

CONNECTIONS

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VOLUME 13, ISSUE 4

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

Trauma Impacts Body, Mind and Soul

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[read more>](#)

Get to Know Joe Acierno

“I’m surrounded by dedicated people who do great work,” said **Dr. Joe Acierno**, DHHS’ new Chief Medical Officer and Director of Public Health. Those who already work with Dr. Acierno know he’s easy-going and has a sense of humor. For those who don’t, you’ll find him approachable and very down-to-earth.

[read more>](#)

“I Know You, and I Want to Thank You”

Running from the other side of the counter, the youth hugged the case worker. Happily, life at home was much better and the job was also helping. The youth paused and then said the future looked bright for the first time in life. The youth thanked the worker for providing a positive influence exactly when it was needed.

Another inspirational story in DHHS’ [“Pathways of Hope”](#) series.

[read more>](#)

Getting Ready for Open Enrollment

By Denise Uhing,
Human Resources and Development

Open Enrollment for the 2013–2014 Plan Year is just around the corner. Here are some tips to help you prepare for the upcoming event.

Tip #1: Open Enrollment is the perfect time to update your Dependent and Beneficiary information including addresses, Social Security Numbers, etc.

Tip #2: If you participate in the Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) you can begin to prepare for the amounts you will have withheld. The image below will assist you in calculating your annual

estimated expenses eligible for the medical Flexible Spending Account.

Tip #3: For up-to-date information add the [DAS Employee Wellness and Benefits](#) webpage to your favorites. Plan information will be posted to this website as soon as it is available.

Tip #4: Watch for email updates about Open Enrollment dates and benefit options available to you and your family for the 2013–2014 Plan Year.

If you have any questions about your benefit information, please contact the [Human Resources person designated](#) for your area.

FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS:

ASI

Annual estimated expenses for services rendered during the upcoming plan year (July 1, 2013 - June 30, 2014) that will not be reimbursed by your medical and / or dental plans:

Deductible, copays \$ coinsurance	\$ _____
Routine office visits	\$ _____
Non-covered prescriptions	\$ _____
Hearing Aids	\$ _____
Over-the-counter medications	\$ _____
Eyeglasses / Contact lenses expense	\$ _____
Dental Work	\$ _____

TOTAL ANNUAL MEDICAL EXPENSES:
Amount Per Pay Period (bi-weekly 24 or monthly 12)

The Guide is not intended to provide information about the plans. For further details and information about the plans, consult the DAS website.

www.das.state.ne.us/personnel/benefits

State Employee Wellness and Benefits / Phone: (402) 471-4443 (inside Lincoln), or (877) 721-2228 (outside Lincoln)

Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

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

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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 Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.

Homepage Homeruns

[DHHS Announces New Deputy Chief Medical Officer - Dr. Leonard McCoy, April 1, 2013](#)

An April Fools' Day spoof on "Neat to Know" and in the "Box" proved popular among employees and generated many original and witty comments. Our thanks to **Dr. Joseph Acierno**, for letting us have some fun with this. In case you missed it, here's the story:

Dr. Leonard McCoy former chief medical officer of the U.S.S. Enterprise and admiral of Starfleet is DHHS' new Deputy Chief Medical Officer.



Photo: Leah Bucco-White

"We're very fortunate to have someone with such extensive experience in advanced medicine and space travel join our DHHS team," said Dr. Joseph Acierno, Chief Medical Officer and Director of Public Health. "I signed aboard to practice medicine," said Dr. McCoy. "I'm a doctor, not a bricklayer, scientist, physicist, escalator, mechanic, engineer, magician or a coal miner."

Dr. Leonard McCoy, a.k.a. Bones, graduated from the University of Mississippi with a degree in physiology, then went to medical school and later became a Starfleet surgeon. He was briefly stationed on planet Capella IV and later joined the U.S.S. Enterprise.

If you see him in the halls with this tricorder, please give him a warm welcome.

"By golly, Joe - I'm beginning to think I can cure a rainy day!"

[Colon Cancer Screenings Save Lives! March 21, 2013](#)

Turning 50 this year? One of the best birthday gifts you can give yourself is a colonoscopy. Really?! Yes! Colon cancer is 90 percent curable if it's found early. And experts agree that many cases of colon cancer could be prevented if men and women 50 and older were screened regularly.

