

Hello. My name is Sharon Blair.

I appreciate being invited to this year's Recovery Rally.

As an advocate for Recovery, I am honored to celebrate and join with the "Voices For Recovery".

The statement: "Together We Learn –Together We Heal" is one of my favorites because their key word is "together". By "us" working, sharing and caring together, we offer help and support for one another.

I would like to share with you a little background on myself.

I am married and the mother of 4 children. My oldest daughter, Jennifer, struggled with a substance addiction for 13 years and died, 2 years ago- Jan.15, 2009 at age 29, of an accidental drug overdose.

After painfully watching Jennifer struggle with a substance addiction, many times advocating on her behalf for treatment and then her premature death, I knew more needs to be done to address the crisis of addiction problems and secure proper treatment.

I drafted The Jennifer Act in 2002 after watching Jennifer fall through the cracks of the system in gaining proper treatment and finished the draft in 2009 after she died. I submitted the draft to 2 State Senators in Florida and Indiana. In Florida, Senator Jack Latvala has drafted the bill and in Indiana Senator Vi Simpson has drafted the proposed legislation.

My mission and my goal of [SB22] is having a tool to intervene and assist those who are severely impaired. The outcome of treatment is lives are saved, persons have the tools to help themselves return to a non-substance using state, as productive citizens in society. Substance Treatment offers professional assessment, evaluation, stabilization and on going support. This helps an addict to regain their life, their children, saves taxpayers money from incarceration, court fees, law enforcement fees, etc. We must address the issues in 2011 and figure out ways to aid those who need treatment, regardless of their lack of health insurance coverage or the inability to afford it.

The Jennifer Act bill is a literal life preserver for those addicted to drugs and alcohol and cannot stop using on their own will power alone. Addiction is a disease and left untreated, death and incarceration are the fate of those who are in bondage of chronic and grave addiction.

My advocacy is to see Indiana and Florida have laws in place that will aid families who have a life and death crisis of substance addiction. The process of a drug/alcohol assessment, intervention, recovery plan made by a professional is the first step to a life free of drugs/alcohol.

Death is not an acceptable answer and many young people are dying because they are addicted to substances and cannot stop using them on will power alone. The pull of their addiction is mind altering; therefore, a plan of action like The Jennifer Act will assist this type of crisis. I focus on preserving families and saving lives. This is my purpose and my vision.

I also am proud to be partnered with NOPE Task Force. NOPE educates about the consequences of drug and alcohol abuse and works on diminishing the frequency and impact of overdose deaths.

I am on the NOPE committee and have participated in 2 NOPE Candle Vigils in Florida and Indiana and am working the 3rd Memorial Vigil this year in Bloomington, IN.

KY. is very fortunate to have Casey's Law to help those in a life and death crisis of addiction. Many thanks to my friend, Charlotte Wethington for introducing this law, KY's Governor and the KY. State Senators and Representatives who supported this life saving bill. It is my prayer we see this same support and laws come to pass with The Jennifer Act in 2012 in IN. & FL.

KY also is so fortunate to have organizations such as PAR, [People Advocating Recovery] and dedicated people like Mike Barry.

While preparing for this Recovery Rally, I found this very emotional for me. Why? Because recovery for people is what I advocate for, write about and talk about on a daily basis. Lives are very precious and well worth fighting for, as I'm sure you will agree. To see the faces of those who are happy and free and celebrating recovery, brings me much happiness and peace. Thank you for allowing me to join you today.

A guest column was written in the Bloomington Herald Times in 2009, by Centerstone's Cathi Norton.

She did such an exceptional job, I wanted to share with you some of her column....

We need to use all available resources to educate people and their families about addiction and get them necessary help. Through dialogue and education, we provide hope and understanding and honor the courage of those locked in the relentless struggle against addiction.

Recovery Month is important. Not only do we applaud those in recovery and the many who serve them, but we want people to know that treatment really works!

In Sept. we work to help the public understand and learn about addiction, treatment options and the stigma that too often prevents people from seeking help in the first place.

Yet little by little, step by step and with the essential help of accurate media coverage and education, more people join the ranks of the recovering, more learn how to help, and the effort to take back healthy lives- moves forward.

Today, this Recovery Rally is celebrating the power of community support and recognizing all those who are living their lives happy, free and in recovery. You, who are living in recovery today, show courage and are a testament to so many others, including those struggling with addiction today.

May I thank personally, all of those who work so hard in providing services such as mental health and addictions treatment. Giving of yourself, is more than just a profession for many of you. It is something you are passionate about and you believe recovery is attainable and make it a reality for thousands of people!

Again, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I would like to share a poem with you. I wrote this poem when Jennifer was still alive. It is called:

MY HEROES

My greatest heroes are not the rich, nor the famous.
They are addicts in recovery.
They have dug down deep within their souls and found courage to say,
"I am going to change".
That last look in the mirror of the wounded, hurting, lonely, tired, pitiful reflection of their lost
souls.
With teary eyes full of heartache,
they are humbled by their reflection.
They have felt different, like an outcast, empty, criticized, humiliated, not worthy, doomed,
hopeless, labeled, crazy, depressed and unlovable.
Yet, somehow, the precious, wounded soul staring back in the mirror said in a soft, faint whisper,
"You can do it". "You can change".
It all started with that first step. That first decision.
Addicts in recovery are my heroes.
They are to be admired, not by their past but by their courageous and victorious life today.
Living against the odds.
Their lives have changed. They can smile again.
Their families rejoice with them and for them.
My prayer is that God's love, God's mercy, God's forgiveness and God's unconditional love
is received today by all my greatest heroes.
Addicts in recovery.
They are alive.

By: Sharon Blair
In memory of my daughter, Jennifer (died 1.15.2009)