

**OPIOID ADDICTION COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

**THURSDAY, MARCH 21, 2019
2:30 P.M.**

PRESENT: Rob Sassi, Chairman,
Kevin W. Hines, Kevindaryan Lujan, Janet Sutherland, Darcie Miller

ALSO

PRESENT: L. Stephen Brescia, Chairman
Thomas Faggione, Legislator
Joel Sierra, Legislator
John Vero, Legislator
Antoinette Reed, Legislative Counsel
Daniel Bloomer, Director of Operations
Mary Pat Smith, Assistant to the County Executive
David Hoovler, District Attorney
Carl DuBois, Sheriff
Kenneth T. Jones, Undersheriff
Annie Rabbitt, County Clerk
Kelly A. Eskew, Deputy County Clerk
Annette Kahrs, President, Tri-County Community Partnership, Hope not Handcuffs Program
Maura Beck, Angel Coordinator, Hope not Handcuffs program

Mr. Sassi called the meeting to order at 2:30 p.m. and asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag. All committee members were present.

Ms. Kahrs and Ms. Beck introduced themselves to the committee and shared their personal stories. Ms. Kahrs started by sharing that her son is 30 years old and in recovery for two years. She helped him through the process of detoxing and medicated assisted therapy for a year. He is now working and doing well. Ms. Beck shared the loss of her son, Ethan, who passed away May 28th, 2017 due to a heroin fentanyl overdose. She felt that the "Hope not Handcuffs" program is incredible because she recalled trying to get her son placed into rehabilitation facilities, detox facilities and got nowhere or it would take very long. This is a different avenue to help people.

Ms. Kahrs explained that "Hope not Handcuffs" is a pre-arrest diversion program. It is Police Assisted Addiction and Recovery Initiative (P.A.A.R.I.) which started in Gloucester, Massachusetts in 2015 with the overdose rates in that area being really high. There was a police chief in Gloucester who started the saying, "We cannot arrest our way out of this problem," which was the start of a new thought process for law enforcement. This allowed anyone to walk into a police department and say they need help, and the police department would assist them with treatment. That is what a P.A.A.R.I. model is and there are over 500 P.A.A.R.I. police departments in the United States. This has been going on for a while and there are some here in Orange County.

A video was shown to the committee on the story of "Hope not Handcuffs" and how it was started.

Ms. Kahrs stated that in the video it mentioned that there were 1,600 people that have been placed, now it is up to 2,508 who have been placed into treatment. "Hope not Handcuffs" started in Detroit, Michigan and launched throughout the whole county at one time and are now in 79 law enforcement agencies and have 800 volunteer angels that are in nine counties. They recently merged with Michigan State Police and are now in every trooper barracks in the state.

Ms. Beck noted that what this does is help reduce crime, with less addicts. They hope that this will help improve public safety, reduce drug use, save lives, lives restored, and less overdoses. They hope that this will reduce a burden on criminal justice to solve public health and challenges.

Ms. Beck explained how "Hope not Handcuffs" worked. Someone in need will go into a participating police station and requests help. The officer will make a phone call to an angel coordinator. They trained 80-100 angels back in January. They do not have any trouble getting volunteers.

Mr. Sassi asked what kind of people sign up to be an angel.

Ms. Kahrs shared that they are nurses, they are teachers and social workers. They offer community support.

Ms. Beck stated that when they dispatch an angel, there is a schedule they follow online. They run from 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. and ask volunteers to sign up for a six-hour slot a day and this is seven days a week. They have a group text also that they use. They were set up with the group text in Michigan just to get a feel for how it worked, and she was shocked how often it went off. Their goal is for an angel to arrive within 20 to 30 minutes. They supply items that are collected and put into bins to the individual in need such as snacks, toiletries and clothing. They also share letters of recovery to help support the individual with their recovery.

Ms. Beck mentioned that police departments approach them, they do not go out and solicit help to the police departments. Some departments requested that they make patches for the police officers and in Middletown there was a request for lapel pins. This helps the individuals trust the police. They provide training to the police officers. The police officers love this program and want to give back to their community.

Mr. Sassi stated that the organization is 100% volunteer. There is no staff and they raise funds privately through fundraising events. The amount of time, energy and effort that they put in is amazing and deserve a lot of credit.

Mr. Hines stated that he lives in Cornwall and noticed that Cornwall was not on the list of participating police departments. If someone needed help where would they go, and should he call one of the participating police departments instead of their own police department.

Ms. Kahrs replied yes, call a participating police department. She did point out that there are a lot of police departments that do something similar on their own.

Mr. Hines asked if they presented this to the Orange County Police Chiefs Association and Ms. Kahrs responded no, they did not.

Mr. Hoovler stated that he was at meeting today and was asked about the program. He shared with all of the chiefs that they have his blessing. It depends on what resources they have, and they understand that it is free.

Ms. Miller asked about the staffing and what prevents them from having staff.

Ms. Kahrs responded that the original model did not have staff either until a very large grant with Michigan State Police came through and now, they have staff.

Ms. Miller stated that this is a big job and there are many coalitions throughout the county. She asked how they can help them. Once money is put into something it changes some of the intentions. Is it better to be volunteer, how do we take this county-wide.

Ms. Kahrs stated that there are a lot of wounded people out there. There are a lot of people who want to help because they make a direct impact.

Mr. Lujan commented that he heard great things about their program. He personally worked for a mental health organization that focused on hospital and jail diversion in Dutchess County. If officers know it is out there, it makes it easier on them. He asked if there were figures from Michigan that show that there have been decreases in reduced crime or drug use. He requested that information be left behind to share with other Legislators.

Ms. Kahrs did not know but will get the answer. She was confident there was, and she was curious herself.

Mr. Lujan asked what kind of data collection is taken.

Ms. Kahrs handed out an intake and authorization form.

Mr. Lujan asked if there was a headquarters to the organization.

Ms. Kahrs stated that she would leave behind her business card. They do not have a headquarters, they meet every third Monday of every month at the Town of Crawford in their government building. She added that they do a lot of work with school districts and during the prom season they hand out pledge cards, they provide information about "Text for Teens" and cab company phone numbers if they are in a situation. They do mental health trainings and narcan trainings.

Mr. Lujan mentioned the involvement with police departments and shared that he is from the City of Middletown and there is a Legislator present from the City of Port Jervis. He noted that they are areas that are heavily impacted by the opioid epidemic. If they have trouble reaching out to police officers or chiefs of police, they can assist them with that because this is something he would really like to see in the City of Newburgh. He thanked both ladies for sharing their story and for the presentation.

Ms. Sutherland asked about their next training.

Ms. Kahrs responded that they were not sure where the next one will take place, but they will put something out soon.

Ms. Sutherland asked how would someone proceed with donations for the bins.

Ms. Kahrs mentioned that there was discussion of having a bin drive at Orange Regional Medical Center, but they have not set anything up yet.

Ms. Sutherland thanked both Ms. Kahrs and Ms. Beck for sharing their story.

On the motion of Mr. Hines, seconded by Mr. Lujan, the meeting adjourned at 3:30 p.m.