

# CONNECTIONS

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Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

## No Hesitation When it Comes to Helping Family

This story starts with a ringing telephone, as so many stories do. It ends with **Caitlin Ossian**, DHHS children and family services specialist, stealing her dad's pickup.

"A call came into the hotline about a family and was accepted for the Alternative Response program," she said. "So it's a situation that's concerning, but hopefully pre-crisis."

This was October 2016, shortly after she was trained on the protocol.

There was a couple, their 20-year-old son and their middle-school-aged son. The woman suffered from health issues that precluded her from working, but the eldest son and father did. The father's work schedule meant he slept during the day. While he slept, the rest were banished to the basement – which was even less healthy than the ground floor.

The basement's window were painted shut, creating poor ventilation and mold. Moreover, the mom struggled going up and down the stairs.

The family had lived in the rental house for 23 years, Ossian said.

"There were a lot of 'antique items,' but it was in essence a hoarding situation," she said. "Old furniture, flowered prints -- almost everything outdated."

The family wasn't on benefits. Seemingly, they weren't even aware of the possibility.

"They were very isolated," Ossian said. "Very unaware of modern benefits and technology. The dad had been paying, like, \$300 a month for cable and didn't know about cheaper options, like Netflix. Dad definitely struggled with comprehension at times. A salesman's dream."

Though she was able to work with the woman, the patriarch was resistant to help for some time, and eventually something – Ossian doesn't know what – happened.

"She called me saying I can't do this anymore. She needed out of the basement that was making her sick and away from the partner that refused to admit the home was a problem, because it wasn't a problem for him," she said.

In response, Ossian set up a plan for the mother and younger boy to live with relatives.

"The day they left was a literal nightmare," she said. "Law enforcement had to be called."

In their wake, the man got help for some of his problems and tried to address the issues keeping the family apart. His wife and son moved back, too. Now that he was healthier, it became clear that the house itself was the cause of many of the problems. Ossian began working to get them out.

By now nearly a year had passed since she first engaged with the family.

At the same time, she cut a lot of bills and got them on track financially.

As it turned out, they were able to fund the deposit themselves, and Ossian thought she could close the case. She figured that they'd have friends and family to help them move.

"But then I got a call where they asked, 'Well, how are we supposed to move,'" she

said. "Only the man and the eldest son were really physically able. So, OK -- we'd come so far, I didn't want to give up."

Ossian had \$400 she could spend, she said, but they would have to stretch it. Ossian called a school social worker who had also been working with the family. The social worker reached out to Mo's Moving of Lincoln, which said it could donate four hours of work.

But that wasn't enough.

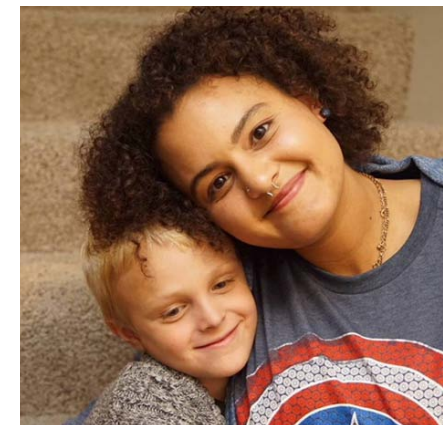
"So I called College Hunks Hauling Junk and Moving," Ossian said, "and coincidentally the owner happened to know my dad. He originally quoted \$2,000 for the whole move, and I asked what he could do with \$400. They agreed to do four hours with two workers. He also let us use his personal pickup truck"

So Ossian had eight hours of donated professional time, the man and his son, plus her.

Of course, there were also trainees in the DHHS office on 16th street: Shai, Alisha, Dillon, and Jacob.

"I said, this is not in your job description, so I get it if you don't want to do it," she said. "But they didn't even hesitate. They agreed to help move absolute strangers knowing that it would be labor intensive and that the only people it benefited was the family."

September 29, 2017, was moving day.



A Lincoln native, **Caitlin Ossian**, who moved heaven and earth to get a family moved, poses with her brother in a recent photo.

That's also the day, some 700 hundred words later, when Ossian "steals" her dad's truck. She needed just a little more room for everything.

With volunteer help and her small amount of funding, everything that was going to the new house – about half of the total -- got moved on the 29th. Mo's Moving moved the second half to storage the following day.

"We did it!" Ossian said, adding that she was even invited to the housewarming party. Despite having to regretfully decline, the offer made her day. She said she had contact with the family in October and that they are doing well.

