

To the editors,
The Ottawa Sun

Silenced by drugs, Jade Bell “speaks” to Ottawa teens
via computer

I’m writing this with the help of a computer. I can’t use my hands or body, but by moving my head from side to side, and touching sensors on each side, I am able to tap out messages using Morse code. Without this technology I would be silenced. And I am writing to tell you why.

As a teen, I was described as “handsome, intelligent, athletic and energetic.” But I also used alcohol and drugs. By age 18, I graduated – not from school, but from soft drugs to hard drugs, namely heroin. I thought nothing could hurt me, and I would know when to stop.

In August, 1997, the drugs proved their power over me. I overdosed on heroin and fell into a coma. When I first awoke I seemed unscathed. But the drugs weren’t finished with me. I lapsed back into a coma. This time when I awoke I was blind, and had suffered a disorder called dystonia that has fettered my mobility, confining me to a wheelchair, in need of 24-hour care. My body was useless, but my mind was intact.

I languished in this hellish place, not alive and not dead. I could hear the world around me, but not see it. I knew that insanity was a distinct possibility, but I thanked the lord for the senses that I still had. My father was there with his unconditional love and

affectionate hugs. Out of the darkness grew a seed of hope and meaning. I realized that I had been dealt this blow for a reason: I was to dedicate my life to educating youth and parents on the risks of drug use.

How could a blind and paralyzed person teach others? Thanks to my late father's ingenuity, I became able to communicate through my computer. Since then, I have "spoken" to more than 100,000 students across Canada. The presence of a young man trapped in a paralyzed and blind body, whose voice is a computer, is compelling to even the most hardened young person. Many have wept, and vowed never to use drugs again.

I'm hoping that you find my story and my cause newsworthy, and I invite you to contact **Hazel Lambert of the Ottawa Catholic School Board, who is responsible for arranging my first presentations to Ottawa area high school students, to see if she would grant you clearance to cover the event. Hazel can be contacted at hazel_lambert@occdsb.on.ca (telephone 613-224-4455 ext. 2354).**

Coverage of one of my presentations by The Ottawa Citizen would help tremendously in getting the message out to parents and others who are concerned about the spreading use of ever more dangerous drugs -- among younger and younger children.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Jade Bell
[\[jadebell@jadebell.ca\]](mailto:jadebell@jadebell.ca)