

Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA)
Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP)

Success Through Collaboration: New Hanover County, North Carolina, Sheriff’s Office and Community Services Provider Coastal Horizons Tackle the Opioid Epidemic Together

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In the wake of a devastating opioid epidemic and the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic, law enforcement agencies find themselves collaborating more and more with public health agencies. Whether implementing new co-responder pilot projects, supporting clinicians working with officers to address opioid overdoses, or launching a vast number of mental health and substance use disorder (SUD) response initiatives to provide services with the right expertise, law enforcement agencies, along with their public health partners, are leading the way to better service delivery, despite cuts in funding and difficulties in recruiting and retention. In some cases, these programs preceded the opioid epidemic and the COVID-19 pandemic.

The New Hanover County, North Carolina, Sheriff’s Office, in collaboration with its local mental health partner, Coastal Horizons, became aware of the gap in services for those struggling with SUDs. Upon release, these individuals were at an extremely high risk for an overdose once the services they were receiving within the jail were no longer available.

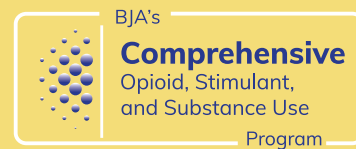


Together, the New Hanover County Sheriff’s Office and Coastal Horizons then launched the ReEntry Systems for

Effective Treatment (RESET) program. This unique reentry program was developed through funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance’s (BJA) Fiscal Year 2014 Second Chance Act Reentry Program for Adults With Co-Occurring Substance Abuse and Mental Disorders.

Originally, the project aimed to address treatment service gaps for females returning to New Hanover County following incarceration. The idea was to develop a “one-stop-shop” approach to meet the needs of formerly incarcerated women living with an SUD or a co-occurring disorder as they transitioned back into the community. Following a full substance use and mental health clinical screening, women were linked with outpatient services and were provided safe housing through a partnering transitional home.

Over time, and as they continued to identify community needs, project stakeholders began incorporating improvements into the program. These included the implementation of programming focused on developing healthy parenting skills and peer support services from staff members with the lived experience of substance use and justice involvement.



In 2018, RESET received funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to expand services not only to meet the needs of participants but to include males returning to the community following a period of incarceration within the local detention center. Since its inception, RESET also has been supported through local funding, which has allowed for the hiring of new staff members, the provision of roundtrip transportation to treatment services, and access to community resources for participants.

The long-standing relationships that Coastal Horizons formed with the New Hanover County Detention Center (local jail) led to this successful collaboration, which began in 2014. A key component of RESET involves allowing program staff access to participants while they are housed in the facility. Staff members are able to screen and assess individuals and provide ongoing case management and group services to participants inside the detention center. Pre-release case management sessions are vital to developing an individualized transition plan and enhancing the facility's smooth handoff to program staff. Coastal Horizons also hosts a Reentry Services Advisory Board that supports maintaining relationships with community partners and incorporating stakeholders in developing, planning, and sustaining operations.

RESET has hosted numerous celebrations over the years to honor those individuals who commit to the program and meet the benchmarks required to graduate. These ceremonies allow program stakeholders, family, friends, and community partners to hear firsthand the testimonies of graduates that attest to the program's ability to positively impact the lives of formerly incarcerated men and women. Stories about regaining custody of children, maintaining sobriety after a lifetime of failed attempts, and declarations such as "RESET saved my life" are repeated threads across ceremonies.

One member of Coastal Horizons' Justice Services staff, Kimberly Hogan, serves as an example of just how

impactful RESET and the services offered can be following incarceration and substance use. When Ms. Hogan enrolled in RESET, she had spent 10 of the previous 20 years incarcerated because of her ongoing battle with substance use. Upon release from her last period of incarceration in 2015, she was linked to transitional housing and introduced to the RESET program. Through RESET, she developed coping skills to address past trauma and build a sustainable recovery network.

As the first official program graduate, Ms. Hogan went on to earn her associate's degree from Cape Fear Community College in Wilmington, North Carolina, and her North Carolina Peer Support Specialist certification and returned to RESET in 2017 as a full-time employee. She fully credits RESET for putting her in a position to model the positive change that comes when individuals are given the tools and supports to embrace a new future post-incarceration. Today, she remains employed with Coastal Horizons' Justice Services and continues to advance professionally within the organization.

Along with qualitative evidence that the RESET program is making a difference in the community, program data reflect positive changes as they relate to improving lives and decreasing recidivism.

