Emily's Hope®

PORT

Post-Overdose Response Team

2026 PILOT PROGRAM PROGRESS REPORT

Providing Hope After Overdose



STOPPING STIGMA.

SAVING LIVES.

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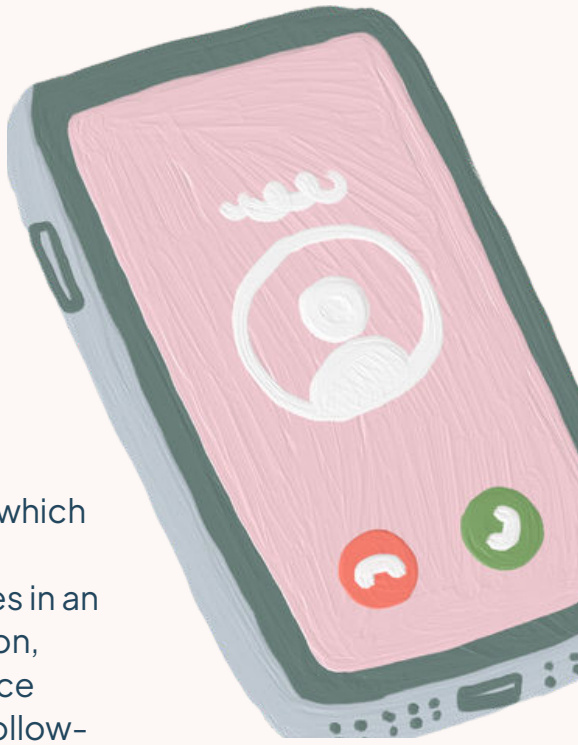
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Emily's Hope®

Emily's Hope Post-Overdose Response Team

PROGRAM OVERVIEW



The Emily's Hope Post-Overdose Response Team (PORT) was established in March 2024 in partnership with the South Dakota Department of Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health, to provide compassionate, evidence-based support for individuals following a non-fatal overdose. While emergency departments are key referral partners, the program welcomes referral pathways from anyone, including first responders, healthcare providers, law enforcement, community organizations, family members, friends, and individuals seeking support for themselves.

Our team of peer support specialists has lived experience, which helps to build trust, reduce barriers to recovery, and provide individualized support during one of the most vulnerable times in an individual's life. Services include recovery coaching, education, free naloxone with training, treatment and community resource navigation, risk assessments, safety planning, and ongoing follow-up for up to 12 months after an overdose to promote long-term recovery.

All services are free of charge, require no commitment, and are provided in a HIPAA-compliant manner to ensure everyone recieves confidential support.

"We recently entered the third year of our PORT program, and we continue to see just how powerful it is when compassion meets timely support. Every survivor deserves someone who shows up for them without judgment and with real solutions."
– Angela Kennecke, Founder of Emily's Hope

Research continues to demonstrate the importance of immediate post-overdose intervention. Recent studies show that nearly 1 in 5 overdose survivors experience another overdose within one year of an emergency department visit, with the highest risk occurring during the first 7 to 30 days after discharge. Additionally, hospitalization can reduce opioid tolerance, increasing the risk of a fatal overdose if support is not immediately available. Studies also show that connecting individuals with peer support increases engagement in treatment, including a 45% increase in the initiation of medication for opioid use disorder (MOUD), while warm handoffs and continued follow-up help reduce repeat overdoses and improve long-term recovery outcomes.

By bridging the gap between emergency care and long-term recovery, PORT provides hope, connection, and life-saving support when it matters most.

Timeline

MARCH 2024

EMILY'S HOPE AND THE SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES DIVISION OF BEHAVIORAL HEALTH ESTABLISH A POST-OVERDOSE RESPONSE TEAM PILOT PROGRAM IN THE SIOUX FALLS AREA

SUMMER 2024-SPRING 2025

PORT ESTABLISHES PARTNERSHIPS, HIRES A PROGRAM MANAGER AND NINE PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS, BUILDS A RESOURCE CENTER, AND LEARNS FROM NATIONAL PORT TEAMS

APRIL 2025

EMILY'S HOPE PROPOSES EXPANSION TO FIVE COUNTIES

AUGUST 2025

PORT EXPANDS TO CODINGTON COUNTY AND HIRES THREE PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS

NOVEMBER 2025

PORT EXPANDS TO YANKTON COUNTY AND HIRES FOUR PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS

DECEMBER 2025

PORT EXPANDS TO TURNER COUNTY AND HIRES TWO PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS

JANUARY 2026

PORT EXPANDS TO BROOKINGS COUNTY AND HIRES ONE PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST

FEBRUARY 2026

PORT EXPANDS TO CLAY COUNTY

FEBRUARY 2026

EMILY'S HOPE PROPOSES EXPANSION TO FIVE ADDITIONAL COUNTIES

MAY 2026

PORT EXPANDS TO BROWN COUNTY AND HIRES ONE PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST

JULY 2026

PORT EXPANDS TO BEADLE COUNTY AND HIRES ONE PEER SUPPORT SPECIALIST

SINCE ESTABLISHMENT, PORT HAS EXPANDED SERVICES TO NINE COUNTIES, ONBOARDED 23 PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS, AND SUPPORTED OVER 43 SURVIVORS IN SOUTH DAKOTA

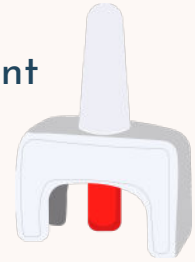
MARCH 2024 — NOVEMBER 2026

VISUAL WORKFLOW

ED Referrals:

1. Overdose occurs

EMS and Law Enforcement Officials are notified and administer naloxone.



