

Free harm reduction supplies available in vending machine



Sara Crawford The Gazette

MEDINA - To make resources more accessible, the Medina County Health Department and Hope Recovery Community recently installed a vending machine stocked with free harm reduction supplies for anyone who needs them.

"There's a lot of people we talk to that want to access things to keep loved ones safe, to keep themselves safe, and they're scared to come in here," Hope Recovery Community Executive Director Stefanie Robinson said.

According to Robinson, people sometimes may not be ready to come through the door and receive services. She said they might not be sure what they want to do about their current condition regarding substance abuse.

By installing the vending machine in the breezeway of Hope Recovery Community's Medina location, 200 Highland Drive, people don't even have to walk through the door. There is also 24-hour access to the vending machine due to its location.

With the understanding that people may not be ready to take that step, Robinson was inspired by other areas that have a similar vending machine setup and began working with the Medina County Health Department.

Medina County Health Department Nursing Program Director Stephanie Young said they worked with Summit County, which has several vending machines throughout the area, and were guided through the process.

Then, they worked with a company in Cincinnati that designed the vending machine, Young said. As part of the design process, the health department and Hope Recovery Community determined what would be included in the vending machine and then measured each package for the appropriate sizing.

The vending machine includes items like Naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan, feminine hygiene packs, COVID-19 tests and general hygiene packs.

"The one big item we have in there are resource packets," Young said. "(It's) just a little packet that contains information about other resources for the county. Our hope is that if someone comes to that vending machine to get Naloxone, that perhaps they'll also pick up that resource packet to connect them with other services in the county."

Everything in the vending machine is free and can be accessed by anyone, Medina County Health Department public health nurse Holly Phillips said. The vending machine does have a note included on it, encouraging people to only take what they need.

Since the vending machine's installation in early May, Robinson said it's been a great resource for the community.

Robinson said Hope Recovery Community is the first recovery community organization in Ohio to have a vending machine like this. Since its launch, she's been contacted by others to see how they can get one started at their location.

"We just want people to be alive long enough to be able to figure out what recovery might look like for them in the future," Robinson said.

The Medina County Health Department has since received funding for a second vending machine, Young said. She said they are looking for another location in Medina County to install the vending machine.

Young said that ideally, it would be in a place open to the public and accessible for priority populations to reach.

"This isn't going to fix everybody's problems, but it's a tool in the toolbox and could potentially get somebody connected with more help," Young said.

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