

Victoria Mello (vsm2118)

Health Promotion Theory

Professor Jane Bogart

May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2023

## **Utilizing Health Promotion Theory to Increase Community Acceptance of an Overdose Prevention Center (OPC) in East Harlem NYC**

### **I. Background: The Scope of the US Opioid Epidemic in NYC**

Opioid Use Disorder (OUD) affects millions of Americans across the country and is characterized by the American Psychiatric Association as “a problematic pattern of opioid use leading to problems and distress” (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). While the opioid crisis has been ongoing for decades in the United States, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has deeply exacerbated the issue. Mandatory social distancing created more isolation, mental health distress was heightened across the globe, in conjunction with pandemic-related economic stressors all contributed to a “perfect storm” scenario for worsening opioid-related morbidity and mortality in the US and New York City specifically. Evidence of the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on the opioid crisis is reflected in the fact that opioid overdose deaths increased about 78 percent from 2019 to 2021 in New York City. However, these opioid-related overdoses are disproportionately impacting communities of color, with Black New Yorkers having the highest rates of overdose mortality across all racial and ethnic groups (NYC DOHMH, 2023). While COVID-19 has certainly exacerbated the opioid crisis, the increase in overdose mortality is also due to the fact that fentanyl, a highly lethal and potent type of opioid that is 50-100 times stronger than morphine, has significantly saturated the illegal drug supply in New York City (Tarentino, 2023). In fact, in 2021 fentanyl was identified in 80% of all NYC overdose-related deaths, making 2021 the fifth year in a row that fentanyl was the most common substance involved in overdose fatalities across the city (NYC DOHMH, 2023).

Due to the alarming increase in opioid-related morbidity and mortality in New York City, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) has expressed a commitment to combat this crisis by expanding evidence-based treatments and supporting harm reduction strategies. In response to the intensifying crisis, two Overdose Prevention Centers (OPCs) were opened in late 2021, one located in the Washington Heights community and the other in East Harlem, both in Manhattan, NYC. The opening of these OPCs marked a significant step towards the NYC DOHMH

goal of implementing evidence-based harm reduction programs for people who use drugs (PWUD) in New York City. According to OnPoint NYC, the organization responsible for operating these two OPCs, the OPCs in Washington Heights and East Harlem have been utilized 72,660 times by over 3,250 participants, and has prevented approximately 898 opioid-related overdoses since the two sites launched on November 30, 2021 (OnPoint NYC, 2023). The overarching goal of the OPCs is to provide people who use drugs (PWUD) with a safe and supervised environment for drug injection in order to reduce public drug use, litter from drug paraphernalia, and fatal opioid-related overdoses. In addition to this primary purpose, OnPoint's OPCs offer several other beneficial services for the community and PWUD. These include drop-in centers where individuals can access hot meals, showers, bathrooms, and laundry facilities along with important harm reduction services such as syringe exchange programs and fentanyl testing strips. OnPoint's OPCs also provide a range of healthcare and support services, including addiction treatment programs, medications for opioid use disorder (MOUD), healthcare services, and case managers who provide mental health support, counseling, and assistance with benefits navigation (OnPoint NYC, 2023).

There is a clear need to employ a social-justice driven harm reduction approach to address the increasing severity of the New York City opioid crisis. The variety of helpful resources and services that are offered by OnPoint's OPCs show significant promise for preventing opioid-related mortality, reducing morbidity, and improving the health of PWUD. There is also significant benefits for the surrounding communities of the OPCs such as decreased public drug use, less drug-related litter, and connecting community members who use drugs to treatment programs to initiate recovery. In fact, PWUD that utilize harm reduction services like OPCs are over five times as likely to initiate addiction treatment in comparison to those who do not utilize harm reduction resources (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Moreover, studies examining the effects of OPCs in other regions have found no significant increase in criminal activity in the communities and neighborhoods surrounding the OPC (Finke & Chan, 2022). Yet despite the overwhelming benefits of OPCs for both PWUD as well as the surrounding community, there has been backlash from East Harlem community members and local civic groups regarding the OPC site placement as many believe that there are already too many substance use programs located in their neighborhood (Interlandi & Smallwood, 2023). To fully realize the potential benefits of OnPoint's Harlem-based OPC, it is essential to garner support from the East Harlem community to reduce stigma associated with the harm reduction program and increase its utilization among PWUD.

