

FEBRUARY 2026

THE CHARLES TOWN INITIATIVE

Monthly Newsletter



DEAR CHARLES TOWN,

February has been a busy and inspiring month for the Charles Town Initiative as we continue strengthening partnerships and investing in prevention. From building trust and connection at Cocoa with the Po Po to representing our community during CADCA Capitol Hill Day, collaboration remains at the heart of our work. In this issue, we share an ODCP Jefferson County snapshot, announce upcoming CIT trainings, and explore how social networks influence substance use prevention. Together, these efforts reflect the power of community-driven solutions. Thank you for your continued support and engagement.

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ODCP JEFFERSON COUNTY AT-A-GLANCE



Success by Numbers

January 2026

School Support Specialist and Lead Mentor

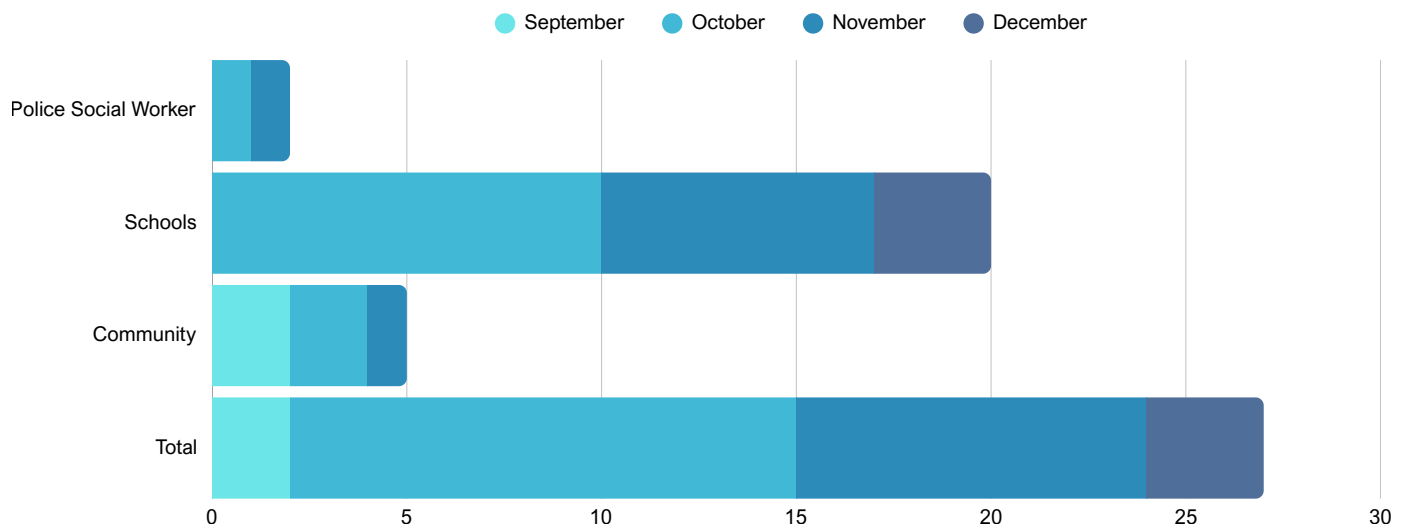
Number of Moderate- or High-Risk Students on Caseload

15 students

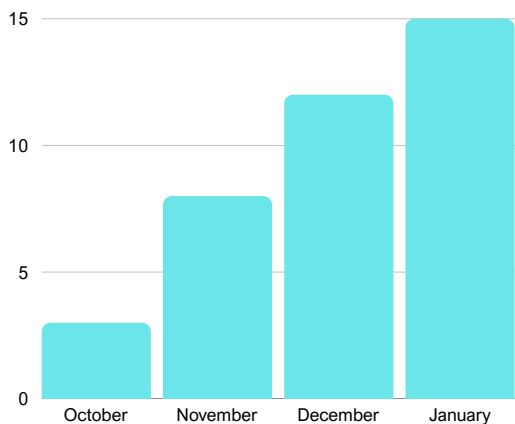
Specialized Skills Building to Moderate/High Risk Children

