

FINDING HOPE AMID TRAGEDY

Addressing the Opioid Crisis
in Berks County, PA



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WHAT IS COCA?

Since 1972, the Council on Chemical Abuse (COCA) has served in a lead role, offering the resources necessary to respond to the complex problems of substance abuse and addiction. Designated by the County Commissioners as the Single County Authority (SCA) for Berks County, COCA is responsible for the administration and management of publicly-funded alcohol, tobacco, and drug services. COCA is a non-profit organization governed by a volunteer Board of Directors reflective of the local community, and serves as the coordinating agency for publicly supported drug and alcohol programming in Berks County, Pennsylvania.

Learn more about us at www.cocaberks.org

MISSION

To provide leadership in the development and implementation of policies and programs related to a system of prevention and intervention services that prevent the onset of addiction, and treatment services that promote recovery.

A MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



On almost a daily basis, we are reminded of the present opioid/heroin epidemic this community is experiencing. Of course, we are not alone with this experience. It is pervasive and with few exceptions, this epidemic has no respect for community boundaries, as well as specific ethnic, race, gender, and/or age groupings. It is unprecedented in the number of lives that are being lost and families destroyed as a result. Any addiction can destroy the person who suffers from it, as well as those around him/her. What is different about this addiction is the misuse of opioids stops an individual from breathing

and without intervention, it can result in death. And yet, sadly the risk of dying is not enough to deter use. This statement is counter intuitive and defies reasonable thought.

The innocent introduction to a prescription opioid can take any person on a trip involving isolation, despair, criminal activities, etc., leaving only the shell of a person remaining. When this happens, it does not happen to “those people” or that grouping, but rather it can happen to anyone who may innocently use prescribed opioid medicine to block and/or reduce pain. For some, it works as prescribed. For others, it opens the door to addiction, reprogramming the brain to believe it needs the drug to feel good – and to relieve the discomfort of withdrawal.

We have heard the stories of individuals who started innocently taking prescribed pain medication, which led them down the road of addiction. For years we have been warning about the rise in addiction to opioids, but none of us could have predicted how devastating this addiction would be for

Amid this tragedy, we must not lose hope...

a community. Many lives have been lost and families torn apart. BUT, amid this tragedy we must not lose hope. *Addiction can be effectively treated, and people do get well.* There are thousands of people in Berks County who are in recovery and enjoying the benefits that go with it. On the following pages, I invite you to read about the great work happening in Berks County in the name of prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery services for addiction. Together, we can and will continue the fight against this horrible disease and help people get well!

THE OPIOID CRISIS IN BERKS COUNTY IT CAN AND MUST BE STOPPED

Nationally, 91 Americans die every day from an opioid overdose. The powerful nature of opioid drugs can trap an individual in an addiction that too often leads to a fatal overdose. The alarming statistics from the Berks County Coroner's Office confirm that our county is tragically impacted by this health crisis. From 2014 to 2016, the total number of drug overdoses doubled. Of the 123 overdose fatalities in Berks County in 2016, 96 deaths were opioid-related with 60 of these deaths directly attributed to heroin.

Berks County, as other communities across the United States, has seen a drastic increase in those addicted to prescription opioid pain medication and heroin. Prescription opioid pain medications have the same effect on the brain as heroin, and the brain does not differentiate between the two. To an addicted individual, who no longer can obtain opioid drugs through prescriptions, heroin becomes a cheaper option.

The devastation of the opioid epidemic has activated responses at all levels of government. In Pennsylvania, statewide electronic monitoring of opioid prescription practices is now in place to track the usage levels of patients as well as prescription patterns of physicians.



HOW DID THIS HAPPEN?

Beginning in 2001, pain treatment became a priority for hospitals and medical practices. Since then there has been a dramatic increase in the acceptance and use of prescription opioids for the treatment of chronic, non-cancer pain, such as injuries, back pain, and osteoarthritis. During this time, doctors and patients were misinformed regarding the addictive nature of opioid drugs.