## **II. Designing a Targeted Campaign for OnPoint's East Harlem OPC**

In order to design and implement a successful campaign to promote community acceptance of OnPoint's OPC in East Harlem, it is important to first understand the individuals who make up the community itself. The East Harlem community predominantly consists of racial and ethnic minorities, with 43% Hispanic and 36% Black individuals, and about 20% of the population are foreign-born. Additionally, there is a 34% poverty rate in the community and the median household income of \$34,000 is about 53% lower than the NYC median (NYU Furman Center, 2019). Understanding the concerns of the East Harlem community regarding OnPoint's OPC is imperative to successfully foster a sentiment of true community ownership over the program, which will hopefully improve perceptions and increase acceptance of the harm reduction program (National Academies of Sciences, 2017). Some of the community grievances with the OPC are already known, such as the fact that the OPC site is directly across the street from a local preschool, and beliefs that the OPC is attracting more drug dealers to the area, and with them, more crime. However, Gretchen Buchenholz, the preschool's executive director, emphasized that "a lot of the problems that get laid at their (OnPoint's) feet are things we've been dealing with since long before they even existed" (Interlandi & Smallwood, 2023).

The key to gaining the support of the East Harlem community for OnPoint's OPC is to meaningfully understand and empower the voices of the community, collaborating with them to develop appropriate solutions to their concerns. It is essential to frame the campaign in a way that emphasizes the positive aspects of the OPC through highlighting the benefits it offers not only to its clients but also to the wider community, while also taking the community's concerns seriously and working to address them collaboratively.

### **Part 1: Partnering with Community Board 11 to Generate Community-Driven Solutions**

The first aspect of the campaign to promote community acceptance of OnPoint's OPC in East Harlem aims to leverage partnerships with community organizations to develop community-driven solutions to their concerns about the OPC. This will be accomplished by utilizing community organizing and building practices, specifically community capacity development, which focuses on consensus-building and cooperation as an organizing approach while also enhancing group problem-solving skills (Minkler & Wakimoto, 2022). East Harlem already has several well-established community-based organizations, and among the most influential is the Community Board 11 (CB11). This board conducts regular community meetings to assess the needs of the neighborhood,

advocates for the expressed needs of community members, and makes recommendations in the City's budget process to address those needs (Community Board 11, 2023). Collaborating with CB11 would be a valuable strategy for OnPoint to gain the support of the East Harlem community for the new OPC. Much of the pushback from the community stems from the fact that they do not feel as though they had a voice in deciding to locate the OPC in their neighborhood, so the strategy of community capacity development in collaboration with CB11 will be useful to mitigate this.

To successfully implement the community capacity development aspect of the campaign, OnPoint will need to establish a partnership with CB11. This can be achieved by connecting with Xavier Santiago, the current chair of CB11, to discuss the vital work being done at OnPoint's OPC in East Harlem and initiate a partnership between the two organizations. The next step would be for the two organizations to hold joint community meetings where OnPoint and OPC workers, along with representatives from CB11, will be present to better understand and address the concerns of the East Harlem community. To build a strong community coalition and work towards mutually beneficial solutions, the joint community meetings with CB11 and OPC workers will serve as the foundation. This coalition will merge the East Harlem community with CB11 and OnPoint, all sharing the goal of finding feasible ways for the OPC to continue operations in a way that also meaningfully serves the community. The formation of the community coalition between OnPoint, CB11, and community members will be informed by Butterfoss and Kegler's (2012) Community Coalition Action Theory (CCAT). This approach targets and merges both the community and organizational levels of the socio-ecological model by creating a powerful partnership between OnPoint, an established community organization, and individual community members themselves.

