

March 24, 2008

### **Staff Speaks out during Social Work Month**

*By Anya Armes Weber*

March is Social Work Month, and the Focus is taking the time to appreciate and celebrate staff in the social services offices of the Cabinet.

In observance of this month, we asked social services staff around the state to tell us how they became involved in social work, what helps them do their jobs and what has been most rewarding.

Look for our final response next week in the Focus.

### **T.Graves, Mental Health/Mental Retardation Program Supervisor Christian County**

During my 15-and-a-half-year social services career (first at the Department for Community Based Services and now at Western State Hospital), it has been most rewarding when former clients contact me to say “thank you” or update me on their life. This is personally and professionally rewarding to me to think I may have actually helped make a difference in someone’s life.

### **Secretary Miller, Legislators Thank Social Work Staff at Capitol Rally**

*By Anya Armes Weber*

At a rally in the Capitol rotunda last week, Secretary Janie Miller and several lawmakers thanked Cabinet social workers for their dedication to helping Kentuckians across the state.

“Your service is a credit to the commonwealth,” she said. “More and more, your clients, your partners and, yes, your Cabinet leadership depend on you to give families the hand up they need.”

The Kentucky chapter of the National Association of Social Workers sponsored the event as part of Social Work Month.

Miller said she comes from a long line of social workers and graduated from Eastern Kentucky University with a degree in social work. “I pledge to continue to support your efforts to address the needs of those we serve,” she said. “It’s you who realize that the laws and policies we all live by are not what is truly transforming lives. It’s the human connection that inspires change.”

Miller also commended Department for Community Based Services Commissioner Patricia R. Wilson for her leadership.

“She has been in the trenches of the front lines of service and understands your feelings of disappointment and accomplishment during complicated cases,” Miller said. “Pat is committed to staff retention and development. Even as a tight budget looms, her priority is a well-trained staff that can deliver quality services.”

Rep. Tom Burch, D-Louisville, spoke about the need for more staff.

“We still don’t have enough social workers in the field to take care of all our problems,” he said.

At a legislative reception, the Kentucky NASW chapter presented Burch with its first “Legislator of the Year” award for his work on the Boni Frederick Memorial Law last year. The law, which took effect last April, provided funding to improve safety for state human services workers and hire more staff.

Rep. Susan Westrom, D-Lexington, who has a degree in social work, told the audience to reach out to lawmakers when they strongly support legislation.

“Please remember that when you have an opinion, that opinion is very important here,” she said. “What is important to you is important to us.”

Another speaker was Rep. Jim Wayne, D-Louisville, a social worker and member of NASW’s Kentucky chapter.

“We are not just a safety net, we are agents of change,” he said. “We are the ones who put forth the reality of pain, hardship and abuse. We tell the nation, ‘This is wrong. This needs to be fixed. And you know what, as social workers, we are going to demand that you fix it.’ ”

Wayne called on social workers “to have a broad vision. Look beyond your caseload.”

“When we see injustices, we must demand that wrongs be righted,” he said. “Whatever it is ... that guides you and that you feel passionate about and that drives you, enlist your fellow social workers and go after it.”

Learn more about NASW online at <http://www.naswky.org/>.

### **Using Pictograms to Communicate with At-Risk Populations**

*By Barbara Fox, Preparedness Public Information Officer*

The Cabinet's office of public affairs, in partnership with the Department for Public Health, is currently conducting research to develop original pictogram designs to communicate critical information to vulnerable populations at clinics that would serve as dispensing sites for Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) drugs or other supplies in an emergency.

Pictures and symbols can be used as tools to reach individuals who may be challenged in

understanding written or spoken English in order to convey important messages, direct people to designated locations, and assist people in making decisions. While certain pictograms may be commonly used or easily recognized, there is not a universally adopted set of pictograms designed specifically for communicating with at-risk populations.

The Cabinet has conducted qualitative and quantitative research with limited English proficient (LEP – persons with limited or no English and low literacy) and deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals. The pictograms were tested in focus groups and surveys conducted with the target populations. Valuable feedback was obtained from the research and the pictograms were adapted based on suggested changes from the research participants. Following a second round of testing that will be conducted in the upcoming months, the pictograms will be incorporated into a set of signage that will be utilized statewide at local clinics, including flu shot and drive-thru clinics.

In addition to the pictogram signage, Kentucky has also developed materials, such as children’s coloring books and folding pocket information cards that utilize pictograms to convey public health preparedness information to at-risk populations in the state.

### **State Employment Update**

*Register Process Changes for the Better*

The Personnel Cabinet last fall successfully launched its new online employment system, Career Opportunities (COS), which makes applying for state employment much easier. Starting on March 18, you must create a COS account and apply to any job postings through COS to be considered. You no longer have to come to the Personnel Cabinet’s offices to complete this process, and from this point on you

March 24, 2008

will always have your application at your fingertips.

