2021 accomplishments show our commitment to uplifting all Kentuckians

As we look back on 2021, we can remember it as a bittersweet chapter in our recent history. We were blessed to receive wide distribution of the life-saving COVID-19 vaccine, but many of us continue to feel the effects of the pandemic both personally and through our clients, neighbors and extended families. While we had long-awaited reunions with family and friends, many of us lost loved ones to COVID. We will forever honor them and their fight. We share a collective gratitude for all those of who have followed the recommended precautions and have taken the vaccines and boosters. Thank you for caring.

We, as usual, certainly met the moment once again, when we needed to step up and make a difference.

Julie Son recognized for aid to neighbors after tornadoes

DFS Field Services Supervisor named Team Kentucky All Star, Superhero

Julie Son of The Lakes Service Region was recently recognized as a Team Kentucky All Star by Gov. Andy Beshear and as a DCBS Superhero for her service to her community and her neighbors. Gov. Andy Beshear featured Julie, a Field Services Supervisor in Caldwell County, and her 16-year-old son, Michael Drennan, in his Budget Address to the Commonwealth on Jan. 13 for coming to the aid of her neighbors after tornadoes ravaged their community on Dec. 10.

SRCA Lindon named Superhero

Congratulations to our Superhero, Margery Lindon, Service Region Clinical Associate in our Eastern Mountain Service Region! Margery was commended by her nominator for being the lead on the region’s Special Investigation Unit.

“She took on the difficult role and task of making face to face with a child who was in the hospital in reference to a near fatality who at the time was so critical it did not appear they would survive,” the nominator said.
Four in DCBS Leadership named 'Champions for Children' by KYA

Four DCBS leadership staff have been honored by Kentucky Youth Advocates as Champion for Children award winners during their Children’s Advocacy Week.

The DCBS winners, who were announced during KYA’s virtual Rally for Kentucky Kids, are:
- Christa Bell, Executive Advisor
- Lesa Dennis, Deputy Commissioner
- Jason Dunn, Director, Division of Family Support
- Sarah Vanover, Director, Division of Child Care

DCBS Commissioner Marta Miranda-Straub said she is so proud of these staff and how they represent their offices' service.

Read the story here

Legislative Update

The 2022 Regular Session of the General Assembly convened on Tuesday, January 4, 2022. Even-numbered sessions are deemed to be a "long session" because they consist of no more than 60 legislative days compared to the 30 legislative days in odd-numbered "short session" years. The primary focus of the long session is always preparing and passing a budget, a requirement of the Kentucky Constitution.

This year, the budget will return to being a biennial budget after the past two sessions consisting of one-year budget bills due to fiscal uncertainties caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Other areas of focus for the General Assembly are election redistricting, natural disaster recovery assistance, pandemic response, education, and addressing the need for recruitment and retention of educators and state employees. The regular session calendar has the General Assembly meeting right up to the constitutional deadline of April 15, 2022.

Information concerning the legislative process, who your legislator is, and access to legislation can all be found on the Legislative Research Commission’s website at https://legislature.ky.gov/Pages/index.aspx. You can tune into KET’s legislative coverage on your KET channel on television or at https://www.ket.org/legislature/.

Equity, Social and Economic Justice

Equity ABC Corner: Social Determinants of Health (SDOH)

Welcome to Equity ABCs, a monthly corner in our DCBS newsletter written by Dr. Brandy Kelly Pryor, Health Equity Advisor for DCBS and Founder of BKP Strategies.

At BKP we developed a program tool, E is for Equity: Equity ABCs, and these corners, introduced in October 2021, represent that work.

1. Read the newsletter and this corner and tell other staff.
2. Take the quick 2 min survey here.
3. Suggest more words at any time here.

On to this month’s concept...Social Determinants of Health

- When you see this picture what do you see?
- What do you think the icons represent? See the accompanying key to check your responses.

Read the story here
Prevention partners support families affected by winter tornadoes with 'Geaux Bags'

On January 5, 2022, Prevent Child Abuse Kentucky (PCAK), delivered 200 Geaux Bags to Lotus Children's Advocacy & Sexual Violence Resource Center in Paducah, Kentucky. PCAK facilitated this donation via the Louisiana Department of Children & Family Services.

Read the story here

Staff assist colleagues, families after storms

Division of Service Regions and the Commissioner’s Office leadership recently gave this update on tornado relief efforts.

We wanted to take this opportunity to let staff know the efforts that we have taken in order to support staff and clients that have been affected by the December tornadoes. Staff from across the state, in every region, have offered to help in some way. Thank you all for pulling together to help your peers and customers in Kentucky. We continue to support those counties affected by the tornadoes and know that we have a long road ahead of us to rebuild. We have to rebuild office buildings, staff homes, communities, and our spirit.

