

## **The Safe Passage Initiative**

### **Katherine Shaw Bethea Hospital – Dixon, IL**

#### **Background**

Since 1999, the number of drug overdose deaths in the United States has more than doubled, and in most states the number now exceeds the number of traffic-related deaths. Drug overdose deaths are now the leading cause of preventable injury death, resulting in nearly 44,000 deaths each year, with most involving either prescription opioids or heroin. In Illinois, there were 1,652 overdose deaths in 2014 – an increase of nearly 29 percent since 2010. In Lee County, 11 people died from heroin-related causes from 2012 to 2015.

#### **Program Overview**

KSB Hospital has partnered with The Dixon Police Department to create a unique program to assist the growing opioid epidemic. Many area agencies partnered together to discover the most impactful, community-based solution to offering treatment and rehab to opiate users in Lee County. Modeled after the inspirational ANGEL Program in Gloucester, Mass., the Safe Passage Initiative aims to encourage addicts to seek police assistance when struggling with a serious drug addiction. Through the program, addicts can contact police without fear of arrest, as long as they don't have any outstanding warrants. People can also turn over drugs and paraphernalia without being charged. KSB Hospital and the Dixon Police Department partner with treatment centers in and outside of Illinois to coordinate care and treatment for participants.

Safe Passage has 16 volunteer "Guides," serving in a variety of roles. They provide support and establish rapport during the intake process, they provide transportation to the treatment facilities, and they follow up with participants through the treatment process. Many of the Guides are currently in recovery (sober for 1 year or more) or have a loved one who suffers from addiction.

#### **Impact**

In the first year, 60 individuals voluntarily entered into treatment. In nearly all cases, the Safe Passage Initiative was able to secure a treatment bed for a participant within two hours. "This is a new day for law enforcement," said Dixon Police Chief Danny Langloss. "Instead of seeing each other as enemies, police officers and people in the grip of addiction are walking together with one goal: getting better."

#### **Lessons Learned**

Funding continues to threaten progress with the initiative. The State of Illinois does not have a budget, greatly limiting grant opportunities for many agencies participating in the partnership.

**Future Goals**

Dozens of counties and municipalities are approaching the group to replicate the initiative. Safe Passage leaders plan to assist other communities in building an opioid program. They also plan to create a crisis-intervention facility with the goal of serving as an alternative to the emergency department for the first triage step.

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