On April 10th, 2019, a gas leak caused an explosion in the Brightleaf District of downtown Durham, causing two deaths, injuring 25 people and destroying several historic buildings. The explosion, which could be felt several miles away, caused widespread damage within the surrounding blocks and prompted rapid evacuations of businesses, restaurants, apartments and the Durham School of the Arts.

As first responders and city officials worked hard to deal with the physical safety needs of people in the impacted area, Alliance staffers started making plans to help people in the community with the mental health needs that are known to follow such a disaster.

Many people experience a range of emotions after traumatic and unexpected events, including anger, frustration and sadness, and can react in many different ways, including physical and psychological symptoms. It is common for people to feel stress and anxiety regardless of whether they were hurt or lost a loved one. Helping people recognize symptoms of trauma and providing coping mechanisms to address negative thoughts and feelings can support the natural recovery process and prompt people to get help if their symptoms persist or become overwhelming.

“Almost everyone in a community struck by a disaster will feel some type of emotional effect,” said Alliance Community Engagement Manager Jennifer Meade. “We wanted to make people aware that what they feel is normal, give them some strategies for coping with it, and just be there to listen and empathize.”

In the days following the explosion, The Alliance communications team swung into action to put together...
Community Collaboratives empower and support families

Community Collaboratives are groups of representatives from service agencies, families, and community stakeholders who work together to address and plan around common concerns regarding the well-being of children and youth and their families.

Community Collaboratives:

- Aid in identifying service gaps through a needs assessment process and filling those gaps through the use of shared resources including services and funding.
- Are responsible for supporting and monitoring the status of Child and Family Teams, including addressing barriers those teams may encounter.
- Ensure that child-serving staff from related agencies and other stakeholders are full participants in training activities to facilitate continuity of care.
- Reduce fragmented or duplicative services.

Durham Community Collaborative:
Meetings are held on the fourth Thursday of each month from 10 am until 11:30 pm at the Durham County Human Services Building located at 414 East Main Street in Durham. If you are interested in joining the Durham County Community Collaborative or attending a meeting contact Ashley Bass Mitchell at ABassMitchell@AllianceHealthPlan.org or (919) 651-8498.

Wake Community Collaborative for Children:
Collaborative members attend monthly meetings on the first Tuesday of each month from 10 am-noon at the Alliance Wake community office. If you are interested in joining the Wake County Community Collaborative or attending a meeting contact Clarette Glenn at cglenn@AllianceHealthPlan.org or (919) 651-8704.

Cumberland Community Collaborative: Meetings are held the fourth Tuesday of each month from 9 am until 11 am in Room 426 of the Alliance Cumberland community office. For more information please contact Sharon Glover at sglover@AllianceHealthPlan.org or (910) 222-6377.

Johnston Collaborative for Families, Youth and Children: Meetings are held on the first Thursday of each month at 10:30 am at the Johnston County Mental Health Center, 521 N. Brightleaf Boulevard, Smithfield. If you are interested in joining the Johnston County Collaborative for Families, Youth and Children or attending a meeting you may contact Tanisha Holder at tholder@AllianceHealthPlan.org or (919) 919-651-8971.

Cumberland Community Collaborative Family Fun Day
Cumberland County Community Collaborative had a Family Fun Day on May 18 at Alliance Health. Youth in foster care, their families and the community enjoyed a day of fun in the sun featuring games, food and fellowship. Click here or on the thumbnails below to see more.
Between now and the end of 2019 Alliance will be making some changes in how care coordination is offered to the people we serve. We are doing this to prepare ourselves for the new way we will be managing care for our members in the future as a result of Medicaid transformation in North Carolina.

Beginning in 2021, Alliance expects to begin operating what is called a Tailored Plan. In that role Alliance will be managing comprehensive whole-person care – that is, physical and behavioral healthcare, plus pharmacy services – to people with more severe mental illnesses, those with a substance use disorder, and those with long-term care needs, including those with an intellectual/developmental disability or traumatic brain injury.

This is why Alliance is moving now to a model of care coordination that brings together a diverse team of professionals to better meet the complex and diverse needs of our members. Each member’s Care Team will be led by a Care Navigator who will be the point of contact for that member and his or her family. Based on a careful review of a member’s specific needs, a Care Team will be formed that may include nurses, a pharmacist, community health workers, senior clinicians, and others.

This Care Team approach will begin to take effect for members with an intellectual/developmental disability on July 1 of this year, and between July and December of this year for members with a mental illness or substance use disorder.

QIP shows improved after-hours response by providers

For the past several years Alliance has been working on a Quality Improvement Project (QIP) focused on increasing provider’s compliance with after-hours first responder responsibilities. Project interventions included provider outreach/feedback calls, technical assistance/training, and referrals to Alliance’s Corporate Compliance Committee for multiple unsuccessful tests.

Working closely with providers, Alliance saw an increase in the number of satisfactory test calls. In fact, during the final QIP measurement 94% of providers were in compliance with after-hours testing protocols. That represents a 30.5% increase for the fiscal year, and a 74% increase since FY16; exceeding Alliance’s goal of having 85% of provider agencies in compliance!