Both men and women are at risk for colon cancer. There are things you can do to avoid becoming a statistic. Personal risk varies, so your doctor can help you make informed decisions about when to begin testing and the most appropriate testing method for you.

Further steps to prevent colorectal cancer (commonly called colon cancer) are easily included in any lifestyle:

- Eat a diet containing fruits, vegetables and fiber.
- Get active! Move your body!
- If you smoke, find help and quit.

For more information about colon cancer detection and prevention, visit DHHS' "[Stay in the Game](#)" Colon Cancer Screening Program website or call the Nebraska Colon Cancer Screening Program office, toll free at 1-800-532-2227.

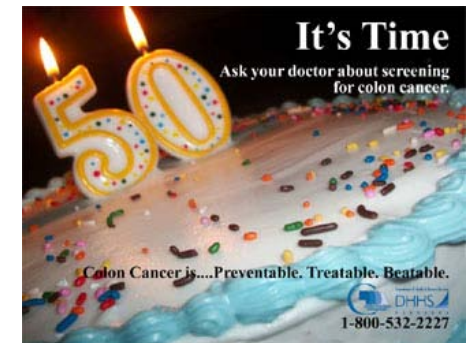


Photo (and cake): Tracey Bonneau

The Good Life:

A reminder of what we all share and hope to provide to our fellow Nebraskans



Photo: Bill Wiley

By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

Occasionally, I have the opportunity to explain the mission and work of DHHS to community groups with a PowerPoint® presentation. In addition, I talk with lawmakers, professional associations and other organizations to help them understand our department. I consider it a privilege to represent you and your work to others.

In fact, in my presentation, one of the slides summarizes what I've learned about you since my appointment in 2009. It states, "What I've learned . . . Nothing is Easy . . . Patience . . . Good People Doing Good Work." At this point in the presentation, I tell the audience the impact of federal regulations and politics when trying to make changes. I explain that it takes time to make changes, thus the need for patience. Then, I talk about you. I admit that I didn't know what to expect when I accepted this position nearly four years ago. What I've discovered, I tell audiences, is that you work at a high performance level and there is great caring among employees for their work and those we serve. Also, I mention that you are mission driven.

Those aren't just words I use to put a good face on DHHS. I am sincere in my comments and truly impressed with the work and commitment of DHHS employees.

Since my confirmation hearing before the Legislature's Health and Human Services Committee in 2009, I've talked about the importance of accountability. That is, taking responsibility for what we do, whether it's our day-to-day activities and ensuring we are in accordance with laws, procedures,

policies, regulations, etc., and stepping up when errors occur.

Let's face it. No one is faultless. We all make errors in our personal lives, during leisure time and in our jobs. It's unavoidable. I, and every director and supervisor, know this is true.

DHHS has been the subject of two Auditor of Public Accounts reports in recent months. The reports pointed out errors in decision making which in one case resulted in the loss of federal dollars. The other cast a negative light on DHHS.

I expect we will see more reports from the auditor with some complimentary and uncomplimentary observations. The directors and I value employees who take ownership of errors and responsibility for their actions while suggesting ways to fix problems. Accountability and transparency occur when we all compare our daily actions with laws, procedures, policies, regulations, etc. These are laudable attributes expected of every employee.

It's important in everything we do, whether the State Auditor brings it to our attention or it's discovered internally (which is preferred), to be open and transparent and try to find solutions to

our errors. Honest mistakes made by the competent and with no malice are opportunities for us to improve so we can help people live better lives.

I reiterate that everyone makes errors. As we continue our work to help the citizens of Nebraska, I encourage all employees to assess your work and double-check federal and state laws, regulations and policies that affect your area. After years of work in this field, it's easy to believe we are performing in accordance with state and federal expectations. Federal requirements change, especially now with the battles over the budget.

Employees who assume they're compliant can sow the seeds of error, even unwittingly, which affects DHHS and the public's perception of our Department. We should always, and especially now, ensure our work remains in line with state and federal laws, procedures, policies, regulations, etc. If errors are found, please bring them forward so we can address them, make adjustments and grow from them.

Handwritten signature of Kerry T. Winterer.

Past Trauma Impacts Body, Mind and Soul

By Marla Augustine

A woman who was assaulted has nightmares and has anxiety attacks in public.

