

## Opioid Response Project Team Spotlight: 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District

The 2nd Judicial District Opioid Coalition includes the district attorney and chief district court judge, as well as human services and law enforcement agencies from each of its five counties: Beaufort, Hyde, Martin, Tyrrell, and Washington. This rural region came with unique challenges and a dedicated group of leaders who saw a need for changes.

The team's original project manager, Kirsten Smith, came on board at the team's launch, excited to bring community leaders together to work collectively. "We recognized the growing opioid crisis in our community," said Smith. "There wasn't even a substance use disorder task force at the time."

A group of leaders began meeting monthly, and the team continued to grow. There were no existing syringe exchange programs in the area, and relatively few available resources. But the team was dedicated to taking action and finding solutions. They started by launching a Facebook page to help build community awareness, then continued with more targeted educational efforts. "The fact that communication was open, that really helped," said Smith.



The team worked on prevention by offering free overdose prevention trainings, including offering free Naloxone kits and medication lock boxes. They worked to increase treatment options in their region as well, including behavioral health services and peer support through the local health department. Local EMS partnered with the team to offer leave-behind brochures about available local programs and resources, focused on harm reduction and other needs like housing, clothing, and healthcare.

One of the team's biggest successes was the launch of two syringe exchange programs in their highest need counties. "Now all 5 counties are served by a syringe exchange program," said Smith.



Navigating the COVID-19 pandemic has definitely been a challenge for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Judicial District, as it has for all communities across the state. The team relies on virtual meetings and social media to keep communication ongoing.

The pandemic also put a temporary hold on syringe exchange programs. They to shift to offering only delivery requests for a period of time, but the programs recently opened back up, according to Smith.

Looking for silver linings, the team noticed an uptick in meeting attendance because of the virtual format. Members spend less time traveling, which offers them more time for attending meetings. “We have a very chatty group and I’m very thankful for that,” said Smith. “But I do miss the face-to-face interaction.”



The 2nd Judicial District Opioid Coalition is extremely grateful for the Opioid Response Project, according to Smith. “We’ve been able to develop an action plan and set goals,” she said. “It has been so good to show what we’re doing and track what we’re doing, keeping people involved and morale high.”

The statewide forums offered the teams support as they worked toward their collective impact goals. The team found the forums to be a great opportunity to get out of their silos and collaborate as a district.

Making new connections around the state was also really helpful to their work. “We connected with the 8<sup>th</sup> judicial district,” said Smith. “That was a lot of fun and we were able to bounce ideas off of each other. I do think we’ll stay in touch even after the project ends.”

Learn more about the [Opioid Response Project](#).

