

Joanne Ramsey Testimony, 9-7-2016

Much of the below was taken from a letter written to a State Representative shortly after David's passing on 3/8/2013 (being read by my mother)

The picture enclosed is of my younger brother, David Ramsey. He passed away of a drug overdose on Friday, March 8th, 2013 at 30 years old.

His arm is around me in the garage of my uncle's Ocean City, NJ shore house. This is where my older brother, my husband, sister in laws and I would retreat for a couple hours while my parents watched our kids during our annual summer vacation. We were having fun and sharing laughs after a long day at the beach. You may have his name somewhere in your stack of papers. The Bensalem detective knew him by a case number. We knew him as David, a loving and caring person who was troubled but remained hopeful. I'm writing this to tell you his story, one that your office was part of.

I'm not afraid of anything anymore as I've faced an unimaginable fear. My parents and I found my brother's lifeless body in the bathroom of his duplex. His strong voice was forever silenced and replaced by my father's desperate scream, one that wakes me from a sound sleep at night.

My father predicted this as though he jumped to the last chapter of David's story. He called your office, begging, pleading for additional funding for his son to remain in rehab or he would die. He had also called the Bucks County Assistance Office multiple times without a return call. Your office was receptive and had advised that it was being worked on but would take time. However, time was what David didn't have. He didn't have health insurance which made obtaining the necessary funding that much more crucial. David's counselor at Valley Forge Medical Center urged my parents. She said that you have to fight to be heard, call your State Rep and call your Congressman. Do what you can to keep him here because he's committed and wants to stay.

David had a desire to get clean like he had never had before. The last 6 months of his life were his most challenging- 2 car accidents, 1 failed attempt at sobriety through another rehab and jail over Christmas. He wanted to reclaim his life. Instead, David didn't receive the additional funding in time and was released from rehab with just 12 days under his belt. Just enough time to go through detoxification. His body left in a vulnerable state, his mind just as it was- no renewed strength- just an ideal environment to really do harm. And harm was done. He passed away within a month of being released from Valley Forge Medical Center. Your office did eventually follow through and the request was granted. The approval came in the form of a letter, which arrived over a month after their initial request and one week after David passed.

David was a kind, loyal, charismatic person. He was 3 years younger than me. Despite our differences, he was there for me and I was for him. We came from a good Catholic family. We went to Assumption BVM grade school and then onto Archbishop Wood High School. Our parents cared and were very involved with all of us. And despite his addiction, he cared about himself. He enjoyed working out and always looked handsome. He gave of himself. He was always there to help repair anything around my parent's house. He was talented and worked in construction and masonry. He was a person with a lot of potential, a lot of love still to give, a lot of memories still to make.

My parents had an unfailing, unwavering love for him. My dad driving to the ends of the world for him, dropping everything for him. My mom spending countless hours talking to him, letting him know how much he is loved. And David loved my parents. He had a bond with my mother that went so far beyond parent child. She was his guardian angel. She wanted to protect him like you would a newborn baby; after all he was her baby. But at 30 years old, that wasn't the easiest thing to do. Someone wise once said, "It's your road and yours alone. Others may walk it with you but no one can walk it for you." That's what my parents so desperately tried to do.

In addition to my parents, me and my older brother, he left behind his fiancée and a 4 year old son. Just as my parents, his fiancée fought this addiction alongside him for 12 years. She showed him unconditional love, picked him back up, cried with him when he wasn't well and believed him when he said he was. Some may call this enabling. I call it a ray of light in an otherwise dark existence.

And David adored his son. He was his playmate -willing to roll around on the ground, dress in costumes, and find Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles in sewers. A father that taught him "life lessons"- never eat yellow snow, throw a punch with a closed fist with your thumb out (but only when absolutely necessary!) and always be nice to your little girl cousin, my daughter and always protect her. I just wish his passing wasn't a lesson his son, or any of us for that matter, had to learn.

I'm not here to place blame. Rather, I'm writing because David's story reflects the flaws that exist when it comes to access to addiction treatment. I want to do something. I need to make his life and his loss matter. My family and I are plagued with questions that have no real answers- did we do enough? Was it our fault? Did we fail him? I now know that the cornerstone of addiction is deception. I now know that David did a disservice to himself and to us by not being open and honest. But we did a disservice to him by not being educated.

Since David's passing only 6 months ago, I have learned of 3 other young adults who have passed from an overdose in the Bucks County area. You will not hear their stories on the news. The dealers will continue to prosper and other families will suffer the agonizing heartache that my family has. This is unconscionable. And the most powerful weapon against this epidemic is awareness and education.

My family and I will be creating a nonprofit with our goal being to assist in subsidizing the cost of rehab for those who need it and can't afford it. The way I view it, denying those suffering with addictions access to mental health counseling and treatment is like giving them a death sentence.

Also, my family and I welcome the opportunity to tell our story and to volunteer at any event you may hold or be a part of that would get the word out. My brother was a very giving soul. We want to do this in his name.

David would often say as he was leaving for work with his son desperately clinging to his leg, "Remember, when daddy's not with you, he's always in your heart," and they would both touch their hearts. And that's where David will remain, forever in the hearts of those who love him and miss him.

Thank you for taking the time to read my letter. (END OF LETTER)

I'm happy to say that we did form our nonprofit, David's New Day, in March of 2014. Since our inception, we have raised over \$35,000. In conjunction with helping individuals directly, we have established a grant with The Council of Southeastern PA that goes towards helping individuals with housing, treatment and services, who otherwise could not afford it.