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LIFE | D1

GOING TO THE DOGS

Local woman is heading back to Austria to train sled dogs

Shutdown averted

By David Levinsky
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TRENTON — It came down to the wire, but New Jersey's government will not shut down.

With only a few hours to spare before the state's midnight budget deadline, Gov. Phil Murphy and his fellow Democratic lawmakers finally

reached an agreement on a \$37 billion spending plan for the new fiscal year, as well as several tax hikes intended to pay for big increases planned for public schools, mass transit and the public employee pension system.

The agreement was reached during a marathon negotiating session between Murphy,

See SHUTDOWN, A2



New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy, center, speaks during a news conference announcing a budget deal between him and Democratic legislative leaders, Saturday, June 30, 2018, in Trenton, N.J. [AP PHOTO/JULIO CORTEZ]

GENDER BARRIERS

Women face unique issues in seeking help for drug addiction.

By Marion Callahan, Kelly Kultys and Jenny Wagner
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For Stacy Vandegrift, getting heroin was never a problem.

"I think it's easier for women to get high because they have that advantage," she said.

That advantage was being a woman, she said.

"As a woman, it's easier," said Vandegrift, 23, a resident of Pemberton Township who's been in recovery since November, and whose older sister, Sabrina, died of an overdose. "So then the men look at you and say, 'It's easier for you to get the money, so why don't you do it?' or, 'It's easier for you to get something from somebody than it's going to be for me, so why don't you do it?'"

Her mother Lisa Vandegrift said the thoughts of her daughter, doing whatever it took to feed her addiction, can haunt her.

See BARRIERS, A8

"Guys will just leech onto girls knowing that they're users or they're former users."

Lisa Vandegrift

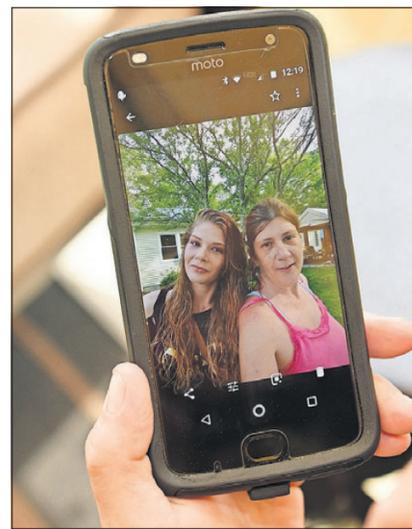


Lisa Vandegrift of Pemberton goes through photographs of her daughters Sabrina and Stacey at her home in Pemberton on Friday, June 8, 2018. Sabrina died of an overdose at age 20. Stacey has been in recovery since November. [CARL KOSOLA / STAFF PHOTOJOURNALIST]

Opioid crisis

Throughout the year, this series will identify efforts being made to save lives impacted by addiction and the opioid crisis, and identify those barriers that keep help out of reach.

Learn more and join the discussion on our Facebook group: bit.ly/StateofEmergencyFacebookGroup. Help inform our reporting: bit.ly/SOEForm.



Lisa Vandegrift of Pemberton goes through photographs of her daughter Stacey on her phone. [CARL KOSOLA / STAFF PHOTOJOURNALIST]

ASK THE BCT

What's delaying the Super Wawa in Westampton?

By Danielle DeSisto
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WESTAMPTON — It's been a year since the Land Development Board approved plans to demolish the Wawa convenience store at the corner of Springside and Woodlane roads and replace it with a Super Wawa with fueling stations.

The 5,585-square-foot upgraded

See WAWA, A18

Got a question?

This story developed from an audience question. Submit your question to burlingtoncountytimes.com/askthebct and we might answer it in a future story. To submit a question to Ask the BCT, visit burlingtoncountytimes.com/ask-the-bct.



A 5,585-square-foot Super Wawa was expected to open in late last fall or early winter at the intersection of Springside and Woodlane roads in Westampton. [NANCY ROKOS / STAFF PHOTOJOURNALIST]



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Danielle McCallum, formerly of Evesham, reflects on the challenges facing her as a woman who was addicted and is now in recovery. [DAVE HERNANDEZ / PHOTOJOURNALIST]

BARRIERS

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“I don’t even want to think about the things that she has done because you don’t want to think about it – that’s your daughter,” she said. “Guys will just leech onto girls knowing that they’re users or they’re former users.”

Stacy’s older sister Sabrina, who died of an overdose when she was 20 in July 2013, felt similar pressures when she was using, Lisa Vandegrift said.

“When Sabrina was actively using, Sabrina would go to work everyday,” Vandegrift said. “She was going to work to support her and her boyfriend’s habit.”

