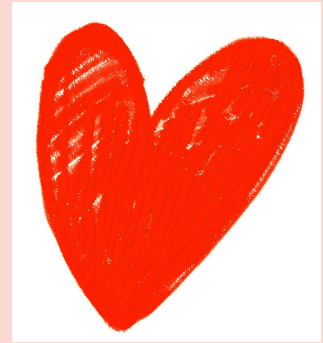
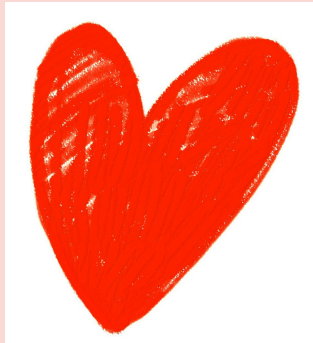




FORSYTH COUNTY
DRUG AWARENESS COUNCIL

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healthier Forsyth County



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February 2025 Volume 4 Issue 10

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and FCDAC Council

Meeting On the Road at

DRUG SUMMIT

DRUG SUMMIT

Youth Substance Abuse Education Event

Meeting On the Road at
UNG
February 4, 2025



Welcome by Director Rachel Kayden, Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council

"Welcome, everyone! My name is Rachel Kayden, and I'm the Executive Director of the Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council." We are a nonprofit coalition providing our community with prevention strategies, education, and resources, advocating for anyone stuck in addiction, especially youth. Our message to anyone addicted is that Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council cares about you. Our community coalition is made up of volunteers from schools, addiction

treatment centers, community organizations, professional groups, interested citizens, law enforcement, and local and state lawmakers. We foster opportunities for our members to connect with one another and reach out to educate and provide resources to our schools and community organizations. We build avenues of connection and communication inroads among parents. We want to be allies working together for the good of students and anyone seeking recovery from addiction. Please join us!

Our council meets every first Wednesday of the month at 8 a.m. at the United Way, and there are many ways to help. Our next big community event is on April 27 at the Cumming Center. The Walk for Recovery. It's a community event to help eliminate stigma, a big issue we've encountered as a council. So please come out and support this event. Flyers are available. Please post them where you can, even on your social media. Drug misuse doesn't discriminate. It affects everybody. It doesn't matter who you are, and it's an issue in our town and all towns.



We are happy to host this 4th Annual Drug Summit with UNG. What a beautiful campus. They have been lovely to work with. Ken is the man "in front of the curtain," making this event happen smoothly. We thank him so much! Thank you to all the resource tables that have come out, showing our community's unity and strength.

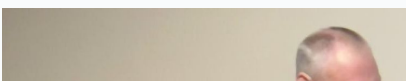


I am grateful to you all for coming tonight. Unfortunately, drug and alcohol misuse is an issue anywhere you go. And so we fight the good fight, united as a community to fight the battle of addiction, and I'm grateful to fight it with you.

I will turn to Cindy Mills, FCDAC's founder and board member, who will facilitate our panel discussions. She has long advocated for drug and alcohol prevention. Welcome, Cindy Mills.

Event Facilitator, Cindy J Mills, FCDAC Founder

"Tonight, we are hearing from school professionals, a student in recovery, a school Substance Use Prevention Coach, get an update on how opioid settlement monies are being used and how it helped UNG get more dually trained Mental Health/Addiction Certified professionals into



our community, state, and country," Cindy Mills stated at the opening of the 4th Annual Drug Summit.



Our school professionals will give us a sense of what they see in the schools, what they are doing, and what they hope to do.

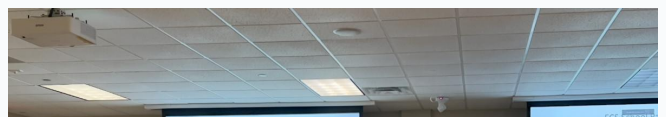
The professional panel consisted of: **Amy Dykes**, Student Support Coordinator, North Forsyth High School; **Kristen Glass**, Principal of Poole's Mill Elementary School; **Katie Newman**, Community Engagement and Wellness Coordinator, East Forsyth High School; **Dr. Megan Thompson**, Principal of Lakeside Middle School; and **Drew Hayes**, Principal, ACE.

