



Youngest Victims of Opioid Abuse to get Access to Help

Federal Department of Justice Grant Provides Funding

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BLOOMINGTON, Ill – The opioid epidemic has swept across the U.S. at alarming rates and without bias. Two counties in Southern Illinois have been notably hard hit. Figures from the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. Census Bureau indicate that in 2014, 34 oxycodone and hydrocodone pills per person were sold in St. Clair County. In Madison County, the figure was 54 pills per person. That compares to the statewide average of 1.22 pills per person.

Helping the youngest victims

Those addicted to these powerful painkillers are not the only ones affected. Now, children will get help recovering from trauma they may have suffered by being exposed to their parents' or caregivers' opioid use.

Chestnut Health Systems has received grant funding totaling \$750,000 over three years from the U.S. Department of Justice. The grant will provide counseling, family therapy, and help with positive coping skills for children ages 8-16 living in Madison and St. Clair Counties. Services are intended for children who have witnessed drug use or crime, experienced neglect, been removed from the home, or suffered physical or emotional abuse.

"We are focused on this age group because the earlier we can intervene, the better," said Chris Norton, director of youth and family crisis intervention services for Chestnut. "While opioid use is often a hidden problem, children as young as age 8 have the cognitive ability to know something might be amiss with their parents," she said.

Reaching those who need help

Chestnut will use a variety of means to identify children who need help. They include adults (parents) in treatment for substance use disorder as well as children being served through Chestnut's school-based services, present in 60 schools in Madison and St. Clair Counties. Chestnut is on pace to treat 2,000 people for opioid use in 2018. Chestnut serves 1,050 students in onsite school programs in the area, with ten percent of children reporting opioid use by one or more parent. Chestnut will accept referrals from parents, schools, juvenile justice agencies, child welfare organizations, and other community partners that have regular contact with children who may have suffered trauma related to opioid use.

Services will be available starting about December 1. The project will serve at least 75 children each year, and approximately 225 children over the course of three years.

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Community approach

Also under the DOJ grant, Chestnut will form a community/project advisory board. A variety of community stakeholders will be invited to participate, including crime victims themselves, who would share their experiences and the barriers they faced in recovering from trauma as a result of their parents' opioid use.

About Chestnut Health Systems

Chestnut Health Systems is a non-profit organization that has cared since 1973 for persons needing behavioral health services. Chestnut provides substance use disorder treatment, mental health counseling, primary health care, credit counseling, and housing and supportive services. It is a leader in substance use-related research. More at www.chestnut.org.

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