This aspect of the OPC campaign will apply the principles and constructs of CCAT to foster a meaningful partnership between OnPoint and the broader East Harlem community, aiming to promote community ownership over the OPC and subsequently improve acceptance of the harm reduction program. To overcome the significant community pushback that exists towards OnPoint's OPC in East Harlem, it is essential to establish relationships with CB11 leaders, who act as key community "gatekeepers," to gain credibility and increase the community's trust in OnPoint during the initial stages of the coalition-building process. This strategy aligns with the "Lead agency/convener group" construct of CCAT, and it will be employed to encourage community trust and participation in the coalition, which will enable community capacity development to take place (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2012). In addition to building community capacity, the coalition will also be utilized as a mechanism to teach community members about harm reduction and the purpose of the

OPC to emphasize the benefits it can bring to not only PWUD but also the East Harlem community as a whole. An example of the types of grievances with the OPC that may arise during the community coalition meetings is the growing frustration among community members about the surge of people injecting narcotics in the nearby 125th Street subway station after OnPoint ceases operations at 8pm (Johnson, 2022). However, by leveraging the CCAT approach, the coalition will be better equipped to address such concerns effectively and collaboratively. For example, by educating the community about the benefits of harm reduction, the coalition may be able to create a mutually beneficial solution that involves community members who are interested in harm reduction work becoming full or part-time paid staff members at OnPoint, enabling the facility to remain open 24/7 and reducing the influx of PWUD seeking refuge at the 125th Street station after hours. The Community Board could then communicate this strategy to City government officials to obtain the necessary funding for expanding the OPC's hours and employing local community members. This collaborative approach pulls from the “Pooled Member and External Resources” construct of CCAT where the synergistic pooling of member and external resources results in comprehensive strategies to address the community’s concerns about the OPC (Butterfoss & Kegler, 2012).

Although the example provided is just one among many potential solutions that can emerge from the implementation of CCAT and the establishment of a community coalition group between OnPoint, CB11, and East Harlem community members, it represents a compelling illustration of the innovative solutions that can be generated through community capacity building and resource pooling to address complex challenges in a mutually beneficial way. At the heart of this aspect of the campaign lies the ultimate objective of generating strategic solutions organically through the coalition and community capacity-building process. This is achieved through the robust engagement of the community using CCAT and community capacity development, which serve as crucial elements in fostering a true sense of community ownership over the OPC among East Harlem residents. By cultivating a mutually beneficial partnership between the community and OnPoint, this approach ensures the sustained success of OnPoint's OPC in the area, with the community taking an active role in shaping the future of the facility.

## **Part 2: Media Campaign Starring a Harm-Reduction TikTok Influencer**

The second component of the campaign aimed at fostering community acceptance and support for OnPoint's OPC in East Harlem is rooted in media communication theory, with a focus on the message effect theory (MET). In contrast to the community engagement and capacity-

building aspect of the campaign, this media approach employs a more direct strategy for disseminating information about OnPoint and its benefits to PWUD and the East Harlem community. While it is less collaborative in nature, it has been proven to be highly effective and will help promote community acceptance of the OPC in East Harlem through the destigmatization of PWUD and expanding knowledge around the various benefits of harm reduction programs. Message Effects Theory postulates that messages of varying forms can influence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors, and aims to determine the most effective means of conveying information to specific audiences. MET investigates how message design and audience characteristics interact to shape information processing and outcomes (Bogart, 2023). Specifically, MET will be utilized to develop a media campaign for the East Harlem community aimed at increasing community acceptance of OnPoint's OPC through collaboration with an influential TikTok, Courtney Dorritie (@court0o0), who makes harm reduction-related content. Courtney is recovering from OUD and lives in a homeless shelter with her husband in Brooklyn. In fact, she commutes into the East Harlem community every day to receive her methadone doses as her treatment facility is located in the neighborhood, and she also works at a harm reduction facility in the South Bronx. Her personal experience with OUD, as well as her commitment to harm reduction, coupled with her substantial influence on TikTok, boasting nearly 300,000 followers, makes her an invaluable spokesperson for OnPoint's media campaign.

