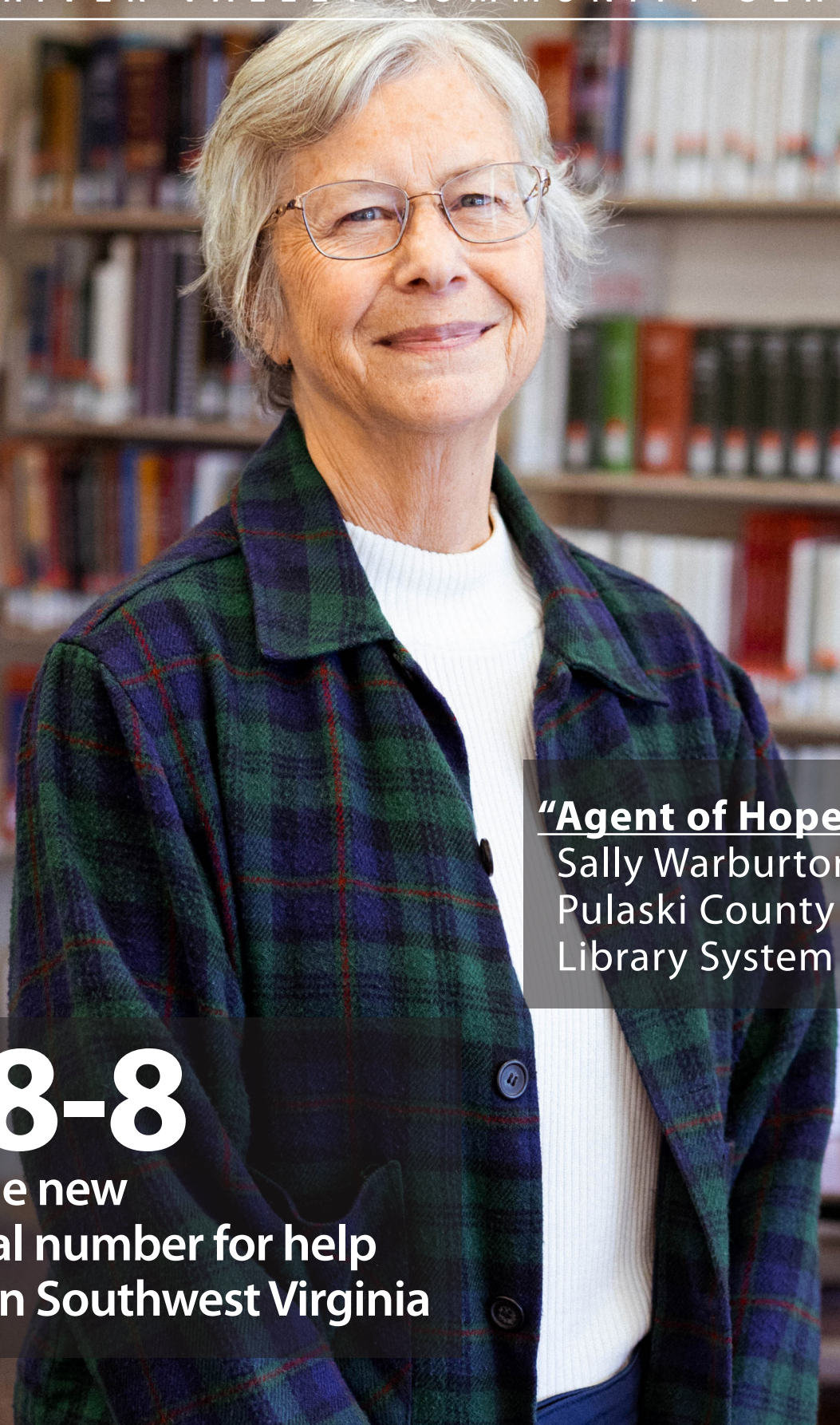


N R V C S

NEW RIVER VALLEY COMMUNITY SERVICES



"Agent of Hope" Profile:

Sally Warburton
Pulaski County
Library System Director

9-8-8

How the new
national number for help
works in Southwest Virginia

9-8-8

How the new national number for help works in Southwest Virginia

Story & Photo: Mike Wade
mwade@nrvcs.org

BLACKSBURG - Individuals experiencing a suicidal crisis or mental health-related distress now have a new number to call for help.

