

## Peer Supporters & Medication-Assisted Treatment Helping Portage Residents

New services to help people struggling with opioid addiction were introduced in Portage County through funding the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County received from the Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services' State Opioid Response (SOR) Grant in 2019. The grant funded the opening of the Opioid Recovery Clinic at Townhall II and introduced peer support specialists to the county's continuum of care.

The clinic provides evaluation and treatment for substance use disorder on an outpatient basis and opioid treatment utilizing approved medications. The clinic has provided an affordable place in Portage County for those who previously had to travel for treatment. Over 100 people have received medication-assisted treatment (MAT) at the clinic since its opening.

Dr. Dean DePerro is the medical director and is also the Portage County Coroner. He has been grateful for the experience to treat people and keep them alive, allowing them to re-engage with their families and reclaim their lives. "Studies have shown conclusively that MAT is the best way to treat somebody who's overdosed," he said.

Clients at the clinic also are connected to a peer support specialist -- a person with "lived experience" who has been trained to support others who are struggling with mental health and addiction issues.

Clinical Director Rob Young said peer specialists have enhanced Townhall II's treatment team. "By sharing their journey in recovery, Certified Peer Recovery Supporters play a vital role in helping clients to obtain needed substance use disorder services and to remain involved in services," he explained. "They are also skilled at identifying client needs and appropriate resources that can improve a client's quality of life and their treatment outcomes."

A function of the peer supporter for clients at the Opioid Recovery Clinic is to keep the client engaged between visits and to be a "middleman" helping to bridge the gaps.

Joe Follen is one of Townhall II's peer support specialists and also works as a Chemical Dependency Counselor Assistant. He enjoys his work as a peer supporter where he can be "hands-on and walk side by side with a person to make the transition easier in their recovery journey."

"My role as a peer supporter allows me to connect with anyone in the community who is struggling," Follen explains. "For example, I got word that someone I knew was out of jail, and I was able to contact them just to say, 'Hey – I'm checking in on you. Anytime I can help, I'm here.' Sometimes people don't know where to turn or what to do, but they may feel comfortable contacting me."

Stefani Whitmire, another peer support specialist, recalls one of the people she worked with this past year.

"I started working with a woman had relapsed after many years in recovery. She lost custody of her child, her job, and her home," recounted Whitmire. "The shame she felt prevented her from reaching out to people or attending



Alcoholics Anonymous meetings.”

During the past last six months, Whitmire attended a recovery meeting with her each week so she wouldn't feel alone in the process. Whitmer also advocated for her in court, worked with her to establish housing, and supported her as she regained custody of her child.

“She has been an Opioid Recovery Clinic client throughout her outpatient treatment here at Townhall II. Her progress has been remarkable, and she has benefited immensely from SOR funded services!” Whitmire concluded.

Although the SOR 1 grant funding has concluded, the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County recently announced they received an additional \$800,000 as part of the SOR 2 funding issued by the Ohio Department of Mental Health Services.

“This funding will allow us to continue and enhance these much-needed treatment services and supports as well as add some new projects such as intensive home-based treatment, family-centered groups, early diversion for at risk adolescents, and tobacco cessation,” stated John Garrity, PhD, executive director of the Mental Health & Recovery Board.

For more information and local resources on addiction treatment and mental health services, visit [www.mental-health-recovery.org](http://www.mental-health-recovery.org). The Addiction Helpline is available to assist people find treatment at 330-678-3006.

## Adult Alcohol Guidelines

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For many adults, consuming alcohol is considered to be a normal part of celebrations and social gatherings. But chronic alcohol use and excessive drinking can lead to many health problems and accidents. During the pandemic this past year, alcohol sales in Ohio rose 18% from 2019. With April being Alcohol Awareness month, the Mental Health & Recovery Board would like to share information about alcohol misuse.

Low-risk alcohol consumption for adult males is considered drinking two or fewer drinks a day or less than 14 a week and for women it is less than one a day or fewer than seven a week. Drinking more than that on a regular basis is concerned excessive. Binge drinking, when a person consumes 4-5 drinks within two hours, is also considered a high-risk behavior. In Portage County, 27% of adults reported to be binge drinkers compared to 19% in the state of Ohio.



“We know from the data gathered in the Portage Community Health Assessment as well as from our substance use disorder treatment providers that heavy drinking is a problem in our local area,” said John Garrity, PhD, executive director of the Mental Health & Recovery Board.

Excessive drinking can increase your risk of serious health problems, including certain cancers, pancreatitis, stroke, liver disease, and heart failure.

