Secretary Eric Friedlander:
When I was doing that work in Louisville and working with homeless population, right? Always the thread was trauma. It always was. And whether it was primary or secondary or secondary reacting to primary, I mean, that's just reality, and it's the reality of the work that we do.

Julianne Hatton:
Hello and welcome to CHFS Community, a podcast about health and well-being for CHFS employees across the Commonwealth, hosted by Secretary Eric Friedlander, broadcasting from Frankfort, Kentucky.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Hello, CHFS. This is Eric Friedlander, your Secretary of the Health and Family Services Cabinet. And today I have with me Marjorie Shular. Hi, Marjorie, how are you today?

Marjorie Shular:
I am good today. Thank you for asking.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Absolutely. It's a little bit of a gray day today, but I think it's going to be one of those hot days before we end today.

Marjorie Shular:
I agree. I agree. It's been very warm lately.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Yes. That's the joy of summer in Kentucky, right?

Marjorie Shular:

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
So you're originally from Kentucky?
Marjorie Shular:
Oh, yes. Whole entire life.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Excellent. Where'd you grow up?

Marjorie Shular:
Every small town imaginable, but mostly Waddy. I spent mostly of my time in Waddy. I was there when I was little, went back there when I was older. So, yeah.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
But you moved around the State a little bit?

Marjorie Shular:
Moved around the Shelby County area.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Okay. Yeah. Yeah.

Marjorie Shular:
So, yeah. So, hit Cropper a little bit. Hit Finchville a little bit.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
There we go. Yeah.

Marjorie Shular:
Hit Mount Eden a little bit, but Waddy was mainly where I was from. Yeah.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Okay. Well, I drive from Louisville most days and so I pass by Waddy and Peytona all the time. What's Waddy like? What was like growing up in Waddy?

Marjorie Shular:
Well, small town like Mayberry, a little bit. Friends down the street, in town. No matter where we went, we always had friends. My family lived there, my cousins, my grandmother lived there. Everybody. My parents grew up lived their...

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
You couldn’t get away with anything?
Marjorie Shular:
No. No. No. No. Me and my cousin stole her stepdad's mail truck one time.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Oh, no. That must have been fun.

Marjorie Shular:
Yeah. We forgot that it clocked the miles. He wrote the miles down all the time, and then we forgot about that. When it came back, we were like, "Okay, well, he's going to notice that so many miles are added to this truck."

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
You didn't do the Ferris Bueller on the day off and try to do in reverse or anything like that?

Marjorie Shular:
We weren't that creative. We were girls, we didn't know. But all we did was drive a little bit around Waddy. There's no place to go really.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Yeah. It's a joyride. That was a joyride.

Marjorie Shular:
It was. It's country roads. It's pretty, it's a nice place to grow up.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
So Waddy, what high school?

Marjorie Shular:
Shelby County High School?

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Shelby County. So you were a rocket?

Marjorie Shular:

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
All right. Very good. Very good.

Marjorie Shular:
Yep. We only had one high school then, so loved it.
Secretary Eric Friedlander:
So that's fun. So, so as you grew up graduated high school, how did you find your way to the Commonwealth of Kentucky at CHFS?

Marjorie Shular:
Oh, gosh. Well, I didn't really know exactly about social work, at first. So what I did was I was really big in the FFA in school. I was all about the Future Farmers of America. Yep. I was a secretary in the FFA, my Ag teacher was the best. I was like his aide for, I don't know how many classes, I was on the landscape judging team, all that stuff. So I wanted to be an Ag teacher, like that was what I wanted to do but I went to Kentucky State University. That's where I went, loved that school. It was great. And I took a social work class as an elective, and I was like, "Oh, this is great." And I was like, "Yep. That's it. That's what I want to do." Yep. Changed the entire major.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Wow. Wow. So you were looking at Ag, which Kentucky State is a good Ag program. Did you ever show at the state fair or anything like that?

Marjorie Shular:
We did a lot of state competitions and a lot of national competitions. So yeah.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
You just bypass the state fair y'all were too good for that.

Marjorie Shular:
Well, I didn't really like show my tobacco and things did work in that stuff from the time I could stand until I was grown.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
That's not easy work.

Marjorie Shular:
It is the hardest work. Yeah. So I appreciate all those people out there that still work in tobacco. Yes, absolutely. It was very difficult. So yeah. My mom, dad, my uncles, my every uncle on both sides of my family. My mom's side of the family, my dad's side of the family all raise some tobacco or some crops or something like that.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Yeah. You hung it all that stuff and-
Marjorie Shular:
Oh, absolutely.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Did it all.

