Community in Action: Tulsa Fire Department Practicum Placement

The Community Assistance, Referral, & Education Services (C.A.R.E.S.) program started in Tulsa as a five-day-a-week pilot in January, 2017. The program collaborates across disciplines and partners with the community to decrease barriers to comprehensive non-emergency health care that encompasses social, behavioral, and environmental factors as well as traditional healthcare connotations, while increasing the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of public resources. The goal of the program is to assist high utilizers of emergency services into the appropriate systems of care while improving their health outcomes and reducing per capita cost of care for the benefit of the community. The pilot program is a coordination between the Tulsa Fire Department, Mental Health Association Oklahoma and University of Oklahoma master's level social work practicum students. Kellie Wilson and Lynn Wilson, who are completing their direct-practice concentration year practicums, are embedded within the Tulsa Fire Department which allows them to work on the front line with first responders to achieve rapid assessment of patient needs and initiation of social supports. These practicum students assist high utilizers through: identification of program participants through emergency system data and referrals from Fire/EMS personnel, assessment of patient needs and barriers, navigation and coordination of social service referrals, and follow up observation to ensure the participant has continued success. Addressing the whole-health needs of high utilizers of emergency services reduces their reliance on emergency medical systems and frees up Fire and EMS personnel to respond to higher priority calls.