

The Rural

DIFFERENCE

Behavioral Health Alliance of Rural Pennsylvania

Welcome to BHARP

Welcome to the Behavioral Health Alliance of Rural Pennsylvania - or BHARP for short - and welcome to the re-launch of our newsletter! Though BHARP was established in December of 2006 to allow the original twenty-three BHARP counties to have input into the newly implemented HealthChoices behavioral health program for Medical Assistance recipients, we've come a long way since then.

On July 1, 2021, BHARP became the primary contract holder for the North Central HealthChoices program. This means we ensure that the members we serve across our now twenty-four rural counties receive accessible, quality care that follows all state and federal guidelines.

Through all of the many changes, BHARP remains dedicated to making our members' lives better and creating balanced representation across all of our counties. We recognize that the population we serve often has complex needs and it remains our focus to ensure we work with our partners toward our members' treatment and recovery.

With our new responsibilities also come new opportunities. We have a new website, new social media accounts, and yes, a brand-new newsletter. In this issue, we cover what other changes have occurred at BHARP over the last few years, how the organization has grown, and where we are headed in the future. Over subsequent issues, you can look forward to feature articles, spotlight on staff, and highlights of the wonderful work our counties are doing to help our members. Published quarterly, this newsletter will give people a glimpse into how BHARP helps our members reach their full potential through behavioral health services.

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MEET THE BHARP STAFF

New Faces and Departments Are Shaping the Future of BHARP

Changing a company's path usually involves change in other areas as well, and that's certainly true for BHARP. After taking on the role of primary contractor, the company has added many new employees and several new departments within the organization.

Sally Walker, who has been with BHARP since the beginning, leads the management team as the company's CEO. Charles Klinger currently serves as BHARP's Chief Operating Officer, while recent hire Amanda Roth fills the role of the Director of Compliance. Currently, Mae Armstrong serves as Executive Assistant and Kelly Strouse, who began as the Human Resources Specialist is now our Human Resources Generalist. Additionally, Brenda Fry is our current Director of Network Oversight and Chris Minnich fills the role of Director of Quality. This expanded staff allows BHARP to have a robust foundation to ensure that all members receive the quality services they deserve and have come to expect over the years.

Melissa Hoover works with Chris on the Quality team as the current Consumer/Family Satisfaction Team (C/FST) Director. Lacey Wallace is our Quality Projects Manager and Rachel Barrett is the Stakeholder Engagement Specialist who helps to promote BHARP to members in the community. The BHARP Quality team also includes two Quality Clinicians, Curt Proctor and Jen Groff. Shelly Rivello serves as our Clinical Coordinator who monitors other parts of program development and regulation. The expansion of this team allows BHARP to better serve its members and make certain the services they're receiving are of the highest quality available.

Several new employees have joined Brenda on the Network Oversight team. These include a number of new County and Provider Relations Coordinators (CPRCs), including Colleen Wilber, Jennifer Stubbs, Kimberly Alfieri, Ronna Tipton, and Sarah Warmbrodt. Each one of them cover their own particular area or specialty. Colleen covers substance use disorder (SUD) and monitoring for all of the twenty-four BHARP counties. Jen works with Centre, Clearfield, Jefferson, Greene, Huntingdon, Mifflin, and Juniata counties while Kim covers Forest, Warren, McKean, Potter, Tioga, Bradford, Sullivan, and Wayne. In addition to their regular mental health provider monitoring for their assigned counties, Jennifer and Kim also serve as co-chairs of the Children's Program Advisory committee.

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Upcoming
Board of
Directors
Meetings

All meetings are
held from
11:00am
until 2:00pm
at the BHARP
offices

March 12, 2024

April 4, 2024

May 2, 2024

June 6, 2024

July 11, 2024

August 1, 2024

MEET THE BHARP STAFF, CONT.

Ronna works with Clarion, Cameron, and Elk Counties, as well as covers mental health provider monitoring. She also has a number of additional duties, including serving as the lead for the reinvestment committee, is the chair of the Mental Health-Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (MH/IDD) Committee, and also functions as the housing coordinator. Sara, the newest CPRC on staff, covers Columbia, Montour, Snyder, Union, Northumberland and Schuylkill Counties, while also performing mental health provider monitoring.

In the finance department, BHARP continues to contract with Binkley Kanavy & Associates of Pittsburgh, PA. Currently Tom Kanavy serves as BHARP's Director of Finance. His company also employs Patrick Kelly as an accountant assisting with the contract, while BHARP directly employs Courtney Haney as the on-site accountant.

New hire Bob Zipf holds the position of Director of IT at BHARP. Additionally, Lori Melnick is the current Database and Network Administrator. Hopefully, we can soon add another position that will make BHARP more nimble in the technical world and allow us to use our existing technology and data to better serve our members, specifically those at the county level.

