



Fentanyl family summit allows loved ones to heal and connect

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CAROLINA BEACH, NC (WWAY) — Since 2013, over 15,000 North Carolinians have died from fentanyl poisoning, with 886 of those deaths occurring in the Cape Fear.

To spread awareness and help families heal, the Fentanyl Victims Network of North Carolina held its 3rd Family Summit of 2023 in Carolina Beach, with the previous 2 having been held in Raleigh and Boone.

More than a dozen families came out for the summit to learn more about what they can do to continue fighting for their loved ones to receive justice.

Additionally, several parents and siblings shared their stories of what happened to their loved ones.

The network's executive director Barb Walsh lost her daughter Sophia to fentanyl poisoning after she unintentionally drank a contaminated bottle of water.

Walsh said being able to learn more about fentanyl helped her and will also help the families of its victims.

"I went down into a black hole like all these families do and it takes a while and some people never come back out," Walsh said. "But when I did, I knew that I needed to know more about fentanyl, I needed to learn about the laws and many of these families helped get this law passed."

Walsh was glad to see so many families come to the summit as Sophia's death is what drove her to join the Fentanyl Victims Network.

"This is very healing, it's healing for me to be able to help other families."

Kami Perez lost her daughter after she took a xanax pill given to her that had more than 13 milligrams of fentanyl in it.

While this was Perez' first summit, she hopes to be able to help other families when they come to future summits.

"I want to be able to be that voice for her and to others who may also be a victim as well, because they don't have any voices, they can't have that voice anymore," Perez said. "So I'm standing in the gap for them to be that advocate, to be able to bring more attention to, I feel like, is an epidemic."

North Carolina recently passed Senate Bill 189, which strengthens penalties for individuals found guilty of distributing controlled substances which result in a fatal overdose. Two individuals in the Cape Fear have been charged with death by distribution since the bill was passed.

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