2. Patient arrives at ED

The patient is transported to the ER, where ER physicians may administer buprenorphine if appropriate, and share information about post-overdose response.

3. Emily's Hope notified

ED staff fax pre-filled release of information, patient demographics sheet with current contact info, and MAT/MOUD orders, if applicable.

4. First interaction

A peer support specialist will respond within 48 hours, ideally prior to discharge, to offer:

- Resources for treatment
- Risk assessment and/or safety plan
- Naloxone training
- In-person or virtual counseling/guidance
- Continued follow-up support for a year



Non-ED Referrals:

1. Overdose occurs

The individual experiences and discloses a recent overdose event.

2. Emily's Hope notified

Law enforcement, community organizations, a loved one, or the individual will call (605) 215-0654 or fill out the HIPAA compliant referral form found on our PORT website to submit a referral.



3. First interaction

A peer support specialist will connect with the individual within 48 hours to offer:

- Resources for treatment
- Risk assessment and/or safety plan
- Naloxone training
- In-person or virtual counseling/guidance
- Continued follow-up support for a year

PROGRAM IMPACT

PORT HAS PARTNERED WITH MORE THAN

35

SERVICE PROVIDERS AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

90%

OF CLIENTS DO NOT EXPERIENCE AN OVERDOSE WITHIN A YEAR OF PARTICIPATING IN PORT

43

SURVIVORS SUPPORTED

Emily's Hope PORT
Post-Overdose Response Team

POST- OVERDOSE RESPONSE TEAM NOW SERVING

9

SOUTH DAKOTA COUNTIES

250+

INTERACTIONS WITH PEER SUPPORT



25+

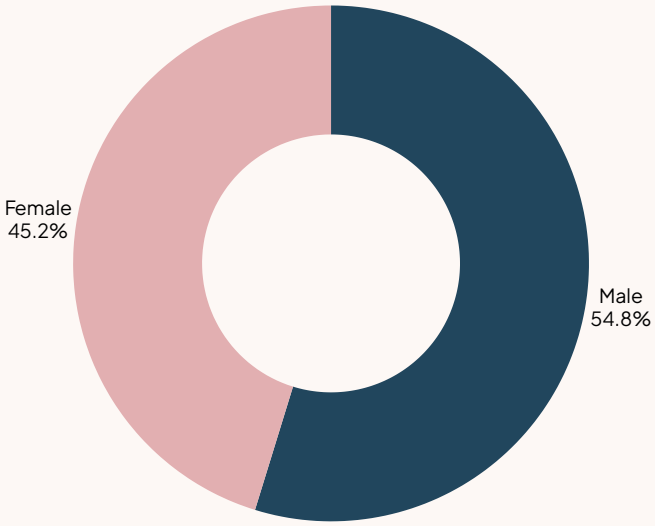
COMMUNITY-FOCUSED PRESENTATIONS ON PORT

MORE THAN **HALF**

OF OUR PORT CLIENTS HAVE BEEN CONNECTED TO TREATMENT OR HAVE REMAINED ENGAGED

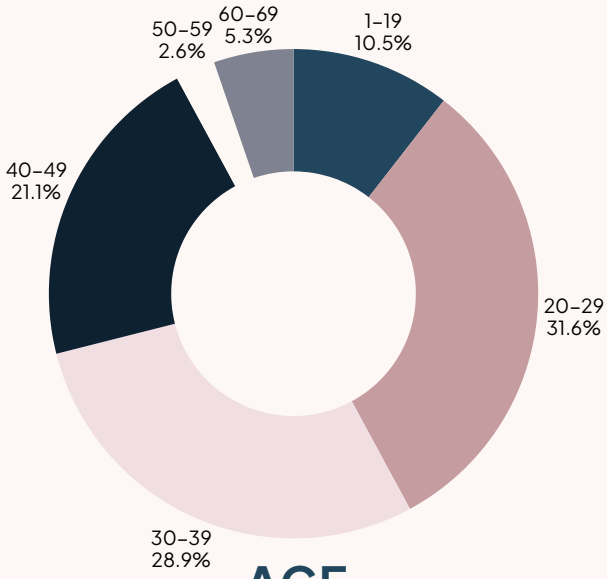
PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS **15**

