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**For Immediate Release**

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## **Two Local Youths Who Battled Drug Addiction, Left Behind Families And Young Children**

### **2016 Run for Recovery to Remember Tyler Gentry and Ashley Grant**

Run/Walk to Push Education to Combat Opiate and Heroin Use Which Claims More Victims Each Year

WATERTOWN (July 15, 2016) – For the second straight year, the Watertown Urban Mission will use its popular 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Run For Recovery 5k/10k run and 5k walk to warn against a dangerous killer in the North Country: heroin and opiate use. This year's event remembers Tyler Gentry and Ashley Grant, two young lives lost to these drugs who each left behind families, including young children.

Rose and Jeffrey Marolf lost their son Tyler Gentry, 24, to an opiate overdose on July 1, 2011. Tyler attended Jefferson Community College, loved music, and was an aspiring hip-hop artist. Tonia and Robert Stephenson lost their daughter Ashley Grant, 27, to a heroin overdose on June 10, 2015. She was a Thousand Islands Central School graduate, certified nursing assistant, and an avid reader of the Bible. Both had battled drug addiction for several years, and both left behind young children.

"Our son had a great personality. He was very charming, and had a great sense of humor," said Rose Marolf, Tyler's mother. "Tyler liked writing music, watching sports, and spending time with his family and his son." Ms. Marolf reflects back to when Tyler's addiction began as a young teenager. In 2010, Tyler was admitted to Jefferson County Drug Court and with support, he became clean. Despite months of sobriety, Tyler again struggled. He was about to go to inpatient rehabilitation when he relapsed in July 2011, and the opiate overdose took his life. Ms. Marolf said, "Drugs are so destructive. They do not just affect the person using them; they destroy relationships, families.... There is nothing worse as a parent than getting that phone call."

Tonia Stephenson, Ashley's mother, said, "Our daughter loved to inspire others to do better, was a care giver and liked helping people. Ashley liked to cook, loved to spend time with her family and two children, and everyone loved her contagious laugh, smile and spirit." Mrs. Stephenson looks back to how Ashley's addictions began as a young teenager. After two years of struggling with heroin use and getting help from various treatment facilities, Ashley finally established sobriety. "Ashley was six months clean and was doing all the right things," said Mrs. Stephenson. The last week of her life she was not showing any signs she was about to relapse. Unfortunately, something led Ashley to use again, and the resulting heroin overdose took her life. After her passing, Mrs. Stephenson helped organize public rallies warning against the dangers of heroin use, and joined Pivot's Alliance for Better Communities. She urges, "Our local kids struggling with addiction need love and understanding, not judgment. No one beats themselves up more than an addict. All it takes is one use, and heroin will forever rob you of any good feelings and self worth."

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For its first six years, the Run for Recovery highlighted and put a human face on the dangers of driving while intoxicated. The 2015 Run for Recovery aimed to educate about and combat the heroin epidemic. This year, the Mission, along with the Grant and Gentry families, continue to spread the word that even such promising young people as Tyler and Ashley could not escape the clutches of these terrible drugs, which sadly has grown in popularity in our community. Jefferson County alone averages one opiate and/or heroin drug overdose death per month, according to Bridge Program Director Salvatore Ciulo.

“Tyler and Ashley’s families would like to make something positive out of their son and daughter’s death,” said Mr. Ciulo. “Tyler and Ashley were loved by many family members and friends, and both had huge hearts for everyone in their lives. Unfortunately, they fell prey to terrible addictions which eventually cost them their lives. Please join us to remember them and spread the word about the dangers of addiction on September 10<sup>th</sup>.”

The Run for Recovery has become a staple running event 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 2015, 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 and become productive members of society. 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 and County Drug Court Program.

“Tyler’s and Ashley’s stories are a reminder for anyone, that flirting with addiction is just too dangerous. A single use can lead to a lifetime of addiction, and the impact of your decisions is felt most by those who know and love you,” said Joanna Loomis, executive director of the Mission. “By participating in this event, you help raise awareness about the dangers of opiate use, and support a program with a long track record of helping people in our community overcome their addiction in order to live healthy, purposeful lives.”

This year’s event will be on Saturday, September 10, 2016 at 9 a.m. and features an exciting course starting at the Alex T. Duffy Fairgrounds in Watertown and heading toward Glen Park. Pre-registration is open now for \$20 per person. Same day registration, which will open at 7:00 a.m. at the event, will be \$25 per person. You can register online, or print a registration form to drop off or mail in, at [www.WatertownUrbanMission.com/RunforRecovery.htm](http://www.WatertownUrbanMission.com/RunforRecovery.htm). There will be an early pick up date for Gift Bag, Bib and T-shirt on September 8, 2016, 3:00 – 6:00 p.m. at the Watertown Urban Mission, Community Room or on Race Day.

For information about opiate and 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, call the Watertown Urban Mission at 315-782-8440 or go to [www.WatertownUrbanMission.com/RunforRecovery.htm](http://www.WatertownUrbanMission.com/RunforRecovery.htm).

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