

5 Years of  
Preventing  
Overdose Deaths

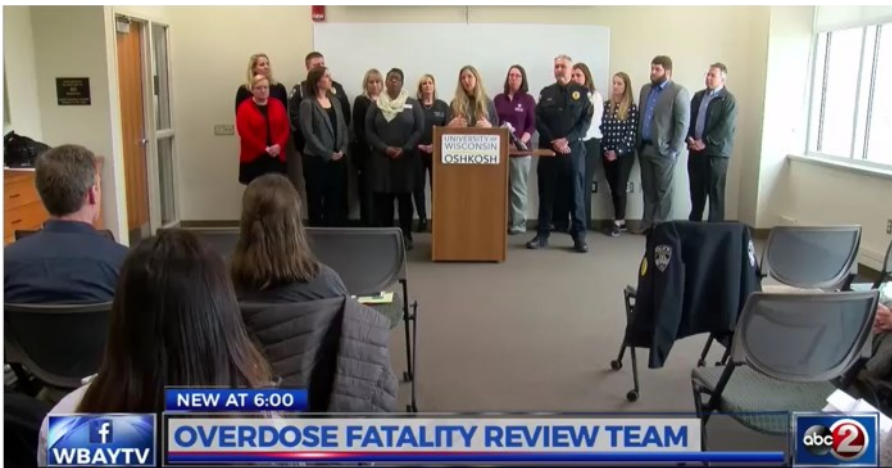


# ANNUAL REPORT

## 2022-2023

## Note from the Facilitator

**W**hen asked to facilitate the OFR five years ago, something in my gut motivated me to say yes. I said yes because I didn't want that sense of isolation or lack of resources for my family, my children, and my community. The Overdose Fatality Review (OFR) is a team that looks holistically at the life of a person who has died from an overdose. Preventing overdoses and lives lost is at the core of the review, and this requires a different type of team. OFRs are unique, but the major difference is the level of trust and respect required to make them successful. Each partner in a review has a reason to be there, a purpose for being involved. Our partners recognize that even though systems may be broken, we as a community are not and individuals can make an impact. The trust partners bring to the table, holding each other accountable to the people who have lost their lives, is unlike anything I've seen before. The willingness to be open and vulnerable creates a positive ripple effect where others also feel comfortable and supported in sharing their thoughts. Five years later, I'm proud to say that OFR has become a platform for community change because of the hard work of its 47 partners representing 36 agencies. We have been able to meet people where they are at, close gaps in the continuum of care, and I am so appreciative of the many partners that have been part of the team yesterday, today, and tomorrow. It is their commitment and hard work, which inspires me that tomorrow will be better. Thank you to the many OFR partners and the community for remembering that people are more than their substance use disorders. People are struggling and we as a community have to continue working, to keep people alive. - Jennifer Skolaski



Left Photo: 3/20/2018  
Press Conference from  
members of the original  
Winnebago County OFR Team

*Photo Credit: WBAYTV*

Right Photo: 12/7/2022  
We Heart You Community Award  
of Excellence Presentation

*Photo Credit: Mirrorless Productions*



Similar to previous OFR annual reports, this document reflects the Winnebago County fatal overdose data from 2022, the major themes and recommendations identified by the OFR team from cases reviewed, and partner successes. In addition, it identifies data and lessons learned from the last five years.

# 2022 Fatal Overdose Data from Winnebago County

The data below and information on the following page represents confirmed data for 2022 overdose deaths in Winnebago County as shared by the Winnebago County Medical Examiner's Office.

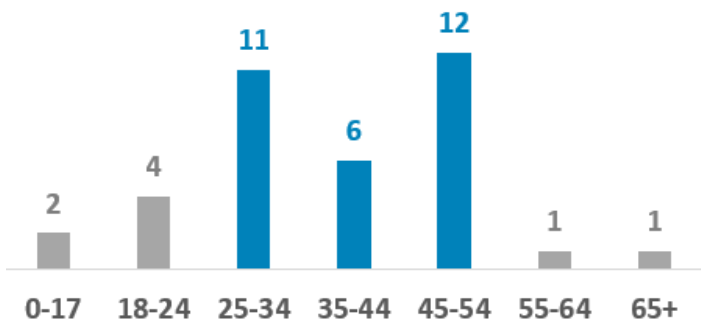
**Sex/Gender\*:** 12 victims were listed as Female, 25 victims were listed as Male

**Race/Ethnicity\*:** 33 victims were listed as White; 4 victims were listed as either Black, Hmong, and/or American Indian

