

Karen's Corner



West Virginia statistics on child welfare are troubling as they reflect the lives of many children. I know that all our employees are dedicated to children and our goal is to provide them with the opportunity for safe, successful, and healthy lives. I'd like to highlight a few achievements that reflect the Bureau for Children and Families' dedication to innovation and advancement.

We're seeing many improvements across the state and in many county offices. Our federal partners recently recognized West Virginia Works for achieving a participation rate above the national average, and Wyoming and Upshur Counties are among the State's top performers. In addition, our time for first contact has improved in Child Protective Services. Congratulations to Putnam and Marion Counties as they lead West Virginia in meeting the first contact timeframes.

Thanks to our economic service workers, West Virginia's SNAP error rate has improved by more than 2 percent over the last two years. Thirty-seven counties have 100% accuracy

for FY 2014.

We're now in the process of implementing Safety Standard Operating Procedures. DHHR is in the beginning stages of rolling out smart phones to Intake Child Protective Services and Adult Protective Services workers and issuing dog repellent to all employees who conduct home or site visits. We plan to begin installing e-panic systems in interview rooms, multidisciplinary team rooms, and visitation rooms this fall.

We are confident that our efforts, whether under the umbrella of our proposed *Safe at Home West Virginia* waiver or in another structure, will come to be recognized as a best practice model for full continuum supports in a community setting, effective project management, focused analysis, well-utilized resources and structured collaboration.

It is easy to see that we are making progress because of the continued commitment of our employees. I commend each Bureau and each individual for their hard work, and am proud of the example you set in your offices and in West Virginia.

Team Bateman Prepares for 5K



The employees of Mildred Mitchell-Bateman Hospital are characterized by CEO Craig Richards as "a caring and dedicated staff driven to make a difference one person at a time." Exemplifying his words are "Team Bateman," hospital employees and family members who are putting on their sneakers for the St. Mary's Hospital PATH to the Cure 5K. The walk takes place on September 28 and benefits St. Mary's Pink Ribbon Fund and the Huntington PATH project.

This is the first year that Mildred Mitchell-Bateman Hospital (MMBH) will have a team in the 5K. The hospital has held in-house events during October, breast cancer awareness month, for the past three years.

"This is a very important topic which has affected our staff," explains Debbie Frasher. "We have had several past and current employees that have been diagnosed with breast cancer. In Nursing Administration alone, 5 of the 15 staff members have been treated for breast cancer. We believe that coming together as a team will enrich the total experience of the 5K as well as boost morale at MMBH."

"We also want to support those in our community who do not have insurance or cannot afford a mammogram to ensure that they have access to mammograms as they need to," Debbie said. Eighty percent of funds raised from the event will go to St. Mary's Hospital Pink Ribbon Fund, which provides financial assistance to women who need mammograms or diagnostic services.

The remaining twenty percent of funds raised through the 5K supports the continuing maintenance of the Paul Ambrose Trail for Health, known as PATH, which is available for use free of charge to the public. PATH is a growing bicycle and pedestrian trail system in Huntington providing free, healthy recreational opportunities for the city and surrounding area. Research shows that persons who have a healthy lifestyle with proper exercise have a reduced risk for cancer, making for a strong connection between the Pink Ribbon Fund and PATH.

For more information on the PATH to the Cure 5K, visit <https://pathtothecure.org>.

School Clothing Allowance Assists More Than 86,000 WV Children

A good education is essential to lead a successful life. New clothing helps students feel confident at school, and confidence conveys the message of being ready to learn. Since the 1970s, DHHR has provided clothing vouchers for low-income school-aged children. This year 86,036 children received \$200 in vouchers that allowed their parents or guardians to purchase new school clothing at participating retailers across the West Virginia. The program is funded through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

Children receiving WV WORKS cash assistance or in foster care are automatically issued vouchers each year during the month of July. Applications are taken from other families from July 1 through July 31. The first vouchers are received by families in mid-July and must be redeemed no later than October 31 of the program year at participating stores. The Bureau for Children and Families works closely with the West Virginia Retailers Association to ensure that parents and caregivers can shop for their children at a variety of stores.

