Heroin is bad and it's Here - If we had only known- Learn from us.

By Molly Johnson

This was in response to multiple articles in the Westerly Sun about a proposed Heroin Treatment Clinic and it's opposition. 10/99

I have been waiting silently for the last two years to speak out on this issue. Thank you to Ellen Moran Santiago for giving Karen and Chris the opportunity to tell their story about Michael last Sunday in the Westerly Sun Newspaper. I know first hand, as I am Michael's Step Mother and friend.

This was a very hard story for Karen and Chris to tell and have put on the front page of the paper.
But we all agree that it was something we had to do --for Michael. Not only for Michael, but for the community. It couldn't come at a more appropriate time, as it was just the 2-year anniversary of the worst time in our lives.

It's time to put a face and a name with the one and only sentence, in all the methadone clinic articles that there had been 2 recent deaths in the area. One of those recent deaths was our son, Michael Alan Johnson.

Heroin is local. Michael grew up here, he played sports here, he rode the bus to school here, he worked at Mcquade's, and Cody's and he died here right in Dunn's Corners. It was here that the Westerly ambulance transported his lifeless body to the Westerly hospital the very place he was born--he was pronounced dead. This is a wake up call. Hopefully, this article can possibly give some meaning to the death of our beloved son.

I want to go further I want to tell you what actually happened and what we have learned as a family from this tragedy, so maybe we can help other parents and their children.

It's has been such an awful time for all of us. It seems that heroin is all around us now.
When Michael was involved with it you never even heard about it. **Had we only known how bad it really is.**

When Michael was first caught with Heroin, Chris asked him "what are you doing with heroin?" He played it down saying "Dad it's not what you think – you snort it". Like that made it not quite so bad. Well we want you to know it is just as bad - even worse. It's so pure now you can snort it, but it's just as addictive and deadly.

The day Michael died was his first day of counseling for being caught with the Heroin earlier. We were told (after the fact), that this is a common occurrence- That kids go out, do it one last time and overdose and die.

In counseling, the kids are told they will be tested and if they fail, the consequence in Michael's case was that they would send him to de-tox. Looking Back- big deal --they should have sent him, then maybe we would still have him. What burns me up is they knew that this was a possibility. They knew the statistics and how addicting heroin is. They were the professionals – what did we know?

Believe me, if we knew --maybe we could've taken a tougher route and saved Michael. Parents naturally trust the professionals. We asked how come you never hear of this happing? We were told that people are ashamed. We all agree we are <u>not ashamed</u> of the way Michael died. We are so very sad.

Heroin is out there. They give it away for free. They know once you try it you'll be back!
And it's the drug of choice. It's cheap $5.00 for the bag that killed Michael.
And he didn't inject it. He "only" snorted it. Well let me tell you "only" snorting it ---cost him his life.

I feel this need to let everyone know just how bad it is. Please, please, please don't even try it.
It not only ruins your life, but all the people you care about most.

In the last two years we have learned a lot about Heroin, more than we would've ever dreamed
This is what has happened to us: something we hope no other parent has to go through:

Day 1:
Do you know what it is like to see the man you love slumped over a table in a pool of tears, crying and shaking uncontrollably, saying not my Son! Calling his name over and over.

Do you know what it is like to call every one of your relatives and tell them your son has died?
To hear them sob, weep and even scream. Believe me it is something I will never forget.

The day Michael died I had to call work and tell them he wouldn't be in – he died.
Just wandering around the house hoping that it is all a mistake. The relatives dropped everything in their lives to be with us and take care of us.

Waiting around for the medical examiner to call. We were told they would call. Trying to leave that phone line open. Why don't they call! Wondering where Michael was and how could this have happened?

Going over it again and again in your mind.

Day2:
The steady stream of people that come to the house, people you haven't seen in years, most you haven't seen since. When all you really want to do is to crawl under the covers and make it all go away.

Still waiting around for the medical examiner to call (--for two days not knowing where your son was?)
Then to find out he had been delivered to the funeral home, "Delivered"- like a package –and never a call from the medical examiner as we were told. Listening to Karen, (Michael's Mom) tell them she wanted to see her son, and being told she would have to wait another day.

Now it was time to pick out a casket. Imagine standing in a room full of caskets -having to pick out a casket – something he would've liked? I don't think so.

Day 3:
Finally seeing Michael:
Not wanting to look, maybe if we don't look it won't be real. Holding Chris up and telling him "I know you don't want to do this" and hearing him say he just can't do it. Karen goes first,
It's awful really really awful we are all just crying. **It is real!**

On to the cemetery to pick out the place where you will bury your only son,
whom you had just seen only 64 hours earlier .

Day 4:
It's official, the death notice is run in the paper.
More waiting… When will this all end.

Day 5:
Doing it for Michael: The calling hours:
This is the part I don't know how we got through it.
All the people, all the tears, and no answers.

All the kids, some going through the line twice to see him -one last time.
The notes, the flowers, momentos and the pictures.
Everyone loved him so much.

Day 6:
The funeral: Standing room only: a blur of people, not wanting to look at anyone.
Just hoping we could make it through the ceremony.

The long and beautiful final ride to the cemetery following the hearst.
(It was a beautiful Indian Summer day in October.)

Parents don't be afraid to know what your kids are doing and with whom.
Don't be afraid to be the bad guy. It is in their best interest. Don't be afraid to say "NO"
Call them often, check up on them. Be their Parent- not their friend. There will be time for friendship once they get through these difficult years.
Lastly, Hug them --for you never know when it may be the last time.