

Amanda Body:

Just kind of remind people that child welfare is not just for you, CPS or just that system. Child welfare belongs to everybody. I think there's a famous James Baldwin quote, I don't remember the whole quote, but it says, "The children are always ours." And that's the family and the community that belongs to everybody.

Eric Friedlander:

Hello CHFS, this is Eric Friedlander, your secretary. And today, I have with me Amanda Body. Good morning, Amanda.

Amanda Body:

Good morning.

Eric Friedlander:

How are you today?

Amanda Body:

I'm good. The rain's making me a little tired, but other than that, pretty good. How are you?

Eric Friedlander:

I'm fine. I'm fine. Doing well, as a matter of fact, so we were just talking. We had these always date with weather, but we had big storms last night and our dogs, my dogs were pretty nervous. Yours were okay?

Amanda Body:

Yeah, so far. I don't know how he's doing now that I'm not home, but we'll see.

Eric Friedlander:

That's right, that's right. All right, well, I always like to start with where are you from?

Amanda Body:

I'm originally from Harlan, Kentucky.

Eric Friedlander:

Okay. All right. And where'd you go to school in Harlan?

Amanda Body:

I went to Harlan Independent School.

Eric Friedlander:

Okay, so you were living in Harlan proper?

Amanda Body:

Well, actually I lived in Harlan proper and then I moved a little bit outside of the city limits, but I was able to keep going to the independent school. And there were more schools, now they're consolidated to the independent school in Harlan County, but at the time I was there, there were a lot of others. There was Evarts and Cawood and Cumberland. So there were a lot of different schools there.

Eric Friedlander:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. A lot of consolidation has happened. How did you like growing up in Harlan?

Amanda Body:

I liked it. It was interesting. I think we had a really strong community. I felt safe. Again, that sense of community. I always felt like there were so many people that we could count on that would show up for, so I thought it was a really good upbringing, I think.

Eric Friedlander:

Good. And so you enjoyed it. What were you into in Harlan?

Amanda Body:

There's not much to be into. Not much. I don't know. In school I did track and field. That was the sport that I mostly did, and then I was active in some other different community things like choirs. I did the school choir. Then we did our community choir, which is all the black churches in Harlan would come together and have a big community choir. So we did things there. So that was probably most of what I got into as far as that. And everything else was pretty much just hanging out with friends.

Eric Friedlander:

Oh, that's good. That's good. What events did you run in track and field?

Amanda Body:

I did sprints and long jump and triple jump.

Eric Friedlander:

Okay. Wow. Wow. You still do any running?

Amanda Body:

No, no. Somebody just asked me that a couple of days ago actually. So I ran all the way through college. I went to Valparaiso University undergrad, and I ran in college there and I ran after I graduated, but it was constant hip pain and leg pain, which I thought was just part of my life. But then when I got my dog, he was a puppy. He did not like to run. I would try to run with him on the leash and he did not like it. So I stopped running for a while and then I started noticing how good I was feeling when I wasn't. So I just stopped.

Eric Friedlander:

All right. Do you still sing?

Amanda Body:

Not really. I still sing, but I wouldn't say I sing well.

Eric Friedlander:

Yeah, I've always enjoyed singing. I haven't done it in a little while. So then you went up to Valparaiso. That's a long drive.

Amanda Body:

Yeah, it's about eight hours from where I'm from. So

Eric Friedlander:

It was A. all the way through the boring Indiana. That's a very boring drive.

Amanda Body:

It is. After you get through Indianapolis and it's just corn fields and windmills, then you hit that little town, which is nice. Valparaiso is a really nice little small town. It has a really cool Main Street downtown. It's a nice town. I really enjoyed it there.

Eric Friedlander:

I had a friend that went up there, so I'd go and visit and it was a nice little place. It really was. Lots to enjoy up there. So you went up to Valpo. What did you major in?

Amanda Body:

I majored in English and political science.

Eric Friedlander:

Okay, all right. And that, of course, got you back to Kentucky. How?

