



Drug Abuse Response Team Achieves Community-Wide Change

BY
John Tharp, Sheriff, and
Tamme Smith, Drug
Abuse Response Team
Community Advocate,
Lucas County Sheriff's
Office, Ohio

IN THE FIGHT AGAINST THE DEVASTATING OPIOID EPIDEMIC GRIPPING OHIO, THERE ARE NOT A LOT OF SUCCESS STORIES. The number of overdoses continues to spiral upward each year, and communities are crushed under the burden of dealing with skyrocketing rates of addiction and all of the social problems that it creates.

Substance use disorders (SUDs) are a disease with a cost that exceeds the lives that are tragically lost. In Ohio, the effects of the opioid epidemic have been especially severe. In one way or another—through deaths; nonfatal overdoses; or disruptions to jobs, marriages, families, and neighborhoods—every community in the state has been impacted

by this growing crisis. Ohio spends billions of dollars annually on incarceration, medical costs, and lost productivity due to this epidemic.

However, in Lucas County, overdose deaths have decreased over the last two years, a downward trend that many credit to the collaborative efforts of Sheriff John Tharp and the Drug Abuse Response Team (D.A.R.T.) Unit. Lucas County is situated in northwest Ohio and borders the state of Michigan. This community of just under 430,000 has been hit hard by the opioid epidemic. From 2004 to 2016, opiate-related overdose deaths jumped exponentially from 21 to 157, an increase of 647 percent.

To address the problem of rising overdose and addiction rates locally, Lucas County Sheriff John Tharp created the D.A.R.T. in 2014. This team, in collaboration with local mental health services and community-based groups, is tasked with addressing the significant drivers of the opioid epidemic—supply and demand—through targeted interventions. Through this partnership, community resources have been identified and coordinated, so that interventions can empower individuals with SUDs and their families to begin or continue the long and difficult path to recovery.

Sheriff Tharp initially started the program after witnessing a young man going through withdrawal in a jail holding cell. “Truly, it was one of the ugliest things I have ever seen,” said Sheriff Tharp. “He was swearing and crying, and his arms and legs were flailing. He was vomiting.” Spurred into action by the scene in front of him, Sheriff Tharp called then-Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine to see whether he would help fund his idea for D.A.R.T.

On the road at the time, the attorney general fielded the call and listened to Sheriff Tharp’s request. An hour later, Attorney General DeWine called Sheriff Tharp back and told him to send a proposal. Eventually, DeWine’s office channeled \$800,000 to Lucas County for D.A.R.T. and treatment programs, noting that the concept was a model that could be replicated.

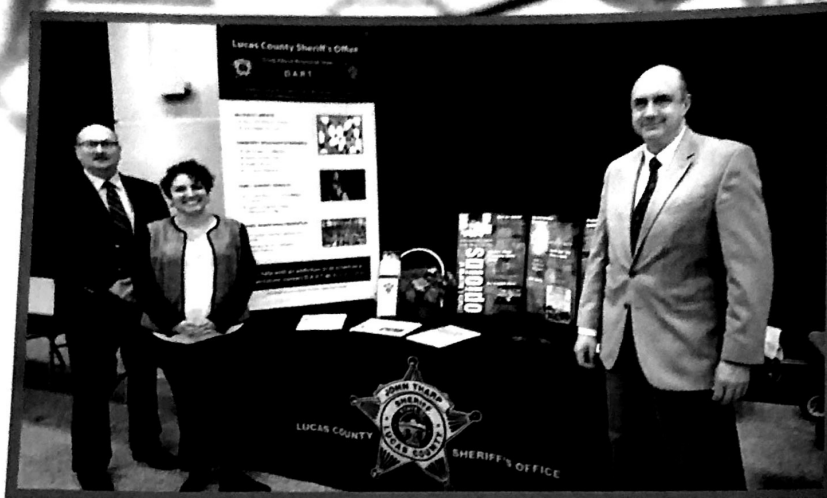
Since 2014, D.A.R.T. has continued to grow and has become a leading example of community policing in the United States. With a unique blend of policing and community engagement, D.A.R.T. has proven to be strong and effective. Officers connect individuals with SUDs to continuums of care, as well as follow through on pursuing information offered voluntarily that will help to prosecute drug suppliers. D.A.R.T. has a 79 percent success rate over the last four years (2014–2018) and has helped more than 3,350 people with SUDs since its inception. Success is defined as engagement with or connection to a treatment provider.