A man who was verbally and physically abused as a child displays hostility frequently and drinks too much.

People with behavioral health problems or substance use disorders often have experienced trauma. The impact of trauma can be deep, life-shaping and life-altering.

“Each one of us brings our trauma history to every interaction,” said **Scot L. Adams**, director of the Division of Behavioral Health. “Trauma impacts body, mind and soul.”

Traumatic events can include rape, physical, emotional or sexual abuse, war combat, urban street violence, torture, motor vehicle accidents, natural disasters and violence associated with crime. Witnesses to these events can also be traumatized.

Trauma seriously affects children who experience sexual and physical abuse, severe neglect, emotional abuse, repeated abandonment and sudden and traumatic loss. It can shape the development of neural pathways in the brain. Adverse childhood events, like abuse, the incarceration or the mental illness of a household member, can lead to unhealthy behaviors later in life.

A person’s response to trauma or an adverse childhood event may involve intense fear, horror, helplessness and

extreme stress that may overwhelm the capacity to cope. They may exhibit self-blame, passivity, addictive behavior, self-harm, impaired relationships and lack of interpersonal skills. They may have mental health problems like post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, excessive hostility, generalized anxiety, substance abuse, interpersonal struggles, eating disorders and thoughts of suicide, among other conditions.

Many people with trauma histories often have overlapping problems with mental health, substance abuse and physical health. They may adopt negative health risk behaviors as coping mechanisms, such as smoking, substance abuse and self-harm. They may have severe medical conditions like heart disease, pulmonary disease, liver disease, STDs and cancer.

A study by the Office of Epidemiology – Division of Public Health of Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System data indicates that 53 percent of Nebraskans report at least one adverse childhood event. The study looked at eight types of adverse events—physical abuse, sexual abuse, verbal abuse, household mental illness, household substance abuse, household incarceration, witnessing abuse among

household adults, and divorce—and found that each event was associated with more than one adverse health outcome.

“When it comes to providing behavioral health and substance abuse services, we think that trauma is the expectation, not the exception,” Adams said. “We have to consider that person’s

“When it comes to providing behavioral health and substance abuse services, we think that trauma is the expectation, not the exception.”

Scot Adams, Director, Behavioral Health

individual history so that we provide services that are trauma-sensitive and trauma-informed. We now bring an increased focus to trauma by asking patients ‘What happened to you?’ rather than ‘What’s wrong with you?’”

The goal is service provision that is aware of the origins of trauma, effects of trauma on survivors and their loved ones, and the possibility that re-traumatization may occur if safe, sensitive services are not available. Services to trauma survivors must be flexible, individualized, culturally competent, recovery-oriented, and promote respect and dignity, Adams said. Trauma-informed care requires specialized knowledge, staff training and collaboration among policy makers, providers and survivors.

Results from the study by the Office of Epidemiology indicate that early

intervention for at-risk children to minimize the effects of adverse events might reduce unhealthy behaviors.

The DBH public behavioral health system has taken many steps toward becoming trauma-informed and trauma-specific.

The Trauma-Informed Nebraska (TIN) campaign, a statewide, consumer-driven, recovery-oriented project, was initiated by DBH in 2006 with a commitment to increasing trauma awareness and trauma-informed care across Nebraska. Trauma-informed care is growing in the six behavioral health regions and spreading among providers of mental health and substance abuse services. The goal is to increase providers’ commitment to providing trauma-informed care and ensure that early screening and ongoing assessment occur for their clients.

DBH now has a policy that all state-funded behavioral health providers must be informed about the effects of trauma, screen for it, provide ongoing assessment of trauma symptoms and develop services that are recovery-oriented and trauma-sensitive, and understand that re-traumatization may occur if safe, responsive services are not available.

“It’s important to recognize the connection between trauma, mental health, physical health and substance abuse by publicly declaring trauma to be a priority health and mental health issue in Nebraska,” Adams said.

[Emotional Abuse . . . Physical Abuse . . . Sexual Abuse . . . Neglect . . . Abandonment . . . Natural Disasters . . . War Combat . . .](#)

Get to Know Joe

By Leah Bucco-White

“It’s Joe.”

That’s what DHHS’ new Chief Medical Officer and Director of Public Health **Dr. Joseph Acierno** told employees at his first public health management meeting in his new position.

