

CONNECTIONS

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Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' employees closer together

Meet Lisa Taylor-Jones, DHHS Human Resources Administrator



When you first meet Lisa Taylor-Jones, the new Human Resources Administrator for DHHS, there is a quiet strength that seems to radiate from her. Upon talking to her, it is obvious that strength is a big part of who she is, and how she was raised. The daughter of a military father and cosmetologist mother, Lisa and her family moved around a lot while she was growing up. Those moves helped her develop the skills that she uses today in her new position.

“Being around people, working with people, having a team, learning how to get things done successfully has always been a large part of my life. Human Resources is a natural part of that,” Lisa said.

Lisa had to learn how to put people at ease and make new friends at each new

school she went to. She also helped out in her mother’s beauty shop. She talked to customers and set up appointments, and by the age of 16 she was teaching her own skin care classes there!

Lisa’s family settled in Omaha when she was in 9th grade and her father retired at Offutt Air Force Base, so she considers Nebraska her home. She attended the University of Nebraska-Lincoln majoring in Psychology.

Her HR career began with the Ford Motor Credit Company in Employee Labor Relations. Then she moved into the healthcare side of HR when she worked at Methodist Health System. That job was a mix of union and non-union work. After a few years, Lisa decided that she wanted to move into a leadership role, and worked for five years at the Nebraska Equal Opportunity Commission investigating charges of discrimination filed in the areas of unemployment, housing, and public accommodations law.

From there she went to Alegent Health System as the Operations Director of Human Resources until 2010. She then led the Human Resources team for Lincoln Financial Group’s Group Protection Division. After four years there, the position at DHHS opened up.

“Once you meet Courtney Phillips, how could you not want to work at DHHS? Courtney excited me about coming to work here. She has so many great things on the horizon for DHHS and has surrounded herself with a phenomenal leadership team. They’re creating cutting-edge programming and are becoming pioneers for other Health and Human Services Departments across the country,” Lisa said.

In her free time, Lisa is a member of the Salem Baptist Church Music and Fine Arts Council. She is also a board

member of Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Midlands and The Women’s Center for Advancement. She also likes to garden and enjoys working out at boot camp.

Lisa and her husband Stan have been married for 29 years. They have five children, ages 10 to 28. One of their daughters lives in Atlanta, and another teaches at Millard Public Schools. Her son is a freelance fashion writer based out of New York City and she has a 4th grader and a 10th grader still at home. The family lives in Bellevue.



Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov

DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees/>

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Children and Family Services
Division Director:
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DHHS' Employee Website....

New information and photos are added daily to the employee website. Here are some recent posts and the dates they appeared. Like what you're seeing and reading? Then check out the employee homepage every day! Got an idea or a photo you'd like to share for the employee homepage or *Connections*? Send it to melissa.lindell@nebraska.gov

Homepage Homeruns

Weekend Fun with Envy!

Even Envy the LRC therapy dog has things to do on the weekends! A few weekends ago she volunteered for Domesti-Pups and raised money sitting in the Kissing Booth with her fellow Therapy Dog partners from Child Guidance, George and Teddy. Of course, Envy stole the show!

When she was on break, she walked around with her handler, Stacey Werth-Sweeney, and ran into a lot of DHHS employees! Envy loved to see her former puppy raiser Renee, her former trainers from Domesti-pups Mary, Ann, and Michelle and all of her friends at Domesti-pups.

Stacey says, "So many people came up to me saying that they work for the state and see Envy's pictures on the intranet....it warms their heart and makes their day! It's great that she not only does such great things for our patients, but also for our staff. She's a wonderful dog and LRC and my family is so honored to have her as a part of our life!"

Photo credit: Rachel Johnson



Special Visitors come to DHHS

Ming Qu, administrator for our Epidemiology and Informatics Unit and **Alison Keyser-Metobo**, an epidemiology surveillance coordinator presented to a group from Ukraine on our surveillance systems and what role informatics plays in helping DHHS get health-related data in a timely manner and how we use that information to help Nebraskans live better and healthier lives.



DHHS Behavioral Health Director named to National Board

Courtney Phillips, Department of Health and Human Services CEO, recently announced that **Sheri Dawson**, RN, Director of the DHHS Division of Behavioral Health, has been named to the board of directors of the National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors (NASMHPD).

"Sheri is a leader with a strong commitment to recovery, service integration and stakeholder engagement," said Phillips.

"She will be an outstanding addition to the NASMHPD board representing the Mid-Western Region."

Dawson was appointed Director of the DHHS Division of Behavioral Health by Gov. Pete Ricketts in August, 2015. She has significant experience in the behavioral health field, both within state government and in the private hospital setting.

