

City of Poulsbo

Housing, Health and Human Services Department



PRESS RELEASE For Immediate Release

Poulsbo City Council Receives 6 Month Report on Fire CARES Program; Over 150 Individuals Assisted.

July 7—The Poulsbo City Council received a 6-month report about the Poulsbo Fire CARES Program this evening. The Program has assisted 157 individuals in Poulsbo and the surrounding area since being launched in January, mostly through home outreach, case management, and care coordination. Around half of those assisted are older adults (65+) who use 911 to address issues such as depression, cognitive decline, and the misuse of alcohol and medication. More than half of those assisted over the last six months report using emergency services (Fire or hospital) at least once during the past year.

“This has been a really interesting 6 months in terms of lessons learned,” says the City’s Housing, Health and Human Services Director Kim Hendrickson. “We knew there were seniors in our community who rely on 911 for help but we didn’t know how common this is. There is a clear need for home based, non emergency assistance to help older adults in our community who are struggling with behavioral health and cognitive issues, and this need is going to be even greater as our residents live longer and age in place.”

Tonight’s presentation was made by the Fire CARES team which consists of Firefighter/Crisis Intervention Officer David Musselman and Community Support Specialist Renee Miller. Director Hendrickson provided information about numbers served and types of service connections.

Fire CARES (Community Assistance, Referral, and Education Service) is a partnership between Poulsbo Fire, the City of Poulsbo, and Olympic Peninsula Community Clinic that provides mobile services to individuals struggling with mental illness, mental health distress, substance use, and other behavioral health issues. The intent is to prevent medical emergencies and break the cycle of reliance on emergency systems for people experiencing behavioral health symptoms.

According to Community Support Specialist Renee Miller, who has provided counseling and coaching for individuals for 18 years, “this is a really effective way to help people who, for whatever reason, have trouble asking for help and accessing mental health and medical services. Dave and I are engaged in a slow and steady process and we are committed to that process. It is such an honor when the folks we help allow us to enter their lives in a meaningful way.”

The Kitsap County Commissioners awarded the City of Poulsbo \$305,000 for the 12-month Fire CARES program. Funding is from the County's one-tenth of one percent "treatment tax" fund that has funded mental health and substance use disorder programs since 2015. Poulsbo Fire CARES services are available throughout North Kitsap and Bainbridge Island through the end of December, and the City of Poulsbo and Poulsbo Fire are applying for funds to continue the program in 2022.

If you have any questions please contact Kim Hendrickson, Housing Health and Human Services Director at kimberlyh@cityofpoulsbo.com

360-394 9794