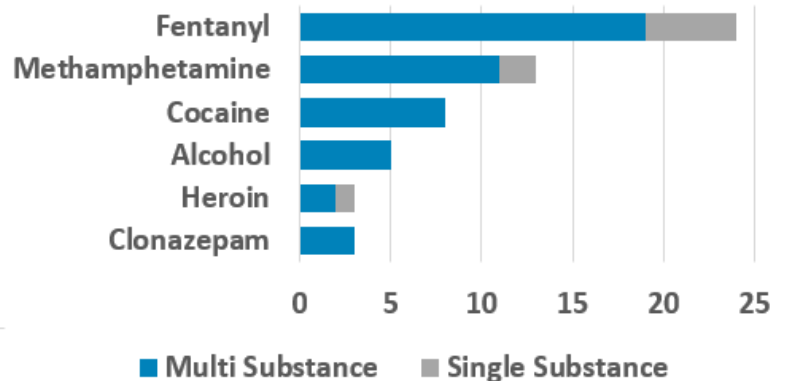
**Geographic Location of Death:** 17 victims died in the City of Oshkosh, 7 in the City of Neenah, 6 in the City of Menasha (this count only reflects on the portion of Menasha that falls within Winnebago County), 3 in the Village of Fox Crossing, and 4 deaths across several small towns in Winnebago County

*\*Sex, race & ethnicity were determined based on identifiers listed on government documents, such as a driver's license. The identifiers listed were not necessarily chosen by the victims. If any victims identified as transgender, they were included in the category that they identified as.*

In 2022, the majority of overdose deaths in Winnebago County occurred among individuals aged **25-54**.



In 2022, Fentanyl was listed as a primary cause of death in 24 overdose deaths.



**Xylazine** has contributed to one overdose death in Winnebago County in 2021 and one death in 2022. Overdoses caused by this non-opioid sedative can not be reversed by naloxone.

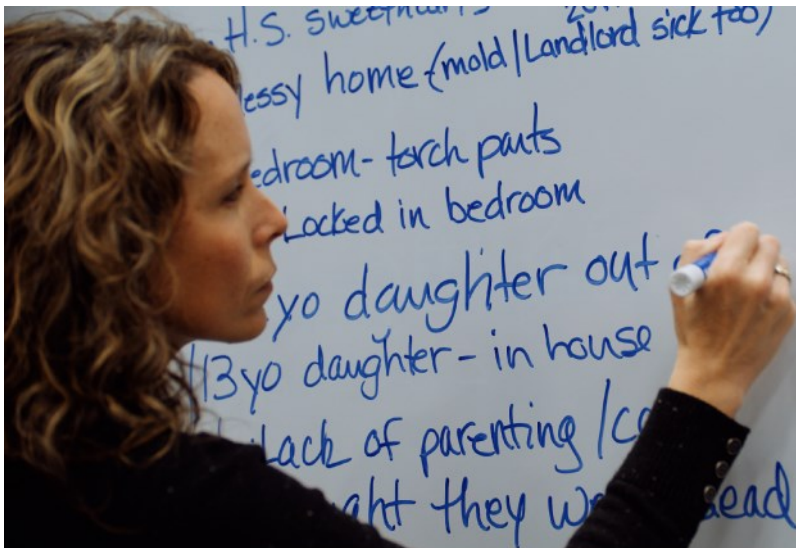
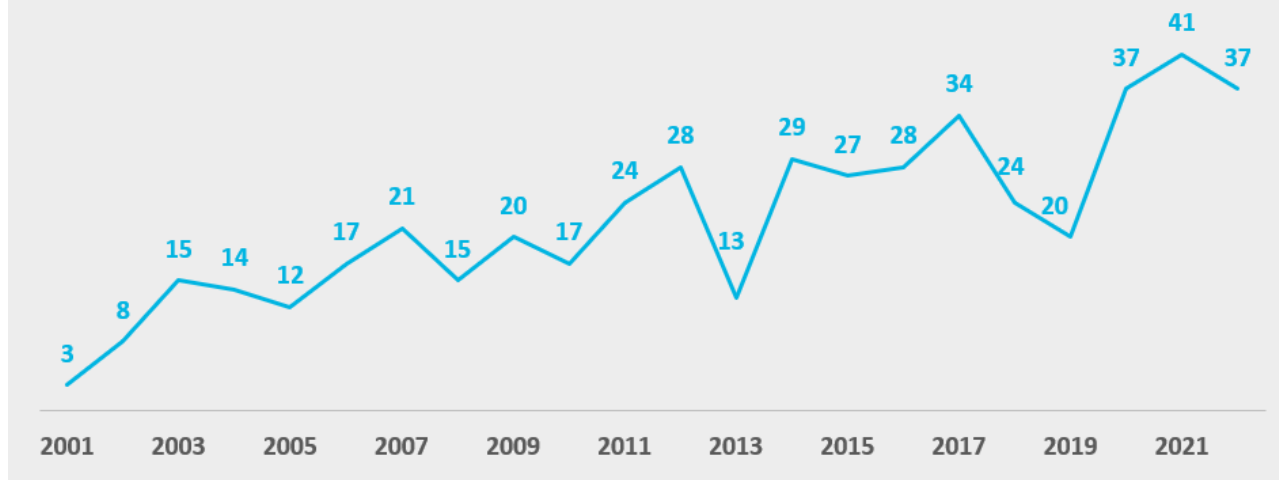


