

Fighting the opioid crisis head-on

SUCCESS STORY BEHAVIORAL HEALTH, ADDICTIONS MANAGEMENT



At a glance

Community

- Behavioral Health, Addictions Management

Organization

- Credo Community Center

Location

- New York

Challenges

- Opioid crisis
- Lack of available substance use treatment

Program

- Opioid treatment program, Medication-assisted treatment

Results

- Served more than 300 individuals since opening

Taking the lead: Addiction treatment at Credo Community Center

Between two northern New York counties, 278 individuals lost their lives to opioids in 2017. After seeing how the opioid crisis was impacting his community and taking lives, Credo Executive Director James Scordo was willing to lead the change and stand up for new treatment programs that could make a difference in the lives of the people they serve.

Forward thinking pays off

Scordo and the Credo Community Center are known around upstate New York for their forward thinking and innovative approaches to addiction treatment. After being approached by New York's Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services (OASAS) regarding Credo opening an opioid addiction treatment clinic, Scordo got to work. He knew the impact this clinic would have and began taking the initial steps to make it a reality. Now two years after opening its doors, Credo Community Center for the Treatment of Addictions, Inc. currently serves almost 150 clients in their opioid treatment program (OTP).

The facility is located in Jefferson County, New York. In this rural community, the opioid crisis has been on the rise, as it has throughout the United States. The closest opioid addiction treatment clinic was located in Syracuse, which for many was one to two hours away. Scordo and the Credo team knew a local clinic was necessary, but it was vital to have the community's support.

The proposition was met with unanimous agreement. Credo began educating the community regarding medication-assisted treatment (MAT) and the benefits of using FDA-approved medications, in combination with counseling and behavioral therapies. According to Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a common misconception associated with MAT is that it substitutes one drug for another. Rather, these medications alleviate the withdrawal symptoms and psychological cravings that cause chemical imbalances. MAT programs provide a safe and controlled level of medication to overcome the use of an abused opioid. Research has shown that when provided the proper dose, MAT medications have

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no adverse effects on a person's intelligence, mental or physical functioning, or employability. The goal is to provide whole-person approach to the treatment of substance use disorders. Through education and advocacy, Credo received overwhelming support to launch the opioid addiction treatment clinic.

"Education was a big part of this," Credo Information Systems Manager Ann DuMond said. "We were prepared to inform people on what MAT is, what it looks like and how impactful it can be. This got the community on board quickly, where we were later met with a resounding 'yes, let's do this.'"

Educating the community can be impactful in more ways than one. DuMond said that after teaching people about the treatment program and the ongoing efforts to help individuals manage their addiction, community members were better prepared to respond to addiction; for example, knowing how to react when someone is about to overdose. They had a better idea of "here's what you can do initially to save someone's life."

As the first OTP in upstate New York, Credo is paving the way for similar treatment services to follow. DuMond said early impacts show that post treatment, their clients are now healthy and participating in the community.

"Families are getting put back together and people are keeping their jobs as a result of this treatment," DuMond said. "Clients' stories are all varied as far as how they ended up being a user. However, the end story is the same; they are working, have housing and re-entering into society as a contributing member."

DuMond had some advice for other communities considering opening an OTP:

- **Maintain a relationship with your community.** This includes community leaders, law enforcement and hospital boards. Communicate with all stakeholders.
- **Educate, educate, educate.** Ensure that people know what this style of treatment means and how effective it can be. Hold forums, make pamphlets and present informative slides.
- **Prepare to meet state and federal requirements.** Every state is different, especially with Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) regulations. Be flexible and prepared to work with government requirements.

In addition, DuMond urges service providers to not be afraid to face the needs of your community. This is not an epidemic unique to upstate New York, so reach out to

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community leaders and find out what services are available for addiction management.

"Don't be afraid to take on the task," DuMond said. "At the end of the day, the reward certainly outweighs the fear."

Although there is a lot of communication, navigation and regulation to undergo, DuMond assures it's worth the process. There was a high need for addiction treatment clinics in this community, as there is in many communities across the country. Nearly two years after opening its doors, DuMond is pleased with Credo's success, as it has served more than 304 individuals while maintaining an enrollment of more than 100 clients in any given month. Needless to say, Credo is hopeful for what's to come.

"I think we're doing some really good work here," DuMond said. "You can see it with the success of our clients. However, there's much more to be done, and we have more on the horizon to help the community keep moving forward."

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