Addiction counselor accompanying West Virginia cops on drug raids

*Huntington, West Virginia, police have brought in a mental health addiction specialist to combat their city's opioid crisis. 60 Minutes reports, Sunday.*

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This small city in West Virginia was losing its war on drugs. On one day, in just a four-hour period, there were 26 opioid overdoses in Huntington. The police were overwhelmed and the city was living up to its reputation as the "Overdose Capital" of America. In Huntington, incidents of drug-related deaths were eight times the national average. To turn the situation around, the city took an unorthodox step and hired an addiction counselor to accompany police on drug raids. Sharyn Alfonsi reports on this unique strategy that an Appalachian city hopes will stem the tide of deadly opioid abuse. The story will appear on the next edition of 60 Minutes, Sunday, June 16 at 7:00 p.m., ET/PT on CBS.

Regular raids of drug houses were not making a dent in the opioid problem in Huntington, says Capt. Rocky Johnson, commander of the city's drug squad. "The next day, they're right back at it. Somebody just filled the spot. And that is when I started to think as hard as we're pressing and as hard as we're pounding away at this problem, we're not making any difference," he says.

Huntington Police Chief Hank Dial was so frustrated, at one point he asked for federal help and received agents from the ATF, the DEA and the FBI. He even called out his state's National Guard. In the end, he realized the problem to fix was the unrelenting demand for drugs. "Our side is to disrupt the supply," he tells Alfonsi. "But what was invariably left behind was a group of people, who were the buyers, who were still coming to the store looking for that."

They turned to an addiction counselor in an unusual move. The city brought in mental health addiction specialist and social worker Krishawna Harless to offer help to the addicts police encountered on drug raids. "Basically, our city was in a crisis. And their officers were exhausted, they couldn't arrest their way out of it," says Harless. "I had to get out on the street and I had to really meet with people all the time and be there all the time."

Harless says Johnson told her he was seen in a different light with her on his raids; people saw him as there to bust the dealers and help the addicts. Says Johnson, "We were handing the addicts off to her so she could do her job. And that freed us up to do ours, which was target the drug dealer." Eventually, drug-related murders came down in Huntington almost 70%. Overdoses dropped more than 40%.

Johnson is pleased he is not seeing many of the sad faces he once encountered regularly. "A lot of those faces and a lot of the people that we dealt with over, over and over again, they're not here anymore. They're off to rehab or straightened their life up and moved on."

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