

Staff Shares Stories of Volunteerism, Service

By Anya Armes Weber

Gov. Steve Beshear has proclaimed April 19-25 as Volunteer Week in the commonwealth, and CHFS staff is joining the awareness effort by sharing their stories of service with Focus readers.

“Volunteerism, community service and neighbor-helping-neighbor are cornerstones of Kentucky culture, and every day, volunteers across Kentucky serve without compensation to meet vital needs that may otherwise fall through the cracks,” Beshear said in a news release.

CHFS’ Kentucky Commission on Community Volunteerism and Service (KCCVS) administers Kentucky’s AmeriCorps national service program and supports state volunteerism.

KCCVS Executive Director Eileen Cackowski said she expected to read some touching accounts of volunteerism.

“Because Cabinet staff works so closely with vulnerable Kentuckians, they know what great needs exist, and they are helping to fill them.”

Each employee who submitted a story will receive a certificate of appreciation signed by Gov. Beshear and provided by KCCVS’ Volunteer Recognition Program.

“We so appreciate these staff’s selfless volunteer efforts and their willingness to share their stories of service,” Cackowski said.

Learn more about KCCVS programs and opportunities [online](#).

Here are the staff submissions on volunteer service.

Miche’ Branscum, Division of Family Support, Department for Community Based Services, Anderson County

I volunteer for Relay for Life of Franklin County, where I also serve on the Team Development Committee. Relay is such a fun, worthwhile event where people can come together and celebrate our cancer survivors, as well as remembering those whom we have lost. And, because the money that is raised benefits our area directly, most people know someone who has been served by Relay.

I have also just signed up to volunteer at the Anderson County Senior Citizens Center -- all while working full time and going to school full time to finish up my degree. I believe that just about anyone can find time to volunteer!

Ann Brown, Office of Administrative and Technology Services, Central Office

I have served as president and board member of a nonprofit group called Housing Management Service, Inc. that builds low- to moderate-income, single family homes in my hometown, Georgetown. I have been a member of this group for more than 15 years. With the assistance of grant money and bank construction loans, we have built more than 62 single family dwellings.

We counsel and mentor the families to move them toward home ownership. We maintain a follow-up period to assist them in transitioning to their home ownership roles.

Karen Cantrell, Office of Health Policy, Central Office

I volunteer in an organization that no one wants to be a part of, The Compassionate Friends organization, a nonprofit organization formed to assist families after the death of a child of any age, any circumstance. I and five others formed a local chapter here in Frankfort in April 2004. I am now chapter leader/regional coordinator of the Frankfort chapter.

We have our five-year anniversary of our chapter this month. In the past five years, the local group has grown from eight members to an average of 10 to 20 per meeting. We have more than 100 on our mailing list for our monthly newsletter. We hate to see the group grow, but we are glad others find us when they need us.

The death of a child is something no one ever wants to think about; it is out of the normal cycle of life. Parents should never have to bury their children, but when it happens, there is an organization ready to offer friendship, understanding and hope that you can survive. We have held a regional conference for the past four years to assist bereaved families, friends and professionals in helping cope with the loss of a child. We hold regular support group meetings. Just this year, we have expanded them to twice monthly because of the need in our area.

Our meetings are at 6:30 p.m. on the first and third Thursdays of the month at the Frankfort Regional Medical Center, Medical Pavilion Building, second floor. We also organize an annual candlelighting ceremony in conjunction with the worldwide candlelighting ceremony held on the second Sunday of December to honor all of the children who have died too early.

We don't look for recognition, but we do work toward improved awareness of our organization. We hope to be here to help families who need us now and those who don't know they will need us in the future.

Dottie Chapman, Central State Hospital, Jefferson County

I am a member of Wonderful Animals Giving Support, or WAGS, a Louisville pet therapy group. WAGS is a not-for-profit, all-volunteer organization dedicated to bringing people and pets together for companionship and therapy. Since WAGS was founded in 1999, members and their Delta-registered pet partners have volunteered thousands of hours visiting hospitals, nursing homes, schools and other facilities throughout the region in an effort to promote and share the special and often healing bond between humans and animals.

I have been active in WAGS for nine years with my dog, Hershey. I have done many visits with Hershey at nursing homes, with Hospice patients, to a reading program at the library and on visits at Central State Hospital and the Kentucky State Reformatory. Volunteering has brought more meaning to my life.

