

# **GRATIOT COUNTY SUBSTANCE ABUSE COALITION**

## **DESCRIPTION OF EXISTING COUNTY PREVENTION SYSTEM**

### **Gratiot County Prevention System**

Gratiot County, population 38,000, is located in the center of Michigan's Lower Peninsula. Largely rural and agricultural, the county consists mostly of small towns and neighborhoods. Alma is the largest city in the county with a population of 9,125. Gratiot County has 6 public school districts: Alma, Ashley, Breckenridge, Fulton, Ithaca, and St. Louis. The total enrollment for the two county Gratiot Isabella Regional Educational District is 14,500, with the largest school district in the county being Alma at just over 2,100 students. Gratiot County also has one small private college, Alma College, with an enrollment of less than 5,000 students.

Because of its' relatively small size, Gratiot County has limited resources to address the problem of alcohol and drug abuse. Addiction Solutions Counseling Center in Alma is currently the only treatment provider in the county. The Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition, which was formed in 2005, has been working to build capacity and develop a prevention system for the county. Because of limited agency time and human resources available in the county, this process has been a particularly slow and challenging.

However, the Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition has been successful in creating essential prevention services for the county with the establishment of two parent / child evidenced based classes; the Nurturing Parenting Program for youth aged 5 – 11 and the Choices Program, for youth aged 11 – 17. Despite the great need for these programs in the community, garnering referrals for the programs has been difficult. For example, referrals from area police departments for the MIP based, Choices Program have been essentially non existent, due to an acknowledged shift in their priorities due to limited budgets. The coalition has been working to establish an identification and referral system at Alma Schools to help with referrals to the programs, which can be duplicated at other districts county wide.

In the upcoming 2010 – 2011 fiscal year, the coalition seeks to expand its membership and raise community awareness countywide with the implementation of a social marketing campaign, Parents Who Host, Lose the Most and other communication strategies. It also intends to build community capacity and expand its' recent relationship with Alma College. Finally, the coalition will continue to build infrastructure in order to sustain the established substance abuse prevention system through the creation of two community capacity reports which help identify alternative sources of funding, as well as community strengths and weaknesses.

GCSAC is committed to local data collection, strategic planning, and the management of resources from Mid South Substance Abuse Commission (MSSAC) or other funding sources for the provision of essential prevention programs, policies and practices to reduce substance use, abuse, and its related consequences. Using the Strategic Prevention Framework (SPF) process and the Risk and Protective factor model, GCSAC commits to addressing prevention's role in the substance abuse system continuum of care, including early intervention, treatment, and recovery. GCSAC will also work to identify and propose improvements for linking prevention efforts and services collectively to treatment for clients, families, and other systems in the Gratiot County community.

### **Formal Coalition structure**

The primary function of the Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition is to identify the substance abuse prevention needs of the county, develop plans to address those needs, and work to build capacity and to acquire additional national, state, and local prevention funding and resources to support the plans. In the past five years, GCSAC has been provided with the necessary resources to build a strong foundation. The 2010-2015 Strategic Prevention Plan was

developed in part to extend this work, in partnership with the Mid South Substance Abuse Commission. As GCSAC continues to develop its infrastructure, it also hopes to move beyond the work that was accomplished during the previous five years in order to create positive lasting population-level change in substance abuse, misuse and its related consequences.

In 2009, Gratiot County established its linkage with MSSAC through a signed Memorandum of Understanding. Additionally, as part of its infrastructure building effort, Memorandums of Commitment were also signed by the various agencies and individuals involved in the Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition. The GCSAC Memorandum of Commitment outlines the agreed upon relationship between the coalition and its' membership. It provides three different choices or levels of participation which allow flexibility as personal or work roles and responsibilities change over time. The three commitment levels are as follows:

1. **Awareness Level:** Individuals and agencies at the *Awareness* level of the GCSAC would like to be informed of GCSAC business and events. These members agree to be placed on the GCSAC e-mail list and Blackboard classroom, which will allow them access to meeting minutes/agendas, e-mail, and published data. Members participating at the *Awareness* level are encouraged to raise awareness about the coalition's prevention efforts with other individuals in the community.
2. **Participative Level:** Individuals and agencies at the *Participative* level of the GCSAC would like to participate with other GCSAC partners in the general business of the coalition. This business includes, but is not limited to the sharing of information between coalition membership, the creation of a strategic plan, and the promotion and support of coalition efforts. *Participative* members are generally less available to attend monthly planning meetings, but may be willing to assist the coalition in the implementation of one or more strategies.
3. **Involved Level:** Individuals and agencies at the *Involved* level of the GCSAC would like to be engaged in the collaborative process of GCSAC. This includes a commitment to attend and participate in the meetings of the coordinating body, as well as to support the development of a strategic plan. Involved membership is also engaged in the implementation of the strategic plan, taking advantage of opportunities to directly impact the community through the sharing of GCSAC data, referrals to coalition programs, and participation in coalition initiatives. Membership participating at the *Involved* level are challenged to become fully engaged in the collaborative process by encouraging participation from other member agencies and investing in positive impact county wide.