What is your biggest concern, and how are you addressing it and reaching out to the parents?
Unanimously, the panel agreed that **Vapes are the biggest concerns** in the schools at the high school level. **Katie Newman** said, "At East Forsyth, I learned through our Addiction Club, One Day at a Time (ODAT), that students' **perception of harm is present**. They know vaping is harmful and do it anyway." Vapes the panel noted present challenges due to the easy accessibility of the high-potency THC vapes, and when a student has taken a hit, sometimes the results have been extreme and scary. The ease at which vapes can be gotten, the fact that they are odorless, and easily hidden because the vapes are made to look like pens and flash drives make them challenging to catch. Vapes can be shared; they are accessible and are marketed to the young by making fruit-flavored cartridges. THC addictiveness and the mental health issues it causes are as extreme as psychosis. To that concern, **Drew Hayes** added that it is challenging to reach the community and families with the message of just how addictive and destructive these vapes are. "We know that the potency of THC is now so much higher than when parents were exposed to it. Back when we were in high school in the 80's and 90's, the THC level was 2.4 percent. Now it's 30, 40 on up percent. And that includes the **THC edibles**. The outcomes for students today are devastating," he said.

Our approach has been education on the dangers of abuse.

What effect does marijuana legalization in other states have on community perception? "Absolutely legalization

leads to misconceptions among parents, and culturally, it is harder to convince the general population that THC is so harmful when we are seeing many states legalize



to be harmful when we're seeing many states legalize it. "The reality is THC is more harmful than parents realize, with long-lasting mental health problems. Additionally, we don't know what's in them, and the leading cause of death for 18 to 45-year-olds is drug overdose. Fentanyl, in particular, kills," responded Principal Hayes. "Education is still key, along with helping people break free once the problem is present," he added.



How can the school help? Both Dr. Thompson, Principal at Lakeside Middle, and Poole's Principal, **Kristen Glass**, said they work hard to let the students know, find and use safe adults to answer their questions or alert them if they see something with their friends, and help their parents with material on how to have conversations about these issues with their children. They stress that the conversations should start early and be ongoing.

East Forsyth High School's Addiction Club uses the community school strategy. It discusses all types of addictions to food and coffee, in addition to nicotine, alcohol, and drugs, and encourages help-seeking behavior. **Research shows how important relationships are, creating connections with others that lead to healthy choices.**

Cindy pointed out that many kids say that even though they are in schools with a high student population, they have no friends.

Another program used is **Sources of Strength**. It's a prevention program that uses the power of peer social networks to create healthy norms and culture, ultimately preventing suicide, violence, bullying, and substance misuse. Sources of Strength aims to prevent adverse outcomes by increasing well-being, help-seeking, resiliency, healthy coping, and belonging.

Amy Dykes from North Forsyth High, "We have a Substance Prevention Coach, **Ainsley Miller**, who meets with students both individually and in small groups weekly. "This has been so beneficial to our students and teachers because now we all have a person on campus with knowledge and resources to funnel situations and questions to before more serious problems develop. The coach shows and provides kids with experiences of real fun without having to rely on substances. Having that resource on campus has helped students and parents open up and seek resources. A struggle is not your identity; help is available with hope, not judgment," she said.

Cindy added that we are entering our sixth year with a drug counselor in two of our schools. North Forsyth got a Substance Prevention Coach two years ago. **In December, we were able to secure a grant and other funding that will allow us to add three more drug counselors to the schools, which is huge.**

"Ninety percent of the students," said Principal Hayes, "coming to the Gateway (alternative school) are coming in because of THC offenses. Having a team approach and resources like prevention coaches and having **FCDAC Parent Partners**-parents with the experience of having a child struggle with addiction- for Parent Nights are all tools in our toolbox, and students and parents are starting to use our tools. Our goal is not to punish but to support and educate."

"We are 6 or 7 years old with a drug counselor at our school, and I have received calls from all over the country because we are on the cutting edge in providing this type of resource inside the school buildings," Hayes said.

Changing gears, **another addiction** that is causing problems at school is **cell phones and social media**. Children are given cell phones at younger and younger ages and are not taught appropriate use. **Cell phones are highly addictive**, and if students have phones, they have problems focusing and concentrating because their brains are looking for that next hit from TikTok or Snapchat, the panel reported. **We can not emphasize enough that when you give a child a cell phone, you provide them**

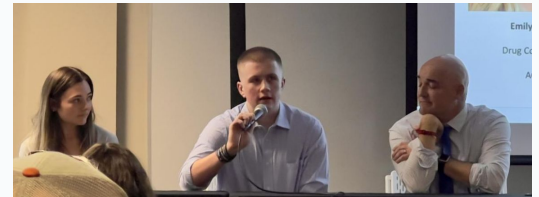
reporter. We can not emphasize enough that when you give a child a cell phone, you provide them with access to the world and the world access to them. Conversations about usage and children observing self-imposed restraint and limits by adults should be ongoing from a young age.



Our 2nd Panel:
Jake Fischer, student; Emily Ennis, Drug Counselor, ACE; and Drew Hayes, Principal ACE.

