

Strategies to Overcome Obstacles and Avoid Recidivism



SYRINGE SERVICE PROGRAM 2023 REPORT



Building Community and Impact

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TO OUR SUPPORTERS



Your support has made a tremendous difference in the lives of local residents in Southeast Michigan. Funds provided by grants, donations, and fundraisers covered the cost of our harm reduction program for youth and adults struggling with structural and systemic barriers, reducing harms associated with trauma, poverty, and oppression. Thanks for your support to help provide services with respect and dignity to improve the quality of life in our communities.



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

SOOAR provides an expanding range of services and programs through culturally humble, judgement-free outreach, providing education, resources, and the tools needed to operate a participant-driven approach that facilitates self-determined wellness goals while providing a trauma-healing-centered environment.



*Harm reduction is a proven practice and evidence-based strategy to improve the health and safety of individuals, families, and our communities.



WHO WE SERVED



JANUARY 1, 2023-DECEMBER 31, 2023

122 DIRECT SERVICE ENCOUNTERS

27 REGISTERED PARTICIPANTS



511 NON-REGISTERED PARTICIPANTS

**1,640
SECONDARY DISTRIBUTIONS**



RISK REDUCTION TOOLS & SERVICES



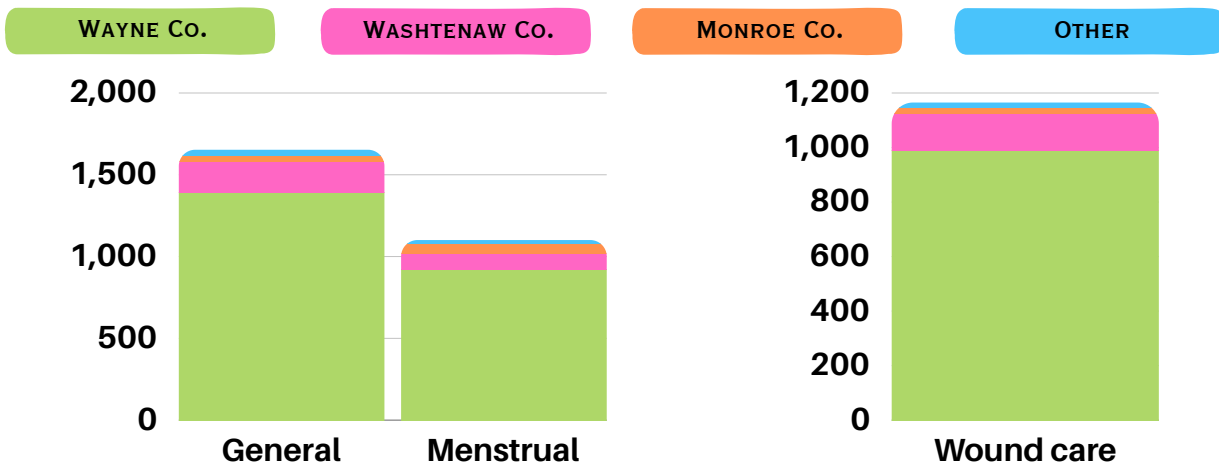
We provided **108,115** syringes, **1,742** safer smoking bubble kits, **4,531** safer smoking stem kits, **850** safer snorting kits and **27,224** condoms preventing the transmission of HIV/HCV and other STI's as well as skin, soft tissue injury and endocarditis.



HEALTH & WELLNESS



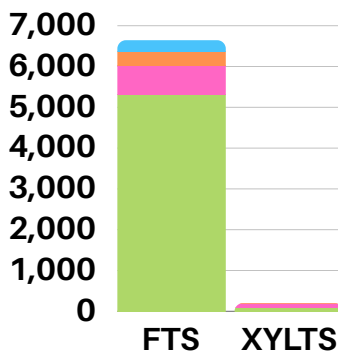
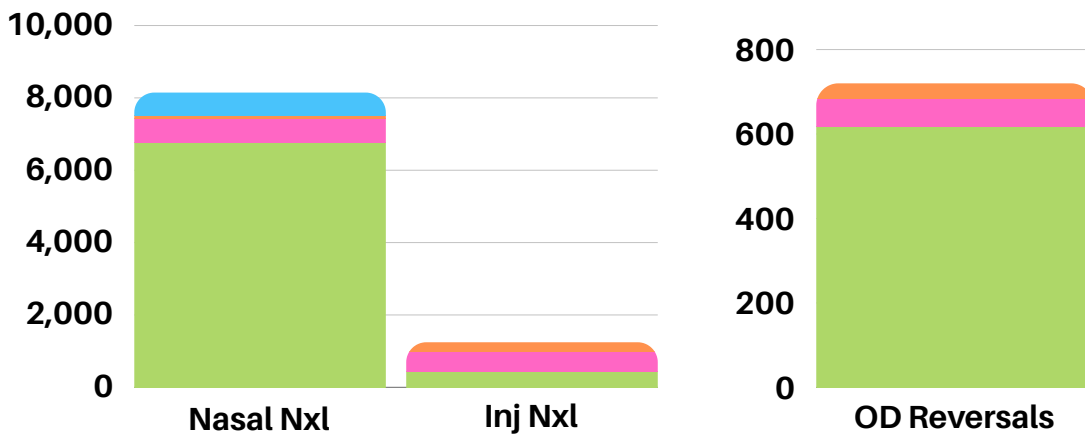
We provided **1,653** general hygiene kits and menstrual hygiene kits to participants to reduce infections and ensure dignity for those who may not have access to resources such as running water or stable housing. We also gave out **1,101** wound care kits to assist in the healing and prevention of infection from simple abscesses to large concerning wounds that required a trusted connection to medical evaluation and interventions.