Currently, there are 27 individuals, representing 19 agencies who have signed a Memorandum of Commitment to be involved in the Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition at either the *Involved* or *Participative* level. The recruitment of new members and agencies, as well as the periodic renewal of coalition commitment is an ongoing process which helps maintain of the energy and vitality of coalition, and is subject to constant change. Therefore, continued capacity building efforts are requested in the 2010 – 2011 Implementation Plan.

Child Advocacy of Central Michigan has been approved as the fiduciary for GCSAC in 2009 – 2010. Child Advocacy will disperse its allocated resources to support the work of the GCSAC in the Implementation Plan as presented herein. This will include support of a Full Time Equivalent staff member to the coalition. Additional services will be contracted and subcontracted through coalition agencies, such as the Gratiot County Juvenile Court, Alma Public Schools, Alma College (internships), as well as local and state police departments. Child Advocacy will provide supervision and oversight to coordinator, clerical services to the coalition, and some programming support through the implementation of the Nurturing Parenting program. Additional services

will be subcontracted for the facilitation of both the Nurturing Parenting and Choices programs. GCSAC meetings for the upcoming year will be presided over by Chairperson Vic Guajardo, Vice Chair Carol Waters, and Past Chair Julie Frick, who were elected by the coalition to lead the group.

### **GCSAC and Gratiot County - Community Readiness**

The Involved and Participative membership of the Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition were surveyed on July 12 to share their impressions of where Gratiot County is in terms of community readiness. Other coalition members also participated in this exercise during a regional prevention orientation provided by Mid South on March 24. When asked the question on where GCSAC would rate in relation to internal coalition readiness, the general impression of both groups was that GCSAC was in the Initiation stage. Coalition members identify that the data decision making process has led to the identification and implementation of program strategies, such as Choices and Nurturing Parenting. Energy and enthusiasm is mostly positive because program is in “growing” stage and limitations are still being worked out.

However, when asked where the membership would place the Gratiot community as a whole, the majority of coalition members felt that the county was in the Vague Awareness stage. Coalition members feel that the general public has some anecdotal information about substance use, but lacks overall understanding of the problem. Also, other community members do not feel there is a problem and need to “buy in.” Coalition programs have struggled to gather referrals in the community, and a part of this problem may be attributed to the general lack of awareness or concern. Coalition efforts must be focused on making a greater impact on the awareness level of the average citizen in Gratiot County.

Community awareness steps suggested by the coalition membership include communication strategies such as presentations to organizations and clubs, information provided in school newsletters, and media efforts in the newspaper and radio. “Parents Who Host, Lose the Most” and town hall meetings were both suggested to get the community more informed and gather their opinions on next steps. Internally, the coalition needs to create more buy in and leadership. There is an identified need to create a subcommittee structure in order to make a greater impact county wide. Most of these next steps are incorporated in the GCSAC funding request in the 2010 – 2011 fiscal year.

### **GCSAC Prevention Staff - Qualifications and Credentials**

The Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition consists of the following staff and contractors:

**Audra Stahl, Ronda Sorensen, and Pam Mahin to be added to this section.**

**Glenn Thelen, GCSAC Coordinator** is a Limited Licensed Masters Social Worker with a degree from Michigan State University in 1997. He has experience in the schools, working in Harrison Community Schools and Alma Public Schools in an elementary counseling role. Glenn also worked as the coordinator of the Gratiot County Collaborative Council prior to becoming the GCSAC coordinator in 2009. Glenn is working on the process of obtaining his full MSW licensure. He also has developed a plan to complete his Substance Abuse Prevention Certification by the end of next fiscal year.

**Julie Frick, Juvenile Probation Officer** obtained her Bachelor of Arts from Alma College in 2004 where she majored in Sociology and Anthropology. Julie has completed master's level coursework in grant fund procurement and volunteer management at Central Michigan University. From 2004-2007, Julie worked in the Juvenile Court as a community service coordinator and co-facilitator for substance abuse treatment and educational classes provided through the court. She has been a juvenile probation officer since 2007, and also continues her role in assisting GCSAC with data driven decision making and planning. Julie has developed a plan to complete her Substance Abuse Prevention Certification by the end of next fiscal year.

