

BPAIR – Bensalem Police Aiding in Recovery: A Novel Approach to a Growing Problem

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Stemming the tide of the influx of persons with mental illness, substance abuse, and/or co-occurring disorders requires a multi-faceted response from the systems of human services and criminal justice. The earlier the intervention, the better the outcomes. As discussed in a [previous article in this edition](#), the Sequential Intercept Model provides a framework for directed intervention. Intercept 0, the newest of the intercepts, posit that when the systems of human services and criminal justice come together to provide options before a person even touches the criminal justice system, there is a dramatic increase in the use of community-based services (Policy Research Associates, 2016). Bensalem Police Assisting in Recovery program (BPAIR) operates as an effective intervention, offering individuals who use drugs, treatment instead of incarceration. Its goals and approach are directly congruent with the Sequential Intercept Model, and the crux of the program is the intent to capitalize on the

opportunity presented at the time of emergency, police, and crisis response in order to link individuals with substance abuse disorders with the appropriate services and prevent their further penetration into the criminal justice system. BPAIR currently operates in Bensalem Township, Bucks County's largest police department with 101 sworn officers and 30 civilian staff.

In Bucks County, there has been a steady increase of accidental drug & alcohol related deaths over the past five years. Bucks County's trends mirror those of Pennsylvania and the country, including increases in prescription medication misuse and abuse, heroin use and abuse, overdoses, underage drinking, co-occurring disorders, and physical/mental health concerns.

Opiate use in particular has become an acute problem in Bucks County, mimicking national trends and resulting in the need for more comprehensive, creative, and flexible interventions. An estimated 44,909 residents over the age of 12 have a substance use disorder, yet only a small percentage seek treatment. Among the residents who do seek residential treatment for substance abuse, the overwhelming majority of them report heroin, morphine, Oxycodone, OxyContin, and Percocet as their primary and secondary drugs of choice. Heroin is the primary drug of use, and continues a steady increase (1,791 individuals sought residential treatment in 2012-2013, 1,874 in 2013-2014, and 1,890 in 2014-2015). It is essential to focus on this not as just an opiate epidemic, but also as a newly

established culture within our County as we are seeing an unprecedented amount of heroin usage and overdoses.

The overarching goal of BPAIR is to have law enforcement officials connect individuals in the community who are struggling with substance use disorders with the appropriate treatment facilities, encouraging their recovery and helping them to avoid incarceration. Modeled after the Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative (PAARI) in Gloucester, Massachusetts, the program seeks to leverage the opportunity that arises when law enforcement personnel interact with an individual who is using drugs. The program shifts the focus from the crime of addiction to the disease itself and the corresponding need for effective treatment.

As first responders, police officers are uniquely positioned to act as a conduit to substance abuse treatment. Under the BPAIR program, an officer who comes in contact with an individual who is using drugs can offer them help versus an arrest. If the individual turns the drugs in his/her possession over to authorities and agrees to seek treatment, he/she is not arrested. Once the resident chooses that option, they are paired with a volunteer Navigator who accompanies them to a nearby treatment center. Navigators are community volunteers who, along with officers, are trained on the psyche of individuals who use drugs. A local taxicab company transports the individual who is using drugs and the Navigator free of charge to the local center. The Navigator can stay at the

assessment and offer support or may leave once they have facilitated the transfer, and they are also driven home by the cab company free of charge. As a parallel process, when EMTs are called to the scene of a drug overdose, they will leave packets of information in the homes of those who refuse treatment. Officers and Navigators are educated on aspects of addiction and work in partnership to offer support and encouragement for individuals to seek appropriate treatment.

BPAIR is currently offered to any adult resident of the Bensalem community 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A typical scenario is as follows: a resident comes in contact with a police officer and is brought to the department, or enters the police department and requests assistance. The on-call supervisor has the resident complete paperwork and they are asked to voluntarily turn over any drugs or related paraphernalia without the fear of being arrested. They are then checked for outstanding warrants. If there is a warrant in effect, the law takes precedence and the participant is invited to return once they have resolved their legal concerns. If the individual is free of warrants, the on-call Navigator is called to respond to headquarters. Male Navigators are paired with male residents, and female Navigators with female residents. Once the Navigator has arrived, a taxi is summoned and both resident and Navigator are transported to Gaudenzia, the local substance abuse center. The Navigator is welcome to stay with the resident until the

individual seeking treatment is comfortable with them leaving. Typically, the Navigator stays with the resident until they are called back for assessment and treatment recommendations.

Future goals include expanding BPAIR to include all police departments in Bucks County under the auspices of BucksPAIR. Currently, the police departments of Upper Southampton, Lower Southampton, Middletown, and Warrington have joined the BPAIR initiative. Growth to BucksPAIR would come to fruition more expeditiously if the county is successful in their grant application to the Bureau of Justice Assistance under its Comprehensive Opioid Abuse Site-based Program solicitation.

BPAIR is an active program aimed at helping people deal with opioid and other drug addictions by connecting them to a treatment provider. Law enforcement agencies across the country have been confronted by the consequences of drug addiction and the toll it has on their community. BPAIR provides a clearer path to recovery for an individual and is showing to be an effective approach to the growing opioid epidemic. BPAIR leverages existing community resources in the Bucks County community, maximizing treatment access and diversion opportunities for individuals who come in contact with the justice system as a result of drug abuse. In addition, it expands outreach, treatment and recovery opportunities; promotes cross-system planning and coordination of service delivery; and reduces the incidence of fatal overdoses as well as the

recidivism and crime associated with drug use.

Works Cited

Policy Research Associates. (2016). [Intercept 0: Expanding the Sequential Intercept Model to prevent criminal justice involvement] [Infographic]. Retrieved from [Link](#).