For instant e-mail notification about vacancies of interest to you, you can take advantage of the new search agent feature. This allows you to identify jobs you would be interested in and COS will notify you when they are open.

For more information or to access COS, go to [www.personnel.ky.gov](http://www.personnel.ky.gov) and click on Career Opportunities System.

### **Child Care: It takes a village**

*By Sadiqa N. Reynolds, Inspector General*

We all want the best for our children, at home or in a child care facility. As Inspector General of the agency responsible for regulating Kentucky child care facilities and, more importantly, as a mother, I know that the morning drop off at daycare can be an emotional time filled with worry and uncertainty for parents. Providing parents with reassurance that their children are in a safe and nurturing environment is a top priority of my office, under the direction of Governor Steve Beshear and Health and Family Services Secretary Janie Miller.

The Office of Inspector General (OIG) helps keep Kentucky's children safe by performing inspections and investigations of child care facilities. The OIG is responsible for certifying 799 homes and licensing 2,419 day care facilities, 126 child-placing agencies and 72 group homes throughout Kentucky. Last year alone we conducted nearly 3,000 annual licensure and certification surveys, and investigated more than 1,500 complaints.

During routine surveys we evaluate aspects of operation such as staff to child ratios, supervision and environmental issues, daily programming schedules, safe play areas, proper transportation accommodations such as car seats

and seat belts, and timely employee background checks. Whenever possible we work with child care facilities to improve services, but we will not hesitate to act if our findings indicate that children may be in harm's way because a facility does not meet licensure standards.

Obviously, OIG staff are not present at child care facilities all of the time. Parents also have a key role to play by choosing the child care facility best suited to serve the needs of their child.

Before making this important decision, I encourage parents to:

Visit the facility, and ask questions of the director and the staff who work directly with the children.

Use your senses – sight, smell, hearing, etc. – to observe the surroundings.

Inquire about staff turnover and job satisfaction.

Ask to allow your child to spend some time in the center before signing a contract.

Check for cleanliness and wear and tear of furnishings, toys, carpeting and paint.

Examine staffing to children ratios – for instance, there should be one staff member for every five children ages birth to 1 year.

Assess staff and child behaviors - Do staff members interact well with the children? Do they address the children by name, respond to their needs, get on the floor with the children, or sit or stand away from the children? Are the children participating in interactive activities?

Don't hesitate to ask for references from other parents and follow up with those parents about their experience with the facility.

Most importantly – trust your instincts. If something doesn't feel quite right to you, do not leave your child.

March 24, 2008

Parents have the right to know they are leaving their children with people they can trust. That's why all child care facility employees must undergo two background checks - a criminal background check from the Kentucky State Police or the Administrative Office of the Courts and an abuse registry check through the Department for Community Based Services. Kentucky law requires a person to pass both types of background checks in order to work at a child care facility. The background checks must be requested immediately upon hiring a new employee, received within 180 days, and placed in the personnel file for review by our surveyors. All new employees must be directly supervised until these requirements are met. There are no exceptions.

Parents may also ask facility staff for the latest OIG report and license, which contains information about any problems as well as the maximum occupancy and services provided. You should feel empowered to speak up on behalf of your child and let facility directors or staff know if you see problems.

If you do not see improvements after voicing your concerns or believe we need to address a problem directly, please report complaints or concerns to the OIG at (502) 564-7962 or online at <http://chfs.ky.gov/oig/complaintinfo.htm>. All complaints are kept confidential. Parents can find more resources on the OIG Web site at <http://chfs.ky.gov/oig/drcc.htm>.

There are many wonderful child care providers in this state that should be applauded for the job they do. By working together, we as parents, care providers and state regulators can better ensure that quality child care is available for Kentucky's children.

## Employee Enrichment

By Anya Armes Weber

If you ever feel your frustration level with a situation or person has built up at the workplace, try these tips from life coach and counselor Mary Lennox to calm down.

**Deal with your frustration.** Don't allow emotions to build up.

**Exercise.** Regular physical activity is a useful way of dealing with stress and will help increase your tolerance levels.

**Know what pushes your buttons.** If you know what might trigger your anger, you can be prepared and deal with it responsibly.

**Know what pushes your coworkers' buttons.** Even though they are responsible for managing their own emotions, you can take care to avoid situations that might upset them.

**Take a time out.** Remove yourself from a situation that could ignite your emotions.

**Compromise.** If you and a coworker disagree about a situation, take time to talk with that person calmly. Be creative about your solution.

**Learn from history.** Change your actions and responses to avoid repeating the same aggravating situation again.

**Make smart food choices.** Your diet affects every part of your life. Don't skip meals. Eat sensible meals and snacks during the workday. If your blood sugar is low, you will be more vulnerable to anxious behavior.