

A Young Hockey Player and Heroin

By Shelly MacNeill

Another story written by a parent has been shared on my newsfeed, so I stop to read it. Woven into the story are the photos of a young man in his hockey uniform, arms and stick in the air and a look on his face that every mother of an athlete knows so well, victory.

Yet the story is painful to read, heart wrenching actually, as it is yet another story written by a parent that has lost her child to heroin.

As I look at the boy's face, I am reminded of my own young son and the pride and joy of watching him on the ice, and yet I'm reading words that make my gut twist and my throat close, and I can feel the tears welling at the thought of the horror this parent has endured.

In my work with the coalition I meet the parents, the recovered addicts, the prevention specialists. As coalition members we sit at tables with good intentions talking about best practices for prevention and education, mental health and screenings for at risk youth.

Yet reading these stories makes me feel small and makes the work we do feel so insignificant and trivial. What good does it do when here I am reading another story of a child that was taken too soon.

How do we stop the overwhelming roller coaster of pain that these families are on? Families who are quietly celebrating three weeks of sobriety one minute and are in complete chaos when a relapse occurs the next.

I have come to one very important conclusion. All of our youth are at risk. I knew this from the statistics, but something about this particular story made it very real for me. Maybe it was seeing her boy so much like mine in so many ways. This thought reminded me that what we are doing is not in any way small or insignificant.

We must continue to educate families to get extra medication out of homes, to educate parents on alternatives to managing pain during an injury, and to educate our children on the very real impact that drugs and alcohol can have both on their lives and ours as parents.

It reminds me of a quote by Martin Luther King, Jr., that reads, "Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be...This is the inter-related structure of reality."

Our reality is that we must continue to work to end stigma, to get those battling addiction the help they need and to support those families that have lost loved ones to this terrible epidemic. Please take part by educating yourself on the issues of addiction and recovery. Attend a coalition meeting, check out the resources at the library, ask questions and get to know the signs that your child may have a substance abuse issue.

It is our collective responsibility to work together to end this epidemic.

For more information go to www.stonehamsac.com

Note: Shelly MacNeill is chairperson of the Substance Abuse Coalition in Stoneham.