

The Exchange Project is about more than needles

Community Health Improvement Plan | Year One Spotlight

For many people, needle exchange has a negative connotation. For Hamilton County Public Health, needle exchange is just one component of the Bloodborne Infectious Disease Prevention Program – also known as The Exchange Project – that is part of the agency's Harm Reduction Program.

MORE THAN NEEDLES

The Exchange van is out in the community four days a week. People who inject drugs can exchange used syringes for new sterile ones. This is vital to reducing the spread of infectious diseases like HIV and hepatitis.

But the van also provides information and referrals for treatment; HIV and Hepatitis C testing; Hepatitis A and B vaccines; and Narcan® (a drug used to reverse overdose).

"We also have condoms and pregnancy tests and soap and shampoo," said Michele Campbell, harm reduction specialist with Hamilton County Public Health.

"We provide information on where they can get food and shelter, too. We try to help the whole person. Not just the drug-addicted person, but the entire person, head to toe."

-Michele Campbell

BUILDING TRUST

Last year, the Exchange distributed 8,636 Narcan doses, administered 287 Hepatitis C tests and 389 HIV tests, and referred 48 clients for treatment.

For people to use these services, they need to feel safe visiting the Exchange van. "Our clients get used to seeing us every week when they come in," Michele said. That continuity builds trust.

Another key to this trust is Michele herself — she has been in recovery for seven years. "I can relate to these people," she said. "I let them know that I am one of them and that I can relate to what they're going through."

Michele says it doesn't take long for clients to trust her. "They know that I'm not there because I have to be there, I'm there because I want to be there and I'm there because I want to help them."

MAKING PROGRESS

Are there success stories? "Yes, I've gotten to see first-hand people get sober," Michele said. "With Narcan® distribution, we're making progress. And I think we're making progress with people understanding how important it is not to share syringes."

Of course, there are also stories of fatal overdoses. "I can offer them everything that we have and then some," Michele said. "But then it's ultimately up to them."



The Exchange van offers a wide array of resources and services. It is in the community four days per week.

HARM REDUCTION FOR ALL

Contrary to what many people think, programs like the Exchange do reduce drug use and don't increase local crime.¹ People who inject drugs are five times more likely to enter treatment when they use a needle exchange program.

For every used needle turned in, that's one that doesn't pose a risk to the public and first responders. And preventing the spread of disease saves lives and health care dollars.

Michele acknowledges that some will never change their mind about needle exchange. "But I want people to know that what we do is important to all of us because we are trying to prevent communicable diseases from spreading."

SOMEBODY'S SOMEONE

Just as the Exchange is about more than needles, so are the people who use it. "The people who come onto the van are somebody's daughter, cousin, friend, dad, mom," Michele said.

"I try to look at people not for what their affliction is, but that they are human beings and they need help." -Michele Campbell

Source:

¹: <https://cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/risk/cdchiv-fs-syringe-services.pdf>



For more information on the Exchange Project, visit our website at hcuph.org/harm-reduction/exchange/ or on social media: @hc.xchange



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