As of July 16, 2022, anyone in this situation can now simply dial or text “988” to access the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - previously known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. The switch to 988 took nearly three years and a literal act of Congress, but officials are hopeful that the number will make it easier for individuals to access the support and care they need.

Calls and texts to 988 are fielded by a national network of more than 200 crisis centers. Southwest Virginia (including the New River Valley) is being served by a call center operated through Planning District One Behavioral Health, NRVCS’ counterpart Community Services Board (CSB) for the counties of Lee, Scott and Wise, and the City of Norton.

“Individuals from our area who call 988 are linked immediately with either mobile crisis or emergency services depending on their needs,” explains NRVCS Executive Director James Pritchett. “If a caller’s issues are not urgent and can wait until the next business day, the call center can provide them with resources available in their area such as Same Day Access provided by CSBs or even things like food banks, if needed.”

Pritchett acknowledges that issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic and concerns about social justice, the economy and military conflicts around the globe have all had a part in exacerbating struggles with mental health.

“Unless you are completely off-the-grid, it’s difficult to avoid feeling at least some impact from what we constantly see on the news and social media,” he notes, “and it’s very easy for us to feel overwhelmed. So, it’s really no surprise that we’re seeing more and more people requesting services.”

The U.S. sees one death by suicide approximately every 11 minutes and suicide is the leading cause of death for persons aged 18-34 years. Data released by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in October 2022 showed that the nation’s overall suicide rate and number of suicides had increased by almost 4% from 2020 to 2021.

Nationally, the switch to 988 appears to be working. On September 9, 2022, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary Xavier Becerra reported that there was a 45% increase in call volume during the first month of the 988 number compared to August 2021. Secretary Becerra also noted a substantial improvement in both answer rates and wait times.

Locally, NRVCS’ emergency services number (1-540-961-8400) is still available for those seeking help, but Pritchett says his staff will gradually be encouraging community members to utilize the 988 number.

“Like anything new, we expect there to be some bumps in the road as we all adjust to this new resource,” Pritchett says. “I do think this transition will ultimately make it easier for folks to get connected to help - and to be served in a more timely manner - which is absolutely critical for those who are in crisis.”

“We are grateful to our friends at PD1 (Planning District One) for leading this effort in our region,” he adds, “but it will fall on each of the CSBs to make sure that our respective teams are prompt with response and thorough with follow-ups.”

“Aside from offering treatment and supports, we are also in the business of providing hope,” concludes Pritchett. “That’s what people calling this number are looking for. They want help and they want hope.”



Photo - Mike Wade/NRVCS

“Agent of Hope” Profile:

Sally WARBURTON

Story & Photo: Ross Wilsie
rwilsie@nrvc.org

PULASKI - Sally Warburton is passionate about her community. From the busy mom bringing her young kids in to enjoy the vibrant children’s section, to the man seeking a quiet place to sit down and charge his phone, Warburton’s message is clear: everyone is welcome at the library.

“We try and provide a little bit of everything for everybody,” she says.

As Director at Pulaski County Library System for more than twelve years, Warburton has seen many faces come and go – each of them with their own story, and each of them with a need where she might just be able to lend a hand.

Warburton’s impact on the community reaches well beyond her position at the Library, and she is no stranger to community involvement. Prior to her current Director position, Warburton served as the Children’s Librarian for 15 years. She also serves with several local community groups, including the Pulaski County Proud Committee, the Pulaski County Commission on Children and Families, and Pulaski Community Partners Coalition (PCPC).

As Treasurer for PCPC, Warburton remembers deciding to join the community prevention coalition many years ago because she was seeing first-hand how substance use disorders and the related issues of family conflict and violence was impacting young people in her community. She recognized that real, tangible action was needed.

“I started with PCPC because I knew several of my children’s friends who got involved in drugs and overdosed, and it was very hard for me as a parent to see that happening,” she explains.

PCPC began in 2002 when Warburton and other local leaders joined representatives from community human services agencies, moved to establish an organizational and collaborative forum to address these issues. Members of PCPC (Warburton included) continue to meet regularly, working towards fulfilling its mission of “reducing substance abuse among youth by promoting healthy, thriving families and a safe community by connecting people, resources, and ideas.”

Even in the face of these difficult, painful, and sometimes seemingly-insurmountable issues afflicting her community, Warburton remains hopeful and optimistic. “I think it’s something that you have to stay optimistic about and you have to continue,” she adds.

