

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together



Legislative Session Wrap-Up

By Bryson Bartels:

The 2018, One Hundred Fifth Legislature, Second Session, has been a rewarding session for Team DHHS. Legislation introduced on our behalf was successfully shepherded through the process. These bills bring state statutes into compliance with federal law, create operational efficiencies, and streamline state government.

Please see the following DHHS bills passed into law:

LB 702 was introduced by **Senator Kolterman**. This bill changes provisions relating to children’s health coverage and Nebraska IV-D child support modification procedures. **LB 702** [\(article continued on page 2\)](#)

CarePortal Links Families to Churches

DHHS teammates are using a software system called CarePortal to introduce families with material needs to community churches that are eager to help.

CarePortal originated in Kansas City three years ago and spread to its first Nebraska city, Kearney, in July of last year. According to Ryan Stanton, president and CEO of Compass – which was instrumental in bringing the system to Nebraska – CarePortal systems will roll out in Hastings and North Platte this month.

Matt Wallen, director of DHHS’s Division of Children and Family Services, is pleased with the arrangement.

“DHHS is thrilled to partner with Compass to connect families and children [\(article continued on page 2\)](#)



The CarePortal roll-out is celebrated in Hastings April 17th.

Pilot Program Case Manager Honored



The professional portrait of Ashley Millard that was included in the brochure for the 35 under 35 in Grand Island awards.

Ashley Millard is a SNAP Employment Case Manager. She works in a pilot program with Department of Labor staff in Grand Island. Her cube is back in the corner by the emergency doors.

Her day varies, she said, which is how she likes it.

As part of the program, DHHS and DOL staff members meet with clients to identify and provide assistance needed to overcome barriers to their success, while enhancing their lives at home. A plan is developed and their DHHS case manager, in this case Millard, coaches and supports them to overcome the barriers keeping them from employment opportunities with higher pay, better hours, and or benefits.

[\(article continued on page 3\)](#)

to the resources they need to keep their families together,” he said. “The Department looks forward to making the program accessible to communities across the state of Nebraska.”

Kearney was the starting place, Stanton said, because of its familiarity.

“Since we’re based in Kearney, that’s kind of our service area, where we had relationships with churches, and we thought it best to start there,” he said, adding that his organization hoped to expand CarePortal into McCook and Grand Island later this year.

The system is simple, he said.

DHHS in-home teammates – like economic assistance workers, Intake and assessment workers, child and family specialists and so on – research family needs, vetting them for relevance with the help of their People Leaders. Those working directly with the families also request permission to input the needs into the CarePortal system.

An email with family needs is then disseminated to designated church representatives who are also in charge of replying with the church’s volunteer to help. Only then are specifics about the family disclosed.

Stanton said these initial stories are written to be compelling but free of identifying factors for the family.

The representatives appreciate the fact that the needs have already been vetted by trained professionals. Moreover, because the requests come with case numbers, the requests and families are tracked and searchable.

“These are things that are sometimes best handled on a local level,” Stanton said. “And the churches love being able to really make a difference.”

In Kearney, 14 churches have agreed to receive the emails. He said they try to get two requests before each church to give a choice of things to address.

“So many churches have stepped up

to the plate,” Wallen said.

In the case of the two cities that are due to go on-line this month, approximately five churches in each have agreed to become part of the project.

In getting the project started in Kearney, Stanton said they began talking to Kansas CarePortal experts in early 2017.

We originally saw the same video I sent you,” Stanton said. “When we launched in Kearney in July we were the 13th state to have CarePortal. Pennsylvania became the 14 state recently.”

In Kansas the program grew out of the Global Orphan Project.

Stanton is one of the co-founders of Compass, a faith-based foster care and family services organization that contracts with DHHS. Starting with two 11 years ago, the company employs 40 now.

Legislative Session [\(article continued from page 1\)](#)

changed these state laws to bring us into compliance with federal law and prevent a loss of \$81 million of federal funding. This bill was passed into law April 4, 2018.

LB 903 was introduced by **Senator Linehan**.

This bill changes provisions relating to the Long-Term Care Ombudsman Act and clarifies the definition of local matching funds. As with **LB 702**, **LB 903** brings these state statutes into compliance with federal law and prevents another loss of \$8 million of federal funding. This bill was passed into law April 11, 2018.