Marjorie Shular:
The hardest part I think, was picking it up out the field and putting it on the wagon and yeah. Going and hanging it in the barn that was... And especially in the heat.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Oh yeah. Because that's when you're hanging it.

Marjorie Shular:

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
So you found social work and you got to do some of that indoors and you didn't have to hang the tobacco.

Marjorie Shular:
Yes. I thought, you know what, I will work hard. I have always had a job of some sort of my entire life. I'm all about working. I will probably work for the rest of my life, but I wanted to go to school. I was the first person ever to go to school in my family. Like go to college.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Congratulations.

Marjorie Shular:
Yes. Thank you. And I was a nerd in school. I love school. I go to school now, I'll go to school. I'll just keep going to school. I just would. But I loved it. I loved school. I loved learning new things and everything. So when I got into social work, it was a career. That's what I wanted to do. I wanted to be a social worker.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
And then you walked across the street. How'd you end up with us?

Marjorie Shular:
So I started in Bullitt County, actually.
Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Okay. All right. Yeah.

Marjorie Shular:
As a frontline social worker, it was the first interview I had. First job I got. And it was about an hour from my house. So I drove there everyday back and forth. It was interesting only because you don't know.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Right.

Marjorie Shular:
Exactly.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
You never know.

Marjorie Shular:
Yeah. You don't know what it's going to be really, but I loved it. It was helping people, helping families. There were some cases at first that were... That made me think, I'm not really sure if this is what I'm supposed to do. But they turned out, well, the kids ended up safe with family. And that made me think, "Okay. At least they're not still living in the woods, camping out with their dad." Because that's where we found these, the first kids that I ever removed. That's where we found them.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Really?

Marjorie Shular:
Yeah.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Wow.

Marjorie Shular:
Yeah. I was out with law enforcement in my court clothes looking all crazy, not dressed appropriately for that trip, but you never know. You could go out one day and have to go to court. And then later on that afternoon you could have to go into an environmental neglect house. You don't know what the house is going to look like. The floors could be falling in anything. You're not just going to be prepared. Not sure what's going to happen next.
Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Yeah. That's just part of what it is to be a social worker with us.

Marjorie Shular:
Absolutely.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
It is definitely something new every day and sometimes it's tragic and sometimes, you see what you do that will improve the life of a child. You get all of that, right?

Marjorie Shular:

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
So you've had a lot of experiences like that.

Marjorie Shular:
Yep. I did a lot of that work. I was a supervisor for eight years, which was absolutely wonderful. My favorite job of all, I think.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Really you enjoyed that?

Marjorie Shular:
Don't tell Lisa Dennis that, because I work for her now.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Okay.

Marjorie Shular:
She might be like, what? No. But yes, that part was getting to teach new social workers.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Yeah. Right.

Marjorie Shular:
Getting to mentor them, getting to just give them the knowledge and guidance on their cases, just on the job itself. I love of the part about mentoring staff and just taking them in, they're new, they were the same as me, honestly. They want to be social workers and they want to help kids and they want to save kids. Okay. So let me help them.
Marjorie Shular:
So that's what I did and I loved it. And plus you get to stay a part of the work. You get to meet with families, you get to do case planning with families. You get to talk to them about their struggles, how they got to where they are, what it is they need. I think a lot of times we forget to ask them, what is it that you need? What got you to where you are today? We all have trauma, right?

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Right.

Marjorie Shular:
And sometimes we don't make the best choices, right? We don't make the best decisions based on the circumstances we're in at the time. And we don't want to be too quick to say that they're bad people or anything like that, because they're not.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Right. That's such an important piece and I'm sure as you mentor, you get to say, "Well, my first child removing place was out in the woods." So that's a pretty strong introduction to what you're doing. But that's a beautiful thing to say. We try to help families.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
That's what we're supposed to do. We try to look at what their strengths are and what we can build on, right? Strength-based. We talk about that all the time, but it's also why we talk about resilience is one of our pillars because everybody we got particularly if you're a social worker going into, to a home that might be emotional neglect or environmental at how to not judge that going in, right? Or to bring our backgrounds, right? Into, into what we see and then just try listening to families. That's powerful. I'm glad you were able to impart that.

Marjorie Shular:
Yes. Absolutely, and not letting it affect you, because our staff are so very... They've had their own trauma and they're exposed to secondary trauma on a daily basis with the things that our families go through and then they're trying to help them through those things and battling some of the same things that they've been through themselves. And so, I see that so often in hiring new staff that they have been in the foster care system, or they have been victims of abuse and neglect themselves, or they've struggled with being in a family where their parent was an alcoholic, or domestic violence or something like that.

