

August 28, 2022

## Overdose memorials planned by families and friends in Grey-Bruce. All are welcome.

With International Overdose Awareness Day coming up on August 31<sup>st</sup>, Joan Farley wants people to know that losing someone to overdose is not only a personal experience, it has devastating effects on families and communities. Joan's son, Grant, died on November 4<sup>th</sup>, 2018, at the age of 35. Joan will be speaking at an awareness and memorial event in Hanover at the Hope Community Church at 6:30pm this Wednesday. Evening memorials will also be held at the Owen Sound farmers market parking lot and the Port Elgin Coulter Parkette on Green Street. Members of the public are encouraged to attend to show their support. Daytime memorials are also planned at M'Wikwedong Indigenous Friendship Centre, Safe n' Sound and the Wellness Pavilion in Neyaashiinigmiing. Visit [www.drugstrategy.org](http://www.drugstrategy.org) for all Grey-Bruce event listings.

Since 2016 Ontario has mourned more than 14,000 individuals, almost all of these were preventable deaths. "It is absolutely critical to center people who use drugs and their families in our response to this crisis", says Alison Govier, Coordinator of the Grey-Bruce Community Drug and Alcohol Strategy (Drug Strategy). "An all-of-government response is urgently needed to prevent more deaths, and we can't do this without the expertise of those on the frontlines".

On August 10<sup>th</sup>, members of the Grey-Bruce Drug Strategy endorsed four policy recommendations to end drug toxicity deaths caused by fentanyl and other synthetic substances found in the unregulated drug market. Among the recommendations is a call to create a provincial Task Force to address the crisis, which must include people who consume – and previously consumed - unregulated drugs. All four policy recommendations can be found on our website. Recommendations include, scaling up harm reduction and treatment services; decriminalizing possession of drugs for personal

---

Reducing Harm in Bruce & Grey.

1101 2nd Ave E, Owen Sound, Ontario N4K 2J1

use; creating a regulatory framework for people to access a safe supply of drugs; and investing in upstream prevention approaches.

All three of the evening memorials on August 31<sup>st</sup> are led by Grey-Bruce residents with lived experience of addiction. Their message is clear. They want the stigma surrounding drug use to end so that their friends, neighbours and family members can get access to the same basic human rights as everyone else. One of the organizers, Gelja Sheardown, explains “ending the stigma will help open up doors for people with substance use disorder. It will create opportunities for people who are affected to actually get the care and support they deserve. It will save lives! We need to act now.”

Michelle Parkes, who is leading the Port Elgin memorial, hopes to see increased involvement from all levels of government to address this epidemic. Her words are echoed by Joan “no one deserves to die because they use drugs.”

The Grey Bruce Public Health Unit and CMHA Grey Bruce clinical staff will be on site at all memorial events to offer overdose response training and harm reduction supplies. Financial support for the events comes from City of Owen Sound, Grey Bruce Public Health, United Way of Bruce Grey, Grey Bruce Health Services and Dundalk Village Pharmacy.

Gelja, Michelle and Joan are members of the Grey-Bruce Peer Advisory Committee, a 10-member committee of people with lived experience working proactively with governments and community agencies to help shape services and supports in the region.

The peer advisory committee is resourced by the Community Drug & Alcohol Strategy, which operates on grants from Grey County and Bruce County, and is hosted by CMHA Grey Bruce.

**For More Information:**

Alison Govier  
Coordinator, Community Drug & Alcohol Strategy  
519-372-7880  
agovier@cmhagb.org