



JEFFERSON COUNTY EDUCATIONAL SERVICE CENTER

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Working together to give A Night to Shine

TORONTO – Some special people were the guests of honor at a prom event for individuals with developmental disabilities held by the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities and Crossroads North River church in Toronto.

A Night to Shine is offered through the Tim Tebow Foundation, which requires a church host the event. The work and commitment of volunteers and agencies helped facilitate the evening.

Assistant Director Lindsay Brandon of OhioRISE (Resilience through Integrated Systems and Excellence) said four members of the staff joined in on Feb. 9. Supervisor Jodie Feezle and care coordinators Katie Forsythe, Teresa Wade-Coursin and Jason Headley all helped give the honored guests a night to remember.

“The volunteers did the honored guests’ hair and makeup and they got everybody dressed up and ready to go, so it was a nice event. They definitely took good care of the honored guests and treated them like kings and queens.”

Brandon said this was a Jefferson County function, but the department works with Stark, Tuscarawas, Columbiana, Jefferson, Carroll, Harrison, Belmont and Monroe Counties to coordinate services. OhioRISE has been reinforcing existing relationships in Jefferson County and building new connections since the program’s inception in July of 2022.

“In that year and a half, we’ve definitely felt those relationships were really starting to strengthen across the board,” she said.

“Some of the relationships are brand-new for us because we weren’t necessarily in those counties, and so we’re really building those relationships from the ground up,” she said. “We’re definitely seeing some increase in that collaboration that we have with the organizations in each of the communities.”

Feezle, who also attends the church, said she and her staff were grateful for the opportunity.

“We work in conjunction with the DD board a lot, especially when it comes to the kiddos that are in OhioRISE. Some the kids that are enrolled in OhioRISE were actually at the event,” she said, adding that she recognized a couple of OhioRISE attendees. “You could tell by the vibe that everyone was having fun. It was so much fun. Even for the volunteers it was fun, just to see the reactions of honored guests.”

Feezle said there is mutual participation among agencies that work with children and young people.

“We are a collaborative agency and it kind of was full circle,” she said. “It’s all connected because our kids utilize their services just as much as they utilize our services. We share kids. They’re all our kids. It’s nice to come together as a whole and know that there’s a lot of agencies and a lot of people working with these kids to get them to where they need to be and where they want to be.”

Feezle looks forward to working with the church in more events such as the Toys for Toronto toy distribution at Christmas time, also used by participants of OhioRISE. Cookie West, employment and community navigator for the Jefferson County Board of Developmental Disabilities said they were happy to partner with the Toronto church. They hosted 68 honored guests ages 14 and older, from recent graduates to senior citizens.

“They were able to walk a red carpet. They were able to have a limo ride. They had a catered dinner. They had a professional photo. They were able to dance the night away,” West said. “Persons with disabilities have the same desires and wants. They like to dress up. They like to have a good time.”

West said OhioRISE’s participation was welcome.

“We had individuals that participate in the OhioRISE program. They participated as honored guests,” she said. “It was such an opportunity for that young person to be in a celebratory, joyful, peaceful environment.

“As we move forward in our integration and our inclusion revolution, to have organizations such as OhioRISE to work side-by-side alongside us as we continue to bring about these activities and events that help persons with disabilities gain greater access to their communities.”

She also said the opportunity for members of different agencies to network with each other will only benefit the people they serve.

“Just being able to have the different organizations and agencies there to help navigate the night for our buddies,” she said. “They’re getting the opportunity to make these diverse connections, and I do believe they’ll be fruitful.”

She said DD will put the word out when they prepare for their next event. More information can be found at jcbdd.com.

Shari Prichard, wife of the Rev. Mark Prichard, pastor of the church, said they were overjoyed to work with community partners and volunteers to give that night to the attendees. She recalled hugs and thank-yous from the honored guests, adding the volunteers were also touched. She looks forward to holding a second event next February.

OhioRISE is a specialized Ohio Medicaid managed care program for children and youth

with complex behavioral and multisystems needs. To learn more about OhioRISE and the services offered, call 740-792-4011, email ohiorise.info@jcesc.org or visit the Jefferson County Educational Service Center website at jcesc.k12.oh.us.



OhioRISE staff joined with other agencies and volunteers in A Night to Shine prom event for people with disabilities. Pictured from left are care coordinator Katie Forsythe, supervisor Jodie Feezle and care coordinators Jason Headley and Teresa Wade-Coursin.