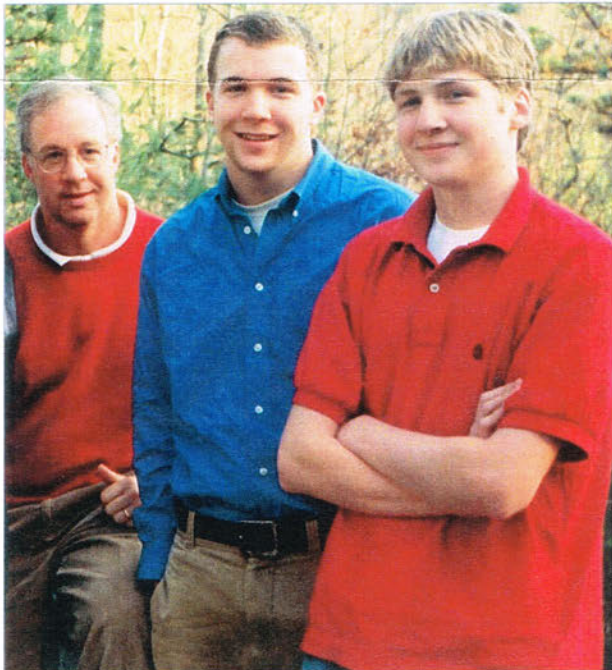


## Out of tragedy, hope

After both his sons died of drug overdoses, Steve Grant wants their legacy to help other addicted youth



From left, Steve, Chris and Kelly Grant. Steve founded Chris and Kelly's HOPE Foundation in his sons' memory to battle drug addiction.

By JERRY SALLEY | staff

In 1999, Christopher Grant was a 6-foot, 170-pound 14-year old, the only freshman on Christ Church Episcopal School's varsity basketball and soccer teams. In 2005, his father, Steve, found him dead at age 21, of an accidental overdose of cocaine and methadone.

In March 2010, Chris's brother Kelly was a junior at the College of Charleston and a drummer in the band Company, which had just signed a record deal. Nine months later, Steve Grant found his second son dead, at age 24, this time of an accidental heroin overdose.

This February, Steve Grant started Chris and Kelly's HOPE Foundation, a foundation dedicated to fighting drug addiction in teens and young adults.

Chris and Kelly's HOPE operates

under the auspices of the Community Foundation of Greenville, and will provide financial support to both local and national programs — "anybody who's worthy," said Grant.

Losing two sons to drug addiction within five years has been hard, Grant said. "I certainly have bad moments. But grief is built on guilt in a lot of ways, and I don't have any guilt at all. Maybe I should have done something differently, but I certainly put forth humongous effort to help both of them, to the detriment of my marriage, to the detriment of my finances."

Grant's efforts to help Chris began with a couple of conversations in 1999. "I was down in my den reading, when he came down to talk to me," Grant remembered. "He told me, 'Dad, I don't want to be a screw-up.'" A week later, the 14-year-old again came to his father in his den. "He said, 'Dad, you're my best friend in this world.'"

"Now, that really got my attention. When I was 14, my father fell down a few rungs as far as being my best friend."

Grant, who helped found a suicide crisis hotline in Greenville, realized Chris was trying to tell him something. "He was telling me, 'I'm addicted to drugs and alcohol, and I don't know what to do,' but I didn't hear that," said Grant. "I did know he was crying for something. I literally jumped to the phone the next morning to get him to see somebody."

Between ages 14 and 21, Chris went to rehab five times. "What I found out was that there were all kinds of options for adults, but not much for adolescents," said Grant. "More depressing was that our state had very little adolescent addiction care."

The standard rehab stint of 28 days is not enough for teens, Grant said. "For an adolescent, there needs to be at least 100 to 120 days of treatment initially to even begin to help."

Along with straining his marriage and his family's finances, the struggle to help his oldest son made an impact on his younger son, Grant admitted. "I look back on Kelly's junior year in high school, when he experienced his parents' divorce after 25 years of marriage," he said. "Pretty devastating stuff, along with being neglected by his parents when they were trying to take care of his brother."

In October 2005, Chris was attending Greenville Tech, having gotten a GED after attending four different high schools after CCES. On October 17, Grant found his son dead in his apartment after Chris missed their customary Sunday evening dinner.

At nine months, Kelly Grant's struggle with addiction was much shorter than his older brother's. "Kelly was a model kid," said his father. "They always say to worry more about the quiet ones."

Kelly "was introduced to heroin by somebody" in Charleston in March, 2010, Grant said. Months later, Grant learned that his son had suffered an overdose in March, and had him come home to Greenville to stay with him for a few months before school began again in the fall.

"He was really trying not to use it," said Grant. "It's almost impossible without help." He urged Kelly to go to rehab. "You can send a 14-year-old kicking and screaming, and he can't leave it," Grant said. "But you can't send a 24-year-old unless he really wants to go."

That fall, Kelly went back to Charleston. In October, his father had him return home when he suspected he was using again. At the end of November, Kelly contacted his supplier in Charleston for a hit. He waited until December 5 to take it. When he did, it was fatal.

The medical examiner only found two needle marks on Kelly's body, Grant said. This proved to him that his son was trying to stop, "but the attraction is overwhelming."

The inspiration to turn his personal tragedy into a chance to help others came, of all places, at a sales conference. Grant, a financial representative at Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance, found himself in a circle of people who were each asked to stand and say what they wanted their legacy to be.

"At first I didn't stand, but eventually I did," he remembered. "When it came my turn, I said, 'I want to leave a legacy that from this day forward people will know I did everything I could do to help save adolescent boys and girls from the perils of substance addiction.'"

Chris and Kelly's HOPE Foundation was born in February, 2012, and has raised more than \$25,000, Grant said. The money will go to local organizations like the White Horse Academy, a 16-bed treatment facility for substance-addicted teenage boys. Run by the Phoenix Center, it is one of only two facilities in the state where a boy can be in treatment for up to 120 days.

"I really think things happen for a reason," said Grant.

Last December, near the sixth anniversary of his older son's death, Grant's mother, who had been in Greenville receiving cancer treatments (she has had a clear PET scan and is now considered free of the disease) was looking at some old photographs when she found one of Chris. The picture was probably 11 years old, Grant remembered, and he didn't know when he had seen it last.

Grant's mother told him to sit down and look at the back of the photograph.

There, in his "terrible" handwriting, Chris Grant had written, "Don't forget me."

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### FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, or to donate, visit [www.chrisandkellyshope.org](http://www.chrisandkellyshope.org).