

The True Heart

by Megan Sturgill, School Counselor
Adult - 1st Place Statewide
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It's a cold, rainy October morning. The fog is barely beginning to lift as I walk towards my school. Through the fog and mist, I see her standing there...waiting. She's waiting for two boys with special needs to arrive on their bus. She's armed with her book bag full of all things boy-Matchbox cars, snacks, juice, stickers, and rewards. She turns and greets me with a warm, welcoming smile. "Good morning, Mrs. Kay" I call out. She is a beautiful, graceful lady, dressed in her warm sweater as she calls out a good morning back to me. Her young charges arrive and she shuttles them out of the cold, one holding each hand, ready to begin a day that, for them, is uncertain and hectic.

Kay Ford is a special education aide at Surgoinsville Elementary. I am uncertain how long she has been at our school as this is only my first year here-but her strength, warmth and compassion were quick to make an impression on me. She is quiet elegance; you often find yourself surprised to find her behind you. She is quick with a kind word, slow to complain. She works with two children who have unique and demanding needs-yet she never seems to tire. In a word, Mrs. Kay is amazing.

I remember the first time I met Mrs. Kay. Though I had heard about her before, her spirit still caught me off guard. Being new in a school of 40 plus faculty and staff, I was a bit overwhelmed. Teachers kept talking, whispering about Mrs. Kay. "Who is Mrs. Kay?" I ask. Immediately I was met with answers such as "oh, she's wonderful," "you'll love Mrs. Kay," and "she's our angel." She had a lot to live up to. I met Mrs. Kay in the hallway, outside my room. She came up to me, stuck out her hand and said "I'm Mrs. Kay; I've already heard you're fantastic and I wanted to introduce myself!" I was surprised by her greeting, and let me assure you, I'm not one usually left speechless. I knew immediately-I was going to like this lady.

Working with children everyday is exhausting. We give our all to these kids-helping them learn, hoping they learn, rejoicing when they do learn. Mrs. Kay is working against some extraordinary odds-her young students aren't like other kids. They demand constant attention-the slightest changes in routine can lead to screaming fits, missing a slight signal could mean a little boy starts seizing before he's laid down. Mrs. Kay is constantly vigilant-always ready to move, intercept, prevent.



Megan Sturgill receives a \$1000 check from Utrust Administrator Dan Tollett

If you're around her long enough though, you begin to see the slight changes in energy, the quiet frustration that understandably comes. Mrs. Kay is also waging battles outside the classroom-as she tends to an ailing husband. When asked what you can do for her, Mrs. Kay simply smiles and says "pray." But she never stops, never ceases. I once brought in some soup for

lunch. When I told her to help herself, she immediately embraced me and stated that I was sustenance for her soul. This wonderful woman really has a way of making you feel good!

While I believe that every school employee has a role that is undeniably important, Mrs. Kay takes on her responsibilities with a strength that makes me want to be a better counselor. She makes me want to be a better person. Mrs. Kay embodies what education is supposed to be about-loving these children and giving our all to them, every day in every way we can. As mentioned, Mrs. Kay carries with her a black book bag. She keeps little treats and rewards for her two young boys. Not always able to stay in a classroom, Mrs. Kay is often seen walking the halls, talking in her quiet soothing voice; always teaching, always striving to help her students learn.

Mrs. Kay not only helps these two students. She can often be seen doling out frequent hugs to a little one, who may have a cold, might feel scared or just needs a little extra love. She encourages all she comes in contact with and I believe she has a big heart, a true heart that shines through in all she does.



Megan Sturgill and Kay Ford