Winchester Police Help Parents Find Drugs ‘Hidden In Plain Sight’

By Chris McKinnon

December 11, 2015 11:34 PM By Chris McKinnon

BOSTON (CBS) – The opioid crisis has made headlines across Massachusetts, but many parents are still completely unaware that their kids are at risk, or already doing drugs. There are often clues to that drug use all over the home, hidden in plain sight.

It’s a message Winchester resource officer Sgt. Dan Perenick wants parents to hear. “Risky behaviors, that’s what we want folks to be aware of,” he said.

With the help of the Winchester Coalition for a Safer Community, Perenick and town activist and volunteer Dot Butler, put together a display at Town Hall of a typical teenager’s bedroom and all the places they can hide drugs and drug paraphernalia.

On the cluttered desk sits a stapler that once opened reveals a joint lying in the spot where the staples go. There is also a mouse with a hidden cover that when removed reveals a small digital drug scale. Instead of pencil shavings, marijuana fills a manual pencil sharpener. There are highlighters, flashlights and pens, all with hidden pipes as well as soda and water bottles with compartments used to hide drugs.

According to Perenick, the exhibit this fall was designed to teach parents where to look.

“It was an eye-opening experience for a lot of parents,” he said.

It’s an experience Lori Gonsalves of Taunton wishes she had back in 2013. “I had a young, athletic son with a great future in front of him,” she said. Instead, her son, Corey, lives with a serious brain injury suffered during a heroin overdose.

Now the whole family speaks to high school students about the dangers of doing drugs. “If I knew all that I know now, this wouldn’t have gone as far as it did and maybe I could have nipped this in the bud right away,” she said.

Looking back, Lori now remembers signs of his drug use around the house that she didn’t pick up on at the time. She recalls noticing everyday items that turned out to be things Corey was using to prepare heroin. “I noticed one of my serving spoons in my kitchen was gone.”

She also noticed her son’s room was full of Q-Tips. “I thought, oh he’s keeping his ears really clean.” She would later learn those Q-Tips are used to filter out impurities from the heroin before it is injected.

Experts like Perenick and Gonsalves tell parents not to be afraid to search your child’s room and learn about all the possible places to look for risky behavior.
Gummy bears could be soaked in alcohol so the teen can eat them during school or other events. Dryer sheets can be used to create filters to mask the smell of marijuana so kids can smoke in their rooms without producing the powerful odor. Lots of empty water bottles in a child’s room can also be a sign of trouble. "That could indicate dry mouth from taking medications like Ritalin, Adderall and ecstasy.

Corey’s life has changed forever. The former college student and gifted athlete now needs help to dress, eat and bathe. He is also legally blind and is unable to read or even operate a cell phone. He now focuses his energy on educating kids about the dangers of drug use.

Lori considers herself lucky. Most people in Corey’s situation don’t survive. She hopes their work together will spare other teens and their parents the horrors of drug addiction. “Standing there as a mom and watching your child get the last rights is absolutely heart-wrenching,” she recalled of the night she thought she was saying goodbye to her son.

The town of Winchester plans another public display of their “Hidden in Plain Sight” exhibit next year. Other communities have offered similar programs to help educate parents.