There are many activities, with various partners, to help support staff in affected areas. Some of supports include:

- A daily “Tornado Response” call with Division of Service Region staff, Safety Administrative staff, Office of Administrative Services, Facilities staff, Office of Administrative and Technology Services, and the Division of Family Support.
- Public Health and the Division of Emergency Management have provided much support to DCBS in helping us find ways to serve families due to damaged DCBS buildings.
- Melanie Taylor, Assistant Director, coordinated with the Division of Protection and Permanency (DPP) and vendor Evident Change, to provide $1850 in gift cards to affected regions who had loss as a result of the tornadoes for staff or client assistance. DPP worked with several private child caring (PCC) and child placing (PCP) agencies, and the Office of Inspector General (OIG) the day following the tornadoes to ensure the safety of children and youth in out-of-home care receiving prompt responses. StepStone was without power but took immediate steps to ensure that the youth in their residential facility had all of their needs met in the short-term until the power was restored. Several foster families with StepStone and NECCO were displaced. These agencies have gone above and beyond to support these families during this difficult time.
- The Division of Family Support led by Director Jason Dunn and Executive Advisor Bobbi Jo Frye helped get our Disaster Snap (DSNAP) plan approved and operational. Staff across the state volunteered to help cover after hours and Saturday hours in order to ensure DSNAP benefits are issued.

Again, we wanted to take a moment and let staff know that our hearts, minds, and efforts are with all the staff and Service Regions impacted by the tornado. We are all in this together and we will continue to support you.

As always, our Kentucky Employee Assistance Program is available to all staff: https://personnel.ky.gov/Pages/KEAP.aspx.
Service Regions Update

Eastern Mountain Service Region
Christmas is a special time for families and a time Breathitt and Wolfe counties Protection and Permanency staff try to make things extra special for children on our caseloads. 2021 was not an easy year due to high caseloads, staff shortages and maltreatment of children higher than even during the pandemic. Staff worked to ensure that children had a magical Christmas, seeking sponsors and fundraising to purchase gifts for each OOH C child as well as a stocking full of goodies. A drive-through Christmas was held with Santa Claus there to pass out each gift and stocking.

SSW Alicia Baker coordinated with Aspire Appalachia, who adopted through an Angel Tree many of the children on her in-home caseload to buy for children who reside with their parents or with relatives. Many of these families could not have been able to provide Christmas without the assistance of this community partner.

Two different small local businesses donated gifts to our agency to distribute to children on our caseloads. The happiest memory is of 2 small girls receiving Plunder necklaces that had their names engraved on them. The girls were so excited they immediately put the necklaces on in the presence of the worker and wore the necklaces for family pictures.

Jefferson Service Region
The Jefferson Service Region was recently awarded a federal grant in the amount of $996,944 to enhance Family Recovery Court (FRC).

The goal of FRC is to address the substance use epidemic through structured evidence based service provision focused on healthy, safe and timely reunification. The program supports families and children in overcoming substance use and moving toward reunification by providing alternatives to unhealthy coping skills and mitigating the impacts of ACEs on children and family systems. DCBS, Seven Counties Services, University of Louisville and Jefferson County Family Court are excited about the opportunity to work in collaboration with our vulnerable families who have been negatively affected by the substance use epidemic.

How to earn LivingWell rewards
In 2022, employees and their spouses enrolled in health insurance coverage through Kentucky Employees Health Plan are eligible to earn LivingWell Engagement Rewards and participate in WebMD quarterly challenges. Employees can take part in healthy activities to earn up to $200 a year in gift cards and spouses covered by KEHP insurance can earn up to $100 a year in gift cards.

kynect enrollment extended to 1/31
kynect has announced that Open Enrollment will continue through January 31! Kentucky residents have until then to enroll in a Qualified Health Plan (QHP) for Plan Year 2022 coverage. Also, all Income Requests for Information (RFI) and Citizenship RFI due dates are extended until Jan. 31. Coverage begins March 1 for those who enroll between Jan. 16 and Jan. 31.

Special Enrollment Period
Beginning January 7, the Special Enrollment Period (SEP) for technical issues and natural disaster has also been extended. Impacted individuals now have though Jan. 31, 2022 to select a Qualified Health Plan through this SEP. Please visit this link for more information: KHBE's Special Enrollment page.

kynect benefits Update
As of December 20, 2021, the kynect Appointment Module has added appointment scheduling for SNAP E&T Assessments and General SNAP E&T appointments in kynect benefits. Due to the tornadoes in Western Kentucky, the Application Intake and Recertification appointments in kynect benefits have been delayed to a later Go-Live date and are coming soon. Following that date, residents, kynectors, Agents, and other users may schedule and manage Application Intake and Recertification appointments in kynect benefits.

December Training Updates
At the end of December, 17 kynect benefits training materials were updated and launched to kynect benefits for Kentucky Residents and SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) Participants. For the latest SNAP E&T training materials visit the SNAP E&T CHFS page.