Although Alliance will continue to test provider first responder capabilities, because of this documented improvement, Alliance successfully closed the First Responder QIP in September 2018. Alliance would like to thank all of the providers who participated in this QIP for their collaboration and ongoing commitment to system-wide quality improvement.
Alliance employee teaches MHFA in Liberia

Alliance Care Review Coordinator Dulce Ramirez recently visited Liberia as part of her internship for NC Central University’s Executive Masters of Public Administration program. Dulce was placed at the Ministry of Health in the Mental Health Unit. While there, she introduced and trained Adult Mental Health First Aid to the Mental Unit staff and collaborated in providing them with materials and information needed to create Liberia’s own Adult Mental Health First Aid program. She also provided support in enhancing the school-based mental health unit by providing information on how to collaborate with faith-based organizations and private institutes to elaborate youth activities.

Community events mark Mental Health Month

May is Mental Health Month, and each year Alliance commemorates it and Childrens Mental Health Awareness Week by celebrating and honoring the people in our communities who help make good things happen.

Our Cumberland County office’s Children’s Mental Health Luncheon featured speaker Eileen Cedzo, Family Resource Center Manager and Nurturing Parenting Program Supervisor at the Partnership For Children of Cumberland County.

In Durham, our Community Health and Well-Being Team held the Making a Difference for Durham Families breakfast, honoring “Above & Beyond” award winners and featuring guest speakers Gayle Harris, Public Health Director and General Manager for Community Well-being at the Durham County Department of Public Health, and Kody H. Kinsley, the Deputy Secretary for Behavioral Health & Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities at NCDHHS.

Our Wake office celebrated the month with their annual Mental WELLness Matters dinner. Speakers included Melea Rose-Waters from Prevent Child Abuse NC and Ahlam Azizbi, a Wake Boys & Girls Club Youth of the Year recipient.

Clockwise from top left: Ahlam Azizbi at the Wake dinner; Eileen Cedzo in Cumberland County; Melea Rose-Waters in Wake; and Gayle Harris and Kody H. Kinsley in Durham. Click for more photos: Cumberland: tinyurl.com/y6sr3vrf; Wake: tinyurl.com/yvryxxft; and Durham: tinyurl.com/y4f6yaen.
a flyer and design a newspaper ad providing information about recognizing and responding to disaster-related stress. Community Health and Well-Being staff partnered with Duke Memorial United Methodist Church to plan a community conversation event, which was also supported by staff from Duke Center for Child & Family Health and El Futuro.

In the week following the incident, teams of Alliance canvassers visited homes and businesses around the Brightleaf neighborhood to check in with community members and share the disaster-related stress flyers. The canvassers asked how people were doing, invited them to share their experiences, and invited them to the community conversation.

In many cases, people contacted by canvassers said that just having someone ask how they were doing made them feel better. One merchant two blocks from the explosion site asked Alliance staff for a hug and said that no one at all had asked her how she was doing since the incident.

Another business manager related that being back at work near the disaster site felt strange, and said that one of her employees had not been able to come back to work because of the distress she felt.

In most cases following a disaster, community members’ natural resilience will help them recover with no additional assistance. However, some people may need a little extra help during the recovery process, and certain groups or populations may be at greater risk for developing severe reactions to a disaster or traumatic event.

Resources exists to help people find the assistance they need. SAMHSA’s Disaster Technical Assistance Center (www.samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-survivors) provides a wealth of information to help survivors during and after disasters.

In Durham, Wake, Johnston and Cumberland counties, licensed clinicians at the Alliance Access and Information Center can assist you in finding the right kind of help 24 hours a day: 800-510-9132.
Wake County BHUC holds official grand opening

The official grand opening of Wake County’s first behavioral health urgent care was held on May 7. The facility, operated by Monarch at 319 Chapanoke Road in Raleigh, serves residents four years of age and older with immediate mental and behavioral health crisis, helping reduce unnecessary emergency department visits.

Speakers at the event included Sean Schrieber, Alliance Executive VP, Provider Networks and Community Health, Dr. Margaret Brunson, Alliance Director of Hospital Relations, and Greg Ford, Wake County Commissioner and Alliance Board member.

Statistics have shown that other states utilizing the BHUC walk-in treatment model have reduced emergency department visits by more than 20 percent. The BHUC provides immediate attention and links people to support, treatment and resources for their mental health crises, and serves as an alternative for people who have usually relied on assistance through the traditional hospital emergency department where waiting for treatment can be lengthy.

The Wake BHUC is the second one in Alliance’s service area. Carolina Outreach opened the first one in Durham in 2017. For more info about the Wake BHUC, visit the Monarch web site: monarchnc.org/behavioral-health-urgent-care. To learn more about the Durham BHUC, visit carolinaoutreachbhuc.com.

Alliance Resources

The Alliance For Action on Opioids website (AllianceForAction.org) is a resource to help individuals, family members, and professionals take small but important steps in their lives and work to help stem the tide of the opioid epidemic.

Discover Recovery University, the online training gateway that allows users to register for all Alliance trainings (online and in-person), including Mental Health First Aid.

The It’s Time to Re-Think campaign aims to debunk the common myths and misconceptions about people with mental illness, substance use disorders and intellectual/developmental disabilities that create stigma and keep them from getting the help they need.

Alliance InTouch is a newsletter for Alliance Health employees and community. Click here to subscribe. Please send comments and suggestions about this publication and its contents to Lisa Brockmeier: LBrockmeier@alliancehealthplan.org.

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