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2023

# IMPACT REPORT

As we conclude a year marked by significant achievements and progress, we are proud to have all of our VitAL supporters as a part of this extraordinary VitAL team. We have been a hub for training, support, and evaluation across the state of Alabama. We are filled with gratitude for the collective accomplishments and impact we have all made through our collaborations. Each of you has played a crucial role in this journey, whether through partnership, receiving technical assistance, attending our events, or accessing and sharing our resources. Looking back, we have not only met our goals; we have set new standards across the state. As we look to the future, I am excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. There is still much work to be done, but I am confident that with our strong foundation and unwavering commitment, we will continue to move the needle in behavioral health care in Alabama. Here's to a future that is as bright and promising as the providers and professionals that power it!

- VitAL Director, Shanna McIntosh MS, AADC



## PROJECT ADDITIONS

VitAL is the recipient of two new grants this year which will further our work in behavioral health.

Project Zero Suicide is implementing the Zero Suicide Model of Care, a multilevel evidence-based suicide prevention practice. The model will be implemented in public health care with individuals who are 18 years of age or older in rural and underserved Cullman County. The project will also build infrastructure for evidenced based suicide care and suicide prevention training in eight additional counties with significantly high suicide rates. These counties include Chambers, Chilton, Clay, Conecuh, Covington, Henry, Marion, and Winston.

The project aims to:

- Increase access to universal suicide screening for adults in public health care settings
- Improve patient outcomes among adults, including veterans, with a risk of suicide
- Increase education and training of professionals to better assess, engage, treat, and transition those with identified suicide risk

This project will bring four new staff members to the team. Tamela Hughes was recently hired as Project Director.

IPS Works Alabama is establishing two Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Works teams to serve Jefferson and Tuscaloosa counties existing Community Mental Health Centers (CMHC), expanding their capacity to offer supported employment evidenced based practices and building the necessary staffing to meet the fidelity of an Evidenced Based Practice (EBP) IPS team.

The project aims to:

- Improve vocational assessment and competitive employment outcomes for adults (18+) with SMI and/or COD
- Increase the capacity to implement and sustain integrated supports in Alabama for adults with SMI and/or COD through outreach, training, and community education
- Promote housing stability among adults with SMI and/or COD

Josh Law, previous Mobile Crisis Coordinator, is serving in the role as the Project Director for this award.

# 2023 PROJECTS

## ALABAMA WORKFORCE STABILIZATION PROGRAM

The Alabama Workforce Stabilization Program (AWSP) team provided Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) training to 287 individuals across 25 businesses in Alabama, serving to increase mental health awareness and understanding of how to respond to a person struggling with a mental health challenge for employers across the state. The team also completed the data collection of a state-wide workplace survey looking at, if and how employers are addressing mental health in Alabama. In addition, the AWSP team developed the content for a Mental Health in the Workplace Toolkit that will be available to the public in 2024.

## COVID GRANT

The COVID grant has offered numerous education and training opportunities for healthcare professionals across the state. In January 2023, the Stop Judging; Start Healing Stigma Summits were brought to seven cities in Alabama ranging north to south with 736 total attendees. The summits included two national keynote speakers, Damon West and Ryan Leaf, who each spoke of their personal experiences with stigma. In August 2023, the 2nd Annual VitAL Alabama Conference was held in Tuscaloosa with more than 400 attendees. Two Medication Access and Training Expansion (MATE) Act training courses for those who hold a DEA license (physicians, physician's assistants, nurse practitioners, and dentists) were also delivered in partnership with the Medical Association of the State of Alabama and the UAB Dental School continuing education office with 310 attendees. Various webinars and other educational initiatives were also delivered on substance use and mental health. VitAL On-Demand was launched in June and delivers evidence-based courses in an accessible and convenient format. Participants benefited from engaging content in a web-based format – one that delivers learning at a time and place that best meets the demand of a professionals' demanding schedule. Webinars were offered through the Covid grant covering multiple topics such as mental health first aid, treatment of trauma, and substance use disorders, with over 150 attending each webinar.

## EVERY STEP

The Every Step team disseminated information throughout the state of Alabama to reduce infant mortality. Dissemination included speaking engagements, content creation, and providing resources at various events and conferences. The team developed resources which include informational flyers and handouts around substance misuse and pregnancy and a self-paced training course, SBIRT (Screening, Brief Intervention, and Referral to Treatment) for Maternal Care and OBGYNs. Every Step team members partnered to create a Perinatal Toolkit which offers providers and individuals within the community information on harm reduction strategies for those who are substance involved and pregnant. SBIRT implementation and refresher trainings were conducted for providers/staff in both the maternal and general healthcare fields. Through collaboration with external agencies, Every Step worked to further promote SBIRT education, SBIRT as a primary pre-screening for all patients, and develop consistent messaging around maternal health and substance misuse.