Photo: Sarah Bassing-Sutton takes notes during the review to identify gaps, missed opportunities, as well as recommendations that the team can take action on. Being able to review someone's life is an amazing honor that not only highlights how systems have failed that person, but also reveals opportunities for change and improvement. OFRs provide a legacy for that victim by saving lives through prevention.

Photo Credit: MTN Craft

## 2022 Community Conditions and 2022-23 Priorities

In 2022, there were 37 overdose deaths in our Winnebago County community, which was a decrease from the 41 overdose deaths in 2021.



- A bystander was present for at least seven of the overdose deaths in 2022. Several of these bystanders did not realize the victim was overdosing, because they were unaware the victim was using substances or they did not recognize the signs of overdose.
- This is the first year that Winnebago County has had overdose deaths reported in teenagers.
- Fentanyl continues to be a major contributor to deaths, regardless of previously known fentanyl use.
- Although the majority of victims passed away inside a residence, several victims in 2022 passed away in public locations.
- More than half of the overdose victims had a known mental health disorder.
- Experiencing incarceration is associated with increased risk of overdose death. Four of the overdose victims had been incarcerated within 30 days prior to their death and ten victims were on community supervision at the time of their death.

## 2022-2023 OFR Priorities

*Last year's priorities included: Mental Health, Child Trauma, Recovery Community, Social Connectedness, and Prevention. Based on cases reviewed and data trends, the OFR team has added the following for the next year:*

### **Close gaps in communication between systems to strengthen continuum of care**

People continue to fall through gaps in the system. It is crucial for our community to prioritize the establishment of effective communication channels and foster a seamless continuum of care across systems.

### **Identify children falling between gaps and connect them to support**

Minors left behind following a family member's overdose are not receiving the assistance they require. This absence of necessary support and access to services for children and their families experiencing these traumas exacerbate their suffering.

### **Focus on preventive efforts (i.e., trauma, early substance use)**

To save lives, we need to continue to focus on multifaceted preventive efforts. This may be with children, after a nonfatal overdose, or connecting with family/friends left behind. Working with substance use organizations, we need to continue to work on preventing youth and adult substance use.



# Major Themes from Deaths Reviewed and New Recommendations

**Children Falling between the Gaps:** Minors left behind due to overdose death continue to be disproportionately impacted. The impact of this trauma is worsened by a lack of support and access to vital services for children and families who experience trauma.

**Mental Health History:** Most victims who died of overdose had a documented history of mental health disorders. Many victims did not receive the treatment services needed to support their dual diagnoses of mental health and substance use disorders.

**Stigma and Shame:** Through these cases, we can see that victims who do not appear as the "norm" for using illicit substances lack the connections for help and resources. Substance use disorder is not a moral failing and does not discriminate based on age, race, ethnicity, income, or gender expression and identity.

**Continuum of Treatment:** Many victims that had participated in treatment experienced temporary success in recovery. The transition period during this time is complicated by an inability to access basic needs (i.e., housing, transportation, employment) and appropriate care. This creates an environment that is not favorable to a life in recovery.

**Incarceration:** Touchpoints with prison or jail systems shortly before death were common. Increasing recovery services, peer support, and transitional services provides a new approach to boost support during the window of opportunity upon release.

**The Need for Harm Reduction:** Most victims died without Narcan and without anyone nearby to help. Focusing on mitigating the potential dangers of drugs is vital.

**Relationships and Connection:** Many victims felt isolated and unsupported. Many are dying alone and do not have anyone they can trust with their substance use disorder and mental health.

