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Heart Month Employee Spotlight: Cat Cunningham, Survivor

This week the Focus talked with Catherine Cunningham, a disability adjudicator in Disability Determination Services. She has worked in state government for eight years. Cunningham, known as Cat to her friends, shares her personal story with readers about dealing with heart disease as a young woman.



How does your job allow you to impact the lives of your fellow Kentuckians? What's the best part of your job?

We are able to provide financial and medical help and hope to people who otherwise cannot work and provide for themselves due to a disability.

The best part of my job is the people I work with, if anything happens or you need something, they are always here for you. I have made many wonderful friends while working here.

Please share your story about heart disease and heart health with readers.

I am an avid animal lover. I love the outdoors, and I love life. I am also a survivor. I am a juvenile diabetic on an insulin pump with a strong family history of heart disease. I have always tried to eat healthy and stay active. However, in June 2007, I had quadruple bypass surgery. I never would have dreamed in a million years that this would happen to me. After all, I am healthy and take care of myself. I eat organic foods. I exercise and keep my blood sugar in control. But one day while teaching

(fitness) class, I just could not breathe. I felt *very* tired. I was embarrassed about not being able to keep up in my own class. So, I went to the doctor and told him how tired I was. He asked when my last stress test was. I, being young (39) and, I thought, in pretty good shape, had never even thought about a stress test. The doctor scheduled one and found five complete blockages. It's a good thing I did not do what I usually do and think, "I'm just tired and under a lot of stress." This time I listened to what my body was telling me. There was no pain, no tightness or other signs at all. I was just tired. Today, I am back to exercising and even took my first kickboxing class recently. The point is, I never really realized how sick I was. I am a very blessed individual, and I am happy every day of my life. Heck, I am even happy to come to work.

How has this experience changed your life?

I do not take one minute for granted. I realize just how important my family and my friends are to me. I don't want to waste one bit of energy being angry or mad. Life is way too short to spend worrying about what you can't do. I wake up each morning with a smile and make the best of what the day brings.

What suggestions would you have for readers to help raise awareness about heart disease?

Listen to your body! Sometimes you are more than just tired. Just because you don't have the classic warning signs does not mean anything. My cardiologist told me that many people may not have signs of heart trouble, especially women. Heart disease can strike anyone. If you have higher risk factors such as family history or other illness, you should get tested. Treatment is a lot more successful when heart disease is caught early.

Get Healthy Kentucky Bluegrass State Games is Recruiting All Kentuckians

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Secretary Miller, Subway's Jared Fogle Kick Off 2008 Events

By Beth Fisher

CHFS Secretary Janie Miller joined Lieutenant Governor Daniel Mongiardo, former Governor Martha Lane Collins and Subway Spokesperson Jared Fogle last Wednesday to promote the 2008 Get Healthy Kentucky Bluegrass State Games.

During a news conference in the Capitol Rotunda, Secretary Miller addressed pressing issues that are keeping Kentuckians unhealthy and challenged all residents of the Commonwealth to take part in the upcoming athletic events – the largest amateur sporting event in the state.

“The Get Healthy Kentucky Bluegrass State Games serve as a perfect platform for Kentuckians to harness their competitive drive; take part in some wonderful athletic events; and improve their own well-being by becoming physically fit,” said Secretary Miller.

This year’s games will be July 18-20, July 26-27 and Aug. 1-3 throughout central Kentucky. All citizens of the commonwealth are encouraged to compete in their favorite event and start training now.

During the news conference, speakers stressed the importance of physical activity in sustaining long-term health and well-being, particularly for young people in Kentucky who are the most overweight in the nation. The current percentage of high school-aged youths in Kentucky who are overweight is 16 percent, compared with 13 percent in the U.S.

Lt. Gov. Mongiardo, a physician, said he regularly sees overweight young people at his Hazard medical practice. To emphasize the need for regular physical activity, he related a

personal story about a 9-year-old patient who already weighs in excess of 300 pounds..

“We’ve gotten away from addressing (the importance) of exercise to our health,” said the lieutenant governor. “We’ve got to get back to that.”

According to Fogle, the key is finding a plan that works for the individual.

A long-time healthy eating and physical activity spokesperson for the Subway restaurant chain, Fogle shared his own weight loss story and displayed the old pair of 60-inch waist jeans he wore while a student at Indiana University. Ten years ago, Fogle said he became resolute about weight loss and created his own somewhat unorthodox, but successful plan.