19 sessions

Source of Referrals to School Support Specialist



Growth in School Support Specialist Caseload



Number of Mentoring Sessions

26 sessions

Number of Crisis Interventions Provided

18 interventions

Number of ACEs Screenings and SDQ/CYRMs

3 screenings

Success by Numbers

January 2026

Police Support Specialist

Number of Successful Encounters

4 encounters

Number of Mental Health Screenings

2 screenings

Number of Social Determinant of Health Screenings

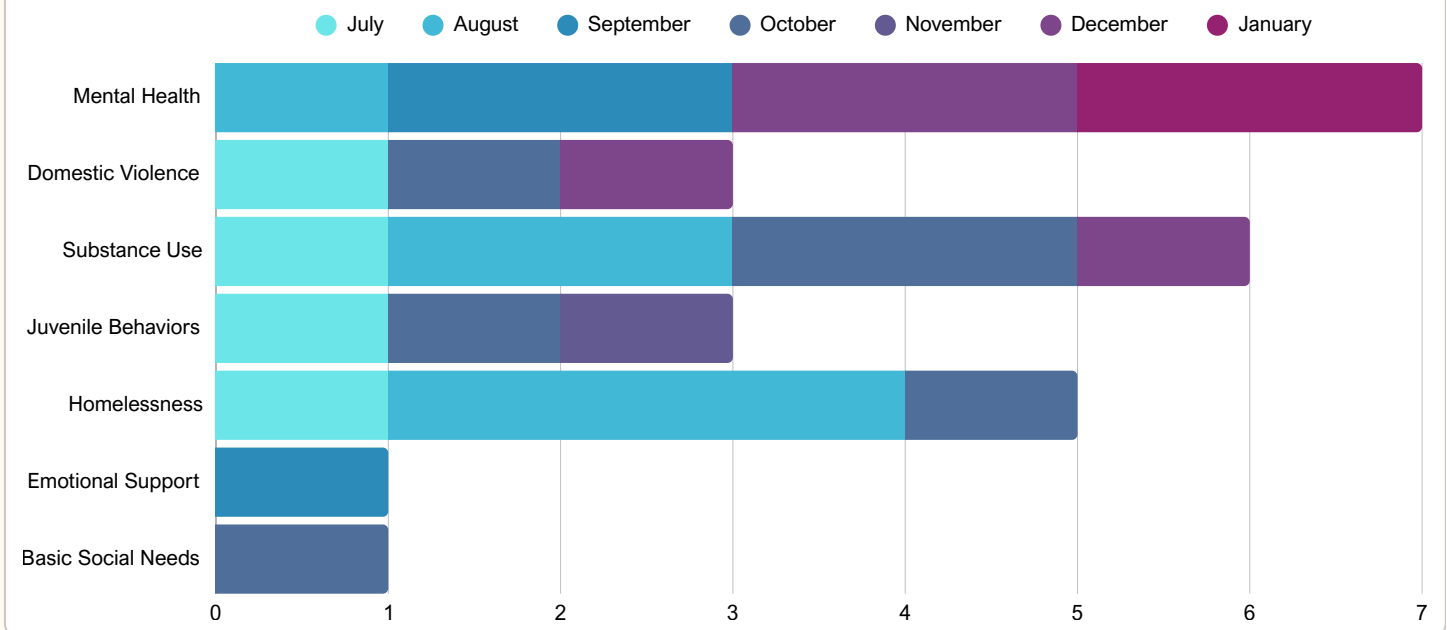
2 screenings

Number of Individuals on Caseload

7 people



Number of Referrals to Police Support Specialist from July 2025 to January 2026



CADCA CAPITOL HILL DAY

West Virginia prevention leaders advocate for sustained funding and policy support

As part of CADCA's Capitol Hill Day during the annual Leadership Forum, Tom Kearns, Coordinator of The Charles Town Initiative's Drug-Free WV Coalition, traveled to Washington, D.C., alongside other prevention advocates and youth coalition members from across West Virginia to advocate for continued investment in prevention efforts. During their visit, the group met with U.S. Senators Jim Justice and Shelley Moore Capito, who took time



to hear about the ongoing statewide needs related to prevention work. His goal was to clearly communicate the importance of sustained prevention initiatives, support policy advancement, and provide an opportunity for participants to share real, local stories directly with their representatives. The delegation expressed gratitude to the senators for their continued support of prevention funding and their engagement with prevention professionals and youth leaders. Although Congressman Riley Moore was unavailable to meet, the group reaffirmed its commitment to advancing prevention initiatives and securing long-term funding throughout West Virginia, emphasizing that these conversations are critical to keeping prevention a priority for communities, families, and youth.



