For 55 years, Oaklawn has provided mental health and addiction services in our community. In recent years, addiction treatment has become a growing part of our work, for the heartbreaking reason that it affects an increasing number of people. More than 20 million adults in the U.S. – about 1 in 12 – have a substance use disorder, and more than 72,000 Americans died from a drug overdose in 2017. Seventy percent of those involved opioids.

Addiction is, indeed, a dangerous and deadly disease. But there’s good news: It’s a treatable one.

In five decades, we have seen so many inspiring stories of recovery and hope – and we have more tools available to treat addiction now than ever before. Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) and Certified Recovery Specialists are trends on different ends of the spectrum that Oaklawn is leveraging for better health and wholeness in our community. Read on to learn more about these emerging treatment models.

Through these services, decreased stigma and increased support from the local community to national leaders – we have many reasons to be encouraged. The bottom line is that treatment works.

Thank you for supporting Oaklawn. You make hope happen.
New partnership combats opioid crisis by meeting people where they need us most

A new partnership between Oaklawn and Beacon Health System is expediting treatment for some of the most vulnerable people – emergency room patients who have just overdosed.

“If the patient is at all amenable to treatment, the goal is to have a peer recovery specialist there within 30 minutes,” explained John Horsley, Oaklawn’s Director of Addictions Services and an architect of the program.

Peer Recovery Specialists are themselves in recovery from addiction and are specially trained to offer peer support. Lorie Simmons is one such coach. Between her initial use and a period of relapse, Simmons has spent nine years in addiction and 11 years in recovery.

“They call it a cloud,” she says, describing the feeling when someone first stops using.

“Once you get that cloud lifted from your head, you can see again. That’s why I love this program, because there’s people like me who can walk other people like me through the cloud.”

After meeting with a new client, Simmons goes to work immediately scheduling an appointment with an Oaklawn therapist, finding stable housing if needed and scheduling an appointment with a physician for Medication-Assisted Treatment, or MAT.

Beacon physician Brandon Zabukovic, M.D., is one of the architects of the new program and a champion of MAT.

“The reason I prescribe it and I’m an advocate is I see that it works,” Zabukovic said. Essentially, the brain of an addict is hungry for opiates. Medication fills the void. “It replaces it with something that lasts longer, doesn’t cause euphoria and doesn’t have the risk of overdose.”

So far, the program has seen immense success. In its first two months, coaches had been called to meet with 32 people; 27 entered treatment.

“Every person’s journey in recovery is different,” Horsley said. “Striking while the iron is hot and being there when a person is ready to recover is the most important thing we can do to help save lives.”

Photo on the right includes: (from the left)
Michelle Pyburn, Recovery Coach Coordinator
Armen Sylvester, Certified Recovery Specialist
Lorie Simmons, Certified Recovery Specialist
ER Treatment Progress

- 84% of individuals seen in the ER have enrolled in services
- 2 the average number of years it takes to stop craving the drug
- 68% the success rate of individuals who utilize Medication-Assisted Treatment
Peer specialists help lead the way

One of the darkest times in Jason’s life is now the basis for his life’s work. Jason is a peer recovery specialist, in recovery from his own addiction and trained to help others in their journey to recovery.

“It’s hard to put into words how much it means,” he said. “It’s so humbling to see the trust that addicts are willing to give someone who is in recovery.”

It’s a hard-earned privilege. Jason was 32 years old with a successful career as a sportscaster when someone asked him if he ever bet on sports online. He tried it once and was hooked. Twelve years passed before he told his wife, parents and brother that he had a problem.

“We really thought that by me saying I had a problem, we had nipped it,” he said. “But it got a lot worse before it got better.”

He pawned his wife’s wedding ring, opened credit cards in other people’s names and transferred the title of a car into his name to get money to feed his addiction. He had stints of recovery and relapse, then spent six months at an inpatient facility in Virginia in 2016. That was the turning point.

He moved back to South Bend to be near his children and wife, who had, “understandably,” he says, filed for divorce. He started outpatient treatment at Oaklawn.

“I don’t think I really knew that I could live daily free from addiction until I had been through Oaklawn’s program and started actually doing it,” he said. Aside from needing to be around people who shared his experience, Jason realized he had a genuine interest in people living with addiction. When he learned of the recovery specialist job, he was all in.

“The best part of my job is being thought of as a peer by our clients,” Jason said. “I’m with them during an extremely fragile time in their lives, and I can say anything to them and they hear it.”
Camp helps kids heal from loved one’s addiction

Just before her 9th birthday, Ashlyn spent a weekend at camp. She enjoyed the traditional camp activities: games, crafts, having fun with kids her age. But for Ashlyn, the camp was about far more than fun and games. It was about healing.

Ashlyn is a graduate of Camp Mariposa, a free weekend camp for kids ages 9-12 whose families are impacted by addiction. Campers learn about addiction as a disease, practice healthy coping skills and share their experiences with counselors and each other.

“I remember I cried a lot,” Ashlyn says of her first camp. “I was working through emotions I had never thought about before. I have been going ever since.”

The camp is offered in partnership with Eluna (formerly The Moyer Foundation), free-of-charge, six times per year. Kids can attend multiple camps throughout the year and participate in reunion activities like baseball and hockey games. Graduates can also volunteer to be junior counselors. That’s what Ashlyn does – she is 16 now – and her two younger sisters, also camp grads, are anxious to volunteer once they’re old enough.

Ashlyn and her mom, Catrina, say the camp has changed her life. “Before camp, I just felt so bitter and angry,” Ashlyn said. Every time she saw alcohol, it made her think of her father’s addiction and she would become furious. She’s learned the difference between someone having a drink and an addiction. She also practices healthy coping skills, like mindfulness and deep breathing, in stressful situations.

Today, Ashlyn is a successful high school junior – she loves cheerleading, marching band and is even taking college-level courses. She’s grateful for the role camp played in her life and still attends as a junior counselor every chance she gets.

“You can see a difference in the kids in just a few months,” Ashlyn said. “They understand each other. They start to understand, maybe not why their family member has an addiction, but how it works and that it’s really not their fault. That was one of the biggest things for me. It wasn’t my fault.”
Our Mission

With uncommon expertise in mental health and addiction services, Oaklawn joins with individuals, families and our community on the journey toward health and wholeness.

Mental health and addiction affect us all. Each of us – whether we face these issues personally, with a loved one or with neighbors unbeknownst to us – is part of the journey. At Oaklawn, we’re honored and humbled to serve 30,000 people in Elkhart and St. Joseph counties. We want to highlight a few numbers that help tell the story of not only Oaklawn’s impact on our community, but also the impact you have through your generous financial support. Thanks for joining us on the journey toward health and wholeness.
30K
clients served in 2017

309
clients provided housing

590
mental health assessments in local emergency rooms

575
new appointments scheduled each month

113
children referred to Partnership for Children in 2017

41
campers who attend Camp Mariposa each camp weekend