NASMHPD operates under a cooperative agreement with the National Governors Association and works with states, federal partners, and stakeholders to promote wellness, recovery, and resilience for people with mental health and substance related disorders. The organization informs members on policy issues, research findings and best practices, provides consultation, and facilitates state to state sharing.

Congrats Sheri!





Courtney Phillips, CEO

Greetings #TeamDHHS!

This month I'm going to take this space to highlight a couple of observances that occur in April. First, April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month. This month is about educating the public about what child abuse is, what prevention measures are, and who to call when you suspect child abuse. Last year, we investigated 13,372 child abuse reports, which was up 11 percent from 2014, a surprising increase compared to recent years.

Our child welfare workers face difficult situations when assisting families, but your work has a positive, long-term impact on many lives. We applaud you for your perseverance on behalf of children and your empathy

Message from Courtney Phillips, CEO

with families to find answers to their challenges. You are helping to build stronger communities as well as build hope in families through Alternative Response and our other programs and services. Together, hotline callers, our workers, and providers form a community with a strong bond that's committed to support families.

When someone calls our Child Abuse and Neglect hotline, they have volunteered to become our eyes and ears that help to keep children safe. The public is vital to our success in stemming child abuse, so we can help children and families. Our child abuse hotline is 800-652-1999.

Another observance, April 4-10, is Public Health Week. It's a time to recognize the contributions of public health and highlight issues that are important to us as a state and nation. This year's theme is the goal of America becoming the healthiest nation by 2030. Nebraska is currently the 10th healthiest state in the nation. Our goal is to move up into the single digits. That comes through public health education efforts and prevention. Together, we can get there. A big shout out to our public health team for helping Nebraskans live healthier lives every day.

I also want to honor some of the most unsung heroes of our agency:

our volunteers. April 10-16 is National Volunteer Week and I want to recognize all of the amazing people who donate their time each day at our facilities and offices. Volunteers help DHHS in many ways and volunteers play an important role in improving the quantity and quality of service. They can also be wonderful ambassadors for DHHS to the community at large.

In 2015, across our agency, volunteers put in 4,280 hours at our facilities and offices. In the first three months of this year, in the Nebraska State Office Building alone, we've already had 13 volunteers give nearly 250 hours of their time! In January, four of these people donated 110 hours to DHHS. If you see any of our volunteers, make sure you thank them for making a difference for our team.

DHHS volunteers help programs and facilities in different activities, and enable staff to perform other duties to help fulfill our mission to help people live better lives. Without this army of volunteers, DHHS wouldn't run as smoothly as it does.

Across #TeamDHHS, volunteers do a variety of things, from office work to tutoring, delivering meals, providing transportation, even helping with special functions and parties. They give support to recreational activities and outings,

yard and garden work, and they assist with snow removal and transportation. Volunteers come to DHHS from all walks of life and backgrounds. They are of all ages, and economic backgrounds, educations, and experiences.

I also want to thank the volunteer coordinators who make this happen. Our volunteer coordinators are located throughout our facilities and offices across the state. They place volunteers into the right situation so that their skills can best benefit those we serve and DHHS. Please take time this month to thank our volunteers and our volunteer coordinators.

I also want to make sure that we give a shout out to those of you who volunteer your time. We all have causes and groups that we give our time to regularly, outside of our working hours. Without you, many of those groups wouldn't be able to function either. Thank you for your selfless work, both for #TeamDHHS and for the causes that are close to your hearts. You truly are living our mission of helping people live better lives.



By Josie Rodriguez, Administrator
Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity

Each April, the DHHS Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity joins with local, regional, and national partners to commemorate National Minority Health Month. During this month, the Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity, along with many other stakeholders, take the opportunity to highlight the disparities that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minority populations across the State of Nebraska. Various activities are held to bring awareness of health disparities and to provide opportunities for collaboration to advance health equity in Nebraska.

The Minority Health Month theme for 2016 is “Accelerating Health Equity for the Nation.” To celebrate, the Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity invites everyone to join the office in a **Minority Health Month Proclamation signing to be held on April 6, 2016 at the State Capitol in Lincoln, NE.** This event provides an opportunity to bring awareness of health disparities and increase momentum toward achieving health equity in Nebraska. We also invite you to attend the 2016

[Minority Health Conference](#) to be held on April 20, 2016 at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney, Nebraska. The theme of the conference is “Practice, Research, and Partnerships: Threading it all Together to Achieve Health Equity.” This year’s conference provides attendees with a great lineup of speakers who will provide tools and strategies that can be used in your work. This conference also provides an opportunity for stakeholders from different sectors to come together to improve the health status of minorities in Nebraska.

