

New Hanover County Impact Report Narratives for Fiscal Year 2023-2024

Each local government that receives opioid settlement funds is asked to share an Annual Settlement Update describing how they have made use of settlement funds during each fiscal year. For each strategy funded, local governments also share additional narratives to describe their progress and successes (success information is optional for some local governments). Across all funded strategies, each local government selects one progress narrative and one success narrative to spotlight each fiscal year.

New Hanover County provided the following narrative information for Fiscal Year 2023-2024 (July 2023 through June 2024):

Annual Settlement Update

Over the past fiscal year, New Hanover County has worked diligently to ensure that opioid settlement funds were deployed swiftly and effectively within our community. We entered into contract agreements with several community partners to enhance recovery housing programs and reduce barriers for individuals with opioid use disorder (OUD). A new Community Paramedics program has been launched through our EMS services to provide immediate medical support to individuals who have overdosed. Additionally, extended service hours are now available at a facility offering medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and therapy.

We have also collaborated with partners to provide employment support services for individuals with OUD who need assistance entering the workforce while focusing on their recovery. Working closely with the Sheriff's Office, we have enhanced the MAT program to offer induction of MAT for qualifying inmates, replenished the naloxone supply, and reintroduced the revised D.A.R.E. program in nearly all of our elementary schools. These initiatives were identified through a comprehensive strategic planning process involving a diverse group of stakeholders, including law enforcement, service providers, individuals with lived experiences, county and city staff, and community partners. To support these efforts, we established the Collaborative Opioid and Mental Health Planning and Strategy Sessions (C.O.M.P.A.S.S.), a collaboration committee that has been meeting monthly since December 2023. This group includes organizations receiving opioid settlement funds and many stakeholders who contributed to the strategic plan, ensuring that those who helped develop the plan are also actively involved in its implementation in our community.

Strategy Spotlights

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy A1: Treat Opioid Use Disorder: Expand availability for treatment for OUD and co-occurring SUD/MH conditions

Progress Narrative

The Coastal Horizons evening dosing program is now fully operational, providing essential services to patients during extended hours. This initiative offers therapy, provider visits, peer support, and medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) options such as methadone, buprenorphine, and buprenorphine/naloxone between 4:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., Monday through Saturday. This schedule

accommodates individuals who cannot attend appointments during traditional business hours, enhancing their access to comprehensive care.

We also offer a Saturday group session, fostering a supportive community environment for those needing additional encouragement in their recovery journey. The flexibility of the evening dosing program has been well-received, with many patients appreciating the ability to access therapy and medication services at more convenient times. This extended availability is crucial for patient engagement, helping them maintain their treatment schedules without disrupting their daily lives. Overall, the evening dosing program is a vital addition, addressing diverse community needs and improving the accessibility of care.

Launched in April 2024, the Community Paramedic (CP) medication assisted treatment (MAT) Program with Novant has made significant strides in supporting individuals with opioid use disorder. Since its inception, 34 individuals have received MAT, primarily those actively using opioids and experiencing withdrawal symptoms. This highlights the urgent need for timely interventions.

We initially aimed to enroll 5% of our overdose survivors into the MAT program but have exceeded this goal by enrolling 19%, demonstrating the program's effectiveness. A key factor in this success is the dedication of our CPs, who have maintained 100% adherence to follow-up schedules, ensuring ongoing support and patient engagement. Remarkably, 90% of MAT patients have transitioned into comprehensive treatment programs, underscoring the program's positive impact.

These combined efforts reflect our commitment to addressing the opioid crisis and supporting individuals on their recovery journey. The success of both the evening dosing and CP MAT programs demonstrates our capacity to meet the evolving needs of our community and expand the availability of evidence-based treatment for opioid use disorder.

❖ **Exhibit A, Strategy 5: Employment-related Services**

Success Narrative

We are honored to share the remarkable journey of a client who overcame the looming threat of homelessness with our dedicated support and funding from New Hanover County. After a period of residing in transitional housing following incarceration, the client found the stability they desperately needed through permanent supportive housing.

Initially, transportation challenges posed a significant barrier to accessing essential services. Our supportive housing program staff intervened, providing reliable transportation to a substance use treatment provider. This provider's flexible scheduling allowed the client to receive vital care without disrupting their work commitments.

Our team also played a pivotal role in the client's employment journey. By offering job leads and enhancing their soft skills, we helped them secure a position that aligned with their needs and aspirations. The comprehensive support we provided empowered the client to regain control of their life, enabling them to attend necessary treatment sessions while maintaining their employment.

