

Dear <<first name>>,

My name is Lisa Binkley, and I am the Director of Prevention for Nashville CARES. As the holiday season approaches and the year ends, I wanted to let you know how our Prevention Department is making a difference in our community, thanks to your generous support.

Nashville CARES launched the DART (Drug Awareness Response Team) Harm Reduction Program in 2023 aimed at addressing the Opioid and HIV Syndemic. With Tennessee having the second-highest overdose rate in the country and an increase in HIV cases among people who inject drugs, we knew we had to make this a priority. We did this by adding two mobile medical units, allowing us the flexibility to bring our services out to the people — Curbside Community Healthcare. We opened a new satellite office, Nashville CARES - Robertson County Campus, in Springfield, TN. This location will focus on HIV and HCV (Hepatitis C) medical treatment and care. It will serve as a permanent Harm Reduction location with extended hours for individuals suffering from Substance Use Disorder (SUD), including access to mental health services and case management support - providing wrap-around, inclusive community healthcare with dignity and respect.

Our Springfield campus sits geographically in the middle of some of the counties with the highest overdose rates in the state, allowing us to provide access to more rural areas. In the last year, the DART Program has:

- Signed up 342 unduplicated members for Harm Reduction services
- Distributed 6,067 doses of Narcan / Kloxxado
- Saved 441 lives with the Narcan distributed

One of our biggest barriers when working with individuals who have SUD is the number of people experiencing homelessness. I want to share with you a story about someone we recently encountered during one of our Harm Reduction outreach events.



"The Hugging Team" aka The Prevention Team

"Joyce" is a 37-year-old mother of five, originally from East Tennessee. She has been without a place to call home for seven years, the same number of years since she last saw her children. The day I met Joyce, she told me she once dreamed of being a nurse and even started nursing school. But like so many do, Joyce fell on hard times, in one abusive relationship after another, unable to make the money stretch far enough. She said her life was "in complete and total chaos." That's when she turned to alcohol and drugs.

What started with drinking and smoking marijuana, soon turned into crystal meth and crack cocaine. And then, one night, someone introduced her to heroin. She said, from that moment on, it became her life - chasing one fix after another. No longer was it about getting high, it was about trying not to be sick. Unable to work because of her addiction, she turned to trading herself for drugs and money. Joyce came to Nashville hoping to find a treatment facility that would work with her, but she soon found she didn't know how to navigate the system.

She was alone in a bigger city, with nowhere to go, and no way to leave. Joyce said she had to survive somehow, so she turned to what she knew best - heroin. By this time, drugs were being laced with Fentanyl, and Joyce found herself living each day at death's door. She told me a story about the first time she overdosed. When the paramedics revived her, they told her she had been sexually assaulted. She said she remembered feeling so dismissed by everyone after that. She knew then she would never trust anyone. Which makes the rest of this story so remarkable.

The day we met Joyce, we were out providing services in the community, but Joyce didn't want anything to do with us. She didn't want to get tested for HIV or HCV. She just wanted to know if we had water and Narcan. Our team gave her some water and provided her with the Narcan she requested, but we also gave her a hug. That hug turned into a conversation, and the conversation turned into her agreeing to get tested. Joyce tested positive that day for HIV and HCV.

We linked her to care and made her an appointment at our clinic for treatment. I talked to her on the phone and told her about Nashville CARES and the services we provide, but Joyce's instinct was to run, and she did. She told me she didn't trust the system or the people in it. I told her she had to trust someone, and we would be here for her, we wouldn't give up on her, so she couldn't give up on herself... and we didn't give up. Every day for two weeks, we went back to where she was staying. I like to say the 'hugging team' was mission-ready. I called her every day, but no Joyce.

Then one day, Joyce answered. We talked for over an hour, and she finally agreed to come to the clinic. Within fifteen minutes, I had staff there to pick her up. I explained everything that would happen that day and reminded her that we promised we wouldn't give up on her, and we kept our word. That day Nashville CARES gained her trust.

Your support furthers our mission, enabling us to continue our work to support our clients, patients and the communities we serve, offering dignity and respect to those like Joyce, who rarely receive it. Your donation is not just a financial contribution; it's a lifeline of hope for someone in need.

Thank you for your ongoing commitment and generosity. Together, we're making a tangible difference in the lives of some of the most vulnerable in our community.

Thank you for partnering with us!

Lisa Binkley