Amanda Body:

Yeah, so I mean, I didn't know what else I was going to do, so I knew I had to go to grad school with those majors because it wasn't something like nursing or engineering where you go directly into a career. It's not just a given there. So I took a year off to figure out what I wanted to do. I kind of explored maybe education or then kind of happened upon social work and went to UK for grad school and got my master's in social work.

Eric Friedlander:

Oh, good. Congratulations. Then you ended up coming to CHFS?

Amanda Body:

I did. I did, yeah.

Eric Friedlander:

I'm one of those folks that just applied to state government. Is that how that worked for you?

Amanda Body:

Yeah. So it was kind of the same situation. I never put a lot, I mean, I guess I've gotten lucky and I wouldn't recommend it. I was pretty sure I wanted to go to Valpo, but I only applied to Valpo and UK. The only reason I applied to Valpo is I literally just said, "The first school that calls me from out of state I'm going to." And I did. Because I knew I just wanted to just go somewhere different for a while. I did, and then I applied for jobs and the first job that I got offered was with the state after grad school, so that brought me to Louisville. So I've moved to Louisville from Lexington, and that got me there and I was there for a couple of years and then I left and did some other things and worked for UofL Health for a long time, most of my career. And then I came back a couple years ago.

Eric Friedlander:

Well, we're glad you came back. What did you do at UofL Health? Was it mainly with their system?

Amanda Body:

Yeah, I did a lot of things there, actually. So I think that was a good thing about being there is that it's a large system, so you can do a lot of different things. So I worked in inpatient and then I worked in outpatient. I did organ transplant, so all assessments and things there, which is really interesting. I worked at the Brown Cancer Center, so lots of different things.

Eric Friedlander:

That's exciting. It's nice to have you get bored of one thing, you can go do something else.

Amanda Body:

I think that's the best way. I teach some classes at Spalding. I got my DSW at Spalding. And that's what I tell the students, because I teach some undergrad classes and I always tell them that's one of the best things about social work, I think, is there's so many things that you can do. So if you start something and you think, "Hey, this is not my thing." there are so many other things that you can do even within the field, but in completely different disciplines. So I think that's a real advantage of the career.

Eric Friedlander:

Yeah. So you came back and you are now division director. Right?

Amanda Body:

Mm-hmm.

Eric Friedlander:

In prevention and community well-being. Tell me a little bit about that.

Amanda Body:

So it's a newer division. We started in earnest in 20, oh my goodness, 2022, I think. So before that there was a prevention branch and protection and permanency, the division of protection and permanency. But they mostly worked on that tertiary level of prevention, which is something's already happened, but they're trying to prevent it from happening again. Kind of keep the family together. This all came forth with the Family First Prevention Services Act that gave us some room to expand. So it was going well with having the branch, but just knowing there was so much more we could do, and we always talk about it. We talk about it as upstream, so we're working on it here when something's already happened,

prevent it from happening again. But what if we can move further up and do more even further up the road before anything ever happens where a family is in danger of being separated or coming to the attention of child welfare in a way that they don't want to.

Amanda Body:

So a division was created so that we have primary prevention, which is what we call prevention for everybody. So you don't have to typically have any criteria. It's awareness, it's access, it's education. And then, we have secondary prevention, and that is a little bit more targeted at populations that have an opportunity for support. And we get in there where we can, provide services, provide resources again to keep the families from falling into crisis. And then we still have that tertiary level of support where if they do, unfortunately, fall into crisis and we're able to respond and hopefully be able to mitigate the effects of that crisis.

Eric Friedlander:

Well, and that's a big difference and a big change too. I've talked with several social workers across many, and that whole piece about, "Well, we can't talk to you until it gets terrible." Was always frustrating for judges, for social workers, for everybody in the system, and to really be able to identify and start the work upstream, that's very important.

Amanda Body:

And people are excited. Once they hear about us, so we're still, again, we're very new, so we're still getting the word out, but once people hear about us, they're so excited. And I think it's important that the division, sometimes people will shorten it as the prevention division, but I always try to say the whole name because we're prevention and community well-being. And I think that community part is so important. It's paramount to the job. You can't just deal with that single family or that single family unit without respect to where they come from, where they live, the supports that they already have around them and those different things. So we really take that into account and it's really exciting. I think it gives people a different idea of what they thought child welfare was and what they thought that CHFS and DCBS was. So people love to hear and talk about it once they know we're around.

