MCHD hires social worker through QRT to help those with substance use disorder

MORGANTOWN, WV (July 6, 2020) — Individuals with substance use disorder and others affected by it will be able to seek an assessment for free counseling, thanks to a grant received by the Monongalia County Quick Response Team (QRT).

Maryland native Mark Liptrap, who has lived in West Virginia for 22 years, has been hired as a social worker at Monongalia County Health Department, which secured the Mon County QRT grant, since May 11.

“We are trying to reach anyone who is affected by substance use disorder and at-risk populations,” Liptrap said.

Liptrap earned a sociology degree from Salisbury University in Maryland but ended up in the restaurant business in Ocean City for the summer season. That led to working at Snowshoe Mountain Resort during the winter and, eventually, managing the Clarksburg restaurant. Right around the time he wanted to leave the restaurant business, he dealt with a social worker when his father was in a hospital.

“My fire was fueled to get into social services.”

Liptrap 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 will serve him in this position 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.

“In some cases, I would be offering short-term services,” Liptrap said. “If I would meet with them and they didn’t have insurance, part of my services would be to link them with insurance or Medicaid that would be able to extend their services.”

A client can be anyone who is affected by substance use disorder and can be seen via referrals, including by the peer recovery coaches who work with the QRT, as well as by appointment. Liptrap will assess the individual and determine if the situation qualifies for free counseling or other services.

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The QRT’s primary purpose is to get treatment and/or services to individuals who overdose within 24-72 hours of the incident. In addition to the PRCs, QRT members include law enforcement, EMS, MECCA 911, faith-based organizations, Monongalia County Health Department employees and others.

“Part of my role for the QRT would be to first see if there are any services that PRCs cannot fulfill with the clients or patients they see,” Liptrap said.

He also has met with the PRCs to see if he can provide support and therapeutic services to what he calls the “first responders” who are fighting the opioid crisis on the front line.

“And the third approach would be to find some counseling for the families of individuals who overdose, so that their families can get some support as well.”

Noted Dan McCawley, a Mon County QRT PRC and program manager for West Virginia PEERS:

“There is a vital piece that our QRT has been lacking in regard to offering direct grief counseling for family and friends that lose someone to an overdose. It is my hope that having a licensed social worker will add this vital and often overlooked piece to the services we provide.”

Liptrap’s position is possible through a grant that the QRT received from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration (SAMHSA) through the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources (DHHR).

“We felt that a social worker would be a perfect complement to the existing services PRCs can offer,” said Brittany Irick, coordinator of the Mon County QRT as well as MCHD’s grant writer.

The Mon County 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.

A portion of the grant was used to hire Irick as the QRT coordinator as well as a data analyst, Stacy Tressler, who since has become an epidemiologist at the health department. Funds also go to the PRCs and to compensate for the data sharing regarding overdoses.

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.

Before joining Monongalia County Health Department, Liptrap had been following the QRT process and also has seen clients with substance use disorder. “The most significant common thread is co-occurring mental health issues, which are underlying issues that are diagnosable in terms of mental health as well as addiction.”

He will prioritize the most significant issue from a client’s perspective, Liptrap said, and coordinate a treatment plan that will be designed to address many of the issues.

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“Mark’s decades of experience will most definitely bring a new depth of value to our outreach,” McCawley said. “He will be able to work on the continuing, and often prevalent, issues of housing insecurity, food insecurity and social service concerns of clients. On top of that, he can bring the skill set of mentoring the team in best practices in terms of mental health first aid and practices to avoid burnout and compassion fatigue.”

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