LB 924 was introduced by **Senator Riepe**. This bill changes provisions of the Emergency Medical Services Act, the Occupational Therapy Practice Act, and the Uniform Credentialing Act. **LB 924** allows more flexibility for emergency care providers and services and eliminates licensing barriers for internationally-educated occupational therapists. Also, this bill creates an operational efficiency by eliminating signature requirements for Board members, the Public Health Director and the Governor and updates language relating to the Nurse Licensure Compact. **LB 924** was amended

into **LB 1034** and **LB 1034** was presented to the Governor, April 18, 2018.

LB 344 was introduced by **Senator Albrecht**, last year. This bill streamlines licensure

requirements relating to mental health centers and substance abuse treatment centers. Also, **LB 344** changes licensure requirements for licensed mental health practitioners. This bill was amended into **LB 1034** and was presented to the Governor, April 18, 2018.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 402-471-0541, Bryson.bartels@nebraska.gov or **Jessie Sampson**, 402-471-1626, Jessie.sampson@nebraska.gov.

I would like to thank all of our team members across the divisions for the hard work in getting this legislation passed.



This is accomplished through job search and résumé assistance, interview training, vouchers to buy clothing for interviews, paying for child care and similar services, occupational skills training services to upgrade their skill set, and work experience and on-the-job training to help them enter new employment.

“Basically, I look at those in the SNAP program who might be eligible for pilot participation, and then I reach out to them,” she said. “We’re with them every step of the way. And I can also show them how accepting employment would change the benefits they are receiving. ... It’s easy for people to pop back here and ask me a question.”

The pilot program began in July 2016, and in 2017 started expanding slowly throughout the state, she said, adding that she hopes it will go statewide.



Influenced in part by her work within the program, the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce recently honored her with one of its Top 35 Under 35 Awards, which recognize those who are making Grand Island a better place to live. Nominated by her former co-worker, **Holly Boeselager**, she filled out paperwork in November that described her work within the pilot program, as well as her work serving on the board of the Crisis Center of Grand Island for four years, as a mentor in Big Brothers Big Sisters, and other activities.

She learned the importance of giving back to the community from her parents, she said.

The awardee decisions were made in December, with the



The 35 Under 35 Award which normally sits in Millard’s home with other keepsakes.



Ashley Millard is flanked by Governor Pete Ricketts and Cindy K. Johnson, president of the Grand Island Chamber of Commerce.

awards formally given the evening of March 15 at Riverside Golf Club. In addition to the 35 young adults being recognized, other types of awards were given. She estimated there were probably 500 people in attendance.

Many of the other winners were professionals serving in various nonprofits, she said, or served in volunteer capacities.

“It was pretty nice to get that recognition,” the 34-year-old said. “It’s nice to share what I’m doing with other people.”

Millard started working at the State in January 2016 as a social service worker, moving into her current position in November of that year.

Elder Justice Training Slated for June 12

By Madhavi Bhadbhade,
Medicaid and Long-Term Care,
State Unit on Aging

The State Unit on Aging in Medicaid and Long-Term Care and the Nebraska State Bar Association's Elder Law Section are co-sponsoring a training on a variety of topics ranging from Caregiving and Respite to Financial Exploitation issues impacting Guardianships and Conservatorships. The training will also address the Medicaid Eligibility process and Nebraska Prescription Drug Overdose Prevention Efforts. The 2018 Elder Justice Training will be held on June 12 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:55 p.m. (CDT) at NET in Lincoln. The training will also be offered via web streaming at 12 locations across the state or to your personal computer.

This free training is open to staff in the Area Agencies on Aging, long-term care facilities, program volunteers, attorneys, bankers, law enforcement, medical professionals

and other organizations. DHHS employees may also attend the training with supervisor approval and by registering in advance. Continuing Education Credits for Nursing will be provided upon request through the Iowa Western Community College.

Amy Hochstetler, IT Business Analyst in the State Unit on Aging will partner with Ryan Sothan, Nebraska Attorney General's Office to present on Cybersecurity. **Sharon Johnson**, Respite Coordinator in DHHS will discuss the Nebraska Lifespan Respite Network. **Jason Davis** and **Kathy Johnson** in Medicaid and Long-Term Care Division will share information on Enhancing Efficiencies in the Medicaid Eligibility and Application Process. **Amy Reynoldson** and **Felicia Quintana-Zinn** in the Division of Public Health will provide updates on the Nebraska Prescription Drug Overdose Prevention Efforts.



