



MARYLAND COMMUNITY
HEALTH RESOURCES
COMMISSION



MARYLAND RURAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

Introduction

- “Maryland’s Rural Health Stories” highlights the human impact of programs in rural communities funded by the Community Health Resources Commission (CHRC).
- To date, the CHRC has awarded 236 grants totaling \$71.3 million. Of this, more than half (121 of 236) have supported programs in rural Maryland.
- Under this collaboration with the Maryland Rural Health Association (MRHA), patients offer their perspective, through on-camera interviews and written testimonials.
- This is the second patient testimonial in “Maryland’s Rural Health Stories.”
- More patient testimonials from across the state will be released later this year.
- To access these testimonials, please visit:

<https://health.maryland.gov/mchrc/Pages/RURAL-HEALTH.aspx>

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To learn more about CHRC and MRHA and how they partner with rural organizations, please visit their websites:

<http://dhmh.maryland.gov/mchrc/pages/Home.aspx>
www.mdruralhealth.org
www.mdruralhealthplan.org

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Jessica's Story

Medication-Assisted Treatment Expansion

Jessica is many things – a wage earner, a rural Maryland transplant by way of Texas and Missouri, and a survivor of life’s many challenges. In 2017, after nearly two decades of substance abuse beginning when she was just nine, Jessica achieved sobriety. She enrolled in the Garrett County Health Department’s Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) Expansion Program fifteen months ago, and it changed her life.

“I [was] a drug addict for 20 years... I’ve been on the streets, whatever I had to do—steal, for my clothes, my food—I didn’t do the things that normal people do.”

The MAT program, supported by a three- year CHRC grant, was implemented in November 2016 to address the growing opioid addiction crisis in rural Western Maryland.

Before the program launched, there were no care coordination services or half-way houses or even any residential treatment programs located in Garrett County, which makes it extremely difficult for people like Jessica to seek treatment for substance use disorders. Before the program, residents of Garrett County had to drive 120 miles round trip to Cumberland to receive treatment.

“I tried other things and I know the programs in Missouri are different,” Jessica says. “Garrett County is ...really supportive... hands on. Maybe if I’d have had this [level of support] earlier, I would have been ready.”

Now Jessica benefits from weekly group sessions, as well as individual sessions with a counselor, whom Jessica describes as extremely caring and supportive. In collaboration with the University of Maryland’s School of Medicine’s Department of Psychiatry, the MAT program uses state-of-the-art telehealth technology to overcome the shortage of providers in Garrett County. Jessica meets monthly via video call with her doctor, who is able to prescribe her medications to help ease her recovery.

The program also helps Jessica arrange transportation to a pharmacy to pick up her medications. “Once I started taking it regularly like I was supposed to, on-time, every day, I quit getting cravings, I quit even wanting drugs,” Jessica says. Kathy Beals, LCSW-C, Substance Abuse Clinical Supervisor, Garrett County Health Department notes that: “This program has helped the community to start to see that there is success. Quite a few employers in the area are willing to hire them, where before they wouldn’t even look at them.”

When asked what, in addition to the program, has helped her to rise above with such resilience, Jessica said, “I am just real strong, I guess. I’ve been on my own a lot. I knew I had to keep on keeping on.” She thinks this program will really help her to maintain lifetime sobriety.

Shortly after her interview, Jessica called back and said, “You know what, you could use my last name. I’m very proud of myself and my story.”

Jessica Howard, you inspire us.

“In three months, I went from being...homeless to living in a three-bedroom apartment and holding a job.”