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Greenview  
Hopewell  
Phoenix  
Prentiss Autism Center  
Willow Creek

**CONNECTIONS**

**EARLY CHILDHOOD PLUS**

**PEP ASSIST**

Dear Friend,

People often ask, "How are things at PEP?"

Candidly, it's a hard question to answer. These past few years have been incredibly hard on the young people we serve. A global pandemic, harsh political discourse and economic hardships have made for painful days for young people who entered this moment already challenged by complex developmental trauma, mental health issues and autism.

For those of us working in these caring spaces, it has meant harder days as we carry the weight of serving as an essential buffer for these youth in these times.

Yet through it all, we persevere. **With a laser-like focus on supporting young people to overcome and thrive**, we have committed ourselves to our vision of an equitable community where every young person is valued and experiences joy and deep fulfillment.

Our strategic framework insists we optimize our programs by advancing proven trauma-informed practices and innovate new services that advance our mission. The stories on the following pages bring to life just some of the ways we are doing that work.

The next question that often follows is, "How can I help?" That answer is clear. **You can make a real impact by making a contribution that allows us to invest in our staff** so that we can create the flourishing workplace needed to do this work in these challenging times.

Thank you for considering this request and many thanks for all the ways you support and celebrate the young people in our communities. We wish for you what we wish for all those we serve — a year filled with joy, connection, love and possibilities.

With gratitude,

Noreen Kilbane  
Chair, Board of Directors

Habeebah R. Grimes  
Chief Executive Officer

# School Family Builds Resilience and Empathy



## A Really Rough Morning

"I can make a taller one!" Tyler\* announced loudly, while eyeing a tower of blocks a group of children was building together. He strode over to the group and forced his way into the circle. "Tyler, stop!" one girl cried, trying to shield the tower from him. He reached past her to grab a handful of blocks, bumping the tower and causing it to topple over.

"You're so annoying, Tyler!" came the familiar chorus from his classmates.

Tyler's experience is a common one for children whose social skills are under-developed. These young people want to connect socially but don't know how to do so in an appropriate way. Their awkward attempts often frustrate their peers, isolating them further.

In another classroom down the hall, 7-year old Isaiah\* was having a rough start to his day. Well, to be fair, Isaiah had been having "a rough start to his day" every day since the he returned to school after the COVID lock down. During the early part of the pandemic, he became accustomed to spending all his time at home with his family. When he returned to school, his separation anxiety had become a serious issue and it was usually at its worst in the morning. Today, when his teacher asked him to enter the classroom, Isaiah collapsed on the floor, took his shoe off and threw it across the hallway.

## Building a School Family at PEP

At **PEP's Day Treatment Centers**, teacher-counselors are skilled at handling tough moments like these. For younger grades, one concept many classrooms use to build competence and empathy is the "School Family." Part of a larger social emotional learning framework known as Conscious Discipline, the School Family, "builds connections between families and schools, teachers and teachers, teachers and students, and students and students to ensure the optimal development of all."



Ultimately, the goal PEP classrooms are aiming for when creating a School Family is for every child to feel supported and cared for at school, just as they do at home. For children who come from homes where they don't feel safety, the School Family is especially important. There are a lot strategies PEP classrooms use to create a school family.

For Isaiah, layering in family support from home was crucial. Now, when Isaiah gets to school, he has a new routine. Before he does anything else, he sits down with a teacher-counselor and reads a social story that was created for him by his teacher and his mother. The story reminds him of what his family wants for him at school — such as for him to have safe hands. It's a helpful way for Isaiah to ease into his school day, keeping in mind that his mother loves him and supports him while he is at PEP.

For Tyler, building a school family had more to do with mindset. The teacher talked to the other students about shifting from seeing Tyler as an annoying classmate to a member of the school family who needed help. At home, you wouldn't shun a family member who was annoying you. The same is true at school. Now, with teacher support, the other kids roleplay with Tyler how to appropriately join in an activity.

## School Family Promotes Resilience and Healing

At PEP, many of our students are facing challenges that make it difficult for them to navigate their days. There are many "Tylers" whose social skills are lagging and there are many "Isaiahs" whose anxiety manifests in challenging behaviors. These young people have experienced a lot of failure in their short lives. They don't have the confidence that comes from feeling successful. Conscious Discipline strategies like the School Family help us focus on the good.

The School Family approach also helps us frame our thinking in a more positive way. Every day, we start fresh in the classroom. Whatever happened yesterday is in the past and today is a new day. Thinking of ourselves as a family helps us build empathy for one another. We care about our family members and focus on how we can all help each other, rather than what everyone is doing wrong. For our kids, so many of whom face unimaginable challenges, having a safe and supportive School Family is a key element in building their resilience and supporting their healing.

\*Not their real names.

## PEP Selected as a Care Management Entity for OhioRISE



PEP is proud to have been named by Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) Director Maureen Corcoran as one of the 20 community-oriented Care Management Entities (CMEs) selected to build local systems of care for OhioRISE (Resilience through Integrated Systems and Excellence), Ohio's first highly integrated care program for youth with complex behavioral health and multi-system needs.