Hershey is now retired, and I am a helper for another pet partner team. I have held several leadership offices in the organization and now serve as an evaluator in our group. We evaluate

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people and their pet partners to see if they will make acceptable therapy teams. I feel being a volunteer is my way of giving back to the community.

Leonard Cieslak, Division of Protection and Permanency, Department for Community Based Services, Floyd County

Social work is a multifaceted profession that requires patience and care for those we serve. I am the safety net specialist for the Eastern Mountain Region. To do this job with some effectiveness -- over such a large area -- requires constant community volunteerism and service.

In these tough economic times, many of my clients have been disconnected from utility services before I can even make contact with them to set up preventive services. State and federal funds for such emergency services are practically nonexistent, so I have worked with several churches and individuals to set up a "benevolence fund" to deal with such client emergencies. In these hard economic times of despair and cold nights, there would be nothing more tragic than to think we are warm and fed while others around us are cold and hungry.

I recently addressed students at Alice-Lloyd College in Sociology 101 and 102 about social work and how to get involved and make a difference in their profession.

I am the local Family Resource and Youth Services Center chair, helping direct services to children in a local school.

I have been involved in starting a catering business with the goal of hiring people who are trying to get off state welfare rolls. Several have succeeded.

I am a member of the PTA and attend every meeting.

I recently received the Gene W. Childress Leadership Award in state government for my work developing (client) resource pamphlets to help needy citizens access services in the Eastern Mountain Region.

I have volunteered for mission trips to South America, Jamaica and Russia to help people find their way to progress, freedom and hope.

I am a deacon in my church and build ramps for people with disabilities so they can get in and out of their homes.

Most of all, I do not want any of my peers to think I am writing this to promote and brag on myself. I just want to inspire all of us who claim state service to just jump in where we are needed and be that hand up to progress and pay it forward to each other, but mostly our clients.

Cathy Lerza, Department for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Addiction Services, Central Office

I live in Lexington, where I volunteer in several ways.

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I have been a member of the Tates Creek High School PTSA (parent, teacher, student association) for 11 years. During that time, I served as the treasurer for two years, recording secretary for three years, and vice president in charge of membership for two years.

I worked for the American Heart Association for six years and still occasionally volunteer. Staff is also invited to be involved. The Central Kentucky Heart Walk is coming up Saturday, April 25. Walkers and donations are needed. To get involved, contact Jennifer Ebert at (859) 278-1632 or jennifer.ebert@heart.org. Or check out this Heart Walk [link](#).

I also help the Happy Chandler Scholarship Foundation. The organization was formed by friends of Happy Chandler to honor his memory. The foundation provides scholarships to Kentucky students to attend state colleges. Our vision is to someday be able to provide one four-year scholarship per county each year. In addition to providing scholarships, the foundation hosts an Awards of Excellence Gala each year. This year, John R. Hall, former CEO of Ashland, Inc., and authors David and Lalie Dick of Plum Lick Publishing will be honored. Learn more about the foundation [online](#).

Finally, one of my favorite volunteer activities is singing in a music group at Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton Church.

Judy Montfort, Department for Medicaid Services, Central Office

I have been a volunteer at L.I.F.E. (Let Important Friends Exist) House for Animals for almost five years now. We are the only no-kill shelter in Frankfort. I work Tuesdays from 5:30-8 p.m., caring for the cats and assisting with the dogs. I also substitute for other volunteers when they can't do their shift. I am known as the "Treat Lady" because I always come in with two bags of goodies for the animals -- one bag full of cat treats, toys and baby blankets for bedding and the other bag full of dog treats, toys and large towels for bedding.

My shift starts with the cats upstairs. I lock the front door, and all the cats are allowed in the lobby area to play and exercise with each other. I clean litter boxes, give fresh water and food, provide clean bedding, mop the floors and then play with each one and get lots of kisses and love rubs back from each of them. I get them back into their rooms by shaking the treat bag and telling them "good night" before I turn out their light. We have three cat rooms. New admissions are kept in the intake room until they have been seen by our vet to rule out health issues. Then they are spayed or neutered before they are moved to the front rooms.

Once I finish with the cats, I take dirty laundry downstairs along with my dog treat bag. I play outside with them, if weather permits, and try to spend some alone time with each one. They all have different personalities, and each has special likes and dislikes. Some like stuffed animals, some like balls and some like squeaky toys, so I make sure they each have their own special toy for bedtime. I pass out treats and try to teach each of them to sit for their treat. The older ones sit when they see me coming, but the puppies are usually jumping around my feet to see who can get their treat first.

