



NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Rally to celebrate healthy communities, recovery draws 1,000 to downtown Marion

Organizers of the inaugural Blue Ridge Recovery Rally estimated that more than 1,000 local residents gathered Saturday in downtown Marion to celebrate healthy communities, hope and recovery.

The first rally of its kind in McDowell County, the event aimed to spread the message that people can and do recovery from addiction, mental health concerns and other life challenges. Two blocks of Main Street were closed to traffic to make room for inflatable bounce houses, music, speakers and a recovery walk, as well as 50 vendors and information booths sponsored by local organizations and treatment providers.

Amy Haynes, director of the McDowell County Health Coalition, a rally sponsor, said she was impressed by the “awesome” turnout of vendors, agencies and local residents coming together in support of people in recovery.

“Support is out there,” Haynes said. “You don’t need to suffer in isolation. There is a community to support you as you get back on your feet.”

Marion Police Chief Allen Lawrence told the crowd that although law enforcement has the responsibility of making arrests related to alcohol and drug crimes, they also want to help people connect to treatment and begin recovery. “My door is always open,” he said. “We’re here to help you.”

Freedom Life Ministries, a rally sponsor, and Nebo Crossing set up a chalkboard and encouraged people to write down their biggest regrets in life. For work on an upcoming video, they then filmed participants discussing what steps they could take to redirect their lives and overcome those challenges. One participant was Jacob Brewer, a 25-year-old Black Mountain resident who is nearing end of a local two-year substance use treatment program.

“There’s a lot of stigma,” Brewer said. “But the reality of it is that it’s just people who have had traumatic experiences. They needed an escape. They’re not bad people. We did bad things under the influence, but it’s not who we are.”

The event’s platinum sponsor was Vaya Health, a public managed healthcare organization in 23 western N.C. counties. “We’re very passionate and committed to recovery,” Vaya CEO Brian Ingraham said. “And by the looks of the great crowd today and participation, a lot of people in Marion feel the same way – which is fantastic.”

Danny Hampton, executive director of Freedom Life Ministries, said substance use is the number one health concern in McDowell County. “I’m seeing a community coming together,” he said Saturday. “I think this is just the start of a movement in this county to support recovery in a substantial way.”

The event was sponsored by a partnership that includes people in recovery and their supporters, healthcare organizations, local government agencies, nonprofits, law enforcement and other community groups.

Addiction and mental health issues affect people from all walks of life, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, gender, education level or other factors. Nationwide, more than 8 percent of people age 12 or older are addicted to or dependent on alcohol or drugs, according to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). Also, 18 percent of adults reported mental health concerns – such as depression or anxiety – in the previous year.

The Blue Ridge Recovery Rally supports a variety of paths to recovery and is not affiliated with any one philosophy or organization.

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About Vaya Health

Vaya Health manages public funds for mental health, substance use disorder and intellectual or developmental disability services in 23 North Carolina counties: Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Caldwell, Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, McDowell, Mitchell, Polk, Rutherford, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, Wilkes and Yancey. Access to services and crisis help are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week at 1-800-849-6127. Learn more at www.vayahealth.com.