## Coalition Training Needs

In the August 2009 year end survey of coalition staff, GCSAC members indicated their degree of comfort with the SPF process, their understanding of the Implementation Plan and strategies. 4 out of 7 (57%) of coalition members *agree* that coalition staff has “adequately trained the coalition membership in the five steps of the Strategic Prevention Framework.” Three individuals (42%) responded with *neither agree nor disagree*. For the question stating, “I am familiar with the strategies being implemented in the current GCSAC Implementation Plan and could communicate them to someone who was interested in joining the coalition,” the same breakout occurred. Because of the low response rate from the coalition it is difficult to extrapolate solid conclusions from the survey. One might suggest, however, that the low response rate is an indication of much greater need for orientation and training at the coalition level.

In response to the need for clarity for the coalition membership, development of coalition member, coordinator, and contractor protocols were written into the 2009 – 2010 Implementation Plan. Additionally, the Orientation training provided by Mid – South in March was heavily promoted and saw 3 new members from Gratiot County attend. The delivery of a GCSAC orientation packet for new and experienced coalition members will hopefully also improve the knowledge base of the membership as a whole. For the 2010 – 2011 Implementation Plan, GCSAC proposes to provide two 1-2 hour “nuts and bolts” orientation / recruiting sessions for the membership.

## GCSAC Strategic Plan Goals

The Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition’s Strategic Plan Goals for 2010 – 2015 include the following:

### Strategic Plan Goals 2010 - 2015

#### Goal 1: Capacity Building

GCSAC will continue to build infrastructure to sustain substance abuse prevention in communities and institutionalize the Strategic Prevention Framework five steps.

#### Goal 2: Alcohol

GCSAC will reduce alcohol involved traffic fatalities, injuries, and crashes due to the use / misuse of alcohol by youth and adults in Gratiot County.

#### Goal 3: Tobacco

GCSAC will reduce tobacco-related death due to tobacco use and exposure to secondhand smoke by youth and adults in Gratiot County.

#### Goal 4: Prescription Drugs

GCSAC will reduce poisonings and deaths due to over-the-counter and prescription drug misuse and abuse by youth and adults in Gratiot County.

## Evaluation of Prevention Efforts

GCSAC program strategies are identified and evaluated using the Strategic Prevention Framework process. The coalition gathers data to develop logic models and identify strategies for implementation. Once implemented, these strategies are reported to the coalition through the completion of an outcome report. The coalition utilizes these reports to review process and evaluation measures. Whenever necessary,

adjustments are made to improve program service delivery. Over the long term, logic model evaluation measures will be taken to determine the impact of the strategy in changing the substance abuse related consequences, consumption patterns, and contributing factors.

GCSAC monitors the planning and progress of all of their proposed strategies through the completion of quarterly reports, action plans, and fidelity assessments. Timelines for completion of milestones, action steps, and strategies help the coalition stay on target throughout the course of the fiscal year. At year end GCSAC completes a review of the coordinator, as well as an overall evaluation of the coalition as a whole. A year end report is produced to highlight the coalition successes over the course of the previous year.

### **Coalition Sustainability – Next Steps**

GCSAC has been at hard at work to improve the sustainability of the coalition and the system of prevention in Gratiot County as a whole through the identification and acceptance of a new fiduciary for the coalition. The fiduciary relationship which the coalition seeks is able to provide greater oversight and ownership of coalition efforts, as well as employer status for coalition staff. The Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition is excited to report that Child Advocacy of Central Michigan has been accepted as the new fiduciary of the coalition. Although this is a significant step, the coalition will continue working to establish more clearly defined roles, expectations and safeguards in the coalition bylaws, for all parties involved.

Additionally, the coalition has indicated a need for the involved and participative membership to take a more active role in selecting, implementing, and evaluating coalition strategies. As part of our bylaw review, GCSAC will develop a formalized committee structure and create an Executive Committee of the leadership which is necessary for overall coalition oversight. These bylaw changes will be presented to the coalition for full approval in the fall of 2010. Training and orientation will be provided to new and existing membership to strengthen the coalition as a whole.

The Gratiot County Substance Abuse Coalition will continue to dedicate its' efforts to the creation of a system of care for substance abuse prevention across Gratiot County. This will include expansion efforts to multiple sources of funding for the coalition, such as grants through the Gratiot County Community Foundation and United Way, as well as private donations and other fundraising efforts. GCSAC will also continue to build capacity for the submission of statewide and federal grant requests. The ability to diversify sources of funding will be critical to the overall success of our coalition efforts and the development of a substance abuse prevention system of care moving forward. Together we will "empower individuals in Gratiot County to choose a healthy, safe way to work, play, and live."