Sexual trauma is just one of the challenges faced by women in addiction. Pressures of caregiving, a history of abuse, and even biological factors can make them more resistant than men to seek help, national research has found. While the death toll for men and women dying from overdoses continues to climb, growing research shows clear gender differences in why they use, patterns of behavior during their use and in their pathways to treatment and recovery.

The number of women in New Jersey who have died from opioid overdoses has more than tripled in the last decade from 98 in 2007 to 375 in 2016, according to data from the Kaiser Family Foundation. Women also are the fastest-growing correctional population in the country, with the number of female inmates rising from 12,746 in 1978 to 111,422 in 2016, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. Burlington County females, currently 50, are housed in the Atlantic County Jail, after the county closed its women’s jail in 2013.

Research from the National Institutes of Health found that when women develop substance abuse problems, they tend to develop them faster than men do, and if they relapse in recovery, it’s typically under different circumstances than men.

“Women are more likely to relapse in the presence of a romantic partner than men are, and are less likely to relapse when they are alone,”



Lisa Vandegrift, of Pemberton, goes through photographs of her daughters Sabrina and Stacey. Both girls struggled with heroin addiction. Sabrina died of an overdose at age 20. Stacey is in recovery. [CARL KOSOLA / STAFF PHOTOJOURNALIST]

Resources for women struggling with addiction, trauma

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration national helpline: 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>

CONTACT of Burlington County crisis helpline: 856-234-8888 or <http://contactburlco.org>

ReachNJ treatment referral hotline: 1-844-ReachNJ (1-844-732-2465) or www.reachnj.gov

NJ Connect for Recovery hotline: 855-652-3737 or <https://www.njconnectforrecovery.org>

Robin’s Nest: Provides services for new and expectant parents and pregnant women. <https://robinsnestinc.org>

Oaks Integrated Care: Provides outpatient services for those struggling with addiction and family-related services for pregnant women. 1-800-963-3377 or <http://bit.ly/oaksintegrated>

Legacy Treatment: Provides crisis intervention, outpatient and addiction treatment, out-of-home care for children and youth. 1-800-433-7365 or <https://www.legacytreatment.org>

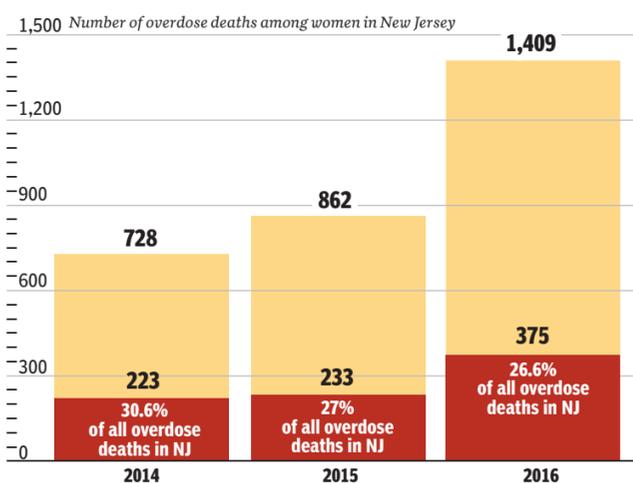
Malvern Institute: Provides addiction treatment and residential detox. <http://www.malverninstitute.com>

New Jersey Department of Human Services information and resources for women and families: <http://bit.ly/NJDHSwomenfamilies>

National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence information on alcoholism, drug dependence and women: <http://bit.ly/NCADDwomen>

Overdose deaths among women

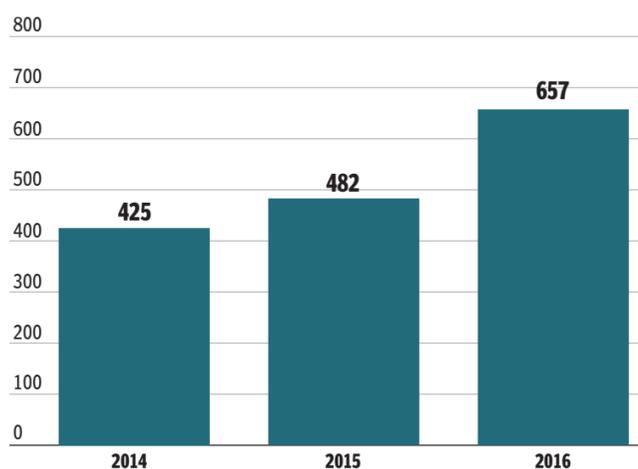
The number of women dying from overdoses has increased in recent years in New Jersey. However, as a percentage of all overdose deaths, those involving women have decreased.



Source: New Jersey Substance Abuse Monitoring System GATEHOUSE MEDIA

More women admitted to treatment

The number of women admitted to addiction treatment for heroin and other opiates has increased across the state and in Burlington County.