CLIENT DEMOGRAPHICS



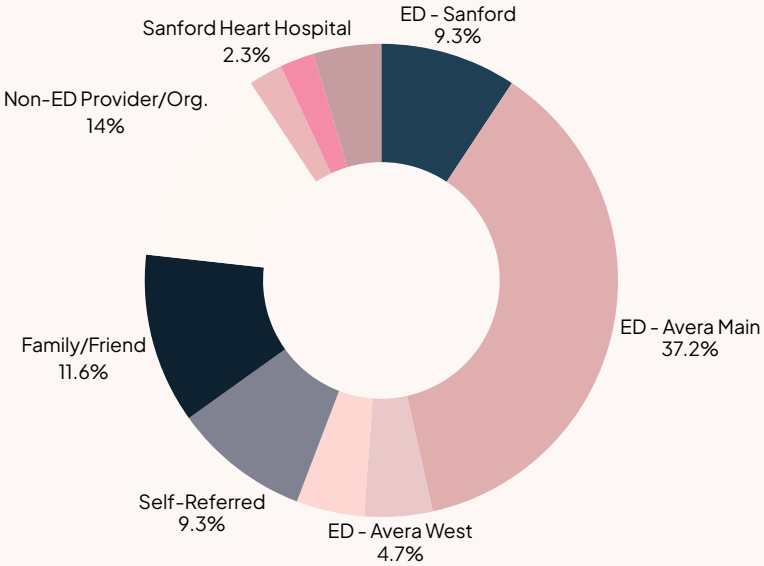
GENDER

- Male **55%**
- Female **45%**



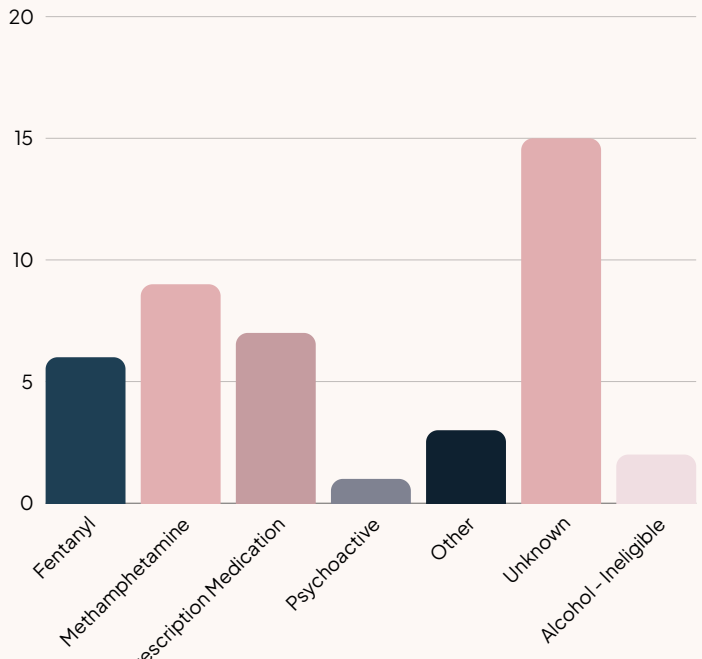
AGE

- 1-19 **10%**
- 20-29 **32%**
- 30-39 **29%**
- 40-49 **21%**
- 50-59 **3%**
- 60-69 **5%**



REFERRAL SOURCE

- ED - Sanford **9%**
- ED - Avera Main **37%**
- ED - Avera West **5%**
- ED - Avera East **5%**
- Self-Referred **9%**
- Family/Friend **12%**
- Non-ED Provider/Organization **14%**
- Sanford Heart Hospital **2%**
- Sanford Hospital (Non-ED) **2%**
- Avera Addiction Care Center **5%**



PRIMARY SUBSTANCE

Evidence of Impact

The research is clear: this work matters.

Narrow Opportunity for Future Overdoses:
Recent studies show that 1 in 5 overdose survivors experience a repeated overdose within one year of an emergency department visit, and 9% experience a fatal overdose. The risk is most elevated in the 7 to 30 days after hospital release (Kleinman et al., 2026).

Peer responders with lived experience reduce the "flight risk" of patients who often leave against medical advice, or AMA:
Data shows that patients who leave AMA are 10 times more likely to overdose within 30 days than those who complete treatment (Khan et al., 2024).

The Tolerance Gap:
Hospital stays, even short ones, can lower a patient's opioid tolerance. Without an immediate connection to a response team for Narcan distribution, MOUD, and a safety plan, the first use after discharge can be fatal (Donroe et al., 2016).

Patients are significantly more likely to start life-saving medication when met by a peer in the ED:
A 2024 study of over 12,000 patients treated in New Jersey found that implementing ED-based peer support led to a 45% increase in the probability of a patient initiating MOUD within 60 days of discharge (Treitler et al., 2024).

Reduction in "Revolving Door" Visits:
Historically, programs that utilize warm handoffs have seen a decrease in repeat medically treated overdoses (Treitler et al., 2024).

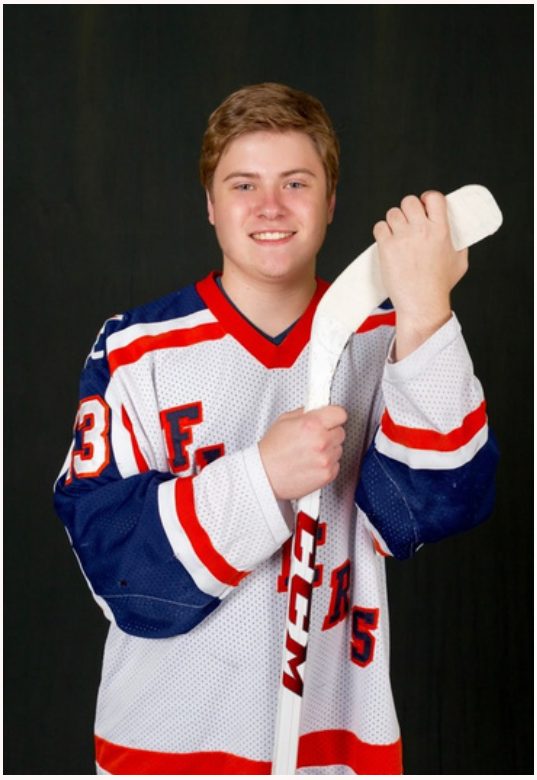
Meet Cameron Nielson

Client Testimonial: Recovery Begins with Connection

Cameron's journey with our team is a powerful testament of how recovery is possible when compassionate connection meets someone at a vulnerable moment in their life. Cameron had a bright and promising childhood, surrounded by support and a love for hockey, where his natural talent and dedication stood out from an early age. As a teenager, Cameron began experimenting with substances while struggling with the pressures and challenges of adolescence. What started as occasional marijuana use gradually progressed into a years-long battle with substance use disorder, bringing repeated setbacks, overdoses, and emotional hardship for both him and his family. Throughout his addiction, his loved ones experienced fear, uncertainty, and the stigma that so often accompanies substance use disorder, while continuing to hope for a turning point.