Warburton’s involvement with PCPC and other community organizations has underscored her understanding of the fact that no person can fix their community alone. That effort must include the hands and feet of as many community members as possible – something made exponentially more difficult with challenges like



Sally Warburton

COVID-19, persistent negative perceptions of Pulaski County, and the generational issues that so many of the county’s residents face.

“I think people who live here, people who visit here, have a perception of Pulaski as kind of downtrodden and hopeless,” notes Warburton. “There’s a lot of grandparents raising grandchildren, there’s a lot of generational issues, and I think that that is one of the biggest problems.”

Warburton cites fun and engaging community events as one of the more effective ways of combatting these problems. “Last night, I went to the homecoming parade – it was wonderful!” declares Warburton. “The energy and the excitement of the kids – from preschoolers in the parade all the way through the high school – the excitement and the fun is one thing that Pulaski needs.”

Adding to that, Warburton lists several amenities that can be enjoyed by those in and around Pulaski County. “Our beautiful Randolph Park draws people from everywhere around, our beautiful hiking trails – we have so much to offer,” Warburton says.

Warburton sees the public library as more than just a place to find books and she - and her staff at both the Pulaski and Dublin branches - do all they can to address these needs of community members who step through her doors.

“I think the library is a support mechanism and a place for dissemination of information,” she says. “We’re cooperating right

Continued on Page 9

Bert Graham retires from NRVCS after 41 years of service

Story & Photo: Mike Wade
mwade@nrvc.org

RADFORD - Bert Graham began working in behavioral health before many of his colleagues and peers at New River Valley Community Services (NRVCS) were even born. While it would be difficult to pin down an exact number, it's safe to say that Graham has had a positive impact on the lives of hundreds - if not thousands - of New River Valley residents.

It's the kind of legacy one can only leave behind by dedicating a significant portion of their life and career to a mission or cause. Now, after 41 years of doing just that, Graham has decided to enter a new phase of life and retire.

Graham first started working for what would eventually become NRVCS on a part-time basis in August of 1981. At the time, he was employed by Raft (now a volunteer-run hotline operated by NRVCS) before that service was even a part of the agency.

His tenure with a single employer is even more impressive when Graham recalls the path that eventually led him to become a behavioral health clinician.

"I describe myself as the guy who kept changing his major in college - except I would get a degree first to do it," says Graham.

Graham had initially planned to study physics in college, but a collapsed lung while playing tennis in high school made him reconsider a potential career in medicine. Despite earning an undergraduate degree in microbiology, an anatomy class session with a dead lab rat was enough to put a halt on Graham's aspirations of becoming a doctor.

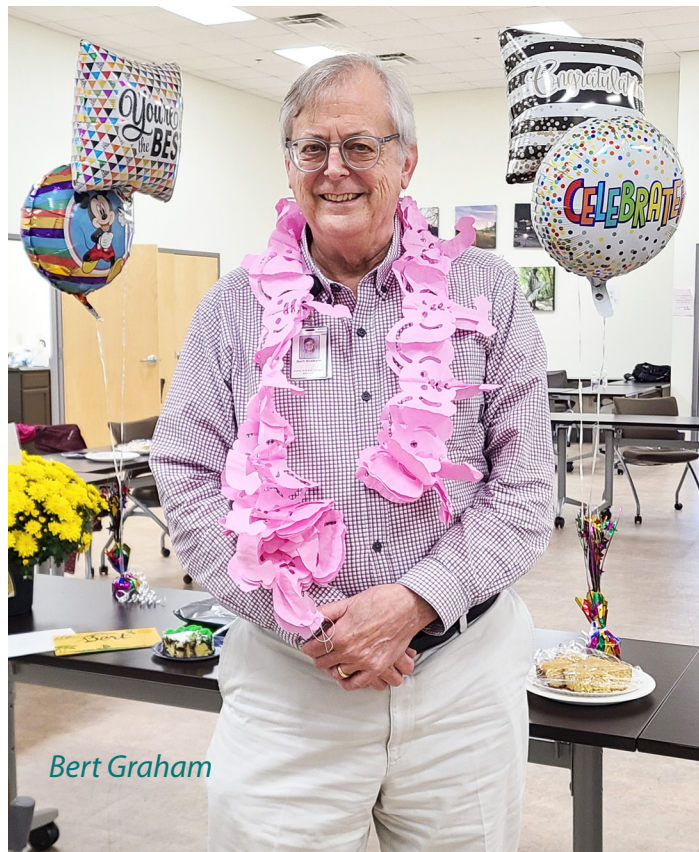
He had been attending college in Indiana when he learned that Virginia Tech was offering a program in environmental engineering for biology majors. He made his way to Blacksburg and eventually earned a Master's degree, but it was his summer job as an aid at the original St. Albans Psychiatric Hospital in Radford that first sparked his interest in mental health.

