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**Cigna Employee Lends a Helping Hand**

**to YSS Youth Mentoring Network**

Wheeling Resident Joins YSS for 3-month Community Ambassador Stint

WHEELING, W.Va. — Colette Sanner knows a thing or two about children in need. As a foster mom, she has learned the ins and outs and ups and downs of the system and the children it serves. Also a former mentor with Big Brothers Big Sisters, Sanner knows mentors play a powerful role in the lives of their mentees.

So when the opportunity arose through her job at Cigna Corp. to help a local social service agency, she knew just where to find a good fit: the Youth Services System Youth Mentoring Network.

The Wheeling resident is one of 10 Cigna Corp. employees nationwide chosen to participate in the company’s Community Ambassador Fellowship. The employees of the international health service company partner with a nonprofit organization of their choice to positively impact the heath, well-being and peace of mind for children, families and others from underserved communities.

Cigna continues to pay the employees’ salaries and benefits during the 90-day fellowship, plus gives them a stipend to spend on their chosen project. Sanner and YSS received $20,000.

Sanner has been working at YSS headquarters in East Wheeling to develop and implement a media campaign with the goal of increasing awareness about the Youth Mentoring Network and boosting participation in the program.

“The reason I chose the Youth Mentoring Network is because I am a foster parent and am very aware of the other social services agencies available to me in the Ohio Valley. We are not a very large community, and we all are linked in one way or another. YSS is very well-known for helping kids,” said Sanner, a licensed professional counselor who is a specialty case manager for Cigna.

In addition to helping promote the program, Sanner and her husband Bobby have become mentors to a 10-year-old girl and 13-year-old boy, respectively. They currently are not fostering any children. They also have a 9-year-old son and host a high school exchange student from Tajikistan.

“Being a Big Sister years back, I know that mentoring results in amazing outcomes for children by being a consistent healthy adult in their lives and by linking their families to necessary resources to support their needs,” Sanner said.

“I know firsthand the difference a caring adult can make in the quality of a child’s life, so I wanted to promote this program believing that if you can’t be a foster parent, why not be a mentor?”

Jill Eddy, who oversees the Youth Mentoring Networks as the YSS director of community-based services, said it is a privilege to be chosen as a Community Ambassador Fellowship site. She is thrilled that Cigna provided $20,000 toward Sanner’s project.

“Colette’s assistance with promoting the Youth Mentoring Network through our local schools has been very helpful. Having a portion of the funds to kick off a media campaign is the gift that will keep giving. Colette believes in the program so much that she and her husband have become mentors, which I think is a reflection of her passion and the importance of the program.”

Introduced in 2018, the Community Ambassador Fellowship program offers eligible Cigna employees an opportunity to take a sabbatical-style paid leave from work to improve life in communities where they work and live by supporting projects that exemplify Cigna’s mission. Program participants are selected through a competitive application process.

“The Cigna mission doesn't have walls. We asked employees to think about how they could broaden Cigna's impact and help others if they could take time away from work, and we were incredibly impressed by the number of proposals from employees driven to combine their passion and expertise to serve their communities,” said John M. Murabito, executive vice president, human resources at Cigna.

The program is consistent with Cigna’s commitment to reach deep into communities to develop meaningful partnerships at the grassroots level, and to help make communities more vibrant and healthy.

Other 2019 fellows chose to work with March of Dimes, Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, and a variety of programs assisting veterans, children, families and people who are homeless.

**About Cigna**

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*Youth Services System, Inc. is committed to responding to the complex needs of youth at serious risk. For over 44 years, Youth Services System, Inc. has reached thousands of youth and their families with our shelter, residential, community-based and professional services. Together with youth and their families, we work to improve their physical and emotional well-being, to address the debilitating effects of abuse, addiction, and trauma, and to build the skills and connections they need to be successful. Supported by our volunteer Board of Directors, dedicated staff, and faithful community support, Youth Services System, Inc. makes an impact in the lives of youth. For more information, visit* [*www.youthservicessystem.org*](http://www.youthservicessystem.org/)*.*

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