That turning point came after another overdose led Cameron to a local emergency department, where he was connected with the Emily's Hope Post-Overdose Response Team (PORT). There, he met peer support specialist Vanessa, whose own lived experience with addiction and recovery allowed her to connect with Cameron in a deeply personal and authentic way. Rather than offering judgment, she provided empathy, encouragement, and reassurance that recovery was possible. Cameron described this interaction as a "breath of fresh air" that gave him hope during one of the darkest moments of his life.



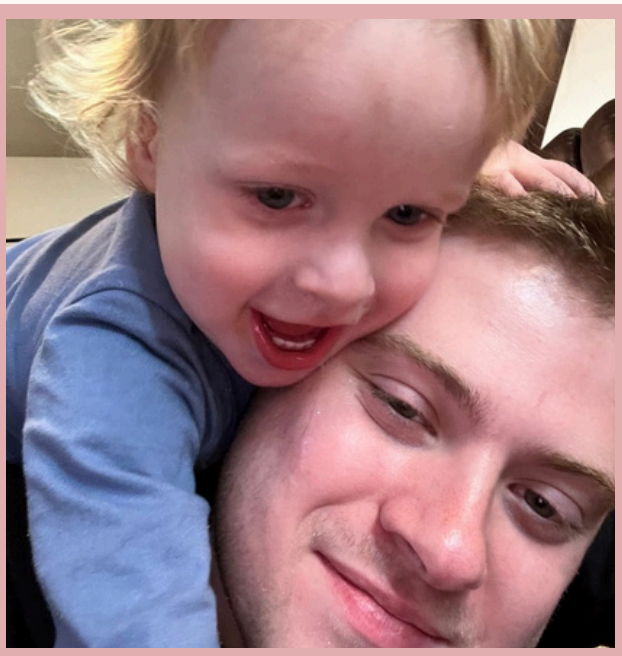


With continued support, Cameron began rebuilding his life through treatment and recovery. His story highlights the life changing impact that peer support holds the power to provide following an overdose, demonstrating how meeting individuals with compassion, understanding, and practical guidance can make the next step towards recovery much easier.

Cameron's experience also showcases the importance of programs like PORT, which bridge the critical gap between an overdose event and long-term recovery by ensuring that no one has to navigate the journey alone.

Today, Cameron is in long-term recovery with support from the medication Suboxone and is a proud father.









[Watch Cameron's Story Here]

PEER SUPPORT SPECIALISTS

At the heart of PORT is an extraordinary group of peer support specialists whose compassion, training, and lived experience drive the program's success. Every member of our team has been personally impacted by substance use disorder, either through their own recovery journey or through the experience of supporting a loved one as a parent, spouse, or caregiver. These experiences have proven to provide a unique foundation for building trust, offering hope, and connecting with individuals following one of the most vulnerable moments in their lives.

The team was intentionally designed to bring together individuals with diverse backgrounds, strengths, and perspectives to ensure that every person referred to our program has access to support that is both relatable and individualized. Many of our team members also serve in full-time roles within behavioral health, substance use treatment, recovery support, and other helping professions, which allows them to combine professional knowledge with lived experience to provide the highest quality of support.

While personal connection is at the core of every interaction, this work extends far beyond offering encouragement. Each peer support specialist works collaboratively with clients to assess risk, develop individualized safety plans, identify personal goals, reduce barriers to care, and connect them with treatment, recovery resources, housing, transportation, healthcare, and other essential resources. Recognizing that recovery is not a single event but an ongoing journey, the team provides consistent follow-up for up to 12 months after an overdose, meeting individuals where they are and adapting support as their needs evolve.


Cali


Brooke


Mickayla

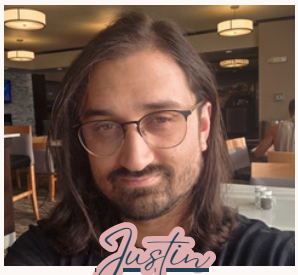

Vanessa


Kendra


Jenny


Stacy


Jeremy


Justin


Kimberlee


Jessica


Kandee


Sam


Andrea

A defining strength of PORT is the commitment to accountability and continuous improvement. Following every client interaction, peer support specialists complete detailed documentation that captures services provided, progress toward recovery goals, identified risks, referrals made, and changes in client needs. This comprehensive follow-up not only ensures continuity of support for the client, but also allows the program to measure engagement, identify emerging concerns, evaluate outcomes, and continuously improve the quality and effectiveness of services delivered.

Beyond direct client services, our team's dedication extends throughout the community. Peer support specialists volunteer at local Emily's Hope events, participate in naloxone education and distribution initiatives, collaborate with community partners, and advocate for reducing the stigma surrounding substance use disorder.

