

# Fort Wayne, Indiana: A Community With HART

Like so many communities across the country, Fort Wayne, Indiana, found that it was not immune to the effects of the opioid epidemic. In 2014, the Vice and Narcotics Division of the Fort Wayne Police Department (FWPD) noticed an increase in the availability of heroin, which led to a rise in nonfatal and fatal overdoses. Community leaders and organizations knew it was time to step in to combat this devastating trend.

In 2017, the Fort Wayne Allen County Task Force for Opioid Strategic Planning (FATOS) was established. This cross-sector collaborative team determined that working across disciplines from the beginning was vital to success. FATOS' multifaceted approach included understanding trauma and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs); prioritizing treatment and recovery; and easing access to clinical treatment, recovery systems, medication-assisted treatment, additional recovery residence beds for justice-involved populations, problem-solving courts, drug courts, and Hoosier's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement (HOPE), a 1-year intense probation supervision program. HOPE Probation is a collaborative strategy that uses evidence-based practices and is offered at no additional cost to the client. Clients can be placed on HOPE Probation at the time of sentencing, or regular supervision can be modified following a violation to place the client on HOPE Probation. Once a client is on HOPE Probation, a violation of the conditions of probation results in immediate court action, with the client being remanded into custody. While the strategic planning was taking place, overdose numbers in Fort Wayne were still rising, with 289 nonfatal overdoses and 144 fatal overdoses in 2019. More positively, the availability and use of Narcan were also increasing.

A local nonprofit organization, The Lutheran Foundation, applied for and received funding through the Indiana Department of Mental Health and Addiction within the Family and Social Services Administration to set in motion the plans that had been laid by FATOS. Through the \$2.5 million grant, the Hope and Recovery Team (HART) was created in October of 2019. In keeping with the cross-sector collaborative efforts of the planning team, HART consisted of members from FWPD, the Parkview Peer



Recovery Program, Lutheran Social Services of Indiana (LSSI), and the grant administrator, The Lutheran Foundation, each with its own role to play in the outreach efforts of HART's overdose response team.

FWPD is tasked with identifying individuals who suffered an overdose. These individuals are identified through 9-1-1 calls, radio traffic, and police reports from the day or weekend before, with FWPD aiming to make contact with the individual within 72 hours. Two plain-clothes Vice and Narcotics Division detectives, along with a Parkview peer recovery coach, respond to the individual's home in an unmarked car and encourage the individual to get involved in a treatment plan. If contact is not made on the initial visit, the field team leaves fliers and business cards that include HART's hotline information. Recovery coaches are also embedded in the Parkview emergency rooms in Fort Wayne, where they make contact with people who are treated for a nonfatal overdose and attempt to connect them with services before they are released. The peer recovery coach will continue to touch base with the individual until they indicate whether they want help getting into treatment.

The Parkview recovery coaches employ the philosophy that there are many paths to recovery and that recovery occurs in stages. Their role is more supportive than directive, and the recovery coach believes in "voice and choice," where the care is patient-centered and self-directed. The coaches are not case managers or 12-step program sponsors. They focus on the client's strengths and resiliencies, providing clients with connections to treatment, social services, and harm-reduction strategies.

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“Substance use disorder has touched many of our lives, and if the HART program can help one person, it makes everything worth it,” says Darcy Robins, the lead social worker for HART.

LSSI provides wraparound services and intensive case management for individuals who have suffered from an overdose and their families. The services offered include financial education, child and infant safety, trauma-focused therapy, and job training through Lasting Stability and Success for Individuals Works, a holistic, multifaceted approach with the goal of sustainable employment and personal and professional skill development. The client must complete or actively engage with clinical treatment services, and they are able to work on their recovery because their basic needs are met through financial assistance and resources. Even if the clients themselves do not want to participate in treatment services, their families are able to participate and benefit from the Lasting Stability and Success for Individuals Works approach.

In the midst of the implementation of HART, social workers were embedded in the FWPD to provide an additional level of support to the officers and the community. Once a month, that partnership hosts an outreach event—Handing Out Hope—that brings 25 agencies together on location to serve the unhoused and low socioeconomic populations. This has provided a unique opportunity for the Fort Wayne community to bring together multiple agencies in one place, at one time, serving individuals on multiple levels instead of just one service at a time. Handing Out Hope provides free cell phones and electronic tablets, food, water, harm-reduction kits, socks, t-shirts, water bottles, feminine hygiene products, wound care kits, HIV and hepatitis C testing, access to health insurance sign-ups, mental health services, veteran services, family support services, and so much more.

Since October 2019, HART has connected with over 1,000 individuals, with 450 of those receiving treatment services. The partnership between FWPD and its embedded social workers led to the creation of a social media campaign spotlighting psychoeducation on harm reduction, substance use disorders, and treatment service agencies in



the Allen County area. The campaign reaches more than 18,000 individuals.

The creation and implementation of HART did not come without its challenges. Having cooperative agreements in place with other first-responder agencies is imperative to reach as many people as possible. The only nonfatal overdose numbers that FWPD had available were those nonfatal overdoses to which an FWPD officer actually responded. If the fire department or emergency medical services personnel responded first and had the situation under control so that an officer was not dispatched to the scene, the contact information for the person who overdosed was not relayed to FWPD, which creates a gap in overdose data. Two-way communication and the exchange of information between all agencies and individuals involved are imperative in order for the response team to work effectively. Captain Kevin Hunter had mentioned in a recent presentation on the HART program that there is also always the potential for disappointment and even heartbreak when a HART client relapses or becomes part of the overdose fatality statistic. Having a committed team of people passionate about the program can help make those struggles more bearable.

“The bright side is most people want help. We have only had two doors slammed in our face in a year,” says Captain Kevin Hunter.



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