Over the course of a year, Fogle was able to shed 245 pounds subsisting on a diet of Subway sandwiches, low-fat potato chips and diet soda. After losing the first 100 pounds, he incorporated moderate exercise into his daily routine.

It proved to be the right formula for him. “It fit my lifestyle,” Fogle said.

For more information about the Bluegrass State Games, visit www.bgsg.org.

Employees Awarded for Suggestions

Eight Cabinet for Health and Family Services employees were recognized last week for suggesting improvements in the way the state does business.

The Employee Suggestion System Awards were Tuesday, Feb. 19, at the Governor’s Mansion. Receiving awards from CHFS were: LaShana Harris and Stephanie Whitaker from the Office of Inspector General; Joyce DeAeth, Office of the Ombudsman; David Knapp, Department for Public Health; and Kalan Slattery, Department

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for Medicaid Services. Not present, but recognized at the ceremony, were: Mary Akers, Department for Community Based Services, Pineville; Brian Combs, Department for Community Based Services, Knott County; and Janice Lunsford, Department for Mental Health and Mental Retardation Services.

“The Employee Suggestion System Awards give us a chance to honor our workforce for their efforts,” said CHFS Deputy Secretary Steve Nunn, who presented some of the awards. “I congratulate the award winners from Health and Family Services. Your rewards are truly well-deserved.”

The Kentucky Employee Suggestion System (ESS) is an incentive program designed to encourage employees to participate in good management by sharing their ideas on improving the productivity and the services offered by the state. Awards may range from a minimum of \$100 to 10 percent of the first year’s documented or estimated savings, up to a maximum of \$2,500. A \$100 award may be given for ideas that are adopted and have intangible savings.

Learn more about ESS and how to submit your own suggestions at <http://personnel.ky.gov/programs/kess/>.

Social Services Staff Can Speak Out about Profession’s Rewards

By Anya Armes Weber

Social services staff: This is your last chance to speak out about your profession for Social Work Month.

The Focus is spotlighting Social Work Month in March and invites you to send us a short reply about one of the following topics:

- What inspired you to become involved in social services work?

- What resources have been most helpful to you in your work?
- How has assisting others through social services rewarded you personally or professionally?

Submit your replies to anya.weber@ky.gov by Monday, Feb. 25. 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 style. Thanks for your participation.

Adverse Weather Policy Reminder

Recent inclement weather has caused many employees to leave work early or stay home to avoid slick and icy roads. Employees have several options in how to report this time on their timesheet. To review the state’s Adverse Weather Policy, [click here](#).

Living Well: You Pick the Topics

For more than a year, the Living Well column has been written to coordinate with holidays, national observances or current events. Now I’m seeking your ideas for the Focus newsletter. I’d like to know what you would like to read. Think about specific topics you would like to know more about relating to:

- Physical activity
- Nutrition
- Worksite wellness

Don’t miss this chance to get answers to your individual questions. Please e-mail your topics and questions for inclusion in future Focus columns to Kris Hayslett at kris.hayslett@ky.gov.

Get Fit for Spring with Cabinet Fitness Challenge

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It may be cold and wintry now, but spring will be here soon. In preparation for warmer weather, Get Healthy Kentucky has created “Six Weeks to a Healthier You” to help residents of the Commonwealth prepare for warm weather activities; become tobacco free; or adopt healthy eating and lifestyle habits.

Whether it’s looking good in a bathing suit, taking a long hike in the mountains, quitting smoking or eating more fruits and vegetables, this Get Healthy Kentucky challenge can help you achieve your wellness goals – in only six weeks! The program, which runs from March 3 to April 11, is open to all Kentuckians interested in becoming more fit, energized and active.

This is your opportunity to commit to a realistic wellness program tailored to fit your needs. Participants looking to get fit will receive information on exercise programs that incorporate both strength and cardiovascular exercise. Those aiming to improve lifestyle habits will receive advice from GHK’s tobacco cessation and nutrition experts.

This is a six-week challenge for you. Visit <http://gethealthy.ky.gov/> to sign up today!

Bowl for Kids Sake 2008

It’s time again for the annual Bowl for Kids Sake fundraiser for Big Brothers/Big Sisters. CHFS teams will bowl at Frankfort’s Capital Bowl alleys beginning at 11 a.m. Monday, March 10, and Tuesday, March 11. The goal is to beat last year’s Cabinet total of \$1,812.