This moment is uniquely meaningful for PEP, as it is the culmination of more than 30 years of advocacy for services to support multi-system involved youth. What began as a demonstration project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation in 1989 to find better strategies to care for young people with serious mental health challenges became **PEP Connections'** intensive care coordination/high-fidelity wraparound service.

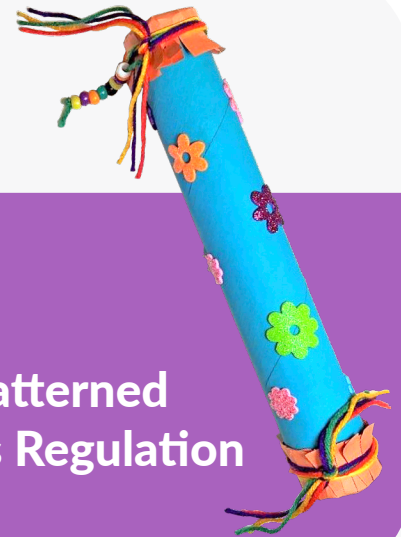
As we witnessed firsthand the positive outcomes this type of service had for kids in crisis, we hoped that one day the model would be available throughout the state. The establishment of OhioRISE signifies that the day we have been working for has finally come.

Care Management Entities for OhioRISE are charged with building local systems of care and will serve as the singular point of contact families can turn to in times of crisis. The focus for CMEs is ensuring that wrap-around, high-intensity care is available, coordinated locally, and clinically integrated for enrolled children.

As Director Corcoran has stated, "Our goal is making sure children with the most complex needs receive the right kind of care, in their hometowns, surrounded by families and communities they know and trust." PEP is grateful to serve as an important component of this essential infrastructure for young people in our region.



## Rhythmic, Patterned Activity Aids Regulation



**PEP Greenview** art teacher, Devon Fegen-Herdman recently had her high school students make rain sticks in her class. This choice of activity was more than just an opportunity to learn about art. Ms. Fegen-Herdman chose it to aid with emotional regulation. Specifically, the project utilizes the Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) strategy of repeated, patterned, rhythmic activity.

"The only way to move from these super-high anxiety states, to calmer more cognitive states, is rhythm," says Bruce Perry, Ph.D., founder of NMT. "Patterned, repetitive rhythmic activity: walking, running, dancing, singing, repetitive meditative breathing – you use brain-stem related somatosensory networks which make your brain accessible to relational (limbic brain) reward and cortical thinking."

To make the rain sticks, students began by hammering more than 100 nails into a cylinder, receiving somatosensory feedback with each hammer strike. The next steps, which included taping and plastering, were soothing and rhythmic. Finally, after adding BBs and beans for sound, students decorated their rain sticks however they wanted. The finished products created a soothing sound. Students loved standing in a line and creating a "rainstorm" by rotating their rain sticks one after the other.

In September, both the Ohio House of Representatives and the Ohio Senate formally recognized **Positive Education Program** in honor of its 50th year of service to the community. Highlights from both commendations are below.

### Ohio Senate Commendation

Since its establishment in 1971, Positive Education Program has made many significant contributions to uplifting children with mental health and behavioral challenges, as well as to the families and the professionals who support them. Indeed, the nonprofit has earned the well-deserved respect and appreciation of all those it has served, and it has stood as a beacon to society thanks to the dedicated people who have willingly given their time, energy, and abilities to advance the well-being of local youth.

Thus, with great pride, we applaud Positive Education Program on its Fiftieth Anniversary and salute it as one of Ohio's finest organizations.

### Ohio General Assembly Commendation

[PEP's 50th anniversary is] indeed, an important event, and it provides an ideal time to acknowledge the exceptional work done by the Positive Education Program...Its various initiatives benefit more than 2,500 children each year, and clearly, its impressive contributions to the community readily explain why it is so widely held in high esteem.

As they celebrate this important milestone, all those associated with the Positive Education Program have the unique opportunity to reflect with pride on the accomplishments of the past and look forward to a rewarding future. Indeed, they have convincingly demonstrated how very much can be accomplished by a group of conscientious people with clear objectives and firm resolve, and we applaud their tremendous efforts.



3100 Euclid Avenue  
Cleveland, Ohio 44115  
216-361-4400

[pepcleve.org](http://pepcleve.org)

Since 1971, **Positive Education Program** has been supporting young people to overcome and thrive. PEP provides services — both direct and consultative in nature — for children challenged by complex developmental trauma, mental health issues and autism, their families and the professionals who support them. PEP is committed to understanding and overcoming the significant trauma and chronic stress experienced by many of the youth we serve. Programs include six **PEP Day Treatment Centers** (Eastwood, Greenview, Hopewell, Phoenix, Prentiss Autism Center, Willow Creek), **PEP Connections**, **PEP Early Childhood Plus** and **PEP Assist**.

Associated with Educational Service Center of Northeast Ohio  
Contract Provider of Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board of Cuyahoga County  
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