

Health coalition focuses on needs in community

By Rudy Diaz

Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Community Health Improvement Coalition makes strides as they continue their work against substance abuse, behavioral health and chronic disease in Grant County.

In 2017, Lisa Weigum, Community Counseling Solutions, and Tracey Blood, Eastern Oregon Coordinated Care Organization, started a trauma inform task force to address gaps in the community regarding trauma-informed care. The task force would eventually evolve into the volunteer-driven Grant County Community Health Improvement Coalition.

The coalition focuses on the most recent Community Health Needs Assessments and local data collections. The data shows gaps in the community and helps the coalition create a well-rounded focus since many of the issues are connected, Weigum said. Blood said nine volunteer board members represent different areas in the community, participate in other committees and have a passion to enhance the work against trauma and intergenerational cycles of abuse.

"They have a cross sec-



Eagle file photo

Grant Union students get busy at the booths during a Teen Health Fair.

tion of representation from the community and are from different sectors in the community focused on this work and have a passion for the work," Blood said. "We do it as part of our career in different avenues of behavioral health."

Since 2018, the coalition carried out 24 projects that provided trainings and education on substance abuse and behavioral health.

"We've had 24 trainings throughout 2018-19 that we were able to bring to the community and engage different target audiences such as teachers, students, parents or the community at whole," Blood

said. One event that has come back each year is the Teen Health Fair. At the fair, experts provide a presentation to all five of the county's school districts and talk with students about substance abuse prevention, mental health and healthy relationships.

"It's important to have these in a community and if you look at other communities that look like they are healthy and retain people, part of that is having coalitions doing work around mental health and substance abuse disorders, having opportunities to talk freely about those topics and

in the community has been a big accomplishment for the coalition.

"We've really worked with the school districts to develop a relationship that is founded in trust and education and that we would come together to enhance the educational opportunities for our youth," Blood said.

The coalition plans to prioritize its efforts based on changing needs within the community.

"We don't want to go out and spend money on an activity that the community is not ready for," Weigum said. "With part of the goal being that we didn't want to come in and do a one-and-done, which is common in this field. All these things tie together in terms of our community's health, and we want to continue promoting those ideas in different angles."

The coalition has also seen community support, donations and funding from the Grant County Court that all go toward implementation of these events and activities, Weigum said. None of the money goes to members of the coalition.

A challenge the coalition faces is burnout and fatigue, Weigum said. Much of the work, especially administra-

tion and coordination, is done through partnerships and the free time coalition members have.

"We have a lot of support from some of the foundations in Oregon to continue this work, and it's a matter of when we apply," Weigum said. "We need to have a plan on how to put this money and where to expel it in a year."

Other volunteer members of the coalition are Allison Field, the director of Grant County Economic Development; Debi Hueckman, from the Department of Human Services; Katrina Randleas, from Families First Parent Resource Center; Jessica Winegar, from the Grant County Health Department; Didgette McCracken, Oregon Statue University, Open Campus; Shelia Comer, from Blue Mt. Hospital; and Mike McManus, Grant County Community Corrections.

Weigum said all of the coalition's events have gone well. The feedback the coalition received for their recent Grant County teacher in-service was that it was some of the best training participants have received, Weigum said.

Email GrantCounty-CHIC@gmail.com for more information or questions for the coalition.

Baker Technical Institute launches CMA program

Blue Mountain Eagle

Baker Technical Institute has added a Certified Medical Assistant Apprenticeship Program. Initially, the program will be available in Baker, Malheur, Grant and Harney counties.

Medical assistants are specially-trained health care workers. Job responsibilities generally include both administrative and clinical tasks that are required in taking care of patients. These responsibilities can vary depending on the place of employment.

According to the Bureau of Labor and Industries, the need for medical assistants is at a rapid rate of growth with a national projected increase of approximately 184,600 new jobs over a 10-year period. With this vast influx of openings, many medical assistant positions are remaining vacant. Due to a lack of training in rural and frontier communities across

Eastern Oregon, these areas are often hit especially hard.

The new BTI program will provide an innovative solution to the workforce shortage and allow individuals living in remote areas to obtain training without relocating.

Instead of paying tuition, students will earn a salary while they learn the trade. The program spans 12 months, where students will complete 2,000 hours of on-the-job paid work experience as well as the required coursework. BTI has collaborated with the Southwestern Oregon Workforce Investment Board and Allied Health West to design a program that works for the students and employers in rural communities of Eastern Oregon.

This collaboration has made it possible for students to train with professionals in the workplace and complete the coursework on their own schedule by accessing the accredited online

curriculum. This makes apprentices eligible to take the Certified Clinical Medical Assistant exam, which is a nationally recognized credential. Apprenticeship costs, including the CCMA test preparation and testing fees, are currently covered by grants allowing apprentices to become trained while being paid at a full-time job without incurring student loans.

"This program has been at the top of our priority list for a while due to the demand across our region combined with the lack of training opportunities that work for where we live," said Tonia Springer, BTI program coordinator. "It is a great feeling to be able to help industry fill positions, while at the same time provide a pathway into the medical profession and required career training at no cost to the students is even better."

For more information, visit bakerti.org.



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Grant Soil & Water Conservation District 2020 Annual Meeting

Thursday, March 5th, 6:00 – 7:30pm

Grant County Municipal Airport, John Day, OR

Guest Speaker: Brenda Sanchez, OR Dept. of Agriculture Strategic Implementation Area (SIA) Program Lead

Upcoming Changes to Oregon's Agricultural Water Quality Management Program

Oregon Department of Agriculture (ODA) has the authority to enforce Administrative Rules under their Agricultural Water Quality Management Program; these rules apply to private property owners or operators whose land is engaged in agricultural use.

Since 2003, enforcement has occurred on a complaint driven basis; ODA is currently proposing an alternative known as the "Strategic Implementation Area" (SIA) process.

This process will select specific watersheds within Grant County and conduct remote evaluations of private lands using aerial and satellite imagery to identify potential water quality concerns; follow up field evaluations will be initiated to further examine the accuracy of the findings conducted remotely.

The proposed schedule to implement this program on private lands includes the North and Middle Fork John Day River as well as the Crooked River basins in 2021, Middle John Day River (downstream of Mountain Creek), Malheur River and the Silvies Basin (Greater Harney Basin) in 2022 and the Upper Mainstem and South Fork John Day Rivers in 2023.

The public is invited to join Grant Soil and Water Conservation District for this informative event. Complimentary refreshments will be served. More information can be obtained either by visiting our website: grantswcd.net, stopping by the District Office located in the USDA Agricultural Service Center (721 S. Canyon Blvd, John Day) or by contacting Kyle Sullivan at (541) 575-0135 x111.

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Eagle file photo

In 2018, coalition members and community members planted over 150 pinwheels to bring awareness to National Child Abuse Prevention Month.

having access to care," said Weigum. "We want to create and build a healthy community and with that comes information, informed decision making about your health."

Blood added that these events create a safe space for learning when talking about intense topics. The fair is planned again for 2020.

Developing strong partnerships between schools in the county, working closely and having a strong partnership with Blue Mountain Hospital and building connections

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