

# Positive Pathways...from Page 1A



The Community Listening Session by Positive Pathways last week was well attended by local stakeholders at the Community Center. Photo by Jarrett Whitener

Shawna Harkins presented information on the drug abuse issue in the state and nation and spoke on the mission of the organization.

"I have been in recovery for three years, and when I moved back to Georgia last year, due to COVID, I didn't have the same recovery community that I had in Asheville (North Carolina)," Cress said. "I yearned for that, and I yearned for meetings and connection and all those things that came with recovery."

"We are here because we feel like everybody's voice in the community matters. By giving the community a voice, we can change how we view recovery and care about our recovering members."

Community members attending the event shared their overwhelming support of the organization, offering tips on getting the ball rolling and posing questions about how the community can help right now.

In its early stages, Positive Pathways will be focusing on forming a definitive plan

and completing organizational elements as it pursues more funding and opportunities to meet its goals.

Barbara Honaker, Coordinator of the Enotah Drug Court, hopes to work closely with Positive Pathways so that the organizations can benefit each other as they strive toward similar goals.

"We need childcare, and we need housing like you wouldn't believe," Honaker said. "It is illegal for me to seek out grants and be able to do the housing, but I have access to hundreds of thousands of dollars for housing."

"Having another organization take it on, I can get \$650 a person for six months in a residential. I need to have the access for that residential, and I can't be the one to do it. It has been very frustrating for me."

Union County Sheriff Mack Mason sees Positive Pathways as a good opportunity to reduce the drug problem in the county and take away some of the financial burdens that may come with recovery efforts.

"We do have a drug problem in Union County, just like everywhere else, and unfortunately, it is getting worse," Mason said. "We need the state to get more involved like they were years ago and have facilities and put money into this problem, and it would save money in the long run."

Added Mason, "People need a place to go after they come out of prison or jail. A lot of times with the drug court and private entities, they are required to pay a fee to have this service, and unfortunately, when they come out of jail or prison, a lot of them don't have money or a job."

While Positive Pathways is still getting started, organizers Cress and Harkins are optimistic that the community support and feedback from the listening session will assist them moving forward.

For updates and more information on Positive Pathways, visit @ UnionCoPositivePathways on Facebook or <https://www.positiverecoverypathways.com>.

# RidgeRunner...from Page 1A

"We were really looking at three groups of people that were suffering at the time," RidgeRunner Owner Brian Kirkland said. "Restaurants, of course, were a big one. Some of them were closing down, and all of them were closed for indoor dining."

"It was really sad to even walk into those restaurants, because it was a bunch of workers just talking to each other and nothing to do. We wanted to help the restaurants and the customers and the people who were quarantined in their home and couldn't get out to go get food."

"We wanted to also help the restaurant employees who went from making money from tips to not. We knew if we could get them on the road, we could put them back to work as servers."

This Friday will make a year that RidgeRunner has been in service, and in that time, Kirkland has heard many testimonials from restaurants that are thriving right alongside RidgeRunner.

"We have had restaurants

come up to us and say that if it wasn't for us, then they wouldn't be here today," Kirkland said. "That is really rewarding and makes us feel like we have accomplished the mission that we set out to do a year ago."

"We have paid out over \$1 million to restaurants in the past year, so I definitely feel like we have contributed to some of the success and rebounding they have done."

RidgeRunner Takeout has grown immensely since its inception, serving the areas and people between Jasper and Clayton in Georgia, up into Hayesville, North Carolina, with a location in Dahlonega coming soon.

Now, Kirkland is focusing on expanding the business and bringing in even more people and opportunities to support the communities and restaurants of North Georgia.

"We have about 95 local drivers," Kirkland said. "We also have four, soon to be five, territory owners who serve their areas. We have 19 dispatchers in our call center, which is located in Tampa,

Florida."

The territory model keeps RidgeRunner Takeout local, which Kirkland believes explains much of the company's success in its first year.

"We are locally owned, and I think that is important," Kirkland said. "Even as we grow, we are going to continue to bring on the local owners, and that makes the difference when you are not having to call a 1-800 number to get something taken care of."

"It helps the restaurants, too, because we are just a text or phone call away if they need to change something or update prices or anything they need to do. I think that is important, and it is something that we try to focus on."

Soon, RidgeRunner will be offering a rideshare program to residents in the North Georgia Mountains, which is something Kirkland said he is "super excited about."

"We spent a lot of money in developing and getting that to be as close to Uber and Lyft as possible," Kirkland said. "If you pull other apps up and ours up, you wouldn't be able to tell much of a difference besides the branding."

To use RidgeRunner Takeout for local restaurants like Skillet Café in Blairsville and Asiano in Hiawassee, download the easy-to-use app or visit [RidgeRunnerTakeout.com](https://www.RidgeRunnerTakeout.com), where prospective employees may also apply to deliver. And keep an eye out for RidgeRunner Rideshare.