

**MINUTES OF THE HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES COMMITTEE**  
**September 24, 2018**  
**East Conference Room**

**Present:** Councilmembers Litten, George, Anderson

**Also Present:** Human Services Director Gelsomino, Erin Helmes, Director of the Woodrow Project; Gina Norris, Project SOAR Peer Support Specialist; two members of the public

**Call to Order:** 5:15 p.m.

**Update on Project SOAR – Supporting Opiate Addiction Recovery**

Director Gelsomino introduced the City’s Project SOAR partners.

Ms. Helmes spoke broadly about addiction and the different strategies used over the years to address it. She remarked that the opiate epidemic is unique due to its deadly nature.

She stated that in January 2016 Lakewood took leadership to address the epidemic by gathering together police, fire, recovery houses, courts and other community stakeholders. They discovered that one of the most common recurring problems was that people with addiction were facing barriers to accessing treatment. SOAR was initiated in December 2017 to meet this need for treatment.

Project SOAR connects people with treatment in three ways:

1. Cleveland Clinic Lakewood Emergency Department – once a person who overdoses is stabilized, a peer support specialist comes in before discharge and discusses treatment options.
2. Fire Station #1 “Safe Station” – persons may self-present at the Fire Station for assessment by an EMT and referral to treatment.
3. Home visits – within a week of an overdose, a team visits the person’s home to discuss treatment.

Ms. Helmes distributed handouts with program statistics detailing the number of overdoses and overdose fatalities over the past three years. It appears that both overdoses and fatalities are decreasing in 2018, thus far. Access to naran and effectiveness of SOAR are both credited for the reductions.

Councilmembers asked for a further break down of the numbers to know how many overdoses and overdose fatalities were Lakewood residents and also how many are repeat overdoses. Ms. Helmes attributed the number of non-Lakewood residents overdosing in Lakewood to the transient nature of the addict population.

The Committee also focused discussion on the program statistics indicating that of the 36 people the program has seen, 27 have initiated treatment – representing a 75% success rate. The high success rate is attributed to the peer-support nature of the program.

In response to Councilmember questions, Ms. Helmes and Director Gelsomino discussed how Cleveland Clinic Lakewood ED has been engaged with the program. ED staff appreciate the program because they feel they are able to help in ways they were unable to before.

Councilmembers asked if the program is in other Emergency Departments. The ADAMHS Board funding is to focus only on the Cleveland Clinic Lakewood Emergency Department. However, a Lakewood resident who overdoses and is taken to Fairview or another Hospital will receive the follow up home visit from a peer support specialist.

Chairman Litten expressed his intention to convene a full report on SOAR before Council once the 2018 data is finalized.

In response to a Councilmember's question, Director Gelsomino explained the impact of the departure of Katie Kurtz who had been key in getting the program up and running. Director Gelsomino explained that program was established to run as a collaboration and once the relationships were solidified and the commitments made that the program runs well with leadership from the Woodrow Project and support from police, EMS, and Human Services. Aside from being the funder, the ADAMHS Board is not directly involved in the Project's day-to-day operations.

The Committee discussed the several large group meetings that were held on the opioid epidemic. Director Gelsomino expressed her intent to reconvene in early 2019 to share an update on Project SOAR.

Ms. Norris provided a brief overview of the peer support concept and how it works. She discussed her own personal story involving addiction. She provided a few brief vignettes of the people she has helped as a peer supporter. Anecdotally, she is aware of many people helped through the program who remain in recovery. Currently the project isn't designed to track people long term.

Director Gelsomino provided closing comments on Project SOAR. She also shared information about the related partnership that has been established to support friends and family of addicts. She also added that the Mayor has been approached about the possibility of a syringe exchange program in Lakewood but is waiting for additional information.

Health & Human Services Committee adjourned at 6:00 p.m.