



JEFFERSON COUNTY EDUCATIONAL SERVICE CENTER

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OhioRISE builds bridges at Harrison Elementary Literacy Night

CADIZ – OhioRISE joined in the educational mission of Literacy Night at Harrison Central Elementary Feb. 29.

Crowds of children and adults attended, with several agencies represented at the gymnasium. Vicky Filtz, care coordinator with OhioRISE (Resilience through Integrated Systems and Excellence), was behind a table offering information and answering questions. She was a frequent stop for young people, and the stress balls at her station quickly became the hit of the night for children to bounce, throw or toss through the basketball hoops.

“Our main goal is to raise awareness about what OhioRISE is and how to connect with us,” she said. “We want the community to understand that there are supports available to them, and through that support we can make sure that they’re connected with the community resources that are going to service the needs of them as a youth and as a family unit.”

OhioRISE is a specialized Ohio Medicaid managed care program for children and youth with complex behavioral health and multisystem needs. The program operates through the Jefferson County Educational Service Center, active in Belmont, Carroll, Columbiana, Harrison, Jefferson, Monroe, Stark and Tuscarawas Counties.

Filtz said OhioRISE’s goal is to help facilitate services, streamline the processes, and reduce the number of meetings families must attend.

By combining meetings OhioRISE is able to assist the team supporting the family understand how they can work together more efficiently.

Filtz said they also take the opportunity to connect with different agencies and make them aware of what OhioRISE offers as well as learning more about the services they provide.

“We’re always looking for opportunities to educate our staff about more resources in the community that they may or may not already be aware of.”

The Harrison County Health Department also had a table that night. Health Commissioner Megan Smolenak said during her year in the commissioner’s position she has seen potential in working with OhioRISE.

“I think it’s a great program regardless and I always am advocating for more resources and more things to come to Harrison County. I think it’s a great thing we’re starting to build that relationship and build that partnership,” Smolenak said.

Director of Nursing Teresa Koniski agreed.

“Typically, Harrison County has trouble obtaining resources, and I think OhioRISE is going to be really great, connecting families to resources that they need,” she said.

They said one common issue in Harrison County was a “transportation barrier.”

“There’s not always a lot of things here within the county, so you have to go out of the county to different appointments,” Koniski said. “That’s where families run into trouble if they don’t have reliable transportation.”

Filtz said OhioRISE’s care coordinators are adept at helping families navigate the benefits they might have through their managed care organizations, and if there can be any increases to those benefits through OhioRISE services and enrollment.

“We can actually physically help them calling and scheduling that transportation. A lot of folks don’t know they have the benefits or how to access those benefits,” Filtz said. Smolenak welcomed the discussion.

“On our end now, we have a resource we can direct people to. If there is somebody who comes in and asks about certain topics like that, then we are able to direct them to someone who knows more than what the health department might know, and they can almost close that loop for them,” she said.

Stephanie McKinney, assistant principal of pre-kindergarten through third grade at Harrison Central Elementary, said OhioRISE supervisor Mary Kakascik had attended a meeting earlier that day to discuss a student’s individualized education plan.

“It was really nice because the parent wasn’t sure if they wanted the services or not,” she said. “She did a wonderful job explaining it. So it was a great opportunity for the special ed teacher because she wasn’t as familiar with it,” McKinney said.

Filtz said she is available anytime to answer questions from staff working at community agencies or schools about OhioRISE’s range of services and how to connect with the program. Her contact information is below.

Stacie Brown, coordinator for the Family and Children First Council for Belmont and Harrison Counties, also had a table. She said she frequently partners with OhioRISE.

“We both provide service coordination for the kids in our areas based on their needs, and we felt we want to fill service gaps in our area and work together with our community partners,” Brown said. “There’s only one of me, and I don’t have the volume of care coordinators that OhioRISE has, and they take care of a lot of the more intense children and needs of children and families.” Jackie Dunlap of Cadiz, attending with her grandchildren, spoke with Filtz.

“I do think it’ll help the children of Harrison County. It is a great program. I’ve been involved in many children’s programs to help the county, collaborative and cluster organizations, and this is just a step up. I think the more we can help the children of Harrison County, the better off we will be as a society in the future,” she said.

Afterward, Filtz reflected on a successful night.

“I was able to connect with some of the staff here at the school and how to reach out. One of them was asking if it had to be a referral from a provider or a school. We were able to help them understand that anyone can make a referral.”

OhioRise is a Medicaid managed care program for children and youth with complex behavioral health and multisystems needs. To learn more about OhioRISE, call 740-792-4011, email ohiorise.info@jcesc.org or visit the Jefferson County Educational Service Center website at jcesc.k12.oh.us.



Photo Cutlines: Vicky Filtz, right, care coordinator with OhioRISE, connects with Harrison County Health Department Director of Nursing Teresa Koniski, left, and Health Commissioner Megan Smolenak during Literacy Night at Harrison Central Elementary on Thursday.