

SD Legislative Interim Study on Drug Abuse Prevention
Deutscher Testimony July 12, 2016

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Good Afternoon,

We are Maureen and Jeff Deutscher of Sioux Falls. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony and our insight regarding Opioid use and the effect on the young people of South Dakota.

In our 30 years of marriage, we have been blessed with 3 wonderful children, Jeremy, Nick and Annie.



Today we are here to tell you about our son, Nick.

Kind, funny, happy, uplifting – these were some of the words used in memory of Nick by friends and family following his death on July 18th of last year.

We would add smart, intuitive, adventurous, frustrating and amazing! Another recurring theme, “Nick always had your back”, a true and loyal friend.

We’re just a regular Sioux Falls family, no big deal. Family vacations, holidays and birthdays celebrated together, regular family dinners. We were involved as parents in religious education, sports via coaching and booster activities, club leaders and room parents. Nick had positive role models in extended family, teachers and coaches. Jeremy and Annie will tell you they could not have asked for a better brother than Nick. Our parenting style, as we would describe it, is consequence when called for, praise and always love. That is not to say we don’t have our share of stress and conflict, but we take care to be there for one another.

So what happened? What did we miss, where did we fail in protecting our son? That has been our daily reflection as parents for the past 51 weeks and 3 days.

Nick excelled in academics and athletics. Nick had many and varied friends. Nick was a bit of a risk taker.... Some marijuana in the first year of high school, a phase we thought, with no question that it was experimentation not to be tolerated.

Nick’s experience with Opioids began with his MCL/ACL injury - second play of the second game Senior Year, a two year starter with the Championship Washington Warrior football team. Then the prescribed Hydrocodone and Percocet – nearly 4 months in total – through the partial tear, rehab, back in play for the last game of the season and subsequent surgery for the full ACL tear.

As though it were yesterday, we recall driving to Wallgreen's pharmacy directly from Howard Wood field for the first of a series of prescriptions. Following recovery and rehab from surgery through December that year, the prescriptions abruptly ceased. Beginning in January, it became very clear that Nick was struggling. Nick underwent counseling and through our physicians, alternative medications were prescribed to help with the withdrawal culminating with 30 days of residential treatment. Nick graduated with his class as a Regents Scholar. No stranger to hard work, Nick made it through that very scary time, again, while under the care of excellent physicians and all with the continued love and support of his family and the support of his high school's principal, coaches and staff.

For the next 3 years Nick attended college classes and worked primarily in his field of interest, culinary, but the disease had taken hold and did not retreat as Nick continued to struggle, protecting us, his family, as best could from the fear of what could happen to him and the frustration at not being able to diminish the symptoms of addiction. Still good, kind, fun and always giving us hope.

The symptoms of Addiction can move a person in directions they do not want to go and often don't comprehend. That happened to Nick as he found himself faced with charges stemming from his marijuana and related substance use in 2014. Nick knew what to do, ask for help. We were blessed to have been able to support him through his work with Tallgrass Recovery in Sioux Falls in two 30 day stays between October 2014 and March 2015. Coming home in March was a young man renewed in his recovery, attending AA meetings, getting together with his sponsor, going to church, working and spending time at Tallgrass.

On May 20th of 2015 we attended Nick's sentencing hearing and on June 3rd Nick checked into the work release program with Minnehaha County for just under 4 months.

July 18th brought a visit by the Minnehaha Sheriff's Department at approximately 8:30 p.m. Nick had died in his sleep, having returned to the work release facility after work at approximately 3:30 that afternoon, spending time with others in the program and laying down for a nap. Nick died an accidental death. Reports indicated prescription medications in Nick's system, all but one prescribed – Oxycodone, at an elevated but non-fatal level. Nick was 21.

From what we can discern through conversations with Nick's friends and investigative findings, Nick likely relapsed due to the stress of his situation, with ongoing care through his 12 Step program, per court orders, to resume **after** his 118 days in the work release program. Scheduling as many work hours as he could, the medications, we believe, were intended by Nick for use as a coping tool and to aid in sleep at the corrections facility. But as all too many parents, family members and friends across the nation are learning every day, for some people, opioids have their own intentions.

We can no longer experience the joy of Nick's laughter, awesome hugs and genuine goodness. What we hope to accomplish here is to reinforce the need for intervention in the middle school and high school settings, highlight the responsibility of Medical Professionals in prescription practices relating to opioid pain medication and, while understanding the focus of this committee is on opioid and methamphetamine use and abuse prevention, the absence of rehabilitation directives and practices in the judicial and corrections systems, as has been our experience, cannot be overlooked.

Over the past 12 months we have had meetings and conversations with county and state appointed and elected officials and representatives, members of the medical and legal communities and judicial systems and agency directors in the field of drug abuse prevention and the very misunderstood field of Addiction and Recovery.

Common themes that we have encountered are:

1. The lack of dollars available to educate and work with our youth in a meaningful and effective way in the teen years when confidence waivers and peer pressure can override good decisions.
2. The absence of resources available to promote rehabilitation of young individuals such as our son, Nick, whose rehabilitation program was put on hold by the sentencing judge for 4 months with no testing for substance use for the 45 day period Nick was in the work release program – cost and practicality being the predominate arguments.
3. The refusal to accept addiction as a disease in the judicial and corrections systems.

We implore you to address the issues and determine a plan of action on three fronts:

1. Providing monetary support for programing in our State's public and private school systems for meaningful and effective education and intervention on drug use by our youth. This might include enlisting representation through recovery and prevention agencies by individuals who have actual experience with personal addiction and recovery. Let our youth know what they are in for with opioid and methamphetamine experimentation and the dire consequences.
2. Work with the State Medical and Pharmacy boards to generate policy on responsible prescription practices and distribution monitoring. In the case of our son, Nick, it appears he obtained the prescription medication contributing to his death from a friend who obtained the pain medication from an older woman having prescriptions filled for resale.
3. Make recommendation for further study and legislation regarding effective rehabilitation efforts through the courts and corrections systems.

In closing, we are grateful for the current work being done to address the issues at hand. Now, we ask for your thoughtful consideration of the information we have provided, experience gained through our journey with our son, Nick.