Our topic for this panel will focus on our Substance Abuse Counselor and on a student who has been impacted by the program.

Jake Fischer, a senior at Forsyth Academy, told his progression from vaping THC to smoking weed and eventually taking Xanax and selling marijuana so he could smoke it for free. "I started vaping THC as a freshman at South Forsyth High School. At first, it was one cartridge a week, then two, to one a day, and then I moved to smoke weed. Then I realized I could sell it and smoke it for free. I sold it at school and kept it in my car. Then, I met a girl who used Xanax, and so I added that to my drug use. I had a grand mal seizure as a result of using Xanax. It sent me to the hospital, and I was put on Keppra. A side-effect of that drug is Keppra Rage, and I had an incident of it that I don't even remember. I attacked my dad. I woke up in the hospital again. My three-year drug problem started with THC, which I believe is a gateway drug, and my life spiraled out of control pretty fast.



What advice do you give other students knowing what you know now? "Vaping is a mixture of many chemicals, and other drugs like Meth besides THC can be included," said Jake. "You don't know what you are getting. I think I've learned I can surround myself with (people who are) winners who are not going to shove drinks or drugs in your face when you are down or having a bad day. Choose friends wisely. It is easier to quit if you don't start."

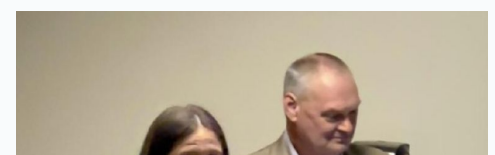
Could you give any advice to parents? Jake recommended, "Know what addiction looks like; when you see it, take action."

How about advice to school officials? "The problem of drugs, especially vaping, is more prevalent than you think," said Jake. "It's a battleground for sure."

What are your plans now, Jake? "I am getting ready to take a test for the military called The Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery. I want to join active duty reserves, take classes at UNG, and get into the Nursing program to help people," he said.

Do you have a plan as to how you will maintain your recovery? "In recovery, you are going to be tested. I am committed to sticking to the 12-step program and hanging out with people who don't do drugs or alcohol."

Emily Ennis is the drug counselor at ACE and works with Jake at Forsyth Academy. He also worked with Gabby Breiten, the previous counselor before Emily. "When I came in," said Emily, "I met with all the students in the small groups, and at that time, Jake was



all the students in the small groups, and at that time, Jake was established in the program and working his (12-step) program. I made myself readily available to Jake and all the students for counseling and support whenever they needed to talk. Jake has been sober for a year. He is a leader, and I could call on him to open up situations for discussions in small groups and even lead groups. He was an encourager and a support to others on their journey. **Sober recreation activities** are opportunities for fun without drugs or alcohol. Jake was always on board with the activities, helping demonstrate that you can have fun without being high. That was an essential key to my maintaining sobriety at a young age."



"As a school drug counselor, I offer resources and workshops for our students' parents. We have speakers like the FCDAC's Parent Partners committee, who provide parents with real-life experience, resources, and hope," she said.

How did Emily's support help you, Jake? "It is just easier talking to someone who has walked a similar path, understands, and isn't judging me. She also facilitated growing our relationships with others on the same journey. I knew I wasn't alone. I learned that connecting with others made me stronger," Jake said.

How do you measure success, Drew? "We keep straightforward metrics because we can't determine the outcomes, Drew Hayes said. "What we can use to measure success is the program's progress. How many students are you meeting with weekly, individually, and in group sessions? How many sober events are you hosting monthly, and what does the participation look like? We can keep track of individual parent meetings and parent nights. **We know that having a counselor on campus makes a huge difference.** When a student needs to talk to his counselor, he knows he can count on talking to them the same day or, at most, the next day. If the student is confident about that, he can hang on until then. Hanging on until you can get support is a vital step in recovery.



Opioid Update - UNG Addiction Certification - 3rd Panel

Cindy said, "As many of you know, our county joined the opioid lawsuits and received a portion of settlement money, which will be dispersed over a 16—or 17-year payout. We are excited to report that FCDAC and other prevention organizations in Forsyth applied for and received grants from the settlement. This money will continue to fund our work. Our county gets the money, some 1.3 Million at this point, in intervals. The money is earmarked explicitly for cleaning up the opioid devastation through education and prevention. We use the grant money to collaborate with many arms of prevention. We are fortunate that UNG is partnering with us to use part of the grant: **Dr. Katie Lamberson, UNG Assistant Dean of the College of Health Sciences and Professions. "UNG's Addiction Counseling program is the only accredited master's addiction counseling track in GA.** Because of the opioid grant money, instead of offering only one class for 30 people, we could hire two more teachers to accommodate more students," Dr. Lamberson said.