Originally of Lincoln, Ossian will reach her two year anniversary with DHHS in December.

*"With Alternative Response, I am allocated funds I can use for the family's benefit. My goal was to find a new house, pay their deposit, and first month's rent," Ossian said. "But I can't find their house for them. ... So I sent them on a house-hunting mission."*

# Stay Connected on



## Grant Seeks to Cut Turnover at CFS

Supervisors in Children and Family Services (CFS) found out about a grant project designed to reduce turnover among Children and Family Services Specialists through the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development (QIC-WD).

CFS was announced in early October as one of eight sites selected through a competitive process to partner with QIC-WD to strengthen their workforce. The federal grant was received by the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's (UNL) Center on Children, Families and the Law at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Over the next four years, CFS will work with QIC-WD to address and study potential solutions to specific workforce issues. Established in 2016, the QIC-WD includes experts in child welfare, workforce, implementation, evaluation and dissemination from partner organizations.

CFS Director **Matt Wallen** said the project is consistent with DHHS' mission to help people live better lives.

He added that strengthening the DHHS team through recruitment, development and retention for CFSS positions helps them find solutions for families' challenges.



**Dr. Michelle Graef**, UNL research associate professor.

### make the connection . . .

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**Dr. Michelle Graef**, UNL research associate professor in industrial-organizational psychology, explains to 100 CFS supervisors the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development grant project.



**100 CFS Workers** at the Quality Improvement Center for Workforce Development grant project meetings.





## Message from Courtney Phillips, CEO

I read notes of thanks that come from consumers and family members, like those included in Connections' "In Gratitude" section.

I also see it when I revisit 2017's accomplishments. I'll touch on just a few and invite you to look at more included alongside this message.

- Completion of over 93 percent of the 213 deliverables in our [first ever Business Plan](#), along with many more projects completed across the agency.
- Launch of the first statewide service of the Behavioral Health System of Care for Children and Youth, youth crisis response.
- Continued improvements in performance and customer service of the ACCESSNebraska program.
- A Developmental Disabilities' services application reduced from 14 pages to three and placed online through ACCESSNebraska.
- Continued improvements in delivering professional licenses including reductions in wait times for nurse and medication aide licenses.
- Successful launch of the Heritage Health Medicaid managed care program that integrates physical health, behavioral health and pharmacy services.

I want to congratulate you all on these accomplishments as well as the many additional successes we've had this past year, from one end of the state to the other.

I know we have had challenges, too, and responding to them hasn't always been easy. But #TeamDHHS has come together to work through these whether it's been to find solutions to meet the needs of Nebraskans, work through budget constraints, or embrace new expectations.

As we move into 2018 our activity level will remain high. It's an exciting time for DHHS and there is great promise in our work ahead. I know I can count on the Team's high level of commitment and endless energy as we continue our mission of helping people live better lives.

I hope that each and every one of you have a Merry Christmas and a happy New Year.

### More DHHS 2017 Accomplishments

- Continued focus on Operational Excellence, resulting in more effective, more efficient and more customer-focused operations and services.
- The Behavioral Health conference that brought together over 400 people with a focus on awareness, prevention, intervention, treatment and leveraging change.
- Additional Behavioral Health System of Care services being implemented in specific parts of the state include Parent and Children Together, Youth Intensive Outpatient program, school-based mental health services, the professional partner program, and family peer support services.
- Receipt of a \$2 million SAMHSA State Targeted Response to the Opioid Crisis grant to Behavioral Health.
- Joint Commission accreditation of the Lincoln Regional Center.
- American Corrections Association accreditation of the YRTC-Kearney and the YRTC-Geneva.
- A new SNAP/Dept. of Labor program connecting families receiving SNAP with better jobs and greater financial independence is now in Grand Island, Hastings, and Columbus, with Norfolk scheduled for next May. Results include increases in pay, better hours, and improved benefits.

(continued on page 6)

#TeamDHHS,

As 2017 comes to a close, I want to once again thank you for everything you have done this year in helping people live better lives.

Your commitment to our mission is evident. I know I've said this before but I don't think it can be said too often – our mission is more than words on paper, it is the way we conduct ourselves every day. It's how we respond to others who depend on us whether that involves investigating abuse, determining eligibility, promoting our many public health efforts, caring for those in communities and in our 24-hour facilities, or providing operational expertise. It's also how we treat each other.

