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# Youth summit addresses meth

By *Diana Hefley*  
Herald Writer

EVERETT -- A stranger came in the middle of the night to take away their daughter.

But their daughter was already gone. In her place, huddled under blankets, pleading not to be sent away, was a drug addict.

"The devil took our child," said Mike Kerwin, explaining his 17-year-old daughter's addiction to methamphetamine and the painful decision to send her out of the country for treatment.

Kerwin and his wife will be one of a handful of speakers at the upcoming Snohomish County Youth Methamphetamine Summit on May 17.

This is the second time a group of teens have pulled together an all-day summit to arm their friends and classmates in the battle against a drug that is plaguing schools, homes, jails and hospitals in Snohomish County.

"This drug is more addictive than any other. It is so powerful and it can wreck so many lives," said 14-year-old Jessica Van Horn, co-chairperson of the event. "This is just a great day for education and prevention."

Last year, about 850 teens listened to the horror stories of former addicts and a mother whose son was murdered, all because of his addiction.

Police officers, prosecutors and medical experts also painted the ugly picture of a drug that is involved in two-thirds of all crimes committed in the county.

Summit organizers hope for a bigger crowd this year.

"I want to see 1,100 kids this year. We need them to change the system so the cycle doesn't repeat itself," said Sheriff Rick Bart. "I'll sleep better thinking we tried to break the cycle."

Bart speaks passionately about running the drug out of the county. Pointing to the overcrowded county jail, he says the majority of crimes can be traced back to drugs.

A study being conducted by the county is leading officials to believe the majority of men booked into the county jail are on drugs at the time.

Between January and March, the county tested 564 men, who were booked into jail, for drugs.

Nearly 74 percent tested positive for drugs, including marijuana, cocaine, heroin and methamphetamine. About 40 percent tested positive for marijuana and 19 percent tested positive for methamphetamine.

"Meth is filling up the jail. We know people steal property to support their habit. People will do a lot to support their habit," Bart said.

He has pitched a plan to hire more deputies assigned to running drugs out of Snohomish County.

But much of the battle lies in the hands of the county's young people, he said.

"We want the kids to understand how destructive this drug can be to them and their families," he said.

The Kerwins will speak to that destruction. The drug turned their daughter into a stranger.

She was a good student, responsible employee and compassionate daughter. That person disappeared soon after she

experimented with the drug with a friend.

"Somewhere along the way she lost her spirit, her self-esteem and all of her motivation," Beth Kerwin said.

After countless lies and a noticeable decline in health, their daughter finally confessed she had been addicted to meth for a year. She was 17.

The Kerwins turned to a program out of the country to treat the addiction after their daughter was expelled from an outpatient treatment center. She was taken away in February.

"It was the hardest thing I've ever done," Mike Kerwin said. "We had to keep telling ourselves we were sending the addict away -- not our daughter."

The drug has ripped their family apart, the Kerwins said. They only hope their story can save others from the same pain.

"I just want to give the perspective of what parents go through. We go through anguish," Mike Kerwin said. "But I know this is a kids' war. The kids have to take the issue to the streets."

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### **Youth summit**

The Snohomish County Youth Methamphetamine Summit will be from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. May 17 at the Howard Johnson Hotel in Everett, 3105 Pine St.

The summit will be followed by a pizza feast at the Marysville YMCA, 6420 60th Drive NE.

To register for the youth summit, contact your high school counselor.