"Our program is unique because we offer an additional 12 hours of specialization in Addiction," Dr. Lamberson said. "The students can get licensed in the state as **Mental Health Providers with a specialization in addiction.** They have met the educational requirements for a Certified Masters

Addiction Counselor credential on top of meeting the requirements for a Mental Health Counselor. These students are dually trained, and as we know, those who struggle with mental health don't all struggle with addiction, but **every person who struggles with addiction struggles with mental health.** Dually trained practitioners are in high demand nationwide," she added.



Thank you, Jason Hanlan, videographer and Central High School video club, for getting the meeting on YouTube in record time!

Watch the Drug Summit, click play on your left!

Resource Tables at the Summit



FCDAC - Marti Roveda, Parent Partners, and Youth Council members, Manasvi Kondamudi and Keertana Uppala



Live Life Counseling



Avita



No Longer Bound



District 2 Public Health



Georgia Highlands

FCDAC Work and Programs Round-up

Kayden's Korner



You guys are the best! Our 4th Annual Drug Summit at UNG on February 4 was an outstanding example of our strength and resolve to bring vital information about what





is happening in schools to our community. Big thank you to Dr. Katie Lamberson and UNG

for securing UNG Cumming Campus for our event. Drugs are present, with vaping being the most problematic.

Vapes are odorless and easily hidden. They contain who knows what, from acetate and heavy metals to drugs like nicotine, THC, Meth, and others!

thank you

We had 100 attendees sign in, 14 resource tables, and great feedback from the community!



Thank you to our coalition members and Cindy Mills, our founder. I am so proud to be a part of it!

Cumming City Center,
April 27, 2025

MARK YOUR CALENDAR!



Our next FCDAC Council Meeting is on
Wednesday, March 5
8 a.m.
United Way Offices

Community Outreach, Youth, Members, and Partners



Special report by
Susan Tanner

**19TH ANNUAL
DRUG & ALCOHOL AWARENESS
Breakfast**



Great turnout on January 18th at the 19th Annual Drug & Alcohol Awareness Breakfast!



Sheriff Ron Freeman addresses the attendees



FCDAC members: Amy Leurart Julie Cordry, Susan Tanner, Cindy Mills, and Emily Ennis

What a very special morning at the **19th Annual Drug & Alcohol Awareness Breakfast** on Saturday, January 18th at Harmony Grove Baptist Church in Cumming, GA. A group of men from the church called "The Brotherhood" prepared a big delicious homemade breakfast buffet.

The guest speaker was **Elizabeth Bragg**, a recovered addict with a gut-wrenching story of what led her to drugs and alcohol and how she fought through to sobriety. Other attendees were given the opportunity to speak, which included Cindy Mills, Forsyth County Sheriff Ron Freeman, the Harmony Grove Church pastor, Celebrate Recovery, My Way Rehab for men, Julie Cordry of Prodigal Child Ministries, Coman Allgood (life coach and mentor), Susan Tanner of the Monday Night Mom's Group and Mentor Me, and a few others such as a parent or grandparent of an addict.

The event ended around 10:00 a.m., and many stayed to talk and exchange resources.

Parent Partners Corner

by Ashley Dickerson and Marti Roveda



Marti Roveda

Marti's only child began his recovery journey at the age of 16, igniting Marti's passion for educating and supporting parents of youth struggling with substance use disorders. Driven by this commitment, she founded **Equanimity Parent Coaching** to help parents find peace and serenity during the challenging times of their parenting journey. Marti is also an active member of FCDAC and volunteers as a parent advisor for an under-18 recovery program in Nashville.

The Parent Partners Committee is ramping up its efforts in prevention advocacy and outreach, creating more opportunities to support families in our community. February kicked off with tabling at the FCDAC Drug Summit, where we connected with key partners from the Forsyth County School District and other organizations. The Summit not only celebrated the district's incredible work in supporting youth struggling with substance use but also underscored the urgent need for greater outreach and education for parents. Recognizing this gap, the Parent

Partners Committee is eager to expand its efforts to meet this need.

Looking ahead, we are scheduled to share our strengths, hopes, and experiences at Gateway Parents Nights on February 25th and April 15th. These events have proven invaluable in helping parents find the support they need for themselves and their children.