I also help with fundraisers for L.I.F.E. House because we operate strictly on donations and rely on volunteers to do the work. I really enjoy the fundraisers because we get to meet the public and tell them all about our wonderful animals and our successful adoptions.

My other volunteer job is helping out at one of our Church Missions at First Baptist Church. We have the Emma Quire Mission Center in Booneville in Owsley County. Owsley County has the highest poverty level in the state. I purchase new children's clothes, accessories and backpacks and then box them to be picked up by our minister, Dr. David Henson, who delivers them twice a year (spring/summer and fall/winter). I enjoy being able to help the parents in Owsley County see that their children are properly dressed both summer and winter, have school supplies, special toys at Christmas and new books to enjoy in their homes.

Emily B. Moses, Office of Communications, Central Office

I completed a training workshop early this year to be a volunteer at the Lexington Humane Society. LHS offers numerous volunteer opportunities that are accommodating to almost anyone's schedule. Working with LHS has broadened my knowledge of the need of my city's stray or unwanted animals and issues the pet overpopulation problem can cause for people in communities across the country. LHS and organizations like it work to address these issues through education and awareness. At the same time, the group helps find homes for animals in need. As an animal-lover with five dogs of my own, volunteering for LHS has made me more appreciative of people who dedicate their lives to the service of others – whether they be four-legged or two. Learn more about LHS online at <http://www.adoptlove.net/>.

Cindy Salyers, Division of Family Support, Department for Community Based Services, Breathitt County

I am a Family Support Specialist in the Breathitt County Family Support office in Jackson. In our line of work, we are always on alert for someone in need. I volunteer at a local food pantry that is a part of the Helping Hands Christian Resources, a nonprofit organization staffed by community volunteers. Volunteering at our food pantry has been the most rewarding thing I have ever done. I started out with a couple of hours two or three times a month. My commitment has now grown to anywhere from 13 to 15 hours a week.

When I began volunteering at the food pantry, I had the title of client manager. I helped the families complete the paperwork to receive assistance. I now have the title of pantry director and find that my volunteerism keeps rewarding me more and more every day.

Our food pantry is open only from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. on the last three Wednesdays of each month. We serve an average of 250 to 300 families every month.

If a family in an emergency situation – with no food or no money - calls our pantry, we will deliver a food box to their home.

I enjoy volunteering at the pantry so much that I find myself there just about every night, and I am always thinking of ways to better serve our families. Because the economy is in such a

difficult state right now, I find many more families who are in need of extra assistance to help them get through the month. Even if it is a bag of pinto beans or a jar of peanut butter, I will go home at night and have the rewarding feeling of knowing that I have helped that family have something to eat and that that a child will not go to bed hungry.

Thank you for this opportunity to share my story. I hope that this will prompt other individuals in our workplace and communities to get involved with a nonprofit organization or simply to lend a helping hand to someone in need.

Stephanie Whitaker, Office of the Inspector General, Central Office

I have been volunteering at the Franklin County Women's Shelter for almost three months. The shelter is able to provide services for up to seven women at one time. While there, they do not have to worry about paying for housing, food or medical costs, and they may stay up to one year. During their stay, they are encouraged to work and pay off any debts and save money for their new home once they move out.

Other than two paid staff members, the shelter is run strictly by volunteers. Once I learned that, I decided that I should help. I have a background in social work and know how desperately women needed a shelter in Franklin County. There has been a men's shelter in Franklin County for many years, but the women had to be placed out of town. This made it hard for them to keep in touch with their families, find stable employment and work toward their personal goals. I have spent time with the women at the Franklin County Women's Shelter, and they are all appreciative of the home in Franklin County and the services it provides.

My 12-year-old daughter, Kali, volunteers with me. I thought this would be excellent experience for her. I wanted her to learn to be grateful for the things she has and that the women there are just like us; they just needed help to get back on their feet.

Another practice that may not technically be "volunteering," is that I also donate platelets at the Kentucky Blood Center almost every two weeks.

I have been doing this for two years. I had two surgeries in the past that required me to have blood transfusions. If there hadn't been any donors, I don't know what would have happened to me. I began donating blood with them; however, they then asked me to donate platelets. They told me that one unit of platelets will help 10 people, seven of whom are cancer patients. It does take a little extra time to make the donation, but while I'm sitting there I just keep telling myself that I am making someone's life become a little better or possibly even helping to save them.

