**KET’s Inside Opioid Addiction Initiative**

In 2016, Kentucky Educational Television (KET) began its “Inside Opioid Addiction” initiative, an ongoing, multi-faceted program to bust stigma, strengthen understanding, and facilitate a recovery-focused revolution in opioid addiction. This series includes the 2017 production of Journey To Recovery: Inside Opioid Addiction television show, a public forum featuring experts, follow-up coverage of legislative efforts by Renee Shaw and the KET Policy team, in-depth conversations on parts of the issue via Renee Shaw’s Connections, and experts being interviewed on KETHealth, Kentucky Tonight, and more.

**Illustrates a creative and innovative approach to the topic and/or story**

This effort by KET was more significant than one television station. It involved the state - and in some cases the world. By linking social media, in-person discussions, facilitating workshops at conferences, and providing educational materials, this project has genuinely changed the stigma of substance abuse – and arguably mental illness – in media as well as our Kentucky communities.

KET’s initiative strengthened (and in some places BUILT) a recovery community – through the facilitation of a public forum, by standardizing language and concepts, and by highlighting the people who are doing WELL instead of only those in deep despair. Groups came together to discuss the series. Online discussions became frank and open. Nonprofits and government entities came to a table to work on problems as one, instead of staying firmly in their silos.

The best part of KET’s Inside Opioid Addiction initiative? It is a living, growing body of work. The information and feedback are relevant far beyond Kentucky. It is presented in a way that resonates with our deep-red state.

**Clear, factual data about mental illness and substance use disorders**

Everything about this initiative is fact-based. The KET team not only did their homework on opioid addiction, but also “recovery” in all its forms, criminal justice processes and reform, medication-assisted treatment, faith-based treatment, harm reduction and more. The video carefully explains addiction in scientific and medical terms. It adds animation to help. It introduces people who are living examples of recovery, and those examples are not homogenous.

The KET group does not dispel myths. They shatter them.

With eyes wide open, the KET team listens and captures the “reality” of opioid addiction without an ulterior motive or end game in sight – other than addressing this issue in a multi-faceted and effective way.

**Provides fresh, non-conventional, in-depth, or unique perspective**

Typically, addiction-related education series are focused on one aspect of the problem. The in-depth approach KET took with this involved a full spectrum view of the treatment options and philosophies and paired them with medical-model discussions. You won’t find a cast of characters to blame. You won’t find a “solution” proposed that is supposed to fix this complex problem in one fell swoop. Instead, viewers and those engaged with the project as a whole get introduced the depth and breadth of the problem.

**Shows those with lived experience in real, multi-dimensional ways**

The KET crew was careful to engage real Kentuckians who are walking a substance abuse recovery walk in different ways. Interviews with each person in recovery still pack in a lot of depth for the timeframe. The staff worked very hard to ensure they weren’t stereotyping or breaking people’s stories into little pieces to fit a predetermined narrative. Sure, interviews are condensed and edited, but overall they serve a purpose of bringing reality to the table, not stereotypes.

**Works to reduce or address stigma around mental illness and substance use.**

The works speak for themselves. The KET team was careful to include person-first language, to honor the wishes of all involved, and to steer discussion in a healthy, non-judgmental manner across all their platforms.

**Conclusion**

The media aspects of this project are to be commended separately. Adding them to a multi-media and multi-channel effort to stay on top of this issue illustrates a commendable commitment to busting stigma, finding truth, and helping Kentuckians navigate the often misunderstood world of substance abuse and opioid addiction. I’m pleased to submit KET’s “Journey to Recovery” and “Inside Opioid Addiction” for the Mental Health America Media Award.

Sincerely,

Marcie Timmerman, MHA

Executive Director

Mental Health America of Kentucky, Inc.