I've seen it clearly over the past two and one-half years as I visit team members in the central office, in offices and facilities across the state, and when

## Addition of Kiosk Restores Names to the Interred

14-year-old **Caleb Cecava** wanted to attach names to numbers.

"I chose to do this because I wanted to provide dignity to these people," Caleb said. "I didn't want them to be forgotten."

The Boy Scout needed a project to attain the rank of Eagle, so he fastened on the idea of creating a kiosk at the Haines Branch Cemetery in Lincoln (also known as Van Dorn Cemetery), located at 2550 S.W.12th St. The cemetery was used from the 1930's until the 1950's as a resting place for residents of the Lincoln Regional Center (LRC), established in 1870 as the Lincoln Hospital for the Insane. It adopted its current name in 1969.

As attention has been focused on these cemeteries, some families have gathered there for belated funerals.

Stacey Werth-Sweeney, LRC facility operating officer, said the work was of real value.

"We're honored to be the recipient of this grand gesture and we are grateful for the work that Caleb put into this project," she said. "Our memorial statue there says, 'For all that was, for all that might have been, grant us rest and peace.' Well, Caleb's project



**Caleb Cecava** (green shirt) oversees the work of framing the kiosk wall.

will provide peace to the souls that are buried there and their families."

The kiosk links names to the numbers on 253 gravestones and helps guide visitors to the correct stone. Planning started about three months ago, and the work was done over two days.

On Oct. 28, thirteen people prepared steel and plastic row markers and assembled the wooden kiosk in a regional center workshop. The work took about three hours.

On Nov. 11, the kiosk was installed near the center of the cemetery and row markers were installed. In addition, a sterling silver linden was planted and earth and weeds

were removed from atop and around the stones. Finally, after about four hours, maps and the list of name were tacked to the cork board of the kiosk and protective glass was installed and sealed over it.

"Some of the stones were eight to 10 inches beneath the ground," the boy's mother, **Mary Cecava**, said. "The boys used the map to learn where they were supposed to be and probed to find something hard." All the stones were located, Mary said. In addition, one stone, located out on its own near the men's section, was discovered.

"It was in a row by itself in the far northeast corner and the number was 4998," Mary said. "That one is a mystery."

Led by Caleb, the work was done by fellow scouts, friends and family – 35 in total – the materials were funded by the regional center. The price came to about \$300, Caleb said.

"We roughly calculated that in all with everyone's work the project took about 150 hours," Mary added.

"I want to make sure to thank **Andy Miller**, who works at the regional center," Caleb said.

"He helped us a lot by getting us tools, and getting us set up to work. He even helped on installation day."

Caleb's mother amplified those thoughts. "Andy put in a ton of hours on the project himself," she said. "We gave him a list of materials and he went out to buy them."

"Also **Dave Nicklas**, the regional center horticulturist," Caleb added. "He helped us find the tree. One side of the leaves is silver, so that it flashes when the wind blows. The regional center said they would take care of it."

The project takes its inspiration from a similar project done four years earlier by Caleb's brother, Ethan, at the Calvert Street Cemetery (also known as Yankee Hill Cemetery). The kiosk design is an edited version of the one built there.

In addition to his brother, **Ethan**, and mother, **Mary**; Caleb has a brother, **Andrew**; sister, **Emily**; and father, **Steve**. Caleb is the youngest of his siblings.

### Recent Memorial Service at Norfolk Regional Center Cemetery

*The Columbus News Team reported on a late November memorial ceremony in a small unmarked Norfolk cemetery. Led by **Candice Mohnson** and **Tommy Newcombe** of Region 4 Behavioral Health Services, the ceremonies are done annually at a patch of grass next to the Pohlman Ag Complex. The area is the resting place of many of those who died at the Norfolk Regional Center before 1953, but there only 12 headstones.*

*The Columbus News Team reported: "Mohnson and Newcombe directed a moment of silence and then read off the names of all those buried in this cemetery and those in a more isolated one near the Regional Center. Then came the laying of two carnations for the two buried children. Their intention is to show respect for those who laid the foundation to break the stigma of mental illness.*

"The Region 4 staff plans to do the ceremony again next year, but on Oct. 10, which is World Mental Health Day."



**Caleb Cecava** poses with the completed project with his mother and father, **Mary** and **Steve Cecava**.



## Celebration Featured Entertainers, Happy Kids

Forty-one children were adopted as part of Douglas County Juvenile Court's 18th annual celebration of National Adoption Day.

