

Trillium's Mobile Crisis Team expands to New Hanover, Pender, Brunswick counties

By

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Mona Townes, the Mobile Crisis Director for Integrated Family Services, has had people tell her, "Had you not come out, my plan was to kill myself."

The Mobile Crisis Team could also be called a mobile mental health triage: Teams of social workers and mental health professionals go where crises are unfolding—schools, homes, and on the street.

And since June 5, the group has expanded its coverage area to New Hanover, Pender and Brunswick counties. It has helped 17 people in the area so far – from youth to the elderly.

The expansion into this area was primarily motivated by the opioid epidemic, Townes said. According to the North Carolina Health Department, overdose rates have increased in the state by 400 percent over the last 15 years; in the tri-county area of New Hanover, Brunswick and Pender, those rates have increased by nearly 1000 percent.

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The service, which is provided by Trillium Health Resources, exists in 21 of the 24 counties in Trillium's catchment area, which is Eastern North Carolina. Trillium provides care for people with substance abuse, mental health and intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The Mobile Crisis Team provides service in those same areas, but most of its calls are for substance abuse or mental health crises.

One example, Townes said, would be someone looking for a detox bed.

"We're going to be there to hold their hand and help them get treatment," Townes said.

The team moves around in a car with the logo, "Mobile Crisis Team," and its phone number, on the car.

"The state gives us two hours to respond to the crisis situation," Townes added. "Our goal is to be there as quickly as possible. Two hours is a long time if someone is truly suicidal."

Since the service started in 2006, 22 percent of the people helped have been between the ages of 11 and 18, Townes said, adding that most adolescents are directed to the group from a third party, through teachers or legal guardians.



Trillium's Mobile Crisis Unit has expanded its services to Pender, Brunswick and New Hanover counties

“We want to break that barrier so they can call us directly,” Townes said, adding that in 2015, the group started an online chat service to try to reach more adolescents. But so far service has yet to get a lot of use, she added.

The group also recently asked the schools to share its information with students.

One of the goals of the program is to minimize unnecessary ER visits, Townes continued, added, “If they do need to go [to the ER], we will help them get there.”

People using the service are never personally billed for it; but their insurance provider or Medicaid would be billed, Townes said.

“We know that we’re saving the community and state money,” Townes said.

The teams are comprised of a licensed clinical social worker, an addiction specialist, and mental health professionals, all of whom have had at least one year of professional experience.

The team also follows up with people, Townes said. “We want to make sure a crisis plan is in place.”

The Mobile Crisis Team is on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Its number is 1-866-437-1821. Their online chat service is available on its website: <https://www.trilliumhealthresources.org/en/For-Individuals-Families/Crisis-Mobile/>.