In order to better accommodate the needs of this growing organization, BHARP has also moved office locations. We left the Match Factory in Bellefonte, PA, and moved to 301 Science Park Road in State College, PA. Many people in the State College area remember the building BHARP now calls home as being occupied by either Raytheon or HRB Singer. Currently, BHARP occupies two floors of a building that it shares with a number of other businesses including Penn State ARL (Applied Research Labs) and the Penn State/NASA Swift Mission Control Center.

As the organization continues to grow even more, additional staff may be added over the coming months and years, and we hope that our current location will continue to serve us well.



Quick Bites:

BHARP's 2023 Annual Report will soon be available on our website.



BHARP relaunched their website in December 2022. A second revision is planned for Spring 2024.



BHARP is planning more trauma training opportunities in 2024 for those who qualify so keep checking the website!

NARCAN IS NOW AVAILABLE TO EVERYONE

It's been available in PA for nearly a decade

On March 29, 2023, the FDA (Food and Drug Administration) approved Narcan nasal spray for over the counter, non-prescription use. Narcan is a naloxone hydrochloride nasal spray that is used to rapidly reverse the effects of opioid overdose and is the standard treatment for opioid overdose. What this means is that anyone, including those with friends and family members who are in danger of an overdose, can go to a local pharmacy and purchase Narcan without a prescription to have on hand in case of an emergency. This approval was heralded as a monumental advancement in the treatment of substance use disorder, as previously, the potentially life-saving treatment was available only to first responders or via a doctor's prescription.

However, in Pennsylvania, family and friends of those with opioid use disorders have been able to obtain Narcan through a pharmacy since 2014. Over the years, BHARP's twenty-four counties have made a commitment to providing Narcan to those in need as well, even those they don't directly serve.

The Juniata Valley Tri-County Drug & Alcohol Commission, which serves Huntingdon, Mifflin, and Juniata Counties, distributed 888, two-dose boxes of Narcan over a one-year period from July 1, 2022, until June 30, 2023. This organization worked with schools, social services, and many other organizations to distribute Narcan as effectively as possible.

In the Clarion area, the Armstrong/Indiana/Clarion Drug and Alcohol Commission (AICDAC) has Naloxone distribution agreements with 43 different agencies. Those organizations provide Naloxone to their staff, their customers and to the public. In that area, AICDAC have given out 1,981 Naloxone kits since July 1, 2020. AICDAC has also partnered with 30 different agencies in Clarion County to install 66 Naloxone Boxes. These are wall-mounted emergency boxes that are stocked with Naloxone and are easily accessible in the event of an overdose. Schools, businesses, and hotels are just a few of the places that are partnering with the AICDAC for this program. The AICDAC is also currently finalizing plans to bring several Naloxone vending machines to Clarion County as well. Some would be outdoor vending machines that are temperature controlled and can be stocked with both Naloxone and other harm reduction supplies, such as test strips. These would be available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. A second option would be an indoor, wall-mounted vending machine that holds up to fifty boxes of Naloxone at one time.

With the new, nation-wide program now ramping up, the hope is that other states will follow Pennsylvania's lead and fully embrace the non-prescription Narcan program. Additionally, as the number of drug overdose deaths that involve fentanyl continue to rise, the need for widely available treatment options, including innovative programs like these, is greater than ever. While these programs are still in their early stages, the results so far have been promising and the hope is that these trends and programs continue to expand as Narcan's availability increases. treatment options, including innovative programs like these, is greater than ever. While these programs are still in their early stages, the results so far have been promising and the hope is that these trends and programs continue to expand as Narcan's availability increases.

THE 988 CRISIS LINE ANNIVERSARY

The state of 988 and Crisis in Pennsylvania

On July 15th, 2023, the national 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline celebrated one year of operation. Available nation-wide, anyone experiencing a crisis can call or text that number and always find someone available to talk, text or chat. The easy to remember number was created to help people dealing with issues like depression, substance use, and thoughts of suicide get immediate help and quickly find additional resources. As an additional feature to mark the one-year anniversary, the line also added Spanish language and American Sign Language capabilities as well, further increasing the number of people the line can serve.

However, one of the biggest challenges facing this program is the lack of local call centers, along with the funds to support them. This is particularly true in Pennsylvania and especially true in BHARP's twenty-four counties. At present, there are only twelve crisis call centers in Pennsylvania and those are divided into three regions. Unfortunately, most of these centers are understaffed and underfunded.

Calls that come in to the 988 line are routed to one of the twelve call centers based on area code and not by any sort of geographic location. If a call isn't answered within one minute, the call is then routed to a national back-up call center. This makes it difficult to make certain a person in crisis can receive the help they need as quickly as possible.

These limitations are particularly felt in rural communities that have traditionally been underserved. However, to better support our members and help them receive services, BHARP has created a crisis workgroup that is made up mental and SCA administrators, as well as others who encompass all the providers from within the BHARP contract. This work group has conducted surveys, collected and analyzed data, and started to map out where the strengths and gaps are within the county crisis systems.