"I kept doing St. Albans here and there as a way to get extra money and I was influenced by a couple of psychiatrists there, so I thought 'what the hell,'" Graham recalls, "...So, I applied to Tech in their clinical psych program and got into that."

Graham didn't complete the program because he couldn't stand the thought of writing a dissertation.

"Writing my Master's thesis was hell on earth and a dissertation would have been even worse," declares Graham. "So, I went to work at the Raft and I went back to Radford and got another Master's degree in psychology so I could get licensed."

He's held a number of positions in his long career with NRVCS. In addition to his years as a clinician, Graham's roles have included stints as a supervisor, coordinator, acting director for



programs serving adults with disabilities, and co-director of services for substance use disorders. Structural changes within the agency several years ago led Graham back to his direct service roots - a change he welcomed.

"I'm probably happier just seeing clients because I'm much more suited to that than administrative things even though I was doing that for a long, long time," he adds.

As one might expect, Graham has also witnessed significant changes in his four decades with NRVCS.

"Besides how much we've grown, I guess the biggest change I might think of is funding," explains Graham, "because in the beginning we were all grant funding and although we did collect fees, it was a tiny part of the budget back then...and, of course, with the change to Medicaid, [almost] everything is fee-driven these days."

Graham says the other major development he's seen is related to the use of technology in the field.

"When I came here, they [computers] did not exist," he notes. "Our technological high points were things like IBM selective typewriters or an adding machine for people to do the budget stuff."

He still recalls the agency's first computer - a mainframe computer that sat in the agency's administrative office with three terminals. Graham also vividly remembers the gradual evolution from "bag phones" to palm pilots to the smartphone technology of today.

"I can't imagine us without laptops these days," Graham adds. "I'm sure most of our staff live on their laptops."

Over the years, much of Graham's work in direct service has focused on helping individuals who live with substance use

Continued on Page 11



“Urgent care” available at Radford crisis center

RADFORD - As community needs evolve, officials at NRVCS are continually looking to expand access for a growing number of residents who are seeking help with mental health and/or substance use disorders.

The NRVCS Crisis Center, which opened earlier this year in Radford, is a local and specialized alternative to the emergency room for behavioral health assessment and support. The space is designed to provide a calm and supportive environment while also helping individuals in need connect more rapidly with resources and care.

Services are open to adults struggling with mental health or substance-related difficulties who need urgent access to counseling, psychiatric assessment, peer recovery services, or those who need assessment and referral for inpatient treatment.

According to Jill Anderson, Emergency and Acute Program Director at NRVCS, each Crisis Center guest receives a variety of services, tailored to meet their specific needs.

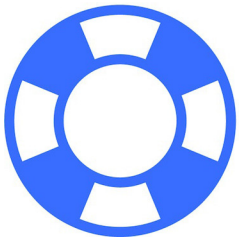
“Our goal is to get you connected to the right care and supports just when you need it,” says Anderson.

The Crisis Center offers nursing and medical screening, counseling, care coordination, peer recovery services, and psychiatric evaluation and screening if needed. Anderson notes that staff are also able to provide assistance with crisis stabilization or inpatient admissions.

The Crisis Center, located at 401 W. Main Street (next door to the 401 Peer Center), can be reached by phone at 540-961-8404.



A calm and supportive environment: The recently opened Crisis Center provides guests with a peaceful environment as they engage with staff to access resources and care. Located in Radford, the facility is just around the corner from the 401 Peer Center. (Photos - R. Wilsie/NRVCS)



**American
Foundation
for Suicide
Prevention**

New River Valley

Saturday, October 22, 2022 @ Randolph Park in



“Out of the Darkness Walk”

Dublin / \$19,750.00 Raised (as of 10/31/22) / Donate at www.afsp.org/nrv



Event photos by Mike Wade/NRVCS



A story of recovery and hope: Chris Rakes, a graduate of the Pulaski County Adult Drug Court Treatment Program, addresses the audience at the “Overdose in our Community” event held on September 22. Looking on are (from left) Pulaski Police Department Community Resource Specialist Sonia Ramsey, Pulaski Police Chief Jill Neice, Kathy Boyers and Anthony Akers, Assistant County Administrator for Pulaski County and Chair of the Pulaski Community Partners Coalition. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

Pulaski event addresses impact of overdose, addiction

Story & Photo: Mike Wade
mwade@nrvc.org

Like so many other communities across the country, Pulaski County has been hit hard by addiction. In fact, 2020 data shows that the county’s rate of reported overdose deaths exceeded Virginia’s state rate by 73.5%.

