

Health & Wellness in 2021

A SPECIAL PUBLICATION OF

The Stanly News & Press

Featuring:

- a look at help for substance abuse;
- one local spot that has helped cheer up the community for more than 50 years;
- healthy eating;
- and more.



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Sandy Huneycutt (CNA) – 5 years, (Beautician) – 43 years; Christine Benjamin (Housekeeping/Dietary) – 9 years;
Back Row: Samantha Jones (Housekeeping/Dietary) – 3 years; Lashica Johnson (Activity Director, Med Tech) – 11 years;
Rev. Lowell Brown (Chaplain) – 17 years, Laura Curcio (CNA/Med Tech) – 22 years.

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Center for Prevention Services works to educate, curb substance abuse in Stanly

By Chris Miller

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StanlyNewsPress.com

Two years ago, well before COVID-19 emerged on the scene, Stanly County was reeling from another deadly epidemic: substance abuse. Stanly was consistently ranked for a number of months as the number one county in the state

when it came to opioid overdoses.

Stanly's struggles though did provide a silver lining in one respect: it attracted some much-needed attention from the Charlotte-based Center for Prevention Services, which awarded a five-year, \$1.26 million Partnership for Success Grant (PSG) two years ago to serve Stanly. The grant, funded by the Substance

Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, began October 2019 and is scheduled to run through Sept. 30, 2024.

The grant provided Stanly with more than \$500,000 in 2019 and 2020 for initiatives to curb substance abuse. CPS is slated to spend around \$253,000 for 2021. These prevention efforts have included,

among other things, educational outreach to students, coordinating medication take back events and bolstering Stanly County's Project Lazarus Coalition.

"Despite of the pandemic, we feel like we have achieved a lot," CPS grant manager Neetu Verma said.

■ See CENTER, 8

Health officials and law enforcement take part in a recent medication take back event.



Cheer Shop brightens lives for more than 50 years

By Chris Miller

Chris.Miller@

StanlyNewsPress.com

The Cheer Shop, inside Atrium Health Stanly, celebrated quite the milestone last year as it celebrated its 50th anniversary in June.

Established in 1970 as a “happy haven” for hospital staff to relax and enjoy a snack, the shop is a free-standing retail store owned not by the hospital but by the volunteers who work there, said Kim Davis, director of volunteer services at the hospital and head of the Cheer Shop. The shop contains items such as baby clothes, kids toys, snacks, gifts, flowers and jewelry.

The purpose of the shop, as stated in its charter, is “to promote and support the hospital; to promote health careers to worthy students through scholarships for education; to operate a shop in the hospital for the sale of merchandise for patients, visitors and staff; and to engage in activity for the improvement of health conditions in Stanly County.”

The founders of the shop were Lucinda Brown, Daisy Fort and J. Crenshaw Thompson, Davis said.

Albemarle lawyer Charles Brown, Lucinda’s husband, said that in late 1969 and early 1970, she “invited a group to meet at

the Brown home and discuss the proposal for a cheer shop at the Stanly County Hospital. The proposal gained support among members of the hospital board and those in the medical community.”

Brown said his wife later served as head of the Cheer Shop and also as president of the Hospital Auxiliary.

The proceeds of the shop go to its scholarship fund, which awards scholarships to graduating seniors at all Stanly County high schools, including those at Gray Stone and Stanly Early College, planning to pursue careers in any healthcare-related field. The shop normally awards four to six seniors each year, each totaling \$1,000. This past year, due to the pandemic, only one scholarship was presented.

Brown said his family has funded the Lucinda Courtney Brown Scholarship through the Cheer Shop each year since Lucinda’s death in 1981.

“We have fundraisers that we do plus any proceeds from the Cheer Shop go towards the scholarship foundation,” Davis said.

About 45 volunteers typically help run the shop, which is still open despite the coronavirus pandemic, though Davis is the

■ See **CHEER**, 6



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■ CHEER

continued from page 5

only person working right now. The Cheer Shop is currently open 10 a.m. to 2 p.m but as volunteers gradually come back to work, the store hours will soon be extended until 4 p.m., Davis said. Masks are required for anyone that enters.

Davis wanted to thank gift shop coordinator Kristie Huber and volunteer treasurer Kathy Diggs for all

of their contributions and help over the years.

The shop has meant a lot to its volunteers and medical professionals during its 50 years of existence.