Additional training topics for the day include Caregiving in Today's Environment by **Lakelyn Hogan**, Home Instead, Bank's Role in Preventing Financial Exploitation by **Jerry Stilmock** and **Robert Hallstrom**, Nebraska Bankers Association and Guardianship and Conservatorship and the Courts by **Honorable Judges Todd Hutton** and **Holly Parsley**. The training will conclude with a discussion on Advance Directives from Social Work and Legal Perspectives by **Amana Duff Randall**, University of Nebraska at Omaha and **Mary Wilson**, Buford Law Office.

For more information, including the agenda, registration form, and web streaming locations, visit www.dhhs.ne.gov/agingtraining.

Water Inspectors Fully Staffed at Seven Again

The seven DHHS positions spread throughout the state whose responsibility includes a number of different inspection types are fully staffed again, according to **Tim Burnham**, who does that job himself.

"At one point we were down to three in the state doing inspections with four positions open," Burnham said, adding that two of the open spots were two of three total positions based in Lincoln. That changed in December, when **Colton Wolinski** and **Khalisha Casey** were hired to join **Mandy Kearney**.

After serving in the role for 29 years, a teammate in North Platte retired, leaving the position open until January, when **Sara Rudloff** stepped in to the spot.

"In Norfolk, **Mark Graf** moved over to the water well program," Burnham said, adding that while the position was open he was able to help us out with the work load.

"We appreciated that he was able to lend a hand," Burnham said. "Finally, we just hired **Ericka Sanders** to fill that spot in Norfolk."

When shortstaffed, there's nothing to do but buckle down and get the work done, Burnham said.

"We just try to do the best job we can and prioritize." What often takes precedence are the well and septic inspections that are tied to house-closing dates and the like.

"Sometimes we have to make schedule changes and handle those," he said. "A lot of people don't know we do seven different kinds of inspections, which include Daycare Centers, Schools/Institutions, Group Homes, Swimming Pools, Summer Camps, Mobile Home Parks and the Private Well/Septic evaluations."

Making an Impact Outside the Office with Big Brothers Big Sisters

Ali Kluver is a case aide for the CFS ongoing unit in Grand Island. She's served in that role for six years, and has worked for the state for 13.

Like so many DHHS teammates, she also cares for and supports the people of Nebraska outside her job. In her case, she does it as a participant of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.

"It's been a lot of fun," she said. "I got into it when my kids were small and their father died. I wanted them to have another adult in their life."

When they were grown, she decided she wanted to give back, to benefit others as her children had been benefited.

Kluver was paired with her "Little Sister" when "J" was 5-years-old. That was two years ago. Kluver meets with J at least four hours a month, but it's usually more. She's from a very large family and really enjoys one-on-one time. They go to museums, the pumpkin patch, they've painted ceramics.

Once Big Sisters have been paired with a Little Sister, it's a permanent bond, ending only when one of the pair decides to end it. J has been in a guardianship for four years, which is unlikely to end. Her mother has rights, but a guardianship is the next permanent thing to an adoption, Kluver

explained.

"Our first meeting was roller-skating," Kluver said.

"She said she didn't want to try and I strapped mine on and away I went." Kluver said that J eventually was able to skate using a rolling trainer she could hang onto.

"I like to think one of the things she's learning from me is to try new things," Kluver said.

One of the strongest memories that arises when she thinks back on the sisterhood is an instance of making homemade play-doh with salt and flour after a trip to McDonalds, one of J's favorite places to eat.

"She was using cookie cutters to cut the dough into different shapes, and she said 'I'm going to remember this forever.' So that really got me."



Ali Kluver became a "Big Sister" in order to benefit children the way her children were benefited.

"What I learned was, it's not how much money you spend. It's how much time you spend. You don't have to spend money to make an impact."

"She was using cookie cutters to cut the dough into different shapes, and she said 'I'm going to remember this forever.' So that really got me."



Mission Trip to Honduras Opens Eyes to True Source of Joy

Sarai Urbina, an initial assessment CFS specialist based in Grand Island, serves children and families on and off the job.