Marjorie Shular:
Very same things that I went through, also as a child. So, which makes me think, "That's why I went there." You know? I went that way because you know. You've been in those situations and you're thinking, I wonder if I can help other people because I've been there and I can understand and relate, but then you also have to remember that you have to take care of
yourself. Because you already have trauma and you can go to therapy and you can do self-care and those things, but you have to be aware. You must have to be aware. If you have an issue with somebody who's an alcoholic, you can't take that out on that family. So you have to be aware of those things.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Well, and past triggers, I mean, when folks do surveys of folks who go into the helping professions, just the helping professions, oftentimes, those adverse childhood experiences, right? They rank pretty high. Because we're trying to heal ourselves, we're trying to heal our communities, right? We're trying to heal families.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
And it comes as a calling and that's powerful. That's very powerful, but you're right. You also have to be aware of those emotional triggers and those traumas that we've all experienced at some point. And get beyond that, right? That's why I was so excited to come back to the Cabinet because I really wanted us all to work on together. Well, I think it's a tremendously important piece around trauma when I was doing that work in Louisville and working with homeless population, right? It always, the thread was trauma. Always was. And whether it was primary or secondary, or secondary reacting to primary, I mean, that's just reality. And it's the reality of the work that we do.

Marjorie Shular:
Yeah. And so I think, building our organization and having a good culture, that's supportive of self-care and being aware of those things and our commissioners done a wonderful job and you have done a wonderful job. I mean, our agency is so much better and so much more aware of trauma and how it relates to our staff and how we should give them resources and make them aware and work on those things. And so I think that's really what we've been working on really hard, especially in the commissioner's office.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Right. And the governor who's been really supportive of all of this. I think the social workers who are advocating, right? For better wages and better wages on the family support side too.

Marjorie Shular:
Oh, absolutely.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
I think impacted the entire state. And I think that's the power of being able to use your voice, right? And to be in the place where you can really acknowledge trauma, secondary trauma, but also then while acknowledging that a part of working through that is being able to advocate for yourself, right?
Marjorie Shular:
Well, and it's great because it's those people that are aware and that can advocate are taking those steps, which is so wonderful. And then those people who are newer or who don't really understand that, they're bringing them along with them. Which is so great. Because then it's an overall agency thing they're including everybody. And so I think, that builds on what they're doing for others. It's an inclusive thing. We need to advocate for making sure that people take their leave time. And they're able to do that without worry that they're going to be so behind when they come back or that they're going to have the support of their supervisor or anybody else above, in the chain of command.

Marjorie Shular:
That their mental health or their physical health or that their family relationships, those things are important. And so we need to make sure that we are always promoting and advocating for those things for them. If I know they've been out all night on a removal, "Well, honey, go home and go to sleep." "Well, I still have all this paperwork to do." No, we'll take care of it. I'm here. I will help you. I have other staff that will help you. It's about being a team. It's not about one person having carry the burden of everything. But as a team, we will help you with the rest of the stuff. Go to sleep, take care of yourself, come back, we'll work on the rest of the stuff. I mean, that's what it's about.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Right. If you're burned out tired, all that stuff, the paperwork then takes three times as long. That's when it's just the most difficult. Now, the other big thing we need to do is I know you work in recruitment, right? How do we get more folks in? I'm hoping that over the past couple of years, folks have understood the importance of their role and the importance of the Cabinet and the importance of our programs. And maybe I hope get attracted to the mission. What do you look for? Because you have a role in recruitment now.

Marjorie Shular:
Yes. Yes, I do. We are working really hard on the recruitment part. So, really it's twofold. It's recruitment and it's retention. We really got to keep our staff. The staff we have now that have been here and dedicated and stayed with us through all this time. All these struggles, all the stuff we are trying to battle and overcome and things have are moving that way, which is great. But then it's also, how do we get new people in the door and keep them? How do we attract them to us?

Marjorie Shular:
And we've made such good strides in terms of the pay is much better, our culture on self-care is better, where we want them to have a healthy work-life balance. And we're trying to encourage those things. We're going to do the whole State Fair recruitment. We have a whole thing planned for that, which is great, I'm so excited and working on volunteers for that. And we have some really good ideas and we're going to try to cover the whole 11 days of the State Fair with people there, to talk to people and give them information.
Marjorie Shular:
We've got our Handshake account through the different universities and things, for recruiting platforms to put out there all of our job openings and that stuff. So it's all those things. And it's telling people about us again, our staff who know people who've worked here before, or who know are looking for a job in social work. The commissioner's new thing is, it's a new day at DCBS, and it is a new day at DCBS. So let's get that information out there.

