

Boots on the Ground:

DSAMH's Bridge Clinic Encampment Outreach Team

Nicholas Panunto

Delaware Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health

This photo essay documents an afternoon with the Division of Substance Abuse and Mental Health's (DSAMH) Bridge Clinic Encampment Response Team. It is a visual representation of the conditions and environments the Bridge Clinic Encampment Team experiences daily. Funded by the State Opioid Response (SOR) grant that the state receives from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), a federal agency, the team seeks to engage individuals who are unhoused (homeless) who may be experiencing substance use disorder or mental health challenges.

The Bridge Clinic Encampment Team is active in all three counties in Delaware. Existing homeless encampments are visited routinely, and the team receives frequent tips about new encampments that have sprung up. When visiting encampments, the team focuses on building relationships with the individuals residing there. Practical supports such as food, hygiene items, or weather-specific items are offered. Narcan kits for overdose reversal are also provided. The team discusses individuals' behavioral health needs and offers connections to care, including transportation if the individual is ready to enter treatment or access services on the spot. Unhoused clients who are actively using street drugs may have skin wounds that need medical attention; DSAMH provides a mobile nurse to assist clients with basic wound care, provides supplies to patients to properly clean and dress their wound, and offers referrals to higher levels of care.

Donations for unhoused individuals are accepted by the Bridge Clinic.



New Castle County Bridge Clinic Encampment Outreach Team (Heather, Dwight, Nurse Amy, Mel, Chelsi, & Ty), our boots on the ground, take a photo with their vehicle fleet before heading out to perform outreach with local encampments.



Ty stands next to a hand-dug shelter pit at a Christiana homeless encampment.



The Encampment Outreach Team (Ty, Dwight, & Mel) engages with individuals at a New Castle County Encampment.



Dwight, Ty, & Mel leave a New Castle County encampment.



New Castle County Bridge Clinic Encampment Outreach Team (Ty, Dwight, Heather, Nurse Amy, & Chelsi) engage with an individual to help them to seek medical services.



New Castle, Kent, & Sussex County Bridge Clinic Encampment Outreach Teams (Mel, John, Joey, Jazmin, Ty, Keyonna, & Chelsi) put their boots on the ground in Dover.



Joey & Ty walk through a tick-infested wooded area to perform outreach. When leaving this encampment, Joey had to remove multiple ticks from his clothing.



An empty encampment in Kent County.



Encampment Team makes their way through a Kent County encampment.



A discarded, empty Narcan Kit rests next to an old tarp within an encampment.

Copyright (c) 2025 Delaware Academy of Medicine / Delaware Public Health Association.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.