COCOA WITH THE PO PO!

Strengthening Community-Police Connections in Jefferson County

Families, students and law enforcement officers came together in Charles Town this weekend for *Cocoa with the Po Po*, a new community outreach event led by the Jefferson Berkeley Alliance on Substance Use Prevention and The Charles Town Initiative. The gathering focused on building trust and creating positive, informal interactions between youth and police.



12 families and 6 officers came together!

Held in a relaxed setting, the event featured games, coloring stations, raffles, and plenty of hot chocolate. Officers played alongside children while families mingled, offering a rare opportunity to connect outside of emergency or enforcement situations. These everyday interactions help break down barriers and humanize both officers and the community they serve.

“[This event] helps officers realize they can do more to connect with children. They’re wonderful at their everyday jobs protecting everyone, but sometimes it’s the small things that matter. Kids really look up to them,” – Misty Waits, CTI Police Support Specialist.

Waits, who serves as a police support specialist providing social work support during active scenes and crisis situations, noted that stronger community relationships benefit everyone:

”

“Sometimes that connection actually makes my job easier... when there’s already trust there, it helps de-escalate things.”

”



Organizers hope to make Cocoa with the Po Po an annual tradition, with additional community engagement events already planned. The Jefferson Berkeley Alliance is also expanding youth prevention initiatives and crisis intervention training to further support families and first responders across the region.

UPCOMING CRISIS INTERVENTION TRAININGS

CTI is expanding its regional trauma-informed crisis response capacity by delivering both foundational (8-hour) and advanced (40-hour) Crisis Intervention Trainings that bring together law enforcement professionals, behavioral health providers, and community experts in a shared learning environment. Through interactive instruction, participants will build practical skills in de-escalation, crisis communication, and recognition of mental health and substance use indicators, while engaging in realistic role-play scenarios that strengthen decision-making under stress. The training emphasizes trauma awareness, cross-sector collaboration, and hands-on navigation of local referral and diversion resources so responders can safely connect individuals in crisis with appropriate services.

CRISIS INTERVENTION TRAINING



This 8-hour Crisis Intervention Training provides an introductory, foundational, CIT-informed approach for law enforcement officers and first responders. Designed for full departments and agencies, the training focuses on recognizing mental health and substance-related crises, understanding the role of law enforcement within the crisis response system, and applying basic de-escalation and communication principles. Participants will gain practical insight into crisis encounters and learn how to identify appropriate referral and diversion options within their community. This course supports agency-wide crisis response capacity and serves as a foundational stepping stone toward the 40-hour CIT certification.



March 19, 2026
8:30 AM - 4:30 PM

REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Before March 11th
20 participants maximum



Our Location
128 INDUSTRIAL BLD. KEARNEYSVILLE, WV



Expert Instructors

CIT International
Certified Trainers



Service Credits

This training provides 8 in-service credits through LEPSIS.

Participants will:



Develop foundational skills to recognize and safely respond to behavioral health and substance-related crises



