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FEATURED

## Montrose's Overdose Awareness Day event throws light on addiction

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From left, Cory Jenkins and Allie McDonald pose at the Aug. 31 Overdose Awareness Day event at Riverbottom Park in Montrose. Jenkins is an assisted treatment care coordinator for River Valley Family Health Centers and McDonald is peer recovery coach for Advocates for Recovery. (Katharhynn Heidelberg/Montrose Daily Press)

Audrey Huddle sat alone at the table at the Riverbottom picnic shelter, glancing toward the skateboard park where she used to take her sons. Those were happier times.

“In 2018, they knocked on my door,” Huddle said, recounting the arrival of the people who informed her that her elder son had died from a heroin overdose.

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Huddle spoke on Aug. 31, International Overdose Awareness Day, during Montrose's first event to remember those lost to addiction and those affected by it. Huddle's younger son, grief-stricken at his brother's passing, marked one year clean in August, she said.

“You really, really struggle trying to get help. It's important we talk about this because I'm not alone,” Huddle said.

Statistics provided by event organizers bear that out. Since 1999, 932,000 people have died from a drug overdose. Of these, 100,306 occurred between April 2020 and 2021. Among opioid overdose deaths, 75,673 occurred during that same period.

“We're educating the public on what an overdose looks like,” said Allie McDonald, peer recovery coach for Advocates for Recovery Colorado. The organization recently branched out to Montrose and Delta. McDonald, who commutes from Palisade, provides one-on-one services, as well as peer recovery groups and meetings.

She brings along her lived experience.

“I'm in recovery, Oct. 10 will be nine years from IV meth use. Because of my addiction, I went down a road of losing my children and actually living in a tent by the river for a period of time. I did about a 10-year run like that and then I found recovery.”

She was pregnant and staying at a drug house when it was raided.

“I went to jail for the last time, and that was Oct. 10 of 2013 and that's my sober date,” she did what I had to do to get my baby back and I've just been on this road of recovery. I just I what I've been through could be someone else's message of hope.”

Several other organizations joined Advocates for Recovery to raise awareness and provide information about their services for those struggling with substance abuse.

The event included a candlelight vigil to remember those who died from overdoses and a lighted memory tree bearing heart-shaped tags with the names of loved ones. The hope is to hold it every Aug. 31, the international day for remembering those affected by or lost to overdoses.

“Mostly our goal is to raise awareness and to reduce stigma, just to create a spot where we can hold open, honest conversations about substance use and also a place to find support,” said Cory Jenkins, medication assisted treatment coordinator for River Valley Family Health Center. “There’s a lot of services around here that some people might not know about.”

About a dozen organizations that offer resources gathered for Overdose Awareness Day, showcasing some of the services available.

There aren’t enough services overall to support all needs, Jenkins said — recovery requires more than willingness to change and addiction-specific help.

“I honestly think that basic needs are an issue right now. Housing is huge. It’s hard to expect people to get sober or to address issues when they don’t have a safe place to sleep. It’s hard for people to have dreams when they don’t get good rest, don’t get good food, don’t have social support,” she said.

No one has to tell that to Huddle.

She said her now deceased son had been on the road to recovery, but when a young woman he’d met in recovery relapsed and died, “it kind of threw him into a spin.”

Her younger son was introduced to drugs by the elder and “completely lost his mind” due to grief when his brother died, Huddle also said.

“I tried everything I could to help him, but I wasn’t getting any support. I wasn’t finding anything. I was that parent who felt like I was completely alone,” she said.

While she tried to help, she also had to function and hold down her job, as well as deal with stigma.

“When your child has cancer, your whole community comes together to support you. When your child has an addiction, it’s different. If you look at all of my friends here at the table, there are none. I’m here alone,” Huddle said.

“I felt like the town gave up on me. I wasn’t aware of half these people and services,” she said, indicating the many providers who attended the event, some of which are new to the area. “How can that be? Me, of all people, how could I not be aware of this?”

Because Huddle’s children were adults, she was not automatically entitled to information about their situations that could have helped: “Your hands are tied.”

