

Social Services Staff Invited to Share Thoughts on Profession

By Anya Armes Weber

Social services staff still has time to share their views with CHFS colleagues.

March is Social Work Month, and the Focus will spotlight CHFS social services staff, who is invited to share their views about their work.

How has social services work changed your life? What inspired you to become involved in social services work? We're looking for stories of inspiration to share with all staff.

Submit your replies to [Anya Weber](#) by Tuesday, Feb. 24. Include your job title and work county. You may also send a digital photo for possible online publication. Submissions may be edited for length and content. Thanks for your participation.

Changes at Pamphlet Library

Agencies that use the Pamphlet Library to store and distribute materials need to make note of an important change to contact information. The e-mail address for the Pamphlet Library has changed. To contact Pamphlet Library Manager Charles Barnett for orders, use the e-mail address cbarnett@bluegrass.org. Effective immediately, patrons should begin sending orders and correspondence to cbarnett@bluegrass.org.

Living Well: Cortisol

Do you constantly feel like your survival mechanism is churning in high gear? Do you have inconsistent sleep patterns, a depressed immune response, blood sugar abnormalities and abdominal weight gain? If you answer yes to any of those questions, you may need to evaluate your current lifestyle. An important part of that evaluation is based on your stress level. If you are feeling stressed and suffer from any of the conditions listed previously, the answer might be found in changes to your body's cortisol levels.

Cortisol is secreted by the adrenal glands and is an important hormone in the body that regulates proper glucose metabolism, blood pressure, insulin release, immune functions and inflammatory response. In normal levels, cortisol has a higher presence in the morning and is lowest at night. It is often referred to as "the stress hormone" because it is secreted into the bloodstream at higher levels during the body's "flight or fight" response.

However, today many people suffer from constant high stress levels that result in a constantly elevated cortisol level. These prolonged and higher levels of cortisol in the bloodstream can cause any of the following:

- Impaired cognitive performance
- Suppressed thyroid function
- Blood sugar imbalances (such as hyperglycemia)
- Decreased bone density
- Decreased muscle tissue
- Higher blood pressure
- Lowered immunity (slowed wound healing and lower inflammatory responses)

- Increased abdominal fat (fat in this area is associated with heart attacks and strokes)

Fortunately, there are ways to combat and control the body's fight-or-flight mode. Some suggestions below have been found to help lower cortisol levels. Statistics are from Prevention Magazine.

- Meditation - Cut levels by 20 percent by using meditation as a daily practice.
- Music - Cut levels by 66 percent by creating your own music mix or special playlist. Create a different list of music for all situations. If you need some motivation for exercise or household chores, select music that has a faster beat. For relaxation during a stressful project, situation or at bedtime, you will wind down faster listening to soothing music versus watching TV.
- Black tea - Cut levels by 47 percent simply by sipping some black tea. The chemicals and flavonoids in black tea have been proven to provide comfort and calm the senses.
- Laugh - Cut levels by 39 percent by hanging out with a funny friend or watching a funny show. Basically, just the anticipation of laughter is enough to reduce cortisol levels by almost half.
- Massage - Pampering yourself with a massage can cut levels by 31 percent. Also, massage is known to promote the production of dopamine and serotonin, which are "feel good" hormones that are normally released when we are experiencing something we enjoy and are having fun.
- Spirituality - Seeking some type of spiritual session either by attending a church service, scheduling a quiet nature walk or volunteering for a charity can cut cortisol levels by 25 percent.
- Chew gum - Popping a stick of gum can instantly defuse tension. Research has shown that chewing gum increased blood flow and neural activity in certain areas of the brain. Remember to make it sugar-free.

Not all of these remedies will work for everyone. If you are unable to experiment with any of the suggestions on the list, be sure to try some type of stress management technique that will better fit your needs. Moreover, if you feel that your stress levels are at an all-time high and you need immediate assistance, contact the Kentucky Employee Assistance Program (KEAP) for more information at <http://personnel.ky.gov/emprel/keap/default.html> or call (502) 564-5788 or toll free (800) 445-KEAP.

Fiscal War

Kentucky Supports America Saves Week

Public Protection Cabinet

Gov. Steve Beshear last week signed a proclamation urging Kentuckians to save money in 2009 in honor of America Saves Week, Feb. 22 - March 1.

The Kentucky Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) is supporting the governor's call by offering a free public workshop on saving money at the Lexington Public Library. "Pay Yourself First" will be presented at 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 24, at the Central Library, 140 East Main St. Free materials and information will cover ways to save money, plan for the future and understand savings and investment accounts. To register, call (859) 231-5532.

Studies show most Americans do not have adequate savings to meet major emergencies, let alone enough savings for retirement. The typical American household has less than \$100,000 in net wealth, including home equity and 401k accumulations, and only about \$10,000 in net financial assets. Lower income families have much fewer resources.

Sign up as an American Saver at www.AmericaSaves.org and receive a free newsletter with tips for reaching your goals.

Pay yourself first. Put into savings a set amount of money from each paycheck before meeting other obligations or spending it elsewhere.

Start a retirement plan, either through your employer or on your own. If you already have one, consider increasing your regular contribution.

Consider investing your money. Before you invest, check out the product and the person selling it by calling DFI at 800-223-2579 or visiting www.kfi.ky.gov/public/invest.htm.

America Saves is a seven-year-old effort to encourage Americans to save money, reduce debt and build wealth. About 1,000 organizations in more than 50 local areas participate. More than 100,000 people have enrolled as American Savers. Their top savings goals are: emergency fund, investing and homeownership.

DFI is an agency in the Public Protection Cabinet. It supervises the financial services industry by examining, chartering, licensing and registering various financial institutions, securities firms and professionals operating in Kentucky. DFI's mission is to serve Kentucky residents by maintaining a stable financial industry, continuing effective and efficient regulatory oversight, promoting consumer confidence, and encouraging economic opportunities.

Employee Enrichment

By Anya Armes Weber

Productive days are good days. But some days, you just feel like you've been very busy without getting a lot of work done. How can you squeeze more out of your day? Here are some suggestions from Rebecca Morgan, an author and writer for Toolbox.com, a human resources management Web site.

Rely on your past work. Keep your files correct and in order so you can reuse parts of them when you need to. Use and update past work to help compose new assignments.

Improve the way you work. If you think you can accomplish your tasks with less effort, try it. See if you can eliminate one or more steps. Embracing technology is one way to find shortcuts. Don't break for interruptions. Yes, there are times when you must help a client with an emergency or take a phone call from your boss, but you don't have to stop for every interruption. Try working nonstop for one hour without answering e-mail or engaging in cubicle conversation.