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Monongalia County QRT launches campaign to reduce stigma in recognition of National Substance Abuse Prevention Month

MORGANTOWN, WV – Jeri started taking prescription pain pills in her 30s, which “took me down a dark path to other dangerous drugs that nearly took my life.” After getting connected to treatment through a member of the Monongalia County Quick Response Team (QRT), Jeri, now 45, has been clean for more than 250 days now.

That’s one story that radio listeners will hear via a month-long campaign launched by the Monongalia County QRT to combat the stigma that surrounds substance abuse.

October is National Substance Abuse Prevention Month. To highlight what the Monongalia County QRT does in the prevention and treatment of substance abuse in the greater Monongalia County area, the team will be telling the stories of those who have struggled with substance abuse through radio commercials, live interviews and public service announcements.

“Treatment for substance use disorders (SUD) should be viewed in the same light as treatment for any other medical condition,” said Dan McCawley, director of operations at West Virginia Sober Living. “They aren't ‘bad people.’ Until we remove the stigma associated with SUD, we will continue to see people afraid of getting the help they so desperately need.”

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 QRT also provides naloxone training through QRT members Monongalia County Health Department and WV PEERS.

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

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) through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Since its initiation in the spring of 2019, the QRT has had more than 2,000 interactions with individuals with substance use disorder and made more than 300 connections to treatment or services for those individuals. The QRT also has helped hundreds of others with prevention strategies, such as the distribution of naloxone, which reverses the effects of an opioid overdose; the distribution of contact cards to those who might need services and training for administering naloxone and CPR.

“Hearing the success stories not only of our PRCs but of individuals they have helped has been a very rewarding part of the QRT experience,” said Brittany Irick, the Monongalia County QRT coordinator and grant writer for Monongalia County Health Department. “We are excited that our community will be able to hear some of those stories as we continue to make progress in fighting this disease.”

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