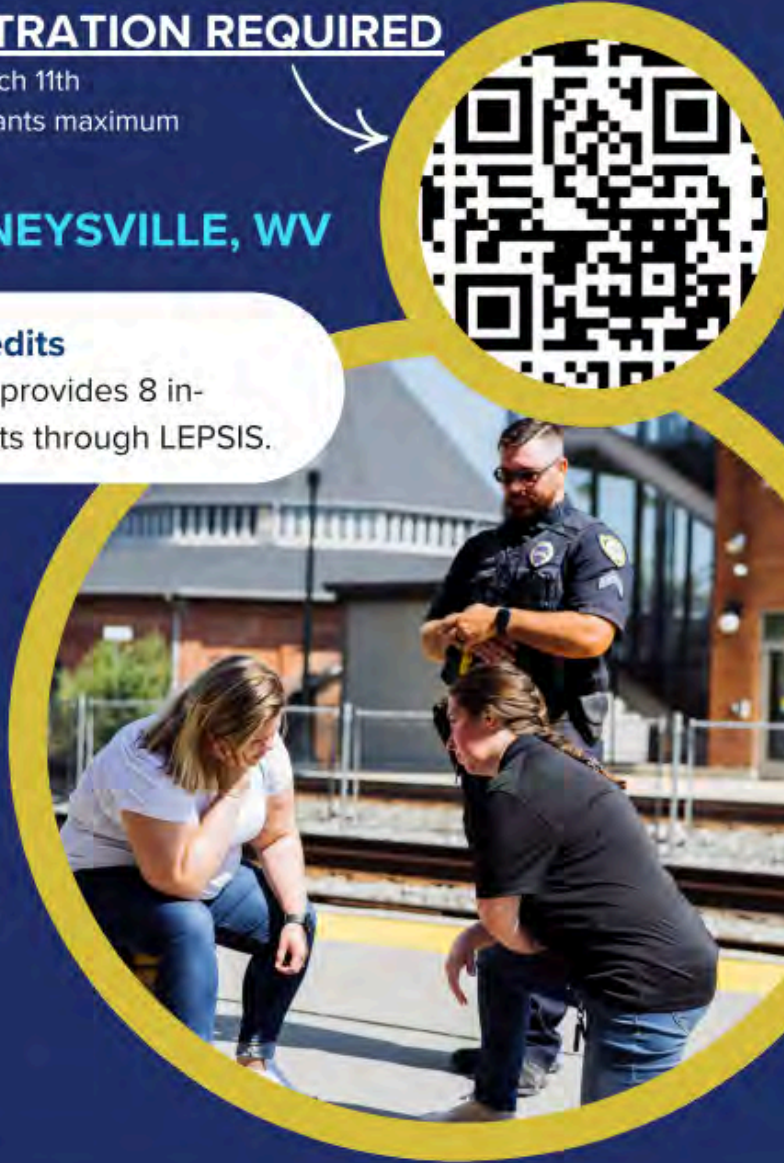
Increase awareness of mental health and substance use disorder indicators commonly encountered in the field



Apply basic de-escalation principles through guided, scenario-based decision-making



Learn how to identify referral and diversion options within the local crisis response system



*This 8-hour training provides a foundational, CIT-informed approach and does not replace the 40-hour Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) certification.

- Business casual attire; uniforms not required
- Active engagement expected throughout
- Drinks and snacks provided; break for lunch each day
- Full participation required



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Questions?

Noel Canellas
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CRISIS INTERVENTION TRAINING



This **40-hour training** is designed to prepare law enforcement officers to effectively and safely respond to individuals experiencing mental health crises. This comprehensive training covers de-escalation techniques, mental health awareness, local resource navigation, and practical scenario-based exercises.



April 13-17, 2026
8:30 AM - 4:30 PM

REGISTRATION REQUIRED

Before April 5th
20 participants maximum



Our Location
128 INDUSTRIAL BLD. KEARNEYSVILLE, WV



Expert Instructors

Including law enforcement professionals, behavioral health providers, and community experts.



Service Credits

This training provides 40 in-service credits through LEPSIS.

Participants will:



Gain skills in de-escalation and crisis communication



Enhance their understanding of mental health and SUD



Engage in role-play scenarios and interactive exercises



Learn to connect individuals in crisis with appropriate community services



- Business casual attire; uniforms not required
- Drinks and snacks provided; break for lunch each day
- Full participation required; completion certificate awarded
- Active engagement expected throughout



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THE POWER OF SOCIAL NETWORKS IN SUBSTANCE USE PREVENTION

New Appalachian research shows how peer relationships shape drug use and support recovery.