A person who finds themselves drinking more than they intended or forgetting how many drinks they have had may be drinking too much. Other signs can be unexplained weight gain, memory lapse, and withdrawing from friends and family who express concern.

There are some practical things a person can do to reduce their alcohol intake. It is advised to keep a drink diary to monitor how much is being consumed. A person should pay attention and understand their triggers – which situations seem to encourage drinking and think of alternatives. Be sure to have a healthy meal and a glass of water before drinking and continue drinking water in between alcoholic beverages. Avoid drinking at home alone.

If you are concerned about yourself or a loved one, take a free, online self-assessment. A link to the screening is available on [www.mental-health-recovery.org](http://www.mental-health-recovery.org). Or call the Portage Addiction Helpline for information and to be connected to resources at 330-678-3006

## Welcome Tamera Hunter, New CEO of Townhall II



Tamera Hunter MA, PC, was named CEO of Townhall II, replacing Sue Whitehurst who retired in January 2021. Prior to joining Townhall II, Hunter supervised residential programming, intensive case management, and peer support.

"I am excited to join such a strong team at Townhall II. I am blessed to work alongside such smart and compassionate people whose mission in life is to positively impact the lives of others," said Hunter. "Furthermore, I appreciate how supportive the Portage County Mental Health and Recovery Board has been during this time. There will be great partnerships ahead!"

## Pizza Shops Promoting Help in Crisis

Local pizza shops in Portage County are helping to spread the message of help that is available for people who are experiencing mental distress. As residents cope with the stresses of the pandemic on top of their daily life stressors, it's important for people to know where they can turn to if they are in need of some help.

The restaurants are attaching flyers with mental health helpline numbers to their pizza boxes for delivery. Participating pizza shops are Bob's Pizza in Atwater, Cal's Pizza Express in Garrettsville, Guido's in Kent, Teresa's Pizza in Mantua, Guido's and Siciliano's in Ravenna, Caporaletti's Pizzeria in Rootstown, Blasiole's in Streetsboro, and Stoney's Pizza in Windham.

330-678-HELP is the number for Portage County's 24/7 helpline. It is operated by Townhall II, a non-profit organization in Kent, and is funded by the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County. For people who would rather text than call someone, the Crisis Text line is available. To reach a crisis counselor for mental health support, text 4hope to 741741.

The helpline and crisis text line are available for free for anyone who is struggling or is concerned for a loved one. These lines aren't only for people who are suicidal. Help is available for anyone who needs to talk about any emotional distress such as relationships, financial stress, depression, anxiety, self-harm, and bullying.

**WE'RE  
HERE  
FOR YOU!**



**A "crisis" doesn't just mean suicide – it's any painful emotion for which you need support:**

- Relationships
- School Stress
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Self-harm
- Family problems
- Bullying
- Suicide

*Our local helpline is here for everyone, in any type of crisis, providing access to support and information.*

**HELPLINE 330.678.4357**  
**CRISIS TEXT 4hope to 741741**



## ADAPTING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Portage County behavioral health agencies stayed open during the pandemic. Telehealth was introduced as a way for clients to continue to get the care they need while adhering to COVID-19 guidelines.

Fortunately, technology has become very user friendly and mobile allowing people to easily access care from their own homes. Many clients reported to be pleased with the new service method as it removes barriers such as transportation and childcare.



Therapists working with children found creative methods to keep them engaged while working on skill development, therapy, and psychiatric needs.



The Board and provider agencies have grown concerned about the effects that isolation and economic stressors have made on the lives of people in recovery.

The opioid overdose reversal drug naloxone has been available at no charge for Portage residents at Townhall II in Kent and at the Portage Health District in Ravenna.

Information packets with local crisis helpline numbers, stress relief tips, and mental health resources have been distributed to area food cupboards and at COVID-19 testing sites. Residents were also urged to properly dispose of their expired and unused medication as they clean out medicine cabinets. Drug disposal pouches were distributed at holiday meal pickups. Medication drop boxes are located at each police station in the county.



# Mental Health & Recovery Board OF PORTAGE COUNTY

## 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

### DIRECTOR'S DESK

Since last March, we have all been navigating uncharted waters as we respond to the global pandemic. We at the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County have worked to stabilize and enhance our community mental health and addiction system of care.

As the COVID-19 pandemic swept through the country, the Board's network of provider agencies, Children's Advantage, Coleman Professional Services, Family & Community Services, and Townhall II quickly modified their delivery of services. Telehealth was introduced as a way to provide care remotely with phone calls or through interactive video conferencing.

