

N R V C S

NEW RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY SERVICES

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Adams named interim director of REACH program

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RADFORD - Like most other parents these days, Karen Adams finds herself adapting to the barrage of changes that have been brought on by COVID-19. She and her husband have five daughters - ranging in age from a high school senior to five-year-old twins - and adjusting to the ebb and flow of school and life in a pandemic has certainly come with its share of challenges.

As if that weren't enough to coordinate and figure out, Adams has also recently taken on a new role at New River Valley Community Services (NRVCS).

Adams, who has been with NRVCS for nearly nine years, was named Interim Director of the REACH (Regional Education Assessment Crisis Services Habilitation) program in early October. She takes over for Denise Hall, who has accepted a position with the Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS).

REACH serves individuals with developmental disabilities who also have mental health or behavioral needs. The REACH program is statewide, divided into five regions. The region Adams is responsible for - which includes the New River Valley - actually covers the majority of southwest Virginia, connected to a total of 10 Community Services Boards (CSBs), like NRVCS.

"I honestly think the school schedules this year - doing hybrid, virtual, and face-to-face - with my own five children and my work schedule has helped me connect with staff and families we serve in REACH on a whole new level," says Adams. "It's definitely challenging and it helps remind me how difficult it can be for our clients to get situated into our system."

Adams earned a Master's degree in child development from Tufts University in Massachusetts. She worked for a program supporting children in rehabilitation before moving to Virginia, where she became a special education teacher at the high school level before eventually becoming administrator for an autism center on the Eastern Shore. The family moved to the New River Valley when Adams' husband landed a job at Radford University. It was there that she first joined NRVCS and started as a team lead with REACH - back when it was known as "START" (Systemic Therapeutic Assessment Respite and Treatment).

The population of individuals served by REACH, which now includes children, can often have high behavior needs that require more intensive supports. While some might shy away from those challenging behaviors, Adams says she finds working with those clients to be very rewarding.

"I truly believe that behavior change comes from pushing people into a level of discomfort," she explains. "You push them but, at the same time, you stand with them."

"I do tend to look at that differently than some - and my threshold is almost too high - so I have to be mindful of that - but the behavioral challenges are not a point of frustration for me," Adams continues. "What I get frustrated with is how difficult it can be to get the system to change and how slow it moves sometimes."

Her desire to quicken the pace at work could be rooted in the fact that Adams has spent much of her life as an athlete and coach. Once a collegiate volleyball player herself, Adams has somehow



Karen Adams

also found the time to coach the sport at Radford High School the past four seasons - the last two of which have resulted in back-to-back state championships for the Lady Bobcats.

"I'm very competitive - I always have been," notes Adams, whose oldest daughter is a standout on the team and has already committed to play at the University of Florida. (By the way, Adams' husband, Caleb, is currently an assistant coach with the Virginia Tech women's volleyball team.) "The state championships have been really exciting and the fact that I'm getting to do this with my daughter makes it extra special."

Like her volleyball teams, Adams acknowledges that success is only possible if everyone does their part - particularly during a global pandemic.

"Our residential staff have truly been amazing - they've gone above and beyond for months now - changing in and out of scrubs every day, doing the daily screenings and being extremely careful about their interactions outside of work," she adds. "Our community staff have handled things well and helped us transition to telehealth...and we're all doing whatever we have to do in order to care for our clients."

Adams points out that the children's program is growing rapidly and that REACH will soon be adding one residential (Tara Lane 2 - see story on Page 3) and working with other parts of the agency to get the children's 23-hour model up and running.

"It's very exciting to be part of something from the ground up - but that's not the only reason I'm proud of this program," Adams continues. "It truly embodies the philosophy of teamwork...Yes, we have our ups and downs and we may disagree at times, but ultimately, we are all here for the same purpose."

ON THE COVER

Fall foliage on full display near the entrance of Bisset Park in Radford. (Photo - Mike Wade/NRVCS)



New facility in Fairlawn: “Tara Lane II” will be the second residential facility operated by the REACH (Regional Education Assessment Crisis Services Habilitation) program. The three-bed facility will serve as a long-term residential placement for adults with developmental disabilities who have complex behavioral issues and require more intensive care. (Photo - Mike Wade /NRVCS)

REACH adding new residential facility in Fairlawn

FAIRLAWN - The mission of the Regional Education Assessment Crisis Services Habilitation or “REACH” program is to provide individuals with developmental disabilities the opportunity to live the most inclusive life possible in his/her community. This includes access to appropriate and effective crisis stabilization, intervention, and prevention services.

REACH’s residential facilities are designed to meet the needs of individuals (ages 18 and up) who also have complex behavioral issues and require more intensive care. The program will soon add a second facility in the Fairlawn area of Pulaski County to serve this population of individuals. “Tara Lane II” is located on property adjacent to REACH’s crisis therapeutic home.

Licensed by the Virginia Department of Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS), Tara Lane II has three beds and will

provide residents with long-term residential placement. Staff are currently being hired and program officials expect the facility to begin housing residents later this fall.