“I work with you and we work as a team. I may be the face of public health but you are the heart and soul,” he said. Dr. Joe Acierno became DHHS’ Chief Medical Officer and Director of Public Health on March 8. He had served as Deputy Chief Medical Officer since 2007 and was legal counsel to the department prior to that.

“I’m surrounded by dedicated people who do great work. I’m excited about our efforts and look forward to what we can accomplish in the months to come.” Those who already work with him know he’s easy-going and has a sense of humor and for those who don’t, you’ll find him approachable and very down-to-earth. Dr. Acierno is committed to ensuring Nebraskans receive safe, effective, quality care as well as helping them live a healthy lifestyle throughout their entire lives.

He plans to build on the good work of his predecessor Dr. Joann Schaefer. He will continue to promote a culture of wellness across the state through health education, immunizations, preventive screenings, good nutrition, physical activity and disease prevention.

He’s committed to wellness himself and has seen the positive effects of practicing a healthy lifestyle personally. He’s lost 70 pounds by walking initially, running, weightlifting and eating a more nutritious diet. He increased fruits, vegetables and protein, watched his portion sizes and ate small, frequent meals.

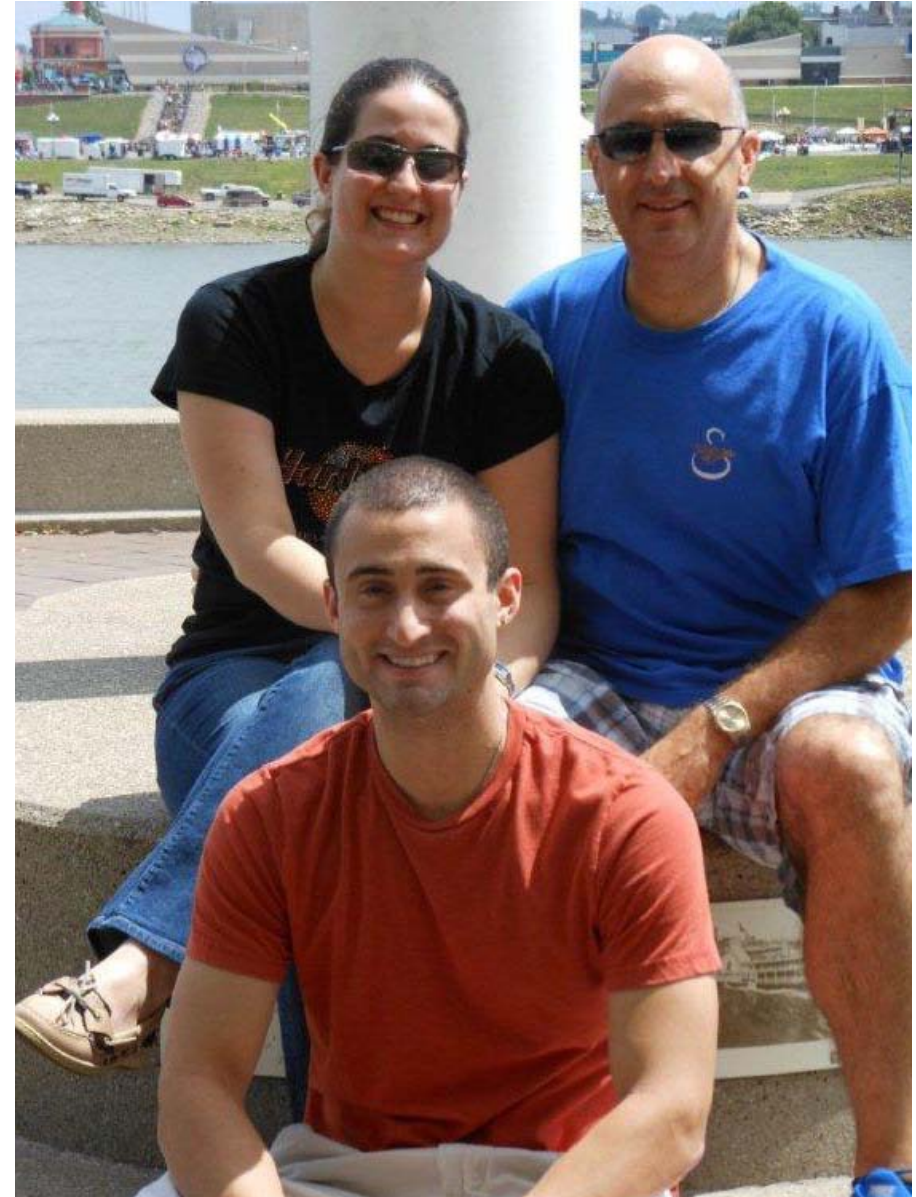
Dr. Acierno holds a Doctor of Medicine, Juris Doctor and Bachelor of Science from Creighton University. So he’s a lawyer and a doctor. The “why” has been of interest to reporters working on articles just like this one... getting to know Joe.

