

**Cobb Opioid Fatality Review (OFR) Project**  
**Year 2 Report – Accomplishments and Next Steps**  
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Applied Research Services, Inc. (ARS) has been retained by the Office of the District Attorney for Cobb County to serve as their research partner on the federally-funded Opioid Fatality Review (OFR) panel and related efforts to address the opioid epidemic in Cobb County. What follows is a report of project activities during the second year of the grant, October 1, 2019 through September 30, 2020.

**Establishing a Local Collaborative**

- Maintained collaborative partnerships with county and state agencies including the following:
  - Georgia Department of Community Supervision (DCS: Parole and Probation)
  - Division of Child and Family Services (DFCS)
  - Cobb/Douglas County Public Health Department
  - Local municipal law enforcement agencies and Kennesaw State University Police Department
  - Cobb County Medical Examiner’s Office
  - Georgia Department of Family and Children’s Services (DFCS)
  - Wellstar Health System
- Establishment of a community-wide Opioid Task Force
  - The initial Community Forum was held on January 27, 2020. This meeting was very well-attended, with representatives from many area agencies and concerned members of the public. In addition to a number of presentations, breakout groups organized by topic were held, with each group developing goals, objectives, and plans to meet subsequently. Many of the groups had begun meeting to meet on a monthly basis, only to be interrupted by the pandemic in March.
- Established a networking system within the Behavioral Health community including the following agencies:
  - WellStar Hospital System
  - Cobb and Douglas Community Service Board (CSB; the state-funded behavioral health provider)
  - Georgia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (statewide male and female inpatient beds)

- Private treatment providers including:
  - La Familia: Latino/Hispanic outpatient counseling
  - Someone Cares: Outpatient SA and MH outpatient treatment with MAT
  - His House: sober living residential facility
  - Alana Recovery: Intensive Outpatient
  - The Extension: Inpatient SA services for homeless clients
  - Harbor Springs Counseling Services: MAT
  - St Jude: MAT
- Working with SAMHSA’s GAINS Center to develop a sequential intercept model/map to address the opioid crisis in Cobb County. A series of preliminary discussions and interviews between the GAINS Center staff and project leadership led up to two large meetings on July 30<sup>th</sup> and September 3, 2020. The meeting on July 30 included two breakout focus groups as well. The result of the process was the joint development of a strategic plan, the implementation of which is being spearheaded by the Cobb County District Attorney’s Office.
- The grant-funded case manager continues to serve as a member of the Recovery Roundtable Leadership Committee at Davis Direction Foundation’s The Zone. The Zone/Davis Direction Foundation is one of the largest Recovery Community Organizations to support long-term recovery and reentry in the county and is known nationally for their leadership in this area.
- The Case Manager attends Cobb County’s Pretrial Diversion orientations on a bi-weekly basis to speak with first-time offenders and discuss wraparound services available to them and their families.

**Establishment of an Opioid Fatality Review (OFR) Panel in Cobb County**

- Opioid Fatality Reviews (OFR), scheduled to occur other month, were held on the following dates:
  - November 20, 2019
    - This was the first OFR panel meeting held, during which introductions were made and ground rules for participation were covered. Three cases were discussed, with significant input from representatives from the Medical Examiner’s Office, the Office of the District Attorney, the Office of the Attorney General, Cobb/Douglas Public Health, the Georgia Department of Community Supervision, and others. Representatives of the largest medical provider in the county, Wellstar Health System, were not present due to concerns regarding HIPAA.
  - January 15, 2019

- The second meeting of the OFR panel, which began with a statement regarding a change in communication protocols to address the HIPAA-related concerns expressed by Wellstar Health System (who were nonetheless not present due to these stated concerns). One case was discussed during this meeting of the OFR panel.
  - March 18, 2020 (*cancelled*)
    - This meeting was cancelled due to the coronavirus pandemic and resulting statewide lockdown.
  - May 20, 2020
    - This meeting was held virtually due to the pandemic. Two cases were discussed. The meeting was less well-attended than the two prior in-person meetings, likely due to the pandemic and reassignments to pandemic-related issues. Cobb/Douglas Public Health has reassigned the two personnel who had been working on this project to pandemic-related duties.
  - July and September 2020 (*cancelled*)
- Pandemic-related issues resulted in significant difficulties obtaining consents from next-of-kin, a necessary step in identifying cases suitable for review. The case manager assigned to this project has been working with the Medical Examiner’s Office to identify appropriate cases and obtain consents for future cases.
- Identified challenges included the following:
  - HIPAA and PHI laws/policies
  - Ensuring the future participation of Behavioral Health and Healthcare, which will depend in large part on the degree to which we are able to resolve questions and concerns about HIPAA and PHI.
- Tools created for use in the OFR Process include the following:
  - Confidentiality documents
  - Paper-based case report form
  - Logic Model and Evaluation Plan
  - Using networks and partnerships in the community the case manager has created a treatment guide/brochure and community resource booklet with up to date community-based services (e.g., food, housing, utility services, healthcare and behavioral healthcare providers). These tools are used to provide appropriate resources to residents of Cobb County impacted by the opioid crisis.
  - COAP grant informational brochure and case management brochure
- OFR Policies and Procedures established and implemented included the following:

- Development of OFR protocol, procedures
- Selection of OFR cases for each of the first three reviews
- OFR Panel meetings will be held the third Wednesday of every odd-numbered month
- OFR facilitators created and implemented a practice to de-identify decedents during each review, such that no names are provided to participants not responsible for providing individual-level information for the reviews
- Established and implemented a case management database using the Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap) program. This program, made available at no cost to sites implementing OFR panels, was installed and modified specifically for the Cobb OFR by Cobb County Information Technology staff. The program is housed on a county server and has been made accessible to county staff working on the OFR project as well as to this author.

### **Community Outreach**

- Continued participation in the Recovery RoundTable Leadership Committee, which meets on a quarterly basis
- The aforementioned Community-wide Opioid Task Force and the subcommittees established as a result

### **Establishment of Other Community Relationships/Partners**

- Continued collaboration with the Georgia overdose prevention coalition
- Continued collaboration with accountability court coordinators in Cobb County

### **Data Analysis and Reports**

- ODMAP implementation
  - Mapping of overdose cases (ongoing)
  - Analysis of overdose locations (ongoing)
  - Compilation of findings and recommendations from OFR panels (ongoing)

### **Trainings/Webinars/Conferences**

- In November 2019 we participated in a site visit to Erie County, New York to observe and interact with leadership in their opioid response initiative, which has become a national model. Those participating from the Cobb County initiative included representatives from the District Attorney’s Office, the county commission, Cobb/Douglas Public Health, and this author. We met with law enforcement, public health, and other leaders, observed a monthly meeting of the collaborative, observed Opioid Court, toured various facilities including the mobile crisis intervention van, and engaged in numerous discussions over the course of the three-day visit.
- Attended the 2020 COAP National Forum, March 10 – 12, in Arlington, Virginia. A number of national leaders provided presentations, breakout groups were held, and a number of networking and information sharing events took place.

- Participated in the aforementioned Sequential Intercept Mapping process with GAINS Center staff.

**Continual efforts**

- Ongoing data collection, analysis and reporting
- Participation on the national OFR listserv
- Continuing to address and resolve issues regarding HIPAA and PII, permitting full data sharing and participation in the OFR panel by healthcare and behavioral health agency personnel