



One Year Later

Community Access
Fall 2023



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MCORT

One Year Later

Last fall, we introduced you to the newly-formed Montgomery County Overdose Response Team (MCORT), which 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.

And now a year later, through the partnerships and community connections, MCORT has processed over 600 referrals. Many of these were live overdose events. Over 30 individuals have gone directly into treatment. There are many people the team engaged with who will not accept treatment immediately, but a relationship is established during each of these contacts. The MCORT team goes out and tries to meet immediate needs, break down barriers of mistrust, and establish a rapport that will lead to long-term intervention and recovery for those they serve. We checked in with the team to see how the last year has been.

"When it started out it was Shane Madden, now our assistant director, it was him and I, and John and another co-worker by the name of Sam. We were the first ones out there. It was new and it was scary, right. But it all fell into place in the first two weeks. And the community didn't really know who we were. There was a trust barrier. So we were just driving and the other EMS happened to be on Pulsepoint and he seen that a cardiac arrest was happening a block or a block and a half from us. And we pull up and the guy's feet are hanging out of the bushes. He's overdosing, he's dying. We get there and we pull him out of the bushes and we Narcan him twice and he comes to. By the time he came to, the paramedics were arriving, so they were able to check him and transport him to the hospital where we met him, and we were able to support him



with getting into treatment. It was sort of like that was the first time that everything came together and went smoothly, and the program did what it was designed to do. Which was to relieve the stress from the EMS teams so they could move on to the next call and we could follow through with them and get them into treatment. So that was the first glimpse that I got that the program was really working.”

Ivan Rosa, Overdose Crisis Worker, MCORT

“Many of the referrals include multiple touchpoints with individuals trying to intervene before it’s too late. Every overdose crisis is a life possibly lost. We try to get out in front of these overdoses. This is why MCORT was created. And the lived experience goes a long, long way, it’s what’s making the difference.

There’s nothing more powerful than someone who can look at you and say, ‘I know recovery is possible, no matter how impossible it feels right now, because I did it.’”

**Shane Madden, Assistant Director of Forensic Partnerships
Montgomery County Mobile Crisis**

“I think one of the key elements of the program is the speed at which we get to these referrals. In a lot of referral-based programs, if you look at the time from the overdose event to the actual engagement, it’s usually several days at best, historically. Our median time to engagement is zero days which means, almost that same day or within 24 hours of the overdose event, the team is out there and I think that’s telling of the gap this program fills. That’s a rapid response and rapid referral to definitive care and treatment.”

Dr. Alvin Wang, Chief Medical Officer & Regional EMS Medical Director

“One of the great things that’s come out of the success of this team is that the county is willing now to fund a total of five and a half paramedics. So as of a week ago, we were finally able to post those positions and put an interview panel together....Our goal was to expand MCORT to two teams with a supervisor in the central portion of the county and provide services sixteen hours a day, seven days a week. That is our ultimate goal, but obviously we’re going to get there in incremental fashion. I think the



MCORT members, Chris Lenkowski, Jonathan Serbin, Ivan Rosa and Cara Butcher meet to reflect on the stories they have collected over the past year.

importance of this team is that we grow at a pace we can sustain. We never want to take a step back, so when we grow, we want to make sure we have a sustainable model behind that growth.”

Dr. Alvin Wang

“The difference of this team is that we can connect. This population can be skittish...and doesn’t trust. They trust us because we’ve been there. They recognize us. And now they call us. They welcome us. They’ll tell us, “look here this person needs support too.” And because we’re connected with Mobile Crisis and Street Outreach and JRS and the 911 system and other emergency personal we have help when we need to find a person that may be struggling. If they’ve had any involvement with any of the county systems, even 211, they’re going to show up and we’ll be able to help them. It might take us a little bit of time, but we’ll be able to find them.

Ivan Rosa

“I think the willingness to meet clients where they’re at, which is sometimes the lowest point they’ve ever been, homeless or overdosed in the ER, I think them seeing us in that moment eliminates the barrier. We’re not scared of what you’re going through. Let us help. Sometimes people who struggle with addiction are used to lashing out and scaring away everyone they loved. And instead we’re like, ‘Okay, I’m not going anywhere, so when you’re done yelling, let’s get back to talking.’ ”

Cara Butcher, Overdose Crisis Worker MCORT



“Sometimes people can’t get to where they need to go. It’s a large county. Bringing the medicine and the specialist to you rather than attempting to go anywhere else, some people don’t want to be bothered, they don’t want to be out in public. That’s when we come to them, and we’ve had a lot of success with that. We have Narcan and now we have the xylazine and fentanyl test strips as well. Making that available and educating people about them. It’s so important. People will stop us on the street to ask us what we do, and we can offer these resources and educate them on how to use them. It can save a life. You never know when something may happen, and you’ll need to use Narcan. Accidental overdoses happen. Even with prescribed medication overdose can still happen. It’s not a bad thing to have Narcan at home.”

Jonathan Serbin, MCORT Paramedic

“I think one of the secrets of our team is, you know we have infrastructure, we have equipment, we have sustainability, but our secret weapon is our certified overdose response team being willing to engage, sort of relentlessly and effectively, people in a space that they can hear that information and get help. It’s only possible when you have a team this dedicated, and this invested in the program. I can’t say enough good things about the founding members of this team. And it was with the support of the Montgomery County commissioners that we were able to even get an audience for this concept and be able to start the preliminary conversations and build the funding and build the infrastructure for this. There were many people instrumental in getting this off the ground. And it’s taken five years to

actualize, but to have over 600 engagements in the first year of the program, it’s pretty amazing to have that much success.”

Dr. Alvin Wang

Do you know someone in Montgomery County struggling with addiction? Call Mobile Crisis to be referred to MCORT at 855-634-HOPE (4673).



MCORT Team: Dr. Alvin Wang, Chris Lenkowski, Jonathan Serbin, Shane Madden, Cara Butcher and Ivan Rosa. Not pictured: Rebecca Lee.

You can support our teams’ efforts to serve in Montgomery County!

As the winter months approach, our Street Outreach team will continue to support those experiencing housing instability. MCORT and Mobile Crisis also team with Street Outreach to provide support and connect those we serve with any support that is available. With both shelters in Montgomery County closed, the cold weather presents uniquely difficult situations for our unsheltered neighbors. You can help our vulnerable neighbors by purchasing items off the Street Outreach wish list here: <https://a.co/hWSOs83>

Who is Access Services?

For 47 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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