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Healthy Bladen Collaborative: Promoting Public Health and Community Engagement

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Featured in the photo, left to right, are Vicky Graham, Bladen County Health Educator II, and Isabella Faison, the HRSA Grant Health Educator.

By Charlotte Smith

On Tuesday, July 25, at 9 am, the Healthy Bladen Collaborative gathered at the Bladen County Health Department for a meeting led by Vicky Graham, Bladen County Health Educator II. The collaborative engaged in a round table discussion, where members updated attendees on the goals established during a prior “Turn the Curve” meeting. One of the primary objectives of the Healthy Bladen Collaborative is to enhance communication with the public, emphasizing information on health, substance misuse, and diet, along with promoting mental health and well-being.



During the meeting, Dr. Teresa (Terri) Duncan, the Bladen County Health & Human Services Director, expressed her commitment to involving faith-based organizations in the collaborative’s efforts. By getting these organizations to the table, they aim to strengthen community ties and foster a united approach to addressing health challenges.

Dr. Duncan also took the opportunity to announce a crucial upcoming event – the Bladen County Substance Misuse Task Force meeting, scheduled for Tuesday, August 8, at 2 pm at the Bladen County Health Department. The task force will focus on tackling substance misuse, specifically addressing the concerning issue of “Xylazine,” a drug used as an anesthetic for animals, but it is being found mixed with fentanyl, evading detection on regular drug screenings. Dr. Duncan noted efforts are underway to develop drug screenings to identify these dangerous combinations. Local mental health providers have been invited to the Substance Misuse Task Force meeting by Bladen County Commissioner Charles Peterson. He asks each agency to present its services to the task force.

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Isabella Faison, the HRSA Grant Health Educator, is diligently working on a website to provide comprehensive information about Substance Misuse, making it easily accessible to the community. She updates the Bladen County Health and Human Services Agency's Facebook page.

In addition, Faison is organizing a monthly calendar for the community. She will publish the calendar each month on the agency's Facebook page.

The meeting also highlighted two significant health awareness events for the upcoming month. August marks National Immunization Awareness Month, emphasizing the importance of vaccinations for individuals of all ages. Additionally, on August 31, the community will observe National Overdose Awareness Day, raising awareness about the impact of drug overdoses and working to prevent further loss of lives to addiction.

Another important topic discussed during the collaborative's meeting was education. Quessie Peterson, with the Baltimore Center, shared details about the successful summer enrichment program at East Arcadia Elementary School. With 61 enrolled students, the camp, held from June 12 to July 21, provided breakfast, lunch, snacks, and educational opportunities to local students, enriching their summer experience.

Dena Hamilton from Trillium Health Resources provided an update on completing a new inclusive playground at Bladen County Park, reflecting the collaborative's efforts to create inclusive and accessible spaces for all community members.

Regarding education, the collaborative was delighted to hear about the Bladen County Public Library's School Supply Giveaway on August 10 at 6 pm. The initiative aims to distribute 350 well-stocked school bags to local students, ensuring they have the necessary supplies to successfully start the new academic year.

Bladen Community College will host its annual Back to School Blast on August 12 from 8 am until 12 noon at their Dublin campus. This event will provide free haircuts, book bags, school supplies, and more, ensuring students are prepared for the upcoming school year.

Lastly, the meeting touched upon the importance of safety preparedness. Safe Kids, an initiative dedicated to promoting child safety, will actively promote National Preparedness Month from September 18 to September 23, raising awareness about emergency preparedness and ensuring the community is equipped to handle potential crises.

As the meeting concluded, the Healthy Bladen Collaborative invited all interested individuals to join their efforts in promoting public health and community engagement. The next meeting will take place on August 22 at 9 am at the Bladen County Health Department, providing an opportunity for community members to contribute to the well-being of Bladen County actively.

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