

## **JOANNE PETERSON**

### **Founder, Executive Director, Learn to Cope Inc.**

Joanne Peterson is the Founder and Executive Director of Learn to Cope (LTC), a non-profit peer-led support network which began in 2004. Mrs. Peterson's journey started as a young girl with siblings experiencing issues with mental illness and addiction. Years later when Joanne discovered that her own son's experimentation with prescription drugs led to an opioid addiction, she was motivated and empowered to use her voice to bring about change. Today her son is in long term recovery. She designed LTC to offer families the support, education, resources and hope that her family would have benefitted from.

Funded by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MADPH), LTC has grown to have a full-staff who collaborate with communities across the state to spread messages of prevention, education, awareness and advocacy. Learn to Cope has over 9,000 members on a private online forum, 24 chapters throughout Massachusetts and most recently 2 chapters in Florida and 1 in Boise, Idaho. LTC families receive unique support and education from professionals and their peers. Through advocacy and awareness, Mrs. Peterson collaborated with MADPH to become the first parent network in the country to provide the overdose reversal antidote nasal Naloxone. Today, 70 of the 180 LTC facilitators are trained and certified to provide overdose education and nasal naloxone kits at each chapter. Since December of 2011 there have been over 100 documented successful reversals by LTC members.

With the growth and expansion of LTC, Mrs. Peterson has been called upon by high level government officials, law enforcement, and educators to assist in their efforts to combat the opioid epidemic. In 2015 Mrs. Peterson was one of the recipients of the Advocate for Action award from the Office of National Drug Control Policy and was also Senator Markey's guest at the State of the Union Address. In March 2016, Mrs. Peterson was asked by Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker to participate as a panelist for the National Governors Association Health and Human Services Committee to discuss the Nations opioid crisis. Most recently, Mrs. Peterson was invited to the West Wing to participate in a discussion held by Michael Botticelli, the National Drug Control Policy Director, on the Administration's efforts to address the country's opioid epidemic. Currently, Mrs. Peterson sits on the Massachusetts Health and Human Services Emergency Department Boarding Work Group, as well as the Governor's Special Commission to Study Licensed Addiction Treatment Centers.