She spent a week and a half at an orphanage near Santa Rosa de Copán, Honduras, in January while serving as part of a missionary effort with her church, the Apostolic Assembly of the Faith in Christ Jesus, where her father Sergio, is pastor. About 150 children call the orphanage home, she said.

Approximately 60 people from the denomination nationwide were part of the mission trip. It was Urbina's first time.

"The church has done it for about eight years," Urbina said. "The people who go on the trips are the 'Christian Brigades.'"



Sarai Urbina poses with two of the children her mission trip reached out to support.

Prior to leaving on the mission trip, she collected school supply items for a full year. Some of these were mailed there and some were delivered in person.

"We made a care package for each kid with a variety of things based on their age," she said. "It was personalized and everything."

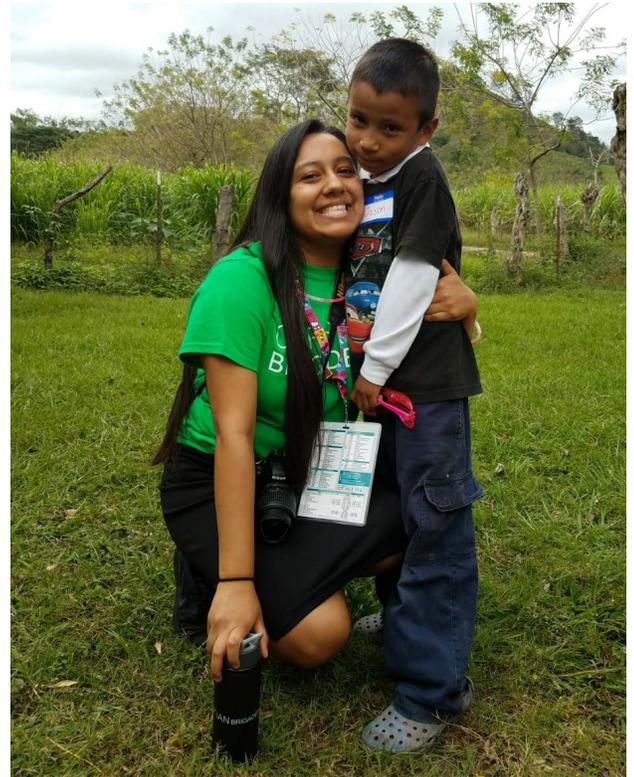
Urbina said that care packages included adjustable shoes that could accommodate five sizes of feet.

In addition to bringing goods to the orphanage, Urbina said they taught classes on hygiene, organization and, in particular, classes concerned with dealing with trauma.

Urbina said she learned as much as the children.

"The trip really taught me that possessions aren't what makes you feel happy," she said. "The greatest impact I felt was that these children who have limited things have an unlimited ability to love and learn. They're so smart."

Now that the trip is over, Urbina hasn't forgotten the children.



Sarai Urbina spent a week and a half at an orphanage.

"We still keep in contact with the children from the orphanage by writing letters," she said. "We also send them pictures we took with them because they love remembering the time we spent with them."

The "Christian Brigades" have gone several places worldwide. Their next trip will take them in India. Though she can't go on that trip because she's getting married, Urbina said she would definitely go again.

Urbina began working for the state 2 ½ years ago in Lincoln in ongoing case management. She started in initial assessment in 2016.

In Gratitude

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

The Nebraska Department
of Health and Human Services' mission:
Helping people live better lives.

A note to [Diana Meyer](#) from Gregory A. Olsen of Boys Town National Research Hospital

"I wanted to take a moment and provide you with feedback on recent stellar customer service I, and my facility, received from [Suzette Moeller](#).

"One of our facilities had not received their updated CLIA Certificate of Waiver by the expiration of their existing certificate. Suzette was educational and took the time to provide us with an overview of the printing and mailing process by CMS and provided me with both reassurance of continuation of an active certificate as well as the subsequent steps to occur in order to obtain a Letter of Verification of Certification.

"Although we were not expecting to receive a formal document of Verification of Certification until later in March, Suzette forwarded us a document first thing on March 1st, certainly exceeding my expectations.

