

Program Title: The Quick Response Team (QRT) – a Strategic Partnership that Can Reduce Opioid Addiction in Your Community

I. Formative Evaluation – Planning

In 2015, the opioid addiction problem in Colerain Township, Hamilton County, Ohio, like most metropolitan areas, was out of control. Colerain is Ohio's largest township comprising 43 square miles and approximately 60,000 residents. At that time, the Colerain Township Department of Fire and Emergency Medical Services (CTFD) responded to approximately 160 overdose cases annually, resulting in countless deaths. This represented a nearly 100 percent increase from just a few years prior. The Township's response to that increase resulted in forming the Nation's first Quick Response Team (QRT), composed of a law enforcement officer, a Community Paramedic, and a Peer Support Specialist. The team's primary function was to bring addiction resources to the doorsteps of an individual who had previously overdosed. The ultimate program goal is to reduce barriers to treatment access. Those barriers are stigma, transportation, undiagnosed medical conditions, lack of insurance, and lack of connection to recovery resources. The planning process involved providing addiction education for the team's public safety partners and case management education for the community paramedic. Additionally, from a leadership perspective, there was an in-depth process in creating an interdisciplinary approach to a social issue from a leadership perspective.

II. Process Evaluation – Implementation

Colerain's QRT is a post-overdose response model. Overdoses throughout the week are flagged for the team to review and follow up. One day, each week, the team gathers the overdose data from the police and emergency medical services (EMS) reporting databases. A suspected overdose initiated a follow-up to the individual's place of residence. Each member of the team has their role. The law enforcement officer is present for safety and supply reduction (investigation) purposes. The community paramedic conducts a full advanced life support medical assessment to diagnose underlying, untreated health conditions that can disqualify one from treatment services. The peer support specialist performs the assessment and determines the best placement for addiction services. All team members are Ohio-certified Chemical Dependency Counselor Assistants (CDCAs) to better assist the individual on the scene. After the assessment, the team distributes a naloxone kit for relapse and subsequent overdose. The kit helps keep the individual alive from the time the QRT engages them until they are in treatment.

The success of the QRT program spawned a second "Safe Station" program in which those suffering from addiction can voluntarily come to any of the five Colerain Township fire stations at any time of day or night and get connected to recovery resources. The staff provides a physical evaluation and either transport to a nearby hospital if their medical condition warrants hospitalization or to the care of an addiction counselor for immediate induction into a treatment program.

III. Impact Evaluation – Short-Term Results

It did not take long for the QRT to see results. Within weeks, the demand for services outside of the follow-ups increased. To date, the team has conducted over 550 overdose follow-up investigations. They have succeeded in connecting face-to-face with 379 of those individuals, representing an approximate 69% success rate for connections. Moreover, they have connected 271 of those individuals to treatment resources.

IV. Outcome Evaluation – Long-Term Results

The short-term results directly define the long-term impacts of this program. For example, a reduction in EMS run volume coupled with a decrease in repeat overdoses per victim resulted in a decrease in overdose death potential, a reduction in potential exposure to Hepatitis-C and HIV, and a reduction in crime responses associated with drug sales and use.

From an operational perspective, our overdose rates have decreased 43% since our peak in 2017. In addition, our repeat overdoses per victim decreased from 22% in 2016 to 6% in 2020. These results combine to create a more vibrant and economically stable community that attracts residents and business owners.

Remarks:

The QRT and the "Safe Station" programs have demonstrated success as pre-arrest post overdose follow-up programs. They have won several honors nationally and become a "gold standard" for an addiction response program in the realm of public safety.

The Colerain Township QRT and "Safe Station" programs spotlight the continuing efforts of the CTFD to increase the capacity of the department's Community Risk Reduction efforts to meet the challenges in their response area. The coalition of strategic partners, including the police department and local addiction counselors, shows that progress can be made not only in the decrease of opioid addiction calls but, more importantly, in the lives of those served as firefighter/paramedics. Furthermore, the QRT program has been a national model of an interdisciplinary approach to healthcare and addiction response.