Eric Friedlander:

Yeah, it's like a new day at DCBS. I know it's something that we say, but it's also something that we do. I would give the example of we'll get the first call sometimes and we don't get the words that trigger an investigation or trigger anything else. And then the second call, and then by the time we get the third call, when we've already had the first call, we see it all the time, where if we could have made an intervention at first with food, with support of some sort or parenting support, that would prevent the family crisis.

Amanda Body:

Absolutely. And that's one of the things that we are really, really honing in on and that we're really proud of in this division, is that we really do work with communities and we try to work with our grassroots organizations. Those are the organizations that know the community the best. It's easier to work with these big organizations that have footprint, and they're definitely needed everywhere because they do have the resources, but to make sure that we don't forget about those smaller organizations that really know the specific culture of their communities.

Amanda Body:

Because what we're trying to get out there is just kind of remind people that child welfare is not just for CPS or just that system. Child welfare belongs to everybody. I think there's a famous James Baldwin, I don't remember the whole quote, but it says, "The children are always ours." And that's the family and the community, that belongs to everybody. So really building those webs of support so that everybody feels involved in their community, and when these things come up, we can respond to it in a more positive way instead of, like you said, waiting until something tragic happens and then trying to respond after the fact.

Eric Friedlander:

And keeping a family together, if at all possible, makes all the difference in the world, not only for that family, but that child. Coming into our child welfare system and foster system, everybody's trying to do their best, but the state has said, "We're going to do better than your parents." And when we don't, it's always a challenge, and I can't imagine turning 18 and not having anybody to turn to. So that's so important to the best we can for the safety of the child, but also then for the whole community as well.

Amanda Body:

Oh, absolutely. Like you said, the whole community. It's so important because it is a traumatic experience and sometimes the safety circumstances necessitate that we do that, but if there's a way that we can keep the children in the home safely, then we want to try to do that. And it's for that child and it's for that family. But like you said, it's also for the community because that child and the family, those are precious resources in that community. They bring so many talents and so many skills and so much color to that community. So when you just pluck that up and just keep plucking often from the same communities, you lose so much of that foundation there. So we really want to be able to strengthen the communities around the families and the families as well.

Eric Friedlander:

And that's something that, I love that you said that, because that's something that is so important. When we have strong family units and strong neighborhoods and strong block by block because we're supporting people. That makes everybody better.

Amanda Body:

It does. It makes our whole society better, and there's more opportunities for everybody. We often think we live in more scarcity than we actually do, but there are so many opportunities for everybody if we're able to recognize people's talents and their strengths. And there's so much, and again, what I always tell my students is even people in the worst situations, while we always talk about from social work, we try to come at it from a strengths perspective.

Amanda Body:

And I say a lot of times you'll look at these people in certain situations, maybe they're unhoused and you think, "Oh my goodness, where are the strengths here?" But I remind them, "Do you know how much skill it has and talent and brain power that you have to have to live on the streets? You have to figure a lot of stuff out. You have to logistically every single day to stay safe, to stay warm, to stay fed." So those are talents and skills that we can use to help the people and to empower them. So there's always something that you can look to the strengths in a person and in a community, no matter what it looks like, that we can use to build them up.

Eric Friedlander:

Well, and it's something, I used to do homeless services in Louisville, and people would say, "Oh, those people are just lazy." I'm like, "Oh, no, they're working harder than you could ever imagine. They're working harder than you just to where the next meal is coming from." Where are you going to sleep? Are you going to be safe? We talk about living day to day. Some folks are living minute to minute out there, and it is, there is nothing easy about it. And we talk about resilience, but nobody shows it better than them.

Amanda Body:

Absolutely. Absolutely. I don't have that fortitude, so I can look at that and easily see, I couldn't do it. So the fact that you're doing it's showing me that you have a lot of skills and maybe you'd be a good navigator in some of these confusing systems that we have. So obviously we don't want anybody to have to live like that. But in helping them get out of those situations, you need to recognize those strengths that they have and help them use it in a different way.

