

The Dalles Chronicle

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Perambulating Pig



Ari smiles and laughs as Wilbur the pig nuzzles his ankle, sitting in the grass in front of Colonel Wright school. Ari was taking Wilbur for a walk—on a leash. Schools closures statewide have been extended. Photo courtesy Brent Larson

Handle with Care program launched



Pictured at the formal signing of the memorandum of understanding that put the new Handle with Care program in place are, from left, Claire Ranit, Candy Armstrong, superintendent of North Wasco County School District 21, Ryan Wraught, superintendent of South Wasco County School District 1, Jack Henderson, superintendent of Dufur School District, Wasco County Sheriff's Sgt. Ray Thomas, Wasco County Sheriff Lane Magill, Oregon State Police Lt. Les Kipper, and The Dalles Police Department Detective Sgt. Eric Macnab. Contributed photo

By Neita Cecil
The Dalles Chronicle

In a new program called "Handle with Care," area law enforcement agencies are giving local schools a heads up when they learn a student has been exposed to trauma.

The schools aren't given any information about the event, but are just told the student needs to be handled with care.

"This comes into effect anytime there's a potentially traumatic event, whether it be a car crash, a domestic violence situation, an assault. It's basically any stressful event that's going to impact the child's ability to learn, remember and practice the emotional intelligence side of stuff," said Wasco County Sheriff's Sgt. Ray Thomas, who spearheaded the local start of the program.

"At that point the school takes extra steps so it continues as a learning environment rather than the child trying to get through the day dealing with all the traumatic events they were exposed to," he said.

"Trauma's really defined by the individual person," Thomas said. "Something that's traumatic for you is not going to be traumatic for me. That's the brilliant thing about this program. If the individual police officer makes contact with the child and they feel they're having some trauma, then they can do a hand-off to this program, just to give them additional resources."

The program, which is in all Wasco County schools in all grades, got off the ground last month. Thomas envisioned each local police agency might be utilizing it multiple times a week.

Thomas first heard about the program a few years ago from Claire Ranit, who at the time was working on a grant aimed at building community resiliency and trauma-informed practices.

Now she is a consultant on trauma-informed practices, resilience-building practices and emergency operations planning.

Trauma-informed practice is a structure that understands, recognizes and responds to the effects of all types of trauma. It represents a shift from asking "what's wrong with you?" to "what happened to you?"

Ranit's grant work focused on the health care sector, first responders and law enforcement. Her grant required her to work with fellow grant recipients across the country, and that was how she first learned of the "Handle with Care" program, which started in West Virginia.

Once she told Thomas about Handle with Care, that led to a series of meetings with local schools and police agencies. Details had to be worked with attorneys to ensure confidential information wasn't shared. Police reports had to be modified to create a check-box for matters that warranted a Handle with Care designation.

Each school has a designee

and an alternate, each of whom receives an email that literally only says "Handle with Care," and the child's name, Thomas said.

Ranit did training at all the schools on how trauma affects the brain.

She said humans experience a stress response to stressful events, regardless of age. But adults have a few more things working in their favor when it comes to responding to stress.

First, the adult brain is fully formed and can access executive functioning skills and it has had more time to build internal coping mechanisms. Adult brains have developed emotional intelligence to understand and manage feelings.

Kids don't have that, she said. They're just learning to identify feelings, to notice how they're feeling and once they notice them, how to manage them.

Stress also alters how the brain accesses memories. "So even 24 hours after a stressor our brain is not necessarily functioning in a way that would support cognitive adaptive learning, which is what we're asking kids to do" in school.

The prefrontal cortex of the brain allows a person to retain information and apply it. School asks kids to block out distractions and to focus and redirect their attention, which is all the work of the prefrontal cortex.

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COVID-19:

MCMC closes to visitors as plan implemented

Hospital will treat and test for virus at separate facility

Mid-Columbia Medical Center has instituted a COVID-19 preparedness plan in collaboration with local health agencies and as part of that plan is taking immediate steps to mitigate exposure in the community, according to a press release.