Her younger son kept getting probation and not succeeding because of his addiction — yet he kept getting released, Huddle said.

The police department did what it could to help her, she also said, but their hands were tied, too, she added. “Something’s wrong.”

Huddle eventually inquired about community corrections, a sentencing option for certain offenders, who can be held in a controlled environment, yet receive treatment and also work in their own community and help pay for their incarceration. Commcorr helps people transition from incarceration and back into their communities successfully. Through it, Huddle said her son was able to address the issues that were driving his problems.

“Commcorr saved that kid’s life. Commcorr is the reason my son is a positive person in this community,” Huddle said.

She said her son is now thriving, one-year clean.

“Before, both my kids were just running amok, causing problems for the police department, the jail, judges. Not helping me help them, or helping them help anyone, is costing this town money. Finally getting help for my younger son, he’s a positive person in this community. He’s doing good things.”

More awareness is needed, Huddle said, in agreement with Overdose Awareness Day organizers like Jenkins and participants like McDonald.

“There’s help out there. You’re not alone,” she said.

“It’s day by day,” said McDonald. “Sometimes it’s hour by hour. Sometimes it’s minute by minute. Don’t give up.”

Community members can also take a big step toward helping. “Acknowledgement is a start,” Huddle said.

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## Resource list

- Advocates for Recovery Colorado is a nonprofit focused on advocacy, education, outreach and peer-run recovery services. In Montrose, 17 N. Sixth St.; [advocatesforrecovery.org](http://advocatesforrecovery.org); [alliemcdonald@advocatesforrecovery.org](mailto:alliemcdonald@advocatesforrecovery.org); 720-924-8272. Service also available in Delta.
- River Valley Family Health Centers is a federally qualified health care facility that takes all kinds of insurance and those without insurance. Medication-assisted treatment is part of its range of services; the clinic operates in Delta, Montrose and Olathe; 970-497-3333.
- Axis Health Solutions (formerly Center for Mental Health). Crisis line 970-252-6220; business line 970-252-3200. Walk-in crisis center is at 300 N. Cascade Ave. in Montrose.
- The Freedom Institute, 307 E. Main St., Montrose, works to break the cycle of poverty and incarceration. Info: [Newlyfree.com](http://Newlyfree.com); [cindy.moss@newlyfree.com](mailto:cindy.moss@newlyfree.com); 970-901-5596.
- Front Range Clinic: The clinic treats all addictions through a team of board-certified addiction specialists. The clinic serves Montrose and Delta along with other locations. Info: 1-866-628-7828 or [frontrangemd.com](http://frontrangemd.com).
- Denver Recovery Group: Brand-new to Montrose, the DRG offers medication-assisted treatment for opioid use disorder; 130 N. Park Ave.; 720-616-0049; [info@denverrecoverygroup.com](mailto:info@denverrecoverygroup.com).
- The PIC Place; 87 Merchant Drive, Montrose; [www.pic.place/](http://www.pic.place/); [info@picplace.org](mailto:info@picplace.org); 970-252-8896.
- Celebrate Recovery meets at 6:30 Friday evenings at Celebration Church, 2900 Sunnyside Road, Montrose. Info: 970-596-6991; 817-879-3338; [celebrationmontrose.org/ministries/celebrate-recovery/](http://celebrationmontrose.org/ministries/celebrate-recovery/)
- Narcotics Anonymous: [www.na.org](http://www.na.org). Serenity Unlimited Area of Narcotics Anonymous operates in Montrose, Delta and other locations. 24-hour helping: 970-201-1113.
- Oxford Houses of Colorado, offering completion of inpatient addiction treatment, detox or withdrawal-f-i abstinence from drugs and alcohol. Fees cover house bills and supplies. Montrose location available. Info: [oxfordhouse.org](http://oxfordhouse.org)

- Tough as a Mother Colorado Crisis Services. 844-493-8255 or text TALK to 38255.
- OpiRescue: BringNaloxoneHome.org — a phone app providing locations offering the opioid reversal drug Naloxone (RX not needed); guidance on reversing an OD; other resources.

*The above list is not intended to be exhaustive of all resources that may be available.*

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