

# NEW TRACES PROGRAM HELPS MOMS AND BABIES SUFFERING FROM OPIOID EPIDEMIC

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*Cassie Tipton York is a Peer Support Specialist for TRACES (Toe River Advocates for Community Education and Support), a new MAHEC initiative designed to help moms and babies at risk of opioid dependence.*

Yancey—Cassie Tipton York, a native of Bakersville, gave an impassioned public presentation last month at Mitchell High School in honor of Overdose Awareness Day.

Cassie told Avery, Mitchell and Yancey county officials and residents that she lost almost everything to opioid and methamphetamine addiction including her children, her home and even her freedom when she was arrested and sent to jail.

“Addiction doesn’t make any sense,” Cassie shares. “Nobody plans addiction. But you definitely need a plan, and a lot of support, to recover from it.”

Cassie went to jail in 2011. She says it was her wake-up call. A lot has changed since then.

She’s been in sustained recovery for the past 6 years and now works as a peer support specialist for Toe River Advocates for Community Education and Support (TRACES), a community health initiative sponsored by the Mountain Area Health Education Center (MAHEC) and funded by a two-year grant from The Duke Endowment.

TRACES aims to reduce the number of unintended pregnancies and babies born going through opioid withdrawal, a condition known as neonatal abstinence syndrome.

“Too many of our mothers and babies are struggling as the result of untreated substance use disorders,” says Jeff Heck, MD, MAHEC president and CEO. “And too many of our rural communities are struggling to access healthcare services. MAHEC is committed to changing that.”

TRACES sponsors free resilience-focused care training for Mitchell and Yancey county officials, justice departments, school systems, and social and healthcare service providers. This training is conducted by Resources for Resilience, a nonprofit organization formerly known as the WNC Resiliency Collaborative, which offers a set of measurably transformative, trauma-informed, practical strategies to help providers care for people who have experienced trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs).

Mitchell County School District and Head Start Programs in Mitchell and Yancey counties have already participated in the 90-minute training.

Trauma often underlies addiction.

“Many people who are dependent on illegal drugs or alcohol were victims of neglect or abuse,” shares Kelly Rothe, DO, a family physician practicing in Burnsville who performed hundreds of sexual and physical abuse exams for children in Yancey and Mitchell counties for more than ten years.

“Those are the stories that come out almost every time,” she explains. “As children, they didn’t have access to the trauma-focused support they needed to cope in healthier ways as teens and adults.”

As a TRACES peer support specialist, Cassie offers individual support to women at risk of substance use disorders and facilitates access to long-acting reversible contraception (LARC) including IUDs and reproductive implants.

“I’m excited to be able to show women in our community that they are not alone,” Cassie shares. “I’ve been there. I wasn’t sure I’d ever break free from addiction. But people can change. I’m proof of that.”

For more information about TRACES, contact Idania Garcia, program manager, at [Idania.Garcia@mahec.net](mailto:Idania.Garcia@mahec.net) or 828-774-6000.

MAHEC was established in 1974 and is a leader in healthcare, education and innovation. Located in Asheville, MAHEC serves a 16-county region in Western North Carolina. It is the largest Area Health Education Center in North Carolina, which evolved to address national and state concerns with the supply, retention and quality of health professionals. MAHEC’s mission is to train the next generation of healthcare professionals for Western North Carolina through quality healthcare, innovative education, and best practice models that can be replicated nationally. For more information on MAHEC, visit [www.mahec.net](http://www.mahec.net).