Eric Friedlander:

Absolutely. Well, and I have the opportunity to see hospital boards and things like that, and I know when I was doing Street Serve out under the viaducts, the same range of personalities is out there in the streets as in the boardroom, and it's just some ways a matter of luck that one person's one place and another. I always used to think there but for grace go I. You know?

Amanda Body:

Yeah, absolutely. There's so much, and I mean, it doesn't mean that you're not working hard at what you did, but so much of our lives do come down to that luck. Again, with all that strength and resilience and those skills, if you would've had that plus a certain home life and a certain community life. Again, I always go back to the students. I love teaching, but I always go back to them. That's something I tell them all the time too, because they'll talk to me about having imposter syndrome, and I always tell them, "When you get in these rooms, you will look around and after a while you will see they're not smarter than me. They don't know more than me." Again, in every room, there's a range of personalities, just like there is in this classroom, just like there is on the streets, just like there is in schools. You fit in, you're okay.

Eric Friedlander:

And we all get imposter syndrome. Every last one of us. So that's not unusual, but it is then you're there because you're bringing your skills and talents. Right?

Amanda Body:

Oh, absolutely.

Eric Friedlander:

Yeah. Listen, but you're there because you bring your unique perspective.

Amanda Body:

Yeah. And you know what? We all do get imposter syndrome. But I think I'm a little bit less prone to that than some people. And the reason is I just say that because I do credit my upbringing in Harlan for that.

Because my friend and I, we laugh about it all the time. We're like, "Man, they used to hype us up for everything." We would make up little songs or dances, the community that we had there. We look back and like, oh my gosh, that was so silly. It's so embarrassing. But they would make us feel like, "Oh my gosh, you need to be on stage. You need to be doing this." I feel like I was raised with such confidence, and not just from my home, but from the whole community, the small community that we had there, everything that you did, people were constantly like, "Oh gosh, you need to do this and pursue this."

Amanda Body:

And I think that was so helpful. But again, it's that luck of the draw. Somebody else might not have grown up in that space, and you might not get that. You didn't have that type of encouragement and things. So it might make it harder for you to feel like, "Hey, where do I fit in in this room?" But I don't consider anybody better than me. And a lot of that is completely in my upbringing because like I say, in small towns, like you leave town on a parade float. And it did feel like that in many ways. They were just very oriented to the needs of the children there, and they made us all feel special and talented and loved. And I'm so happy to have grown up that way.

Eric Friedlander:

And shouldn't we expect that from all our communities and neighborhoods?

Amanda Body:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Eric Friedlander:

Shouldn't we support all our communities and neighborhoods, so they can do that?

Amanda Body:

Absolutely.

Eric Friedlander:

And today, speaking of community, we have Rally To End Abuse and The Pinwheel Ceremony. You want to talk a little bit about that?

Amanda Body:

So April is Child Abuse Prevention Month. And so, there are lots of activities throughout the commonwealth during that month. First of all, spreading awareness for the issue. And also it used to actually be Child Abuse Awareness Month but we changed that to prevention because it's more of a call to action. Right? So you don't want to just be aware. You want to be aware of what you can do and what your community can do. We're the child welfare agency, we're not all of child welfare, that belongs to everybody. So we all kind of get together and the governor will be there speaking. There will be several organizations from all over the state. All over the state. And there's a lot of kids groups and some schools and different organizations will bring the kids there. I actually have my kid here.

Eric Friedlander:

Oh, nice.



Amanda Body:

Yeah. Several of us are bringing our kids to get them oriented to that. And we'll just uplift some of the work that's being done in Kentucky that we're working on to prevent child abuse and to prevent poor outcomes for families. And we'll do a pinwheel planting at the end to represent some of the children that were not so lucky. But also to have that visual to remember what we're working for and what we're working towards, not having to do this in the future because everybody is aware we're bringing those communities and those families up. So it's a good time, and it's also a good time to visually see how many people are working for this, because when you're doing the work, sometimes I know especially our workers that work in direct service, it can feel really bleak and really hard sometimes. And you feel like you're just trying to keep your head above water. But when you're out there and you can see so many people in so many different communities doing this work and trying to make it better, I think it's really encouraging.