Marjorie Shular:
Let our staff be our voice and let them find some staff for us. Bring these people back that are/have been great staff for us, and who left because maybe they weren't making the amount of money that they needed, or maybe that left because they had a difficult time with their schedule. We have more flexible schedules. All of these things that they left for, let's bring them back. Because we can do these things now.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Well, we've seen an increase, small, right?

Marjorie Shular:
Mm-hmm.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
We know we have to have more people.

Marjorie Shular:
Oh, absolutely.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
There's no question about that. And, and it takes time to build trust, right? You have to start somewhere.

Marjorie Shular:
Right. Right.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
You have to start somewhere. And I believe that starting somewhere has pulled a lot of other folks up and we're still working on it. We're still working on it.

Marjorie Shular:
It's a work in progress. And it will always be a work in progress, I think. Absolutely. Absolutely. Yes. And no, we don't want to ever leave anybody out. And we haven't. Absolutely. It's just
nothing happens at the same time, it doesn't. Like you said, "It's a work in progress." We have to move from one thing to the next. It's constantly moving.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
It is. It's like perfect is the enemy of done. And if you wait till you could be perfect with everything, you never get done.

Marjorie Shular:
That's right. That is very good. I like that so much. I'm going to have to write that down and use that, but yes, that's absolutely right. Yes.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Yeah. Because you got to move forward. So what I've seen is right now, particularly in the family support side, we're really starting to pick up now we're almost treading water on the social work side, and in certain counties we're doing better.

Marjorie Shular:
No agency to work for is 100% perfect or great. Everything's going to be wonderful every day. It's just not going to be, we all know that we live in reality, but we are so much better than we were even yesterday.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Right. Right. It's all about improvement. It's all about daily improvement and again, we'll stumble and fall different counties, different supervisors. Yeah. They need to not perfect out there, but we know we're trying to make progress and that's the important thing, right? And if you bring somebody on new, on the family support side, adult medical is complicated.

Marjorie Shular:
I've heard, I have heard. Yes. I have heard. Yes.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
And learning what it's really like to be in the field. It's some academic exercise, but it really is. You have to be there because there's nothing like being in the woods, right?

Marjorie Shular:
Absolutely.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Trying figure out what's going on with a dad and children. And I would see it again when I was doing some of the homeless work, right? Some of the youth, a lot of the youth that we saw on the street were coming through our system, right? So we've got a lot of work to do-
Marjorie Shular:
We do.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
... but you got to admit it and you got to address it. You got to take it on, right?

Marjorie Shular:
That's right. That's right.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
All right. So we talked about self-care, right? How do you take care of yourself and how do you get that nourishment outside of work? What's that nourishment for you? What does that look like for you?

Marjorie Shular:
Well, I'm going to be honest. I am not the best at self-care, but-

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Neither I'll shake your hand on that, but we'll work on it. We work on it, right?

Marjorie Shular:
We do. We work on it. And it helps that I have a boss that's very encouraging of self-care and I think that's one of the keys. So to have someone that's supportive of you and encourages you, I think is one of the biggest keys, especially, for our staff. And they don't have somebody that's in their corner that advocates for them. I don't think that they feel that they can do it, or that they should do it or that they want to make it a priority.

Marjorie Shular:
So every supervisor I've had in this agency, I've been in the Cabinet. I've not worked anywhere else in state government, besides the Cabinet for Health and Family Services since July 1st of 2001.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Wow. Yeah.

Marjorie Shular:
So every supervisor I've had has been very supportive, right?

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Yeah.
Marjorie Shular:
I can't say that I've had a supervisor that's not. And so I can preach self-care all day.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
So what do you do?

Marjorie Shular:
So what I do is, because right now what I do is I try to plan things for when I know I'm going to have a break from school, and I can take a break from work. So I've been planning concerts. So this year I have planned things. So I have something to look forward to. So I know that this break is coming, you know what I'm saying? So that's my... I'm all busy, but I can stop and think, okay. So in October, I know October's coming, I've got a few days. I'm going to Nashville and I'm going to see Post Malone and you probably think I'm crazy.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
No. That's good.

Marjorie Shular:
That's what I'm going to do. But on a daily basis, it's really Grey's Anatomy.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Yeah. Yeah. That works. And-

Marjorie Shular:
Netflix.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
... you like learning. So you're constantly engaged in learning, right?

