

Project Title/Name: Regional Recovery Support Navigator

Project Description: To partner with GAAMHA, a 501c3 nonprofit provider who has been providing a wide array SUD services in the City of Gardner since 1967, to provide a minimum of 1.0 FTE Recovery Support Navigators to provide care management and systems navigation to support individuals with a diagnosis of a substance use disorder and/ or co-occurring mental health disorders. The RSN is a paraprofessional who partners with a broad base of individuals, clinicians, medical staff, and other organizations to provide outreach, case management, and supports to navigate various systems of care. RSN's engage individuals wherever they present in the treatment system and assist in the creation and implementation of personal goals and objectives around treatment and recovery. RSN's possess a thorough understanding of community culture to address the barriers to successful recovery, use human experience language and provide links to community resources and treatment options. Access to RSN services is based on necessity and a referral by a medical or behavioral health provider, community partner, or other care managers who can identify the need for additional support.

Goals:

1. To provide expedited access to RSN services for residents in need of support related to substance misuse.
2. To assist local Police Departments with follow-ups to overdose events and offer support, education, and care coordination to individuals and families impacted by overdose events.
3. To assist residents and local referral sources with systems navigation, referrals to services, bed searches, etc.

Please describe how PWLLE were involved in your decision making around opioid settlement funded projects and expenditures:

The City of Gardner is fortunate to be the host community of Alyssa's Place, a MA DPH-BSAS funded and CAPRSS accredited, Peer Recovery Support Center. The City of Gardner's full-time Prevention Coordinator, Veronika Patty, worked cooperatively with the staff at Alyssa's Place to convene several community meetings which are attended by PWLLE as well as families and allies impacted by substance use, to assess the needs of our community and determine the most effective use of opioid settlement funds.

Please describe any existing plans you have for future spending:

Plans are underway to repeat this same process in FY26 using community meetings at Alyssa's Place to share the impact of previously spent funds, determine current/future needs of the community, and decide whether to continue to the current use of the funds and/or undertake new projects that best serve PWLLE in the City of Gardner.

Sometimes progress is made before strategies can be implemented. Foundational relationship-building and community engagement work is essential even if it doesn't have a direct cost. Capturing it helps tell the full story of progress. Please describe the opioid abatement progress you've made without expenditures. Examples include community engagement and coordination, capacity building and planning, systems change and readiness.

Gardner's use of opioid settlement funds have helped us to expand upon an already established foundation of cooperation between the City, our residents, local providers, and PWLLE to address concerns around the impact opioids and substance misuse impact our community. In spite of being the smallest city in the Commonwealth with a population just over 21,000 people, Gardner is seen by many as a landmark in the recovery community due to our rich tapestry of support options. We are proud to be the host community for Alyssa's Place PRSC and its active membership of 600+ PWWLE, 2 BSAS licensed Recovery homes including the Carl E. Dahl House (the only Co-Occurring Enhanced Recovery/Therapeutic Farm in the state), 7 sober living facilities, 2 IOP/PHP programs, Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center, ROOTS at Evergreen Grove, Heywood Hospital, 2 FQCHC Community Health Centers that offer OBAT and outpatient services. Our City plays a vital role in maintaining the collaborative environment and cooperative spirit amongst these many entities. Our Prevention Coordinator also serves as the coordinator the Gardner Community Action Team (GCAT). GCAT host monthly meetings where representatives from these provider agencies, municipal and elected officials, PWLLE, and other various community members convene to discuss concerns related to how substance use impacts our community, share resources, and plan community events. Other examples of our community engagement effort include our monthly "Coffee with a Cop" meetings at Alyssa's Place where PWLLE and officers from Gardner PD connect to have meaningful conversations and form bonds that further the work of building a restorative and collaborative relationship between our PWLLE residents and local law enforcement, as well as humanizing issues surrounding substance use for those are tasked with responding to emergencies and service calls. In addition, Gardner hosts one of the largest International Overdose Awareness Day events in Central Mass each August while simultaneously working with our PWLLE community to place memorial ribbons on the front

lawn of City Hall each year to recognize every life lost in Massachusetts to overdose each year.