Locally, the Berks County Opioid Task Force has been established to assess and respond to the local impact of the opioid epidemic. This task force, working in conjunction with the University of Pittsburgh, will be the driving force to move Berks County forward in the implementation of strategic responses to this epidemic.

Task Force members include local government representatives, drug and alcohol professionals, emergency and medical personnel, religious leaders, representatives of the Latino community, and individuals in the criminal justice, business and education fields.

The goals of the Berks County Opioid Task Force include the following:

- Decrease deaths related to opioid use
- Establish tighter regulations and safeguards in the dispensing of any opioid medication
- Decrease the availability of heroin
- Increase treatment opportunities for individuals suffering from addiction to opioid drugs

- Increase prevention messages and reach Berks County youth early, often and continually through maturation
- And lastly, establish and sustain county-wide awareness campaigns that address the disease of addiction, as well as the stigma that surrounds it.

Berks County, through this task force, will take a comprehensive and aggressive approach to addressing all aspects of this epidemic by increasing the levels of prevention education, intervention, treatment and recovery services to respond to the opioid epidemic.



WHAT IS AN OVERDOSE?

An overdose is an excessive and dangerous dose of a drug that can result in death.



WHAT ARE SIGNS OF AN OPIOID OVERDOSE?

- Pale skin and/or feels “clammy” to touch
- Body goes limp
- Fingernails or lips are purple or blue
- Vomiting
- Unconsciousness
- Breathing or heartbeat slows or stops
- Pinpoint pupils
- Unresponsive to pain



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

If you think someone is overdosing
CALL 911 IMMEDIATELY.

Administer Naloxone, if available.

*How Can You Get Naloxone?
Find information on page 8.*

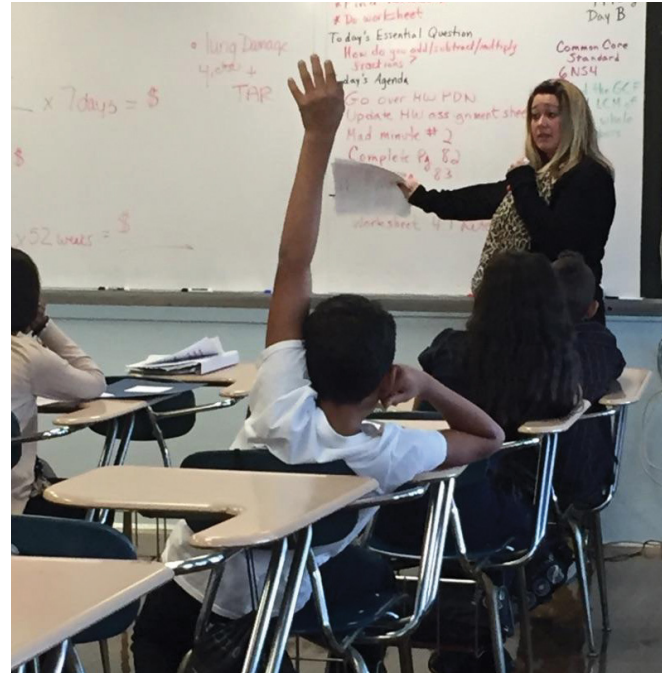
WE BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF PREVENTION

“ I believe in what I’m teaching and the importance it holds. Providing an educational environment that allows students the opportunity to share their viewpoints, ask questions about drugs and alcohol, and learn coping and refusal skills is absolutely crucial, and through evidence, we know this works!

- Paige Carroll, *Prevention Specialist*

What is Prevention?