Their commitment to prevention, education, and recovery reflects a shared belief that lasting change is achieved through strong community partnerships and accessible, compassionate support.

"I remember feeling so frustrated that one doctor, one skillset, one place, couldn't just put a bandaid on the problem. Recovery was something I had to work on for many years alongside many people who brought knowledge and skills that helped me along the way"
– Cali Loria, Peer Support Specialist

PORT represents more than a program- it represents hope. Through unwavering dedication, authenticity, and belief in the possibility of recovery, our peer support specialists help transform moments of crisis into opportunities for healing. Their work continues to strengthen individuals, families, healthcare partnerships, and communities, making them an invaluable part of the organization's mission and a team of which we are immensely proud.





Meet Vanessa Needles

The Purpose Behind the Role: A Peer Support Specialist's Story

Vanessa Needles's life took a drastic turn at just 14 years old, when she was run over by a car. The accident left her with a fractured skull, a broken pelvis in four places, and several other severe injuries. To manage the excruciating pain, she was prescribed hydrocodone, a powerful opioid. "That moment didn't just injure my body," Vanessa says. "It changed the direction of my entire life."

As she navigated her teenage years, she found that substances provided a temporary escape from her reality. She said, "Substances became my solution long before they became my problem." Though she had dreams of attending college and fulfilling her family's hopes for her future, the growing grip of addiction began to derail her life. Even as the consequences mounted and she experienced the terror of overdosing, she found herself unable to stop. At 21, she completed a 30-day treatment program, but the cycle of the disease drew her back into use almost immediately after her release.





During this period of relapse, Vanessa made a choice that would result in a lifelong burden. She got behind the wheel while intoxicated and was involved in a tragic rollover accident. Her friend Vince, who was a passenger in the vehicle, did not survive. Vanessa pleaded guilty to vehicular homicide and, though she received a suspended sentence and forgiveness from Vince's family, she found that forgiving herself was nearly impossible.

With the weight of this tragedy, she continued to use until she reached a breaking point at age 22. Realizing she wanted more for her life, she made a solemn vow never to use drugs or alcohol again. Now 31, she has maintained her sobriety for nine years, finding that her true healing comes from serving others. Today, she is a vital member of our Post-Overdose Response Team, where she meets others in the same vulnerable state she once occupied. "Emily's Hope doesn't just save lives," Vanessa says. "It gave mine purpose."



"It's my responsibility and it's a privilege to stand in front of somebody and be that person for them,"
– Vanessa Needles, Peer Support Specialist

Vanessa's life today is a vibrant reflection of the goals she once thought were lost. She is a mother of three and is on the verge of completing her bachelor's degree in addiction studies. In an era where fentanyl has claimed the lives of many of her friends, she recognizes her survival as a profound gift. She now inspires others, proving that recovery is not just about survival, but about transformation. "My life is proof that even from the ashes," she notes, "something beautiful can grow."







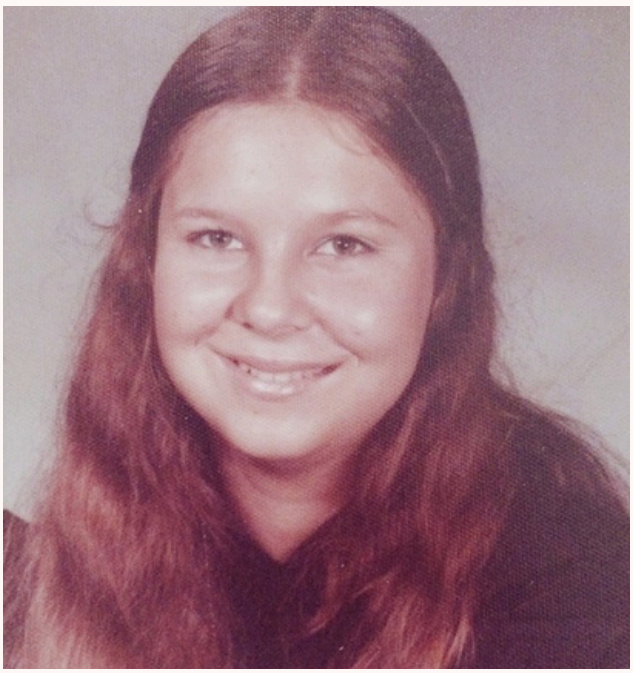
Meet Diana Leal

Emily's Hope Post-Overdose Response Team Program Manager

With a master's degree in Public Health, Diana Leal brings a unique combination of professional expertise, lived experience, and unwavering passion to her role as the Program Manager for our Post-Overdose Response Team. Her career has been guided by a commitment to improving the health and well-being of individuals and families impacted by substance use disorder, with a focus on creating meaningful, lasting change through prevention, education, and recovery support.

During graduate school, Diana focused her studies on substance use disorder within the perinatal period as a graduate researcher for a HRSA grant at South Dakota State University, working alongside mothers navigating recovery during pregnancy and early parenthood. This experience provided valuable insight into the complex barriers families face while reinforcing the importance of compassionate, person-centered care. In addition to her research work, she produced a policy analysis examining exposure testing in newborns and the implications for family structure and stability, to highlight policies within other states that prioritize treatment and recovery over criminalization. These experiences strengthened her understanding that lasting change requires not only individual support, but also improvements to the systems that serve people.