Going forward, the workgroup will continue to meet and plan the next steps to help push crisis intervention forward, even as some counties remove or end currently available services. Recently, the four crisis providers within the BHARP counties have committed to more fully participating in the workgroup as well, so that more members can be helped going forward. Some counties, such as Wayne County, are even working to open a residential crisis program.

Though the 988-crisis line remains a valuable tool, a lot of the actual work with those in crisis happens at a local level. Therefore, BHARP and the counties need to make sure that the support services are as robust and widely available as possible so that no one "slips through the cracks." At some point, there might even be an integration of both the Substance Use Disorder and Mental Health crisis systems to better serve everyone in need.

PROGRAMS THAT WORK

Calming Rooms

In the behavioral health field, those involved are always looking for new ways to help people, particularly children, work through their issues. This is a particularly important area to focus on since children don't always have the ability to communicate on the same level that an adult would.

In the twenty-four BHARP counties, one effective way of helping people, particularly children, learn self-regulation is through the use of calming rooms. A calming or "calm" room is a designated space intentionally structured to help students pause and re-center both physically and emotionally outside of the classroom. The room can be used for prevention or to de-escalate emotions or anxiety before a person, particularly a child, gets too overwhelmed.

These rooms are often filled with items such as bean bag chairs, lava or bubble lamps, small trampolines, scooters, soft rugs, noise canceling headphones, electronic tablets, sensory items, essential oil diffusers, and, in some cases, a sensory blackout tent. All of those items are designed to help a child calm and self-regulate themselves in order to be able to successfully re-enter outside world situations.

Currently, there are fifty-eight calming rooms throughout our counties. They can be found in a variety of places from schools to courthouses to hospitals and emergency rooms. The de-escalation skills learned in a calming room can ideally be applied to other settings and used throughout a person's lifetime.

Clarion County, in particular, has used calming rooms extensively, including in the county courthouse where the Children and Youth Services (CYS) department has used one to great effect since creating the room. In the eastern part of the state, locations in Snyder County have also reported great success, as has the Berwick Middle School in Berwick, Columbia County.

Over the next few years, it's hoped that the success of these calming rooms can spread from one BHARP county to another until all of our covered areas have similar programs available that can assist youth in need of a safe space to learn to manage their emotions rather than allow their emotions to manage them.

Important Numbers to Remember:

Suicide and Crisis Line: 988

Veteran Specific Suicide and Crisis Line: 838255

<https://988lifeline.org>



BHARP Offices:
814-826-2952

www.bharp.org



Community Care Behavioral Health:
1-866-878-6046

www.ccbh.com



Other State Services:

1-800-662- HELP

www.ddap.pa.gov

Police Co-Responders

Across the country, there is a growing call for mental and behavioral health professionals to respond with police officers to calls when necessary, particularly as the number of available officers continues to decline. A plan called the “police co-responder model” is one way of handling that lack of staffing and the increased need for help.

Within the BHARP-served counties, Mifflin and Huntingdon Counties (both part of HMJ or the Huntingdon/Mifflin/Juniata joinder) have recently begun implementing this program with great success.

After a 2019 visit to Chambersburg in Franklin County, groups within Mifflin and Huntingdon Counties began to work toward implementing similar programs within their organizations. Though the program officially began in these counties in October 2020, there were a few set-backs including the pandemic and being unable to secure a full-time mental and behavioral health professional to go on police calls when requested.

However by February 2023, the Mifflin County Regional Police Department had their program up and running. The Huntingdon Borough PD followed in April 2023. Data collected from both organizations indicate that the project is working well and, that with additional funding, can become sustainable in the future. Initially the project used reinvestment funding to get started, though that model is not considered sustainable

With the success of these programs, it’s hoped that similar models can be introduced to other BHARP counties, further helping to identify those who need behavioral and/or mental health services, as well as decreasing both the overall number of police calls for incidents of this nature and reducing those that have a greater chance of ending in violence.





Find us online and on social media!

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/bharpofpa>

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/bharpofpa>

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/BHARPOfPA>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/86941578>

YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBR78vmDDsln50ch0Setr9g>

Official Hash Tag: #bharpofpa

Email: theruraldifference@bharp.org

Website: www.bharp.org



BHARP Comes to Social Media!

Yes! It's true! In addition to a new website that's mobile friendly, BHARP is now on social media! If you want to follow us, just use the links listed above or do a search of our website. You'll find direct links to all of our accounts on our homepage. Just click on the icon and you'll be taken directly to our page. Also, if you're on X (formerly known as Twitter), be sure to follow our hashtag for the latest BHARP news and information, including events in your area.



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Did You Know?

All BHARP Board
of Directors
Meetings are open
to the public.