OVERDOSE EDUCATION, PREVENTION, & RESPONSE



We were able to provide numerous formal and informal trainings, distributed **16,294** doses of nasal naloxone, **28** injectable naloxone vials, **6,645** fentanyl test strips, **195** xylazine test strips, and **720** overdose reversals reports through our naloxone distribution.



SERVICES, CONNECTIONS & REFERRALS



We were able to screen and embrace any positive change through **48** engagements for substance use management, create **14** safety plans with multiple support groups, and provide **78** referrals to substance use management /treatment services. We made **48** food deliveries to assist with food insecurity within our communities.

Additional Supports & Referrals:



COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT



We are building with community a system of care for people who want to learn more about harm reduction and provide safer spaces for people who use drugs and/or engage in sex work.

In 2023, we started collaborating with the Southeast Michigan Users Union to build collective power and action amongst the people impacted most and at risk of individual, systemic and structural harms of prohibition.

Our Collective Action Included:

- Funding for secondary distributors
- Hosted virtual and in-person skillshares
- Hosted a harm reduction party to celebrate our participants and community members
- Provided emergency survival supplies along with our health and wellness supplies
- Paid for emergency hotel rooms for 16 community members, ranging from two nights, to two months



LESSONS LEARNED



HARM REDUCTION IS COMMUNITY HEALTHCARE

Syringe Service Programs (SSPs), a core component of harm reduction services are evidence-based health-centered interventions originally created over 40 years ago by early pioneers of individuals who used drugs and community activist who provided care to keep their communities healthy and safe. The Center for Disease Control has declared SSPs are safe, effective, and cost-saving public health approaches to preventing infectious diseases, including hepatitis C (HCV) and HIV, reducing skin, soft-tissue, and venous infections (SSTVIs), endocarditis, sepsis, osteomyelitis, and overdoses.

Given the aligned values of person-centric comprehensive wellness of health centers and harm reduction, SOOAR believed partnering with Western Wayne Family Health Center (WWFHC), a Federally Qualified Health Center that provides limited forms of Medication for Opioid Use Disorders, could create a synergistic relationship that enhanced harm reduction efforts, providing comprehensive care, and improve the overall health and well-being of individuals who use drugs and engage in sex work. This partnership could have leveraged the strengths of both organizations to address the complex healthcare needs of communities within Out-Wayne County.

SOOAR was refused to provide risk reduction services within our rented space at WWFHC. This loss of space occurred due to a small number of regressive and hostile actors in the community who did not want harm reduction services, but especially PWUD, present 'in their backyard'. These actors chose to ignore federal and state guidelines, citing regulatory and legal barriers which had been overturned years (even decades) previously, and to fail in their professional and legal obligation to provide preventative community health services to all patients without discrimination based on suspicion or diagnosis of an SUD.

In this moment of crisis, SOOAR has the same intentions and goals of offering support dignified care to populations which experience the burden of the same stigma which certain local providers stated unapologetically to us (PWUD are a problem, they don't want to see or treat them, they don't believe in harm reduction as they think PWUD don't deserve equal care).



LESSONS LEARNED



ACCESS AND PROTECTIONS FOR SSPS DO NOT EXIST IN MICHIGAN

Syringe Service Programs (SSPs) are being restricted throughout the majority of the state from operating legally. Under state law, syringes and other equipment provided by health programs are not classified as drug paraphernalia; however, throughout the 1,700+ municipalities, majority maintain and enforce paraphernalia ordinances that criminalize the possession of public health supplies and trace amounts of residual substances within these supplies. These laws deem life-saving supplies like fentanyl test strips and other drug checking equipment as paraphernalia.