When D.A.R.T. started in 2014, it consisted of two Lucas County deputy sheriffs and personnel begged and borrowed from other Lucas County agencies—the Oregon Police Department, University of Toledo Police, Mercy Hospital

Public Safety Police, Toledo Police Department, Waterville Township Police, Springfield Township Fire and EMS, Lucas County Public Library, Toledo Metro Parks and Recreation, Arrowhead Behavioral Health Care, Unison Behavioral Health Care, Midwest Recovery, Zepf Center, and Empower for Excellence. The team is now up to ten officers, two advocates, and five social workers and peer support persons. D.A.R.T. members visit people with SUDs in hospitals, homes, homeless shelters—wherever the team is needed—offering help to get the individuals through the difficult and painful detoxification process and into long-term treatment. Members of the team drive unmarked cars and wear suits and ties to make them less threatening to police-wary drug users.

Clients come to D.A.R.T. via self-referral, family referral, drug court, children’s services, the Area Office of Aging, and the Lucas County Correctional Facility or following a confirmed opioid overdose by EMS. Opioid overdoses are confirmed with the administration of naloxone by a first responder dispatched to the scene. When clients are identified following an opioid overdose, officers respond to the area emergency rooms to engage them. Clients are connected to treatment providers following a brief intake by the responding officer. Based upon the need and desire of the client, the officer will link the client into services that may include a formal assessment, detoxification, a treatment plan, counseling, intensive outpatient therapy, medication-assisted treatment, recovery housing, and sober supports.

D.A.R.T. maintains relationships with local mental health treatment agencies, obtaining daily updates on the available number of detoxification and recovery housing beds. Due to those relationships, officers have 24-hour-a-day access to recovery and detoxification beds within the referral network. Upon agreeing on a treatment location, the officer may transport the client from the hospital to one of those treatment locations. Officers provide a soft handoff for the client to the treatment agency, encouraging the client to complete releases of information for both the officer and agency. Once a person has agreed to participate in the services offered by D.A.R.T., clients and their families remain a member of the D.A.R.T. family for a minimum of two years.



When responding to an overdose, officers ask open-ended questions seeking basic information, including drugs of choice, method of use, why the client believes he or she is in the hospital, history of treatment, and interest in treatment. Officers also request information from the clients on their need for detoxification and if they are currently taking any medications. After officers obtain responses to the questions, the information is placed into a D.A.R.T. database and maintained as part of an open or closed case file. Should clients agree to enter treatment, officers continue building rapport by maintaining ongoing contact with the clients. All communication with the clients is documented and logged into the D.A.R.T. database created and maintained by the Northwest Ohio Regional Information System.

The D.A.R.T. Unit originally focused on reducing opioid-related overdose deaths by facilitating connections to appropriate treatment, but quickly discovered that their efforts needed to extend beyond saving the lives of those with SUDs. It became clear that addiction is not an isolated event, but something that affects the family unit; the disease of addiction is a family disease. Across the United States, approximately 8.7 million (one in eight) children live with one or more parents with an SUD. In 2012, over 30 percent of children placed in foster care entered the system because one or both parents had an SUD. In some states, this rate was double at over 60 percent of children in foster care placements.

The foster care system in Lucas County was quickly becoming overburdened with both the number of children needing placements and the increasing length of their placements. In light of this, enhancing D.A.R.T.'s call to action was only natural. In 2012, 921 children were in the custody of Lucas County Children Services (LCCS) for at least one day, which means they were either in foster care,

a group home setting, or kinship placement. That number climbed to 988 in 2015, then to 1,139 in 2016, and again to 1,387 in 2017.

In October 2017, the sheriff's office deputized Jeffery Molnar, an officer from the Lucas County Department of Children Services, to join the D.A.R.T. Unit. Officer Molnar partnered with the Community Advocates Outreach Project, a division of D.A.R.T., to assist parents with SUDs who are associated with LCCS, as well as their children who have been placed in foster care. The goal of this expansion was simple, but critical: reunite the parents and their kids after successful recoveries.

Officer Molnar responds to overdoses and follows up on abuse complaints from local hospitals about pregnant women who are addicted to opioids. Through the established open line of communication with area treatment providers, he can connect the parent and his or her partner to detoxification or ongoing recovery services. This officer continues to support the parents of the identified opioid-dependent infant for up to two years and, if needed, will report on the success of the parents to drug court and their LCCS case manager.

The importance of this connection is best described by former D.A.R.T. supervisor Lieutenant Robert Chromik,

The partnership between D.A.R.T. and the LCCS was designed to not only motivate the parents to get and remain sober but to deflate the stigma that law enforcement or children services are out to take away their kids.

