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*from The Lakeville Journal,
The Millerton News and The Winsted Journal*

Published on *TriCornerNews* (<http://tricornernews.com>)

[Home](#) > Realities of opioid crisis hit home

Realities of opioid crisis hit home

Wed, 08/23/2017 - 3:05pm [Lakeville Journal](#) [1] [Millerton News](#) [2]

By Patrick L. Sullivan

A new publication, “Beneath the Surface: The Opioid Epidemic in Northwest Connecticut,” provides Northwest Corner residents with a concise and informative overview of the opioid drug problem in their small towns and cities.

The 41-page booklet was created by the Foundation for Community Health, the Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation, the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation and the McCall Center for Behavioral Health.

It covers the origin of the problem: over-prescribing of prescription pain medications, and the quiet movement of illegal drug dealers into the untapped rural and suburban markets.

The booklet defines opioids and opiate antagonists used to treat addiction.

There is demographic information on who is affected, who is arrested and who is at risk.

It delves into the relationship between substance abuse and trauma.

It specifically addresses the problem of addiction in rural communities, provides information on how to recognize the signs of addiction, discusses treatment options and offers concrete suggestions for action.

And the booklet provides startling narratives from people caught in the trap of addiction.

The two steps everyone can take immediately: Safely discard all medication not being used to treat a current illness or condition, and lock up those medications that must be at home.

Maria Coutant Skinner, executive director at McCall, said in a phone interview Aug. 4 that “we’re in the middle of a public emergency.”

The booklet was presented to the Torrington/Winsted Rotary Club last week, and more talks with civic organizations are in the works.

Skinner said anyone who wants a hard copy can get one from McCall (860-496-2100). It is available online at www.northwestcf.org/opioid [3].

The report arrives as nonprofit agencies such as McCall are experiencing cuts in state aid due to the Connecticut General Assembly’s inability to pass a budget. Skinner said the first round of cuts, amounting to 2.5 percent, has already occurred, with a 5 percent cut due in September if the Legislature is still deadlocked.

If the cuts continue to the anticipated 10 percent of state funding for McCall, that amounts to about \$80,000.

Skinner said McCall's budget is about \$5 million, and the \$80,000 figure would almost certainly result in fewer personnel.

"We're already consolidating positions."

McCall's new office at Geer Village in North Canaan, which opened in February, "is starting to build a census."

But even with the space provided rent-free by Geer, the office is a net money loser, and if the state aid situation gets worse, there is a possibility the North Canaan office could close.

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[3] <http://www.northwestcf.org/opioid>