Tara Lane II features a primary and secondary kitchen area and two sensory support spaces, as well as indoor and outdoor design to support individuals who have experienced long-term and sustained housing and community integration barriers due to their complex behavioral needs.

The layout and environment of the home - including furniture, bedroom, living and dining areas, as well as the indoor and outdoor space - were carefully developed, designed and furnished to support an optimal integrated setting.

Tara Lane II staff will receive specialized and ongoing training to meet the unique needs of its residents.

Leroy Robinson named supervisor of 401 Peer Center

RADFORD - Leroy Robinson has been named supervisor of the 401 Peer Center, a facility in Radford operated by NRVCS that is designed to support individuals in recovery from substance use and mental health disorders.

Originally from Philadelphia, Robinson himself is in long-term recovery, after 24 years of active addiction. He was one of the first two participants to graduate from the Pulaski County Adult Drug Court Treatment Program in 2016 and has most recently been employed by NRVCS as a Peer Recovery Specialist, assisting individuals enrolled in local drug court and jail diversion programs.



Robinson

“We are excited that Leroy accepted the position of Supervisor at the 401,” notes Angela Scott, Director of NRVCS’ Office of Peer Supports and Recovery. “He is bringing his lived experiences in recovery and community work, a comprehensive local and regional vision, passion and lots of recovery capital to our growing Office of Peer Supports and Recovery – and to the 401 Peer Center.”

“Being entrusted with the role as the Supervisor of the 401 Peer Center awards me the opportunity to encourage recovery to a broader audience and inspire hope at a more rapid pace to the seemingly hopeless,” says Robinson. “It means being part of a movement that will revolutionize services in our community, be a beacon of hope during times of racial disparities, and will yield a return on its investment into people’s lives by producing responsible and productive members of our society that are accepted for who they are.”

New campaign launched to address surge in overdose

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While much of our collective attention this year has been focused on the COVID-19 pandemic - and rightfully so - the opioid epidemic rages on.

According to preliminary data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), approximately 72,000 Americans died last year from overdose - with roughly 50,000 of those deaths being attributed to opioids. All indications are that those numbers will only go up in 2020.

Locally, law enforcement and health officials are already seeing a noticeable increase in overdose. In fact, emergency department visits related to overdose in the New River Valley have gone up by 11% since the start of 2020.

To help address this issue, NRVCS Community Wellness and Outreach recently launched the #EndOverdoseNRV campaign, a regional effort designed to increase public awareness and prevention of overdose.

The campaign launched on August 31 (which is also International Overdose Awareness Day) with a virtual town hall featuring treatment professionals, law enforcement, and individuals in long-term recovery. The event was streamed live over Facebook and has since had more than 1,800 views.



More than 100 doses of Narcan were distributed at 'drive-thru' events held in early September. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

That same night, NRVCS clinics in all five jurisdictions were illuminated with purple lights in honor of those lives lost to overdose.

Additionally, NRVCS has utilized State Opioid Response (SOR) funding to purchase a series of television ads on WDBJ, WZBZ and WFXR - and also promoted the hashtag through its various social media platforms.

Giles County has been especially hard hit by overdose. According to Chief Deputy Scott Moye with the Giles County Sheriff's Office, his department has reported 27 accidental overdoses for the year (as of August 31), compared to just seven for the entire year in 2019.

"This is something that law enforcement agencies in the New River Valley very much see as a concern," noted Moye, who participated in the virtual town hall event.

"It's definitely on the rise in our communities."

"I've been a drug investigator for most of my career...Not until this year have I seen something that I would call an epidemic," added Moye, who has worked in law enforcement since 2006. "The drugs that we're seeing here now make the other things that I've dealt with in my career seem like child's play...when you're talking about fentanyl, heroin and methamphetamine and those are the drugs being used in our community right now."

COVID-19 has also forced NRVCS to adapt its harm reduction efforts. Since in-person trainings are not necessarily feasible during the pandemic, the agency decided to record and publish a REVIVE! Training on its website (nrvc.org/revive) and implement a series of 'drive-thru' Narcan distribution and education events in each of the five jurisdictions served by NRVCS. More than 100 doses of Narcan were handed out at these events.

NRVCS is planning additional 'drive-thru' Narcan events and is actively promoting the DEA's National Prescription Drug Take Back Day (scheduled for October 24). The agency has also partnered with police departments in both Radford and Dublin to install permanent drop boxes at their respective headquarters



Virtual town hall: NRVCS hosted a virtual town hall on August 31 in conjunction with International Overdose Awareness Day to help kick off the #EndOverdoseNRV campaign. The virtual event featured treatment professionals, law enforcement and individuals in long-term recovery. Streamed via Facebook Live, the video has since had over 1,800 views.





Charlie Herbert has been instrumental in development of the Giles Community Garden since the project was first launched in 2014. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

Giles Community Garden receives VFHY grant

PEARISBURG - Giles Community Garden is proud to announce the formation of a Healthy Communities Action Team (HCAT). This team has received a three-year, nearly \$90,000 grant from the [Virginia Foundation for Healthy Youth \(VFHY\)](#) based in Richmond, VA.

