

Project ADAM celebrates 25 years of serving the area community

By AMBER ROESSNER
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In the last 25 years, Project ADAM has assisted countless individuals throughout Georgia in overcoming addictions to drug and alcohol.

What today is a multi-function program that provides services such as workplace drug testing, a driver's improvement clinic and a Christian-based 34-bed, level III.1 treatment facility, all started with a group of local ministers coming together to address the county's problems with drugs and alcohol in 1980.

A LOOK BACK

“Project ADAM (which stands for Alcohol and Drug Abuse Ministries) was founded in reaction to Barrow County losing funding for alcohol and drug referral services,” said Project ADAM executive director Gina McDonald. “Initially, we provided referrals to treatment programs outside the community, counseling and alcohol and drug prevention and education programs. Our first building was in the Village on North Broad in a space that Dr. Baxter graciously donated.”

Those early prevention and education programs consisted of teen dances for area middle schoolers each Friday night at the Winder Woman's Club and programs such as Soberfest, a week-long drug and alcohol awareness campaign celebrated each year in mid-May. Soberfest focused on the message that you can have fun and be sober and included activities such as softball and tennis tournaments, road races, student essays and poster competitions.

In 1982, Project ADAM began offering DUI/Risk Reduction classes. From its inception, Rev. J.V. Nickelson, one of the founding members of the board of trustees, has donated his time to teach the DUI School.

As the program evolved, McDonald and other staff members noticed the need for more comprehensive treatment options in Barrow County.

“We realized that there was a huge need for a residential treatment center because if you didn't have great insurance or a lot of money, affordable treatment was difficult to find,” she recalls.

In 1987, Barrow County helped Project ADAM reach its vision, providing space in the basement and second floor of the old hospital for a 30-day, 14-bed treatment facility.

“It didn't take long for us to realize that 30 days and 14 beds weren't enough,” McDonald says.

So, once more, area leaders answered the call for action. The City of Winder and Barrow County deeded the property at 112 Lanthier Street to Project ADAM in 1990, and two years later, Project ADAM opened at its current location, offering the area a 32-bed, level III.1 treatment facility for adult males featuring an innovative Christian-based approach to traditional 12-step care.

In recent years, Project ADAM has continued its growth and commitment to serving Barrow County, adding a workplace drug and alcohol testing program and clinical evaluation services.

PROJECT ADAM TODAY

Executive director Gina McDonald has been at the helm during Project ADAM's continued growth.

"Twenty five years ago, Project ADAM helped me and now I'm dedicated to helping others with similar problems," she said.

But, McDonald is quick to give her committed staff credit for the program's success.

"I have a very dedicated and loyal staff, who go above and beyond their duties to help people in need," she said.

Today, Project ADAM provides community services including inpatient treatment to non-violent offenders, workplace alcohol and drug testing, weekend DUI School and clinical evaluations and outpatient services.

"We provide reality-based therapy," says Project ADAM service coordinator Mike McDonald, who assists Project ADAM, Barrow County Work Release and The Light Homeless Shelter clients in finding stable employment. "It's a goal-generated program in which we assist clients in working off their treatment plans. I love people and seeing people succeed regardless of who they are."

Adds resident manager Bill Tschiniak, "We provide physical and spiritual help. I had no idea coming here to get help for my problems that I would be giving help to others later."

Within the past year, Project ADAM has expanded its services yet again—this time to address the methamphetamine crisis in conjunction with the Barrow County Methamphetamine Task Force.

"Through that initiative, Project ADAM began group counseling sessions at the Barrow County Detention Center for men and women," Project ADAM counselor Don Bailey said. "As a result of that, we're providing outpatient treatment to probation offenders and workplace employees."

For Lee Brannon, who was recently incarcerated at the Barrow County Detention Center, Project ADAM was a lifesaver.

“I got into some trouble and spent some time in the area detention center because of a possession and tampering with evidence charge,” Brannon said. “I got into a group. They came into jail and they helped me in amazing ways. God really pulled me through. Gina (McDonald) and Bob (Davis, outpatient service counselor) helped me get stronger and gain some structure in my life.”

Today, Brannon lives in Oakwood and has gained employment at Northeast Georgia Medical Center.

“Project ADAM has enabled us to enhance our services to those addicted to methamphetamines,” said Major Murray Kogod of the Barrow County Sheriff Department. “We very much appreciate Gina McDonald and the Project ADAM staff for their partnership and support of the Barrow County Methamphetamine Task Force.”

LOOKING FORWARD

Through the years, Project ADAM has continued to expand to meet the needs of the community, says Gina McDonald.

And, with America’s addiction to drugs and alcohol steadily on the rise, Project ADAM hopes to continue its support well into the next 25 years.

“The problem with drugs and alcohol is increasing,” she said. “I see our residential and outpatient services expanding as we attempt to overcome the methamphetamine crisis. We’re just beginning to see the severity of the problem. We see a need for program expansion and increased bed-space. We would like to include more comprehensive services for women.”

As Project ADAM continues to expand, they know that the people of Barrow County will continue to show an outpouring of support.

“Barrow County is about people helping people,” McDonald said. “Project ADAM has been helped by the community since its inception. We especially thank United Way and organizations such as Johns Manville, the Barrow County Builders Association, the Cooper Foundation, Rhodia and countless individuals for their continued support.”