

Starting a New Chapter

By Libby Brim

It's been a very busy summer at my house. My son just graduated from college, and my daughter just graduated from high school. We went to the ceremonies, celebrated with friends and family, and now we're up to our eyeballs packing and planning for their next chapters. For my son, that means moving into his first apartment several hundred miles away. For my daughter, that means gearing up for dorm life on a large college campus a few hours down the road.

Launching two kids in two different directions at the same time is both incredibly exciting (did I mention my spouse and I will be empty nesters?), and a bit terrifying. For the past two decades we've done everything we could to prepare our kids for independence, and that time has come. Three, two, one...liftoff.

A lot of our focus has been on my daughter since this will be her first living experience away from home. We've pored over lists of what to take, as well as what not to take. So I've tried to focus on the essentials. I want her to have everything that she needs, and I want to have the peace of mind that she's prepared for just about anything, without overdoing it.

In addition to checking things off the dorm list, I've been going through my mental list and asking myself if I've done enough to fully prepare my daughter for what lies ahead. College is a time of enormous independence and exploration. And it's hard not to worry about the role that alcohol and other drugs play on college campuses. However, there's nothing on the college supply checklist that deals with that. I can't look to Target or Amazon for that solution. But my teen and I have talked about it. A lot.

Our conversations about alcohol and other drugs started at an early age. In elementary school, some of the information seemed to go over her head, or she just listened and didn't seem all that interested or concerned. As she got older, some of those conversations were peppered with lots of questions on her part. Sometimes our talks consisted of me talking and her doing a lot of eye-rolling or responding with "I know, Mom" or "Don't you trust me?" The truth is, I DO trust her. But I also know the environment that she's walking into. I know that her teenage brain isn't fully developed yet. And I know it can be hard to say no when everyone else is saying yes. So we continue to talk....and talk.

It's natural for me to wonder if all of our conversations have made a difference. Research tells me they have and they will. Strong family support, including positive communication and healthy expectations, can help reduce the likelihood of risky behaviors such as alcohol and other drug use, **by as much as 50%**. Is it a guarantee that our kids will make healthy decisions 100% of the time? Absolutely not. But will they think about some of those conversations when faced with decisions about alcohol and other drugs? Most likely, yes.

So if you're like me and you're checking off all of those boxes for the dorm list, don't forget to include a few important (and possibly awkward) conversations. Even though it may not seem like it, they're listening.

Need help starting a conversation? Go to talkaboutitmo.com.



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conversation starters

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WSDC Grant – Making Medications Safe for All

By Mike Foley



In April PreventEd was awarded a grant from the WSDC Foundation to support our efforts around the prevention of opioid misuse. Opioid use disorder can often begin with the misuse of unused prescription opioids. For several years PreventEd has received funding to purchase and distribute Drug Disposal bags, which safely destroy unused or expired medications, making them

unavailable for misuse and safe for disposal in the normal trash.

The campaign was launched in April to coincide with Earth Day, in recognition of the huge environmental issue caused by the improper disposal of unused prescription and over-the-counter medications.

Through the grant from WSDC Foundation, PreventEd has been able to leverage the power of broadcast media partnership with Hubbard Radio and 2060 Digital to get the message out to listeners throughout the St. Louis region. You may have heard

the radio ads, seen a message on social media, or encountered the disposal bags at any of a dozen remote broadcasts done by one of Hubbard's radio stations.

If you would like to learn more about how you can get a drug disposal bag and/or safely dispose of your medications additional information is available on our website at www.prevented.org/resources/safe-disposal-resource/



conversation starters

SUMMER 2023

The newsletter of PreventEd

Recovery Friendly Workplace

By Nichole Dawsey



In 2018, New Hampshire launched a Recovery Friendly Workplace (RFW) initiative. This initiative equips employers with the knowledge and tools they need to better understand substance use disorder and to better support employees who have been impacted. Missouri developed its own RFW initiative a few years ago through the University of Missouri Extension and has been picking up steam ever since.

I'm thrilled to share that our Board of Directors unanimously approved a new personnel policy indicating that PreventEd is a Recovery Friendly Workplace:

PreventEd values the health and safety of all our employees and is dedicated to supporting those employees with substance use disorder through our participation in the Recovery Friendly Workplace (RFW) Missouri Initiative. As a Recovery Friendly Workplace, PreventEd:

- Recognizes that substance use disorder is a disease to be treated the same as any other medical condition.
- Recognizes that there are many paths to recovery and that recovery may look different from employee to employee.
- Encourages employees who are struggling to maintain recovery to seek help and to voluntarily participate in the PreventEd's Employee Assistance Plan.
- Endeavors to provide employees with the tools and connections necessary to achieve and/or maintain recovery.

We are one of a handful of organizations that have received this designation in Missouri.

But what does this policy *mean*? This designation means that we are going to keep doing what we have always done to support our employees in long-term recovery. A few examples: We allow employees to take time during their day to access mental health support; we offer a robust EAP program; we prioritize businesses owned by people in recovery; and we celebrate recovery birthdays.

Speaking of the last two...

Gerald Watson, one of our staff members, celebrated his 20th recovery birthday on May 5th. We used this momentous occasion as an opportunity to throw a party. The folks from the Missouri Extension were on hand to officially give us our RFW designation while we shared fellowship and ate delicious BBQ made by Gerald himself! We had coffee and cookies from Coffee Culture, a local business owned by a person in long-term recovery.