Clothing appropriate for school such as pants, shirts, skirts, dresses, shoes, coats, underwear, and other basic clothing may be purchased. Piece goods may be purchased to make clothing, if the family desires. Purchases made with the vouchers are exempt from sales tax and some stores offer discounts to customers who use the vouchers in their stores.

April Saunders, Senior Policy Specialist explained, "The School Clothing Allowance program means so much to students from families with limited resources. For some, it is their only opportunity to purchase new clothes. It shows these children and families that we believe in them, and that their education is important to us."



BCF's Janice Lamparski & April Saunders

September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month



Ali Wymer was diagnosed with cancer at six years old.

September is Childhood Cancer Awareness Month, a time where we recognize families, friends, professionals, and communities committed to combatting pediatric cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, 1 in 408 children will be diagnosed with cancer before age 15 and 1 in 285 children will be diagnosed with cancer before age 20.

"Awareness is key."

Those are a few words of insight from the mother of a childhood cancer survivor. At six and a half years old, Kelly Wymer's daughter Ali was diagnosed with Pre-Cursor B-Cell Lymphoblastic Lymphoma, one of the most common types of cancer in children.

"Ali was lying in my lap when I felt the pea-sized lump on her head in late November. We took her to the doctor and our pediatrician said it was nothing, but we couldn't stop there. It wasn't until March of the next year that the lump was finally removed and St. Jude diagnosed her type," said Kelly.

Kelly's experience is similar to that of many others. Often-times, cancer in children is mistaken for something else, which is why early detection is rare. Parents should pay close attention to potential signs such as an unusual mass or frequent headaches, bruising and muscle pain, and ensure that children have regular medical checkups.

A survivor, Ali went through two and a half years of treatment with the support of friends and family from beginning to end, and although she still attends the late term effects clinic for annual exams, she's now helping her mother spread awareness throughout the state.

Kelly co-founded WV Kids Cancer Crusaders, a collaborative group of individuals, medical professionals and organizations created to raise awareness and support for those affected by childhood cancer. The organization helps navigate families to three foundations that provide support within the state – Emma's

Touch, Walking Miracles and The Jonathan Powell Foundation. Kelly says the problem is real for West Virginia. WV Kids Crusaders has offered support to numerous families since its inception, including those of five babies from Morgantown, Huntington and Charleston who received the diagnoses this year.

Such support organizations are important when it comes to spreading the word and providing support to families. DHHR also promotes cancer awareness with programs such as the Office of Epidemiology and Prevention Services, which offers cancer incidence reports along with various resources and links to organizations.

According to Kelly, you don't have to have a personal experience or connection to childhood cancer in order to raise awareness.

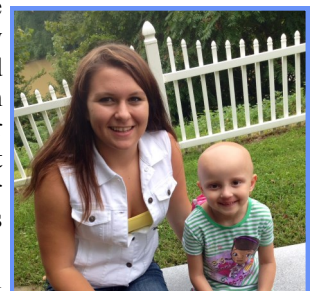
"We all need to get involved in helping these children. They are here in West Virginia, in your community, in your schools; they are your neighbors."

Kelly emphasized the importance of volunteering for community fundraising and awareness events and showing support for awareness month with a display of the awareness color (gold). She encourages readers to visit the WV Kids Cancer Crusader for updates on special events such as "WV Go Gold Day" on September 12.

Supporters can also attend local government meetings, city council or school board meetings to let leaders know accessible services and funding for research help strengthen families and communities.

Join Kelly, Ali and other West Virginians in shining a light on the types of cancer that largely affect children and survivorship issues, and help raise funds for research and family support.

As Kelly says, we have to "unite to fight childhood cancer. This should be our commitment in September and all months of the year."



Ten years later, Ali is raising awareness across the state.