It is my hope that our partnership with the Lucas County Children Services Board will provide an additional tool in our toolbox for combating the opioid crisis in Lucas County. By assisting families during the recovery of their loved ones, we hope to grow and strengthen the supports for those in recovery. I am optimistic that law enforcement joining forces with Lucas County Children Services will prove to be an effective strategy in our community that can be expanded and duplicated in other communities.

In 2017, D.A.R.T. was also awarded more than \$122,000 annually for two years to cover the addition of the two community advocates to the unit—Deputy Karl Schwemley and Tamme Smith, a licensed social worker and licensed chemical dependency counselor—through the Ohio State Victims Assistance Act. While the D.A.R.T. officer focuses on assisting persons with an SUD, the two community advocates provide youth education and brief services to at-risk families who are identified as having a loved one in recovery for



STARTING AN OUTREACH RESPONSE PROGRAM IN YOUR JURISDICTION

Based on Lucas County's experience and lessons learned, the following drug addiction response programs, practices, and standards are recommended.

Background Goals

- promote community buy-in starting at the grassroot level through the identification of other key stakeholders (mental health department, law enforcement, EMS, court, media, hospitals, churches, etc.).
- have collaboration between the criminal justice and key stakeholders through the creation of a coalition.
- establish common goals and objectives to promote a community emphasis of education at all levels, with all audiences and through various mediums (media, print, radio, billboard, podium talks, community forums, etc.).
- include case management along with procedures to coordinate the flow of information and to serve the best interests of the victim (identified person using and family members).
- are transparent and friendly with the community. The responders are approachable and available for questions, comments, and suggestions. They will dress in suits not uniforms, transport to destination in plain cars not squad cars, and remain visible around the community with the use of Facebook, a webpage, and a hotline number.
- report back to the community.
- have a configuration of law enforcement and social workers on staff for effective delivery of services.

opiate addiction. The purpose of this component of the program is to help at-risk youth and families understand the science behind addiction as well as develop a program of recovery that is congruent with the sober lifestyle of their loved one. This comprehensive approach seeks to reduce relapse and increase family reunification.

Advocates facilitate four-week groups, called Family to Family, for families referred by LCCS, about the science of addiction, the cycle of addiction, recovery from drug addiction, and grief and loss. The advocates provide in-home supportive services and make community referrals as needed. Additionally, the advocates have developed partnerships with Toledo Public Schools and the Lucas County Public Libraries to provide educational presentations for youth in grades 6–12 and to provide naloxone education to their families and other community members. Due to the work the advocates have done within the school system within the past two years, the Ohio Attorney General has recognized the Community Advocates Outreach Project as Ohio's 2019 Promising Practice Program. The curriculum addresses drug trends and promotes being drug free through a 45-minute classroom-style presentation. Students are provided with pre- and post-presentation surveys to test their knowledge. The results of the surveys have demonstrated a significant change in the students' thinking after the class. Survey results indicate a 21 percent paradigm change from seeing addiction as a choice to understanding that addiction is a brain disease.

Sheriff Tharp saw an opportunity for another novel partnership when he added Deputy Sheriff Jeff Medere to the D.A.R.T. Unit to work with the Area Office on Aging of Northwestern Ohio. Sheriff Tharp said,

Older adults, particularly those with pain management concerns after multiple surgeries, are especially at risk for abuse and addiction. They are also susceptible to medication theft from family members or others.

In fact, while opioid use disorders are more commonly reported in younger populations, prevalence among older adults is rapidly growing and poses unique risks in the geriatric population.

Deputy Medere will offer addiction education to seniors (adults 60 and over). Utilizing the curriculum Generation Rx, he will travel to senior centers, senior living facilities, and libraries to promote drug safety, organize drug take-back days, distribute drug disposal kits, and teach seniors how to advocate for themselves.

As the Community Advocate Outreach Project continues to expand, it will include outreach directed specifically to the Latino and African American communities. This educational team will attend community events and provide training and education on opioids and drug prevention to local businesses, community groups, and schools throughout northwest Ohio.

In the words of Sheriff Tharp,

As a public service official, our job is to keep our citizens safe and secure. We strive to protect what we love in this world, and I love Lucas County. My objective with this unit is to stop the profound number of deaths of our friends and loved ones caused by drug overdoses while helping victims to overcome their addictions. With the help of my community and the members of the unit, we are making a difference, even if it is one life at a time. ♥

IACP RESOURCES

- Law Enforcement Diversion Models to Intervene in the Opioid Epidemic (recorded workshop)
- Law Enforcement Opioid Response Center

theIACP.org

- "Pre-Arrest Diversion: The Long Overdue Collaboration Between Police and Treatment" (article)

policechiefmagazine.org