Health and Family Services Employee Named Pharmacist of the Year

Dave Sallengs, a pharmacist with the Cabinet for Health and Family Services Office of Inspector General, has been named Pharmacist of the Year by the Kentucky Pharmacy Association.

Sallengs, a licensed pharmacist, works with the Kentucky All Schedule Prescription Reporting System (KASPER) in the Office of Inspector General (OIG), assisting with investigations to stamp out prescription drug abuse, misuse and diversion across the state.

Sallengs, along with his OIG colleagues, have worked diligently to expand the capacity of the KASPER reporting system, strengthening ties with the law enforcement and medical community. Most recently, Sallengs' branch has been successful in recognizing pharmaceuticals that could be abused and making sure they are added to the KASPER schedule of narcotics.

"Much of the success we have achieved in recent years is the direct result of the dedication and hard work of my colleagues in the OIG," said Sallengs. "Many have worked tirelessly to combat our state's prescription drug problem and continue to look for ways to strengthen our capabilities to identify abuse, misuse and diversion of prescription drugs."

Prior to joining CHFS in 1999, Sallengs served as the owner/operator of an independent retail pharmacy. He's also worked in the wholesale drug industry in sales, computer systems support and management.

At CHFS, he works with the OIG's Drug Enforcement and Professional Practices Branch, including controlled substance field investigations and managing the KASPER program. He has been branch manager since 2003.

The pharmacy association's "Pharmacist of the Year" recognizes a pharmacist for outstanding professional activities undertaken during the current or previous calendar year, which resulted in demonstrable benefit to the profession of pharmacy. Only active or honorary life members of the association are eligible for the honor.

"This is a tremendous honor, and I'm extremely excited and humbled to receive the award," said Sallengs, a 1969 graduate of the University of Kentucky College of Pharmacy. "I would like to thank my colleagues at the Kentucky Pharmacy Association for this recognition and support offered throughout my career."

CHFS Nurses Sought

In honor of Nurses Appreciation Week May 4–8, the Cabinet for Health and Family Services would like to recognize all nurses' "Journey of Nursing Excellence." The planning committee would like to recognize all nurses in the Cabinet, including those working in a non-nursing position. Many activities are planned during this week. If you would like to participate, please respond to susan.reffett@ky.gov to let the committee know who you are, where you are, what you are presently doing and how long you have been with CHFS. The committee also would like to be informed of any nursing recognition activities planned for Nurses Week.

Living Well:

Columnist Interviews Self in Familiar Format

Do you know what Jo Dee Messina (country music star), Michael Waltrip (race care driver), Tom Izzo (Michigan State men's basketball coach), David Paterson (governor of New York), Natalie Coughlin (Olympic swimmer), and Dr. Sanjay Gupta have in common? They are all runners and have been featured in the Runner's World magazine article "I am a runner." I also define myself as a runner. However, my definition does not disclose my actual speed (I am more of a slow trotter), the length of my strides (if only I had longer legs) or the depth of my addiction ("runners high"). As a runner I am always curious as to who else is a self-proclaimed runner and why. Which made me wonder how I would answer those familiar "I am a runner" questions. So I decided to ask myself! Here are my answers.

Q: When did you start running?

A: In college, when I started dating a cross-country runner. I did take some time off after having my kids but fell back into a regular running routine in 2002.

Q: How does it help your everyday life?

A: I have a busy schedule like everyone, so running works well for me because I can get some physical activity and still have time to spend with my family. I am just like everyone else, I struggle to get out the door but once I hit the road I gain 30 minutes of needed clarity that allows me to feel better, have more energy and deal with a busy schedule.

Q: What do you think about when you run?

A: It depends on the day and how I am feeling during the run. Each run is different so sometimes I will run through the daily schedule, ponder random thoughts or make a mental list of what I have to do when I get home. On my worst days, I am just hoping that I don't have to walk (because it takes more time). On my best days, my legs feel lighter, my breathing is steady and I fall into a comfortable rhythm.

Q: What are your favorite places, times and weather to run in?

A: I prefer warm to hot, sunny weather, but I have had to train in the rain. My best runs have been at 6 a.m. when the roads are still empty. I also enjoy watching the sun come up and how quiet the neighborhood is at that time. I think I like that time, too, because my workout is already done before I start my workday, and my family is still at home sleeping so I don't miss anything at home. Over the winter I started trail running (if you are interested we go on Thursday nights to Capitol View Park in Frankfort), and it has become one of my favorite places to run. Also, my neighborhood has wide walking trails and bike trails so I have a lot of options when it comes to selecting different routes.

