



Preparation Meets Opportunity

IRIS Launch in the Tazewell County All Our Kids (AOK) Network

Launched in January 2020, the Tazewell, Peoria, and Woodford (TPW) IRIS Community in Illinois built upon their existing coordinated intake model to establish a process to engage partners and connect families to services. The timing of IRIS launch provided this community a connected system, supporting providers through the pandemic. TPW is now looking to expand beyond early childhood with plans to focus on perinatal depression supports in the community.

The Illinois Action For Children spotlights the work led by Julie Herzog, All Our Kids Network Coordinator.

The Tazewell AOK (All Our Kids) network has worked diligently to create a collaboration of partners with a robust sense of trust and communication in Tazewell and neighboring counties. Despite a solid foundation of strong relationships, the collaborative recognized that it was still challenging for partners to know what was happening to families after a referral. Leading up to becoming an IRIS pilot site, the collaboration worked to lay a strong foundation for successful implementation. They identified who would be part of the referral system and where they could build on existing resources in the community. Members held community dialogues and collected feedback through Art of Hosting events and workgroups. They were off to a great start when they integrated their existing coordinated intake model into the IRIS system.

This groundwork made for a smooth launch of the IRIS system for Tazewell, Peoria, and Woodford (TPW) in January of 2020, two months before the onset of the pandemic. The collaborative successfully established a strong referral and intake system for their providers and families during one of the most challenging times of our lifetimes, the COVID-19 pandemic, and that made a world of difference.

Since the launch of the pilot, the IRIS community has engaged partners to understand the current referral practices and the how's and why's of the IRIS process. They configured IRIS to meet the specific needs of the community and established community standards for using the integrated referral system.

The collaboration launched TPW's first cohort of participating programs in January 2020 with 14 programs including coordinated Intake, home visiting, early intervention, and supportive early childhood services. The IRIS system helped providers continue a strong referral process during a time of great need even while working remotely. Now at 38 programs, the collaboration has

enrolled 46% of the more than 1,400 families referred in services. The referral process also expanded beyond early childhood programs to include services that support the basic needs of families – e.g., perinatal support, domestic violence, food assistance, and crisis assistance programs.

Going forward, the collaboration will do a crosswalk on perinatal depression supports and onboard maternal mental health providers, including a local hospital. The goal is to create a bidirectional referral process.

Julie Herzog, the All Our Kids Network Coordinator whom we interviewed for this article, recalls a time when she worked in Head Start and a referral system like IRIS was just a vision. She is ecstatic at being part of the team that made this vision a reality!