

# ROAD TO RECOVERY: Support available for those battling substance abuse

BY BRIANNE FLEMING STAFF WRITER | Posted: Tuesday, April 21, 2015 12:00 am

In light of the recent video, “There is Hope,” released by Burke County Sheriff Steve Whisenant concerning the growing issue of substance abuse, a local agency is speaking out on this topic as well as the services they offer.

Burke Recovery — formerly the Burke Council on Alcoholism & Chemical Dependency — offers treatment, prevention and recovery services to Burke County citizens, regardless of their ability to pay. They also aim to provide educational services to people of all ages in the community.

Burke Recovery Executive Director Jim Van Hecke said according to Tom McLellan, PhD Chair of the Treatment Research Institute, national statistics show that 65-70 million people don’t use substances or use them with no health or safety consequences. Forty million people are harmfully using medical drugs, with more than 23 million addicted and only 10 percent getting treated. This information indicates about an 8 percent rate of addiction. With Burke County’s population of about 90,000, that means more than 7,000 people struggle with addiction and the medically harmful use rate would add another 10,000.

Most people who end up seeking treatment are referred from places such as the court system, the Department of Social Services, the Burke County Health Department or a family member will bring them in, Van Hecke said. After doing an assessment and diagnostic evaluation, they then determine what type of treatment is best — outpatient therapy, residential care or referrals to another treatment center — depending on the person’s condition and resources. Some people will start with individual sessions and then move onto group sessions. After treatment, they try to connect the client with other support systems, such as AA meetings or churches.

“We have licensed and certified counselors on staff, peer support, specialists — everybody there is trained to work with the person who comes in the door to help them make the best decisions they can make for their recovery,” Van Hecke said. “(And) sometimes we have to seek other help beyond us. This is an asset-rich county in a lot of ways.”

Burke Recovery also has counselors in local schools who will talk with students and do an evaluation, and there is an after-school program for kids who are referred. They also are working with two grants right now that deal with helping young people.

“Sometimes, it’s just having a friend or a mentor to talk to them before it gets to a serious problem,” Van Hecke said. “These diseases don’t just come from families that are dysfunctional or impoverished



*Flynn Recovery Community Program Manager Kevin Norris leads a discussion group at Flynn Recovery Community, a local residential treatment center for men.*

— you have a whole, wide spectrum of people. It’s all part of a journey they have to want to be on and work at.”

When working with adolescents, Van Hecke said they are sure to involve the whole family in the treatment process.

“When kids call us, we’re going to make other options for them,” he said. “We love working with young people and their families and their parents.”

Burke Recovery is turning around an average of 18 lives per year, Van Hecke said.

Susan Brown, who is chief nurse executive with Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge, said that in 2014, there were 233 males — at the average age of 41 — and 189 females — at the average of 34 — who completed the detox program. There also are co-occurring illnesses such as depression and anxiety.

“This is a big problem, and I just think it’s good that as a community we’re doing something to address it because a lot of communities aren’t, and we’re doing it in a nonjudgmental way,” she said. “That’s really important because a lot of people who have drug problems feel judged, and it doesn’t help.”

Board member Chuck Moseley said when he joined the Burke Recovery board again in 2008, the mission was to become a “doorway to recovery” — a place where people could go for help with substance abuse and recovery, recourses and referrals.

As a society, we as people need to be more sympathetic and understanding of the powers of addiction, Brown said.

“People die from this every day,” she said. “Often times, these are young people who have their whole lives ahead of them, but they’ve been hijacked by these addictions that have kept them from living a normal life.”

Burke Recovery works with other agencies in the community, such as Burke County United Way, the Community Foundation, the Burke County Health Department and the Department of Social Services.

Van Hecke said Burke Recovery is reimbursed for Medicaid-eligible clients and state-eligible clients through Partners Behavioral Health Management. Most clients are publically funded or have support from family or other outlets.

Drug abuse is something that tends to be associated with shame, and therefore people don’t often openly talk about it. There also have been some hidden aspects over the years that are just coming to light more recently, like the abuse of prescription drugs. Many property crimes in Burke County are substance abuse related, according to Sheriff Whisenant, Van Hecke said, with more and more break-ins involving the person trying to steal prescription drugs.

Through partnership with other agencies in the community, Van Hecke said their job is to be a source of help and hope for those who are struggling with addiction and don’t know where else to turn.

“Eight percent of the population has a severe or dangerous substance abuse issue in the county,” Van Hecke said. “We have a big, big problem here, and we’re trying to say these are opportunities for us as Burke Recovery or other providers in the community to expand and meet that need. Together, we can help make a difference one life and one day at a time.

“(It’s) the whole idea of recovery, transforming lives and being a transforming agent to help people do what they can do to save their life.”

Those who know someone who needs help with substance abuse, can visit [www.bcad.org](http://www.bcad.org) or call 828-433-1287 for more information.

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