"In my eleven years at Boys Town, she has always been responsive to our needs. She excels in customer service and is always polite, patient and focused on meeting our needs."

[Paul Downs](#) used Facebook to thank a member of the team:

"Shout Out to [Caroline O'Leary](#) (Vital Statistics Clerk) – Awesome attitude and Very Helpful – thank you so much."



A portion of a letter sent by [Brooklyn Stack](#) of Chadron to Patti Reddick of CFS

"... I would like to express my utmost gratitude for the foster care system. After researching and reviewing individuals that have been involved with the system, I see that change is being done in the world. I appreciate the hard work and dedication that goes into helping children create better futures for themselves and this foundation comes from the home environment. I would like all those involved in the foster care work community to know that your actions are not unnoticed and you do make a difference.

"Your efforts may seem small but they make a world of change for other individuals. Not only have children been able to thrive through the program, but individuals like [Carsyn Long](#), have also been able to educate people about the efforts. Making adoption an available addition to this system has given children the second chance and way to belong to a forever home.

"I sincerely appreciate your work and effort into changing the world child by child, home by home. Thank you for your time."

A note to [Sherri Haber](#) from a Creighton University adjunct:

"I am writing you to commend your employee, Jill Holt, for agreeing to speak to my class this past February. I am teaching a new course at Creighton, in the undergraduate social work program, on forensic social work. We have a unit on the Indian Child Welfare Act.

"Jill was engaging, knowledgeable, and professional in her discussion of issues that arise in the Indian Child Welfare Act in Nebraska. Until last year, I was the Indian Child Welfare Specialist at the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C., and was on the team that wrote the new ICWA rules and guidelines. I was able to appreciate Jill's knowledge and was impressed by the ICWA activities in Nebraska."

Maintaining Morale Goal of CFS Grand Island Effort

Three Grand Island-based Children and Family Services Supervisors – **Suzana Borowski**, **Katie Harvey**, and **Shayla Trejo** – are making a concerted effort to combat the stresses incurred by the 20 CFS specialists they supervise.

Each of the supervisors supervise about six case workers and assist with their case load and the stresses they incur.

“My people take care of 103 children. It’s stressful,” Harvey said.

“I think the biggest stress is that we go out and we’re in the middle of abuse and neglect situations with children and sometimes it can be really tough to observe,” Borowski said. “Unfortunately, despite all the assistance you attempt to provide to families there can be backlash from parents and the community, which can cause more anxiety for workers.”

“If we can reduce stress, we can do our jobs better,” Harvey continued. “We want to make it a place where people want to come. I think what we’re trying to do is make it about the people and maybe less about the numbers.”

Reaching out to that larger group during an office meeting, they requested nominations for a 2018 motto, choosing five from those submitted. Those five were voted on and “Build Up to Reach Out” was chosen.

“We broke up into groups and everyone got to contribute to the mission for this year,” Borowski said.

“We’ll be putting up posters around the office to focus attention on the idea that teamwork and building each other up are really important in being able to do our jobs.” Harvey said, adding that the CFS staff in Grand Island were among the first to start daily Huddles, making them routine even before Yellow Belt training.

“Initial assessment has always met together early in the morning to start the day off right,” Borowski added.

In addition to the motto, the leaders use several means to support morale, including special days and activities, like Motivational Mondays or hour-long Wednesday morning meetings for one group.

These meeting have become so important for some staff, they will remote-in while waiting for a flight so they can participate.

“Your co-workers become your family,” Trejo said.

In addition, they keep track of intra-staff thanks and notes of encouragement on Kudos Boards and have devoted a weekly huddle to a fun activity, often a game. Borowski made construction-paper cutouts of the teams they supervise, calling them superheroes. Trejo, who only started as a supervisor in



Suzanna Borowski made construction paper “superheroes” to represent the case workers she supervises.



Shayla Trejo stands next to a letter board used to share inspiring quotations.



Katie Harvey stands next to a bulletin board used to share successes and notes of appreciation.



A “Kudos Board” provides a place for teammates to publicly share thanks and support for co-workers.

February, brought a small letter board into her office, where she posts an inspiring “Quote of the Week.”

All of these efforts have assisted in the Grand Island office having one of the lowest turnover rates in the Division of Children and Family Services.

Make the Connection...

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

DHHS Helpline: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov

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