



# RIVER HILLS PREVENTION CONNECTION

**COMMUNITY CONTEXT:** Lawrence County is the southernmost county in the state of Ohio, in the rural heart of Appalachia. As is the norm in a rural area, poverty, substance misuse, and hopelessness are a defining factor. Due to the size of our community and availability of resources, the River Hills Prevention Connection covers all areas of prevention work: Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention.

## LEAD AGENCY OR CONVENER GROUP

The River Hills Prevention Connection (RHPC) coalition serves the Lawrence County area with the goal of reducing substance abuse and improving the community at large. The lead agency, Impact Prevention, a 501c3, provides paid staff and manages grants that help fund the coalition.

## COALITION MEMBERSHIP

With around 10-15 regular members, we have diverse representation from a variety of sectors, experiences, and backgrounds that reflect the community population.

### OPERATIONS AND PROCESSES

The overall organizational climate and group communication is open, relaxed, and accepting, with members being encouraged to lend their voice and experience as much as possible.

### LEADERSHIP AND STAFFING

Aside from Impact Prevention staff who are paid, all members are volunteers, including the leadership team (a chair and vice-chair).

### STRUCTURES

As the River Hills Prevention Connection addresses a wide variety of community concerns, there are sub-committees dedicated to each area of focus: Faith-based community efforts, gathering data, suicide prevention, community connectedness, as well as the youth council.

### POOLED RESOURCES

Aside from Impact Prevention, a variety of organizations around the community provide volunteers, expertise, experience, education, support, and data that are used when moving forward with efforts. These organizations also come together to contribute services or donations that support coalition projects, such as "Parks Alive," which utilizes parks around the county to encourage connectedness.

### MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Members are constantly searching for efforts in the community that align with the coalition's mission, and to on-board committed organizations who are completing those efforts. Each member has a voice and is encouraged to participate in sub-committees, events, and other networking opportunities.

### ASSESSMENT AND PLANNING

The coalition analyzes local data from a variety of sources and identifies the appropriate time to implement each chosen strategy. We ensure sustainability by strategic planning, reviewing financial and personal resources regularly, and properly building capacity for each effort.

### IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIES

Impact Prevention acquires resources through grants, as well as in-kind contributions and volunteers, and the coalition then collectively proceeds with the strategic planning process.

### COMMUNITY CHANGE OUTCOMES

Targeted outcomes include: greater family communication regarding the risks of substance misuse, greater education regarding the signs and symptoms of suicide, and an increase in resources for mental wellness.

### COMMUNITY CAPACITY

As a result of participation in the coalition, members are more engaged in community work and informed about the local conditions, which then allows for greater preparation for future efforts.

### HEALTH AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Through the work of the River Hills Prevention Connection, we hope to see the following health and social outcomes: An overall decrease in substance misuse, reduced mental health stigma, and greater mental wellness.

FORMATION

MAINTENANCE

INSTITUTIONALIZATION

SYNERGY

**Community Coalition Action Theory – Longer Narrative**  
**River Hills Prevention Connection**  
**Lawrence County, Ohio**

**Community Context**

Lawrence County is the southernmost county in the state of Ohio, on the border of Kentucky and West Virginia. Surrounding areas have seen economic downturn/loss of work due to closing of local industries, which is leading to a growing divide between the “haves” and “have-nots”, a disappearing middle class, and a recent increase in overdose deaths and suicide. Other contextual factors include: Grandparents taking the primary role in raising their grandchildren, an education level below the national and state averages. “Culture and social standing are family centered and the extended family includes fictive kin (e.g., near neighbors, fellow church members).” (Russ, 2010) While in metropolitan areas community coalitions are more specified, the River Hills Prevention Connection covers all areas of prevention work: Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention.

**Lead Agency or Convener Group**

The River Hills Prevention Connection (RHPC) coalition serves the Lawrence County/Southeastern Ohio area with the goal of reducing substance abuse and improving the community at large. RHPC began as a collaboration called HEAL MAPPs (Healthy Eating Active Living), between the Ohio State University Extension office, a local hospital, and Youth Empowerment Activities (a sub-group of Impact Prevention. The lead agency, Impact Prevention, a 501c3, provides paid staff and manages grants that help fund the coalition.

**Coalition Membership**

We have representation from each of the Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) 12 sectors<sup>1</sup>, and our membership is reflective of demographics including race, socioeconomic factors, age, education, and recovery status. There are between 10-15 regular members. However, we are constantly seeking new members to balance sector representation across the board. In our coalition, the priority population is the youth, with efforts being centered around prevention of substance abuse and mental health promotion.

**Coalition Operations and Processes**

The overall organizational climate is open, relaxed, and accepting, with members who are curious, driven, and want to make change. The coalition communicates with its members primarily via email, encouraging them to add any updates to the next meeting’s agenda, or to celebrate a group success. Because of our diverse membership, we are able to easily reach local government, members of the priority population, and sub-groups who may be more difficult to engage, such as senior citizens or people in recovery. Conflict management is mediated as per the by-laws the coalition has in place. Opportunities, such as grants or events, are presented as agenda items at each meeting and discussed at length. The lead agency manages finances, and provides a report for any coalition-specific funding. Decisions of any kind are made by a majority vote.

**Leadership and Staffing**

Diva Justice serves as the coalition chair and represents the healthcare sector, through King’s Daughters Medical Center. Sallie Schisler, the vice-chair, represents the faith sector as the priest of Christ Episcopal Church. Aside from Impact Prevention staff who are paid, all members are volunteers, including the leadership team. All members are given the opportunity to serve on sub-committees and are encouraged to participate and bring their ideas to the table for the benefit of the community.