Left to right: Jenny Armbruster, Deputy Executive Director at PreventEd; Gerald Watson, Fresh Start Coalition Coordinator; Ann McCauley, MEd, Rural Opioids Technical Assistance Project Director; Nichole Dawsey, Executive Director at PreventEd

We are so incredibly proud of our RFW designation. But let's be real—we are much prouder of Gerald. His steadfast commitment to his well-being is what's truly worth celebrating. And that's the power of the RFW designation...creating a workplace environment where we can support and uplift employees like Gerald.

The policy and the designation is not an end; it's a beginning. I'm always open to hearing ideas about how else we can support our team members, so please send any thoughts my way. And, if you are interested in your workplace becoming designated as Recovery Friendly, visit <https://recoveryfriendlymo.com>.

Another Unfortunate Shift in the Opioid Epidemic

By Stacie Zellin



Stacie Zellin
Community Education
Coordinator

Depending on who you ask, you might get several different answers as to when the heroin and opioid epidemic started. Some might say as far back as the 1980s, the 1970s, or even the 1960s. Of course, in those decades, we did not employ a public health response as we do now—instead, people struggling with substance use disorders were incarcerated.

Around 2010, when we arguably started paying attention and directing resources to the opioid epidemic, prescription pain medications were driving overdoses. Public health responded to the oversupply and overprescribing of prescription pain medications with revised prescribing guidelines, prescription drug monitoring programs, and campaigns to encourage people to safely use, store, and dispose of their medications. But then we saw yet another shift in the epidemic, transitioning from prescription pain pill misuse to heroin misuse. The previously mentioned public health interventions are still helpful, but they don't necessarily address the changes. We must adapt to the evolving epidemic and craft new public health interventions and messaging.

Fast forward to today, and fentanyl is overwhelmingly driving overdoses. But even within the timeframe of fentanyl leading the opioid epidemic, we have seen nuance and micro-shifts. The availability of fentanyl tablets, including those that resemble existing pharmaceuticals (i.e., counterfeit pills), changes how we understand the circumstances of overdose deaths, and informs how we can work to prevent them.

It's 2023 and the epidemic has shifted yet again, and overdose deaths that involve the xylazine are increasing at an alarming rate. According to the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services, xylazine-involved deaths in Missouri increased from 39 deaths in 2021 to 109 deaths in 2022, which is a 180% increase. Xylazine is used in veterinary medicine as a sedative and muscle relaxant, but it is not approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) for use in humans. As it is increasingly being



found in combination with opioids such as fentanyl, xylazine is known as “tranq” or “tranq dope” in the illicit drug market. The drug's reported duration of effect is longer than that of fentanyl; therefore, it may enhance the euphoria and analgesia induced by fentanyl and reduce the frequency of injections.

Because xylazine impacts circulation in the skin, people who inject drugs containing xylazine can develop severe skin wounds and patches of dead and rotting tissue that easily become infected and, if left untreated, may require amputation. Just like other substances, individuals using xylazine can develop a dependence on the drug and can experience withdrawal if they decrease or discontinue their use. Xylazine also impacts the central nervous system, causing respiratory depression. Combined with opioids, xylazine can increase the risk of a fatal overdose. While Narcan/naloxone can reverse the effects of a heroin or opioid overdose, it is not effective in reversing the impacts of xylazine.

Just as we've adapted our conversations about heroin and opioids over the past fifteen years, we will continue to provide up-to-date and science-based information about new and emerging threats such as xylazine. PreventEd will continue the work of prevention and education, as well as supporting our partner organizations in identifying and assisting those at risk of xylazine and opioid use. And while it is hopeful to think that this could be one of the last shifts of the ongoing heroin and opioid epidemic, PreventEd will remain vigilant to further shifts or concerns related to substance use challenges in our communities.



UPCOMING TRAININGS

PreventEd continues to provide our regular roster of trainings virtually. For more information, visit: prevented.org/events

“We must adapt to the evolving epidemic and craft new public health interventions and messaging.”

Leveling Up at Teen Institute

By Joy Carter

We know how great teens can be, and with Teen Institute's theme of Level Up, students were challenged to find their passion and see themselves as someone who is capable of achieving greatness. Teen Institute gave teens an opportunity to embrace their potential for greatness and create a clear path to make a positive impact in their schools and communities.

This life-changing retreat took place in June with teens from across the St. Louis region. Not only did teens gain a wealth of knowledge, but they had fun doing it. Evening activities such as self-defense and karaoke kept teens engaged and helped them forge new friendships. At the end of TI, participants took away the skills needed to create powerful, lasting change for themselves, their friends, their schools, and communities.

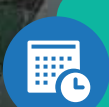


SAVE THE DATE

2023 Topgolf Tournament

Wednesday, September 13, 2023 • 1:00 – 4:00pm
at Topgolf in Chesterfield

Scan QR code to register!



UPCOMING EVENTS

Please visit our website for the most up-to-date event information and registration: prevented.org/events



Be a part of the solution.

Donating is the best way you can help us continue to deliver our top-ranked prevention education. Scan the QR code above to make your donation today and join us in leading the conversation on alcohol and other drugs.



2nd Annual Racial Equity Day Away – Learning & Relaxing

By Alicia Smith

Mission: Create an economical dream day for life-long learners.
Solution: A day away from work duties for “infotainment.”

The Racial Equity Committee (REC) began the 2nd Annual Day Away with an exercise led by Undo Bias, providing an opportunity to anonymously gauge our progress with racial equity. Following a yoga break, we had an informative presentation on Trauma & Substance Use in Indigenous communities by Manasseh Begay, of Washington University. We concluded the day with a field trip to the oldest African American schoolhouses in Missouri, where we were provided an oral history of the structure and the students. We hope that every attendee learned something new and had a great time!