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Five Community Agencies Awarded 2019 Innovation Award for Community Inclusion Efforts

Pinehurst, NC (December 5, 2019). Five community agencies - McLeod Center, Addiction Recovery Medical Services, Olive Branch Ministry, PQA Healthcare, Catawba Valley Behavioral Health, and Partners Behavioral Health Management (a Local Management Entity/Managed Care Organization) have been working together since January of 2018 to add Certified Peer Support Specialists (CPSS) to opioid treatment programs (OTP) in the Partners catchment area to enhance the focus on opioid recovery. This program was recognized by the i2i Center with a 2019 Community Inclusion Innovation Award.

In March of 2019, a comprehensive specialized training program was created by the five groups to provide six seasoned Community Peer Support Specialist workers to educate those receiving opioid treatment on Medication Assisted Recovery and the treatment model of the Outpatient Program. These staff now work daily in the opioid treatment programs as role models, engagement specialists, and resource experts.

The Certified Peer Support Specialists quickly identified that many consumers struggled to participate in community support groups such as Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and responded to concerns from individuals receiving services in opioid treatment programs and started a nontraditional 12-step program where participants would feel accepted. The Certified Peer Support Specialists worked together to start Medication Assisted Recovery Anonymous (MARA) support groups in each clinic. (<https://www.mara-international.org/>) These groups initially began as a collaboration of peers in several locations who were connected via a conference call at a designated time each week.

Over the course of several months, support for the MARA groups grew at each site and, the initial group separated and focused on their local participants.

Hosting the MARA groups within the opioid treatment programs gives individuals who are participating in opioid treatment an opportunity to connect with peers and offers hope and inspiration in a nonjudgmental environment. Building community capacity and thus inclusion for this alternative support group creates a safe and welcoming space for individuals using medications to assist with recovery.

About i2i Center for Integrative Health

The mission of the i2i Center is to foster collaborative and evidence-based initiatives for improving the quality and efficacy of the behavioral health, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and substance use care and support services systems within a comprehensive system of whole person care. The i2i Center accomplishes its mission by convening stakeholders, strategizing solutions, and activating change.