The concept of drug and alcohol prevention is easy to understand, yet challenging to implement. To be effective, we need to reach out to youth early and often with preventive messages that are constantly reinforced throughout the youth’s development. The greatest influences are parents and teachers. We recognize that our youth need to be educated about the effects and consequences of drug use. However, more importantly, they need skills to support good decision making and to resist risky behaviors. With science and research on our side, we now have opportunities to positively engage young people in proven prevention programs. This has moved beyond scare tactics onto providing youth with the skills they need to navigate the difficulties of growing up. Evidence-based education is currently being taught in 6 of the 18 school districts in Berks County. COCA prevention staff can assist in the start up of evidence-based education. All prevention education services from COCA are offered to Berks County schools at no cost.



Prevention Specialist, Paige Carroll, teaches Botvin LifeSkills® Training (LST) at Northwest Middle School in Reading, PA.

the good news

According to post-test data, about 2/3 of Berks County middle school students receiving prevention programming reported gaining knowledge in the dangers of drug and alcohol use. *

* During the period running July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016.



Silence is dangerous.

As parents, we are the first, and perhaps the most influential voice our children will hear. Unfortunately, when it comes to discussing drug use, we wait for the right or perfect moment to initiate the conversation. The problem is waiting may result in no talk at all...

Gain the confidence you need to start the conversation sooner rather than later. Find information tailored for talking with children of all ages. **It's Time to Talk!**

cocaberks.org/timetotalk.html

An Added "Dose" of Prevention

In response to requests from Berks County schools, Prevention Specialists from the Council on Chemical Abuse developed a 2-part prevention educational program for middle and high school students called "A Clear & Present Danger." With a specific focus on prescription pain medication and heroin, this program engages youth in conversation about medication safety and addiction. The interactive dialogue provides students with accurate information about prescription drugs and teaches them about the connection between prescription opioid pain medications and heroin.

Topics and discussion in Part One include what are prescription medications, what is misuse, how prescriptions can be used safely, as well as techniques for turning down the pressure to use drugs and engaging in positive alternative activities.

In Part Two, students are actively involved in the journey of two fictional characters that represent true stories. Each character misused prescription

drugs with different outcomes. Students learn about the progression from misusing prescription opioid drugs to heroin use and addiction. They discuss the reality of death from the disease of addiction, along with the effectiveness of treatment, and the hope that can be found in recovery. The content of this program is age appropriate to the particular student audience.

A teacher's response to the "A Clear & Present Danger" program:

“ I learned so much! The next day when we spoke about prescription drugs, the students were really able to show us what they learned. Every school should have this presentation. ”

- Beth Patten, *Kutztown Area Middle School*

INTERVENTION WE CHOOSE LIFE

The Earliest Intervention

As the opioid epidemic escalates, hospitals in Berks County have seen an increase in the number of opioid addicted pregnant women. The most devastating consequence of parental opioid addiction is Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome (NAS), the drug withdrawal syndrome in newborns exposed to opioid drugs during pregnancy. Newborns with NAS experience longer, often medically complex and costly initial hospitalizations, as well as needed follow-up medical care.

Berks County's hospitals and drug and alcohol treatment providers are working closely together to intervene with mothers identified with opioid use. Early intervention during pregnancy holds the hope of protecting the health of both the mother and child, and increases the possibility of a safe and healthy delivery. A mother with an opioid use disorder and her infant have better health outcomes when the mother is able to begin medication-assisted treatment (MAT) during her pregnancy.

To respond to this specialized health condition, the Reading Health System and New Directions Treatment Services provide MAT to pregnant women who are opioid dependent. The introduction of medication during pregnancy prevents both the mother and the infant from suffering from opioid withdrawal. Following discharge from the hospital, on-going case management services insure that the family stays connected to vital addiction treatment, as well as medical and social services.*

School-Based Intervention

For many who receive treatment for drug and alcohol addiction, their experimentation and use began during their middle and high school years. Early intervention can help prevent addiction and/or help recognize problem areas that can be addressed before more damaging consequences occur. The Student Assistance Program (SAP) is a mandated program for Pennsylvania schools designed to assist school personnel in identifying issues including alcohol, tobacco, other drugs, and mental health concerns which pose a barrier to a student's success. Anyone, including parents, can refer a student to SAP. Parental involvement is *crucial* for successful intervention.

