

Drug addiction aid 'Just a Nickel' away

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A nickel may not buy much today. But many nickels can.

The Parent to Parent "Just a Nickel" campaign is using that simple principle to raise money for the treatment of children and young adults addicted to drugs, alcohol or both.

Raising the levy imposed on alcohol by just a nickel would generate \$10 million in additional revenue for addiction treatment throughout the state and treat 3,800 people, according to the Marlton-based organization. The non-profit group recently began dispersing glass collection jugs to businesses, treatment facilities and service providers in Gloucester and other counties.

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The advertisement is a rectangular graphic with a light blue background. At the top, a dark blue banner contains four white text elements: '» FIND AN AGENT', '» FIND A RENTAL', '» FIND A BROKER', and '» FIND A HOME'. Below this banner is a photograph of a man and a woman standing in front of a green house with a white picket fence. Underneath the photo is another dark blue banner with the white text 'FIND IT ALL HERE AND GET TO THE FUN PART FASTER!'. At the bottom left is the 'nj.com' logo, and at the bottom right is the tagline 'The Best Local Real Estate'.

The idea came about when Kathleen Dobbs, who helped found the organization 9 years ago, put a nickel in the hand of a reporter at a press conference on raising the alcohol tax and asked "If your child's life depended on this, what would you do?"

Dobbs began her advocacy after experiencing her son's addiction.

"My husband and I nailed the windows shut, made him sleep in a sleeping bag on the floor of our bedroom and took him to work with us. I made a promise to God that if my son got better, I would never let a parent go through that again."

Of the eight million people in New Jersey, 800,000 seek treatment every year, she said. Between 70,000 and

80,000 actually receive it.

Since the late 1990s, the state Division of Addiction Services has been providing \$400,000 toward addiction treatment for 18 to 24-year olds by contracting with various treatment facilities and associated agencies.

Each year, the state earns \$99 million by taxing alcohol -- 11 percent of which goes toward the prevention, education and treatment of drug and alcohol addiction. Of that, 2 percent is used for administrative costs.

"We said to ourselves, 'Why hasn't anyone come to the forefront and said hey there's a problem, we're gonna do something about it?' " said Kass Foster, also a founder of Parent to Parent, who lost a child to addiction.

The campaign is also working to help push elected officials to pass legislation raising the tax. Foster recently made phone calls to Assemblyman Herbert Conaway of Burlington County, a member of the Health Committee, as well as Senators Richard Codey and Joseph Vitale to request meetings.

The National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence has been seeking a raise in the alcohol tax, Foster said. The tax has not been raised since 1992.

For more information, visit www.justanickel.org or call Parent to Parent at (856) 983-3328.