

Appalachian Ohio Children's Victim Assistance and Prevention Project

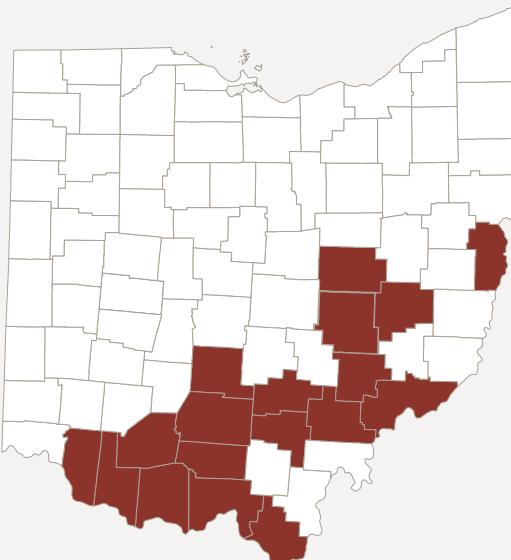


Southeastern Ohio Legal Services
With funding from the
U.S. Department of Justice
Office for Victims of Crime

PURPOSE

Southeastern Ohio Legal Services (SEOLS), through funding from the Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime, undertook the task of identifying the challenges and needs that children in Southeast Ohio experience due to the opioid epidemic in the region.

SEOLS conducted 44 interviews with county judges, social service providers, law enforcement officials, child protective services staff, behavioral health treatment providers and other community leaders across 18 counties. These interviews explored how different communities were attempting to understand and address the needs of children and their families that have been impacted by the opioid epidemic and substance abuse. The local capacity varied widely from county to county.



WHAT WORKS

Strong collaborations

Infrastructure, such as local coalitions or drug treatment courts, promoted collaboration and provided structure for involvement. It is especially important for there to be strong collaborations between courts, treatment providers, and child protective services.

Competent, trusted behavioral health professionals

In communities with these professionals, these experts are viewed as providing accurate and important information. They are advocates for children and families.

Law enforcement officials and judges who understand addiction and its treatment

This includes officials who believe that treatment should begin while individuals are incarcerated, and that people should be connected to recovery resources on release. It is also vital for there to be judges who understand addiction and its impact on children and families.

Strong local champions for prevention

It is vital that there be ongoing efforts to prevent substance use and addiction. These efforts may be promoted by local coalitions, treatment agencies, schools and/or law enforcement. What is key is that there is a strong local champion for prevention.

GENERAL CHALLENGES

Under-resourced child protective services agencies.

Most child protective service agencies are stretched beyond their capacity by the opioid epidemic and this has a number of negative consequences:

- (1) There is a shortage of local foster care homes, especially therapeutic foster care homes, which can result in children being placed outside of their communities and away from family.
- (2) Children Service agencies have to prioritize the most serious situations and this means that earlier intervention is more challenging.
- (3) Formal and informal resources for kinship care, which allows children to remain with family members, are in short supply.

Shortages of treatment services

Services for parents and caregivers with addiction issues also face some limitations. While outpatient treatment services are broadly available, other important treatment resources are more scarce. In particular, Medically Assisted Treatment (MAT) was not available in every county. Residential, detox or in-patient treatment services are typically not available in every county.



Shortage of behavioral health services for children.

Professionals who have expertise in working with trauma and children are lacking in most areas of the region. While there have been extensive professional development efforts to build this expertise, once clinicians are trained and certified, they often leave for better jobs in Ohio's urban areas or elsewhere.

Lack of respite care and crisis stabilization services for children.

These services, when available, are often far away from the child's home. Local respite care and crisis stabilization services could allow children to live safely with their families or relatives.

Basic needs

Lack of transportation, safe housing and jobs that pay a living wage continue to disproportionately affect children and families with substance abuse issues. Second chance employment opportunity employers that support recovery are often hard to find. These are major barriers to treatment and recovery.



BRIGHT SPOTS

Increased availability of outpatient treatment for adults

In the past few years, outpatient treatment for substance abuse and opioid addiction has become more widely available. Most of the people interviewed were generally pleased at the greater availability of outpatient treatment services for adults with substance abuse issues.

Law enforcement supportive of treatment

In a number of counties, law enforcement was a champion for more treatment-based approaches to substance use and abuse.

Collaboration between schools and law enforcement

Schools that have embraced PAX, the Good Behavior Game and/or implemented Handle with Care (HWC) protocols with local law enforcement report very positive results.

Ohio START

The Ohio START program has been initiated in a number of the counties and is seen as a real game changer for families and children. Ohio START teams parents with a Peer Support Specialist who has experience with recovery and working with child protective services. This approach has increased positive outcomes for children, families and the organizations that work with them.

Specialty dockets and drug courts

Judges who operate specialty dockets, such as family treatment courts, understand the impact of addiction on both adults and children and are familiar with resources that meet the needs of both. Judges who oversee specialty drug courts indicate that their knowledge and understanding of substance abuse has been greatly enhanced, allowing them to make more informed decisions.



RECOMMENDATIONS

Increase local respite care and crisis stabilization services for children.

Most counties lack access to local respite care and crisis stabilization for children. These services enable children to receive the treatment they need safely, while staying close to family.

Increase availability of trauma-informed behavioral health care for children.

Finding and keeping qualified behavioral health providers is a longstanding issue in the region due to limited resources and the movement of trained clinicians to better paying areas.

Strengthen local child protective service agencies.

These agencies are on the front lines when it comes to addressing the needs of children whose families have been devastated by addiction. They need more resources for kinship care and foster care, including therapeutic foster care. Children will benefit if these agencies are better resourced to work with families through recovery and reunification, and to provide supports so that children can remain in their own home or as close to home as possible. Additionally, engaging in evidence-based practices, such as Ohio START, helps to promote recovery and safety.

Support the full spectrum of substance abuse treatment options

While outpatient substance abuse treatment is widely available, this epidemic requires that every tool be used to address addiction issues, including all forms of MAT and other evidence-based treatments. Integration of substance abuse treatment and family therapy is also recommended, as well as the provision of ongoing recovery supports.

Provide access to treatment through the justice system.

Treatment needs to begin while individuals are in jail, followed by strong linkages to care and treatment once individuals are released. This is increasingly recognized by many law enforcement officials and a number of judges.



For more information about what communities can do to combat the drug abuse epidemic and its impact on children, please contact:

Robin Bozian rbozian@seols.org

Abigail McCoy amccoy@seols.org

Baylee Butler bbutler@seols.org