At the core of each school's SAP team are knowledgeable school staff and professionals from the drug/alcohol and mental health field. SAP team members are trained to identify problems, determine whether or not the presenting problem lies within the responsibility of the school, and make recommendations to assist the student and the parent. When the problem lies beyond the scope of the school, the SAP team will assist the parent and student so they may access appropriate services within the community.

** In accordance with federal and state requirements, pregnant women are afforded preference in regard to access to treatment services funded by the Council on Chemical Abuse.*

Emergency Help

If revived from an overdose, a natural thought may be that as a result of having a near death experience, the overdose victim would never use drugs again. While that can happen, all too often the overdose survivor returns to their drug of choice, again risking their life. This is not surprising and speaks to the power of addiction.

Recognizing this, COCA established a “Warm Handoff” response for overdose survivors. Once the individual is medically stable, a certified recovery specialist (CRS) will meet the survivor on site at the hospital and assist them in engaging in treatment and recovery services. This initiative is provided at both Reading and St. Joseph’s Hospitals, through a contract with Treatment Access and Services Center (TASC).

“Warm Handoff” efforts in Berks County have received state recognition for their high success rate of getting overdose survivors to enter treatment. In addition to assisting overdose survivors, certified recovery specialists also help in getting care for people who experience severe opioid withdrawal symptoms in the emergency room. There is no need to wait until an overdose occurs before treatment is initiated.

1 HOW CAN YOU GET NALOXONE?

FREE Naloxone kits are available to Berks County residents through the Council on Chemical Abuse.

Request your Naloxone kit by following three easy steps.

Visit cocaberks.org/getnaloxone.html to start the process.



Are You a First Responder?

If you answered no, you may want to re-think your answer. The truth is anyone can be a first responder. By this we mean anyone could be the first person to arrive at the scene of an overdose.

When someone has overdosed, *every second counts*. For more than 40 years, Naloxone has been safely used to reverse overdoses caused by an opioid drug (i.e. prescription pain medication or heroin). When administered during an overdose, Naloxone blocks the effects of opioids on the brain and restores breathing within two to eight minutes. If used on someone that is not experiencing an opioid overdose, no harm is done to the individual. You can prepare yourself by learning the signs of an overdose and requesting your free overdose prevention kit from COCA.

What you do after you suspect an overdose can save a person’s life. Your response can save an individual suffering from the chronic disease of addiction.

TREATMENT FIRST STEP TO RECOVERY

When someone is suffering from an addiction to opioids, it is important to get a thorough drug and alcohol evaluation to determine the appropriate course of treatment. Just like with other chronic diseases, no single episode or approach to treatment may be sufficient to effectively arrest/address the problem. Professionals work with each individual to create a specialized treatment and recovery plan to address areas of need.

Treatment options for Berks County residents addicted to opioids include both residential and outpatient settings and vary in intensity and duration, depending on the needs of each individual. *Regardless of the setting or intensity of treatment, research shows that effective treatment for individuals addicted to opioids may also include medication-assisted treatment (MAT) using methadone, buprenorphine, or naltrexone.* These medications normalize brain chemistry, block the euphoric effects of opioids, and relieve physiological cravings. This allows the individual to participate in behavioral therapy, and to attend to other areas of his/her needs including engaging in recovery supportive activities. With the appropriate type and duration of treatment, people with an addiction to opioids do recover and live addiction-free, productive lives.