Photo: Denise Holz and Walter Ragland at OFR  
Photo Credit: MTN Craft

## New Recommendations

The OFR team meets monthly to review cases of people who have lost their lives to an overdose. Based on the data, the team develops recommendations to create change in our community to save lives. The team created and voted on the following local recommendations this past year:

- *Create an alternative to medical detox in the community for people that do not meet hospital admission criteria or are awaiting treatment.*
- *Provide education/training around methamphetamines (i.e., data, meth-induced psychosis, strategies for intervention) to the OFR team.*
- *Educate/train the community on the drug trends of our community and what they can do about it.*
- *Develop a community presentation on OFR, local resources to share, and stories from people in recovery to break stigma of addiction.*
- *Identify the needs of parents who are in recovery, and those who are currently struggling with substance use disorder in Winnebago County.*

**Statewide Recommendation:** *We recommend the State of WI Department of Corrections expand the availability of medications assisting in the treatment of addiction which can be prescribed to persons in their care, to include methadone and suboxone.*

## Recovery in our Community

A personal, supportive recovery network was missing in many of the victims' lives. A strong recovery community is critical to counteract the shame and stigma many people experience and reduces the risk of recurrence of use. Through these cases, we can see that while the recovery community itself is strong, the broader community has a role to play in closing gaps for people.



## Five Year Trends from 2018-2022 Deaths



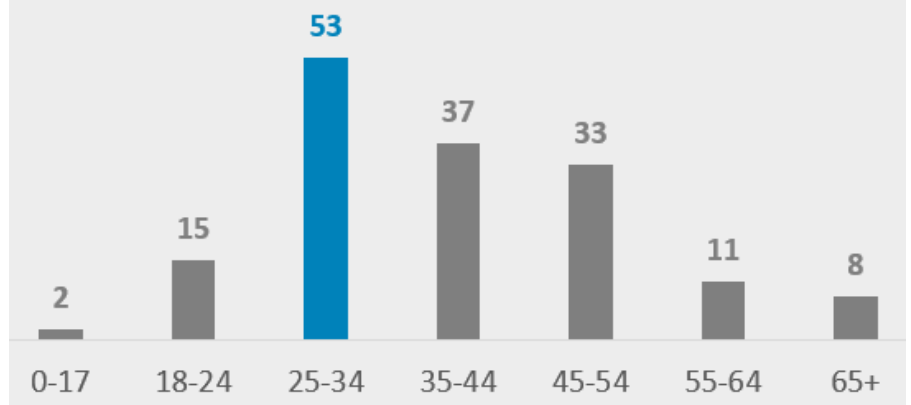
In 2017, the Winnebago County Drug and Alcohol Coalition (WCDAC) reviewed the data of people dying from overdoses, which jumped from 28 in 2016 to 34 in 2017 in Winnebago County. Knowing something needed to be done the team wrote for a grant to start an OFR in the county. It is because of these visionaries that the OFR is successful. It started bringing together community partners to review data and drive community action. In 2020, WCDAC became rebranded as Breakwater with a mission of preventing and reducing youth and adults substance use in Winnebago County. OFR and Breakwater continue to collaborate, especially on “We Heart You,” because no matter someone’s age, our teams believe that people deserve a second, third, or tenth chance to get the help they need. To learn more about the amazing work that Breakwater is doing with youth, their podcast, or the Be Courageous campaign, go to [www.breakwaterwi.org](http://www.breakwaterwi.org).



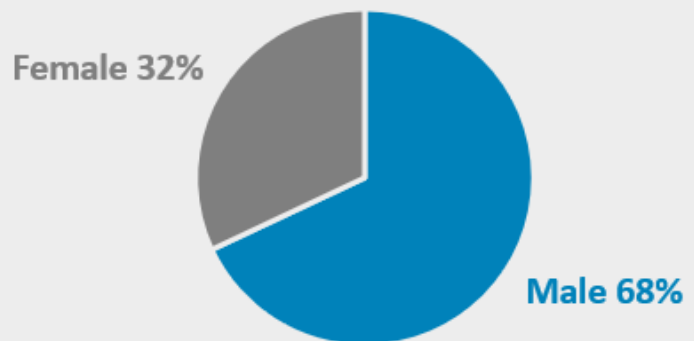
Photo: Breakwater Teen Panel  
Photo Credit: Breakwater

There have been 159 overdose deaths in Winnebago County across the past 5 years. The yearly number of deaths during this time period have ranged from 20 overdose deaths in 2019 to 41 deaths in 2022. Fentanyl has contributed to 59% of the overdose deaths, many unintentionally. In recent years, there has been an increase in stimulants contributing to overdose deaths. Methamphetamines contributed to 31% of these deaths and cocaine contributed to 16% of the overdose deaths across the past five years.