SOOAR has faced ongoing barriers to providing services and having to take legal risks for operations from simply traveling from one small city to another across the county. These risks having our company vehicle impounded, having to face arrests, citations, charges, but most concerning is the trauma and heightened alert of the reality of our team driving while Black and very real concerns of being targeted and dealing with police violence.

These concerns also extend out to our community members and participants who have reported over the years police harassment including having their SSP cards taken and destroyed, vehicles impounded, arrested and charged with paraphernalia upon picking up supplies, as well as facing possession charges for returning used equipment back to us. Any involvement with the criminal legal system can cause harm from trauma to putting people are higher risks for communicable infections as well as overdoses. Sadly, this burden is placed across all SSPs throughout Michigan and the harmful drug policies continues to devastate all Michiganders, especially low-income, Black and Brown communities that disproportionately impacted.

SOOAR advocates with our communities to have access to the health tools, education, and resources they need to be healthy. We also are advocating in the decriminalization of health tools deemed paraphernalia and those who provide them, the decriminalization of PWUD and sex workers, overdose prevention centers, as well as removing systemic and structural barriers and discrimination.



LOOKING FORWARD

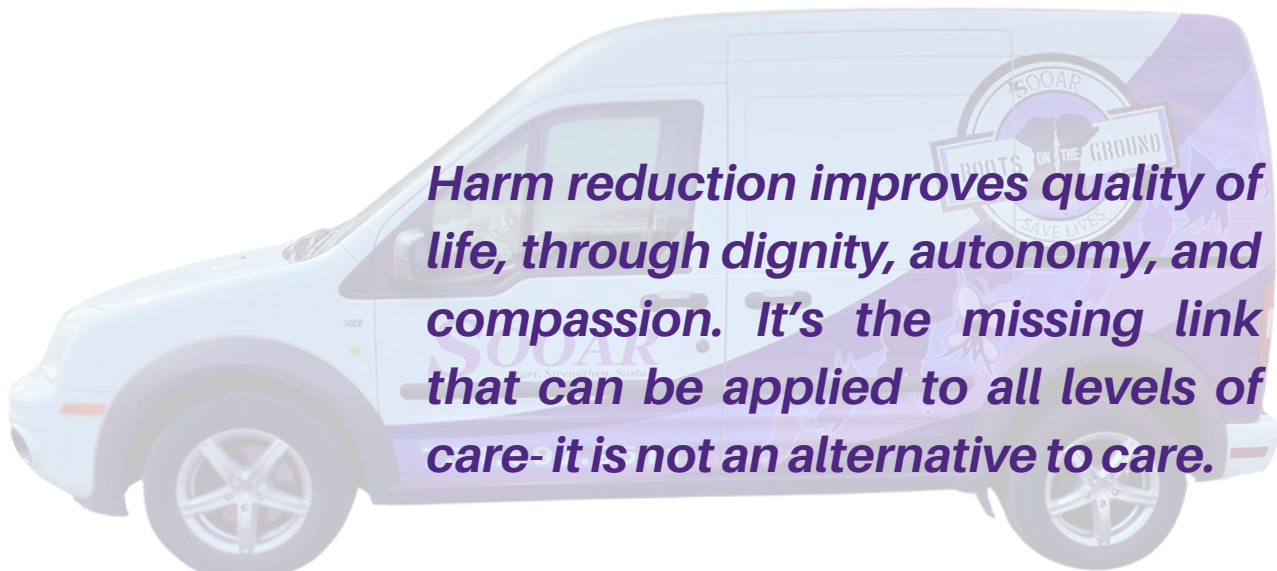


RECAP OF KEY POINTS

In 2023, SOOAR made a commitment to ourselves and our communities to challenge and dismantle racial injustice, that specifically affects people who use drugs and/or engage in sex work with our organization. Through organizational and individual assessments, we are auditing our policies, developing a timeline, and utilizing and enhancing our Participant Advisory Board. We understand this to be an iterative process and look forward to working more closely with those whose values are aligned towards solidarity and adequate resourcing for people impacted by racist, classist and homophobic deadly drug policies.

In collaboration with our partners, SOOAR will provide a framework of what harm reduction philosophies and practices are, provide and receive referrals from other organizations to reduce the gaps and barriers that Michiganders face for residents most impacted by drug use and racism.

SOOAR is committed to strengthening education, awareness, services, and support for people who use drugs and their community.



Harm reduction improves quality of life, through dignity, autonomy, and compassion. It's the missing link that can be applied to all levels of care- it is not an alternative to care.



Thank you



CONTACT INFORMATION FOR FURTHER INQUIRIES

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