

Missoula County Media Release

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First Friday Event to Highlight Local Experiences with Mental Health, Substance Abuse Crises

The Missoula City-County Health Department will kick off Mental Health Awareness Month with a powerful, interactive storytelling event this Friday, May 3, from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Downtown Dance Collective, 121 W. Main St.

“Through a Different Lens: A Look into Behavioral Health Crisis Experiences in Missoula County” will showcase the experiences of Missoulians who have struggled with mental health or substance use disorders and who have had to access crisis services in our community.

“My partner went from a kind, hard-working, giving, stable person to a desperate person who was drowning and had no way out,” said one project participant, describing life with a partner who had developed a substance abuse disorder.

This First Friday event is a project of the health department’s Behavioral Health Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) Team. It is also part of a graduate-level capstone project that involved collecting photos and stories from individuals on what it’s like to access behavioral health crisis services. “Through a Different Lens” assesses how the community supports those in crisis and provides insight on how to improve those outcomes.

“Part of the problem with stigma surrounding mental health and substance use is the stories we tell ourselves as a society often don’t align with what people are actually experiencing,” said Bonnie Bishop, the University of Montana graduate student who spearheaded the project. “We need to better understand and address the stigma faced by those who experience mental health and substance use crises. Perhaps we can create new stories together – ones that involves listening, creative solutions and accessible resources.”

Mental illness and substance use disorder affects millions of Americans each year. Estimates from the National Survey on Drug Use and Health suggest that 42,600 adults living in Montana have a serious mental illness, and 73,000 report symptoms of a substance use disorder.

“Through a Different Lens” is free and open to the public, and light refreshments will be provided.

For more information, call Leah Fitch, substance abuse prevention coordinator, at 406-258-3023 or email lfitch@missoulacounty.us.

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