“I have enjoyed working there for more than 20 years,” said volunteer Martha Lowder. “I always tell shoppers that this is the best gift shop in town. It provides a service to hospi-

tal employees as well as visitors. As I volunteer, I feel that I’m helping to raise money for scholarships for local students. This makes me happy.”

“I volunteered at the Cheer Shop for over 25 years and saw how much it meant to both the hospital employees who would come in for candy and gifts and visiting citizens

who came in for gifts for others and also for themselves,” said volunteer Sandy Rogers. “The gift shop has always been a great source for so many reasons. For me personally, I enjoyed working at the gift shop because just about every time I was there someone would come in that I

■ See CHEER, 9



The Cheer Shop inside Atrium Health Stanly has served the community for more than 50 years.



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CENTER

continued from page 4

Establishing a foothold in the school system

While the grant is multifaceted and targets many areas, one of the biggest has been educating students about the importance of substance use prevention, including getting them to feel comfortable talking about tough subjects like substance use and mental health. There's often a reticence in many communities, especially smaller, more rural ones like Stanly, to discuss sensitive topics like whether young people have access to substances such as alcohol and tobacco — which is why the Partnership for Success grant is so critical, organizers said.

"I think with our presence being here, that door has been opened and now they're having to talk about it and we're putting programs into the schools," said CPS youth coordinator Kaitlin Smith, who has been the person working directly with students across the county.

A 2019 East Carolina graduate with a degree in public health, Smith was hired by CPS to establish Teens for Change clubs at each of the area high schools to foster relationships with the students and educate them about substance use prevention, including the dangers of drugs and vaping. The idea was that as a young person herself, Smith, 24, could serve as a close confidante, whom students would feel comfortable talking with.

"When I was working with my kids, they finally had a group where they were able to come in and talk about the issues that they were dealing with at home, and the issues they were dealing with individually

and with their friends," Smith said.

Aside from various substances like alcohol and tobacco, other topics that were discussed included ways to improve students' mental health and their self-confidence.

She had already established a steady presence at West Stanly and was looking to broaden her impact to the other schools, when the pandemic hit last spring. Since she could no longer forge in-person connections with students, Smith pivoted and began providing assistance in other areas. She helped with CPS's medication take back events and began meeting once a week with Albemarle Middle students, as part of the after-school SPARK program.

With Covid cases continuing to decrease and with more people getting vaccinated each week, Beverly Pennington, director of student services with Stanly County Schools, anticipates Smith will be able to resume her work establishing Teens for Change clubs at the high schools next school year.

"It is my hope that we will be able to open up, have support people such as Kaitlin come in and work with our students and have after-school activities," Pennington said.

Implementation of a Youth Drug Survey

When asked about the biggest accomplishment of the grant to date, Verma mentioned the implementation of the Youth Drug Survey, which was completed last spring by 1,226 sixth, eighth, 10th and 12th graders from 11 schools in the county. Students answered a multitude of questions about how often

they used substances including alcohol, prescription drugs, marijuana, e-cigarettes and cigarettes. The survey was anonymous and students had the choice to not participate.

According to the results of the survey, which CPS shared with the public in December 2020, more Stanly County youth were using electronic cigarettes than any other substances, including alcohol.

YDS found that while roughly 7 percent of middle school respondents had consumed e-cigarettes over a 30-day period, the number more than doubled to 16 percent for high school respondents.

Aside from e-cigarettes, other common substances used by youth over a 30-day period included alcohol (10 percent of respondents), pre-

scription drugs without a prescription (7 percent) and marijuana (5 percent). The smoking of traditional cigarettes was low, with only 2 percent of respondents reporting they had done so over the 30-day period.

Overall though, the results seemed to be encouraging.

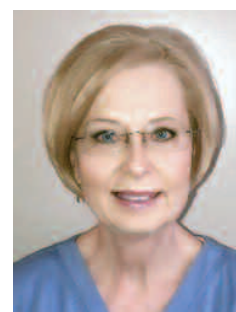
"What I'm happy to see is that the numbers are low in Stanly County and I think they're going to continue to drop in other places where we're having strong prevention efforts," said Andrew Reynolds, a consultant with Common Good Data, who co-authored the youth survey. "Prevention is effective and it works and it's one of the best ways that we can address substance use not only

■ See CENTER, 14

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Kim Davis is the director of volunteer services at the hospital and manager of the Cheer Shop.