A new longitudinal study offers important insight into how social relationships shape substance use patterns in rural communities. Researchers Elizabeth Upton and colleagues followed a network of more than 500 people who use drugs in rural Eastern Kentucky over a two-year period, examining how friendships and social ties influence the initiation, continuation, and cessation of injection drug use. Their results reinforce a key message for prevention professionals: substance use does not occur in isolation. It spreads, stabilizes, and changes within social networks.

The study focused on two major forces that influence behavior.

The first is **selection**, meaning people tend to form and maintain relationships with others who behave similarly. The second is **social influence**, where individuals adjust their behavior to match their peers.

The researchers found evidence of both forces at work, particularly for injection drug use.

Participants were more likely to stay connected to people who shared their injection status and were more likely to start or stop injecting depending on what their peers were doing. In contrast, heroin and stimulant use showed weaker network effects, suggesting injection behaviors may be especially shaped by close social ties.

One of the most important findings was the stability of certain social structures over time.

Reciprocal relationships (where two people mutually identify each other as close contacts) and tightly connected clusters tended to persist across the study period. This stability matters because it means prevention and recovery efforts can help entire groups, not just individuals. If behavior spreads through networks, so can positive change. The study supports growing evidence that network-based interventions such as peer recovery support, group harm-reduction strategies, and social norm campaigns can shift health behaviors in meaningful ways.



For West Virginia, where rural geography and tight-knit communities shape daily life, the implications are powerful. Prevention efforts that focus only on individuals may miss the broader social forces that sustain substance use. Programs that engage peer leaders, strengthen recovery networks, and build positive social connections may have ripple effects across entire communities. The researchers emphasize that these patterns were consistent across time, suggesting that the social mechanisms driving drug use are not random or temporary. They are predictable and therefore actionable. By understanding how networks operate, community organizations can design smarter interventions that leverage existing relationships rather than fighting against them.

For local prevention organizations, this study highlights the importance of **community connection as a public health strategy**. Substance use is not just an individual health issue; it is a social phenomenon embedded in relationships, trust, and shared norms. Strengthening healthy networks may be just as critical as providing treatment services. In communities like ours, where relationships run deep, prevention may succeed best when it spreads person to person.

READ THE *STUDY*

JEFFERSON COUNTY

At-A-Glance 2025

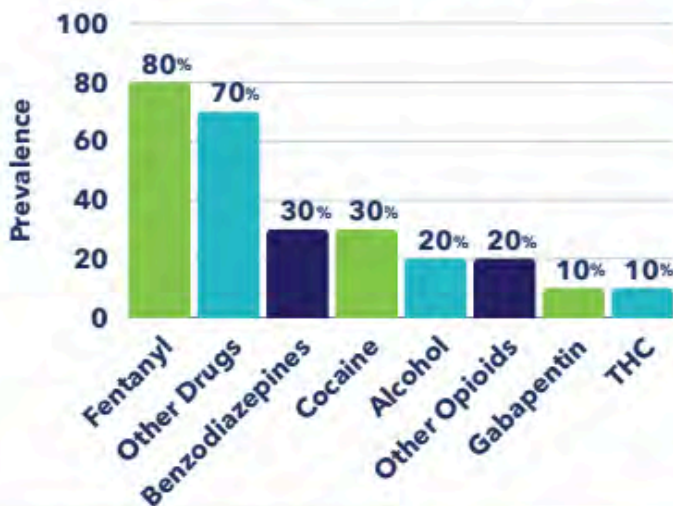


**WEST VIRGINIA OFFICE OF
DRUG CONTROL POLICY**
West Virginia Department of Human Services



Substance Prevalence in Overdose Fatalities in 2024

Jefferson County



**FROM 2014 TO 2024, OPIOID
PRESCRIPTION DRUG DISPENSING
DECREASED BY 53.1%**

Population: 61,264

**Number of overdose
fatalities in 2023:
23**

**Number of overdose
fatalities in 2024:
10**

Top 5 Prescribed Medications:

Drug	Amount
Gabapentin	1,413,692
Oxycodone (SA)	639,282
Tramadol (SA)	349,131
Buprenorphine	306,415
Pregabalin (Lyrica)	290,335