Ashley Dickerson

Ashely currently holds the role of Revenue Accounting

Director at AT&T and is an active member of FCDAC. Her

personal journey as a parent of a child who suffers from Substance Use Disorder covers a lot of pain, frustration, and isolation; but also a lot of hope and healing. Ashley openly shares her story of personal recovery with other parents to reduce the shame

Additionally, Marti continues her advocacy efforts with Georgians for Responsible Marijuana Policy (GRMP) during the 2025 Legislative session, working to close the Delta-8 loophole through written and spoken testimony for Senate Bill 33.

Together, we are committed to fostering education, awareness, and meaningful change for families navigating the challenges of substance use.

parents to reduce the shame and stigma of the disease and help start the dialog among parents who may be struggling to find support for themselves. She contributes her insights monthly to the *Strategizer*."

Youth Outreach

Youth Council



Keertana Uppala

Keertana is a West Forsyth High School freshman. While researching

ways to build up community, I discovered the Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council. It interests me because of the plethora of ways you can be involved. Even the tiniest of actions made by teenagers can bring about significant change.. I am involved with **Youth Law Institute** writing articles related to law related issues. I am part of **GYJC**, training to become qualified to serve as an advocate, judge, bailiff and juror in deposition hearings. My school clubs are FBLA, DECA, UNICEF, and Debate.

Youth Recruitment Project

I am beginning a **youth recruitment project** and am very excited about it!

My project revolves around finding youth in Forsyth County who, like me, want to see youth survive their teen years and thrive in healthy ways through service and participation in FCDAC. **I've been recruiting people through word of mouth, posting on TikTok, and finding individuals on LinkedIn interested in the opportunities FCDAC offers.** I am discussing the activities and services youth can participate in with Rachel and other established youth members. Prominent projects might include passion projects like **Manasvi Kondamudi's Narcan and Prevention Kits**. Volunteering at the Drug Summit and Walk for Recovery, establishing student-led drug-free clubs in schools, and working on letter and phone calling campaigns and trips to the state capitol to meet legislative leaders are all possibilities that can have a great impact.

Our Partners in Prevention

More Great Community Events from our Friends at the ...



2x a day/7 days a week
10 AM & 7 PM EST

zoom.us/j/695949293

Meeting ID: 695 949 293
Passcode: recovery

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Georgia Council for Recovery
Recovery from Addiction

Coming to Fayette March 25-27, 2025

February 20, 2025

Please help us... help our kids

PROUDLY PRESENTING

CHRIS HERREN SPEAKING SERIES

Chris Herren, a former NBA basketball star, is a renowned speaker and advocate for substance abuse prevention. With a powerful story of overcoming addiction, Chris had dedicated his life to education teenagers on the dangerous paths that alcohol and drugs lead us. He champions compassion and dignity in how students treat each other. Chris speaks to the hearts of these young students helping them understand the decisions they make now will have a lasting impact on their lives tomorrow. So far Chris has spoken to over one million teenagers... we would like him to speak to our teenagers in Coweta and Fayette County as well. We have too many teens losing their lives to alcohol and drugs. This will save lives.

We have a commitment from the Herren Foundation for Mr. Herren to speak to students at every high school in both Coweta and Fayette Counties... nearly 14,000 teenagers! Additionally there will be two evening parent / community events. The dates for Coweta are Oct 28 - 29, 2024 and for Fayette Mar 25 - 27, 2025.

We are a non-profit and 100% of the financial burden of this initiative is on us as communities. Individuals can make a donation of any amount on our website listed below. Business and Corporate sponsorships start at \$500 and are rewarded with a powerful advertising package. Check out our webpage and if you need more information please reach out to our program manager Tara Hannon by email at TaraHannon@FayetteFactor.org or by phone 470-651-6374

THANK YOU! www.FACT4future.org THANK YOU!

Highland Rivers Behavioral Health

CAREER FAIR

Looking for a new career opportunity? Come join Highland Rivers Behavioral Health at our next career fair in Austell, Georgia!

- Therapist Lead
- Therapist
- Substance Use Counselor
- Vocational Specialist
- Case Manager
- Certified Peer Specialist
- Vehicle Operator
- SOAR Specialist
- Supported Employment Specialist
- Housing Support Specialist

DATE: 02.20.2025

TIME: 10:00 am - 3:00 pm

JOIN NOW

<https://highlandrivers.org/careers/>

keylagarcia@highlandrivers.org

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3rd ANNUAL

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Free Thrifting Extravaganza

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2/7/25 at the Forsyth Central
High School Front Office

ARAD2025
ASSOCIATION OF RECOVERY ADVOCATES

ARAD 2025

Monday 3 March

Meet Your Legislators

South Steps

Suits, Dress Shirts, Ties, Belts, Skirts, Blouses, Slacks, and gently used Professional Dress Shoes in ALL

Donated clothes can be worn for Dress for Success, Interviews, Graduation, Mock Trial, Debate Club,



Second Floor Inside Capitol

STATE ID REQUIRED TO ENTER CAPITOL

10 AM Registration Open

11 AM Press Conference

12:30 PM Meet Your Legislators



MONDAY
3 MARCH



TIME
10:00 AM

#GARecovers



2025 Prevention Days Be Part of the Movement!

Your voice matters. Your advocacy makes a difference.