- “Why would you put yourself through that?”
- “You must really like learning.”
- “Are you a glutton for punishment?”

Dr. Acierno will tell you that yes, he likes learning and considers what he does the practice of medicine, albeit a little differently. He thinks medicine in its complexity benefits from having physicians trained as lawyers.

He was an emergency department physician while attending law school. He relocated to Los Angeles where he practiced medical-legal law, later returning closer to home for a position at an Omaha law firm.

Dr. Acierno lives in Omaha with his wife JoAnn who’s an Associate Professor of Nursing at Clarkson College. They have two grown children, Michelle and Michael, and a 12-year-old Westie named Riley.



Daughter Michelle, son Michael and Joe Acierno in Cincinnati, Ohio

“Respect is a two-way street, if you want to get it, you’ve got to give it.” – R.G. Risch

Demonstrating Respect at Work

By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources and Development

Mutual respect is the foundation to all workplace relationships. The absence of respect, real or perceived, is the single greatest barrier to people communicating and working together well, *and is at the heart of interpersonal conflict*. All of this takes its toll at work.

If we ever feel as though there is an absence of respect at work, it’s a good idea to ask ourselves privately, **“Am I doing my part in contributing to a respectful workplace?”**

Following are examples of what people in organizations commonly look for as signs that they are being treated with respect—things each of us can easily do.

- Greet people with a smile and a sincere **“Hello”** or **“Good morning.”**
- Remember to say, **“Please,” “Thank you,” “You’re welcome,”** and all the other fundamental courtesies we use when we are at our best.
- Listen for understanding when someone is speaking. Use good eye contact and an open, inviting



demeanor, without interrupting. Look for and highlight where the two of you agree and what you have in common. Do not hesitate to say, **“I’d like to hear more.”**

- Be inclusive. Ensure that everyone has been invited to the pot luck or that everyone has been asked for their opinion.
- Make a point of holding a door or elevator for someone behind you. Sometimes the simplest of gestures makes a powerful impression on another person.
- Acknowledge other peoples’ positive contributions to the workplace. Be appreciative of people who go the extra mile. As Mark Twain said, **“I can live for two months on a good compliment.”**
- Avoid burdening people with negativity and complaining about things that neither of you can solve. Highlight the positive and what you can make better.

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Please email me your thoughts, concerns, or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships at: Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov . I will email you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your ideas in a future column.



“I Know You, and I Want to Thank You”

Every day, DHHS employees help to produce good outcomes for children and families, making a difference in the lives of Nebraskans. DHHS is sharing those special stories on our website in a series called **“Pathways of Hope.”** Anyone can subscribe to the page and receive notification when a new story appears. New stories will be posted often.

These heartwarming stories are about DHHS employees who made a positive difference in the lives of children and families.

The following story is about a case worker providing just the right words of encouragement to a youth in need.

.....

The child put up a brave front, but the worker saw there were more challenges in the youth’s life than appeared in court. The worker lined



up a number of evaluations. During that time, she encouraged the youth by pointing to unused potential. The help the child received and the positive attention from the worker began to make a difference. Grades improved and the youth met all requirements set by the court. The case was closed.

Months later, the worker stopped at a sandwich shop for lunch. As she was leaving, she heard, “I know you!” It was the youth she had helped. Running from the other side of the counter, the youth hugged the case worker. Happily, life at home was much better and the job was also helping. The youth paused and then said the future looked bright for the first time in life. The youth thanked the worker for providing a positive influence exactly when it was needed. No one had ever said that to the youth before. Providing pathways of hope. That’s what we do.

.....

