

Fourth-annual Overdose Awareness Day to take place in virtual format this year

Written By PAULA BROWN

The Dufferin Overdose Awareness Committee will be hosting their fourth annual Overdose Awareness Day event virtually on Monday (Aug. 31).

"This year's event looks a little bit different with us having to do everything virtually," said Kristy Fearon, addiction outreach councillor at Family Transition Place. "But we've also been having a little bit of fun trying to get some ideas going in terms of different videos."

"Although COVID-19 has forced us to rethink how we will mark Overdose Awareness Day this year, we still hope that the community will support our virtual awareness campaign," said Const. Scott Davis, community services officer with Orangeville Police Service.

The Dufferin Overdose Awareness Committee was launched in 2017 and attempts to bring attention to the addiction services available in Dufferin County and Caledon. After losing two clients to overdose in 2017, Fearon says herself and another co-worker sat down with Family Transition Place for a way to honor August 31, International Overdose Awareness Day, in the community. For the last three years, Fearon and Const. Davis have worked with various community volunteers to establish the committee, working to fight drug abuse and prevent unnecessary overdoses within the region.

Despite having to go virtual, the committee plans to display different videos throughout the event, such as a walk through process with a pharmacist on the process of buying a naloxone kit, and posts remembering those who have died or been injured through drug overdose.

"Families don't necessarily, in obituaries, say it was an overdose. There's still a lot of stigma," said Fearon. "We're really trying to break down those barriers and break down the stigma around it for families to feel better supported, but also for individuals that are using to feel the support that they're not alone in this."

"Our goal is to provide the citizens of our community with the education, resources and tools that they need to assist with substance use and misuse," said Const. Davis.

Gathering information on the number of overdoses that have happened in Dufferin County this year, Fearon said, has been difficult. With that said, Dufferin EMS has, thus far, reported a decrease in overdose-related calls in 2020. Dufferin EMS previously told the Shelburne Free Press, in July, that they had reported 97 calls for assistance with overdoses in 2020. Around this time last year, there had been at least 178 reported cases in Dufferin County.

"Many of the clients, if they have experienced an overdose or somebody they know has experienced an overdose, they haven't necessarily called 911 because of the fear of the COVID-19 virus," said Fearon, who added that since the beginning of the pandemic she has lost one client to an overdose.

Overdose Awareness Day will take place on Aug. 31 on the Dufferin Overdose Awareness Committee Facebook page. To commemorate someone, you can message Dufferin/Caledon Victim Services through the committee Facebook page or email Kristy Fearon at kristy@familytransitionplace.ca, with a photo.