Join us for Prevention Days where we are coming together to take action on substance use and suicide prevention in our communities. Whether you are a professional, advocate, student, or concerned community member - this event is for **YOU!**



STRONGER TOGETHER
EMPOWERMENT THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



STRONGER TOGETHER
BUILDING BRIDGES WITH COMPASSION

Suicide Prevention Day

March 20, 2025 | Sloppy Floyd Building/ Floyd Room

[Register Here](#)

Substance Use Prevention Day

February 27, 2025 | The Georgia Freight Depot

[Register Here](#)

Narcan Virtual Training

Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities Narcan virtual training sessions

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Local News



Georgia Council
for Recovery
Freedom from Addiction

Apply Now For The CARES Academy 71!!!

Applications will close on Friday, February 21st, 2025 @ 4PM
Group Interviews will take place on Tuesday, March 18th, 2025.
Academy Dates April 21st - 25th, 2025

This will be an in-person training

the 40 hour training. 5 CARES Academy attendees must adhere to the personnel rules or guidelines set by their employers.6. In order to retain certification, CARES must earn 12 CARES recovery oriented continuing education units CEUs each calendar year following the year they attend the CARES Academy.

- B.GENERAL STATEMENT OF ELIGIBILITY & PRIORITY People in recovery who are interested in becoming a CARES must apply to the Georgia Council for Recovery (GC4R). Following an initial screening by the CARES Academy Selection Committee, qualified candidates are invited to a group interview. Final sections are based on a combination of the submitted application materials, verifications, and group interview ratings. Group Interviews will take place on Tuesday, March 18th, 2025.

[Click Here to Register](#)

The Certified Addiction Recovery Empowerment Specialist Academy was developed by the Georgia Council for Recovery to create a workforce of peers that provide recovery support services to the communities of Georgia. Funded by Georgia's Department of Behavioral Health and Development Disabilities, the CARES Academy is the first of its kind in the country to be Medicaid billable.

- A. Information regarding the CARES Academy 1. Upon completion of the 40 hour CARES Academy, candidates must pass a written exam.2. Tuition for the CARES training is free. Hotel accommodations in double rooms will be provided for participants who live 60 miles or more from the training site. 3. Lunch and breaks are provided for all participants. GC4R does not provide other meals.4. GC4R does not reimburse CARES Academy attendees for their time during

State News

EXCITING NEWS ARAD 2025

Monday, 3 March



The Georgia Recovery Community will convene inside the State Capitol under the Gold Dome for a special program highlighting that Recovery is Real in communities across Georgia.

Please join us for this very special event. Wear your favorite RCO / ARSC / recovery shirt - let's send a message that recovery is

South Steps
Second Floor Inside Capitol

STATE ID REQUIRED TO ENTER CAPITOL

10 AM Registration Open

11 AM Press Conference

12:30 PM Meet Your Legislators



MONDAY
3 MARCH



TIME
10:00 AM

#GARecovers

in communities across Georgia

We will have a special program and then meet our local legislators and hold signs

Let's send a powerful positive message as we advocate for legislation, programs, and funding for peer lead recovery

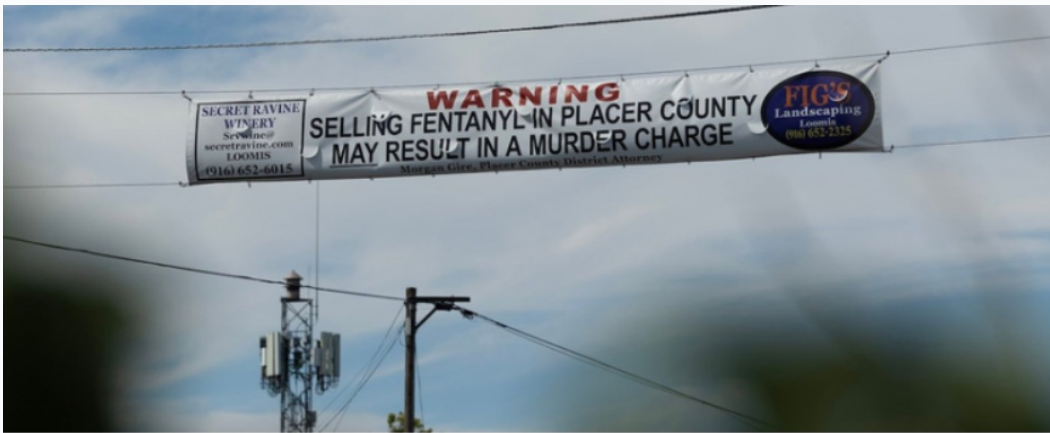
#GARecovers

National News

Californians want to change course in Treatments for Addiction and Homelessness*

*Excerpts follow from Cal Matters' opinion piece that appeared in the *Santa Monica Daily Press*, January 29, 2025.

