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## PUBLIC LIBRARIES RESPOND TO THE OPIOID CRISIS WITH THEIR COMMUNITIES: CASE STUDIES

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# Case Study: Barrington Public Library

Through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, OCLC and the Public Library Association have conducted research into how public libraries are supporting their communities through the opioid crisis, and how libraries are partnering with organizations to meet local needs. This profile was created through interviews with eight individuals: two staff members at the Barrington Public Library, two staff members at Barrington Adult Youth Team, a library board member, and three community members who participated in events at the library. Their thoughts and experiences may not be generalizable to all of the staff of the library or their partners.

*This is one of eight research-based case studies highlighting varying opioid response efforts across eight locations in the US. Additional information about the project can be found online at [oc.lc/opioid-crisis](https://oc.lc/opioid-crisis).*

## Community and Library Overview

Barrington Public Library (BPL) has a service population size of 16,068 and operates with one central location. It has an operating budget of \$2,053,831 with seven professional librarians and 39 other staff, totaling 48 personnel. The library reported 186,819 patron visits.<sup>1</sup>

Barrington, RI, is comprised mostly of White populations (93.4%), some Asian populations (3.7%), and some Hispanic or Latino populations (2.7%). Almost all of its citizens hold a high school diploma (96.7%) and over two-thirds of its citizens hold a bachelor's degree (67.7%).<sup>2</sup>

The median household income is \$117,408, and 2.8% of its residents are living in poverty.<sup>3</sup> Barrington's unemployment rate is 2.9%<sup>4</sup>, and 1.9% of the population does not have health insurance.<sup>5</sup>

Bristol County has a prescribing rate of 39.7, which is the number of retail opioid prescriptions dispensed per 100 people. The number of general drug overdose deaths for Bristol County was 31 people from 2015 through 2017.<sup>6</sup> From 2009 to 2016, Rhode Island experienced a 2.5-fold increase in the number of drug overdose deaths.<sup>7</sup>



**1 LIBRARY LOCATION**



**SERVICE POPULATION, 16,068**



**UNINSURED RATE, 2.3%**



**OPIOID PRESCRIBING RATE, 39.7  
(per 100 people)**



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“I think it’s really important that they were already in tune with educating people and bringing awareness to mental health, and that it’s not just the presentations that we were offering to the community, but it’s about the staff being educated about increasing their abilities to understand and better serve their customers as they come in.”

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—Community Partner Director

## Barrington Public Library’s Opioid Response

Barrington Public Library has offered a variety of community engagement and mental health and wellness activities to address the growing opioid crisis. A robust six-month program of events is listed in the calendar in the appendix at the end; several highlights include:

- Community discussion of the book, *Dreamland: The True Tale of America’s Opiate Epidemic*
- Study night for teens that included food, space to study, yoga, and a therapy dog
- Mental Health First Aid Training to teach the skills to respond to the signs of mental illness and substance use in youth
- Film screenings related to substance use disorders and mental health, such as *Inside Out* for younger audiences and *Suicide: The Ripple Effect* for adults
- Naloxone training offered to the public
- Promoting drug take-back days

BPL planned a wide variety of programs to engage a diverse range of community members. In addition to the programming, all library staff received training on administering naloxone and one staff member participated in Mental Health First Aid training to support interactions with patrons experiencing mental health crises.

BPL and their partners at Barrington Adult Youth Team (BAY Team) developed the programming to be more broadly about wellness. Together, they wanted to help address the stigma associated with people experiencing substance use issues, and the resistance within the community to acknowledge the impact of opioid misuse in Barrington. This broad focus resulted in the “It’s Time We Talk” campaign, which had the underlying goal to connect the community through a series of discussions and events promoting emotional wellbeing.

The library director spearheaded the effort and worked to get buy-in from staff and community members and leaders at town council meetings and through communication channels such as social media, the library website, the local newspaper, and flyers posted at different locations throughout Barrington.

## Partnering for Success

The library director and staff from the BAY team met in February 2018 through their participation in Community Overdose Engagement (CODE), which is an initiative through the Department of Health, under the strategic plan of the Governor’s Overdose Task Force. The BAY Team was tasked with leading CODE and implementing the strategies such as the creation of a resource brochure for distribution throughout town, including at the library and by first responders.

