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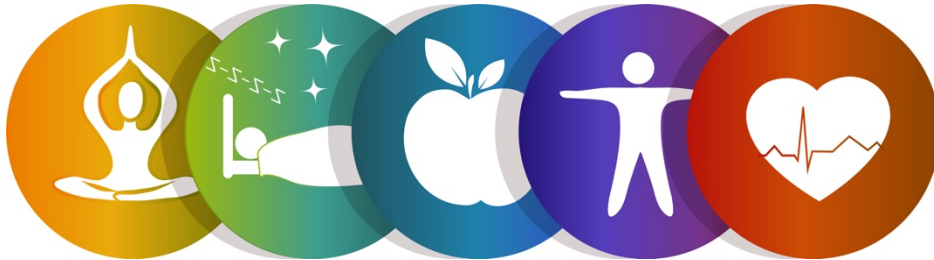
A SECOND CHANCE^{INC.}



National Kinship Review

**News, Networking & Information for
Kinship Care Professionals & Advocates**

Making Wellness and Work-Life Balance Intentional, Not an Option



What does supporting kinship families and achieving positive child welfare outcomes have to do with enjoying a high-energy Zumba class, coming out of your cubicle to crochet with colleagues in the afternoon, or knowing that your company is a supportive place for you to be a good parent and a good worker? Everything. Ensuring that the children and families in your care thrive, are safe and nurtured, demands a healthy workforce that manages its stress and is able to take on the rigors that come with working in human services.

But in the child welfare field, staying well can be tough and striking that sought-after work-life balance, a constant pursuit, says Sharon Martin, a veteran licensed clinical social worker and author of “Setting Boundaries Without Guilt: A Workbook to Move You From Doormat to Empowerment.” After all, this is a stressed system where staff stress, clients stress and management stress intermingle. Today, the impact can be devastating. Child welfare workers suffer the nation’s highest rates of secondary traumatic stress (STS), which researchers say can affect mental health and impair their ability to effectively help those who require services. Research suggests most child caseworkers will experience STS during their careers, with up to a third experiencing significant symptoms. That’s why Georgia’s Division of Family and Children’s Services, in partnership with Georgia State University, is training child welfare caseworkers and their supervisors across the state on how to prevent depression, anxiety, burnout and turnover caused by STS. The training program is in its first year

When Sharon L. McDaniel, MPA, Ed.D., opened A Second Chance, Inc. (ASCI) in 1994, she was a decade into her career as a children’s advocate and a director in Pittsburgh. Those years taught her important lessons—the work could be perilous to your health and staff wellness is paramount. But it was her dissertation,

“Examining the Antecedents of Stress and Burnout in Human Services Workers,” that fueled the idea for the pioneering workplace wellness initiative that Dr. McDaniel put in place for her ASCI staff.

“I wanted to change the culture of what’s expected in taking care of staff and to get staff buy-in on what would work for them,” McDaniel recalls. She knew that without a robust plan to support physical, emotional and overall health, the stress and rigors that come with being on the frontline of providing care for the Kinship Triad (parents, children and caregivers), could easily grip her staff, trigger high job turnover and disrupt the continuity of care and services. In those early years at the agency, afternoon karaoke, on-site babysitting service and manicures and haircuts, a walking club, and art therapy were common, and a part of the innovative wellness program model that she envisioned.

Nearly two decades later, the agency’s wellness program is managed by its Human Resources Department (HR). Today, HR Generalist Shamena Thomas is leading the charge, organizing everything from healthy cooking classes and sessions on creating Vision Boards, wellness retreats, to time for staff to get up and groove with a dance a coach. But it can be tough to lure caseworkers and other staff who spend most of their day in the field, to a wellness class or talk, Thomas says. She is looking to incorporate some wellness and work-life balance activities into the agency’s scheduled all-staff and department meetings so that more of them can participate. Encouraging frontline staff who have more cases and transports than time to take even 10 minutes during the day to pause, meditate or pray; or to swap a bag of fast food for a healthier lunchtime meal, is also a part of the wellness model.

For Stacy Johnson, who directs permanency in the agency’s Child and Family Services Department, “being available” could mean being roused by an urgent call or email ping at 6 a.m. or at midnight. Following company procedures, having a plan and being intentional, are a part of Johnson’s prescription for saying well and striving for a work-life balance in a field that demands her to always be on the run.

“For me, work-life balance is all about pre-planning my time. I’m very intentional about the time that I carve out to be with my family,” says Johnson. “That time is their time, and I want to be present and in the moment.” She also wants the same

for her staff, but knows that sometimes managing “severe cases” and juggling the unpredictability that comes with human services work can make it difficult “to leave home at home and leave work at work.” That’s why Johnson pays attention to their behavior and their workload.

“I try to notice when staff are tired, more stressed than usual or are having a moment.” Sometimes it means sending an employee home to work, a remedy intended to be restorative, not punitive. Johnson says working remotely can also help short circuit the need for long absences because staff feel overwhelmed and overworked. “We’re fortunate to have an organizational culture that is not only supportive of finding work-life balance, but that makes wellness efforts intentional, not an option for staff.”

Are you striking that work-life balance? Sharon Martin, LSW offers this guidance to help you make progress:

- **Clearly define when you are working and when you are “off”**
- **Don’t stay tied to your phone or computer**
- **Identify a colleague who can cover for you when you’re gone**
- **Make time for yourself after you leave the office**
- **Take vacations**
- **Don’t feel guilty about asking for time off**

National and international Kinship Care News Roundup:

NATIONAL: [The nominee for the top child welfare job established the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives under the George W. Bush administration.](#)

NATIONAL: [Partnership Aims to Strengthen Network of American Indian, African-American Kinship Caregivers](#) - A Second Chance, Inc. is among the organizations teaming up with Generations United to create a unique voice and education opportunity for American Indian and African American caregivers.

NATIONAL: Pennsylvania county takes pains to support kinship caregivers: Fixing the nation’s foster care crisis is the subject of a national investigative series by the

Arizona Daily Star. A Second Chance, Inc. is featured in this segment on successful intervention and models. [Learn more about the series.](#)

NATIONAL: [Family First Act Feedback: Comments from Chronicle's TweetChat on Major Child Welfare Reform Law](#)

The Chronicle of Social Change compiled this collection of responses via Twitter from those in the field on the Family First Act, which will start to take effect in October of 2018.

PENNSYLVANIA: [Philly puts out 'urgent' call - 300 families needed for fostering](#)

The Department of Human Services has put out an urgent call for more foster families.

KENTUCKY: [House passes two-year budget plan with help for pensions, historic SEEK funding, some new taxes](#)

Budget highlights include, funding for the Family Resource and Youth Services Centers at an increased rate of \$185 per child, and kinship care and relative placement are funded by almost \$30 million.

NEW YORK: [Program Keeping Convicted Youths Closer to Home Enjoys Success, Faces Cuts](#)

'Close to Home' residential facility for youth offenders is working to keep families together.

OREGON: [Former Oregon Child Welfare Director: DHS Must Reprioritize Prevention](#)

UNITED KINGDOM: ['Plunged into poverty': are kinship carers getting the support they need?](#)

Around 180,000 children live with relatives or friends, and nine in 10 kinship carers say they do not feel supported in bringing up children who might otherwise be adopted or go into long-term foster care.

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