



CITY OF RICHMOND
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THE COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE
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Richmond-Dr. Antionette V. Irving, Sheriff has been making a strong effort to save as many lives as possible by helping our returning citizens with any issues that they may face with their addictions.

The national opioid crisis is a result of the widespread use of highly addictive prescription and nonprescription drugs. The opioid epidemic started oddly enough by way of pain management. Through the efforts of pain management, particular drugs became highly addictive. The Opioid epidemic is a sad reality in the city of Richmond that we have been facing in the wake of so many other issues. As this crisis continuously hit home in the City of Richmond we found it necessary to do our part to help save as many lives as possible in and out of the jail systems.

According to the CDC's National Center for Health Statistics, the Opioid Epidemic caused more than 42,000 deaths in the year 2016. Most recently, there were an estimated 100,306 drug overdose deaths in the United States during the 12-month period ending in April 2021, an increase of 28.5% from the 78,056 deaths during the same period the year before.

The impact of this opioid epidemic is impacting communities and families across Virginia with nearly 11,000 related deaths last year. As is the case in cities across the country, Richmond is experiencing a significant spike during the pandemic. In fact, 155 people died the first year of the pandemic, which was up over 150% over the previous year.

Four years ago, the Richmond City Sheriff's Office introduced a new recovery program to provide inmates with an opportunity to participate in its G.R.A.C.E. Program, which stands for *Growth through Recovery over Addiction with Counseling to Empower*. It is a voluntary substance abuse treatment program.

"Last year 512 people housed in our facility participated in our G.R.A.C.E. program", said Sheriff Irving, "Although they go through the program, we are fully aware we have many offenders returning to their families and communities who are also returning to their old lifestyles and addictions. That is why we are equipping them with the ability to save their lives and the lives of others."

Within the Richmond City Justice Center, 140 inmates have received naloxone training (Narcan) to learn how to use the substance to reverse the life-threatening effects of opioids. Naloxone blocks the effects of opioids for 30 to 90 minutes. It can also be distributed in several different ways, by spraying into the nose, intravenously, or injecting into the muscle.



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“I am very passionate about the individuals we have returning to our communities. I want them to be safe, not only while they are with us; but, also while outside of the Justice Center. When they are in our facility, they have an opportunity to get clean from their addiction. It does not mean the addiction goes away. The addiction is still there. That’s the reality and we have to do something about that too,” said Sheriff Irving.

Unfortunately, when individuals return home to their normal lives they are still faced with addiction. Therefore we give them naloxone training inside the facility so that they are aware of how to help save others once presented with a situation of a possible overdose of a friend or loved one.

The Narcan training has been successful; however, there is a new threat in our area: fentanyl, a synthetic opioid that causes respiratory distress and death when taken in high doses or when combined with other substances, especially alcohol or other illicit drugs such as heroin or cocaine.

As Richmond now sees addiction to fentanyl on the rise and an increase in overdoses relating to that drug, the Sheriff’s Office has implemented another training program, Fentanyl Test Strips. Inmates are receiving training before their release on how to use the Fentanyl Test Strips to detect fentanyl in substances prior to usage. Our hope is they will realize the danger and make an informed decision regarding the lethality and not use. Additionally, they will be able to inform the medic of what was in the substance when their friend or loved one is in a crisis.

“Sometimes individuals don’t even know a substance is laced with fentanyl, which makes for a very dangerous and deadly situation because fentanyl is highly addictive and deadly. By providing the test strips and training, our hope is they will detect it, realize the danger, and make an informed decision regarding the lethality, said Sheriff Irving”.

Ultimately, the Sheriff’s Office wants individuals to be able to detect fentanyl and make the informed choice not to take it. In addition, if there is a fentanyl overdose, individuals will be able to inform the emergency medical professionals of what was in the substance when their friend or loved one is in a crisis. When people are in the midst of an opioid overdose, every second is critical and is the difference between life and death.

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