The client is transforming their life through unwavering resilience and the right support. Their story serves as a compelling testament to the strength of community determination, motivating us all to persist in our mission to create meaningful change. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of community collaboration, demonstrating how two agencies receiving opioid settlement funds and multiple program staff members came together to collectively support the client and address their needs effectively.

Progress and Success Narratives for All Funded Strategies

❖ Exhibit A, Strategy 11: Addiction Treatment for Incarcerated Persons

Progress Narrative

We have strengthened our partnerships with Wellpath and the New Hanover County Detention Center to better support individuals with opioid use disorders who are incarcerated. Recently, we have expanded services by offering telehealth visits with a physician assistant from Coastal Horizons. This new initiative allows inmates to access opioid use treatment more conveniently, bridging the gap in care for those who need it most.

Despite these advancements, there are still challenges to address. Space limitations within the detention center make it difficult to provide comprehensive services to all inmates who would benefit from them. Additionally, the unpredictable nature of inmates' release dates complicates the planning and continuity of care. It can be challenging to ensure that individuals remain engaged in treatment after their release, especially if they are discharged unexpectedly.

However, our efforts are showing promising results. Nearly every individual who received treatment while incarcerated has continued with their recovery journey after leaving the detention center, with only two exceptions. This high follow-up rate indicates the effectiveness of our partnerships and the critical importance of providing access to care during incarceration.

We are committed to overcoming the remaining barriers and are actively exploring ways to further expand access to treatment within the detention center. By continuing to collaborate with Wellpath and other partners, we aim to enhance support for incarcerated individuals, helping them build a foundation for long-term recovery and reducing the likelihood of recidivism.

Success Narrative

One success story is about an individual who did not want to begin medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD) while incarcerated but agreed to meet with staff while incarcerated to ask questions. He shared that he had been nervous about treatment in the past, had used opioids, and had mental health concerns. He reported fear about MOUD but felt this was a safe way to talk about his options. He did not start MOUD while in the jail, but upon release presented for services. Another success was our induction. This person had been incarcerated in New Hanover County (NHC) before being moved to another prison to serve his time. He finished time and was returned to NHC to complete a short sentence before being released. He was inducted on medication assisted treatment and when released, engaged in services. His spouse reached out the day before his release expressing gratitude that he was on medication and had treatment options, noting that she was pregnant and needed him to be sober and in treatment for her health and the health of her baby. Upon release, he was immediately connected to the community health center and remains in treatment today. The family reports gratitude for this program to allow him the chance to be on a path to recovery while finishing out time from past mistakes.

❖ Exhibit A, Strategy 4: Recovery Housing Support

Progress Narrative

Since February 2024, Coastal Horizons' Opioid Recovery Housing Project (ORHP) has made significant strides in supporting individuals diagnosed with opioid use disorder (OUD). The project began with the hiring of a full-time case manager, who enrolled the first client on February 11. To

date, 21 participants have been enrolled, all of whom have been placed in recovery housing. The ORHP case manager works closely with each client, focusing on personalized goals such as securing employment, obtaining identification, and accessing healthcare and food resources.

The ORHP team has established strong referral partnerships with the Quick Response Team, Walter B. Jones Alcohol and Drug Abuse Treatment Center, and The Healing Place of New Hanover County, and is actively working to expand relationships with additional recovery housing providers. Currently, the project supports 13 active clients, with 12 housed and seven in ORHP-funded recovery beds and four living independently with ongoing case management. Of these clients, eight are employed, and two receive Social Security or SSI Disability Income. Eleven clients are maintaining sobriety.

Eight participants have been discharged from the program: three successfully completed their recovery plans, two relocated out of the county, and three relapsed and declined further care.

The Tides Residential Housing Program has been operating at near capacity throughout 2024, highlighting the ongoing need for supportive housing for women and children. With grant funding, the program secured an additional apartment, increasing its capacity from 12 to 14 beds this quarter. This expansion has enabled Tides to offer a stable environment to more families in need.

Significant milestones include two women maintaining residency for over six months, and one woman regaining custody of her four children and transitioning to independent living after 1.5 years in the program. Tides provided financial assistance for utility deposits and other essentials to facilitate her successful transition. Graduates of the program continue to receive support, including rent subsidies and assistance with deposits, which has helped them achieve long-term stability. The continued support underscores the program's lasting impact on women and children's lives.

