

**News Release
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Northwest Michigan Works! Joins Fight Against Opioid Crisis

NORTHERN LOWER, MI— At a time when employers need all the help they can get to maintain a healthy, skilled workforce, Northwest Michigan Works! has partnered with Michigan Works! Region 7B and Michigan Works! Northeast Consortium to provide employment services designed to help communities address a critical issue that impacts lives across the Northern Lower Michigan region: The Opioid Epidemic.

According to the State of Michigan, from 1999 to 2018, opioid overdose deaths increased from 118 to 2036, with 8.4 million prescriptions written for opioid medication in 2018. Across the country, the number of opioid overdose deaths is around 47,000 per year, with millions of loved ones impacted not only by these deaths, but by addiction.

In 2021, the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) has pledged to fight this epidemic with a crisis response strategy of prevention, treatment, and harm reduction. To that end, 24 Northern Michigan Counties – including those represented by Northwest Michigan Works! (Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford) – will receive over \$3 million in funding to help fight the opioid epidemic in our communities.

The Michigan Works! agencies know that in order to help local employers, the impact of this crisis needs to be addressed, and this is an innovative way to bring together the employer, employee, and resources for success.

“We are excited to be able to positively impact those who have been affected by the opioid epidemic and are ready to return to work,” said Terry Vandercook, Chief Program Officer for Northwest Michigan Works!. “The need for connecting job seekers and employers is as important now as it has ever

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been. This program will train and introduce those individuals looking for work to the employers who need them, a win-win for everyone involved. Northwest Michigan Works! is happy to help facilitate this opportunity throughout our region.”

Employers in support of this grant also noted that it wasn’t just hiring, but retaining employees, that was directly impacted by drug use.

“In at least three scenarios over the past several years we’ve had employees that start to slip, they become unreliable with their attendance, they start to miss deadlines making managing the resource a challenge,” said Aaron Swanker, Creative Director and Co-Founder for Flight Path Creative. “Initially we found ourselves scratching our heads looking for answers. But ultimately we suspected the individuals were having substance abuse issues clearly impacting their career. As an employer we are unaware of resources to support these individuals. This grant opportunity will help us get these team members back on track and continue to contribute to our team.”

The funding will make it possible to hire and train Certified Professional Life Coaches to assist individuals affected by opioid dependency – whether by their own addiction or that of a family member or friend – with any issues that may affect their success in life and at work. These Life Coaches will help those impacted by the opioid crisis to navigate resources, career training, and employment opportunities.

“The Life Coaches are in such a unique position, and are integral to the success of our program participants,” said Lisa Schut, Regional Director for Northwest Michigan Works!. “They will be trained to apply a holistic strategy when providing services and assistance to participants. Everyone has a story, and it’s our job to work closely with each individual to listen and learn each story to help them identify and achieve their goals. We are on their side and are excited to help them transition into their dream job.”

With the funding from this grant, the three Michigan Works! agencies aim to serve almost 200 participants across the region.

Northwest Michigan Works! continues to build partnerships with other agencies and organizations across the region that provide services and resources to people struggling with effects of opioid addiction. Anyone interested in partnering with us or participating in the grant is encouraged to contact Lisa Schut at lisa.schut@networksnorthwest.org.

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NOTE to Media: Images are oftentimes available upon request by emailing Dan Boss at dan.boss@networksnorthwest.org and stating preferences for resolution, file format, and file size. Or phone (231) 929-5047. Check our online Media Room at: networksnorthwest.org/media.



Founded in 1974, Networks Northwest facilitates and manages various programs and services for the-10 county region. These programs include Northwest Michigan Works, Small Business Development Center, Procurement Technical Assistance Center, various business services, and many different regional planning initiatives in response to our communities' requests and needs. You will see the broad spectrum of workforce, business, and community services Networks Northwest offers if you visit our website, networksnorthwest.org. Networks Northwest's member counties are Antrim, Benzie, Charlevoix, Emmet, Grand Traverse, Kalkaska, Leelanau, Manistee, Missaukee, and Wexford.