Across the past 5 years, **one-third** of the overdose deaths in Winnebago County have occurred in the **25-34** age group.



Across the past 5 years, **two-thirds** of the overdose deaths in Winnebago County were among victims listed as **male**.



***“The partnerships garnered from the OFR Team have been incredible. It takes buy-in from all of the partners to truly make a change, and I believe we are achieving that.” - OFR Partner***

# Five Year Trends from 2018-2022 Deaths

People are predominately dying in their own residence, and dying alone. Rates of overdose deaths in the Cities of Oshkosh, Neenah, and Menasha/Appleton are greater than the County overdose death rate. Rates are used to compare across different population sizes. Death rate is the number of deaths divided by the population multiplied by 100,000.

	Number of overdose deaths	Death rate per 100,000 population	Population
City of Oshkosh	79	118.0	66,929
City of Neenah	33	119.0	27,726
Towns & Villages	26	42.5	61,203
Cities of Menasha & Appleton	19	113.9	16,684
Winnebago County* Total	157	91.0	172,542

\*Winnebago County total differs from data presented elsewhere. In the past 5 years, two deaths occurred outside of Winnebago County.

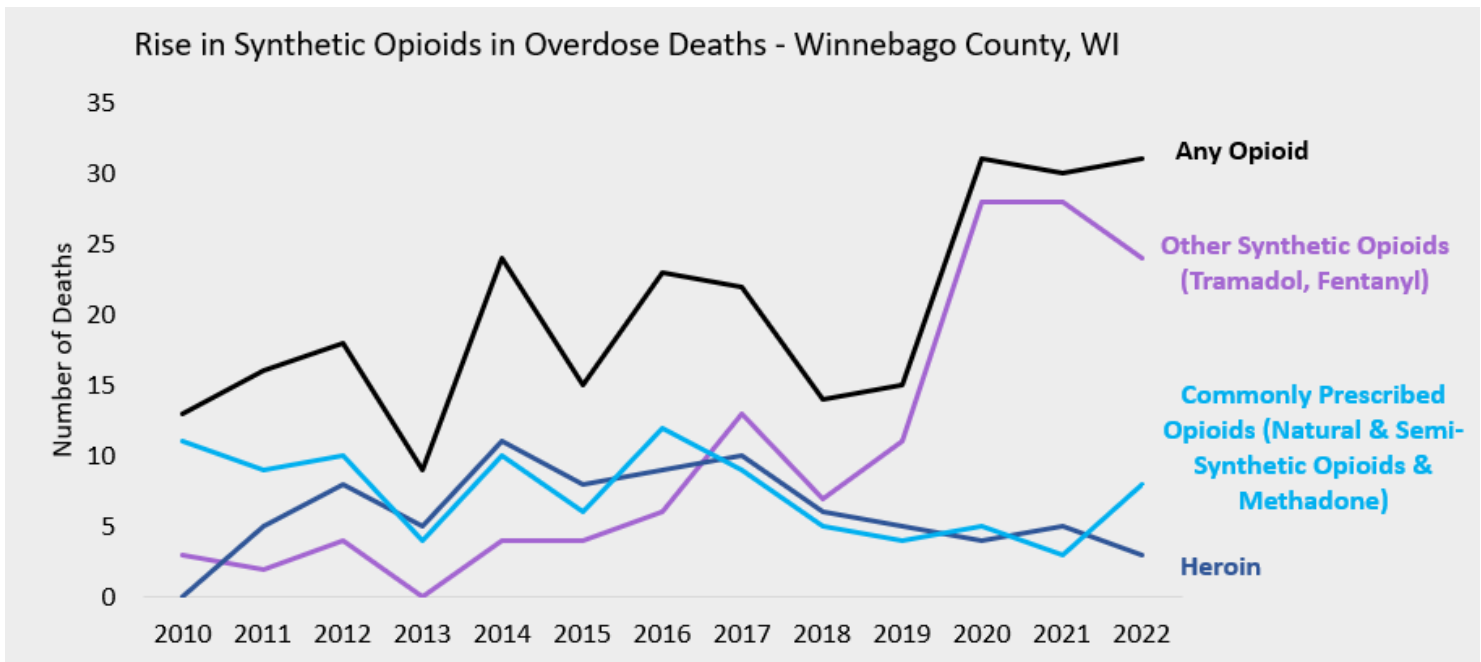


Photo: Amy Jahnke, Chuck Hable, and Cheryl Brehmer at an OFR meeting  
 Photo Credit: MTN Craft



