

Breaking News: A Courageous Milwaukee Woman, Shunda Garrett, Defied the Odds and Saved a Stranger's Life with Naloxone

After enduring the tragic loss of her brother and cousin to drug overdoses, Shunda saved a life with quick thinking

MILWAUKEE, WI, UNITED STATES, May 21, 2025 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Her Mother, Anita Garrett, is a local leader in the 'You Have the Power to Save a Life Campaign,' which is increasing access to naloxone in Milwaukee and other cities.

A Milwaukee woman, who lost her brother and cousin to drug overdoses, alertly rescued a man on Tuesday, May 13, with life-saving naloxone. Shunda Garrett, 36, spotted a car driving erratically at 61st and North and swerving into a pole. The school security guard parked and ran over to the car, where the driver was losing consciousness. Immediately, she suspected the driver had suffered an overdose. She dashed back to her car.

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Anita Garrett

She grabbed naloxone, also known by the brand name Narcan, from the glove compartment and raced back to the vehicle. The female passenger in the car fled the scene. With the help of bystanders, they pulled the unconscious driver from the vehicle, and Garrett administered the naloxone nose spray that revived the driver. A short time later, police arrived at the scene.

“This is the exact message we are trying to convey,” asserted her mother, Anita Garrett. She is actively engaged in the “You Have the Power to Save Lives” campaign, which aims to increase access to naloxone in Black communities, and she relayed the details of the rescue. “I am so



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proud of Shunda. Everyone must realize that they need to have naloxone on them to save a life.”

Anita Garrett maintained that the campaign seems to be working. “Shunda had training on how to use naloxone at her school, but this campaign has emphasized the importance of having naloxone with you,” she said. “That’s what she realized, and that’s the message we must also convey to the community. Getting training is helpful, but it alone won’t save a life; having the naloxone nasal spray and knowing how to use it can save lives.”

Back in 2011, when Shunda was 22, her brother Sammie Garrett, 31, overdosed on ecstasy pills laced with fentanyl when he was partying with friends. The Food and Drug Administration had approved naloxone in 1971, but it wasn’t widely available when Sammie needed it. As the overdose unfolded, his friends were slow to call the authorities because they didn’t want to get arrested.

“The urgency of the situation would have been clear to me, but it wasn’t to those around him,” said Anita Garrett. “Sammie might still be with us today if his friends had reacted quicker.” A few years later, Romeo Thames, 35, who was Shunda’s cousin and Anita’s nephew, also fell victim to an overdose. Naloxone was there this time; someone had it in the car they drove in, but they didn’t know how to use it. Calling it a tragic loss, Anita Garrett said he died because the Black community hadn’t fully embraced naloxone as a lifesaver.

“Two people very close to me are gone because our community doesn’t know what to do when someone overdoses,” she said. “There is a fear and a stigma around nearly everything regarding drugs. I can’t stop people from using drugs, but I can educate my community about how to save lives with naloxone.”

Today, Anita Garrett is committed to the You Have the Power to Save Lives campaign and shares her personal story in videos (<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DHqk80YuDw8>) and interviews



Anita Garrett

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lives when
we give
naloxone.**

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HAVE THE
POWER TO
SAVE LIVES**

YouCanSaveLives.org

<https://content.communityjournal.net/content/uploads/20250403101805/MCJ040225-PAGES.pdf>

. In addition to Milwaukee, the campaign is in Philadelphia, PA; Louisville, KY; Newark, NJ; Durham, NC; Albuquerque, NM; and Detroit, MI, locations where a disproportionate number of overdose deaths still plague Black communities. A website, YouCanSaveLives.org, highlights the life-saving potential of naloxone and provides guidance on its use. The website also directs visitors to locations in Milwaukee and other target cities, where free naloxone is available, making it a valuable resource for those seeking to learn more about naloxone and its potential to save lives.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recently reported that overdose deaths fell by nearly 30,000 last year, down 27%. But while the overdose rate has edged downward, it remains a crisis in many Black communities. The campaign, in a Data Brief, noted that:□

- Despite an overall decline in overdose deaths in Milwaukee County in 2024, [the overdose death rate for Black Milwaukee residents](#) remained twice as high as the rate for whites in the city.
- In 2024, Black Milwaukee residents [accounted for 42% of all overdose deaths in the county](#), despite accounting for 27% of the county's population.
- Overdose deaths in the City of Milwaukee [are concentrated in the predominantly Black neighborhoods of the Northside](#).

"My commitment to saving lives in our community is deeply personal," said Anita Garrett. "I'm a recovering substance user myself, and I'm driven by the desire to prevent another mother from experiencing the pain and suffering that I have endured. "

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About Vital Strategies:

Vital Strategies is a global health organization that believes every person should be protected by a strong public health system. Our overdose prevention program works to strengthen and scale evidence-based, data-driven policies and interventions to create equitable and sustainable reductions in overdose deaths in several U.S. states and local jurisdictions.

About the National Black Harm Reduction Network:

The National Black Harm Reduction Network is dedicated to advancing harm reduction principles that optimize health and wellness for Black people who are disproportionately harmed by public health initiatives, the criminal legal system, and drug policies.

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