Racial and ethnic minorities are far more likely to suffer from chronic conditions, therefore taking the opportunity to increase awareness of health disparities each year in the month of April is important as the minority population continues to increase in Nebraska and in the Nation.

In the mid 1990’s, the US Census Bureau projected that Nebraska’s minority population would reach a high of 15% of the total population by the year 2025. In 2010, fifteen years ahead of the projection, the minority population in Nebraska had reached a high of 17.9%. In 2014, 11 years ahead of the projection, the minority population in Nebraska was 19.5%. In 2015, forty-five of Nebraska’s ninety-three counties had minority populations of 5% or more. A focus on health disparities and the various causes of these disparities, especially socioeconomic barriers, is critical as we continue to strive to achieve health equity in our state.

We invite you to partner with us to increase your awareness of health disparities and learn about the many resources and programs we provide to assist programs in providing services to minority populations in Nebraska. The Office recently published the Nebraska Health Disparities Report,

which highlights the disparities that disproportionately affect racial and ethnic minorities in Nebraska. This report includes extensive data and information about health and socio-economic disparities among minority populations in Nebraska. The report also includes a health disparities report card, infographics, and progress made toward healthy people 2010 objectives. Many other reports and data are available on our website.

As we move forward in achieving our vision of health equity for all Nebraskans, it is important that we increase our collaboration with many stakeholders. To learn more about the work we do and to partner with us, and to find out more information about the 2016 Minority Health Month Proclamation and Minority Health Conference, please visit our [website](#).

Sources:

- US Census Bureau, 2010 Census*
- U.S. Census Bureau, 2014 Population Estimates Program*



DHHS Staff Volunteers Train for Simulated Anthrax Emergency

By: Mike Wight

In a cold warehouse in February approximately 25 DHHS staff and two representatives of law enforcement practiced re-packaging, wrapping and shipping cases of emergency medical supplies in response to a simulated Anthrax emergency at a large spring event in Omaha. The SNS is controlled by the CDC and authority for the medicines and supplies is transferred to DHHS when the stockpile is requested. Most of the Receiving, Shipping and Storage (RSS) team volunteers had practiced before or had done the work for real during the H1N1 emergency event in 2009.

However, Shirley Pickens-White, a Health Program Manager in the Division of Public Health, was new to the team and this was her first RSS exercise. “We were given some instructions first and then we practiced re-packaging the pallets to create new pallets that would be shipped across the state,” Pickens-White said. “We worked in ‘pick teams’ and needed to find the correct cases of supplies and stack them together on new pallets being sure we put the right number of cases together according to ‘pick sheets.’ Finally we wrapped the pallets so they stayed tightly together during shipment.”

The pallets of cases in the warehouse simulated a shipment of supplies from the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS). The SNS is a CDC controlled, pre-packaged

and pre-positioned stockpile of controlled medicines, masks, syringes and other supplies to be used, if needed, in a large emergency. A ‘push pack’ of these supplies would include up to 133 containers weighing approximately 50 tons and would be received within 24-48 hours after requested and approved. The shipments are escorted by law enforcement. Part of this stockpile was received by DHHS during the H1N1 national emergency in 2009.

“If needed the ‘push pack’ of supplies would be flown in to a Midwest location and then shipped via truck to a Lincoln warehouse that has been selected to receive the shipment, said Russ Wren, Epidemiology Surveillance Coordinator for the Division of Public Health. “At this warehouse, which is different from the warehouse we trained, the DHHS volunteers would report to work and begin to re-package the pallets for distribution within Nebraska.”

The work of the RSS Team involves managing the supplies, removing them from the trucks, re-packaging the supplies for shipment to pre-established hubs and then on to sub-hubs as needed.

The RSS Team is always looking for a few good staff members to join their team and if you’re interested, talk to your supervisor about joining Then contact Russ at 402-471-3438 or email him at russ.wren@nebraska.gov .



Way to Go!

Statewide and National Recognitions, Honors and Awards

Dear Ms. Phillips,

My name is K. A. and I have worked with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services for over twenty years; first as a foster parent, then as an adoptive parent, and now as a grandmother of a child receiving services.

I am writing this letter to compliment Chevy Fisher on her professionalism and prompt response to my phone call. I call the Department at least once a week if not two or three times a week. Chevy was the most helpful person I have talked to in a long time. She seemed to really care about helping me with my problem and was very patient in going through everything I needed to do in order to get services reinstated for my grandchildren. I thanked her for being so helpful and indicated that she impressed me so much I was going to write a letter to the Director to let them know just how wonderful she was.