Eric Friedlander:

It is. It is. And thank you for that work. How would folks get in touch with the work that you all are doing?

Amanda Body:

So we are the division of prevention and community wellbeing. Of course, my email is amanda.body(at)ky.gov. You can always email me and I'll get back with you. But yeah, so we should be, we're a little bit late. It takes a little while. Sometimes things in the state, but we should be on the website if we're not on there very soon. We've been working on that to get everything on our website. So just on the DCBS website, there will be a tab for the division of prevention and community wellbeing like there is with all the other divisions there. And we try to be around, we try to show up at community events and organizations. We have a big push with some work, some really, really cool work that I'm really proud of that we're doing with public libraries.

Eric Friedlander:

Oh, yeah. That's exciting.

Amanda Body:

So we're showing up in all those spaces, not just the libraries that are a part of some of the pilots that we're doing, but just libraries, the state in general. We're trying to show up in those spaces to let people know we're here and these are the services that we have. Because a lot of issues come up with people just not knowing the services that they qualify for. So putting that word out there and helping people get signed up or get assessed to see if they do is something that's really important to us.

Eric Friedlander:

Yes. And folks, we've really changed the focus on some of the family preservation pieces that we do and family support pieces we do. That's prevention. It is.

Amanda Body:

Oh, absolutely.

Eric Friedlander:

That's prevention, all of that's prevention and making sure folks have access to getting people to their community organizations. That is prevention.

Amanda Body:

Absolutely. And we are doing a lot of work with family support, and that's part of our job too, is trying to bring all these pieces together so they're not siloed, but almost everything is prevention. And that family support is so important. We do a lot of work with our lived experts, people that have been through the system in one way or another, and they really help inform a lot of the work that we do. And they've given us a lot of things that maybe if you haven't been through the system that you wouldn't have thought about.

Amanda Body:

They were like, "Oh, one of the biggest things was I was going through grief here, and I was so overwhelmed at this point where Child Protective Services came in because my husband had just passed away. And if you all would've had resources at the local funeral home, and I would've known like, 'hey,' while I'm in the midst of this that, 'hey, oh,' reminded me I can get something here, then that would've helped. That would've been way up upstream from where we ended up." So just hearing those places or those ideas about where we should be and where we could be and where people really need that support is paramount to the work that we do.

That's why we try to really, really include lived experts in our work so we don't have to go back later and find out, oh, of course this was never going to work because there was a bunch of people on the room who are detached from this at this point in their lives, and we see the world differently and we really need people that are closer to having been through the system recently to be able to tell us, "Hey, this is what worked for me, this is what didn't work for me." So that we can make adjustments and hopefully prevent those things that didn't work from other families from having to go through that in the future.

Eric Friedlander:

Yeah. Well, it is heavy work. So what do you do to take care of you?

Amanda Body:

Oh, I don't know. I spend time with my kid. I do Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu. And I've recently taken up ukulele lessons, which is really fun. I've never played any musical instrument at all. I do not have good finger dexterity, so it's a challenge, but it's really fun and I'm really enjoying it.

Eric Friedlander:

Well, that's cool. And Jiu-Jitsu, how long have you been doing that?

Amanda Body:

Several years now. I haven't been as consistent in the last couple of years since I started this job, but now we're fully staffed and we're getting to the point where things are regulating. But I've been doing it for several years and I enjoy that. But the ukulele thing is very new. I've just been doing that about a month, and I always wanted to be in band when I was a kid, but I was afraid of failing at it because it just didn't come natural. So I always regretted not learning how to play an instrument in school. And so this is kind of my trying to make that right, I guess, in later life.

Eric Friedlander:

That's all right. It is never too late in learning a new skill.

Amanda Body:

Absolutely.

Eric Friedlander:

Making music and all that. I just think it's so important and good self-care.

Amanda Body:

Oh, it really is. It's so relaxing.

Eric Friedlander:

That's great. Well, thank you for talking with me today. I really enjoyed our conversation, and we'll have a good day at the Pinwheel later.

Amanda Body:

All right. Thank you.