It’s a battle that county officials, first responders and treatment providers have been fighting for years - since the first waves of the OxyContin abuse epidemic crashed down on central Appalachia more than a quarter century ago. Innovative approaches like the Drug Court Treatment Program (Pulaski County’s was the first in the New River Valley) are making strides but most county residents would agree that far too many lives are still being lost to the disease of addiction.

That was the motivation behind the recent “Overdose in Our Community” event held on September 22 at the Pulaski Train Station. Co-sponsored by the Pulaski Community Partners Coalition (PCPC) and the Town of Pulaski Police Department, the event featured first-hand accounts of three local residents who have been directly impacted by opioids, overdose and addiction in general.

Kathy Boyers knows that pain all too well. On the morning of September 4, 2021, she found her 35-year-old son, Frank, dead in his room. She says Frank had recently injured his back and allegedly gotten a pill from someone to help with his pain. What he didn’t know was that the pill contained fentanyl, the highly-potent opioid that has caused national overdose numbers to soar in recent years. What’s even more tragic is that Frank had successfully completed the Drug Court program

and had been doing well in his recovery.

“My son is gone,” Boyers told the audience. “It’s not fair to me. It’s not fair to his children...He’ll always be my little boy.”

In her remarks, Boyers vowed to do whatever she could to help others from going through the same tragedy.

Chris Rakes, another Drug Court graduate, offered a message of hope to those in attendance. With his wife and young daughter looking on, Rakes shared his journey and the opportunities he has been able to enjoy thanks to his recovery - including his daughter’s birth.

“The overwhelming rush of emotions when she held my finger in that nursery cannot be explained,” recalled Rakes. “...The best part was that I was present, I was clean and I felt the rush of emotions and tears down my face - something I could never feel when I was in active addiction.”

Jeremiah Robinson’s story underscored the impact that substance use disorders has not just on the person who is addicted, but their families - including children.

“He didn’t even know I was born - he wasn’t even there,” Robinson said of his father, Leroy, who is in long-term recovery and now serves as supervisor of the 401 Peer Center. “...Now, he’s trying to get me to college.”

Pulaski Police Chief Jill Neice, who became emotional during her remarks, closed the event by emphasizing the need for greater community support and understanding of the issue.

“Clearly, addiction is a multi-faceted problem and clearly we have that in our community,” Neice declared.

“It can’t be solved by law enforcement alone,” she said. “It can’t be solved by the courts alone or the mental health system, the clergy or family alone. It’s a community problem and I think we need to approach it with a community effort.”



Community servant: Sally Warburton, dressed as “Waldo,” worked with other volunteers from the Pulaski Community Partners Coalition (PCPC) to hand out candy and information about Red Ribbon Week to children and families at the Pulaski County “Trick-or-Treat” event on Saturday, October 29, 2022. (Photo - M. Wade/NRVCS)

Warburton

From Page 3

now with NRVCS for the ACE (Adverse Childhood Experiences) training. We have Deterra pouches where you can place leftover medications and it neutralizes them, and we have Narcan (Naloxone spray) on hand.

“We partner with Red Sun Farms, and they give us fresh vegetables every week, and that’s for anyone to take. We also support the Little Free Libraries. If we see people who need it, we certainly give them information about Daily Bread (food distribution), Community Action, and other information about where they can find help,” continues Warburton. “I think mostly it’s a safe place and a place for warmth and cooling.”

Under Warburton’s leadership, the Library is also involved in events supporting the LGBTQ community and the homeless population, as well as with campaigns such as the NRV CARES pinwheel gardens that raise awareness for child abuse prevention, the Purple Ribbon campaign supporting domestic violence awareness, and Red Ribbon Week supporting a drug-free future for our children. She sums it all up with a smile and a warm, heartfelt statement: “It’s just nice to be a part of everybody’s community.”