Ms. Fisher is truly an asset to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. I feel she went above and beyond in helping me resolve the problem I was dealing with. I wish you had more employees like Ms. Fisher.

Also, I want to say that her call was the first time I didn't have to be on hold for at least five minutes or more. In the past I have waited up to 55 minutes to speak to someone. So the system is working better than it has in the past. Thanks for helping eliminate wait times.

Sincerely,

K. A.

Understanding Interpersonal Conflict and what you can do about it

“Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new end.” Author Unknown

By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources

Interpersonal conflict comes down to disagreement between persons expressed with emotion. It's no more complicated than that. Common signs of interpersonal conflict are:

- Harsh exchanges, sometimes with raised voices
- Defensive and angry body language
- Name calling
- Mutual attempts at intimidation and coercion
- Passive aggressive comments and behaviors—sarcasm
- Gossip
- Mutual distancing and avoidance

Interpersonal conflict creates drama that interferes with productivity and quality of work life, as people can feel miserable at work.

Conflict Issues

Issues that drive interpersonal conflicts are matters of concern over which there exists emotionally charged disagreement.

Conflict issues may not seem earth shattering to outsiders, but they can be deeply troubling to the people feeling them.

There is an easy process that you can use in sorting through conflict issues toward agreement.

- Conflict issues are stated as a **complaint**.
- Behind a complaint you can identify a **request**.
- Once a request is identified, an **agreement** can be formed.



An example from home follows, showing how straightforward this can be.

Complaint: “You never empty the kitchen trash can.”
Request: (No rocket science here.) “Please empty the kitchen trash can now and then, and don’t always leave it up to me.”
Agreement: Both people at home reach agreement on whose job it is to empty the kitchen trash can, and whose job it is to help out in another way.

Below is an example of how this can play out at work.

Complaint: “You act like I’m supposed to drop everything and help you out whenever you call.”
Request: “When you expect to need some help from me, please let me know as soon ahead of time as possible, so I can organize my work accordingly.”
Agreement: The two people involved agree to huddle up at the beginning of each shift to plan ahead of time when each is likely to request assistance from the other.

Arguing over mutual complaints is a non-starter, and likely to fuel disagreements.

Thinking of interpersonal conflict in the way presented here allows us to focus attention on the request behind the other person’s complaint. Agreements can come with ease when people discuss mutual requests they have of one another.

When a disagreement is resolved, put it behind you—let it go.

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Please e-mail me your thoughts, concerns, or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationship at: Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov. I will e-mail you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your thoughts, concerns, or questions in a future column.

ACCESSNebraska

By: Russ Reno

Currently in Nebraska about 240,000 persons receive benefits from at least one DHHS Economic Assistance program. Each month about 6,000 initial applications and 12,000 review/recertification applications are received. The following is an example of one client's experience.

Jane and her two daughters live in Central Nebraska. She is employed as a teller at the local bank. Jane started receiving assistance a year ago when she was out of work and needed assistance to help keep her family going. The first week in February, Jane submitted her application for her six-month recertification for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, and other Economic Assistance programs. The next day, her applications were approved and funds already deposited for her use to buy food and pay bills. Jane felt relieved to be able to continue receiving assistance in purchasing food to feed her daughters. Jane smiled because DHHS just made her life better so quickly.

Six months ago, Jane submitted her application to continue benefits, but she waited and waited to hear an answer. Eventually, she even called ACCESSNebraska to check on her case only to wait again for more than 15 minutes just to talk to someone. Jane got her answer but spent several sleepless nights wondering if she would be able to put food on the table and make ends meet. Luckily for Jane, and the other 240,000 clients, those days of waiting are behind them.

The progress on the Economic Assistance (EA) side of ACCESSNebraska has markedly improved the last six months, and clients have expressed sincere thanks, happiness and praise for staff. And, the only story about ACCESSNebraska on the evening news is positive.

How did it happen so quickly? Doug Weinberg, director of Children and Family Services, credits employees.

"We have dedicated, hard-working staff who give 100 percent to make sure our clients receive their benefits as soon as possible," he said. "The progress we've made in the past year, and especially since last August, is nothing but phenomenal. Everyone has pitched in to find solutions to our challenges and improve our processes so we can give our customers the kind of service they deserve."

"Improvements of this magnitude don't just happen," said Karen Heng, EA deputy director in Children and Family Services. "A lot of employees with a strong commitment to our clients made a big difference in our service to them."

For instance, timeliness in processing SNAP caught the wary eye of the U.S. Food and Nutrition Service the last 12 months.