■ CHEER

continued from page 6

hadn't seen in a long time, and we could catch up. It was always a great way for me to stay in touch with a wonderful variety of people."

Respiratory Therapist Deborah Geer said the shop is her "go-to for last minute gifts and special holiday items," while nurse Winslow Mullis said "I can always count on the Cheer Shop to give me a little hap-

piness and a sweet treat during my shift."

"Spreading cheer is our number one goal," volunteer Diane Jordan said.

Additional volunteers are needed to help work the Cheer Shop. If people are interested, they should contact Davis at 980-323-4387.

"Spreading cheer is our number one goal."

**— Diane Jordan,
volunteer,
The Cheer Shop,
Atrium Health Stanly**

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Healthy habits that can become part of your daily routine

A person's habits can have a strong impact on his or her overall health. Unhealthy habits like smoking and living a sedentary lifestyle can increase a person's risk for various conditions and diseases. On the flip side, healthy habits like eating a nutritious diet and getting enough sleep can bolster a person's immune system and reduce his or her risk for various ailments.

Some healthy habits, like daily exercise, can be time-consuming. Busy adults may not have time to exercise vigorously each day, though the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services urges men and women to find time for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity aerobic activity each week. But not all healthy habits take up time. In fact, adults can incorporate various healthy practices into their daily routines without skipping a beat.

- **Take the stairs.** Taking the stairs instead of the elevator can have a profound effect on overall health. According to Duke University, climbing just two flights of stairs combined per day can contribute to six pounds of weight loss over the course of a single year.

In addition, a study from the North American Menopause Society found that stair climbing can help postmenopausal women reduce their risk for osteoporosis and help them lower their blood pressure.

- **Drink more water.** The Centers



for Disease Control and Prevention notes that water helps the body maintain a normal temperature, lubricates and cushions joints, protects the spinal cord and other sensitive tissues, and helps to rid the body of waste through urination, perspiration and bowel movements.

Adults who are thirsty can choose water over soda or other sugary beverages. The CDC notes that sugary beverages like soda and sports drinks contain calories but little nutritional value, making water a healthier way for individuals to quench their thirst.

- **Go for daily walks.** Walking benefits the body in myriad ways. For example, the Harvard School of Public Health notes that women who walk 30 minutes per day can reduce their risk of stroke by 20 percent and potentially by 40 percent if they walk briskly.

In addition, researchers at the University of Virginia Health System found that men between the ages of 71 and 93 who walked more than a quarter mile per day had half the incidence of dementia and Alzheimer's disease as men who



doesn't require a major overhaul of an individual's lifestyle. The U.S. Department of Agriculture notes that dark green leafy vegetables, such as spinach, are rich in vitamins A, C, E, and K.

The Mayo Clinic notes that vitamin E alone can help people maintain their vision and promote a healthy reproductive system while also improving the health of the blood, brain and skin. The USDA also notes that green vegetables contain very little carbohydrates, sodium and cholesterol.

Adults won't have to reinvent the

walked less. A 15-minute walk around the neighborhood each morning coupled with a 15-minute walk after dinner can help adults dramatically improve their overall health.

- **Eat more greens.** Eating more greens is another healthy habit that

■ See **HEALTHY**, 13

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The risks of an overly sedentary lifestyle

Health experts call it “sitting disease.” It refers to when people spend more of their time behind a desk or steering wheel of a car or planted in front of a television than they do engaging in physical activity. According to the American Heart Association, sedentary jobs have increased by 83 percent since 1950, and technology has reduced many people’s need to get up and move. Inactivity is taking a considerable toll on public health.

A study from the University of Cambridge equated inactivity with

being obese. The Mayo Clinic advises that research has linked sedentary behavior to a host of health concerns, and found those who sat for more than eight hours a day with no physical activity had a risk of dying similar to the risks of fatality linked to obesity and smoking. Increased blood pressure, high blood sugar, abnormal cholesterol levels, and excess body fat all can be attributed to inactivity.

Mental health can be adversely affected by a sedentary lifestyle as well. Australian researchers surveyed more than 3,300

government employees and found men who sat for more than six hours a day at work were 90 percent more likely to feel moderate psychological distress, such as restlessness, nervousness or hopelessness, than those who sat for less than three hours a day.

In addition, a sedentary lifestyle can significantly increase a person’s risk for various types of cancer. A German meta-analysis of 43 studies involving four million people indicated those who sit the most have higher propensities to develop colon cancer, endometrial cancer

and lung cancer.

