Reach out for mental health support without stigma

May is Mental Health Awareness Month, and I want to remind all of you that part of self-care is asking for support and assistance. Our mental health is a key part of our wellness, as you know these last two and a half years have challenged all of us in multiple ways, including the grief of those we have lost. I have shared parts of this message many times, and because of its urgency it bears repeating. We all need help sometimes, and that help can come in many forms. Giving yourself permission to seek this support when you need it will open your life to the grace and peace you deserve.

As a person in recovery from drugs and alcohol, a trauma survivor, and a teacher and social worker for now 48, working with individuals, families, youth, organizations and communities I have learned that self-sufficiency is over rated, that we are interdependent on each other, that asking for help is courageous and that having a CARE circle of friends and families is crucial to managing the challenges we face as human beings and as professional helpers. I have also learned that the self-awareness, transparency and humility that it takes to acknowledge our needs and seek support builds trust, safety and resilience.

ORHM Executive Director Straw named Superhero

CHFS Office of Human Resource Management Executive Director Tresa Straw was recently named DCBS Superhero for her tireless efforts to support DCBS staff in the salary equity process.

Commissioner Marta Miranda-Straub, Deputy Commissioner Lesa Dennis and Chief of Staff Shannon Hall presented Tresa with the award, a card and a potted flower at a recent department leadership meeting to thank her for her expertise and advocacy on personnel issues.

“Tresa, your service and outspokenness has been instrumental in helping us achieve the current staff reclassifications and new entry salaries for recruitment,” Commissioner Miranda-Straub told Tresa.

Read the story here
Jefferson locality premium is good news for all staff

Greetings DCBS,

Earlier this month, Commissioner Marta Miranda-Straub, Deputy Commissioner Lesa Dennis and I joined Jefferson Service Region Administrator Amanda Gehring and several JSR staff in person to announce the wonderful and welcome news of the Jefferson Service Region Locality Premium Pilot.

This means that all full-time, part-time and interim staff assigned to the Jefferson Service Region – our largest region - will receive an extra $4 an hour. It is applied to working hours (hours coded as 1REG and 6ADL). All staff will receive the locality premium added to their pay for every hour recorded as 1REG and 6ADL.

It is not applied to hours taken when leave is used (annual, sick, comp) or for holidays (except when 6ADL is coded on holidays). The effective date was May 16, and changes will be made to reflect the locality premium indicator for employees in the KHRIS system, behind the scenes. Employees will not have to enter anything specific on their timesheets to receive the locality premium.

Staff receiving the locality premium would no longer be eligible if they transferred, promoted, demoted, etc., to an organizational unit outside of the Jefferson Service Region, i.e., another service region, division, department, cabinet, etc. Also please note that the Personnel Cabinet Secretary may rescind authorization to pay a locality premium for a job classification at any time.

Read the story here

Workgroups aim to improve quality of health care, outcomes for foster children

Dr. David Lohr is DCBS Chief Medical Director.

I have been asked to highlight some of the things I’m working on as Medical Director. Currently, these areas have my main focus as we all strive to ensure good overall health for Kentucky children.

Oversight of Psychotropic Medications
Children in foster care are treated with three times more medications for emotional and behavioral disorders than children with Medicaid and not in foster care. This group has the goals to train DCBS workers and foster parents on the role of psychotropic medications in the overall treatment of youth in our care, conduct reviews of pharmacy claims to see overall trends, and have the Medical Director consult calls on youth with concerning medication practices.

CHFS Hard to Place Youth Workgroup
This an effort to address the crisis of youth in need of services who are boarding in hospitals, emergency rooms, or even hotel rooms and offices. Not just a problem for Kentucky child services, it is a national crisis.

The group is currently trying to understand the volume of the problem and the causes behind it.

Read the story here

CQI Update

The Field Quality Branch will launch an ongoing CQI newsletter informing staff of CQI issue resolutions to inform and assist with the continuous feedback loop as well as highlight CQI work among all divisions. In addition, we are working with the Voices of the Commonwealth as part of our ongoing work with youth engagement in the CQI process. Youth play a very vital and meaningful role in sharing their lived experiences and recommendations for improvements in the child welfare system. Recently, youth shared their feedback and suggestions focused around our CFSR/PIP items for safety, permanency and well-being that was shared with staff. The Field Quality Branch along with VOC youth are creating a Youth CQI Engagement FAQ document that will help inform youth of their role in CQI, how their voice can influence change that can improve the experience of families and children that we serve now and in the future.

Read the story here
The Division of Service Regions’ statewide scorecard for April 2022 is ready, and its data shows progress in almost every area.