In an article titled, *Californians made it clear they want a different approach to addiction and homelessness*, by Cal Matters January 29, 2025 in Opinion, *Santa Monica Daily Press* he writes, "California's drug crisis has only escalated, with so-called "compassionate solutions"



A sign warning against selling fentanyl in Placer County hangs over Taylor Road in Loomis on July 24, 2023. Photo by Miguel Gutierrez Jr., CalMatters

like harm reduction and past policies that decriminalized hard drugs, making things worse.

Many drug addicts in the state have essentially faced two stark choices: homelessness or incarceration. This false dichotomy has normalized substance abuse, endangering public safety, and failed to address the

root causes of both homelessness and addiction.

In response, [California voters last fall overwhelmingly passed Proposition 36](#), a third option that prioritizes rehabilitation over incarceration and offers a clear path to recovery, helping break the cycle of addiction and homelessness.

Programs like syringe exchanges, for example, have fallen short in addressing addiction itself. While well-intentioned, these programs have led to unintended consequences, including public spaces littered with used needles, increased health risks, and the normalization of drug use. While syringe exchanges help reduce disease transmission, they don't always guarantee that people enroll in treatment programs, and research shows they can even increase mortality rates.

The scale of this problem is stark. In 2021 alone, nearly 11,000 Californians died from drug overdoses,

with over two-thirds involving opioids like fentanyl. Each of these lives lost represents a missed opportunity for intervention and recovery. [Prop. 36](#) has given the state a framework to address this crisis by requiring treatment and rehabilitation for people struggling with addiction. This approach has the potential to reduce recidivism, save lives, and help people reclaim their futures."

"California must now leverage the tools Prop. 36 provides a way to move beyond the shortcomings of harm reduction. Drug courts, for example, offer a proven model for addressing addiction by combining judicial oversight with mandatory treatment and rehabilitation services. Studies show that these programs reduce both substance use and criminal behavior, making them an effective strategy for fostering long-term recovery.

Public education campaigns also play a vital role and can shift cultural attitudes toward addiction and encourage healthier choices — as they did for smoking and drunk driving. School-based education programs, community outreach, and interventions for at-risk youth can help us create a prevention-focused culture.

The need for action is urgent. As Robert F. Kennedy Jr., a former addict and the current nominee to lead the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has noted, "Addiction requires long-term treatment, not short-term harm mitigation." His leadership could inspire California to expand its commitment to treatment-based solutions and reimagine its approach to the opioid epidemic.

Normalizing addiction is neither compassionate nor effective — it's destructive."

Read the entire article [HERE](#).

Call for Advocacy

2025 Legislative Priorities



Jeff Breedlove, Strategic Policy Advisor at the Georgia Council for Recovery, looks forward to 2025.

Recovery is Real

As we begin 2025, the **Georgia Council for Recovery** has prepared an aggressive set of legislative priorities at the federal, state, and local levels to break stigma and advance peer and family positive addiction recovery policy. While great strides have been made, there is much work to do in 2025 at every level of government and in every community across Georgia.

"The reality of Substance Use Disorder (addiction) medical issues demands a serious and dedicated response from government at all levels. Our communities are stepping up, we need our government to follow suit. In the United States, every year, more than 107,000 people are dying fentanyl poisoning / overdoses and 178,000 from alcohol use. Georgia's annual share of those tragic deaths are 2,687 and 3,953 respectively. Georgia is facing an epidemic regarding addiction; our public servants must provide new funding to support peer led recovery programs," *said Laurisa Guerrero, Executive Director, The Georgia Council for Recovery.*

"The Number One domestic Policy issue is the Addiction Epidemic. The Number one cause of death in America, including Georgia, for people 18 - 45 is overdose / fentanyl poisoning. There are 46 MILLION Americans in active addiction / 1.3 MILLION across Georgia. There are over 900,000 people across Georgia in recovery from addiction / 29 MILLION nationwide. Together, with our family and friends we

will be working to educate our public officials at the federal, state, and local level on the importance of expanding funding for existing peer led recovery programs in communities across Georgia," *said Jeff Breedlove, Strategic Policy Advisor, The Georgia Council for Recovery.*

LOCAL

- The Georgia Council for Recovery will expand our work in local communities across Georgia to increase membership in the Georgia Communities Working Group on Addiction and Recovery. As more local elected officials join, the more stigma is broken and peer positive policies are put in place in our local communities.

