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For Immediate Release

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Our Son Was Not Invincible: Local Family Faces Void Left by Heroin Overdose 2015 Run for Recovery to Remember Victim, Help Family Make Sense of Loss

7th Annual Event Remembers Runner, Valedictorian, Clarkson Grad, & JCC Instructor Gavin Tedford
Run/Walk to Push Education to Combat Heroin Epidemic which Claimed Gavin, Many More Each Year

WATERTOWN (June 9, 2015) – A local family still struggling with the loss of their son to a heroin overdose last year, has a message for young people, especially those who think they can manage their drug use, or are in denial about addiction: “Our son had everything going for him, but he wasn’t invincible. Now we’re left to suffer.”

Diane and Don Tedford lost their son Gavin, 29, to a heroin overdose on February 4, 2014. The past 15 months have been a challenge for the family, remembering the son they loved and dealing with his loss. They have chosen to take their grief and anguish and point it toward helping prevent future tragedies by speaking out about addiction and remembering their son in the Watertown Urban Mission’s 7th Annual Run for Recovery in September.

“Our son had so many things going for him, but addiction took him from us,” said Diane. “Gavin was so bright, athletic, loving and had such a magnetic personality, but he was not invincible. Even with all he had going for him, his addiction to heroin took his life and left us to feel the void he left. We want to help other families avoid the tragedy that has changed our lives.”

With heroin use on the rise in the North Country, the Watertown Urban Mission will use its highly successful and popular annual 5k run/walk and 10k run to raise awareness about the dangers of heroin use by remembering a young man whose death demonstrates that addiction can claim even the best and brightest.

As a Lyme Central School valedictorian, Clarkson graduate, Jefferson Community College instructor, and avid runner, his story is a reminder that addiction knows no boundaries. It devastates families rich and poor, alike. It can strike down the average and the honors student just the same. By remembering Gavin with this event, the Watertown Urban Mission and his family hope to find healing by raising awareness about the epidemic, bringing the people together and speaking out to help make our community stronger.

“Our son was very gifted, but he was always humble about it, pushing himself to the max,” said Diane Tedford, Gavin’s mother. “He knew it was wrong. The problem is that too many young people just like him think that all the dangers and risks do not apply to them. So they chase these drugs, and instead, this insidious addiction robs these very same young people of hope. We want to tell you that your life matters. Your decision to start using affects more than just you. We still suffer with Gavin’s addiction and death. If you’re using, please seek help as soon as possible. You deserve better.”

Even just changing the course of a handful of lives will save hundreds in this community from suffering the same grief they have endured. By supporting and being a part of the run, Diane said the community will

show how much they care for young people battling with addiction and the temptation of drugs, while also demonstrating that a better life is possible without drugs.

In this way, the participation of the Tedford family continues the tradition of the annual Run for Recovery 5k run/walk and 10k run put on each year by the Watertown Urban Mission. The fundraiser supports the Mission's Bridge Program, which helps individuals battling with addiction, to see their personal self worth, recognize that they have a purpose greater than serving a sentence in jail, and put their life back together to be a productive member of our community.

In its first six years, the Run for Recovery has remembered those who lost their life because of a tragedy caused by driving while intoxicated. Families of both those who lost their life because of their own choice to drive under the influence and those who were killed by drunk drivers came together at each event to raise awareness in the hope that their stories would keep at least one person, and ideally, many more from drinking and driving.

"We are a family of families who have endured these tragedies," said Kathie Strader, sister of Bob Burkard, who was killed by a drunk driver in 2009 and remembered by the 3rd Annual Run for Recovery in 2011. "It is addiction that took our loved ones, and that is what took Gavin from us. We stand with Diane and Don in remembering her son and hope that our voices together will open eyes and save lives."

This year's event will be on Saturday, September 12, 2015 at 9 a.m. and features a great course starting at the Alex T. Duffy Fairgrounds in Watertown and heading toward Glen Park. Pre-registration is open now for \$20 per person or \$105 for a team of six. Discounts for our military and students drop the cost to \$18 per person or \$96 per team. Same day registration, which will open at 6:30 a.m. with check in at the event, will be \$25 per person with no discounts. You can register online or print a registration form to drop off or mail in at www.WatertownUrbanMission.com/RunforRecovery.htm.

"Gavin's family has chosen to work toward making something positive out of their tragedy," said Sal Ciulo, Bridge Program Director, who had bonded with Gavin and had been planning to run in a marathon with him before the young man's death. "Gavin was loved by many family and friends, and had a huge heart for everyone in his life. He was taken from us too soon and it has left a hole in our hearts. It's so important that we all join together to give his life a new meaning, by saving lives through his story."

The Run for Recovery has become one of the most popular running events in the north country with a great course, awards for seven age groups, team competition, and an after celebration that features great food and fun for the whole family. In 2014, the event drew nearly 500 participants, and raised more than \$20,000 for the Mission's Bridge Program, which helps individuals struggling with addiction to rise above their challenges without going to prison or jail. The Run/Walk has drawn repeat and new sponsorship, including Alpine Fence as the lead sponsor, whose owner, Nick Washburn, is a graduate of the Bridge Program.

"Gavin's story is a reminder for anyone, that flirting with the clutches of addiction is just too dangerous and the impact of your decisions is felt most by those who know and love you," said Erika Flint, executive director of the Mission. "By participating in this event, either as a runner, walker or sponsor, you help families like Gavin's accomplish this incredible goal of using the pain they've endured to spare others."

Mrs. Tedford said she is grateful for the opportunity to make something positive out of her son's death. She said she wants to see organizations such as Narcotics Anonymous empowered to reach more people and for treatment options to grow in Jefferson County and throughout the North Country.

For information about heroin addiction, please go to <http://combatheroin.ny.gov>. For information about the Run for Recovery, including registering online and to download and print registration forms, go to www.WatertownUrbanMission.com/RunforRecovery.htm.