

Mother drives home danger zone message

NEOSHO, Mo. — No one is more aware of the danger zone's deadly potential than Terri Wright and her family. In 2004, they lost 6-year-old Jacob when he was run over by his school bus.

Two-and-a-half years later, Wright began delivering a presentation to pupil transportation professionals throughout Missouri in an effort to prevent another such tragedy.

In July, Wright stood before members of the Missouri Association for Pupil Transportation (MAPT) at their annual conference in Springfield. She recounted the heartbreaking tale.

It was Jacob's first year riding the school bus. One December afternoon, he and his older brother Jeremiah got off the bus at the stop near their home. As they walked alongside the bus, Jacob slipped on loose gravel and fell under the massive vehicle as it began driving away.

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Terri Wright, danger zone safety presenter
Neosho, Mo.

The school bus driver reportedly said that he had seen Jeremiah in his mirror and assumed Jacob was with him. He also said that he was distracted by a nearby skateboarder. Wright stresses these details during her presentation.

"I make the point that if you lose sight of a child — even for one sec-



Jacob Wright was killed at 6 years old when he was run over by his school bus. Now his mother, Terri, is speaking out.

ond — that child can be lost forever," Wright said in an interview. Drivers must be able to see each child who got off at a stop before moving the bus, she said.

Wright's lecture also highlights the importance of educating children and parents on the danger zone. She said that Jeremiah and her oldest son had never been to school bus safety training because their district rotated each year which schools it was held at.

Since speaking to transportation directors at the MAPT meeting, Wright has visited more than a dozen school districts in the state to give the presentation to drivers. Her audiences are consistently moved.

"I had a male bus driver come up to me afterward and say, 'I just have one suggestion: bring tissues.' He said he was bawling," Wright recalled.

Adding to the effect of Wright's speech, she runs a slideshow with pictures of Jacob set to the song "Angels Among Us," performed by the band Alabama.

Wright's lecture circuit had begun after a conversation with Tom Quinn, the state pupil transportation director in Missouri.

"I asked her whether she was at the point in time where she felt like she could share her story, and she said that she thought she was," said Quinn. He then connected Wright with Shirley Francis, who is in-

involved with the programming of the MAPT conference.

At the event, Quinn introduced Wright and her husband to the crowd of about 200 people.

"I said that she had a story to tell," Quinn recalled. "I didn't say what it was, but I said that they would remember it for a long time."

The crowd's reaction was "tremendous," Quinn said. Afterward, attendees began asking Wright to give her presentation at their operations.

While Wright would like to take her message beyond Missouri, she said that she is reluctant to spend too much time traveling away from her family. However, she's hoping to create a DVD of the presentation and has already had offers from school transportation people to help with the endeavor.

Wright said that giving the presentation helps with the grieving process, but the family continues to struggle with the loss of Jacob. She said that Jeremiah has gone through post-traumatic stress.

"In a sense, I lost Jeremiah as well, because he is not who he was," Wright said. "He used to be independent. Now if I go to the store, he asks me when I'm coming home."

But Wright hasn't lost trust in school bus transportation. Jeremiah is now riding the bus home from school again, although he's now enrolled in a different district.

"I've never had anything against buses or our bus driver," Wright said. "School bus drivers are wonderful people who love their kids. This was human error. But you see that this is happening more and more, and I felt like I had to call attention to it."