## Lessons from the Last Five Years



### Team of Action

The OFR team has voted on 48 data-driven recommendations, and 75% have been completed. Another 21% of recommendations are active projects, and 4% have not yet started. In addition, the team has worked on 11 projects separate from recommendations: Handle with Care; several We Heart You projects (event, app, award, website); the Leave Behind Narcan program; the Overdose Spike Alert pilot system; this annual report; and mentoring OFR teams throughout the state and country. The urgency of overdose deaths is taken seriously and recommendations are provided that can prevent them.



### Handle with Care

This trauma-informed partnership between the Oshkosh Police Department, Oshkosh Area School District (OASD), Valley Christian School, and Lourdes Academy continues to identify kids who have experienced trauma to wrap around services for them and their families. Since 2020, more than 400 students were referred for trauma assessment. The program continues to identify trends in our community, such as increases in domestic violence, substance use, and housing instability. In 2022, the program won the Spirit of Education award from OASD. The team is expanding the program throughout the county and continues to identify ways to best support kids.



### Throwing Darts

Every person's journey through addiction and recovery is different, which is why the OFR team does not just focus on the bullseye. Each recommendation is a new dart in hopes that it reaches people where they are at, knowing that the number of people overdosing continues to rise and lives are at stake. The OFR helps bridge previously disconnected systems. Conversations at the OFR table represent those systems, and the continuous partner building helps the community problem solve differently. The safe space the team has created makes the real work happen. Five years later, while there are still challenges, OFR partners continue to show up and provide hope.



## Shifting Stigma Around Peer Work

The OFR team has learned the importance of involving those with lived experience, which is now echoed and imbedded in every part of the implementation work. Those with lived experience can offer a unique perspective to identifying challenges and solutions. Their voices guide the table; they are OFR partners who provide feedback on the relevancy of recommendations. Recently, our peers have been working with the team to identify potential upstream interventions for people after a nonfatal overdose. After 30 stakeholder interviews regarding implementation of a rapid response model, the community knew this work needed to be done by peers, which started the Solutions Peer Response Team (SPRT). The OFR team continues to find funding for the SPRT program, fully realizing that peer led work not only breaks stigma but saves lives.



## We Heart You

Since 2019, We Heart You has undergone multiple reiterations. In March of 2022, the We Heart You Event was held to bridge the broader community with people in recovery to break the silence, reduce stigma, and save lives. In December of 2022, the team created the We Heart You Community Award of Excellence, which was given to Chief Tim Styka. In spring of 2022, the team created the 'We Heart You' website ([www.weheartyou.org](http://www.weheartyou.org)), which includes the Thriving in Recovery PSA and the We Heart You app. "We Heart You" has become the community's motto that we hear you, we love you, and we stand together as a community to help one another in times of need.



Photos (Page 8): Members of the OFR Team meet to review a case, Brandon Ansell and Jennifer Skolaski represent the Handle with Care program for the 2022 OASD Spirit of Education Award, Eric Smiltneek and Aaron Sabel participate in OFR discussion

Photos (Page 9): Members of the Solutions Peer Response Team, Trevor Fenrich, Sandy Shaffer, and Chris Tarmann attending an Overdose Fatality Review meeting



*Photo Credits: Solutions Recovery and MTN Craft*

## OFR Partner Successes

**Thriving in Recovery:** Working with Mirrorless Productions and using OD2A implementation funds, our team created a short video that highlights local people thriving in recovery. The video debuted at the National OFR Conference in January 2023 and has been tailored for sites across the country. Watch the videos and learn more about their stories here: [www.weheartyou.org/recovery-stories](http://www.weheartyou.org/recovery-stories).

**COSSAP Grant:** The OFR team via support and collaboration with the Winnebago County Health Department, was awarded a \$1.3 million grant to support OFR work and evaluation, to fund a new bereavement coordinator position in the Medical Examiner's Office, and to fund the Solutions Peer Response Team program director and four peer recovery specialists for the next three years.

**GRASP:** Knowing that grief and support after an overdose looks different, a local chapter of Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing was created. The team meets the 3rd Wednesday of each month from 6:30-8:30pm in Oshkosh. People interested in participating can email: [foxcitiesgrasp@gmail.com](mailto:foxcitiesgrasp@gmail.com).

