Employee Spotlight: Catie Meyer



Can you tell us a little bit about yourself?

My name is Catie Meyer, and I joined the Kent County Health Department in 2023 as a Health Education Intern in Environmental Health while completing my Master of Public Health degree. After graduating, I was fortunate to join the Health Education and Promotion team full-time as a Health Educator. More recently, I stepped into the role of Public Health Program Supervisor for the team. It's been an exciting and slightly surreal journey, and I'm grateful for the opportunities that have brought me here!

I moved to West Michigan from the Metro Detroit area in 2017 to attend college and quickly fell in love with the beauty of the west side of the state. I grew up dancing and continued through the beginning of college. As a child, I dreamed of becoming a professional ballerina (Angelina Ballerna was my idol), and as I got older, I also considered a career in physical therapy. Ultimately, a professor during my undergraduate studies introduced me to the field of public health, and I knew I had found my calling.

In 2021, I reconnected with my now husband, and when it came time to get married, we couldn't settle in just one place. So, naturally, we got married three times... first at a courthouse, then at a Taco Bell in Las Vegas, and finally at a historic inn in Ithaca, New York! My husband also works for Kent County through the Sheriff's Office, so we're proud to be a Kent County household.

Outside of work, our home is happily run by Rocky, our goofy 7-year-old German Shepherd/Swiss Mountain Dog mix, and our six chickens, Hennifer Lawrence, Debra, Florence, Parmesean, Mabel and Sandy. We like to spend our time exploring new places, hiking, and camping. In my free time you can typically find me taking a nap, at a hot yoga class, trying a new recipe, gardening, or curled up with a good book.

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(Continued from page 1)

What is your position at Kent County and what individuals/customers do you work with?

I'm the Public Health Program Supervisor for the Health Education and Promotion team at the Kent County Health Department. Our team focuses primarily on substance use prevention for youth in grades K–12. We work with schools, educators, students, families, and community partners to provide evidence-based prevention education and programs that help young people build healthy coping skills, understand the risks associated with substance use, and make informed decisions.

In my role, I supervise our team of health educators and help oversee our prevention programming and other related projects. We work closely with schools and organizations throughout Kent County to understand what students and communities need and make sure they have access to effective prevention resources. We also regularly gather feedback from students, schools, and community partners to ensure our programs remain relevant and responsive. The world young people are growing up in is constantly changing, so it's important that prevention efforts evolve alongside their experiences, challenges, and needs.

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

Regarding my role and the work we are doing around youth substance use, Kent County staff should be aware that prevention happens before there's a problem to fix. A big part of our work is reaching young people early and helping build protective factors, healthy coping skills, positive relationships, and decision-making skills that can reduce the likelihood of substance use later in life.

Our team's work extends beyond schools. While school-based prevention is an important (and large) part of what we do, our team wears many hats when it comes to substance use prevention. In addition to our school programming, we run diversion programs for youth who have initiated substance use through the courts, provide tobacco retailer compliance checks (also known as "stings") and in person tobacco retailer education, marketing campaigns, and so much more. Each member of our team wears many hats!

Secondly, our work has to evolve with young people. The landscape students are growing up in is constantly changing (especially with technology). We use evidence-based prevention efforts and feedback from students and schools to make sure our programs are relevant, meaningful, and responsive to what young people are actually experiencing.

And, finally, we're focused on giving students tools, not just information.

(Continued from page 2)

Substance use prevention is about more than telling students what not to do. We want to give them practical skills, support, and resources they can use to navigate challenges and make healthy decisions.

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

The most rewarding part of my job is knowing that our work can make a meaningful impact. It's especially fulfilling to hear directly from students and schools about how a program resonated with them or made a difference in their lives. Seeing former students and hearing them reflect on what they've learned is a powerful reminder of the lasting impact of our work. It's also heartwarming when students get excited to see you come into their classroom, because it shows that you've built a connection with them.

The most challenging part is that schools have a lot competing for their time and attention, and substance use prevention is one piece of a much bigger picture. One of the challenges, and something I really enjoy about our work, is finding ways to make prevention fit into each school's unique needs and schedule. We offer programs in a variety of formats and lengths so schools have options and students can still have access to important information.

Do you have any interesting/fun stories about your work with staff or residents that you would want to share?

One of my favorite parts of working with students is the relationships we build with them. One of the best feelings is walking through a school hallway and hearing, "Miss Catie is here!" from students who recognize you from previous programs and are genuinely excited to see you. One time, a group of 6th graders did a great job on a Kahoot (an interactive quiz game), so we celebrated by doing the Cha Cha Slide together.

In another classroom students created lyrics about some of the information we had learned and dubbed them over popular songs and performed them. Moments like those are some of my favorites because they show that prevention education can be meaningful AND fun, allow space for creativity, and that students can be excited to be a part of our programs.

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

I could share so many funny (and not so funny) moments with students, or go on about how amazing it feels when you see students make connections to the content. Those experiences, combined with working alongside such a dedicated and passionate team of health educators, remind me why this work matters. I'm grateful to be part of a team that is making a difference and proud to serve Kent County.