

Ofc Matthew Kennedy Named CIT Officer of the Year

The Mental Health & Recovery Board is proud to announce the 2021 Crisis Intervention Team Officer of the Year awarded by the Portage County Police Chief's Association is Officer Matthew Kennedy of Brimfield Police. He received the honor for the assistance he gave to a suicidal woman this year.

In the early morning hours of their midnight shift in April, Officer Matthew Kennedy and Officer Carrozzi of Brimfield Police responded to a call of a distraught female standing on the outside ledge of a bridge threatening to jump.

The woman told them she wanted to die. Officer Kennedy began to engage her in conversation in a calm manner and built a rapport with her by asking about her family. He empathized with her and let her know over and over that it would be OK and that he was there to help her through this.

At one point, Officer Kennedy climbed up onto the hood of his cruiser so that he could engage with the woman in a face-to-face manner and keep her focused on him. The officers worked together to secure a sling around her waist to keep her stable until the fire department arrived to help her down.

Chief Ron Mosley recommended Kennedy for the award. "Ofc Kennedy and Carrozi both received a Life Saving Award for their actions on the bridge. I also recommended Officer Matthew Kennedy as a CIT Officer of the Year due to how he approached and engaged with this distraught woman over an extended period of time," Mosley explained. "He used skills learned and honed through CIT that contributed to bringing this to a successful outcome. Keeping her engaged with him was key, and it was a job well done."

"Each year we recognize officers for practicing the communication and de-escalation techniques they learned during their CIT training in helping individuals who are experiencing a mental health crisis or are struggling with addiction," explained John Garrity, PhD, executive director of the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County. "Officer Kennedy clearly demonstrated his commitment to the values of the CIT training and helping residents in need."



Officer Kennedy received his award during the Portage Substance Abuse and Mental Health Conference held on October 26, 2021 (from left) Bill Nome, Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County Chairman, Ofc Kennedy, Chief Ron Mosely, and John Garrity, executive director, Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County.

Whitmire Receives CARES Champions of Recovery Award

Stefani Whitmire, Peer Recovery Supporter at Townhall II, received the 2021 CARES *Champions of Recovery* Award from the Ohio Association of County Behavioral Health Authorities. Whitmire was one of eight recipients in the state of Ohio for this annual award that recognizes frontline workers and leaders who have dedicated significant time and expertise to support and serve Ohioans impacted by substance use disorders.

Tamera Hunter, CEO of Townhall II, a non-profit agency in Kent, expressed her appreciation of Whitmire's work. "Stefani has great compassion and commitment for helping others. Her work as a peer recovery supporter has been valuable to individuals and families impacted by addiction."

A peer recovery supporter is a person with "lived experience" who has been trained to support others who are struggling with mental health and addiction issues. Since peer supporters have been successful in their own recovery process, they are able to help others experiencing similar situations through shared understanding, respect, and mutual empowerment.

John Garrity, executive director of the Mental Health & Recovery Board of Portage County commented, "Peer recovery supporters play an important role in our continuum of care, and we are fortunate in Portage County to have Stefani, who is one of the best!"

To learn more about treatment and recovery services available in Portage County, contact the Addiction Helpline at Townhall II at 330-678-3006.

Grief Recovery After Substance Passing Group Available in Portage

Joey, Debby Smith's only son died of an accidental heroin overdose 7 years ago on October 2, 2014. Devasted, Debby sought counseling, but realized she was looking for something more to help her through her grief. She then discovered GRASP - Grief Recovery After Substance Passing. GRASP is a support group for those who have lost a loved one to substance abuse. This group offers a stigma-free safe-space that allows participants to be open about their losses without any judgement.

"Unfortunately, there is a stigma that people who die from substance abuse are bad people and had bad parents, partners, and friends," stated Debby. "This is simply not true."

GRASP works to eliminate those beliefs and help those affected understand that no one is to blame, and everyone does their best. This group offers understanding, compassion, and support for those who have been affected by addiction and overdose. Others in the support group understand the pain because they have suffered a similar kind of loss but have found love and connection through others who have experienced the same.

"It is really helpful for me to be around people who had been through similar situations and who understand," Debby said.

Debby found GRASP online, but since there wasn't a local group, she decided to start one here in Portage County. The group meets every first and third Monday of each month at 6pm

Debby also recommends the Families Anonymous Program for those struggling with family members addicted to drugs or alcohol or those with behavior-related issues. Addiction is an illness that affects every



member of the family. She is one of the facilitators for this 12-step fellowship program. In these meetings individuals can learn how to become part of the solution rather than the problem. Any concerned individual is welcome to attend these meetings and learn more. Families Anonymous also suggests attending five meetings before making the decision of whether the program is right for you. Meetings are held every first and third Wednesday of each month at 6pm at United Methodist Church of Kent at 1435 E Main St Kent

There is no cost to attend either of these meetings. Contact Debby Smith at 330-296-7071 Portage.Grasp@gmail.com for the GRASP meeting location and additional information.

More Support in Portage County

Kelly's Grief Center will be offering support groups for accidental overdose and suicide loss beginning the week of February 7. For more information, and to register, visit their [website](http://www.kellysgriefcenter.org) www.kellysgriefcenter.org

Family-to-Family 8 Week Course

Tuesdays at 6:30pm
March 29 - May 17



Designed for family members who have loved ones with mental illness

Register & Info at
330-673-1756



MENTAL HEALTH & RECOVERY BOARD OF PORTAGE COUNTY
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