

New Bedford Police receive LEAD van for harm-reduction response to low-level offenses

"The Bristol County District Attorney's office has contributed towards the purchase of a new vehicle for the New Bedford police department.

On June 21st, a new 2022 Kia Carnival passenger van was put on the road. This van will primarily be used by the department's LEAD (Law Enforcement Assisted Diversion) team and outreach workers. LEAD is a program launched in May 2018 which focuses on a harm-reduction response to lower-level offenses such as simple drug possession. The intent is to reduce the number of individuals being sent to court or incarcerated and divert them to treatment instead.

LEAD is a collaborative effort between the NBPD, the District Attorney's office, 7 Hills Behavioral and will soon include the NB Health Dept. The operational team now includes Gifford St. Wellness and Steppingstones peer-to-peer program.

To date, 119 people have gone through the program and been diverted away from their initial criminal charges which are eliminated by the District Attorney's office upon completion. LEAD is a national program that began in Seattle, Washington, and has spread throughout the country. We are proud to boast the first LEAD program here in Massachusetts.

This van will be used by the team to head out into the community to visit individuals post-overdose, distribute Narcan, and check on various program participants.

"Prior to the acquisition of this vehicle, outreach workers

had to use cruisers to conduct visits. These cruisers drew unwanted attention to the person being visited. This van enhances the effectiveness of our team and I'm very grateful to DA Quinn for recognizing the value of preventive programs like this." said Chief Paul Oliveira.

Those who qualify for participation in the LEAD program are individuals who struggle with a substance abuse disorder, have committed a misdemeanor offense, and are receptive to the process.

PHOTO from left to right – Deputy Chief Adelino Sousa, Sgt. Samuel Ortega (program supervisor), Natasha Patricio (project coordinator), Haywood Barnes (full-time recovery coach), Ashley Cabral (part-time recovery coach), District Attorney Tom Quinn, and Chief Paul Oliveira." -New Bedford Police Department.



New Bedford Police Department photo.