

Proactive program successfully getting addicts into rehab

Quick Response Team efforts are working, police say

Emily Wood CINCINNATI —

Within five days of an overdose, a Colerain police officer, medic and addiction specialist make a stop at the person's home.

The Quick Response Team is there to offer help and access to treatment.

The team said if the person is not home, the face-to-face contact with a family member or friend has been enough to start the conversation and connect with addicts on a more personal level.

"When you actually spend the time with someone at their home or here at the Community Resource Center, you actually get to learn about the person and where they came from and how it happened," Colerain firefighter and paramedic Doug Rolf said.

"Surprising, the majority of people that we meet, they want something better and something different and to be in treatment. They just don't know how," addiction specialist Shana Merrick said.

Since 2015, Colerain's QRT has knocked on more than 300 doors. They've made contact with 250 people and have helped 210 addicts start a recovery program.

The recommended goal of the program was to initially get 10 percent of people in rehab. Colerain's success rate after two years is an impressive 82 percent.

"We're saving lives. The men and women who work in this Quick Response Team and the men and women in our fire and police because it's growing outside of the Quick Response Team," Township Administrator Dan Meloy said.

Meloy, a former Colerain police chief, said he came up with the QRT idea as a way to prevent overdoses and reduce crime.

"If you're not doing heroin, you're not in that world, there's probably a good chance that you're not going to be driven to commit the crime that's often associated with feeding that beast," Meloy said.

As Colerain's QRT enters its third year, addicts are starting to approach the team at the Community Resource Center on Colerain Avenue and the police substation inside Northgate Mall.

Rondell Helton overdosed on heroin this past spring, but without a home, the QRT did not have a way to follow up, until Officer Niki Dennis saw Helton days later near the mall.

"I don't know what, I can't explain it, but something in that moment told me to keep talking to him, keep telling him about this program," Dennis said.

"I knew he needed that person. He needed that person to tell him, you can do it."

When WLWT met Helton, he was 77 days clean and had perfect attendance in his rehab program at Brightview.

"When you're doing this drug, the heroin, you feel like no one cares, no one gives a heck about you, and this program -- it's changed everything," Helton said.

Since Colerain started QRT, more than a dozen agencies from around the country, state and Greater Cincinnati have used Colerain's model to start their own program, including:

- City of Cincinnati
- Lawrenceburg, Indiana
- Troy, Ohio
- Kenton County, Kentucky
- Richland County, Ohio
- Middletown, Ohio
- Logan County, Ohio
- Mansfield, Ohio
- City of Hamilton
- Raleigh, North Carolina
- Indianapolis, Indiana
- Akron, Ohio
- Cleveland, Ohio

For more information on QRT or to connect directly with an addiction specialist, [click here](#).