The media campaign will rely on MET constructs, with a focus on exemplars, narratives, and message framing. Exemplars use examples to illustrate a "general class of events", and narratives are an extension of exemplars which have been proven to be one of the most powerful and visible messaging structures (Bogart, 2023). Courtney's personal journey towards recovery represents a compelling narrative example of how harm reduction programs, such as OnPoint's OPC in East Harlem, can significantly transform the lives of PWUD. In this campaign, having a narrative example like Courtney's is essential, given the high level of stigma associated with PWUD in American society and the widespread misconception that OPCs and harm-reduction programs reward or encourage drug use. Courtney's story provides a powerful counterexample to this stigma and highlights the value of harm reduction programs in facilitating recovery. Moreover, Courtney's unique recovery journey in NYC makes her an excellent partner for spreading this message to the East Harlem community. Many community members are unhappy with OnPoint's OPC, as they believe it attracts PWUD from outside the community, further destabilizing their neighborhood's social fabric. By showcasing the experience of Courtney, who receives her daily methadone doses at

a clinic in East Harlem but does not go to OnPoint's OPC, she will demonstrate the types of people seeking help and treatment for OUD in the East Harlem community. This approach can help alleviate concerns and misconceptions around OPCs and harm reduction programs, fostering greater community engagement and support for OnPoint's OPC in East Harlem. However, to successfully promote the destigmatization of PWUD and increase community knowledge about the significance of OnPoint's OPC and harm reduction programs, the media campaign with Courtney will be strategically framed and informed by MET. Specifically, the campaign will emphasize how OPCs and harm reduction programs are a pathway to recovery for people just like Courtney, and her first-hand experiences with harm reduction helping her in her recovery from OUD will serve as a powerful narrative to convey this message.

To effectively implement and disseminate OnPoint's media campaign with Courtney, two distinct outreach strategies will be utilized to engage a wider range of members in the East Harlem community. Given Courtney's significant presence and influence on TikTok, the first outreach strategy of the media campaign will focus on utilizing the TikTok platform to create a series of short video clips. The videos will highlight Courtney's personal journey to recovery through harm reduction programs and emphasize the positive impact of OPCs like the one in East Harlem specifically. The goal of this strategy is to engage the TikTok community and increase visibility and awareness about the importance of harm reduction programs, as well as generate support for the OPC in East Harlem. The videos will be carefully crafted to be visually compelling, emotionally resonant, and utilize TikTok's unique features and tools, such as hashtags and music, to maximize engagement with the target audience in East Harlem. Additionally, the videos will be promoted through paid social media advertising to reach a wider audience beyond Courtney's existing followers. This outreach strategy aims to create a grassroots movement through social media that will raise awareness and generate support for harm reduction and OPC programs among the East Harlem community. The campaign clips from this portion of the media outreach strategy will also be featured on OnPoint's website.

While TikTok is a widely used platform among all age groups, it is important to note that older generations and the elderly are less represented on the app. Thus, the second outreach strategy of the media campaign will involve partnering with local media outlets in the East Harlem community to ensure that OnPoint and Courtney's message is disseminated to a broader audience within the area. Through partnering with local media outlets, the media campaign can leverage these platforms to not only increase visibility of the campaign and its message, but also to provide more

comprehensive coverage and in-depth interviews with Courtney and OnPoint OPC workers. The interviews will be framed strategically to evoke positive perceptions of the OPC among East Harlem community members by utilizing the MET constructs, such as Courtney's compelling narrative and message framing. By doing so, the media campaign can effectively convey the importance of harm reduction programs and the significant impact they can have on individuals and communities affected by the opioid crisis. By utilizing multiple outreach strategies, the media campaign can ensure a wide-reaching and effective dissemination of its message to the diverse members of the East Harlem community, ultimately maximizing the impact of the campaign in increasing community support for OnPoint's OPC in the East Harlem neighborhood.

### **III. Conclusions**

To increase support for OnPoint's OPC among East Harlem community members, this comprehensive campaign employs health promotion constructs derived from community organizing and building practices, specifically the Community Coalition Action Theory (CCAT). Additionally, the campaign utilizes media communication theory, such as the Message Effect Theory (MET), to further promote community acceptance as well as destigmatize PWUD and harm reduction programs more generally. Establishing a relationship with CB11 will be imperative for the community coalition building process as CB11 leaders will act as key community "gatekeepers" who increase the community's trust in the coalition and OnPoint. The campaign's community organizing and building aspect aims to target the community and organizational levels of the socio-ecological model by establishing a coalition among CB11, OnPoint, and East Harlem community members to generate collaborative, community-driven solutions regarding the OPC.