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<sup>1</sup>CADCA’s 12 Sectors: Youth, Parents, Businesses, Media, Schools, Youth-serving organizations, Law enforcement, Religious or fraternal organizations, Civic or volunteer groups, Healthcare professionals, State, local, or tribal governmental agencies with expertise in substance misuse, Other organizations involved in reducing substance misuse (treatment providers)

## **Structures**

The RHPC operates largely under a sub-committee structure with the following groups in place:

Faith-based Quick Response Team - This subcommittee works to support the individuals and families of individuals who are involved in the court system and struggling with addiction.

Prevention Data Committee - Keeps a pulse on OHYES! data collection reviewing for trends that may be addressed and progress on projected outcomes. The PDC also oversees Community Readiness Assessment and focus group sessions around identified trends/issues as well as local conditions.

Suicide Prevention: The Suicide Prevention sub-committee was first orchestrated as a result of the death by suicide of a Lawrence County commissioner in winter of 2018.

Community Connectedness - This subcommittee focuses on bringing the community together with positive, substance-free activities, particularly in the parks across the county.

Youth Council- The youth council is a team of passionate, community-minded young people who are committed to making change in our area, and making it a safe place to live and thrive.

## **Pooled Resources**

Most organizations currently serving the priority population, youth and those at-risk for substance abuse, in our community have been on-boarded to the coalition. Many community stakeholders, including representatives of the Mayor's office, are active members. Aside from Impact Prevention, other organizations provide volunteers, expertise, experience, education, support, and data that are used when moving forward with efforts. Members are always encouraged to contribute data and field knowledge to the grant/funding acquisition process. We are currently preparing data for a Drug-Free Communities grant bid in the future.

## **Member Engagement**

Members are constantly searching for efforts in the community that align with the coalition's mission, and to on-board committed organizations who are completing those efforts. Each member understands that their ideas and concerns will be heard. Further, they are encouraged to participate in sub-committees and events, and are given an opportunity to connect other members to their home organization. A set schedule and procedures in place allow members the opportunity to ensure they are able to participate and contribute any agenda items. Professional development opportunities such as the CADCA conference, resources (readings, articles, websites) to provide ongoing education all empower members to succeed in their coalition work.

## **Assessment and Planning**

As per the adage, "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail." The coalition's Prevention Data sub-committee strategically plans and identifies the appropriate time to implement each strategy, and then presents to the full council to discuss proceeding. The intervening variables and local conditions are assessed by analyzing data collected from a variety of sources such as the criminal justice system, schools, healthcare agencies, and the county coroner. We ensure sustainability by strategic planning, reviewing financial and personal resources regularly, and properly building capacity for each effort. With a data-driven approach to planning, the coalition sets itself on the most direct course for success by ensuring that each effort is deliberate and relevant. By assessing before and after each effort, the impact and outcomes can be measured and success can be determined.

## **Synergy**

When organizations come together and combine resources, knowledge, skills, and different points of view, they create something new that can accomplish more than the individual organizations could have accomplished on their own (Taylor-Powell, Rossing & Geran, 1998). There is something powerful in this partnership which researchers and others call synergy (Lasker, Weiss & Miller, 2001; Taylor-Powell, Rossing & Geran, 1998). In the CCAT, synergy occurs through the combination of: pooled resources, member engagement and assessment and planning. Synergy is most evident in our work through a coalition project called "Parks Alive," which utilizes parks around the county to encourage connectedness in our community. To ensure the program's

success, each organization contributes services or donations such as: food, games, transportation, giveaways, and health education.

### **Implementation of Strategies**

In order to implement strategies, the fiscal agent, Impact Prevention, acquires resources through federal and state grants, as well as in-kind contributions and volunteers. The coalition then collectively assesses what is needed to carry out any plan to fidelity, and then builds capacity as needed. The coalition ensures that its timelines are realistic via a backwards design approach to planning, and utilizing data to set SMART goals. We provide consistent updates to members and other stakeholders throughout the project or effort to ensure engagement and input.

### **Community Change Outcomes**

Community change outcomes we would like to see consist of the following:

*Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention:* Greater communication between parents and youth regarding the risks of substance misuse and underage drinking.

*Suicide Prevention:* Greater education regarding the signs and symptoms of suicide and suicidal ideation.

*Mental Health Promotion:* An increase in resources for mental wellness and greater, more frequent conversation overall, and especially in light of the COVID-19 crisis.

### **Health and Social Outcomes**

Through the work of the River Hills Prevention Connection, we hope to see the following health and social outcomes:

*Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention:* As a result of our efforts to increase family communication, we hope to see supply and demand reduction for prescription and illicit substances, and a reduction in underage drinking.

*Suicide Prevention:* A decrease in stigma regarding suicide and suicidal ideation and a deeper understanding of causal factors.

*Mental Health Promotion:* More open, comfortable conversation regarding mental health, and greater self-care among community members.

### **Community Capacity**

As a result of participation in the coalition, members are more engaged in community work and informed about the local conditions. With regard to building capacity, our next steps are to complete the Community Readiness Assessment for Suicide Prevention work, review upcoming data from schools for trends, and use gathered data to implement a social norms campaign addressing a mental health misconception in our area. The idea is that with each of these things we will be able to identify needs and begin increasing visibility to prepare for more meaningful and effective programming. Overall, there has been an increase in capacity (human and financial resources) as a result of the work of our coalition.

## References

Russ, K. A. (2010). Working with clients of Appalachian culture. Retrieved from [http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas10/Article\\_69.pdf](http://counselingoutfitters.com/vistas/vistas10/Article_69.pdf)

**Community Coalition Action Theory – Shorter Narrative**  
**River Hills Prevention Connection**  
**Lawrence County, Ohio**

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