The BAY Team operates as the substance abuse coalition for Barrington, and administers

grants throughout Bristol County, which includes the towns of Bristol, East Providence, Warren, and Barrington. Leveraging the BAY Team’s extensive relationships with community and statewide services made it possible for the library to present a wide variety of content and speakers in its six months of opioid response programming.

Prior to planning any activities, the BAY Team sought to understand how the opioid response activities would be received by the Barrington community as part of their regular programming. They did so through a community needs assessment, surveying parents and key community stakeholders. As a result, they concluded that the community was not yet ready for a six-month program specifically focused on opioid misuse. Instead, the team decided to approach the topics through a series called “It’s Time We Talk,” which incorporates substance misuse issues into community discussions and events on mental wellness.

In addition to working directly with the BAY Team, BPL continued to participate in CODE which is comprised of town leaders; rescue, fire, and police representatives; the YMCA; the superintendent of schools; faith-based leaders; community organizations; the recreation department; and the library. The group provided feedback and support to BPL and the BAY Team during program development.



BPL used materials from the Change Direction campaign to talk about and promote mental health awareness..  
*Photo courtesy of Give an Hour*

## Funding

The town manager prompted BPL’s educational events by sharing information about a grant opportunity with the library director. Because the library was already peripherally involved in working to address the opioid crisis as a community stakeholder, it made sense to the director to take a more active role.

The library then applied for and received a \$10,000 community grant from the Rhode Island Foundation to support six months of community-wide programming. The Friends of the Barrington Public Library contributed an additional \$1,000. BPL and the BAY Team covered indirect costs of staff time to plan and implement the programs.

## Local Conditions Leading Up to the Library’s Response

Several local factors and conditions led to BPL’s response to the opioid crisis with their community partners including:

- increased impact of the opioid crisis in the local area
- a change in needs of the community and the patrons coming into the library
- difficult situations indicating a need for staff training and support
- grant funding opportunity

Through their participation in the Barrington Community Support Coalition and CODE, BPL and its partners were discussing the national opioid crisis, noting its increasing impact on the community. Around the same time, a patron who visited the library experienced a mental health crisis, and staff were unsure about how best to respond—indicating a need for staff training and support. Moreover, the library’s location on the bus route from Providence was bringing vulnerable populations looking for safe spaces into the library, and BPL saw an increase in this population.

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“The opioid crisis is one that we all need to address. What better way to bring it to the community than to our library, where people feel so welcome and so safe? Our library is where all can learn according to their own interest and at their own comfort level about this critical issue that has such an important impact for all of us.”

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—Barrington Public Library Board Member

As one library frontline staff member explained, “There have been different populations that have been coming in over the past ten or 11 years. A lot more people are experiencing homelessness. I think we have to try to create a culture within the library and within the community where we recognize and try to work with a person in noticeable distress. Let’s show compassion. Let’s see if they need help.” The combination of these factors prompted the library to apply for grant funding when the opportunity arose.

## Reactions and Experiences of Library Staff, Board, and Community Members

Overall the reactions and experiences of BPL staff, the media, and impacted community members are positive and supportive of the library’s opioid response activities.

### LIBRARY STAFF AND BOARD

BPL’s staff and board were supportive of the six-month program of opioid response wellness activities offered to the public, though more communication about the purpose and expectation of the opioid response activities could have been shared with the staff to build buy-in and support. Library staff also mentioned the value of the Mental Health First Aid training in helping to support patrons experiencing a mental health crisis.

A library board member shared their perspective of the activities and efforts of the director,

“The vision of our director and her partnership with the BAY Team truly contributed to the success. Our library has a history of, and our current director has a personal and professional commitment to, bringing important issues to our library that affect our community.”

### MEDIA

Media response to the library’s opioid response work has been neutral to positive. Although the local media have not taken as active a role in covering BPL activities as the library would like, they are receptive to publicizing events if the library and its partners are proactive about submitting press releases. The local newspaper contains a section where the library can list its events.

