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Cochise Harm Reduction reaching more people with Peer Navigation program, building in Bisbee



Photo by: Alexis Ramanjulu (KGUN)

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By: Alexis Ramanjulu

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BISBEE, Ariz. (KGUN) — The nonprofit Cochise Harm Reduction and the City of Bisbee partnered to open a brick-and-mortar a year ago, offering free resources to the community.

Cochise Harm Reduction [had been serving Cochise County with the mobile units for years](#). Executive Director Lu Funk, said it was a board member's idea to open a brick-and-mortar in Bisbee because he knew the city had some vacant buildings on Brewery Avenue. The group still has its days on the road, but it is seeing a difference with having a stationary location.

"It's more of a sustained relationship," Funk said. "You're able to spend more time with people. It's more of a relaxed setting where people know where to find you."

Vanessa Lopez opens the office every Thursday and serves as the organization's peer navigator — a new program aimed at providing peer support to anyone who walks through their doors.

The space is equipped with free commodities and is often staffed with Lopez and people from other agencies to help anyone who needs them

"It's not just a working relationship. I'm friends with all of them, and they consider me their friend, and that means a lot to me," Lopez said.

The peer navigator program allows them to help people by handing out free food, and hygiene products, while also providing legal aid and help with filling out important documents — like filing for social security, food stamps, and other government programs.

"What makes this so amazing is all of the different organizations that I'm able to partner with when I'm doing peer navigation," Lopez said. "They have really played a huge role in our success over here."

Cody Pearson used the free program to apply for food stamps and to find housing, something he says gives him a sense of freedom.

"It's nice to know that I don't have to go without having, like, something to eat for like, a couple days...I can walk up to the Circle K and grab something to eat," Pearson said.

Seeing the impact makes the nonprofit want to grow the program into other parts of the county.

"We never thought it was going to blow up the way that it did, and it's been beautiful to see so super excited to see in our future what's all going to what's going to play out, because I think it's going to be really big," Lopez said.

The center, located at 62 Brewery Ave., is open every Thursday from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

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