While her education and professional experiences have shaped her career, the driving force behind her work is deeply personal. At the age of 10, Diana lost her mother to long-term complications from substance use disorder, after years of struggling with addiction throughout her adolescence and adulthood. Experiencing a major loss at such a young age gave her firsthand insight into the profound ripple effects substance use disorder can have on individuals, children, families, and entire communities. It also instilled a lifelong commitment to ensuring that others have the opportunities for healing, support, and recovery that her own family did not.



Diana's mother, Deborah, one year before she left highschool and began using multiple substances



Deborah at 19 years old in the midst of her addiction

Today, as Program Manager, Diana is honored to help lead efforts that prevent fatal overdoses, expand access to life-saving resources, and support individuals as they begin and sustain their recovery journey. She is a firm believer that recovery is possible for everyone when individuals are met with compassion, dignity, and evidence-based care.

For Diana, this work is far more than a role, it is a personal mission rooted in both loss and hope. Every opportunity to help someone access care, remain engaged in recovery, or reconnect with their family represents the possibility of changing a life story. She is grateful to be part of a team dedicated to meeting people where they are, fostering hope, and helping build healthier futures for individuals, families, and communities.

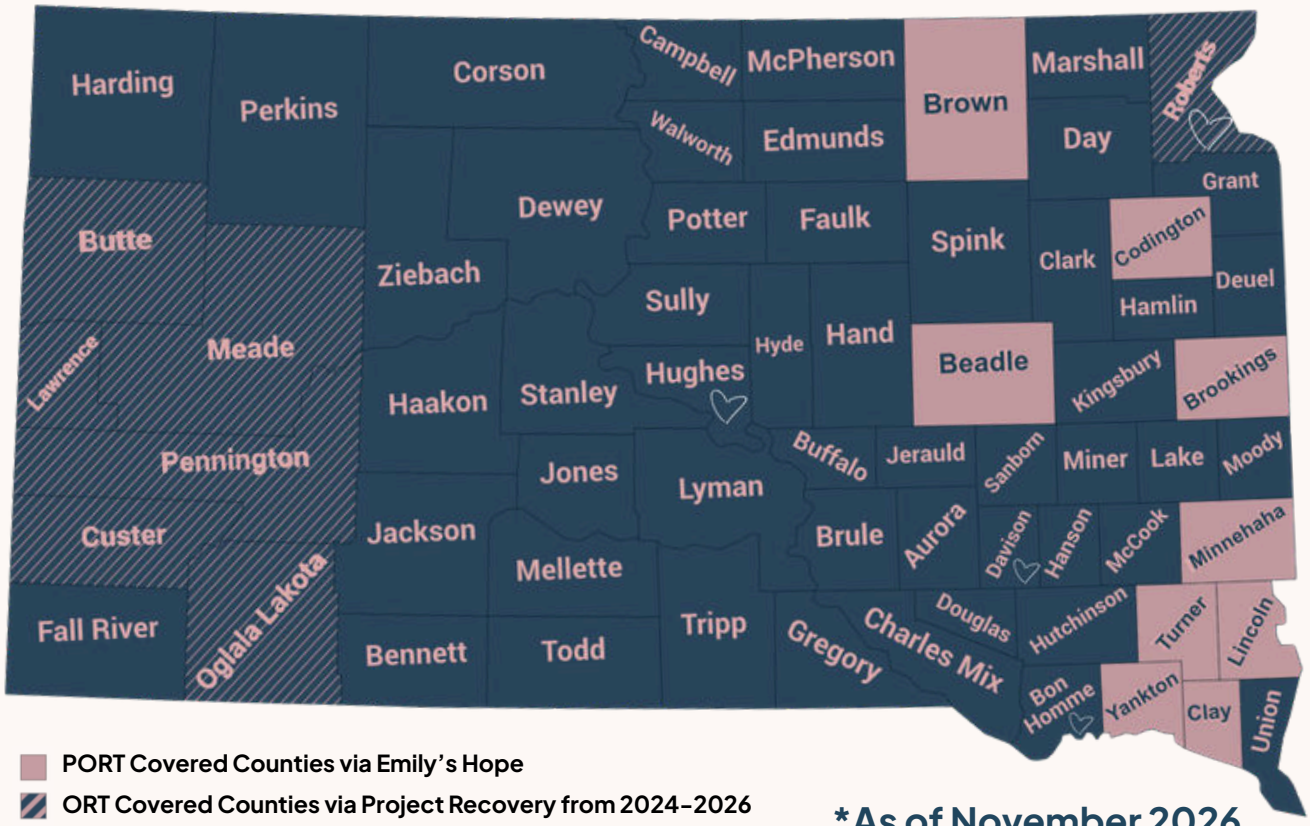
Emily's Hope PORT
Post-Overdose Response Team



Expansion

Program expansion has been a cornerstone of our mission to ensure that more overdose survivors across South Dakota have access to compassionate, evidence-based follow-up care. In April 2025, we proposed our first expansion into five additional counties in response to growing interest from local communities and the strong partnerships we had established with the two major healthcare systems serving those regions. These relationships created an opportunity to extend our services to individuals who previously had no access to post-overdose support.

Following the successful implementation of that expansion, we identified an opportunity to reach five more counties that demonstrated a clear, data-driven need for overdose response services. These counties had experienced higher rates of substance use disorder and overdose relative to their population and had also expressed interest in bringing the program to their communities. The selection process was guided by population size, overdose and substance use trends, and requests from local emergency healthcare leaders who recognized the value of connecting overdose survivors to ongoing support.