Source: New Jersey Substance Abuse Monitoring System GATEHOUSE MEDIA

BARRIERS

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according to research published in American Addiction Center.

“Women bring in different histories, particularly trauma, and require specialized programs,” said Diane Rosati, executive director of The Bucks County Drug and Alcohol Commission in Pennsylvania. Many are caregivers, and in 2017, 45 of the 173 who needed county-funded treatment in Bucks County had children.

Pressures of caregiving

Danielle McCallum knows what it’s like to struggle with addiction while being a mother.

“My son was about 3, maybe a little younger, (and) I would get up in the morning and he would have his bottle or his cup, and I knew I would have to take my medicine and I remember this one day, just sitting on the couch and I couldn’t do anything until it kicked in,” McCallum, who lived in Evesham for most of her life, said. “And I remember thinking in my head, this is an issue.”

McCallum, 37, now of Mays Landing in Atlantic County, began trying alcohol and marijuana when she was in eighth grade. By the time she graduated high school, she was using cocaine. Shortly after, she began having issues with her back, especially after she gave birth to her first son, who’s now 14

“I started with Percocet then, and it kind of just never really stopped,” she said.

Even after she realized she had an issue, she continuing using, and eventually turned to heroin. It took her until she was living on the streets in Kensington to realize how bad her addiction had gotten.

She recalled crying on the corner, where she was approached by a man who asked her if she was OK and then gave her a place to live. Just a few days later, however, he accused her of stealing his rent money, and McCallum said he kicked her face, but still, she stayed because she had nowhere to go.

Her rock bottom came a few weeks later, where she said woke up and realized this isn’t what she wanted to be.

“I don’t even feel like going to get drugs anymore,” she said. “I didn’t even feel like going to get them — I was like, I’m not even good at this. I’m not even a good drug addict.”

She ended up locking herself in the room, detoxing for over two weeks, before turning herself in to the Evesham police station, where there were warrants out for her arrest.

“I just knew I had to do it on my own so I did the whole painful thing because that’s how I learned lessons and that’s how I function,” McCallum said. “I wanted to remember it so badly so that way I would never touch it again.”

Still, that doesn’t mean she doesn’t feel some regret, especially for what her addiction did to her relationship with her oldest son.

“I still feel that guilt,” she said. “I had to walk away from him — it was either that or drag him through the mud. It didn’t become a choice and because of that I still don’t have custody of him and he’s 14 years old. He doesn’t have the relationship that he should have with me.”

Trauma and addiction

The most significant difference between men and women, experts say, is the role of trauma. As many as 80 percent of women seeking treatment have a history of sexual or physical abuse, or both, according to the National Institute on Drug Abuse. Men experience trauma as well, but it’s a critical factor for women when it comes to risk of addiction and effectiveness of treatment,



The community lounge in the Women’s Empowerment Program wing at Malvern Institute’s Willow Grove campus in Upper Moreland. The residential addiction treatment program launched a year ago with a focus on addressing trauma and co-occurring mental health disorders in women. [COURTESY MALVERN INSTITUTE]

“They confuse love and abuse. As women, they are still being victimized by the people who say ‘I love you.’”

Pat McGovern, director of special programming at Malvern Institute

according to research by Stephanie Covington, co-director of the Institute for Relational Development and the Center for Gender and Justice in California.

Gina Corso knew the importance of providing a safe place for women. Corso, a board member of the Mansfield-based nonprofit “A Future After Rehab,” also known as AFAR, oversees the women’s sober living home in Bordentown City that currently serves six women in recovery.

“I wanted a woman’s house, because women get cheated,” she said. “So I really wanted to run a woman’s house.”

Historically, treatment programs focused on the needs of men, and it was assumed that other issues women had would “either resolve themselves through recovery or would be dealt with by another helping professional at a later time,” according to Covington, whose work helped shape the gender-specific residential treatment program at Malvern Institute, which has campuses in Burlington County and Montgomery County, Pennsylvania. But Covington found that treatment is likely to be ineffective without addressing “the realities of women’s lives, which include the high prevalence of violence and other types of abuse.”

Pat McGovern, director of special programming at Malvern Institute, said often, the abuse is at the hands of family members, partners or others close to them, resulting in an inability to form good relationships.

“They confuse love and abuse,” McGovern said. “As women, they are still being victimized by the people who say ‘I love you.’”

Brit, who lives in AFAR’s sober living home in Bordentown City and recently celebrated 11 months clean, said women who are using will do whatever it takes to feed their habit.

“I know from my experience, coming into (living in a sober home), a program, a lot of women don’t come in like men, because of the things that we do when we’re out on the streets,” she said. “It keeps us out there longer. Then coming in, we have to live with stuff that men might not have to live with necessarily because of the things that we’ve done. Dealing with the emotions post-addiction, in

recovery, it’s more difficult on a woman’s side.”

