



Enhancing Program Coordination Through IRIS

IRIS in Clay, Geary, Pottawatomie, and Riley
Counties, Kansas

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"Through our IRIS network, I was able to connect a client with a car seat program! At the time, we didn't have car seats available in Clay County, but I was able to work with the other members on our Local Leadership Team and refer the client to a program in a nearby town."— Nikki Burwell, Public Health Nurse, Clay County Health Department

The Clay County, Kansas IRIS Network was born from a partnership between the Clay County Health Department and a local school district counselor. Through their work, it became clear that there was a need in the community for enhanced program coordination and a streamlined approach to helping families access local services. However, following the Clay County early 2021 launch, local providers were still experiencing barriers when trying to connect families with needed services.

Like in many small, rural communities, resources are minimal, and providers are often at capacity, requiring families to travel outside their county of residence to access programs. This lack is especially true when a family is seeking specialty services. The opportunity for the Clay County IRIS Network to join the existing Wildcat Region IRIS Network, comprised of neighboring Riley, Geary, and Pottawatomie Counties, was a natural fit, as many families in Clay County were often directed to these counties for services unavailable in their area.

Through local leadership collaboration, the Clay County IRIS Network merged with the Wildcat Region IRIS Network in February of 2023. Only two months into the merger, Clay County providers already see increased success in connecting their families to needed resources. Nikki Burwell, the Clay County IRIS Champion and Clay County Health Department Public Health Nurse, is thrilled about participating in the more extensive Wildcat Region IRIS Network. She shared how this merger has been particularly impactful to her. She states, *"With just two quick IRIS referrals, I was able to get a client with post-partum anxiety connected to a mental health provider for treatment. She is getting better now and can get more sleep and lay the baby down without overwhelming fears."*

Looking to the future, Nikki is excited about the opportunities this network provides families in Clay County accessing services - specifically, those related to connecting new moms in the hospital after their delivery. The Wildcat Region IRIS Network is one of two merged IRIS networks in Kansas that have created a more cohesive cross-county network of providers, connecting families to services outside their county of residence.

This newly formed leadership team consists of representatives from Clay County Health Department, Food Pantry of Geary County, Junction City YMCA, Pottawatomie County Health Department, and Riley County Health Department.