



Retail Business Services

Mother Finds Strength in Advocacy

September 8, 2021

While the world struggled to adapt to a global pandemic, Laura Shanafelter, Finance Operations Coordinator



for Retail Business Services – the services company of Ahold Delhaize USA – was fighting a different battle. In October 2020, Laura's son, Tyler, died of an overdose.

"My son was 18," she said. "He had just graduated from high school. He was barely an adult – he had a whole life to live, and that was taken from him."

Tyler was a smart, kind person, who had a bright future.

"He would literally give someone the shirt off his back," Laura said. "But, just like a lot of kids today, he got mixed up with the wrong people, and decided to try drugs."

But what killed him that day in October wasn't a Percocet, the prescription medication Tyler preferred – it was fentanyl, an illegal, addictive substance that's caused a rash of overdose deaths in the U.S. in recent years.

"I know my son didn't want to die," Laura said. "He bought what he thought was 30 milligrams of Percocet and it turned out to be pure fentanyl. My son made a choice, but he didn't choose fentanyl – it was just given to him."

In the months since Tyler's death, Laura has dedicated herself to raising awareness about fentanyl poisoning and to advocating for others fighting the same battle as Tyler.

"I've sort of made it my mission in life to be my son's voice, now," she shared. "I want to be there for anyone who needs help."

Laura works on advocacy, attends support groups and helps others who have suffered a tragic loss.

Aug. 31 was National Overdose Awareness Day, and to those who have a loved one struggling with addiction, Laura encourages finding support – both for your loved one and yourself. Be aware of the dangers of fentanyl and overdose, and remember to carry doses of Narcan – a life-saving drug that can reverse the effects of an overdose. Above all, be alert.

"I just want parents to know that it can happen to your child," she said. "I would have bet every penny I've ever made in my entire life that this would not happen to my family – especially my son. But it did. Don't ever think it can't happen to you. Drug addiction does not discriminate. It doesn't have anything to do with how you were raised, what kind of home you lived in, what kind of financial background your parents have. It has nothing to do with the color of your skin, what religion you believe in – it does not discriminate. I encourage everyone to educate themselves on this issue."

As for Laura and her family, she hopes people will remember her son as he truly was: a kind, caring individual who was well loved.