

# Employee Spotlight: Teresa Payne



## **Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?**

Where should I start? I was born in Grand Rapids, lived on Alexander Street, played and swam at Franklin Park (MLK Park) went to Ottawa Hills Elementary School, moved to Remus, MI where I attended Chippewa Hills High School. I have a Bachelor's degree in Public Health Education from CMU, a Masters of Health Administration from GVSU, and a Diversity & Inclusion Certificate from Cornell University. I've had a wonderful career of 26 years at Kent County serving our community in various leadership roles at the Kent County Health Department and now in County Administration. I have two kids, Denny and Shayna, a daughter-in-law Aubryana, and 1 granddaughter Malaney.

I got married to my best friend (Damion) in 2023, and we reconnected 25+ years after college and now have a beautiful blended family adding three more family members to love, Octavia, Kellen, and Cameron. Oh and I just published a book of poetry called "Taking Care of Me." I love being in the company of friends and family and working with dynamic colleagues everyday.

## **What is your position at Kent County and what individuals do you work with?**

My position is Chief Inclusion Officer. I work with multiple partners representative of organizations, community groups, coalitions, County Administrator's Office staff and leadership, department directors, employees, the Kent County Cultural Insight Council, community residents, State of Michigan, West Michigan Inclusion Professionals and Practitioners, Office of Global Michigan, West Michigan Welcome Plan Collaborative, and more.

## **What are two or three things that staff should know about your role?**

I'm here to serve our County staff and residents so please consider me a resource and support for departments, community initiatives or outreach opportunities that you're engaged in. We will be rolling out a new Inclusion Strategic Plan and encourage departments and staff to get involved and to share any ideas and best practices with us that you'd like to see. We support many community engagement events, provide lunch and learns, a series of inclusion related trainings and we invite employees to take part in any of these offerings. My role also supports the West Michigan Welcome Plan Collaborative Team for New Americans, Immigrants, and Refugees and we encourage County staff to get engaged in our communities Welcome Plan work as you see fit.

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## **What is the most rewarding part of your job? What is the most challenging?**

I've always said and will continue to say that for me the most rewarding part of my job, or what I love the most, are all the wonderful and talented people that I've had the joy of working with through the years and now. We really have some pretty cool peeps working for the County. I especially enjoy meeting new people, making new County connections, and strengthening relationships and collaborations wherever I can. I love meeting with our Cultural Insight Council monthly which is representative of our 25 departments. The Council has operated for 20+ years and this group is truly great!

One of the challenges as an Inclusion Officer is balancing and managing many community interests and needs with County priorities and Inclusive Participation goals. We serve a large County and workforce, so when it comes to inclusion we strive to make sure that we are continually thinking about staff engagement, the best ways to reach out to the community, and at the end of the day making sure we do our part to ensure there is access to services and that we are creating a welcoming environment for all.

## **Do you have any interesting/ fun stories about residents you have worked with?**

Well, I've heard many people say that there's never a dull day in County Government. There's always something interesting and fun taking place around the County. It just feels good to be able to laugh with staff in County Administration, laugh at ourselves sometimes, and whenever I connect with partners and residents around inclusion, there's always a story or two to share. I love the authentic communication and establishing meaningful, mutually beneficial relationships with residents.

## **Is there anything else you want to say/talk about?**

Kent County is a great place to work!