As of Wednesday, March 18:

- Visitors are no longer be allowed. This policy applies to all MCMC facilities including the main hospital and all outpatient clinics. Patients and loved ones are encouraged to communicate via phone and/or video calls. If you are a caregiver, a staff member will communicate with you by phone to coordinate care instructions and patient pick-up. Minimal exceptions are in place for end-of-life patients, laboring mothers, pediatric patients, and trauma and critically ill emergency room patients.

- Patients with respiratory symptoms, such as fever, cough or shortness of breath, should call their primary care provider's office. Please know that you may be asked to visit a clinic site different than your regular care provider's office, or to see a provider other than your own. As a precautionary measure, and to protect patients, those with the above symptoms will be seen at our MCMC Family Medicine location, 1620 E. 12th Street. Those with an appointment for a routine exam at the Family Medicine location will be contacted by MCMC staff.

- All wellness visits—for children and adults—will be moved to either MCMC Internal Medicine or MCMC Pediatrics. MCMC Internal Medicine is located within Water's Edge at 551 Lone Pine Blvd. and MCMC Pediatrics is located at 1935 E. 19th St.

- Elective procedures, surgeries and some diagnostic imaging procedures are being postponed beginning Wednesday, March 18, 2020. Urgent and emergency surgeries and imaging will continue as needed.

"These are not decisions we make lightly. The health and safety of our patients and staff are always our top priority," said Stephanie Bowen, MCMC public information officer. "We apologize for any inconvenience this poses to you and your family, and we appreciate your understanding during this challenging time."

No cases of COVID-19 in Wasco, Sherman and Gilliam counties

There were no cases of COVID-19 in Wasco, Sherman or Gilliam counties as of Thursday, March 19, 2020, according to the North Central Public Health District. If a case is confirmed, the District will release that information to the public, according to the press release.

Oregon Gov. Kate Brown on Monday announced new social distancing measures, aimed at slowing the transmission of novel coronavirus, the virus that causes COVID-19. All events and gatherings of 25 people or more are canceled for at least the next four weeks, exempting workplaces, grocery stores, pharmacies and retail stores.

Restaurants, bars and other establishments that offer food or beverages for sale are restricted to carry-out and delivery only for at least the next four weeks. All other businesses are urged to implement strong social distancing measures and provide their services similarly to take-out for restaurants if possible. If not, they should close temporarily, she said.

She also recommended that Oregonians avoid gatherings of 10 people or more.

A large gathering is defined as any event in a space in which appropriate social distancing of at least three feet cannot be maintained. Gatherings include concerts, festivals, conferences, worship services, sporting events, etc.

Not complying with these measures is a Class C misdemeanor, but Brown urged people to follow the spirit of the law to avoid straining law enforcement resources. The measures are aimed at slowing the transmission of COVID-19 and preventing a surge of hospitalizations that would overwhelm the healthcare system.

Other community-wide measures like good hand hygiene, frequently cleaning high-touch surfaces, and staying home when ill are essential to decrease further community spread of the novel coronavirus.

The main symptoms of COVID-19 are fever, cough and shortness of breath.

Cherry Fest postponed

The 41st Annual Northwest Cherry Festival has been postponed to July, and will be managed in partnering with Fort Dalles Fourth celebrations, according The Dalles Area Chamber of Commerce.

After careful consideration of the rapidly changing situation, our board of directors and the team at The Dalles Area Chamber of Commerce decided to postpone the festival Thursday, March 19, 2020.

At its core, the Northwest Cherry Festival is a celebration of community and the chamber is doing everything in its power to protect that community. said events coordinator Katie McClintock. "Even with the precautionary measures we had planned to ensure adequate sanitation and airflow, the risk is too great to hold it at this time," she said. The festival has been rescheduled to July 3-5, 2020. It was originally scheduled April 24-26, 2020.

The chamber will partner with Fort Dalles Fourth and Nolan Hare

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