(SA= Short Acting)

**Naloxone Kits
Distributed**

4,265

**Certified
Treatment Beds**

0

**Certified Recovery
Housing**

0

**Number of
Jobs & Hope
Hotline Calls**

25

**Number of
Help4WV
Helpline Calls**

205

Local Comprehensive Behavioral Healthcare Provider:

East Ridge Health Systems

Local Prevention Lead Organization:

Potomac Highlands Guild

Community Corrections Programs:

None

Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers:

None

Family Treatment Courts:

No



“TALK. THEY HEAR YOU.”[®]
CAMPAIGN



What You Can Do to Prevent Your Child From Drinking Alcohol or Using Other Drugs

Be aware of potential risk factors, including:

- Significant life transitions, such as graduating from middle or high school or getting a driver's license;
- A history of social and emotional problems;
- Depression, anxiety disorders, or other mental health issues;
- A family history of alcohol or other substance use disorders; and
- Hanging out with friends or peers who drink alcohol or use other drugs.

Be a positive role model.



- Don't drink alcohol or use other drugs and drive, and don't get in a car if the driver has been drinking or using other drugs.
- Don't use prescription medication that wasn't prescribed by your doctor. And don't misuse medication that was prescribed to you.
- Get help if you think you have an alcohol- or other drug use-related problem.
- Don't give alcohol or other drugs to your child or their friends and peers. Explain that underage drinking and other drug use are never acceptable inside or outside your home.
- Know where you keep all of your alcohol and prescription medication, and always remind your child and their friends and peers that these substances are off-limits.

Work with schools and communities to ensure that they:

- Support and reward young people's decisions not to drink alcohol and use other drugs;
- Identify and intervene with kids who are engaged in alcohol and other drug use;
- Create, enforce, and promote rules that prevent underage drinking and other drug use; and
- Develop acceptable behavior agreements that are established, well-known, and applied consistently.

Provide support and give space for growth.

- Be involved in your child's life. Go to their school events and extracurricular activities, ask about their day, follow through on your commitments to them, and set aside time to do things together.
- Stay actively engaged in their social media activity. Talk with them about the differences between appropriate and inappropriate content and emphasize that what gets posted online can be there forever.
- Encourage their independence while establishing appropriate limits.
- Make it easy for them to share information about their life by actively listening and asking open-ended questions.
- Know where they are, what they're doing, and whom they're spending time with.

- Meet and get to know the parents or caregivers of their friends and peers. Share your rules about not allowing underage drinking or other drug use.
- Find ways for them to be involved in family life, such as participating in fun family activities and events, helping with house projects or weekly meal planning, doing chores, or volunteering together in the community.

Set clear rules and expectations.

- Brainstorm with your child about ways they can have fun without drinking alcohol or using other drugs.
- Encourage them to avoid parties and other gatherings where alcohol or other drugs are present. And don't allow underage drinking or other drug use at get-togethers in your home.

- Tell them to never drink alcohol or use other drugs and drive or get in a car driven by someone who has been drinking or using other drugs.
- Help them find services and support if you're worried that they're using substances.
- Create and sign a family agreement form where you agree to help keep them substance-free and they agree to not drink alcohol or use other drugs.
- Learn more about the risks and dangers of underage drinking and other drug use by visiting talktheyhearyou.samhsa.gov and using #TalkTheyHearYou on social media. Share and discuss this information with them.



Use Screen4Success.

Talking with kids early and often about the risks and dangers of underage drinking and other drug use can help keep them safe. But how do you know if your child needs more support, and where do you go to find it? Screen4Success will help you better understand your child's health, wellness, and wellbeing and find resources to help address their needs.

HELPFUL RESOURCES



Use and share Screen4Success.



Download and use "Talk. They Hear You." mobile app.



Subscribe and listen to "What Parents Are Saying" podcast.



Download and order "Talk. They Hear You." materials online from SAMHSA Store.



Download and read full "Tips for Teens" fact sheet series.



Download and read other SAMHSA underage drinking prevention and reduction materials.