Q: Do you reward yourself after running?

A: Not really. I enjoy getting out on the road or the trail either by myself or with my running friends. However, I did enroll in the Virgin Health Miles program, and I enjoy checking my pedometer after my runs to see how many steps/strides I took. I am hoping to win one of the cash rewards so my hard efforts might become a reward.

If you have an activity that you use to define yourself or you have recently enrolled in the Virgin Health Miles program, please contact me at Kris.Hayslett@ky.gov and share your story with other CHFS employees.

Fiscal War

By Beth Fisher

Are you a financial sucker? Chances are you answered no to this question, but the truth is we could all fall victim to a clever criminal if we're not prepared. Luckily, plenty of people are working to make sure we're protected and aware of the dangers, scams and financial traps out there.

For example, Gov. Steve Beshear recently proclaimed April to be Financial Literacy Month in Kentucky, and the Kentucky Department of Financial Institutions (DFI) and AARP Kentucky are now offering a new, informational DVD about avoiding consumer fraud. This is a great resource for the fiscally minded state employee, particularly those of you preparing for retirement or who are members of the baby boom generation.

"Buyer Beware" showcases presentations to Kentucky consumers from a statewide series of Senior Scam Jam events. The video's purpose is to educate consumers on spotting and avoiding investment fraud. It includes examples and advice from actual victims. Viewers also learn about mail fraud from the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, predatory lending from DFI and identity theft from the Attorney General's Office.

Other helpful features of the video include warning signs of financial fraud and tips to protect consumers from becoming victims. It delivers state and national contact information for agencies where consumers can report fraud or get help.

"Buyer Beware" is available free on a first-come, first-served basis to groups of 25 or more. It also includes printable documents for use in a group or workshop setting. Groups or organizations may order a free copy by calling DFI at (800) 223-2579 or AARP at (866) 295-7275 or by sending an e-mail to aarpky@aarp.org. So check it out!

Fiscal War Money Saving Tip of the Week: If you are looking to avoid a scam, or think you are susceptible to fiscal scoundrels, take steps now to prevent a major catastrophe. Plenty of resources are available from your local bank to Web sites like the American Institute for Economic Research, www.aier.org, so be sure to ask questions and get answers.

Focus Health Tip: Average Diet is too High in Sodium

The Kentucky Department for Public Health wants to make CHFS employees aware of the dangers of consuming too much sodium, particularly among those at risk for or currently struggling with high blood pressure.

A new study from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) shows that more than 2 out of 3 adults fall into a risk group recommended for lower sodium intake. These groups include people who have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, African-Americans, middle-aged

people and older adults. Yet, the study found, in 2005-06, the estimated average sodium intake among Americans was 3,436 mg a day – more than double the recommended amount for most people.

The Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2005 recommends that adults, in general, should consume less than 2,300 mg of sodium per day (about one teaspoon). People considered at risk for hypertension should consume no more than 1,500 mg per day.

A diet high in sodium increases the risk of having high blood pressure, also known as hypertension. According to DPH, hypertension is a major cause of heart disease and stroke, diseases that claimed the lives of 13,879 Kentuckians in 2005.

For more information on sodium intake and other components of a heart healthy diet, contact DPH at (502) 564-7996 or visit the department's Web site at <http://chfs.ky.gov/dph/info/dpqi/cd/default.htm>.

Employee Enrichment

By Anya Armes Weber

There is a lot you can do to support a coworker or friend who is depressed or has a mental illness. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's whatadifference.org lists several tips to respond positively.

- Express sympathy and concern.
- Ask "How is it going?" and listen to the response. Say you want to know how your friend is managing and offer meaningful conversation. Make sure your friend understands that you truly care.
- Ask how you can help. Suggesting specific tasks that might directly help your friend will show you are sincere.
- Reassure your friend that you still care, and be sure to include him or her in your everyday plans like taking a coffee break, going out to lunch or exercising. If you meet resistance, reassure your friend and keep trying without being overbearing.
- Remind your friend that treatment is available. Ask if he or she is getting the proper medical care. You may be able to help find the right care.
- If a friend is having a psychiatric emergency, ask them what kind of help they need and respond immediately. You are there to give them hope and encourage them to seek professional support, including calling a crisis line, or the National Suicide Prevention Line at 1-800-273-TALK.
- Take eating disorders seriously. Immediate medical attention is in order if somebody you care about is very weak or ill from an eating disorder.