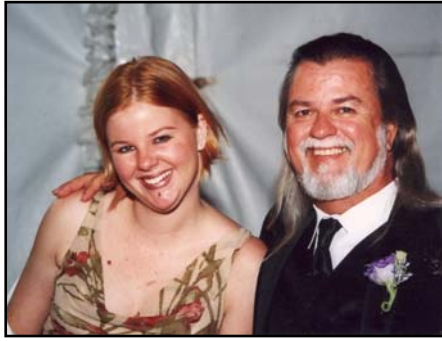
Yet, with more than 24,000 Americans dying every year of overdoses, McCormick says many students are cynical that the spread of drugs can be stopped, since they personally know people who have died or are abusing drugs.



So the self-described former hippie often stares deep into the eyes of “deliberately indifferent” youths as he walks up to Mehgen’s photo overlooking the crowd and describes her lost potential as an artist.

“We’re not going to reach everyone sitting there. But we are getting to many of them,” he said. “It’s incredible to see these kids walking out of the gyms and cafeterias quiet and crying.”

Following most presentations, teenagers approach him and other speakers to ask questions. Some admit to using drugs and seek help.



McCormick, a handy man who has worked in carpentry and plumbing, learned about the presentations shortly after he spoke at Mehgen’s funeral. He initially feared he couldn’t talk, but ended up delivering a 20-minute eulogy. A friend suggested he would be a natural NOPE Task Force volunteer. He attended a high school presentation a few months later.

“I sat there watching and had tears running down my face,” he said. “I knew I wanted to do this.”

He trained that weekend and started talking the following week. He hasn’t stopped since.

“I’m there to save lives,” he said.

If you value NOPE Task Force’s commitment to preventing drug overdoses, please consider a voluntary payment to support the organization. Donate at www.nopetaskforce.org/donations.asp

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