



"THAT KID HAD A GOOD HEART" (clockwise, from left): Cierra Adams died of a heroin overdose on her 18th birthday; SOMETHING TO SAY: Four different t-shirts broadcast different messages at the Cierra Adams Memorial Walk, including some against drugs. One had a photo of the teen smiling. Another said RIP July 16 CLA (the day she died with her initials) on the front and "I miss everything about you" on the back. SIGN OF SUPPORT: Her mother, Karen, led the Cierra Adams Memorial Walk out of the park. She carried a poster that urged, "Give hugs, not drugs."

The sharp knife of a short life

Heroin has invaded the heartland, and 18-year old Cierra Adams lost her life to the drug ... but her community is fighting back to prevent another life from being taken and to get the drug off of their streets.

Batesville teen Cierra Adams died on her 18th birthday. Instead of going shopping with a girlfriend or to King's Island as she had planned, the Batesville High School senior was found "unresponsive and not breathing" July 16 at about 2:22 p.m. at a friend's house after staying there overnight, said Batesville Police Department Detective Mike Benjamin. While the autopsy and toxicology reports have not been released by the Hamilton County Coroner's Office, Cincinnati, yet, her mother knows what happened. "We know there was heroin use going on that night," Karen Adams said. Principal Sherri Preston recalled, "Cierra was a nice young lady, had lots of friends. She was a well behaved student" involved in the school's mentorship program.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DEBBIE BLANK

Her mom explained, "I want her to be remembered for the beautiful soul that she was. The person who was a friend to everybody, always had a smile for you. The person who took up for the underdog and mentally challenged and physically handicapped kids. That kid had a good heart."

Karen Adams learned her daughter had tried marijuana and drank alcohol a few times.

"She knew I didn't approve of either one."

The Batesville mother continued to worry, knowing that teens can start using one illicit substance, then switch to more dangerous ones.

When Karen Adams warned her daughter about heroin's effects, Cierra responded, "Mom, I told you. I don't do that stuff."

Now the family wonders if their child's first experience with the drug killed her.

Within the past year, two persons died of heroin overdoses in Franklin County, one in rural Batesville, according to Sheriff Ken Murphy. In Ripley County, heroin killed one Sunman resident, according to Ripley County Sheriff Tom Grills.

It's hard to deny this area has a heroin problem when facts like these are revealed.

Grills maintained heroin "breaks families and causes people to do terrible things."

Murphy reported, "We call them hunters and gatherers. Cavemen had to get up every morning to go out and kill something to eat. These guys have to go out every morning to steal something to sell to buy more drugs."

Batesville Police Chief Stan Holt said his officers have not arrested anyone on heroin charges recently. However, "more and more" property crime investigations are "coming back to being drug related, a lot directly to heroin, to support their habits."

Cierra Adams' mom noted, "I will never have the opportunity to hear my baby's voice again ... I can't hug her or tell her I love her."

Instead of just grieving, her relatives became activists.

They planned the July 30 Cierra Adams Memorial Walk, which was followed by speakers and a candlelight vigil, at Batesville's Liberty Park.

The event was "for anybody who lost a neighbor, friend, loved one or anyone to drugs or alcohol ... or anyone in the community who is concerned" about the issue. "We want to show dealers ... we don't want drugs in the hands of our kids," Adams said.

As stark reminders of the recent tragedy, a Batesville Police Department Crime Scene Unit SUV led the six-blocks-long procession of close

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- KAREN ADAMS, MOTHER

to 300, half teens and half adults. At the end was a Batesville EMS 10 ambulance.

The mood was defiant, not sorrowful.

"Drugs are stupid" one group shouted repeatedly. Another chanted, "Drugs are retarded, don't get started!"

Even before the Batesville student died, citizens became aware of the problem during a June 28 forum at the BHS auditorium attended by 350.

It was organized by a new Community Issues Committee. Batesville Community School Corp. superintendent Dr. Jim Roberts formed the group, which met for the first time May 24. Members have ballooned to over 30 from the city, public and private schools, hospital, police, YMCA, chamber of commerce and media.

Subcommittees were formed to research a fact sheet, drug testing at schools, resources and speakers. The entire group met again Aug. 16 and will gather Sept. 20.

Its ultimate goals are to see that drug dealers are incarcerated and that addicts find the help they need.

At the forum, the superintendent told citizens, "For the sake of our kids, we have to figure this out."

Diana Fugate, Morris, one of Cierra Adams' aunts, said, "We need to get the message out to these children ... the next time you're offered something ... at a party, ask yourself this question: 'Is it worth my life?' If Cierra could come back ... she would say, 'Don't do it.'" ❀

WATCH FOR THE SIGNS OF HEROIN

At the heroin forum, Indiana State Police Drug Enforcement Section Detective Tami Watson,

Indianapolis, listed signs of heroin addiction: dry mouth; droopy appearance (as if extremities are heavy); alternately wakeful, then drowsy; poor mental functioning; disorientation; infection near scab sites; shallow breathing; lying or deception; runny nose and eyes; eyes appear lost or have a faraway look; constricted pupils; slurred speech; unkept appearance; replacing old friends with new ones; dramatic drop in grades or job performance; lethargic or not motivated when playing sports; apathy; no interest in future plans; broken commitments; hostility; unexplained absences; and running away. Some of the same symptoms indicate depression.

Certain items should raise red flags: capsules (a vitamin can be taken apart and filled with heroin), small syringes, unusual residue in a coffee bean grinder, pattern of stealing or borrowing money, money missing from a wallet, unexplained valuables (stolen to be sold to get drug money).

Watson added, "A heroin user may wear winter clothing during the summer to hide needle marks."

To find help for addicts, persons may go to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Admin's Web site www.samhsa.gov and can click on Treatment Locators on the page's right side.