### COMMUNITY MEMBERS

Based on the results of the BAY Team’s community readiness assessment, BPL staff and partners were concerned there would be resistance from the community regarding the opioid response programs offered. Anecdotal feedback from patrons has only been positive, with comments that they learned a lot from attending the events and appreciated them. However, naloxone posters hung in the library bathroom have been torn down several times.

A community member who participated in the library’s programming shared this, indicating the value of the activities, “I felt like I learned something at each of the events I attended. I really support the mission of educating youth, certainly, but also adults about substance abuse because I think that’s probably the best way to prevent people from using.”

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“Our library is a vibrant center of community knowledge and community participation. Our director’s commitment to making sure that important public issues are represented maintains that essential mission.”

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—Barrington Public Library Board Member

## Outcomes of the Library’s Response

Many positive outcomes have occurred as a result of BPL’s opioid programming, including:

- strengthened partnerships
- similar programs offered at other libraries in the region
- increased awareness and knowledge of mental health issues among community members

In order to implement the community-wide events, BPL developed new partnerships and strengthened existing ones. For example, the library developed a new relationship with the local schools when they worked together to publicize their youth-focused Mental Health First Aid Training and exam study nights.

Through their relationship with and funding from the local and regional prevention coalitions, the libraries in East Providence offer programs and events similar to those hosted at Barrington Public Library, such as therapeutic theater, which offers people in recovery an opportunity to use performance as a way to express themselves. Lastly, community members who attended the events indicated they learned a lot about mental health and substance use disorders and are now more aware of what might be happening in their community.

### FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESS

Many factors contributed to the success of BPL’s activities, such as:

- an involved, well-resourced community that values learning
- a champion at the library and support from community leaders to drive the work forward
- strong, collaborative relationship between the library and its partner, the BAY Team
- the BAY Team’s connections throughout the community

BPL benefited from working in a local context with a history of active community organizations and collaboration across groups. Since 1987, the BAY Team has been working on prevention issues locally and recently completed 10 years of activities supported by the federally-funded Drug Free Communities program. BPL started working with the BAY Team as a result of the opioid response activities and the library director has now formally joined their board.

Several of Barrington’s community organizations lent their support to the library’s grant application to the Rhode Island Foundation and wrote letters of recommendation. The BPL director’s commitment to addressing the opioid crisis and initiative to secure grant funding, in collaboration with the BAY Team, were key elements of the success of the programs. This strong and effective partnership made



Flyer promoting an “It’s Time We Talk” event.  
Photo courtesy of Barrington Public Library



it possible for program development and implementation to run smoothly. BPL's opioid response activities also benefited from the BAY Team's capacity-building skills and extensive network of contacts.

## Challenges, Needs, and Opportunities

Through the course of developing and implementing their opioid response activities, BPL experienced challenges, needs, and identified opportunities for the work moving forward.

### CHALLENGES AND NEEDS

- There is a perception among community members that drug misuse is not occurring locally and therefore is not affecting their community.
- There is stigma present in the community toward people with substance use disorders.
- Implementing a series of programs requires significant staff time and effort; additional staff is needed to provide administrative and technology support.
- Attracting sufficient interest in library programs can be difficult; several opioid response events were canceled due to low registration numbers.
- Additional and ongoing staff-wide training and professional development on topics of mental health and substance use disorder is needed to continue to build staff skills and confidence in these areas.

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“The biggest thing we have here is stigma. If we go really heavy with these topics, we’re not going to get anywhere. Let’s go in the side door because it all relates”

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—Barrington Public Library Director

### OPPORTUNITIES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The following are ongoing and future needs to support efforts to best address the opioid crisis:

- **Assess community needs** and readiness before implementing community-wide initiatives.
- **Be as transparent as possible** with staff about plans for opioid-related programming and involve them in the development process to build buy-in, especially for those responsible for implementing the programming and interacting directly with the public.
- **Have a strong partnership** with an organization like the BAY Team, which can bring an extensive network of established relationships with mental health and substance abuse organizations in the community, rather than needing to start from scratch.
- **Engage in an aggressive marketing campaign** that includes advertising through businesses, local hangouts, and other non-traditional channels to reach people who may not read the newspaper or attend the community events where the library typically advertises.

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The views, findings, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this case study do not necessarily represent those of the Institute of Museum and Library Services.

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## NOTES

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