



Lincoln County Outreach Expands Addiction Services to Waldoboro

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February 7, 2018

Angela Musto (left) and William Ellsworth, of Lincoln County Outreach, discuss the program's expansion to Waldoboro. (Alexander Violo photo)

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Lincoln County Outreach has expanded its addiction recovery services to Waldoboro in an effort to better serve area residents.

Since its start as an outreach program working with men's and women's groups at Two Bridges Regional Jail in Wiscasset, Lincoln County Outreach has grown to serve men's and women's groups from its offices in the basement of the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office in Wiscasset and, more recently, a coed peer support outreach group at VFW Post 4525 on Mill Street in Waldoboro.

At its heart, Bill Ellsworth said, the outreach program is about helping people throughout the 19 municipalities of Lincoln County.

"How do we help people in our community? That's really what it is all about," Ellsworth, head of the county's outreach program, said.

Ellsworth said the program takes a local approach to the nationwide opioid epidemic.

"We have an epidemic here. How do we focus on the people here and what help can we offer them?" he said.

The program offers recovery coaching to clients, helping them land jobs, grow relationships, and work on personal development, according to Ellsworth.

"Lincoln County Outreach is a grass-roots operation we make available to people in our community who have a continuation of substance-abuse problems," he said.

Lincoln County Outreach has also worked with Sagadahoc County and is in the initial stages of planning to provide services to a group in the Damariscotta area.

To date, the outreach program has served over 600 clients.

Ellsworth started the program, a partnership between the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office and the Mid Coast Hospital Addiction Resource Center, over 20 years ago. The sheriff's office, with county funds, contracts with the hospital to run the program.

Since the late 1980s, Ellsworth has been the sole recovery coach working through the Lincoln County Sheriff's Office, but in 2016, the contract between the sheriff's office and the Addiction Resource Center at Mid Coast Hospital in Brunswick was expanded, allowing Angela Musto, a recovery coach with the Addiction Resource Center, to join Ellsworth in supporting residents of Lincoln County struggling with addiction.

Musto started with the program in January 2016 as an intern.

“There is no other program out there like this program. Bill (Ellsworth) developed the program in the 1990s. It’s all about peers helping peers,” Musto said.

Musto said the peer support group in Waldoboro started in April 2017, and has been a popular addition to the Lincoln County Outreach.

Musto said the group meets at the VFW hall from 8-9:30 a.m. each Tuesday.

The Waldoboro group has grown quickly, she said, starting with a couple clients in April 2017, growing to 20 in August 2017, and now serving around 40 people.

Ellsworth said the outreach program decided to start the group in Waldoboro because it is an area of the county where addiction issues are prevalent.

“We basically took our outreach program, put it on a helicopter, and dropped it in the middle of it up in Waldoboro,” Ellsworth said.

Ellsworth and Musto work with program participants in group settings and individually, to discuss everyday issues and help them find their footing as they recover from addiction, including by finding gainful employment. The work aims to reduce rates of recidivism in Lincoln County.

Ellsworth said a key to the program’s recovery efforts is community involvement and engagement, having neighbors come in and offer support to those in recovery.

Musto said friends are encouraged to come to the meetings and lend support to their friends’ recovery efforts.

A police officer attends every meeting, but officers leave their badges at the door and interact with clients on a person-to-person basis, Ellsworth said. He credited Waldoboro Police Chief Bill Labombarde for his willingness to work with the program since its start last year.

“He’s committed to the program,” Ellsworth said.

Musto said the Waldoboro group had a Christmas party, for which the police chief dressed up as Santa Claus, and 25-30 donated cans of popcorn were given out as gifts.

“We had people there who wouldn’t have got a Christmas gift otherwise,” Musto said.

According to Ellsworth, the success of the program would not be possible without the support of the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners, Lincoln County Sheriff Todd Brackett, and Lincoln County Sheriff’s Deputy James Read, of the LCSO Diversion Program.

“The secret to this program is that it is community-based. Local law enforcement has really given us their support. Support also comes from the commissioners, and the sheriff has really been behind all this. We are fortunate enough to have a sheriff with an open mind who has given us a chance to do something here,” Ellsworth said.

Ellsworth also made a point to thank the Waldoboro community for supporting the program. In October of last year, the outreach program couldn’t afford to keep the lights and heat on in the VFW building during its meetings, so the VFW stepped up and raised \$1,500 for the program.

“They raised the money so we could have heat and light in the building every Tuesday,” Ellsworth said.

According to Ellsworth, 89 percent of recovery coaching clients have remained free from incarceration, translating to significant cost savings for the county.

Aiding in keeping recidivism rates low, Musto said, are the trips she makes with Ellsworth to the jail to meet people entering their program.

“We are meeting them where they are at,” she said. “It is very important to do this. We begin a therapeutic relationship there. Before an inmate is released, they have two people to contact and somewhere to go when they get out.”

To house one inmate costs Two Bridges Regional Jail \$57,600 a year, according to a November 2017 presentation by Lincoln County Outreach to the New England Council on Crime and Delinquency in Portland.

In addition to recidivism rates, Ellsworth keeps tabs on the number of clients who become gainfully employed. Ninety percent of people in the program are gainfully employed, he said.

“We work with local merchants to help find employment opportunities,” he said.

In addition to cost savings for taxpayers, the outreach program saves money for clients.

“There are no fees and no financial burden for people to take part,” Musto said.

Musto said inmates often must undergo court-ordered counseling upon their release from jail. Instead of paying out of pocket for private services, clients can come to the outreach program.

Ellsworth said education, encouragement, support, and empowerment are key components of the outreach program, citing respect for the individual and a safe atmosphere where individuals can speak as key factors in the initiative’s success.

“We provide a safe and open environment and that is very important. Clients are not being judged or chastised,” Ellsworth said.

In their office, Ellsworth and Musto employ a whiteboard as they work with clients, on which appear questions such as “Who am I?” and “What quality of person am I?” and “Have I met my own potential?”

Lincoln County Outreach offers one-on-one counseling after the meetings in Waldoboro. The one-on-one sessions fulfill some clients’ probationary requirements and give the coaches an opportunity to speak with clients.

Musto said addiction can span generations, and a key part of Lincoln County Outreach is breaking the chain of addiction.

“It’s not only about what we do to help them rehabilitate, but what can we do to help ensure their children have fruitful lives,” Musto said.

Musto said the program is open to everyone and encouraged individuals interested in taking part in recovery coaching to come see them in Wiscasset or at the weekly meeting in Waldoboro.

“Anybody can walk through these doors and know someone is here to help them,” Musto said.