



BCPO News

Scott A. Coffina, Prosecutor



Philip S. Aronow
First Assistant Prosecutor

Darren N. Anderson
Chief of Detectives

Joel Bewley
Public Information Officer
Desk: 609-265-5777
Cell: 609-820-4407
jbewley@co.burlington.nj.us

May 3, 2020

“Operation Helping Hand” Re-initiated During COVID-19

Treatment program provides 24/7 support for those struggling with substance use

Burlington County Prosecutor Scott Coffina announced that the Burlington County Operation Helping Hand program has been re-initiated and over the next four months will make certified recovery specialists available around the clock to those who are struggling with substance use.

The program offers assistance to substance users who have just been reversed from an overdose, arrested on a disorderly persons offense related to substance use, or are known to be facing addiction and open to receiving assistance.

“It is critical that treatment services continue to be available during this public health crisis,” Prosecutor Coffina said. “With the multiple additional pressures that COVID-19 and the ongoing restrictions on our activities bring to people facing addiction, we are seeing an uptick in overdoses, including fatal overdoses, throughout Burlington County. While the news is filled with headlines and stories about what is closed, we want to remind everyone that treatment options remain available to people in need.”

OHH 24/7 Recovery Specialist Availability

The program began May 1 and will run through August 31. This is the fourth round of Operation Helping Hand launched by the BCPO, and is being done in partnership with the nonprofit City of Angels. In February of this year, we completed a successful 24/7 recovery specialist availability program that resulted in nearly a third of participants seeking treatment and 60 percent accepting coaching services. We also held a week-long recovery specialist training program to expand the number of recovery specialists who will be able to provide peer-support in Burlington County.

The 24/7 operation relies on municipal police officers to request the services of a recovery specialist, also known as a recovery coach, when they encounter someone they believe would benefit from treatment or support services. Recovery coaches will not force participants to enter a treatment program, but can assist with that process for those who are seeking those services.

Due to the pandemic, the response will be telephonic during the month of May. However, we anticipate that from June through August the recovery specialists will be able to respond to the scene, police station, or hospital to connect with the person in need of help.

more...

Operation Helping Hand was developed by Attorney General Gurbir S. Grewal as a new way to combat opioid addiction in Bergen County while serving as the Bergen County Prosecutor in 2016. Under his leadership as Attorney General, the first multi-county "Operation Helping Hand" initiative was launched in five counties in June 2018. Through the use of federal and state funding, the Operation Helping Hand program was expanded to 17 counties in September 2018, and to all 21 counties in the state in September 2019.

"The anxiety and feelings of isolation many are experiencing during the COVID-19 public health emergency are particularly hard-hitting for individuals struggling with addiction," Attorney General Grewal said. "With reports of fatal overdoses increasing nationwide, it's imperative that help is accessible for those who need it. We applaud Prosecutor Coffina for making Operation Helping Hand recovery specialists available 24/7 during this time of crisis."

The traditional OHH model involved law enforcement officers arresting users purchasing heroin - or other narcotics - at open-air drug markets and then offering to link those individuals to care. The model has since been adapted by various counties to include law enforcement proactively linking individuals suffering from substance use issues to treatment and/or recovery services through non-arrest means such as roving vehicles, Superior Court or municipal court programs, and direct outreach to those identified as being most at risk of overdosing.

OHH Municipal Court Diversion Initiative

The BCPO has embraced Operation Helping Hand and utilized the program in creative ways to provide treatment and support options to those who need them. In February, we expanded services into the municipal court that serves Burlington City and Burlington Township, with outreach and treatment options being offered to those arrested for nonviolent offenses related to their drug use.

In partnership with the Burlington Township Police Department, the City of Burlington Police Department, and Solstice Counseling and Wellness Center, the County Prosecutor's Municipal Court Diversion Initiative (MCDI) provides intervention to those arrested for drug-related disorderly persons offenses or petty disorderly persons offenses by presenting the opportunity to enter treatment and have their court matter adjourned for a period of time.

At the successful conclusion of treatment, the defendant will return to court to face the charges, hopefully on the path to recovery so that the municipal prosecutor and municipal judge can consider their progress when determining the appropriate disposition or sentence in the case.

The MCDI is not a get-out-of-jail-free card, and enrolling in a treatment program is no guarantee that the charges will be dropped or reduced. However, the municipal prosecutor and judge will give consideration to program participants who make a good-faith effort to pursue treatment, participate in counseling and embrace the recovery process.

The MCDI program, which will run at least through August, is focused specifically on defendants charged with nonviolent offenses in municipal court. Eligible defendants must be referred by a police officer from the City of Burlington or Burlington Township police departments, or by the municipal prosecutor overseeing cases in the joint municipal court.

more...

Straight . . . to Treatment and Operation Safe Overnight

Operation Helping Hand is one of three BCPO initiatives aimed at combatting the opioid epidemic.

Operation Safe Overnight, which began in November 2018, focuses on saving lives and increasing enforcement activity at hotels and motels that have experienced overdoses and drug-related criminal activity. Through this program, with the support of Virtua Health, the BCPO has provided Narcan to county hotels and has also trained hotel employees how to use it to reverse an overdose and save a person's life.

Straight ... to Treatment is a program that allows people to walk off the street and into police stations in three municipalities to seek treatment for drug addiction, regardless of whether they are insured or live in Burlington County.

The Straight ... to Treatment program began in Evesham Township in early 2018, expanded to Pemberton Township in September 2018, and to the City of Burlington in April 2019. For more information on that program visit <https://burlpros.org/community-outreach/opioid-treatment/>.

END