With so many needs and challenges facing our local communities, one might ask what helps Warburton remain hopeful and optimistic about the future?

“We had a great summer at the Library,” she says. “We had over 350 hours of volunteer work, many of which came from students. And I’ll tell you, our students are just amazing – we don’t have anything to worry about. There are some really encouraging things, and it’s neat to meet these young people.”

“There are many things that are issues today, but I do think that we’ll be able to work through them because people are amazing, and we’ll find solutions.”

- Sally Warburton

When it comes to finding hope in solutions to some of the challenges in her community, Warburton is quick to point out that while money can sometimes help, it takes more than that to have real impact. “Just throwing money at something doesn’t always fix it,” she says. “I think expectations – thinking outside the box, being creative, being hopeful, being optimistic – all of those things can solve problems, too.”

“I am hopeful,” continues Warburton. “I just see a future that is pretty good. There are many things that are issues today, but I do think that we’ll be able to work through them because people are amazing, and we’ll find solutions.”

“If you do feel down, get some help. Do something to change your trajectory. Come to the library!”

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF

ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES (ACEs)



Presented by NRVCS / FREE and open to the public

Monday, November 14 | 1 - 2 PM

Pearisburg Public Library (209 Fort Branch Rd., Pearisburg)

Friday, November 18 | 3 - 4 PM

Iris Brammer Public Library (109 Mary St., Narrows)

Adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, are responses to traumatic events that occur in childhood (0-17 years).

ACEs are linked to chronic health problems, mental illness, and substance use problems in adolescence and adulthood. ACEs can also negatively impact education, job opportunities, and earning potential. However, ACEs can be prevented.

Join us to learn more about ACEs and how you can take an active role in improving the overall wellness of our community!



*A presentation of
NRVCS Community Wellness
& Outreach*

Interested in an ACEs presentation for your organization? Email info@nrvcs.org to learn more.



NRV Resiliency Network establishes Little Free Library in Pulaski: Andi Golusky (left), Executive Director of NRV CARES and Chair of the NRV Resiliency Network, presents a certificate of appreciation to Eleanor Lichty during a dedication ceremony for the new Little Free Library at Pulaski’s Jackson Park. The ceremony was held on Wednesday, October 26, 2022. Lichty, a resident of Christiansburg and member of Girl Scout Troop 888, recently constructed the Library using materials made possible through a mini-grant from the Family & Children’s Trust Fund of Virginia. The initial supply of books was donated by New River Valley Community Services. (Photo – M. Wade/NRVCS)

Graham

From Page 4

disorders, through both individual counseling and group programs. He says the current prevalence of polysubstance use (regular use of more than one substance) is perhaps the biggest challenge with addiction treatment.

“In the drug world, I have seen ups and downs with what the ‘popular’ drug is...and these days, I would probably just say, there’s a lot more of a lot more,” he says. “Right now, we have loads of people who do both methamphetamine and opiates constantly - and I can remember a time when you typically had people who liked stimulants and people who liked depressants and it was rare to have anyone mixing them - and now it seems everyone is mixing them.”

“I think that has to do with the current easy access to methamphetamine that wasn’t always there,” Graham adds, “but these days, it’s worse overall because everybody is using everything.”

As for his retirement plans, Graham and his wife of 32 years will be traveling to Portsmouth regularly to visit their grandson. The couple, who have two daughters, are also big Shakespeare fans

and plan on revisiting the American Shakespeare Center’s Blackfriars Playhouse in Staunton - something they’ve been unable to enjoy in person during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“This may sound like the last thing many people would want to do, but until you see the American Shakespeare Center’s performers in person, you have no idea how good live theater can be and how meaningful for modern times Shakespeare can be,” says Graham, who also plans to start playing piano again with his extra time.

Will he miss working? Like many others who reach retirement, it’s something he views with mixed emotions.

“I have never felt burned out by the clients, they are a joy,” responds Graham. “The paperwork, on the other hand...”

Graham’s favorite quote is from George Bernard Shaw: “*The single biggest problem with communication is the illusion it has taken place.*”

“Can’t tell you how many times I have seen that proven true,” says Graham.

Join the NRVCS team



nrvcs.org/employment

Rewarding career opportunities in behavioral health

Meaningful work | Supportive environment | Excellent benefits



mental health disorders
substance use disorders
developmental disabilities
community wellness & outreach



www.nrvcs.org
Follow us on
Facebook, Twitter,
LinkedIn & YouTube