Marjorie Shular:
Well, I'm constantly doing schoolwork every day. I'm doing homework. I like school. I will keep doing that. I'm getting my doctorate in social work. Yes.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
So that's a part of self-care too, right? Is learning for you, right? That's part of what nourishes you. That's a great answer, right? I like to learn. And then when I have downtime and I'm watching Grey's Anatomy. Okay. And I'm going to go to concert and I love music, right? All of those things, that is self-care, right? That is what it is.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
And that's a beautiful way to do it, right?
Marjorie Shular:
Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
All right. Some of it feels like work, but if it's learning and you have a passion for that, and that's really what I think self-care is about too. Where do we find our... What feeds us? What nourishes us, right?

Marjorie Shular:
Yeah.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
And that piece of learning, right?

Marjorie Shular:
Yes, it does. And that's really what I'm working on right now in school, is primary trauma, secondary trauma, burnout, turnover, and self-care. That's like my focus.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Sure.

Marjorie Shular:
Right now.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
And that's a great way of having it reflect on what we do and what you do every day and trying to bring some more evidence-based practice is what we talk about.

Marjorie Shular:
It's like, how do all these things connect and what can we do to affect change? That's really what I'm interested in. What can we do? So our staff are supported and that we continue to help them, in all of those struggles.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Do you put your hands in the dirt, any? Do you do any gardening?

Marjorie Shular:
Oh, no. I kill every plant that I have in my house.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
But you were in FFA.
Marjorie Shular:
Let me tell you, I don't really know how I survived that to be quite honest. But no, every time I get a plant and it looks like, "It's not going to make it, mom, can you please come and get this plant. Take it home," she has it living in two seconds. It's beautiful and everything. So I just call mama, "mama."

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Oh, well that's good.

Marjorie Shular:
I'm going to give a shout out to her because let me tell you she works in the Washington County Family Support Office. She is a Family Support worker.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Oh, wow. So all in the family?

Marjorie Shular:
Well, she just started there in December, so she is a new recruit – just so you know.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:

Marjorie Shular:
Her favorite thing about it is helping the people. They'll come in or they'll call and they'll be so lost about applying for benefits and things. And when she gets done, she'll call me sometimes at the end of the day. And she'll be like, "They were so thankful and they were so appreciative because they didn't understand the system." How it works or what they needed to turn in or any of these things. And she said, "I was able to help them and now they're going to get their benefits." And she said, especially the older ones that have a little bit harder time with the system and that stuff. And it just makes her day. She loves every bit of it and...

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Well, and that's part of prevention and that's part of what we do in this Cabinet. And I think it's so beautiful. You're a mom who just started, is able to help people get the benefits, which is probably going to change their life for the better. Not probably is. And it's something we get to wake up and do every day. I think it's just so beautiful that we're able to do that.

Marjorie Shular:
She loves it. Just because she's at home, she's gardening. She's flower potting and planting and all that stuff. And she's like, "Yeah. I'm interested in that." I think, all right. I was like, "Well, you go ahead and apply and here's how you do it." I was like, "Good luck to you." Then she tells me she got a job and I was like, "Well congratulations." But she's loved it from day one.
Secretary Eric Friedlander:
That's beautiful. That's really beautiful. Thank you. Thank you. And thank your mom for me too.

Marjorie Shular:
I will do. Yeah. Yeah. She's just so proud every day when I talk to her.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Excellent. And we all should be, because we're all trying to do good work.

Marjorie Shular:
Absolutely.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
And not perfection, right?

Marjorie Shular:
No.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Never get there. But we are trying to help everybody who lives in this state and make people's lives better. That's what our mission is, right?

Marjorie Shular:
We do. Progress every day.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Every day.

Marjorie Shular:
A bit of progress every day.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
That's right. Thank you.

Marjorie Shular:
Thanks for listening to me.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
Yeah. This has been a great conversation. I appreciate your perspective. Thanks to mom. Go to more concerts. And again, progress not perfection. So we keep working on it together, right?
Marjorie Shular:
We will. We will.

Secretary Eric Friedlander:
All right. Well thank you. And I hope folks have enjoyed this podcast and that you'll come back and listen to a few others.

Julianne Hatton:
Thanks for joining us on CHFS Community. Hosted by Secretary Eric Friedlander produced by Julianne Hatton. Our Assistant Producer is Beth Fisher. Our Technical Director and Graphic Artist is Lisa Wallace.

Julianne Hatton:
Watch for the podcast preview in your email. So you'll never miss an episode, while you're at it tell your co-workers about the show. Until next time, stay healthy Kentucky.