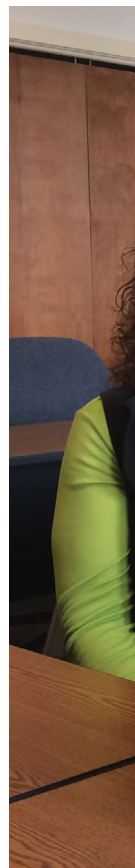
“ During a hopeless time in my life, I was pregnant and addicted to heroin. I knew I needed help. Thankfully, help was available. My only option was to get on Methadone. Today, I am no longer on Methadone, but am grateful for the availability of the treatment. Medication-assisted treatment gave me what I needed – help for my substance use disorder. I was able to have a successful delivery of a healthy baby and a life beyond my wildest dreams. ”

- Margaret M., Person in long-term recovery since 2014

5,800+

The number of requests for treatment received by Treatment Access and Services Center (TASC), Berks County's Drug and Alcohol Central Intake Unit.*

* During the period running July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016.





**I'M NOT
ASHAMED
ANYMORE.**

Nigel Walker shares about her experience in treatment for addiction.

For more information regarding treatment, visit cocaberks.org/addiction-treatment-reading-pa.html

NIGEL'S STORY

When asked, "What word would describe your life prior to receiving treatment services?" Nigel responded, "Chaotic." She had committed a crime to support her drug use, got caught and was ordered to pay restitution to her former employer. Her attorney encouraged her to apply for participation in Berks County's Drug Treatment Court. Nigel said she was scared, ashamed and embarrassed. She wasn't sure what to expect and did not like being told what to do. As part of the treatment court program, Nigel was ordered to intensive supervision by the Adult Probation Department, to random drug screens, to seek employment and to participate in mandated drug and alcohol treatment services.

Nigel's treatment experience included inpatient, intensive outpatient and outpatient services. It was during this time that she began to understand that she has a disease called addiction. "When you get deep inside of yourself as to what is really going on, it hurts," she said. The treatment experience afforded Nigel the opportunity to learn more about her illness, the problems and consequences caused by her addiction and the solutions that were available.

"I'm not ashamed anymore," Nigel said about her recovery story. Over time, she has felt more comfortable with herself and realizes the value in the help she has received. She still uses the scrapbook which she completed in Drug Treatment Court as a way to remember to keep moving forward. "My journey is not complete. I keep adding to it and I don't want to put this experience behind me."

WE ARE RECOVERY PROUD!

For me, my close relationship with God and being connected to people in recovery is important to staying sober.

- Dan M.



I'm celebrating 27 years of recovery! It's because of events like the Recovery Walk, that have helped me stay sober.

- Jan T.



I have been freed from the horrors of addiction and I'm enjoying the life I have today!

- Taniva W.



Every year hundreds of individuals gather in Berks County to celebrate National Recovery Month during the month of September. This day-long event features a Recovery Walk followed by a festival with music, food, and activities for adults and youth. Hear more people share what recovery means to them in our video "Berks County - Recovery Proud" on YouTube.

MAT & Recovery

"Some people have strong feelings about the use of medication as part of treatment and recovery, but medication-assisted treatment (MAT) has helped me," said Dan M., pictured right.

Today Dan credits medication-assisted treatment as providing the approach that both changed and stabilized his life. But it wasn't always that way. Several years ago, Dan's life was very different. In high school Dan "dabbled" with drug use, including marijuana and Xanax, but at 19, it was cocaine that spurred his addiction to progress quickly, which eventually led to using heroin. As his addiction progressed, his parents saw signs and encouraged him to get help.

Between 2008 and 2009, Dan experienced the highs and lows of getting sober through inpatient and outpatient treatment and recovery housing. "I was resistant to the recovery process at first," Dan admitted, "I continued to use heroin and pills, despite the services I was receiving." Following an intervention with Dan's family, he entered Reading Hospital Detox, where he met Dr. William Santoro and was introduced to MAT. Dan began to finally find relief from his cravings. He was able to focus, and started to build a strong foundation of recovery. Additionally, Dan diligently sought to form a connection with his higher power, find a good job, develop and follow a schedule, and connect with people in the recovery community.

To read Dan's full story and other recovery stories, please visit: recoveryandme.org



Giving Back

An old adage in the recovery community says that in order for a person to fully embrace recovery, he/she needs to "give it back," or share his/her experience with others struggling with addiction.