The Cabinet will field at least eight teams this year. Teams should have five members, but individual bowlers and teams with fewer than five members may register and will be assigned to teams.

Assemble your teams and designate a team captain. Send one e-mail per team/individual to Brichelle.Hall@ky.gov with the names of your

team members and contact information (complete work mailing address and phone number) for your team captain.

Sponsor forms will be provided. Bowlers are encouraged to recruit as many sponsors as possible.

Lunch on bowling day will be provided by Arby’s and Little Caesar’s. Bowlers who raise \$75 will receive a special Bowl for Kids Sake T-shirt.

This is a fun event for a great cause. For more information, call Brichelle Hall at (502) 564-6930, ext. 3435.

CHFS Health Tip

From <http://www.4woman.gov/>

Waiting in your doctor's office can make you feel nervous, impatient, or even scared. You might worry about what's wrong with you. You might feel annoyed because you're not getting other things done. Then when you see your doctor or nurse, the visit seems to be so short. You might have only a few minutes to explain your symptoms and concerns. Later that day, you might remember something you forgot to ask. You wonder if your question and its answer matters. Knowing how to talk to your doctor, nurse, or other members of your health care team will help you get the information you need.

Tips: How to talk to your primary care provider

List your questions and concerns. Before your appointment, make a list of what you want to ask. When you're in the waiting room, review your list and organize your thoughts. You can share the list with your doctor or nurse.

Describe your symptoms. Say when these problems started. Say how they make you feel. If

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you know, say what sets them off or triggers them. Say what you've done to feel better.

Give your doctor a list of your medications.

Tell what prescription drugs and over-the-counter medicines, vitamins, herbal products, and other supplements you're taking.

Be honest about your diet, physical activity, smoking, alcohol or drug use, and sexual history. Not sharing information with your doctor or nurse can be harmful!

Describe any allergies to drugs, foods, pollen, or other things. Don't forget to mention if you are being treated by other doctors, including mental health professionals.

Talk about sensitive topics. Your doctor or nurse has probably heard it before! Don't leave something out because you're worried about taking up too much time. Be sure to talk about all of your concerns before you leave. If you don't understand the answers your doctor gives you, ask again.

Ask questions about any tests and your test results. Get instructions on what you need to do to get ready for the test(s). Ask if there are any dangers or side effects. Ask how you can learn the test results. Ask how long it will take to get the results.

Ask questions about your condition or illness. If you are diagnosed with a condition, ask your doctor how you can learn more about it. What caused it? Is it permanent? What can you do to help yourself feel better? How can it be treated?

Tell your doctor or nurse if you are pregnant or intend to become pregnant. Some medicines may not be suitable for you. Other medicines should be used with caution if you are pregnant or about to become pregnant.

Ask your doctor about any treatments he or she recommends. Be sure to ask about all of your options for treatment. Ask how long the treatment will last. Ask if it has any side effects. Ask how much it will cost. Ask if it is covered by your health insurance.

Ask your doctor about any medicines he or she prescribes for you. Make sure you understand how to take your medicine. What should you do if you miss a dose? Are there any foods, drugs, or activities you should avoid when taking the medicine? Is there a generic brand of the drug you can use? You can also ask your pharmacist if a generic drug is available for your medication.

Ask more questions if you don't understand something. If you're not clear about what your doctor or nurse is asking you to do or why, ask to have it explained again.

Bring a family member or trusted friend with you. That person can take notes, offer moral support, and help you remember what was discussed. You can have that person ask questions, too!

Call before your visit to tell them if you have special needs. If you don't speak or understand English well, the office may need to find an interpreter. If you have a disability, ask if they can accommodate you.

Employee Enrichment

By Anya Armes Weber

Saying "no" to a work project may make you feel guilty, even if you are not the right person for the job or don't have the time. Some assignments – those that are from your supervisor or are time-sensitive – must be squeezed in. For other situations,

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OnlineOrganizing.com offers several suggested responses. Confidently try one of these when it fits the circumstance.

I'm in the middle of several projects. If you have other responsibilities, no one can fault you for not having free time.

I'm not the right person for that job, but I can help you find someone who is. If the task is beyond your qualifications or responsibilities, say so. Offering to find the right person is a good gesture.

I can review your work, but I think you can do a great job on your own. Sometimes people will ask for help when they doubt their own abilities. Telling them they can tackle a project by themselves may give them a confidence boost.

I don't have time now, but I'd like to help you later. If your skills are really needed, your coworkers can wait. If not, they can find someone else to help.