

NEWS

Trumbull mom 'on a mission' after son's death

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Wally and Niki Beddoe stand beside a tree planted in honor of their son outside their home in Trumbull, Conn. on Tuesday, August 11, 2020. The Beddoe's 25-year-old son, Jake, died from accidental fentanyl ingestion.

Brian A. Pounds / Hearst Connecticut Media file photo

TRUMBULL - Niki Beddoe doesn't like to use the word overdose. That's not what happened to her son, Jake, last year when he took alprazolam, an anti-anxiety medication sold under the brand name Xanax, closed his eyes, and never woke up, she said.

Jake died from taking a counterfeit pill that was laced with fentanyl, a narcotic prescribed to treat extreme pain that can cause respiratory distress and death in large amounts or when taken in combination with other drugs. Niki Beddoe has since spoken out against counterfeit pills, written editorials, and publicly [shared her family's story](#).

Now she is [partnering with the state's YouThinkYouKnow awareness campaign](#) to warn adults about the dangers of fentanyl-laced drugs. But she also wants to help remove the stigma that comes from prescription drug deaths.

She described herself as a mom on a mission.

"I just want to save any other family from having to go through this because it's a tragic way to go," Beddoe said.

Nine months ago, Beddoe became involved with TPAUD, Trumbull's Prevention Partnership, due to the organization's work preventing drug use among teens. TPAUD then worked with the state campaign to include Beddoe's story, illustrating the dangers of fake pills.

The organization has also hosted the YouThinkYouKnow campaign site on its own website. Melissa McGarry, the organization's project director, explained that one of the root causes behind the explosion in illicit prescription pill use has been the increase in mental health struggles. Young people can start to self-medicate in an effort to lessen their burdens, at the risk of losing their lives. she said.

"We have more kids talking about feeling isolated, feeling worried, feeling anxious," McGarry said.

"Our kids may take them for any number of reasons. All legitimate, but yet they don't know the dangers they're exposing themselves to," McGarry said.

According to a recent Drug Enforcement Agency press release, criminal networks that make counterfeit pills add substances like fentanyl and methamphetamine to increase potency. The result is that the pills that end up on the streets run a good chance of being contaminated. Because fentanyl is much more more potent than morphine, the result is a higher chance of an overdose. McGarry said.

Another reason Beddoe has decided to keep sharing her son's story is because she said there's still a deep sense of shame within local families over drug-related deaths. Because many parents still associate fentanyl with heroin, she said these kinds of deaths sneak up on parents, some of who simply cannot bear to share how their children died, fearing judgment from others.

One parent she said, tried to cover up the cause of his son's death, preferring to say his son had a heart attack instead.

"They just didn't want the 'shame' attached to his death," Beddoe said.

While Beddoe continues to speak out in her son's memory, the void is never deep below the surface.

"We feel his loss, and we feel the pain every day, but one day at a time because we have no other choice," she said.

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