### **Solutions Peer Response Team (SPRT):**

SPRT launched in September 2022 as an initiative to mitigate fatal and non-fatal overdoses in Winnebago County. This 24/7, peer-driven program is made up of trained recovery coaches that help individuals struggling with addiction. In its nine months, the SPRT served a total of 675 unique individuals with 3,124 contacts. The team has partnered with the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office (Jail), Oshkosh Fire Department – EMS, Oshkosh Police Department, Father Carr's Place 2B, Day by Day Warming Shelter, Probation and Parole, Winnebago County Crisis/Human Services, and the broader community. With over 501 transports, the team regularly gets people connected to sober living, residential treatment, and emergency shelter.



Photo: Alex Belville was featured in the Thriving in Recovery PSA

*Photo Credit: Mirrorless Productions*

## Access to Narcan in 2022

In March of 2019, OFR made the recommendation that "Winnebago County Health Department would give out free Narcan with training." Since that time the County has worked with many community partners to continue providing this life-saving resource.

- **UW Oshkosh** installed 6 Nalox Boxes on campus.
- **Solutions Recovery** installed 8 Nalox Boxes throughout the community.
- From February 1 to December 31, 2022 **Oshkosh Fire Department** left behind 35 Narcan Kits.
- **Winnebago County Human Services** gave out 1,000 doses of Narcan as part of the Clinical Diversion Team, 24/7 Drug, and the SOAR programs.
- **Winnebago County Health Department** gave out 2,078 Narcan kits.



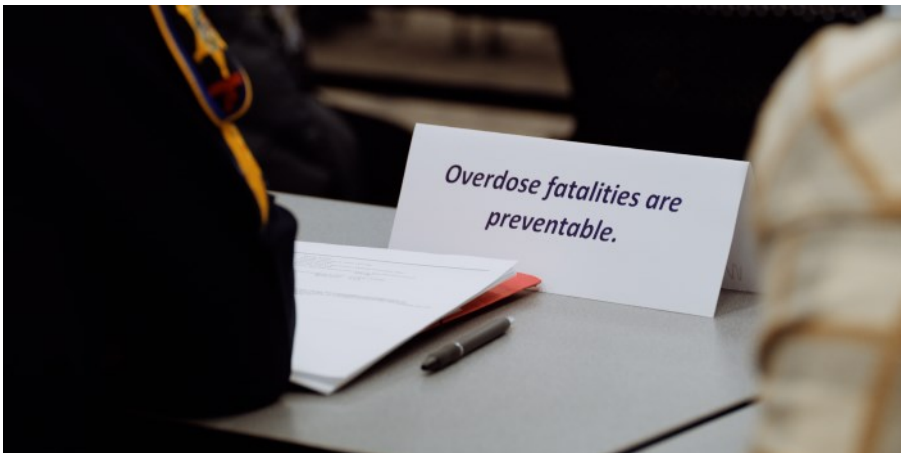
## Thank You to the 2022-23 OFR Partners!

Addiction Medical Solutions of Wisconsin  
Apricity  
Ascension  
Aurora Medical Center of Oshkosh  
Breakwater  
City of Appleton Health Department  
City of Menasha Health Department  
City of Menasha Police Department  
City of Oshkosh Fire Department/Emergency  
Medical Services  
City of Oshkosh Police Department  
Community Church  
Department of Justice  
Fox Crossing Police Department  
Gold Cross Ambulance Service  
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church  
Lake Winnebago Area Metropolitan  
Enforcement Group  
Neenah Police Department  
Northeast Wisconsin Mental Health  
Connection  
Omro Police Department  
Oshkosh Area School District  
Partnership Community Health Center

Shaffer Counseling & Consulting, LLC, part of  
Collaborative Wellness  
Solutions Recovery, Inc.  
ThedaCare Inc.  
Unity Recovery Services  
University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Police  
Department  
Village of Winneconne Police Department  
Winnebago County Health Department  
Winnebago County Human Services  
Department - Behavioral Health and  
Child Welfare  
Winnebago County Medical Examiner's Office  
Winnebago County Office of the District  
Attorney  
Winnebago County Sheriff's Office  
Winnebago County Sheriff's Office - Jail  
Wisconsin Department of Corrections

***Thank you to all of the OFR partners who continue to show up, remain committed to working together to address the root causes of overdose deaths, and make our community a safer place to live, work, and be!***