In addition, the media communication and Message Effect Theory aspect of the campaign targets both the community and societal levels of the socio-ecological model. The media campaign, featuring a harm reduction TikTok influencer who is actively recovering from OUD, is designed to shift perceptions among East Harlem community members regarding OnPoint's OPC and harm reduction programs more generally. Furthermore, the campaign aims to promote the destigmatization of PWUD by effectively framing Courtney's powerful narrative experience with OUD and harm reduction as a successful pathway to recovery. This is important because the intense stigmatization of PWUD and harm reduction programs is rooted in the pervasive societal stigma in the United States around drug use and the ethos of harm reduction. Thus, this aspect of the



campaign will touch upon both the local East Harlem community as well as address the broader societal stigma around PWUD and harm reduction as a whole.

Overall, the campaign seeks to engage, educate, and empower the East Harlem community to support harm reduction programs such as OnPoint's OPC by targeting the organizational, community, and societal levels of the socio-ecological model through employing CCAT and MET constructs. To achieve this goal, the campaign creates a collaborative problem solving environment through coalition building and disseminates a persuasive message about the many benefits of harm reduction programs and OPCs that is easily understood and relevant to the East Harlem community. Through this approach, the campaign aims to foster greater trust, engagement, and support for OnPoint's OPC among the East Harlem community members.

## References

- American Psychiatric Association. (2022, December). *Opioid Use Disorder*.  
<https://www.psychiatry.org:443/patients-families/opioid-use-disorder>
- Bogart, Jane, Communication Session 11. *Health Promotion Theory, Research and Practice*.  
 Lecture, Columbia Mailman School of Public Health, New York, NY. April 6, 2023.
- Butterfoss, F., & Kegler, M. (2012). A coalition model for community action. *Community Organizing and Community Building for Health and Welfare*, 309–328.
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, January 11). *Summary of Information on The Safety and Effectiveness of Syringe Services Programs (SSPs) | CDC*. <https://www.cdc.gov/ssp/syringe-services-programs-summary.html>
- Community Board 11. (2023). *Community Board 11*. <http://www.cb11m.org/>
- Finke, J., & Chan, J. (2022). The Case for Supervised Injection Sites in the United States. *American Family Physician*, 105(5), 454–455.  
<https://www.aafp.org/pubs/afp/issues/2022/0500/p454.html>
- Interlandi, J., & Smallwood, D. (2023, February 22). Opinion | One Year Inside a Radical New Approach to America’s Overdose Crisis. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/22/opinion/drug-crisis-addiction-harm-reduction.html>
- Johnson, S. (2022, December 13). *Saving Lives or Ruining the Neighborhood? East Harlem Locals at Odds as America’s First Safe Injection Site Turns One*. The City: Reporting for New Yorkers.  
<https://www.thecity.nyc/2022/12/13/23506502/harlem-locals-at-odds-first-anniversary-of-americas-first-safe-injection-site>
- Minkler, M., & Wakimoto, P. (2022). *Community Organizing and Community Building for Health and Social Equity*, 4th edition. *Rutgers University Press*.

<https://www.rutgersuniversitypress.org/community-organizing-and-community-building-for-health-and-social-equity-4th-edition/9781978824744/>

National Academies of Sciences, E., Division, H. and M., Practice, B. on P. H. and P. H., States, C. on C.-B. S. to P. H. E. in the U., Baciu, A., Negussie, Y., Geller, A., & Weinstein, J. N. (2017). *The Role of Communities in Promoting Health Equity*. In *Communities in Action: Pathways to Health Equity*. National Academies Press (US).

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK425849/>

NYC DOHMH. (2023, January 12). *New York City Releases 2021 Overdose Data Showing Unprecedented Overdose Levels—NYC Health*. New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/about/press/pr2023/overdose-rates-reach-unprecedented-levels.page>

NYU Furman Center. (2019). *East Harlem Neighborhood Profile*.

<https://furmancenter.org/neighborhoods/view/east-harlem>

OnPoint NYC. (2023). *OnPoint NYC - Making History. Saving Lives*. OnPoint NYC.

<https://onpointnyc.org/>

Tarentino, F. (2023, January 5). *DEA New York and NYC's Office of the Special Narcotics Prosecutor Seize Record Amounts of Fentanyl-Laced, Fake Prescription Pills and Fentanyl Powder During 2022*. Drug Enforcement Administration. <https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2023/01/05/dea-new-york-and-nycs-office-special-narcotics-prosecutor-seize-record>