The purpose of the grant is to help in the fight against childhood obesity by developing community-based strategies that will increase access to fresh produce, while also promoting healthy life choices through interactive learning experiences and outdoor/physical activities.

Initial HCAT team members include: Charlie Herbert, Garden Manager; Jeff Dinger, Giles County Administration; Mike Wade, NRVCS; Stephanie Spencer, Giles Carilion Community Hospital; Kevin White, Giles County Public Schools; and Sherri Nipper-Williams, Giles Breakfast Lions Club. The team has expanded to include Darlene Smith, Master Gardener; Christine Thomas, Registered Dietician with Carilion Clinic; and Gigi Robertson, Virginia Tech Cooperative Extension Service.

Begun as a partnership between Giles Breakfast Lions Club and Christ Episcopal Church in 2014, the garden is an effort to help feed and nourish the local neighborhood in Pearisburg. Two major, early ex-

pansion partners were soon added.

In the winter of 2015, a Seed-to-Fork Program was begun with the NRCA Head Start Schools in Giles County. This program began in the schools and was carried forward with activities in the garden which included planting crops, moving small rocks working with child-sized garden tools and then harvesting some of the produce they had planted.

The summer of 2016 saw the addition of a summer program designed for the children associated with Family Preservation Services. These elementary/middle school children had a full garden experience including planting, harvesting, weeding, crop identification and taste testing.

"Giles Community Garden has developed and nurtured a strong bond with children and their understanding of how tasty and healthy fresh food is when picked directly from the garden," notes Garden Manager Charlie Herbert. "Because of the current issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, we did not spend any time with children in the garden this summer but we hope this will change by the spring and summer of 2021."

Herbert explains that this year's garden focused on productivity and spreading the good news about gardening and the health benefits to body, mind and soul. He adds

that the number of family units volunteering to work in the garden has actually increased compared to last year and there has been an increased volume of nearby residents who are accessing the fresh produce from the garden.

"I think both of these increases can be linked to the health crisis and the desire to learn to grow good food and the lack of free, nourishing food available to them," Herbert says.

The first year grant cycle for this project began July 1 and runs through June 30, 2021. Work in the garden begins in January and February with planting seeds and tending to the greenhouse. Herbert adds that the first year of the grant will be focused on strategic planning and implementing the VFHY-approved workplan. NRVCS is serving as fiscal agent for the grant.

"We look forward to expanding our reach into other communities in Giles County through our partners with this grant," adds Herbert. "The educational and nutritional opportunities of our HCAT are boundless. This team is committed to bringing down the obesity rate for children in Giles County. In the process, we will help people learn the benefits to their overall health through organic gardening."

Pulaski County coalition addressing domestic violence

PULASKI - Almost everyone recognizes physical violence as a potential sign of domestic violence, but what about name-calling? Controlling a bank account? Harming a family pet? The impact on children who are exposed to violence in the home? Or living in fear of threatened harm?

On average, 24 people per minute are victims of rape, physical violence, or stalking by an intimate partner in the United States. Over the course of a year, that equals more than 12 million women and men.

To help address these issues on a local level, officials with the Pulaski Community Partners Coalition (PCPC) and the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley (WRC-NRV) recently launched a new campaign to call attention to Domestic Violence Awareness Month. The tag line for the campaign is, "Power Up to End Domestic Violence."

"Ending domestic violence is a community problem that requires a community solution," explains Laura Beth Weaver, Executive Director of the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley. "We are very pleased to have the support of the Pulaski Community Partners Coalition

in raising awareness of an issue that quite frankly affects us all in some way."

A key component of the campaign will be a weekly series of videos featuring a variety of community leaders and stakeholders from Pulaski County. The introductory video, which is scheduled to be published on Monday, October 5, will be followed each Monday by a video with a different topic related to domestic violence, including: Keeping Youth Safe, Animal Abuse & Domestic Violence, and Men as Allies.

"The support from our community partners in developing this video series has been incredible," notes Anthony Akers, Chair of PCPC. "Our friends with the Women's Resource Center have been valuable members of our coalition and we are grateful to be working with them on such an important issue."

"Sadly, Pulaski County is no different from any other community in this country and we are not immune from the devastating effects of domestic violence," adds Akers. "However, our community does have a very strong network of agencies and professionals who are deeply invested in doing whatever it takes to not only address the issue,

but to make sure every citizen feels safe and supported."

Weaver notes that 1 in 4 women nationally is the victim of severe physical violence by an intimate partner while 1 in 7 men experiences severe physical violence by an intimate partner at some point in their lifetime.

She adds that up to 70% of domestic violence victims have pets, and 48% of women in an abusive relationships delay leaving a dangerous situation out of concern for their pet's safety.

"Being an ally means not ignoring abusive behaviors," explains Weaver. "Keeping victims safe means holding perpetrators accountable."

"We are making a point to encourage men in our community to get involved to end domestic violence," Akers adds. "Being an ally means speaking up when you hear someone express an attitude or belief that supports violence against another person."

To learn more about the "Power Up" campaign, or find out more about the services and programs offered by the Women's Resource Center of the New River Valley, visit wrcnrv.org.

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