

Consultant Profile: Jerria Martin

Jerria Martin, executive director of Drug Free Communities in Selma, Alabama, believes wholeheartedly that education is the foundation of drug prevention. As a prevention consultant for the SAMHSA-funded *Opioid Response Network*, Ms. Martin is working with the Alabama Department of Mental Health, on an intensive technical assistance (TA) request across 19 of the poorest counties in the country to expand access to treatment of opioid use disorder (OUD).



Jerria Martin, executive director of Drug Free Communities

Originally, this region of the country was referred to as the “Black Belt” for its rich, fertile black soil, but now this region is known for its poverty, and one that is also seeing too many of its residents addicted to heroin. This area is also part of the Bible Belt, as pointed out by Ms. Martin, who as an ordained minister is one of the reasons she was brought on to work with *ORN*. Since it is often the case that faith and evidence-based practices have been at odds, Ms. Martin’s understanding of both perspectives is a key asset to educating the faith-based community on a better understanding and hopefully acceptance of the role of medication and treatment of addictions. The mission of *ORN* is to work locally with communities and organizations, to bring in local consultants who understand the issues facing residents and build a foundation for sustainability beyond the grant funding. Ms. Martin has a deep understanding of the local needs and barriers; she lives in this region and even ran for mayor of Selma in 2016.

“I’m just honored and humbled to be part of this team,” Ms. Martin said. “The work that we do is making a tremendous impact. What I really realize is that most people have no idea what MAT is. Or even opioids. It’s really about educating the community. That’s our first priority. “

In addition to gaining a better understanding of the resources and needs in all 19 counties through asset mapping, Ms. Martin is helping to pull together key stakeholders in these counties for a two-day conference on July 10 and 11. Key goals of this conference are to educate the participants in evidence-based practices for opioid use disorder prevention, treatment and recovery, as well as gain a better understanding on how *ORN* can support the region in building capacity to address the opioid crisis. The overall goal is to support those attending to become more aware and active in this work to increase evidence-based practices in the prevention, treatment and recovery of opioid use disorders.

In addition to asset mapping and a statewide conference in Alabama, Ms. Martin is also working on a statewide initiative to reduce stigma.

Along the way, Ms. Martin says she's learned an unexpected lesson: "A lot of prevention people don't understand how having a positive relationship with treatment and recovery can help and add value to your perspective," she said. "That was a huge awakening of how we all can work together to accomplish some pretty huge goals."