In Kentucky, there were a total of 317 children that exited out of home care in April. 95 of those children were reunified with their parents, 76 were adopted, 71 were placed with relatives, 19 were placed with fictive kin and nine children chose to extend commitment. Kentucky’s Recruitment and Certification Teams approved 97 new resource homes. Statewide, in April, 692 ongoing request/agency APS/CPS cases were closed.

Almost every outcome seen an increase from March to April!

**Improved Outcomes:**
- Timely Initiations- .03% increase from March and .75% increase from January
- Past due Investigations- 3.07% decrease from March and a 1.82% decrease from January
- Caseworker Visits- .63% increase from March and a 3.19% increase from January
- Case plans- 1.18% increase from March and a 2.77% increase from January

**Areas of Improvement:**
- Supervisor Consults documented: Decreased 3.25% from March to April and decreased .71% from January.
- Investigations completed Timely: Decreased .89% from March to April, but has increased 4.3% from January.

This scorecard utilizes evaluation calculations for the following elements: Timely Initiations, Consults, Case plans, Timely Completion, Contacts, % Past Due, and Caseworker visits. It references the 050 Enter/Exit Statistic report for reasons in which children exited care; Parent reunification, adoption, etc.

Almost every outcome seen an increase from March to April

**Protection & Permanency Update**

**Pilot partnership supports kinship caregivers and children**

The Bair Foundation, in partnership with DCBS, has launched a pilot in Fayette and Scott counties called the Kindred Roots Program, which will support kinship caregivers and children. Bair will provide supportive coaching and development for kinship caregivers, children in kinship care and their parents. Additionally, Bair will provide a trauma-responsive method of parent coaching skills and visitation within a family-friendly environment.

The program approaches family success from a ‘whatever it takes’ paradigm where Bair Caregiver Advocates stand alongside the kinship caregiver(s), biological parent(s), and child(ren) in helping with anything from case management, child welfare navigation, supportive coaching, securing employment, budgeting, home repairs, housing, meals, mental health referrals, drug/alcohol referrals, and understanding the role changes that occur within the family dynamics when kinship caregivers stand in as a caregiver.

This program will be housed at the University of Kentucky, who graciously agreed to partner with Bair in providing the brick and mortar, along with the enhancement of interns and practicum students involved in delivery of care as Bair Family Advocates. Changing the paradigm and culture around the advantages of kinship starts with our next generation of social workers.
Foster Care Month Spotlight

Former foster child donates $700 for children in care

Nine-year-old CJ Fong of Fort Mitchell has donated $700 to help children in foster care. CJ was adopted from foster care as a baby. He raised the money through snow cone sales in his neighborhood and a Facebook fundraiser. He and his father Jonathan delivered a check to the Northern Bluegrass Service Region Recruitment and Certification team earlier this month.

Commissioner Marta Miranda-Straub named CJ a DCBS Superhero and sent him a special certificate for his efforts to help foster children in his community.

CJ specifically asked NBSR leadership that this money go to support kids who need things like food, clothes and basic necessities while they are waiting for a foster home. The money will go to the Foster Care Cooperative. Northern Bluegrass Service Region Administrator Kelly Skerchock, Service Region Administrator Associate Denise Eubanks and Family Services Office Supervisor Jennifer Wiehe presented CJ a gift card to thank him for his generosity.

CJ was also featured in area media for his service and donation. Read the WKRC-TV story here: https://bit.ly/38q5zVb.
WKU celebrates child welfare progress at Expo

Western Kentucky University's LifeSkills Center for Child Welfare Education and Research hosted its 2nd Annual Child Welfare Expo in Bowling Green in April. The event was a way to solidify collaborations in child services, recognize and honor groups and individuals who are working to better support and protect children and their families, and show appreciation for all child welfare practitioners. Several DCBS staff participated. Here are some scenes from this amazing event in the Two Rivers Service Region.

Above: Angela Lane, right, with nominees for the Angela Lane Community Award for Leadership in Child Welfare - Specialist Ashley Richey and SRAA Heather Cann, and SRAA Susan Evans, who attended to support coworkers, students and staff.

Below: SRCA Angela Lane and SRAA Kim Butler and at the DCBS table—SRAA Butler spoke with students about working at DCBS.

**Above Left:** SRCA Angela Lane and former foster child and expo speaker Tyler Hunter Boards, former member of Voices of the Commonwealth and current advocate for the foster children's rights.

**Above Right:** Angela Lane with LifeSkills Center for Child Welfare Education and Research Director Dr. Austin Griffiths.

**Right:** Three of the nominees for the Student Award for Child Welfare and Advocacy: Amber Flannery, Warren County FSOS, and Ryan Flowers, SSA in the Salt River Trail Region. They join Cassidy Howard, right, a WKU graduate assistant.