

Chippewa Valley coalition director named Preventionist of Year

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Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families Executive Director Charlene McGunn will receive an award from the Michigan Prevention Association in January. Pictured is McGunn giving the 2017 Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families Partnership Award to Larry Neal, director of the Clinton-Macomb Public Library.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CHIPPEWA VALLEY COALITION FOR YOUTH AND FAMILIES

Although it will be her name that appears on the award for Preventionist of the Year, Charlene McGunn is quick to credit the entire Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families for the honor she will receive.

“I am grateful to receive the award, but it is an award I receive on behalf of the coalition, through the many volunteers and many coalition members that work enormous, immense hours and dedicate time and efforts to protecting kids,” McGunn said.

The recognition will be handed out Jan. 30 during the Michigan Prevention Association's Burning Issues conference in East Lansing. MPA is dedicated to promoting excellence in the field of prevention and uniting prevention advocates across disciplines. Members span a wide variety of prevention issues, and include volunteers and professionals. The group promotes advocacy, development, networking and support across preventionists in health, education and human services disciplines.

The group's annual Prevention Awards are given to individuals and organization that have made outstanding contributions to the field of prevention across the state. A selection committee considers professional and personal qualities in selecting the Preventionist of the Year award.

Dawn Radzioch, the prevention coordinator for Macomb Community Mental Health's Office of Substance Abuse, nominated McGunn for the Preventionist of the Year award last fall.

"They request nominations for individuals and agencies we feel have done a good job of being leaders and sharing information in the community," Radzioch said.

Having partnered with McGunn on coalition issues for youth marijuana use prevention, Radzioch felt she would make a good candidate for the award. In her nomination form, Radzioch cited McGunn's work in prevention of youth marijuana use, underage drinking and opioids abuse.

McGunn is not only the executive director of the Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families, she also holds a doctorate in clinical psychology, has a private practice and teaches at Wayne State University.

The Chippewa Valley Coalition for Youth and Families combines school, family and community partners to prevent and reduce youth substance use as well as prevent teen suicide. The coalition serves the geographic area of Chippewa Valley School district, which includes Clinton and Macomb townships.

McGunn began working in Chippewa Valley Schools in 1980 as a school social worker.

"In 1994 the coalition began as a steering committee for the Safe and Drug Free Schools grant, a small federal grant to the school district, for which I provided oversight," McGunn said.

She was instrumental in forming the coalition and served as its part-time director from 1996 until 2009. In 2009, the coalition was awarded a federal Drug Free Communities Grant, at which time McGunn became its full-time executive director. The coalition was re-awarded a federal Drug Free Communities Grant in 2014, the same year that the MPA recognized it as the Prevention Organization of the Year.

“We are unique in our production of drug prevention materials for youth, used across the state and nation, and the number of youth members,” McGunn said.

On Nov. 6, Michigan voters passed Proposal 1, a ballot initiative to legalize, regulate and tax recreational marijuana use in the state for adults age 21 and older. The coalition plans to reinforce its efforts to prevent youth marijuana use in light of the passage, according to McGunn.

“In our efforts to educate, and I am sure many others, we all need to work together to educate parents and anyone that works with youth, to carry an appropriate message to them, about the dangers,” McGunn said.