Even as the schools closed their buildings, Board-funded prevention education continued to reach the students of Portage County. Townhall II's Prevention Specialists created virtual lessons through slide shows and interactive games for the students to learn at home. In this stressful and challenging time, it was important for the students to stay informed and educated in the areas of social and emotional learning.

As we quickly adjusted to the new issues brought on by the pandemic, we continued to coordinate new services and supports for individuals and families of Portage County. The Board was pleased to partner with Recovery Works Portage, a new withdrawal management facility located within University Hospitals Portage Medical Center as our local withdrawal management service.

The Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services established new funding to help meet the needs of individuals and families to prevent or stabilize a substance use or a mental health crisis. With this funding, we worked with Coleman Professional Services to develop additional follow-up services for clients in crisis to ensure they are linked with community services to help remain stable and grow in recovery.

The Board introduced a new Minority Outreach Committee with the goals of ensuring health equity and cultural competence in prevention, treatment, and recovery support programs, to meet the needs of diverse populations, and to reduce stigma, address trauma, and eliminate barriers to care.

Finally, I'd like to thank all the counselors, social workers, healthcare workers, first responders, and everyone who is providing essential behavioral health services to the residents of Portage County. We anticipate the need for mental health and addiction services will increase as the impact of the pandemic is realized for years to come.

John Garrity, PhD, Executive Director



### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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# FISCAL YEAR 2019-2020

## HELPING PORTAGE CHILDREN & ADULTS

**572** children and teens received treatment for trauma, emotional problems, mental illness and substance use disorders.

**2194** adults received treatment for trauma, emotional problems, mental illness and substance use disorders.

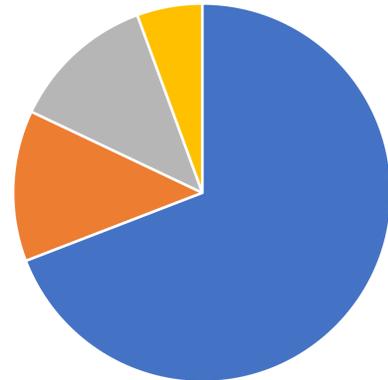
**28,185** contacts with people through the 24-HR crisis calls, information and referral calls, incidents of walk-in counseling, crisis outreach and screening for hospitalization.

**193** admissions through the Coleman Crisis Stabilization Unit.

**4471** youth and adults participated in prevention education programs.

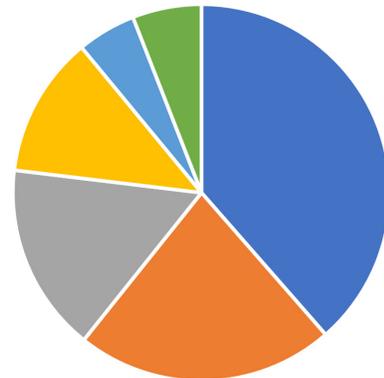
**644** students identified at risk and screened in all Portage County School Districts through a program funded by the Board. **33%** were identified as having mental health issues requiring therapy and/or psychiatry services.

### REVENUE SOURCES FOR FY2020 TOTAL REVENUE = \$8,483,166



- County Levies: 69%
- State Subsidies & Grants: 13%
- Federal Grants: 12%
- Other: 6%

### TOTAL EXPENDITURES FOR FY 2020 = \$7,990,557



- Treatment Services: 39%
- Crisis Services: 22%
- Recovery Supports: 16%
- Board Administration: 12%
- Board Investment in Agencies: 6%
- Prevention Services: 5%

#### NETWORK OF AGENCIES:

Children's Advantage • Coleman Professional Services  
Family & Community Services • Townhall II



[www.mental-health-recovery.org](http://www.mental-health-recovery.org) • 330.673.1756 • 155 E. Main St. PO Box 743, Kent, OH 44240



The 2020 Crisis Intervention Team Officers of the Year awarded by the Portage County Police Chief's Association: Officer Josh Bartholomew, Streetsboro PD; Officer Matthew Butcher, Kent City PD; Officer Scott Krieger, Ravenna PD. The officers were recognized for practicing the communication and de-escalation techniques they learned during their CIT training in dealing with individuals who are experiencing a mental health crisis or are struggling with addiction.



Children's Advantage opened their new Family Center in Ravenna. This 7,000 square foot facility will be a place to provide healing and comprehensive care for the entire family. The building and renovation was funded with a grant from the Ohio Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services and by the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County.