PORT Covered Counties via Emily's Hope

ORT Covered Counties via Project Recovery from 2024-2026

SD DSS Approval to Expand PORT via Emily's Hope

*As of November 2026

Expanding our program serves three primary purposes. First, it increases opportunities for referrals by strengthening partnerships with hospitals, emergency medical services, law enforcement, and other community organizations. Second, it raises awareness of the life-saving services available through PORT, ensuring that more individuals and providers know where to turn after an overdose.

Third and most importantly, expansion allows us to bring this critical resource to more communities, ensuring that overdose survivors have access to timely follow-up care, peer support, harm reduction resources, and connections to treatment and recovery services regardless of where they reside.

Every new South Dakota county we serve represents another community where individuals and families have greater access to support following an overdose event.



Brookings County PORT expansion kick-off meeting with Brookings Health System leadership and local law enforcement



Beadle County PORT expansion kick-off community event with Huron Regional Medical Center leadership, local law enforcement, and Kendra, our Beadle team peer support specialist



Yankton County PORT expansion kick-off meeting with Avera Sacred Heart leadership, Justin, one of our Yankton team peer support specialists, and local law enforcement



Clay County PORT expansion kick-off meeting with Sanford Vermillion leadership and local law enforcement

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

In addition to our partnership with the South Dakota Department of Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health, Emily's Hope PORT has worked to strengthen existing community partnerships and built new ones throughout program expansion. These relationships are critical to connecting as many overdose survivors to follow-up support as possible. Partners include healthcare systems, law enforcement, emergency medical services, as well as nonprofits, service providers, and community organizations who serve community members through diverse programs and services.

This work would not be possible without the following supporters:

SD Behavioral Health
Department of Social Services

St. Francis House
Moving People from Homelessness to Hope

Sioux Falls Police

Straight Up Care

Prairie Lakes Healthcare System

Minnehaha County
Strong Foundation. Strong Future.

The Ivy Center
Brookings Behavioral Health

link
creating a community where hope lives and everyone is respected

Midwest Street Medicine

Lost & Found

SDUIH
South Dakota Urban Indian Health
Integrated Care for All

Glory House

Brothers & Sisters Behind Bars

Codington County Restart

Avera

iRecover.US

Bethany Christian Services

Sanford Health

UGM

helpline center

Bishop Dudley Hospitality House

HRMC
Huron Regional Medical Center

Department of Veterans Affairs
United States of America

Sheriff Lincoln County

Brookings Health System

South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations

CFM
Center for Family Medicine

Project Recovery

Face It Together

South Dakota Health Link
Exchanging information. Changing lives.

BAART Programs

PatientCare EMS Solutions

Lewis & Clark Behavioral Health Services

CHWSD

Community Outreach

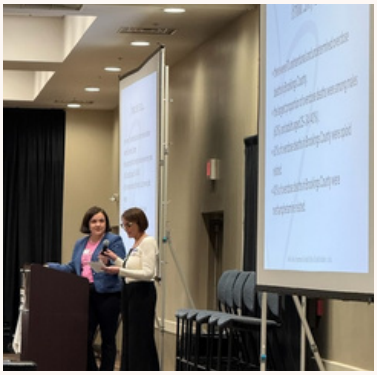
Creating a connection with our South Dakota neighbors is critical for the success of our PORT program. Our program manager, Diana Leal, continues to be actively engaged with healthcare providers, first responders, businesses, faith-based organizations, and community groups to increase awareness of substance use disorder, recovery, harm reduction, and the life-saving services available through our team.

Through educational presentations, community events, and collaborative partnerships, our team has worked to debunk misconceptions surrounding substance use disorder, encourage compassionate, evidence-based approaches to care, and highlight the critical role of early intervention and ongoing recovery support following an overdose.

By maintaining a visible presence throughout our PORT-serviced counties, our team has strengthened relationships with local partners while ensuring community members know where to turn for help. Every outreach opportunity represents more than program awareness and education, it is an opportunity to inspire hope, reduce stigma, and remind individuals and families that recovery is possible. Through continued community engagement, PORT is directly involved in creating a more informed, compassionate, and connected community where individuals affected by substance use disorder feel supported and empowered to seek help.

1. Our PORT Program Manager with Raelene Broz, Substance Use Disorder Program Director at Lewis & Clark Behavioral Health Services





2. Our PORT Program Manager with Karen Weber, Emergency Department Director at Brookings Health System co-presenting on PORT at the Stonger Together Conference in Brookings

3. Our PORT Program Manager with members of the Community Health Workers Collaborative of South Dakota





4. Our PORT Program Manager with Angie Collignon, Substance Use and Justice Programs Coordinator at Codington County Community Services

EXPERIENCE + EXPOSURE

Building strong partnerships with local emergency departments begins with understanding the unique environment in which they provide care. Throughout the year, our PORT program manager has invested time in strengthening these relationships by shadowing staff within each partnered emergency department. These experiences have provided valuable insight into the day-to-day operations, patient flow, discharge processes, and challenges faced by emergency department providers, nurses, case managers, and social workers. By observing these workflows firsthand, PORT has explored new opportunities to streamline referrals, improve communication, and integrate peer support into existing care processes in a way that best collaboratively serves both healthcare providers and patients.

These shadowing experiences have also helped foster stronger relationships with hospital staff, creating greater mutual understanding and trust in our partnership. By gaining a deeper appreciation for the fast-paced nature of emergency medicine, PORT has been able to better tailor our services to meet the needs of healthcare partners while ensuring individuals experiencing an overdose are connected to follow-up support as seamlessly as possible.