## FREEDOM NORTH

FREEDOM North offered numerous training opportunities for first responders on Opioid Safety & Hazards, Compassion Fatigue, and Mental Health First Aid. FREEDOM North expanded in 2023 to include Public Safety Officers among the first responders eligible to participate in training and naloxone distribution. More than 560 first responders, including volunteer and municipal fire, law enforcement, and public safety officers were provided 2926 Narcan kits during FREEDOM North's fourth year. The catchment area was expanded to 30 counties from the original 16, to help combat the opioid epidemic and increasing number of opioid overdoses and deaths. Additional education and training opportunities were provided to healthcare professionals on the treatment of opioid use disorders and how stigma contributes to the opioid epidemic.

## FREEDOM SOUTH

In its second year, FREEDOM South enlarged their catchment area from 16 counties to 25 counties. This grant also distributed 1,286 Naloxone kits to first responders and trained over 1,000 first responders on opioid safety and compassion fatigue. Additionally, 4,472 members of the community and 3,388 healthcare providers have been trained in the dangers of high toxicity opioids, proper prescription use and disposal and the Good Samaritan Law. Members of the FREEDOM South staff presented at many conferences, community events and virtual trainings to promote community engagement, substance misuse abuse prevention and the dissemination of educational materials pertaining to the scope of the grant.

# 2023 PROJECTS

## MI CHILDREN'S

The MI Children's grant completed ten Intensive Care Coordination, ten In-Home Intervention and eight Therapeutic Mentoring trainings for Children's Services staff at Certified Community Mental Health Centers across the state. The participants expressed greater understanding of subject matter at the completion of each training, which was shown by improved test scores (pre and post-tests); insightful participation for which they offered relevant feedback during the trainings; and participant evaluations in which the participant was asked to rate the training materials and presentation. Participants freely shared additional comments to rate the amount of information presented, to offer feedback on the trainers' presentation and engagement, and to suggest improvements. In 2023, the program added continuing education credits for all three courses for licensed participants.

## MOBILE CRISIS REDESIGN

The VitAL Mobile Crisis Redesign Project Team worked alongside state partners at the Alabama Department of Mental Health and the Alabama Medicaid Agency to conduct a statewide program evaluation of existing mobile crisis team (MCT) services at eleven community mental health centers across Alabama. The VitAL Mobile Crisis Redesign Team engaged MCT administrators and providers at each of the eleven participating centers in in-depth interviews and analyzed a robust collection of data through the lens of SAMHSA's National Guidelines for Behavioral Health Crisis Care: Best Practice Toolkit. The resultant analysis produced individualized reports for the state and each participating center. These reports not only included information that guided the development of nine online, evidence based MCT training modules, but also identified areas of growth and strengths for the centers and the state regarding the planning, implementation, and future of Alabama's redesigned and up-to-date crisis system of care. Following the production of these reports, the VitAL Mobile Crisis Redesign Team then engaged each of the eleven centers in individualized meetings where the results of collected data and analyses were discussed in depth.

## OD2A/CONNECT ALABAMA

Since the launch of Connect Alabama in July 2022 there have been nearly 7,000 downloads. The application enhanced capabilities in 2023 to include access to telehealth substance use assessments which provide end-users the ability to request appointments for the assessments directly from the app. The app also added a speaker request function to request a subject matter expert to speak anywhere in the state on topics related to substance use, prevention, and mental health. Other functions added in 2023 include Google maps integration for directions to providers and resources, direct call feature for phone numbers in the app, text box search to easily locate content, scrolling hot topic banner, new treatment and recovery resources in the directory, and ADMH Crisis Centers were added in Helplines. Connect Alabama is preparing to launch Phase III which will include integrating a self-help meeting tool to locate available meetings, a portal for providers and resource agencies to request inclusion in the app directory, and self-screening tools for behavioral health concerns. The Stop Judging; Start Healing social media and webpage were merged with VitAL's to broaden the audience. VitAL ran multiple Stop Judging; Start Healing anti-stigma campaigns to reduce stigma via education on a variety of topics including Medication Assisted Recovery. OD2A held the first Alabama A+ Summits in four Alabama cities to address health disparities in prevention, treatment, and recovery in the state, highlighting root causes of health disparities and established solutions to promote and achieve health equity.

## PROJECT POSSIBILITIES

Project Possibilities worked to develop, implement, and expand a combination of law enforcement diversion programs, comprehensive and real-time data collection, analysis, and dissemination, and introducing Medication-Assisted Treatment and peer support recovery support services into existing systems of service in the State of Alabama across Calhoun, Dekalb, Etowah, Jefferson, Madison, Mobile, Montgomery, and Walker counties. The project partners include Alabama Bureau of Pardons and Paroles, Recovery Organization of Support Specialist, and People Engaged in Recovery who served individuals identified across the criminal justice system including those in need of diversion from and preventing the return to the criminal justice system.

## PROJECT SUPPORT

Project Support trained a total of 581 First Responders in Mental Health First Aid Training throughout the state of Alabama. Participants of the training made a total of 3,422 referrals for individuals in need of mental health or substance use resources, highlighting the impact of the training on communities. A partnership with the Equitable Neighborhoods Initiative also provided Mental Health First Aid to their 15 targeted rural communities throughout the state, including two Indigenous Tribes. The Program Manager also joined the statewide Crisis Intervention Team (CIT), further developing relationships with First Responders across the state. Recognition was awarded by the National Council on Mental Well-Being for being the top trainer for Mental Health First Aid in Alabama.