

Operation BRIDGE

Focus on getting drugs off streets, help for drug users

More than a dozen Richland County and state law enforcement and treatment agencies joined the Ohio Narcotics Intelligence Center and RecoveryOhio in Richland County to conduct a coordinated drug/outreach saturation event.

Operation BRIDGE was aimed at removing drugs and traffickers from the streets as well as connecting individuals with substance use disorder to the help and treatment they need. The METRICH Enforcement Unit, which operates in a 10-county north central Ohio area, sought to be proactive in addressing the drug scourge in Richland County and requested the surge, according to a news release from the Ohio Department of Public Safety Thursday.

The two-day enforcement surge combined the efforts of drug task forces, law enforcement agencies, quick response teams and harm reduction and treatment providers from the area for a comprehensive approach to the addiction crisis.

Law enforcement agencies fanned out across Richland County and other major interdiction routes coming into Richland County to stop the drugs through the area and to nab couriers responsible for supplying drugs to the area.

During Operation BRIDGE, METRICH officers seized 1,044 grams of cocaine, 42 grams of fentanyl, 44 grams of marijuana, 6 grams of crack, and 2 grams of methamphetamine.

Officers made seven drug-related felony arrests; five non-drug-related felony arrests; 13 drug-related misdemeanor arrests, and four non-drug-related misdemeanor arrests.

Four search warrants were executed and three guns were seized.

"The drug trade doesn't stop at the county line. Individuals using illegal substances often travel just a few miles to another county to buy drugs when their supply is disrupted or

vice versa," said Ben Suver, Ohio Department of Public Safety director of law enforcement initiatives, who oversees the Ohio Narcotics Intelligence Center.

RecoveryOhio supported the mission by working with local agencies to ensure access and distribution of 150 naloxone kits to those who need it. Mansfield police crime lab assumed responsibility for storing and destroying all the collected pills.

The Richland County Prosecutor's Office participated in Operation BRIDGE by offering to amend charges for low-level felony drug offenders who requested help.

Participating agencies included METRICH Enforcement Unit, Richland County Sheriff's Office, Richland County Prosecutor's Office, Richland County Mental health and Recovery, Mansfield Police Department, Ontario Police Department, Shelby Police Department, Lexington Police Department, Bellville and Butler police departments, Ohio Highway Patrol, Catalyst Life Services and Avita Health, OhioHealth.

Originally published in the News Journal on August 19, 2022.