RESET Outcomes

One goal of RESET is to reduce recidivism among participants and thereby increase public safety in New Hanover County. Recidivism has been defined as any conviction for a misdemeanor or felony offense. The external evaluation team examines recidivism while participants are enrolled in the program and in the year following their discharge from it. Participants can be successfully or unsuccessfully discharged from the program.

As of September 31, 2021, of the 118 individuals released from the New Hanover County Detention Center, 83.9 percent (n=99) remained crime-free in the 6 months following enrollment in RESET. Of the 89 individuals who

separated from RESET (either successfully or unsuccessfully) for at least 12 months, 92.1 percent (n=81) remained crime-free during the 12 months following program exit. These data reveal that RESET had met its stated objective of reducing recidivism among participants.

The RESET program also has a history of improving housing stability and employment status among participants through the provision of recovery support services available to participants. Among the 176 participants for whom data for both their program entry and exit were available, results showed that RESET participants greatly improved their housing stability. For example, 41.5 percent of participants reported being homeless at program entry, while only 6.3 percent reported that status at exit. Not surprisingly, given the financial support that RESET provides for those residing in transitional/halfway houses, the percentage of participants residing in this type of residence rose from just 1.1 percent (at program entry) to 19.9 percent (at program exit). Similar increases are seen among those who owned/rented housing.

In addition, the majority (93.1 percent) of RESET participants were unemployed when they entered the program and only 5.1 percent were employed (either part- or full-time). However, at the time of program exit, 50 percent were employed and 48.2 percent were unemployed. The same percentage of participants reported receiving disability benefits at program entry and exit (1.7 percent).

Decades of research have demonstrated that housing stability and employment reduce the likelihood of recidivism. The foregoing data demonstrates that a significant percentage of RESET participants are obtaining stable housing and employment during their time in the program.

The RESET program continues to pave the way for additional reentry services at Coastal Horizons, such as the Survivors of the Opioid/Covid Epidemics, Utilization of Resources Community Engagement (SOURCE) program, implemented in 2021 as a response to the COVID-19

pandemic. Coastal Horizons recognized the increasing need to embrace a harm reduction model within the justice system and support individuals at highest risk of experiencing an overdose during their reentry.

SOURCE specifically focuses on prioritizing marginalized populations, linking clients to available services regardless of their personal recovery philosophy and reducing opioid-related overdose deaths in the community.

Since the creation of SOURCE, Coastal Horizons' Justice Services has continued to grow with additional funding to support the Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion (LEAD) program, which previously operated without dedicated funding. LEAD is a pre-arrest diversion program that is also a collaboration with the New Hanover County Sheriff's Office and the Wilmington Police Department.



About Coastal Horizons

The mission of Coastal Horizons is to promote choices for healthier lives, stronger families, and safer communities. It is the largest private, nonprofit human services organization in southeastern North Carolina. With more than 600 employees, it serves more than half the counties in North Carolina. Nationally accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), Coastal Horizons provides a broad range of evidence-based professional services. These include substance use, mental

health, crisis intervention, family preservation, transitional living, school-based health, primary care, justice, and veteran services.

NSA is a partner of Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities' (TASC) Center for Health and Justice (CHJ).

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Visit the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Abuse Program (COSSAP) Resource Center (transitioning in the next few months to the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program [COSSUP] Resource Center) at www.cossapresources.org.

About COSSUP

COSSAP is transitioning to the Comprehensive Opioid, Stimulant, and Substance Use Program (COSSUP). This change in title for the program is indicative of efforts to reduce the stigma related to substance use and to support impacted people in their recovery journey.

Visit the National Association of State EMS Officials at <https://nasems.org/>.

About TASC's Center for Health and Justice (CHJ)

CHJ helps COSSAP grantees implement evidence-based, systemic solutions at the front end of the justice system to respond to the substance use that often underlies criminal justice involvement. CHJ helps build integrated criminal justice, behavioral health, and community systems by assisting first responders in developing pathways to treatment for individuals at risk for illicit substance use and misuse. CHJ offers online resources and in-person training and technical assistance (TTA) engagements customized to the needs of specific jurisdictions with the goals of connecting and maximizing the treatment resources of the community to improve public health and safety. Request TTA from CHJ by contacting the COSSAP Project Lead, Hope Fiori, at hfiori@tasc.org.

About BJA

The Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) provides leadership and services in grant administration and criminal justice policy development to support local, state, and tribal law enforcement in achieving safer communities. To learn more about BJA, visit www.bja.gov and follow us on Facebook (www.facebook.com/DOJBJA) and Twitter (@DOJBJA). BJA is part of the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs.

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