Success Narrative

The Coastal Horizons "Opioid Recovery Housing Project" (ORHP) client is a New Hanover County native who began using opiates at age 15 and progressed to heroin at age 20. Client has overdosed 4 times in the past. Client has attempted substance use treatment in the past with some success. Their most recent relapse was related to a family death, 7 months ago. Since that time the client was unable to achieve sobriety on their own. The client was self-referred to Coastal Horizons for medication assisted treatment (MAT) and began treatment. At the time of admission, they were homeless and unemployed, without a support system. They were admitted to ORHP on 03/19/24 and admitted to a recovery house the same day. Since their admission, client has engaged in case management and individual therapy. The client has been able to maintain sobriety since admission. With the assistance of their case manager, client has also obtained employment and attends Narcotics Anonymous meetings weekly. Client has remained stable on MAT, sees a psychiatric provider to address mental health symptoms, and has followed up with Horizons Health primary care. Client engaged with the ORHP case manager for 11 weeks, completing the program on 06/03/24. Client was able to take over their own rent at the recovery house, is working full time and continues to attend dosing and therapy with Coastal Horizons Center.

❖ Exhibit A, Strategy 5: Employment-related Services

Progress Narrative

The Employment Boot Camp has demonstrated remarkable effectiveness in empowering job seekers. By offering invaluable guidance and motivation, the program sets participants on a path to success. The Boot Camp has excelled in developing essential soft skills, connecting individuals with job opportunities, and providing comprehensive resources to support both mental well-being and career advancement. Participants have reported significant improvements in their ability to secure well-

compensated positions and perform confidently during interviews. The program's impact extends beyond immediate employment, as it equips individuals with the tools and mindset necessary for long-term career growth. The success of the Employment Boot Camp has led to positive word-of-mouth referrals, with many graduates recommending the program to others seeking career advancement. This organic growth speaks to the tangible benefits experienced by those who have completed the Boot Camp. While the program has already achieved notable success, we are committed to continuous improvement. Our team is actively working on refining the curriculum and methodologies to ensure the Boot Camp remains at the forefront of career development. Additionally, we are exploring strategies to expand the program's reach, aiming to make these valuable resources accessible to a wider audience of job seekers. Overall, the Employment Boot Camp has proven to be a transformative experience, offering a structured approach to job seeking that combines skill development, networking opportunities, and personal growth. Its holistic methodology has consistently yielded positive outcomes for participants, making it a valuable resource in today's competitive job market. As we continue to enhance and expand the program, we anticipate even greater impact and success stories in the future.

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Success Narrative

A patient was experiencing withdrawal symptoms while detoxing at a local facility. Their goal was sobriety and obtaining their peer support specialist certificate so they could help others like themselves. Due to the detox facility requirements, patient was unable to leave the facility to receive medication assisted treatment (MAT) medications from a local MAT provider for seven more days. The Community Paramedics were able to control their withdrawal symptoms and agreed to provide the patient with their daily MAT medication until they successfully completed the facilities detox requirements. A warm handoff was provided to our MAT partner on day seven. The patient reached out to the Community Paramedics one month later explaining that they were still sober, living in housing, but struggling with their addiction. They also expressed difficulty obtaining basic hygiene items. The Community Paramedics assisted the patient with obtaining basic hygiene items and helped patient connect with their peer support team and substance abuse provider. The patient was able to maintain their sobriety and continue with their outpatient program.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy G8: Prevent Misuse of Opioids: Fund evidence-based prevention programs in schools or evidence-informed school and community education programs and campaigns for students, families, school employees, school athletic programs, parent-teacher and student associations, and others.

Progress Narrative

For the 2023-2024 school year, the New Hanover County Sheriff's Office has revitalized and reintroduced the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program in several New Hanover County schools. This initiative fills the gap left by the former Gang Resistance Education and Training (G.R.E.A.T.) program, which previously served as a key component of the county's youth outreach efforts. The earlier version of D.A.R.E., used over a decade ago, had become outdated and was

discontinued. Now, with a modernized curriculum that addresses current issues, the new D.A.R.E. program aims to educate students on making safe and responsible choices.

Prior to the start of the school year, several deputies underwent specialized training and were certified as D.A.R.E. instructors, with the goal of implementing the program in every elementary school in New Hanover County. Although not all schools were able to participate this year, 19 schools successfully integrated the program into their curriculum. These schools reported exceptional levels of engagement, with numerous students completing the course and graduating from the program.

The revitalized D.A.R.E. program focuses on critical topics such as drug prevention, decision-making skills, and building self-esteem, tailored to resonate with today's youth. By reintroducing D.A.R.E., the Sheriff's Office is reaffirming its commitment to proactive youth education and community engagement. The positive reception and success of the program demonstrate its value as an essential tool in fostering a safe and informed community.

