



13: Workforce Response to Tennessee Opioid Crisis

A high prevalence of prescription drug abuse has created an unhealthy workforce in northeast Tennessee. As a result, the region has high instances of addiction, neonatal abstinence syndrome (NAS), and overdose deaths.

The region is learning how to contend with the impact that the opioid crisis has on its workforce. Rather than sweep the issues under the rug, the [First Tennessee Development District](#) (FTDD) took a lead role in bringing partners together to tackle the epidemic and is building a system of support for the lifecycle – from babies suffering with NAS to senior adults.

FTDD’s Lottie Ryans and Mark Stephens outline how they are working toward a healthier workforce for a brighter tomorrow. They share practical ways to educate, boost awareness, and build solutions the entire community can embrace. This episode features sound bites from their [presentation](#) at the 2019 [ACT Workforce Summit](#) in Charlotte, North Carolina.

“This really represents a shift, from being overwhelmed by this problem, to here’s a way we can start working our way back.”

Mark Stevans,

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Resources

[NE Tennessee Regional Response to Opioid Crisis presentation at 2019 ACT Workforce Summit \(PDF\)](#)

[First Tennessee Development District](#)

[Creating a Community of Trauma Informed Community System of Care in Northeast Tennessee](#)

[ACEs Connection Nationwide Gateway on Trauma Informed Care](#)

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About Our Guests



Lottie Ryans has served as the Director of Workforce and Literacy Initiatives for the First Tennessee Development District since April 2016. In this role, she develops creative partnerships and programs to ensure a strong workforce pipeline. She also works with school systems and community partners to address literacy issues in an eight-county region. Ryans frequently serves as a speaker for professional development workshops and as a speaker for professional development workshops and as a panelist for community engagement forums.

Ryans' professional history includes a 32-year telecommunications career. She retired in 2015 after serving as Vice President and General Manager for CenturyLink's Western North Carolina/Tennessee Division. Her civic history includes being a three-term elected member of the Johnson City Board of Education including service as board chair and

being a TSBA Master Board's Member. Some of her current board positions include Blue Cross Blue Shield of Tennessee, Second Harvest Food Bank, the ACT State Council, Northeast Tennessee Workforce Development Board, Vice Chair of the Northeast State Community College Foundation Board, ETSU College of Business & Technology Advisory Board and the Milligan College President's Executive Council. She served two years on the State Workforce Board in a position appointed by Governor Haslam. She also has served as chair for the Johnson City Chamber and the Washington County Economic Development Council. She served on the organizing team for the Holy Friendship Summit, a gathering of medical, community and faith-based leaders to address the opioid crisis in Northeast Tennessee and Southwest Virginia and now serves as Vice Chair for the Holy Friendship Collaborative, an offshoot of the summit. She is a member of the 2018/19 Complete Tennessee Leadership Institute co-hort. Ryans has received numerous local and national honors. Ryans is a graduate of the University of Tennessee.



Mark Stevans joined the First Tennessee Development District in July of 2015. Mark serves as the Director of Special Projects and acts as the primary contact and liaison on behalf of the District and several community organizations. In his role with the District, Mark provides logistical and technical support for regional efforts, such as curbing and ending the prescription drug abuse epidemic, tourism and food systems. Mark is also responsible for monitoring legislation that affects the District's work and staffs the FTDD Foundation's efforts to support aging, housing and workforce initiatives.

Prior to joining the staff of the FTDD, Mark served as the Western Program Manager for the Congressional Award, the U.S. Congress' highest award for youth, where he acted as the liaison between western Senate and House offices and the Congressional Award and awardees. Mark is a graduate of East Tennessee State University with a degree in history and political science.