Biological differences

Kristen Hamilton, 27, of Bordentown City, said she believes that drugs, particularly the two she struggled with — alcohol and painkillers — affect women differently than men.

“Your body goes through a lot more as a woman, and when you’re coming off of whatever you were doing, I feel like it might be a bit harder on most women,” she said.

Science backs up her anecdotal experiences.

Addiction specialist Dr. Michael Frost, who has a practice in Conshohocken, Pennsylvania, and serves as medical director for a women’s treatment program in Tampa, Florida, said some studies have shown women experience cravings more intensely than men when it comes to certain substances. And for some women, excess emotions brought on by PMS, PMDD or menopause, may be triggers for substance use.

“Somebody that gets very anxious, that gets very ... moody and has recognized that if I use this drug it helps level me out, the next time they get those feelings the brain is going to want to go back to those drugs,” he explained. “You have to address how to manage those periods that are going to come every month — those recurring triggers.”

For Hamilton and the five other women she shares the AFAR sober living home with, building a community has helped them in their recovery.

“It’s actually really refreshing because when I was living with my parents they didn’t quite understand it and living here with women that actually understand what you’re going through and understand the struggle, it’s a lot easier to be open and talk about things,” Hamilton said. “(That) helps a lot with sobriety, because you can’t keep everything in. It just gets bottled up.”

Brit said she never had a support system like this one.

“These women, I know if anything’s heavy on my heart or really bothering me, they understand,” she said. “There’s always somebody who has my back and understands what I’m going through. A lot of houses, sober houses, they don’t have like a connection between the group

of women living there. Here we all know each other we all talk we all care about each other.”

The Women in Malvern’s Women’s Empowerment program also emphasizes the importance of building relationships with other women to improve their chances of recovery, McGovern said.

There, at their own wing at the institute’s Willow Grove campus in Upper Moreland, Pennsylvania, they receive counseling and have access to art and music therapy, yoga, drum circles, meditation, small groups and educational sessions on topics such as parenting and building self-esteem.

Female-centric

For McCallum, during her time on the streets of Kensington, she was often alone or living in a house with people she didn’t know. She recalled being asked to make a run for someone and get them their fix from a nearby home.

“I willingly went into get drugs from another house and then I was sexually abused by five men there and I didn’t know what was going to happen,” she said.

Her hope is that more women in recovery will find similar resources that are available to men. “I know that a lot of women suffer from addiction, but the recovery scene is predominantly men,” she said. “A lot of the recovery scene — they’re a very tight-knit crew — and for the guys that’s OK.”

However, McCallum said it’s hard for her, and women like her who are married with children, to participate in some recovery community activities since it’s very male-centric.

“I don’t think women get to embrace it as much as they should,” she said.

Rosati, of Bucks County, said services are growing for women, including a specialized program that addresses trauma and a mobile engagement support program that supports families struggling in addiction. But the services to respond to trauma and child care are still in demand.

Of the women who have entered residential treatment in that county, 6 percent were identified as possibly involved in human trafficking, 4 percent were pregnant and 68 percent of women in

treatment were identified as having a co-occurring disorder, requiring mental health and addiction treatment.

Still, gaps for women seeking treatment and support are there, and treatment beds are in short supply.

“There is, at times, a lack of bed availability (because more men are in treatment), and lack of female-only facilities,” Rosati said. “And of the female-only facilities, there is sometimes a wait to enter treatment.”

Colleen McMullen, 45, a self-described “garbage addict,” said she was in and out of programs and using on and off since she was 21. It took her until January of this year to decide to try something different and put herself first.

“I’ve never focused on myself,” she said referring to many of the years she spent using.

She has two children, now 20 and 21, and their father had passed from drug use, she said. She’s also had her share of relationships during that time, and said she never really took her recovery seriously and never worked on herself as she bounced around from jails to institutions, from couch to couch.

“It’s amazing how far I’ve come just in this little bit of time, just to have an independence and not have to rely on my parents,” she said. “Forty-five years old, finally growing up a little bit. Still not there yet — I have a lot of growing up to do — but to be on my own, and to do this by myself for once.”

Women like McMullen who are used to putting other first and not focusing on themselves are not unusual.

“Some women do not want to enter treatment due to lack of child care, not wanting to relocate their child to different school district while in treatment, and need for family support while in treatment,” Rosati said.

Corso stressed the importance of having the women in her house focus on getting themselves right before trying to get into a relationship or take care of others.

“They’ve got to be careful because you’re really not supposed to get involved with anybody for at least a year because they’re healing,” she said. “It takes at least a year for them to start even thinking right. They’ve got to come first. They really need that.”