In Berks County, Certified Recovery Specialist (CRS) services have emerged to provide around-the-clock assistance. These peer-to-peer recovery services have demonstrated positive outcomes

across the nation, including a dramatic drop in crisis contacts and hospitalizations, less alcohol and drug use, improved living situations, and enhanced income and health, as compared to individuals not receiving these support services. Locally, CRS services have shown to be helpful in assisting individuals who are confronted with significant challenges, to complete treatment and reduce barriers to achieving long-term recovery.

These services should never replace professionally directed treatment as a means of initiating recovery. Rather, these services are intended to support and offer

encouragement to those suffering from addiction by promoting sustained recovery and helping to prevent, or minimize, relapse. CRS services may be provided prior to, during, and/or following treatment to help someone achieve their ultimate goal: recovery from addiction and a meaningful life in the community. For more information about these services, you can contact Treatment Access and Services Center (TASC) at (610) 375-4426.

30,000+

Estimated number of Berks Countians
in recovery from addiction to
drugs and alcohol.

THE SERVANTS OF BERKS MAKING A DIFFERENCE



Congratulations
to our 2016
Conference
Award winners!

Pictured from left to right:

The Francis "Fran" Drexler Public Safety Award

Stephanie Smith, *Berks County Jail System*

The Roger S. Hertz Education Award

Tiger Assistance Program, *Fleetwood Middle School*

The Joseph "Bud" Haines Community Award

Tyler Bard & Reverend Jeremiah Sassaman, *Topton American Legion Ambulance Services*

The President's Award - Berks County Commissioner Kevin S. Barnhardt

Betty J. McDonough Treatment Award

Mairead Desmond, *New Directions Treatment Services*

The President's Award - Berks County Commissioner Christian Y. Leinbach

Algot "Al" Eckstrom Recovery Award

Sam Albert, *Recovery Coaching Services*

Not pictured: **The President's Award** - Berks County Commissioner Mark C. Scott



*If you would like information regarding programs and statistics for the 15-16 Fiscal Year, running July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016, please visit: cocaberks.org/findinghope-2017.html

Honoring Our Heroes

Each year, the Council on Chemical Abuse presents awards to acknowledge the positive efforts made by individuals, groups and/or organizations working to address areas of alcohol, drugs and other addictions, prevention, intervention, treatment and recovery issues. These individuals are our “heroes,” working daily in their field to help the lives of those affected by addiction. They are criminal justice professionals, teachers, ministers, emergency responders, legislators and servants of Berks County.

“If we want others to get well and to enter into long-term recovery from the disease of addiction, we all have to work together. We are truly thankful for these individuals who tirelessly invest in the lives of those who need help,” said Yvonne Stroman, Drug and Alcohol Program Representative and Annual Conference Coordinator.

IN MEMORY OF...

Sara L. Lengel (Passed away February 10, 2016)



Sara, or “Sally” as many called her, was a one-of-a-kind treatment professional, and the first COCA Treatment Professional Award winner in 2005 (pictured left with Executive Director, George Vogel). Her dedication to the treatment of the disease of addiction left an impact on many Berks County residents, and us as well.

Stanley E. Cieplinski Jr. (April 2, 1949 - July 20, 2016)



Known throughout Berks County for his long-time connection with scholastic sports, Stan also served on the COCA Board of Directors and served a term as Board President. His care for and concern about youth was evident. He tirelessly advocated for prevention services in our local schools.

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Mark C. Scott, Esq.

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As of 2/28/2017

Finding Hope Amid Tragedy

“ This conference was one of the best I have ever attended. The presentations were given by well respected professionals that work in the field of addiction. Well done. ”

- Stephanie
2016 Conference Attendee

Council on Chemical Abuse

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www.cocaberks.org



SAVE THE DATE!

2017 ANNUAL COCA CONFERENCE
Thursday, November 2, 2017
Crowne Plaza Hotel, Wyomissing, PA