***“OFR has helped us identify gaps, celebrate successes together, build a strong network of professionals, and shift the mindset of folks who weren't previously able to see the importance of our work. This group has helped our community learn how to create proactive measures to save lives.” - OFR Partner***

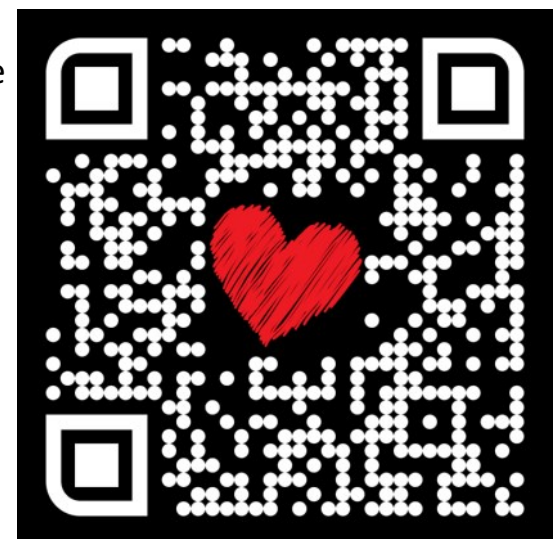
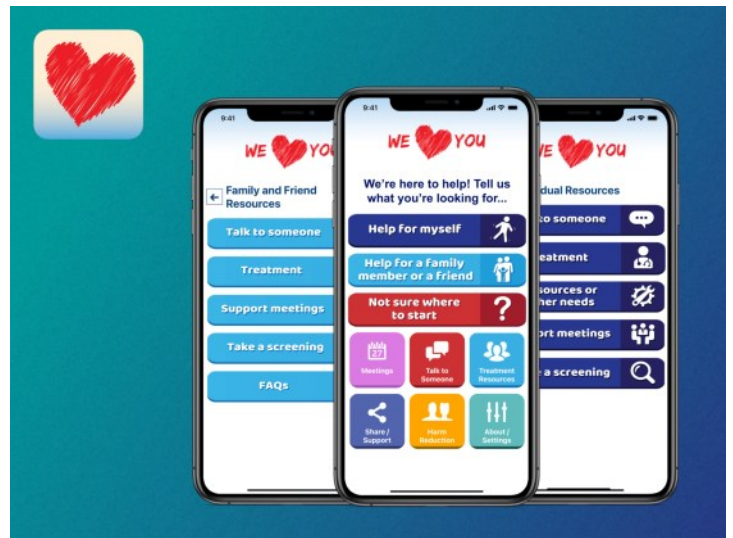


***“In all my years of work in the Winnebago County Community this has been the most involved, engaged, and results focused team I have ever worked with.”  
- OFR Partner***



While this epidemic can be overwhelming, there are ways you can get involved, help, and support the work. Together we can make a difference!

- Connect your loved ones to the **We Heart You app**.
- Watch the **Thriving in Recovery PSA** and share.
- Go to [weheartyou.org](http://weheartyou.org) and learn about the resources, hear the stories, and be inspired.
- Go to the Winnebago County Health Department (WCHD, 112 Otter Ave., Oshkosh) to **get trained on how to use Narcan** for you, your loved ones, or your community. Get FREE Narcan and Fentanyl Test Strips at WCHD, M-F from 8am-4pm.
- **Connect someone to the Solutions Peer Response Team.** Download the We Heart You App or call 1-866-465-0010 to talk to someone who's been through it.
- **Connect with Breakwater** ([www.breakwaterwi.org](http://www.breakwaterwi.org)). Volunteer to help prevent and reduce youth substance use in Winnebago County.
- **Donate** to a local treatment or recovery organization like Apricity, Nova Counseling, Solutions Recovery, or Unity Recovery Services.
- **Attend a GRASP meeting.** Are you or someone you know grieving from a substance use passing of a loved one? Contact: [foxcitiesgrasp@gmail.com](mailto:foxcitiesgrasp@gmail.com) to find out more.
- **Spread Hope!** We Heart You means we hear you, we love you, and we stand together as a community to help one another in times of need. Connect with the Facebook page (We Heart You Recovery), be there for others, and don't give up on hope.



**#weheartyourecovery**

**Contact information:** OFR support is coordinated through the Winnebago County Health Department. Jennifer Skolaski, the OFR facilitator, can be reached by email at: [jskolaski@winnebagoountywi.gov](mailto:jskolaski@winnebagoountywi.gov)