

Pandemic increasing need for crisis intervention services



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MEDINA — Calls to the 24/7 Crisis and Behavioral Health Helpline have been soaring.

In a year that has seen thousands of Ohioans die due to the coronavirus pandemic that has impacted everything from the economy to education, increased anxiety is an unsurprising side effect. Call volume to the hotline operated by Alternative Paths and funded by the Medina County Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health board has tripled.

When the helpline was started three years ago, it received about 1,123 calls annually, Jeff Allen, chief executive officer of Alternative Paths, said Friday at the Medina County Opiate Task Force meeting.

“This year, we’re trending toward 5,000,” Allen said. “We are helping more people.”

Crisis intervention services are available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year by calling the hotline at (330) 725-9195. Callers can speak to a licensed clinician to assist them through a psychiatric emergency.

In addition to hotline services, face-to-face crisis assessments for adults, adolescents and children are conducted when there is a risk of suicide, decompensation of mental status or other psychiatric symptoms that indicate a need for psychiatric hospitalization.

Face-to-face crisis assessments may be conducted at one of the three Alternative Paths offices including the Medina office at 246 Northland Drive, Suite 200A, or at any hospital or emergency room in Medina County.

If an individual requires psychiatric hospitalization, Alternative Paths will work to coordinate their post-hospitalization services, connecting them back to community-based care when they return home.

Allen said when someone in distress makes a call to the helpline, that individual will have access to someone on his team — no matter what time of day.

There are also active rescues. If the caller has a gun and is thinking of killing himself or herself, the helpline develops a rescue plan through local law enforcement.

“When in doubt, reach out,” Allen said. “We’re here.”

For individuals with a substance-use disorder, the agency will work with individuals to choose the treatment options that are best for their personal needs and work to assist the individual in attaining sustained recovery.

Alternative Paths provides dual diagnosis treatment services for individuals with both mental health and substance-use disorders through its clinical team that includes psychiatrists, psychiatric advanced practice nurses, clinical social workers, clinical counselors, psychiatric nurses, chemical dependency counselors, community case managers and peer supporters.

In other news

- There have been 22 deaths through July from drug overdoses by Medina County residents, Medina County Health Commissioner Krista Wasowski said.

At this time last year there were 15 overdose deaths.

There have been no deaths thus far in July and August, but she expects that number to change. Some are pending with the Medina County Coroner’s Office.

Wasowski said there have been 226 emergency room visits through July that were related to overdoses. At this time last year, there were 247.

Darren Stout, director of the Medina County Drug Task Force, said there have been five nonintentional fatal overdoses so far this year, as well as 28 nonfatal overdoses. He said his

numbers were opiate-specific, and opiate use has dropped off considerably, but there is an increased use of methamphetamines.

Stout said most of it comes to the area from the southwest border of the U.S. He said many of the people interviewed who suffered overdoses said they thought they were purchasing cocaine, but the drugs were actually fentanyl-based.

Stout said naloxone was deployed in 30 of the 33 cases.

- Phillip Titterington, director of the ADAMH board, said construction of the women's recovery house is done on Northland Drive in Medina.

The Discovery Recovery House, currently vacant, will be unveiled at a later date, Titterington said. He said a house manager has been hired. He said it will work in conjunction with Cathy's House and Hope Recovery Community.

The ADAMH board has purchased a building to house, which will provide trauma center care for children on an outpatient basis. Alternative Paths' personnel is expected to run the operation that is currently on hold.

- A program to help K-12 students and their families has been initiated by the ADAMH board for the seven public school districts in the county.

"We are identifying their needs," Titterington said. "We'll provide them with funding. It's a one-time thing."

The ADAMH board will help schools' develop action plans based on their needs.

- Jon Robinson, executive director of Cathy's House, said it has just completed its capital project to increase its occupancy at 515 W. Liberty St., Medina.

He said it now has 11 men's beds and seven women's beds.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the ADAMH board provided five weeks of free rent to the occupants. Marie's Café and Cups Café provided three meals a day for eight weeks for its occupants.

- Gail Houk, director of Forensic Services at Alternative Paths, reported on the Medina County Opiate Response Team.

The Medina County Opiate Response Team is a collaboration between Alternative Paths and the Medina County Sheriff's Office. The team will ensure a standardized response to meet with an individual who has experienced an overdose to assess that person's needs and engage them in appropriate treatment with a chemical dependency treatment provider in Medina County.

Since the program started three years ago, Houk said there have been 648 community referrals, including 209 in March through June of this year.

There was an uptick in referrals in July, including eight in a 10-day period.

- Hope Recovery Community was forced to close during the peak of COVID-19 and moved all of its programs to Zoom.

It reopened in June on a limited capacity. Executive Director Stefanie Robinson said it has 25 meetings/programming hours a week and has made about 2,000 recovery touches per month.

Titterington said from where Hope Community was when it started to its current state is "mind-blowing."

- Houk, also with the Suicide Prevention Coalition, said her agency tried to target middle-age males by printing 5,000 coasters and distributed them in sports bars and golf courses. The coasters warn about the signs of suicide.

Houk said there have been 15 suicides in the county so far this year, just two females.

There were 32 suicides in 2019.

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