Our commitment to continuous improvement extends beyond our local partnerships. Emily's Hope traveled to North Carolina to shadow an experienced overdose response team recognized for its innovative approach to peer-led intervention and recovery support. This opportunity provided valuable insight into successful engagement strategies, operational workflows, community partnerships, and methods for sustaining long-term client relationships following an overdose.



Angela and Taryn with Shelby Joffrions, the City of Charlestons COSSUP/SCORF Project Coordinator



Angela and Taryn at their Medical University of South Carolina visit learning about a local MAT-ED program

Lessons learned from both local emergency department shadowing and the North Carolina site visit have helped strengthen the program's approach to post-overdose care. By embracing collaboration, learning from experienced partners, and continually evaluating opportunities for improvement, PORT remains committed to delivering high-quality, evidence-based services that meet the evolving needs of individuals, healthcare partners, and the communities we serve.

Advancements

Our Post-Overdose Response Team is grateful to highlight the following program advancements:

Expansion

By increasing our coverage area, we continue to strengthen opportunities for referrals and provide follow-up for additional South Dakotans.



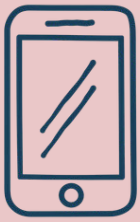
HealthLink Partnership

Our partnership with Healthlink and the South Dakota Department of Health provides details on overdose cases at each partnered emergency department.



Peer Support Specialist App

We've improved the workflow of peer support work with an interactive and one-stop-shop webapp exclusively for PORT peer support specialists.



Together, these initiatives enhance engagement with clients, expand the reach of PORT services, improve coordination across partners, and strengthen our team's ability to prevent future overdoses through timely, targeted, and evidence-based interventions.

BARRIERS + RESOLUTIONS

Limited Engagement from Select Partners

By creating a utilization strategy to measure engagement, PORT will establish regular communication to strengthen partner relationships, clarify expectations, provide tailored support and resources, and set shared goals with clear follow-up expectations. Recognizing contributions and demonstrating the value of participation is expected to strengthen long-term engagement.

Lack of Referrals

PORT will continue to advocate and work toward system changes to establish a routine and expectation of offering follow-up support to overdose survivors within each partnered emergency department. Additionally, increasing pathways and rewards for referrals will continue to improve our connection to survivors.

Unreliable Overdose Reporting

Following removal of access from the statewide ODMap platform, PORT has explored additional opportunities to make data-driven decisions such as establishing a partnership with the Department of Health to receive daily reports of overdose cases. By strengthening this partnership, we will gain a strong visual of missed connections with overdose survivors.

Moving Forward

As PORT continues to grow, so does our commitment to ensuring that every individual who experiences an overdose has access to timely, compassionate, and evidence-based support. The past two years have demonstrated the power of collaboration, peer support, and community partnerships to provide a strong foundation for the future.

In the coming year, our team will continue strengthening relationships with emergency departments, first responders, behavioral health providers, treatment programs, and community organizations to create an even more seamless continuum of support for overdose survivors. By expanding referral pathways, simplifying access to services, and increasing awareness of the program, we aim to ensure that no opportunity to connect someone with recovery support is missed, and networks of support extend far beyond the initial overdose event.

Continuously strengthening opportunities to connect with every survivor and quality improvement will remain a priority. By evaluating program outcomes, monitoring client engagement, and using data to identify trends, successes, and areas for growth, we will continue refining our services to maximize impact. Investing in peer support training and evidence-based practices will ensure our peer support specialists remain equipped to provide exceptional, person-centered care while adapting to the evolving needs of the communities we serve.

Looking ahead, our vision is to transform the way communities support recovery. Every partnership strengthened, every presentation delivered, every referral received, and every life touched brings us closer to a future where individuals are met with compassion instead of judgment and where recovery support is accessible whenever and wherever it is needed.

This work is far from over, but neither is our dedication. Guided by lived experience, strengthened by collaboration, and inspired by the resilience of those we serve, PORT will continue moving forward with purpose, innovation, and hope. Together, we are building a future where recovery is possible, support is unwavering, and every life is valued.

Acknowledgements

This work would not be possible without the collective effort of our partners across South Dakota who share a commitment to saving lives. We are profoundly grateful to the South Dakota Department of Social Services, Division of Behavioral Health, our healthcare system partners, and the community partners who support this mission, value collaboration, and believe in it. This collective investment has made it possible to connect with survivors, improve the quality of our work, and continue to expand our services to more South Dakota communities. .

To our state partners, thank you for believing in this program and investing in it. Your support has helped us grow this program and continue reaching people when they need it most. We appreciate your partnership and your commitment to building a stronger response to overdose across our communities. To our peer support team, thank you for your dedication to service by bringing your lived experience, honesty, and compassion to every interaction. You meet people where they are, often on one of the hardest days of their lives, and remind them that recovery is possible because you've walked that road yourselves. Your work changes lives in ways that cannot always be measured. To our community partners, first responders, treatment providers, hospitals, recovery organizations, law enforcement, EMS, public health, and everyone who has stood beside us, thank you. Every referral, every conversation, every act of collaboration has made this work stronger.

And finally, thank you to our community members who believe in this mission. Whether through advocating for this program, supporting a loved one, sharing your story, or simply believing that people deserve another chance, you've helped make this work possible. We are grateful to be part of a community that chooses compassion, hope, and recovery.



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Post-Overdose Response Team