

Supporting wellness



for the whole person

Community Access
Fall 2022



**ACCESS
SERVICES**
unlocking potential

Joining Forces For a Greater Good

"Montgomery County continues to take a multidisciplinary, holistic approach to the opioid overdose epidemic that includes prevention, intervention, and treatment. Through this work, we know there are many barriers to our residents accessing needed healthcare services. To help address this, the Montgomery County Overdose Response Team [MCORT] program was launched..."

Dr. Valerie A. Arkoosh, Chair
Montgomery County Board of Commissioners

"By pairing a Department of Public Safety paramedic with a Certified Recovery Specialist, we can leverage their unique skills to provide support to individuals in our county who are plagued by addiction."

Michael Vest, Director
Montgomery County Department of Public Safety

Addiction.

It's a word that brings up strong emotions. For some, their thoughts immediately go to their loved ones struggling, loved ones lost, or their own struggles that they have overcome. For others, it goes to the feeling of helplessness from being on the front lines serving the community and seeing the overwhelming need for more. For others, it's a struggle to see the humanity in addiction, to see the need as a community issue and not just a personal choice. Addiction has long come with stigma and shame. But as the epidemic has slowly crept into every corner of our area, there is more and more recognition of the need for better answers and long-term, person-centered solutions.



Sam Barriskell, Paramedic with MCORT and Alvin Wang, Chief Medical Officer for the Montgomery County Department of Public Safety, stand in the hall of Montgomery County's Department of Public Safety to discuss target areas for MCORT services.



The Overdose Response Team often meets in a neutral, public place before dispatching to response areas.

Since 2018, there was a desire to create a program dedicated to Overdose Response. Ideas can take time to grow into developed solutions, but collaboration can bring innovation to life. Driven by a desire to fill gaps, Access Services looks to move visionary ideas forward. The Montgomery County Department of Public Safety prides itself in being relentlessly prepared for every situation, planning down to the last possible contingency. Collaboration allows for both organization’s strengths to work together to create something beyond what we could do on our own.

“The goal of Mobile Integrated Health is to utilize a team approach to fill gaps in existing healthcare coverage to ensure that we reach our most vulnerable patients in an equitable and culturally competent manner.”

*Alvin Wang, Chief Medical Officer
Montgomery County Department of Public Safety*

Montgomery County Overdose Response Team (MCORT) officially launched on September 12th, 2022. MCORT is a collaborative effort that puts a Department of Public Safety paramedic and a Certified Recovery Specialist (CRS) on a team to outreach on referrals of overdose or relapse involvement.

“Co-locating a Community Paramedic with a Crisis Worker with additional training as a Certified Recovery Specialist in a mobile response vehicle is just one of the many ways our county continues to look for innovative and data-driven programs to bring these vital services directly to our residents in their time of need.”

*Alvin Wang, Chief Medical Officer
Montgomery County Department of Public Safety*

The teams are outfitted with everything that a paramedic would need to respond in an emergency situation, Advanced Life Support equipment essential for providing acute medical treatment along with the benefit of a crisis worker who has lived experience with addiction.

Frontline workers meet people in some of their toughest moments every day. Many times, that is their last contact with someone. Or worse, you may have to revive them on multiple occasions. Each person serving on the frontline does this work because they care about helping people. Following up with individuals after an overdose or relapse has not been possible, but they often wonder what happens to the people whose lives they work to save, hoping they can overcome addiction and lead a healthy and full life. Now frontline workers can submit referrals to MCORT, activating the team to follow-up and build a relationship with the person.



Alvin Wang shares the contents of an Overdose Response kit to another team member. Kits include wound care supplies and naran.

“Imagine getting a letter that says, ‘A person who you referred to MCORT has entered rehab today.’ That can alter the trajectory of a provider’s life.” Sam Barriskell, Paramedic with MCORT

There have been studies that show that there is a relationship between connection and overcoming addiction. This is easier said than done. It takes time, effort and a willingness to trust. How do you connect if addiction has made you an outcast? If addiction has made you an untouchable to your community? Who will you reach out to when addiction has led to involvement with the justice department? Who do you trust to reconnect with your community? Because addiction is deeply stigmatized, these are very real issues that are barriers to connection. Community bridges are the solution to long-term reduction of the opioid crisis. This is the goal of MCORT.

And who can truly understand the experience of addiction without walking this path? This is where Certified Recovery Specialists (CRS) bridge the gap. MCORT pairs a CRS with a paramedic to reach out. As someone who has walked this path and overcome addiction, a CRS can meet people where they are in that moment. Someone who reaches out with snacks, a listening ear and zero judgement to build a bridge.

“To be able to stand by someone actively struggling with addiction and simply say, ‘I know’. This is powerful. This is your superpower as a CRS.”

*Ivan Rosa
CRS with MCORT*

In the short-term, it’s important for MCORT to build relationships with Montgomery County EMS agencies and law enforcement. We’re so thankful for the deep support that exists within the county.

The initial positive reception to the MCORT concept will hopefully continue to grow and deepen as relationships are strengthened through delivering meaningful support to individuals and families who are experiencing addiction. Once a contact is made, a relationship can hopefully be built. This can lead to connection to community resources, short and long-term rehabilitation, recovery and more.

This is part of the longer goal for tracking the results of the efforts of MCORT. To be a go-to resource for the emergency responder community and to the larger community to reduce the trauma impact. To be able to give people who referred individuals to MCORT some type of confirmation that their efforts made a difference. We want to reduce the incidence of overdose and the impact of trauma on families and individuals by partnering with them to realize a pathway out of addiction.

“We’re excited for Access Services’ Mobile Crisis to partner with Montgomery County’s Department of Public Safety. We believe that together, we can realize life-saving impact for individuals and families in the struggle of addiction.”

*Jess Fenchel
VP of Behavioral Health, Access Services*

How you can help

If someone you know is struggling with addiction in Montgomery County, there is help. Please reach out to the Mobile Crisis team to be referred to support at **1-855-634-HOPE (4673)**.

If someone you know is struggling with addiction in Pennsylvania, please reach out to the 24/7 toll-free helpline: **1-800-662-HELP (4357)**.

We are excited for the potential this program has to change lives in Montgomery County! You can support the work being done at Access Services by partnering with us. Your investment in our organization will equip us to meet needs and impact lives in the community. Please donate at: **www.accessservices.org/donate/**

Who is Access Services?

For 45 years, Access Services has been developing innovative ways to provide support services to individuals with special needs. Today, we are a large non-profit organization operating in fourteen counties in Eastern Pennsylvania.

Our mission is to empower and serve people in need of specialized supports by providing innovative services that improve their ability to live fulfilling lives in the community.



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