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## **For Immediate Release**

### ***MCHD social worker Mark Liptrap named fellow with national group***

**MORGANTOWN, WV (Oct. 22, 2020)** — As a counselor and social worker at Monongalia County Health Department whose primary focus is working with individuals with substance use issues and their loved ones, Mark Liptrap sees how his position can be used to help certain foster families.

Liptrap started at MCHD in May — funded by a grant secured by the Monongalia County Quick Response Team (QRT) — with a goal of seeing patients who overdose on drugs and sometimes, their impacted family and friends.

Now his goal is to extend those services to foster families affected by drug use. His objective got a boost recently when he was named one of 15 fellows by Los Angeles-based The Network for Social Work Management (NSWM).

The fellowship will give Liptrap the opportunity to work with a mentor to identify foster families whose situations have come about at least in part by drug use and provide them with additional help to resolve their issues.

“I am very grateful that I will be able to explore this situation more and help get some relief to West Virginia families,” Liptrap said.

Liptrap will work with Dr. Grey Endres of the Kansas City metropolitan area, he added. The two had their first Zoom meeting in early October. “We are matched to mentors that share similar interests based on the mentee’s policy topic.”

The Monongalia County QRT is a collaboration among first responders, public health, peer recovery coaches (PRCs) and other health care and private partners dedicated to providing immediate and longer-term help to those struggling with substance abuse.

The increase in the number of parents with substance use disorder has placed additional burdens on West Virginia's foster family system. According to the Monongalia County Child Advocacy Center, of the 175 petitions filed since Sept. 15 to place children in foster care, 100% were due at least in part to parental drug use.

In his application to NSWM, Liptrap wrote, "West Virginia's foster care policy needs to be updated to reflect the current state of affairs with addiction in our state. My delivery involves the collaboration between community leaders, policy makers, community agencies and local and state governments as the way to reduce overdose deaths, drug use, crime associated with drug use, homelessness and generational drug use."

To achieve this goal, Liptrap would like to develop a collaborative approach between West Virginia Child Protective Services (CPS) and the Monongalia County QRT to create a service delivery template that will track and monitor the help offered to CPS cases involving substance use.

"The best approach is to ensure that the services that are needed are being offered and monitored to ensure their efficacy so permanency, that is, finding permanent placements for foster children, can be achieved while reducing the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) scores in children navigating the terrifying and frightening world of foster care," Liptrap said.

Dennis Boyd, one of the NSWM program administrators as well as a former fellow himself, noted that while 15 fellows are selected annually, five of them must come from one of each of New York City's boroughs. This means that all other applicants are vying for 10 open spots.

"It's very selective and very competitive," Boyd said.

NSWM administrators generally are looking for specific qualities in those to whom they extend fellowships, he added.

"No. 1, we're looking for highly motivated individuals who are passionate about policy interests," Boyd said. "And No. 2, we're looking for individuals who have a plan and a vision for what they are going to be doing with their policy interest beyond the scope of the

fellowship. We are looking to see if they have a five-year plan and if their policy interests are aligned with their goals.”

A native of Maryland, Liptrap earned a sociology degree from Salisbury University in Maryland but ended up in the restaurant business, which brought him to West Virginia. After interacting with a social worker during a stay in the hospital by his father, Liptrap decided to make a career change.

He earned a master’s degree in social work and a Master of Science degree in rehabilitation counseling at West Virginia University, finishing up his postgraduate degrees in 2010. The dual degrees serve him in his work as he deals with clients who potentially might need not only counseling, but also help to find a place to live or secure health insurance or Medicaid.

“We’re excited that Mark is going to have this opportunity to make a contribution that will help kids in the foster family system,” said Dr. Lee B. Smith, MCHD executive director and county health officer. “The QRT’s goal is to help individuals with substance use disorder, and this provides another avenue for us to reach people.”

The QRT began meeting weekly in May 2019 with the support of a \$230,000 grant secured by MCHD from the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Office of Maternal Child and Family Health.

Earlier this year, MCHD received another grant, once again distributed through the state DHHR, that will allow the QRT to operate at least through August 2022. These funds come from an Overdose Data to Action grant ([cdc.gov/drugoverdose/od2a/index.html](https://cdc.gov/drugoverdose/od2a/index.html)) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

“I’m really excited to be able to help serve this segment of the population that is in dire need of attention,” Liptrap said. “Working with the Monongalia County QRT has really highlighted how substance use disorder can adversely affect families.”

Boyd has high hopes that Liptrap’s work will make an impact on the foster family problem. “As a competitive applicant, that means the panel of reviewers saw that his project has the potential to have a large-scale impact,” he said. “We’re definitely looking for applicants with the potential and the right support to have a large-scale impact.”

For up-to-date information on health and wellness in Monongalia County, check out [monchd.org](https://monchd.org) and follow the health department on Facebook and Twitter @WVMCHD and on Instagram at #wvmchd.