Success Narrative

The 2023-2024 school year Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) Program has been a complete success! The amount of participation versus nonparticipation easily outweighs the other. I have attended all but 2 graduations, and the support from teachers, parents, students and even community support has been phenomenal. Multiple compliments have been received from parents referencing their own experiences in the D. A. R. E. Program from when they were in school. The D. A. R. E. Program also holds the values for the New Hanover Sheriff's Office School Resource Officer Unit and places and emphasizes on Protect, Mentor and Educate.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy H1: Prevent Overdose Deaths and Other Harm: Increase availability and distribution of naloxone and other drugs that treat overdoses

Progress Narrative

The Naloxone Replacement Program has equipped every patrol car with at least one naloxone kit, ensuring that deputies are prepared to respond to opioid overdose emergencies in the community. This program's funding has also enabled the Sheriff's Office to replace expired kits, maintaining a full and effective stock at all times. With these resources, deputies can provide immediate life-saving intervention when encountering individuals experiencing opioid overdoses.

In addition to supporting frontline law enforcement, the program has had a broader impact on community safety. By maintaining an ample supply of naloxone, the Sheriff's Office can extend emergency support to other local organizations and community partners when they are in need. This ability to share resources has strengthened collaborative efforts in combating the opioid crisis without compromising the department's capacity to respond effectively to emergencies.

The proactive replenishment of naloxone kits ensures that deputies are always equipped with the necessary tools to save lives and respond quickly to overdoses, a critical aspect of the office's commitment to public safety. Moreover, this program reflects a commitment to not only protecting the public but also enhancing inter-agency support within the community. By providing a dependable supply of naloxone to both law enforcement and community partners, the Sheriff's Office helps ensure a comprehensive and coordinated response to the ongoing opioid epidemic.

Success Narrative

MedNorth Health Center, the only Federally Qualified Health Center in Wilmington, NC, provides free naloxone to anyone in the community. Recently, they have faced significant challenges in maintaining an adequate supply due to the high demand for this life-saving medication. Frequent

shortages and difficulties in sourcing additional naloxone from suppliers left MedNorth struggling to meet community needs.

During one of our monthly collaboration meetings, MedNorth shared with the group their urgent need for naloxone replenishment to continue supporting individuals at risk of opioid overdose. Recognizing the severity of the situation, a representative from the Sheriff's Office took immediate action. They coordinated a donation of naloxone kits to MedNorth, ensuring that the health center could continue offering this vital resource to those in need.

This donation was made possible through the Sheriff's Office's own naloxone replacement program, which maintains a robust supply to support both their operations and community partners. By providing these additional resources, the Sheriff's Office helped MedNorth avoid interruptions in their life-saving services without compromising the department's ability to respond to emergencies.

❖ Exhibit B, Strategy K1: Training: Provide funding for staff training or networking programs and services to improve the capability of government, community, and not-for-profit entities to abate the opioid crisis.

Progress Narrative

Like many organizations, the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program has faced its share of challenges. After speaking with the regional director, I learned that, due to retirements, relocations, and financial constraints, hosting an in-house D.A.R.E. training school this year is not feasible. However, we will still have the opportunity to send deputies to a training session at the Samarcand Training Academy, which will be held later in the year. Although specific dates and class sizes for this course have not yet been announced, it remains a valuable opportunity for expanding our team of trained instructors.

Despite the inability to host our own training, we are actively exploring options to certify our current D.A.R.E. instructors as mentors. This certification would enable them to train officers from other agencies, further extending the reach and impact of the D.A.R.E. program throughout the region. Obtaining this certification would be a significant step forward in strengthening our ability to provide effective drug prevention education.

While it has not been confirmed, our goal for the 2024-2025 school year is to have the D.A.R.E. program implemented in every elementary school in New Hanover County. By expanding the program to all schools, we hope to provide consistent and comprehensive education on drug prevention, decision-making, and personal safety to every student. Although there are challenges ahead, we remain committed to the growth and success of the D.A.R.E. program and its positive impact on our community.

Success Narrative

The School Resource Officers (SROs) who have received Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) training report significant improvements in their ability to support students who are facing challenges in school. The D.A.R.E. program, which emphasizes making positive life choices and resisting peer pressure, has had a noticeable impact on students who have completed the program. SROs observe that these students are demonstrating better decision-making skills and improved behavior in and out of the classroom. Additionally, the training has enabled SROs to build stronger, more trusting relationships with students. Many officers have found that their interactions extend beyond the classroom, allowing them to serve as mentors and positive role models. This mentorship helps reinforce the principles taught in the D.A.R.E. program and provides ongoing support for students as they navigate academic and social challenges. The positive outcomes reported by the SROs

highlight the effectiveness of D.A.R.E. training in fostering a safer and more supportive school environment. By equipping officers with the tools to connect with students on a deeper level, the program contributes to a culture of trust and respect, benefiting both the students and the broader school community.