



Eastern Ohio  
ASPIRE



## JEFFERSON COUNTY EDUCATIONAL SERVICE CENTER

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Aspire education opening doors for job seekers

WINTERSVILLE – Eastern Ohio Aspire had a strong presence during a job fair at Florian Hall Sept. 18. Their message was education opens more doors and Aspire is a resource to fill that gap.

Funded by the Aspire grant through the Ohio Department of Higher Education and managed through the Jefferson County Educational Service Center, Eastern Ohio Aspire offers adult educational services and assists with high school equivalency diplomas as well as offering services for English speakers of other languages, integrated education and training, correctional education, distance learning, and workplace and family literacy. Eastern Ohio Aspire covers Mahoning, Jefferson, Belmont, Harrison, Carroll and Columbiana Counties.

Director of Transitions Christina Wanat and other staffers spoke to members of the public about the benefits of Aspire, including a chance for better employment and to go on to post-secondary education if they so desire. “This is for individuals to get their high school equivalency,” Wanat said.

Director of Support Services and Curriculum Development Hayden Martin said Aspire offers a wide variety of services including remediation to build skills. They have formed valuable partnerships with Ohio Means Jobs and hold adult education classes at their locations. Hayden Martin said Aspire also works within the Lisbon Eastern Ohio Correction Center for female residents, and the Wintersville Eastern Ohio Correction Center for male residents. Additionally, Aspire helps nursing students prepare for the test of essential academic skills.

“We help them attain that and get them where they want to be. We also help them getting into the workforce.” They answered questions about how to seek remediation and high school equivalency. One member of the public expressed interest in teaching.

Hazel Martin, who works as a career navigator, data entry and instructor, was enthusiastic throughout the job fair as she made the rounds and introduced Aspire to other service providers. Many were interested in what Aspire could offer and saw potential in working together.

As a career navigator, Hazel Martin also checks students’ status after they graduate. She learns if they have found employment and helps point them in the right direction if they have not. The job fair was an opportunity to talk with potential employers for Aspire graduates.

Hazel Martin said if students attend Aspire classes regularly and apply themselves, they could be ready to earn a HSE in eight weeks or longer.

“It depends on your own schedule and how much time you’re willing to put in.”

Director Jermel Bailey said Aspire courses include workplace literacy for people in correctional facilities, with the goal of imparting workplace skills to help them obtain and retain jobs after their release.

Bailey also commented on Aspire’s work with English speakers of other languages and assisting them in learning English.

“We help them navigate,” he said. “Getting their citizenship as well. We offer those classes to those people that are new to the country.”

Bailey began as a teacher. He said he found purpose with Aspire and in observing how the program changed lives. “That’s been my main thing that’s kept me going,” he said. “There’s really no greater feeling than that.”

Bailey said honesty and respect for students was a recipe for success. The length of the courses depends on students and how much work they put in, and Aspire staff are committed to giving their students what they might have lacked in earlier education. Students can receive individualized attention and staff work with them every step of the way. “I bring a family approach to the program and the classroom. I like to say once they join, that we’re a family,” he said. “I do want to see them succeed and complete their ultimate goal.”

Hope McAfee, Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act Director with the Jefferson County CAC, said Aspire was a natural invite to the job fair.

“They partner with us at the CAC,” she said. “We refer people who need their GEDs or they need tutoring or a little bit of extra help to get them to where they need to be for education and training purposes,” she said. “If we have someone who’s struggling, one of the measures for youth is basic skills deficiency, so if we have someone who isn’t quite meeting that measure, Aspire is fantastic in taking the time to help tutor them to get them where they need to be.”

McAfee added Aspire’s classes for people who are learning English is also valuable.

Lysaih Rice, a youth case manager with Ohio Means Jobs of Jefferson County, spoke highly of the program.

“They are very helpful. They respond in a timely manner. I’ve had a couple kids who were interested in getting their GED,” Rice said, adding Bailey works very well with them. “They’re kind of like family honestly.”

Aspire also met the state-funded Growing Rural Independence Together (GRIT) project, which offers job assessments and guidance to match young adults with potential careers. Leigh Ann Smith, community outreach partner, was interested in working with Aspire. She was intrigued to learn Aspire worked in multiple counties, adding GRIT operated in Ohio’s Appalachian counties and Aspire sounded easily accessible.

“Oftentimes we see that one of their barriers is not having that high school diploma, so I think the services of Aspire would be super beneficial to our job seekers.”

U.S. Army Sgt. Tyler Gossett was excited to hear from Aspire. A high school education is required to serve, and he often meets prospective recruits who do not know the resources available. He said putting prospective recruits in touch with Aspire could give them the tools they need.

“We’ll definitely be using it.”

Eastern Ohio Aspire can be reached at [aspire@jcesc.org](mailto:aspire@jcesc.org). The web page is <https://www.jcesc.k12.oh.us/EasternOhioASPIRE.aspx>.



Eastern Ohio Aspire Director of Transitions Christina Wanat, left, front, career navigator and data entry instructor Hazel Martin, Director Jermel Bailey, left, back, and Director of Support Services and Curriculum Development Hayden Martin join in a job fair and spread word of Aspire’s services in helping people earn a high school equivalency diploma and the opportunities this can bring.



Hazel Martin, career navigator and data entry instructor with Eastern Ohio Aspire, makes connections with businesses and agencies during a job fair in Wintersville. Aspire offers adult education services toward earning a high school equivalency diploma. The program also provides remediation, integrated education and training, and courses for English speakers of other languages. Employers and job seekers find the program valuable.