FEDERAL

- The Georgia Council for Recovery will work with the Georgia Congressional Delegation to increase their public support for the Georgia Recovery Community. The first opportunity is for every member of the Georgia Congressional Delegation to join the Congressional Bipartisan Addiction and Mental Health Task Force and support peer friendly legislation and funding.
- The Georgia Council for Recovery will work with Members of Congress to advance legislation which supports enhanced and dedicated funding for peer led recovery services. The Georgia Council for Recovery will work with RCOs in surrounding states to build a Southeastern US recovery coalition.
- The Georgia Council for Recovery will work with the Trump Administration to support the Office of National Drug Control Policy being elevated to a full Cabinet position and to enhance and expand peer led programs and funding from SAMHSA.

STATE

The 2025 Georgia Council for Recovery Legislative Agenda for the 2025 General Assembly Session

- Expand funding for Recovery Community Organizations
- Work with the General Assembly Working Group on Addiction and Recovery to expand support for peer-led recovery
- Expand funding for Alcohol Use Disorder supports
- Work on legislation for standards in recovery housing
- Expand funding for Maternal Peer Support
- Work on legislation to define a Recovery Community Organization
- Work on legislation to enhance and modernize support for Georgia nurses who enter into the addiction intervention protocol
- Work on legislation to require the University System of Georgia and Technical College System of Georgia to install opioid reversal boxes in all locations across campus where there is an existing AED box
- Work to enforce parity accountability and enforcement by establishing an automated claim denial appeal process and an online scheduling and compliance tool and encourage participation by providers, facilities, and systems in ensuring parity accountability, including the regular submission of parity data to regulators and establishing a single Parity Regulator.
- Work to improve provider licensing and the paneling process to reduce delays in licensing behavioral health professionals to address the state's behavioral health workforce shortage.
- Work to expand workforce capacity including making more efficient use of existing behavioral healthcare providers by providing services via telehealth.
- Grow the Georgia Communities Working Group on Addiction and Recovery
- Work with the Georgia Behavioral Health Innovation and Reform Commission to ensure addiction policies are included in their work

[Contact Jeff Here](#)

FENTANYL IS THE NUMBER ONE KILLER
FOR PEOPLE AGES 18 - 45



BECAUSE WE LOVE
YOU!

Never Assume A Pill Is Real



Stigma silences. Shame isolates.
It's time to change that.

Join the movement to end stigma by
spreading the No Shame Pledge

[Sign the Pledge Here](#)

The No Shame Toolkit

Our newly-updated toolkit is here!

Get your [Toolkit HERE](#)

No Shame Education Program

The No Shame Education Program is a fundamental course on substance addiction and mental health that is universal, innovative, and evidence-informed.

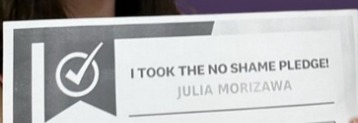
Get your [No Shame Education Program Here](#)

DEFYING SHAME



“ I believe that normalizing addiction and mental health challenges by sharing our lived experiences is one of the most powerful ways to reduce stigma.

As a person in recovery, and as someone who finds purpose through storytelling, I am so grateful that a resource like SAFE Project is available. I am proud to have signed the #NoShame pledge.



Julia Morizawa
Actress • Writer

The Snowball - A Short Film

Alcohol misuse during winter months



Alcohol misuse can snowball when it gets colder and darker. Winter months often drive dangerous increases in alcohol consumption, leading to cirrhosis and other life-threatening conditions. A sobering and creatively portrayed short film by the SafeProject, Snowball effectively gets its message across.



Are you in a cold, dark place?

[Click Here for Resources](#)

On the Calendar

February



- FCDAC Drug Summit, February 4,

UNG

- St. Valentine's Day, February 14
- Central High Dress for Success
- President's Day February 17



FORSYTH COUNTY
DRUG AWARENESS COUNCIL

DONATE
TODAY!



SCAN ME

March



- ARAD 2025, March 3 at the State Capitol
- St. Patrick's Day, March 17
- FACT 4 Future March 25-27 Fayette, GA



FOR RECOVERY

- **Cumming City Center, April 27**

Forsyth County Drug Awareness Council | 240 Elm Street | Cumming, GA 30040 US

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