Johns Hopkins Medical Center says research shows that high levels of exercise at some point in the day can lessen some risk, but it’s not entirely effective if most of the rest of the day a person is inactive.

Risk for cardiovascular disease increases significantly for people who spend 10 hours or more sitting each day.

Various medical organizations recommend individuals get up and move at any opportunity to help reduce risks of inactivity.

Erin Michos, M.D., M.H.S., associate director of preventive cardiology at the Ciccarone Center for the Prevention of Heart Disease, advises people who are very sedentary to aim for 4,000 steps per day. Such individuals can then build up to a target of 10,000 steps daily.

The Mayo Clinic recommends these strategies to reduce the amount of time you spend sitting.

- **Stand while talking on the phone or watching television**
- **Invest in a standing desk**
- **Get up from sitting every 30 minutes**
- **Walk at lunch or during meetings**

Sedentary lifestyles can affect health in many negative ways. But there are various ways to get up and go over the course of a typical day.

— METRO CREATIVE
CONNECTION



■ HEALTHY

continued from page 10

dietary wheel to incorporate more live healthier lives, and such habits greens into their diets, and the results of doing so can have a significant, positive effect on their overall health.

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now...but as youth get older.”

This was the first drug survey administered in Stanly County, Verma said, which provided a critical window into the kind of substances popular among the county’s young people. The YDS was designed by CPS more than 30 years ago for students in Mecklenburg County and has been in continuous use with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools ever since.

“This survey gives us a look at youth perspectives on substance use including which substances youth in the county are aware of and possibly using,” said Wendy Growcock, public health specialist with the Stanly County Health Department. “The YDS data informs all agencies in the county working with youth or with substance use prevention how to target their efforts.”

Stanly County Schools used the survey results to assess its needs and help decide where resources needed to be spent, Pennington said. As a result of the YDS data, along with other data points, the school system will be funding a coordinator for social, emotional and mental health services for next school year.

A second group of students (sixth, eighth, 10th and 12th graders) will complete the survey at the end of October, Verma said. She hopes to have more student participation this time.

Botvin Life training

Another key part of the grant has gone towards training Stanly County Schools staff in the Botvin LifeSkills Training program.

It is an evidence-based prevention program backed by more than 30 scientific studies that has been

“The YDS data informs all agencies in the county working with youth or with substance use prevention how to target their efforts.”

— Wendy Growcock,
public health specialist,
Stanly County Health Department

shown to be effective in reducing alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other drug use. According to its website, its programs are used in many states across the United States along with more than 30 countries around the world.

Studies show the program also helps reduce violence and school drop-out and helps with student academic performance.

Ten middle school and two high school health and P.E. teachers were trained in the curriculum last fall while an additional eight high school teachers were trained in the spring, Verma said.

The Botvin curriculum was taught to more than 500 sixth grade students this past school year and will reach sixth, seventh and ninth grade students in 2021-2022. (As part of the \$3.7 million, five-year RESTORE Grant, which is separate from CPS and was awarded to Stanly and Montgomery County Schools in 2019, the Botvin curriculum was also taught to middle school and ninth grade students at Albemarle High, Albemarle Middle and Stanly Academy Learning Center.)

“The teachers enjoyed having this resource available to them,” Pennington said, noting they no longer had to search for lessons that met specific parts of the standardized curriculum for health instruction. “And students have found that it is helpful and have enjoyed learning more about the different components that it covers such as decision-making and not falling into peer pressure.”

Some of the other major initiatives over the past two years have included:

- Several drive-through medication take back events throughout the county for people to safely dispose

of prescription drugs. A total of 81 pounds of drugs were collected during the four events, Verma said. The next one will be from 2-4 p.m. July 11 at Pfeiffer University (in front of the chapel).


- Distributing lock boxes and chemical disposal kits at various events including the farmers market at the Stanly Commons, and the medication take back events.

- An extensive media campaign (billboards, movie theater public service announcements and sandwich boards at the schools) informing the public about drug prevention.

- Alcohol purchase surveys to make sure stores are checking young peoples’ ID.

- Several in-person and virtual town hall events to educate and engage parents and community members on substance use prevention strategies.

- Bolstering and expanding membership in Project Lazarus, a group comprised of public health, health care, law enforcement, mental health personnel and concerned citizens to combat drug abuse.



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