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# Because I Love You (B.I.L.Y.) helps families in crisis

Thursday, July 2, 2015



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The free Granada Hills-based non-profit Because I Love You has helped nearly 800,000 people cope with crisis at home.

GRANADA HILLS, Calif. (KABC) -- Jody Waxman was shocked to find out her son Alex was addicted to heroin.

"He said, 'Mom, I'm a heroin addict and I need help. I can't do this anymore.' Even saying it right now, it gives me the chills," she recalled.

"I was very secretive. My mom had no idea, had zero clue," Alex Waxman said.

Jody then turned to the free, parental support group Because I Love You (B.I.L.Y.). She attended weekly meetings and commiserated with other parents dealing with similar issues.

"They were there for me, they supported me. I got phone calls from them daily, multiple phone calls during the day for support," she said. "It was [the] help that I needed, and they got me through it."

Alex found salvation in a B.I.L.Y. youth group.

"I craved that sort of structure," he said.

Dennis Poncher founded B.I.L.Y. 33 years ago after his wife died. At the time, his 13-year-old son was addicted to drugs and his 16-year-old daughter was a runaway.

"I didn't want to feel guilty, which I did. I didn't want to feel alone, which I did. I didn't want to feel judged, which I did, and I wanted to hear what other parents were doing," Poncher said.

He said the program helped save his kids' lives.

"It takes a village, it's not a one person job. You can't do it alone," Poncher said.

Nearly 800,000 have attended B.I.L.Y. meetings in 12 states and in Canada. Everyone involved in the organization is a volunteer, which allows all the meetings to be free.

"People are going to come when there's no cost involved. They're going to come a lot easier, and they're going to come back," Poncher said.

Meetings are held every Monday in San Clemente, Tuesdays in Granada Hills and Thursdays in Van Nuys.

For more information on meetings, visit <http://www.bily.org>.

As for Alex, he's now six months sober. Both he and his mom are studying to become addiction specialists.

"There's something in every family and people keep it a secret," Jody said.

Alex offered his advice for those addicted to drugs: "You don't have to keep digging, you can stop and you can ask for help and there's a way out."

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