Be sure to let Russ.Reno@nebraska.gov know about the positive stories you and your coworkers experience. Your story may be the next “Pathways of Hope!”

Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

Pat Infield Recognized for Distinguished Service Award

Pat Infield, Tuberculosis Program Manager, Public Health, received the 2012 Nebraska Infection Control Network Distinguished Service Award at a TB Advisory Committee Meeting held at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in March.

Pat started working for DHHS in 1975 as a Community Health Nurse. She received her BSN from Winona State University in 1971. In 2003 she became the Program Manager for the TB program. Pat has been active in the National TB Controller's Association serving as a state representative and currently as the organization's treasurer.

Locally, Pat is often referred as to the "TB lady" by many who have questions for their health care facilities. She created the Nebraska TB Advisory Committee and was instrumental in the development of important legislation.

Pat said she was surprised and honored to receive this award. "My coworkers even gave me a beautiful corsage to wear during the event, which was very sweet

Way to Go, Pat!."



Pat is pictured above receiving the 2012 Nebraska Infection Control Network Distinguished Service Award from Dr. Phil Smith, UNMC. When Dr. Smith presented the award he said that people really appreciate what Pat does here at DHHS.

An Exercise in Serving People with Eggcellence



By Deb Pool, Administrative Assistant, Grand Island

The Central Service Area Children and Family Services

staff attended an All Staff Meeting on April 3, 2013. The meeting began with introductions and an exercise of "Serving People With Eggcellence."

Employee were given pieces of white paper with egg shapes, crayons, markers, stickers, and scissors, and were instructed to decorate the eggs using something they had learned from the Serving People With Excellence Training that everyone attended during February and March.

Kathleen Stolz, Children and Family Services Administrator, gave a brief recap of the Serving People with Excellence training before staff decorated their Eggcellence Eggs. The paper eggs were



then all combined signifying the teamwork of our agency. Decorated eggs will be on display in each of the DHHS CSA Offices as a reminder of how we all will continue to serve people with excellence.

Patience, Respect, Understanding...

All great ideas and thoughts written on decorated eggs of excellence. The credit for the creative egg decorating staff exercise goes to **Kaye Hoffman**, Administrative Assistant, Hastings.



In Gratitude

Letters to DHHS employees who are *helping people live better lives*

Dear **Mr. Brandon Pierce** (Youth Counselor, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center – Kearney),

I just want to thank you for everything you did for me while I was at YRTC-K. You truly helped me become a much better person. I am enrolled back in high school and have been maintaining pretty good grades. I have passed all of my drug tests and am attending drug and alcohol counseling along with equine therapy. What you did worked for me and I know if others in the group accept what you're trying to teach them they will be successful also. Thank you, Mr. Pierce. Tell everyone I said hey and that I'm doing well.

A Grateful Youth

NE Immunization Program, from an employee Bulletin Board post dated 4-4-13:

The Center for Disease Control (CDC) conducted a site visit this week on the Nebraska Immunization Program. It's not often that I hear a federal reviewer refer to one of our programs as "innovative" but I did today. Congratulations to the Nebraska Immunization Program staff for an awesome site visit and thank you for all the hard work you do for the citizens of the State of Nebraska!

Kevin Nelson, Internal Auditor, Operations

Dan Scarborough (Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center – Geneva),

Just a quick note to tell you thanks, and to ask that you also pass on to our outstanding tour guides a thanks for the impressive tour that we experienced last Wednesday afternoon. (I received a thank you note in today's mail from one of the law students who also toured with us. So, clearly, I was not the only attendee who found the tour to be informative and well worth my time!)

The young women who lead our tour were enchanting, informative and refreshing, Dan. You are to be commended and your staff as well. We (the court system and, really, the citizens of the State of Nebraska) should be impressed - and grateful - for the programs, facility and environment that is YRTC - Geneva. Please feel free to share my sentiment with any and all who might appreciate to hear the same.

Best wishes for continued successes and thanks again!

Mike Burns, County Judge, Hastings

Delores Feeken-Schmidt (Staff Assistant, Operations, Lincoln),

Thank you so much for getting the ball rolling. I think we have at least sparked an interest. That's what I need.

Again, I can't thank you enough for helping me when you did not even know exactly what I was needing. You are a person to be recognized for going above and beyond.

A Client Grateful for Help with Daughter and Grandson

Thanks! 

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

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