

Hello,

My name is Tera Howard and I am a recovering addict. Last October I Celebrated 15 years of sobriety. Getting clean was the second hardest thing I've ever done, but the hardest thing in my life was losing my little brother to an overdose in 2019. He was 31 years old and had so much life left to live. Losing him is the worst pain I've ever felt. Our mother spends the rest of her days completely heartbroken because she had to give a child back.

Overdose deaths and Substance Use Disorder are a major public health challenge in Vermont and nationwide. I've seen every side of addiction, and they are all incredibly painful and hard, not just for the person suffering with addiction, but for their loves ones and family members as well. We have a generation of children being raised by other people because their parents are either struggling with addiction, or lost their life to overdose.

I joined the Windsor Selectboard last year, and our community, like most other Vermont communities, have seen our fair share of Overdose deaths. I started looking into what I could do to raise awareness on overdose as well as Substance Use Disorder. I saw that August 31st was International Overdose Awareness Day, the world's largest campaign to end overdose. And I noticed on this day, numerous communities across the Unites States held Overdose Awareness events to raise awareness and help end the stigma. I organized and hosted Windsor's First Annual Overdose Awareness Day last year on August 31st and there was a pretty big turn out. I worked with local agencies who attended and provided resources including narcan and narcan training. We had several speakers including myself, and a beautiful candlelight vigil for our loved ones lost to Overdose. This event was also recorded and shared. I was completely blown away with the amount of people that reached out to me and thanked me for sharing mine and my brothers stories. I just couldn't believe how many people it reached. Someone who was too scared to ask for help reached out to me after she saw me share my story so that she could get some resources.

Did you know that the opposite of addiction is not Recovery? It's connection. Having events like this make that connection possible. Having a day that we recognize will help make those connections possible, while also providing support for those grieving the loss of a loved one lost to overdose.

Everyone is always asking, what can we do to help with the drug problems crippling our communities, and how do we stop these overdose deaths... The answer is to raise more awareness, and make resources more available. We need to talk about it more, and we need to end the stigma that come with drug related deaths. My family and I suffered in silence for 3 years grieving the loss of my brother, due to the stigma that comes with overdose deaths. No one should ever have to feel this alone, it's almost unbearable. In hosting Windsor's Overdose Awareness Day, I connected with so many people dealing with the same kind of pain, and for the first time since losing my brother, I saw that we were not alone. Overdose deaths continue to rise, and we need to take action.

Please consider passing Bill S.104 and make August 31st Overdose Awareness Day in Vermont. So many Vermonters are struggling right now. Some with addiction, some with someone they know/love struggling with addiction, and some that lost a loved one to overdose. This would show solidarity in our state and would ultimately make Vermont better and stronger. I don't see one negative side in having August 31st as Overdose Awareness Day in Vermont, but I do see an opportunity to spread Awareness so that we can ultimately save people lives before they Overdose. Please help Vermont take one small step in the right direction to help end overdose.

Thank you,

Tera Howard

Windsor Selectboard