

SPOTLIGHT: Manchester, NH Fire Department Safe Stations Program



Every fire station in Manchester, NH, is a designated safe haven for people struggling with addiction who want to enter treatment and begin their path to recovery. Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, any person can go to any fire station in the city, speak with the firefighters on duty, and immediately get connected to treatment support and services. Developed and implemented without any new funding, Safe Stations has connected 1,326 people to treatment between May 4, 2016 and March 4, 2017.

How Safe Stations Work

Anyone interested in seeking treatment for drug or alcohol use can simply show up to any one of Manchester Fire Department's (MFD) ten stations and ask for help. Unless the participant requires immediate medical attention, this introduction begins the process of placement into a treatment facility. If the participant arrives between 9:00 AM and 8:00 PM, he or she is transferred directly to a treatment center for intake; a van from a local treatment center typically responds to the fire station within 15 minutes of being called. If the participant arrives after 8:00PM, a Certified Recovery Supporter Worker (case workers and social workers) or a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor counsels the participant, and provides him or her with a place to stay for the night. The following morning, the participant is transferred to a treatment facility.

If the person is transported to a hospital the hospital staff is made aware of the situation and that the person came through the Safe Station program. Once the person has received the additional care they require, Serenity Place is contacted by the hospital staff, and they pick them up from the hospital.

Building Safe Stations

In April, 2016, a man came into an MFD station to speak with his step-brother, a firefighter, about his struggle with opioid addiction. Christopher Hickey, another MFD employee on duty, called a local treatment center and worked with them to arrange for this man's admission to the center that day.

"We're starting to finally see a drop in the overdoses that we respond to. We've had days now where we haven't had an overdose, which is a refreshing feeling."

– Christopher Hickey,
Program Coordinator Safe Stations

Reflecting on the positive outcome of this interaction, Mr. Hickey reached out to Manchester Mayor Ted Gatsas, who encouraged Mr. Hickey to draft a policy for a program wherein anyone suffering from addiction could seek help at the MFD fire stations. Safe Stations was officially launched in Manchester on May 4, 2016, without any new funding.

Safe Stations Eligibility Criteria

Safe Stations is available to any adult (18 years or older) voluntarily seeking treatment for a substance use disorder. No one is turned away for lack of health insurance; if a participant does not have insurance, the treatment facility will help them enroll.

If during the course of the intake evaluation, it is found that the participant has a non-drug related warrant for serious or violent offenses, the individual will be brought to the Manchester Police Department to resolve the warrant or outstanding arrest. Most warrants are able to be put "on hold" while the person is in active treatment.

If the participant is in possession of an unlawful weapon or a large quantity of illegal drugs, then the MFD staffers are obligated to involve MPD before they can connect the participant to treatment. MPD's role in Safe Station besides support is to take possession of weapons or drugs that are disposed of by the person seeking help at the Manchester Fire Department.

Spotlight Series: highlighting innovative programs across the nation enacting a comprehensive strategy to address substance use disorders and addiction.

Training and certification is also available online for Maryland residents through getnaloxonenow.org.

Demonstrating Success

Safe Stations has connected more than a thousand people to treatment services since its inception. The program has proven successful not only in terms of the number of connects, but also the high rate of treatment completion. According to the affiliated treatment facilities, approximately 70% of 1,326 Safe Station participants finish the treatment program.

Safe Stations may also help to reduce the number of people who overdose. In fact, when compared to the same timeframe in 2015 -2016, 2016 -2017 has seen a significant reduction in overdoses and in overdose deaths. City officials attribute this to the success of Safe Stations.

Stakeholders & Partners

Safe Stations capitalizes on Manchester's extensive network of community-based resources and services. Partnerships include, but are not limited to: Serenity Place, a local treatment center; HOPE for Recovery, a non-profit organization that helps to connect people to the appropriate treatment center; Granite United Way's "211," which is a community resources hotline; along with Catholic Medical Center, Anthem, and United Way, which have all agreed to help fund treatment programs.

When you can bring the nonprofit world, the public sector, the business community and members of the community at large together, you can make a difference in this epidemic. If someone is ready to make a change in their life, it's important that we get them the help they need right away."

– Christopher Hickey,
Program Coordinator Safe Stations

As the program coordinator, Mr. Hickey speaks with the service providers on a weekly basis to get an update on how the program is progressing from their perspective. He also circulates a weekly update to all stakeholders, a mechanism that encourages collaborative improvements to the program as issues arise.

The Future of Safe Stations

Policymakers in other jurisdictions have reached out to Mr. Hickey to inquire about implementing Safe Stations in their communities. Fire Departments in Newmarket, Hooksett, and Nashua, New Hampshire have recently launched Safe Stations programs and other cities are in the development process.

Resources & References

Maryland Department of Health & Human Hygiene, "Overdose Response Program: FY16 Report", Maryland Department of Health & Human Hygiene (Sept. 1, 2016) <http://bha.dhmh.maryland.gov/NALOXONE/Documents/Overdose%20Response%20Program%20FY16%20Annual%20Report.pdf>.

Office of Governor Larry Hogan, "Hogan-Rutherford Administration Declares State of Emergency, Announces Major Funding to Combat Heroin and Opioid Crisis in Maryland", Press Release (March 3, 2017) <http://governor.maryland.gov/2017/03/01/hogan-rutherford-administration-declares-state-of-emergency-announces-major-funding-to-combat-heroin-and-opioid-crisis-in-maryland/>.