

# Quick Response Team aims to fill void for overdose survivors



FINDLAY — When Bill Fedirka woke up in the hospital after one of his overdoses and was told he had died, he was scared.

The fear made him want to quit, to get clean. That fear faded, though, as the sickness of withdrawal took hold. And then it left. And then he started using again.

“At first I was scared and afraid, but then no one came to me,” he said.

For 20 years he used, but now he’s clean, and Mr. Fedirka’s mission is to fill

that void for others, to make sure there's someone there. He's the coordinator for the Hancock County Quick Response Team, a coordinated effort to provide peer support to overdose survivors and their families.

The team was created last year with an \$87,500 grant from the Ohio Attorney General's Office, and has been up and running since the tail end of 2017. Mr. Fedirka and a Findlay police officer will visit an addict within 72 hours of an overdose, offering treatment options and other support.

The state funded 39 programs for 21 months as either Quick Response Teams or Drug Addiction Response Teams that provide immediate intervention after overdoses, an attempt to steer users away from opioids at the moment the most harmful effects are apparent.

He'll speak to addicts about their options, but also to family members about what they can do for both self-care and to provide support for their loved ones in the throes of addiction.

"It's not just the user, but the family and everyone that might be living there," he said.

A former peer counselor for Century Health, he didn't have to reinvent the wheel when developing the program. The DART program, started in 2014 by the Lucas County Sheriff's Office, provided significant advice, though that program has more resources. Eventually, Mr. Fedirka said, he'd like the Hancock County program to expand to a similar scope.

Funding for the grants was established in Ohio's 2017 two-year budget, with the goal to help communities replicate Lucas County's effort. Programs in Wood and Ottawa counties also received grants.

"They typically work to reduce overdose-related deaths, reduce repeated

overdoses per victim, increase the support network for survivors and their families, and help overdose victims get into treatment," said Dan Tierney, spokesman for the Ohio Attorney General's Office.

The QRT isn't an intervention, but it can be intensive, with Mr. Fedirka at times calling someone in recovery daily to check up when they are at their most vulnerable. Of the first about half-dozen people to go through the program, half are still in recovery, he said.

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