- The average days to process applications in March 2015, was 17 days. In February, that average dropped to just 12.5 days, and it will drop again to an average of about nine days in March.
- Just last August, call wait times averaged over 14 minutes. The February average wait time was only 2 minutes and 18 seconds, and it is expected to be below 2 minutes in March.



Doug Weinberg

- In March 2015, the number of SNAP applications processed within the Federal guidelines was 88.68 percent. At the end of March, the percent completed on time was 97.67 percent. The improved performance gives CFS confidence they will meet the requirements of an agreement with Nebraska Appleseed to dismiss a lawsuit. It calls for the timely processing of 96 percent of SNAP applications for 25 of 28 months. With the March timeliness already exceeding that requirement, optimism is high. A judge will determine after an April 1 hearing whether to dismiss the lawsuit.
- Heng said changes in processes and hard work continue to improve service to clients. She explained that:
 - Picking up mailed-in applications and information at the Post Office at 2 a.m. instead of 8 a.m. enables the ACCESSNebraska Document Imaging Centers (ANDI) to scan

documents and to pend and tie applications to the correct cases in the master file on N-FOCUS. Now, when DHHS employees arrive at work, the clients' cases that were waiting documents to arrive via the mail are there and ready to be processed. This change has reduced the number and length of calls from clients checking on their cases, and expedites work on cases. Previously, it could take two-to-three days before information was placed with a case.

- The number of calls coming into the Customer Service Centers has reduced due to cases being processed quickly, so fewer clients are waiting for an answer. Call volume has dropped from 1,700 – 3,500 calls per day to 1,100 – 2,400. The average wait time for March has been around one and one-half minutes, and the longest anyone has had to wait is 15 minutes compared to the hour or more previously.
- The number of walk-ins at local offices is down due to the prompt processing of cases and phones being answered quickly. DHHS has more than 50 local offices offering in-person service.
- Workforce management tools are utilized to assign staff's work each day. For example, staff could be assigned to address work tasks and alerts flagged by the system, or process initial or recertification applications, or assist customers in person at a local office, or answer phones at the Customer Service Center.

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Besides Service Delivery staff across the state, the improvements in service would not have been possible without the policy staff working hard to simplify policy; the Program Accuracy and Quality Control staff reviewing the cases and making recommendations for improvements; the IS&T staff implementing N-FOCUS changes and creating reports to monitor progress; Human Resources staff assisting in hiring and training new staff; and assistance from other Divisions, such as Medicaid and Long-Term Care and Developmental Disabilities in providing needed services to clients as well as our partners in the CFS Division who handle Child Support and Protection and Safety. It takes a village to keep ACCESSNebraska and Economic Assistance delivering benefits to our clients.

We are so glad to be One Team.
GO #TEAM DHHS.

Other changes have impacted Economic Assistance's improved response to clients. Cumulatively, each step of the ACCESSNebraska process affects all the others and adds to the advances made to better serve clients, Heng said.

"Every level of employees' work impacts all other levels of our service to our clients," Heng said. "Together, every employee has a part in our success and helping everyone be successful."

In Gratitude

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' mission:

Helping people live better lives.



Here are some letters & notes DHHS employees have received thanking us for the work we do every day to help people live better lives.

Dear **Lisa Britt**, ENVH Unit Manager

Joe and I want to thank you & your staff for everything you did for Dad these past 5+ years. We can't begin to repay the many kindnesses and expressions of respect and care that Dad received every day at the ENVH. You, and all who care for Dad were extraordinary...and we will never forget that. God bless you all.

-Eileen McBride

Mr. Rodriguez, Facility Operating Officer at YRTC-K

On behalf of Bill Sebree, myself and the entire membership of Kearney Elk's Lodge #984. Thank you and your students for their assistance in helping us state the "Elk's Hoops Shoot" on Sunday December 14th.

Having your guys keep the ball moving during the competition really helps get things done in an efficient and timely manner, which is invaluable to the shooters and all involved. With over 140 kids competing in this year's event it is of great benefit. Hope to see you again next year.

Sincerely, Gregory Williams

Dr. Brad Rodgers called to say what a privilege it is to work with such a passionate and caring team (at HRC). His orientation experience impressed him. He has never seen such mission focused, talented, compassionate, knowledgeable staff in all of his years. He is grateful for the opportunity to serve the team and young men at HRC and truly sent a heartfelt thank you.

-Lisa Rolik

Congratulations to **Heather Post**, SESA Case Manager. A Juvenile Judge in Lancaster County stated the following in a recent court order, "Not only does the record establish reasonable efforts were made, it establishes a record of exemplary case management by Heather Post..." Strong case management is recognized by the courts!!!!

-Lindy Bryceson