

Quick Response Team, resource bus debut

First-of-its-kind program assists those with substance abuse troubles

By Isabella Breda

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The Mason County Quick Response Team hit the road Monday to provide support and resources to those struggling with substance abuse.

"Typically, law enforcement and fire show up to an overdose, pick up the patient and zip them off to the hospital, hoping something happens magically there," said Beau Bakken, North Mason Regional Fire Authority chief. "Now, we have a team to follow up with the individual and check in with the family to make sure they're getting the help they need."

The Quick Response Team, composed of Peninsu-

la Community Health Services chemical dependency professionals Jackielynn Jones, Amy Sampson and Community Health worker Rachel Parker, operate out of a surplus Mason Transit Authority bus.

"Whether it be school districts, whether it be patients just released from jail, individual family units, churches — I mean any member of our community can activate this team to come out and help with an opioid or substance use disorder," Bakken said:

Working 40 hours per week and accepting referrals 24/7, the team will respond to calls for services and accompany law enforcement and fire personnel on overdose-related responses. The team will not provide treatment, but rather connect family members and patients with local resources, help facilitate and drive patients to appointments and provide ongoing support.

"Their job is to help families navigate those services, because it is a very difficult and complicated

road to try to follow. The job is to help folks through that process," Bakken said.

The bus, equipped with a wireless hotspot, will provide the access needed to research available options for patients and make online appointments.

"Patients who may be homeless or have a disconnected phone are difficult to follow up with," Jackielynn Jones said. "This gives us the opportunity to receive, refer and to engage them into treatment or coordinate care."

The surplus Mason Transit Authority bus was purchased for \$1 in the spring. Kathy Geist, Mason Transit Authority outreach and planner, is part of the Opioid Stakeholders Group in Mason County — a task force representing local agencies.

Geist said the project was a high priority.

"We as a community have a need to fulfill," she said. "Instead of waiting for these issues to blow up,

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North Mason Regional Fire Authority Chief Beau Bakken opens the door on the county's new Quick Response Team bus, a mobile resource for those struggling with substance abuse. *Herald photo by Isabella Breda*

Response: Team funded by 2-year, \$500K federal grant

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this team takes a more proactive approach.”

Bakken said the community's need became evident to him during a substance abuse forum by Mason County Public Health three years ago.

“One-fourth of attendees were family members of those that struggled with abuse and didn't know where to turn to get their child or loved one help,” Bakken said.

According to the Washington state Department of Health, 14 opioid-related drug overdoses occurred between January 2016 and June 2018 in Mason County.

“Something's gotta give,” Bakken said.

In the past few months the team has worked with patients to refine the team's processes to prepare, Bakken said.

“Our hope is that as we move forward with the full rollout we have the ability to fill that gap between engaging with patients and getting them into treatment,” Jones said.

The team will also connect individuals with health care at PCHS and other local health care providers “because what we have seen with individuals with substance use is they lack medical care,” Jones said. “PCHS has allowed us to better serve our patients through the using full body approach — medical, dental — whatever they need to do to get healthy again.”

North Mason Regional Fire Authority created the Quick Response Team using a two-year, \$500,000 grant from the Department of Justice, which was received in October 2018. After the two-year grant concludes, Bakken said he hopes to apply for future grants and that the community will support the importance of the team and its function.



The Mason County Quick Response Team bus is equipped with a mobile Wi-Fi hotspot and meeting space for substance abuse disorder patients and families to help coordinate treatment and next steps. Herald photo by Isabella Breda

“Prevention really comes down to educating the community and being a resource they can come and turn to if they have questions,” Jones said.

The Quick Response Team can be reached directly

at 360-801-2020.

“What we're hoping to do is show this program is not just nice to have in our community,” Bakken said. “It's a necessity.”