The day began at 8:30 a.m. with a press conference, followed by adoption hearings and an hours-long celebration that featured street percussionists, balloon artists, a stilt-walker, costumed Star Wars enthusiasts and much more.

According to Service Area Administrator **Camas Steuter**, most of the entertainers at the event have been used several times in the past. They often donate their service or are paid by another non-profit. About five different groups provided entertainment, she said, in addition to the food and drink in the food court and professional family photos.

Steuter said all five juvenile court justices were actively holding hearings. Rather than preside in their usual courtrooms on the sixth floor, they used civil courtrooms on the second. The civil court rooms were easier to reach and provided more room.



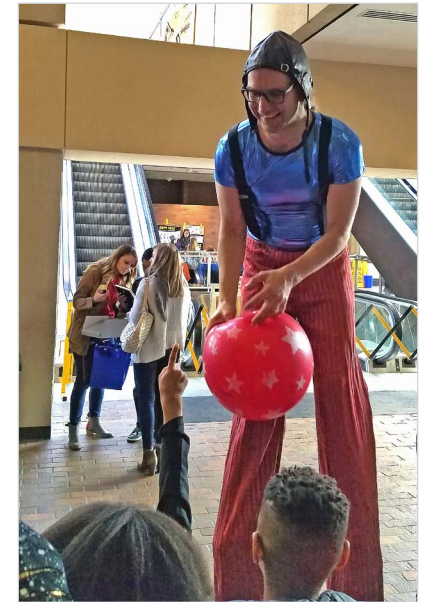
Bryan Dulaney, left, of the Rebel Legion Starfighter Command, meets one of the attendees of Omaha's Adoption Day. Dulaney is dressed as an X-Wing Pilot



Justin Fisher, center, of Omaha Street Percussion, makes music on trash can lids and pots and pans.



A crown-making station was sponsored and staffed by the Nebraska Families Collaborative.



Stiltwalker Peter Brunette, of the Balloon Brigade, entertains at the event.

Several other Nebraska counties held similar events, aimed at drawing attention to the need for more foster and adoptive families across the state. Approximately 150 children were adopted across the state on Nov. 18.

"Our adoption day adoptions are down slightly," she said, "because more adoptions happen throughout the year." The number of children adopted 2017 from foster homes is expected to exceed last year's total of 504. Post adoption parties were held featuring chili and pizza. The events wrapped up at 2 p.m.



Adoption Day in Norfolk.



Balloons in Norfolk.



Fingerpainting in Norfolk.



Norfolk adoption day celebration.

## Relocations Without Letup: COOP Exercise Held

If something very bad happens in Nebraska, businesses can fold up shop for a while, but not the Department of Health and Human Services. If key primary buildings are damaged or destroyed, essential service to the state must be maintained at other sites.

So the trick is relocation without interruption – a bit like a juggler with beanbags in the air stepping from one rowboat to another.

Exploring this idea, a Continuity of Operations (COOP) exercise was held Nov. 9. Divided into three-hour morning and afternoon sessions for various divisions of DHHS, the exercise used three modules based around a northward-moving F3 tornado that damages a large area of Lincoln, including the State Capitol Office Complex. Striking at 4:30 a.m., the tornado hurts no-one, but because the buildings are unusable for at least a few weeks, the governor and the Crisis Action team declare a COOP event and direct state agencies to enact their plans.

Numbering about 35 people, the morning session included three teams – central office staff and the divisions of Behavioral Health and Public Health – each sitting around a large table. Each appointed a secretary, and the groups worked through a set of questions associated with the modules, taking about 20 minutes with each. As each

module was completed, a spokesperson read their answers to the group. Division of Public Health Emergency Response Coordinator **Russ Wren**, outside contractor **Chuck LaFollette**, **Troy Paisely** and **Amy Lynn Creaney** from the Department of Administrative Services, created the scenarios, and facilitated their discussions.

The divisions of Children and Family Services, Developmental Disabilities

and Medicaid and Long-Term Care attended the afternoon session.

The first module dealt with the steps that must be taken immediately after a disaster and the hurdles and pitfalls that may arise. The second dealt with an extended period of off-site work and having to depend on back-up information technology systems.

(article continued on page 7)



Three teams discuss the first set of module questions Nov. 10 at the morning Continuity of Operations exercise, while facilitators roam the space answering questions.

### 2017 Accomplishments

(article continued from page 3)

- Children and Family Services' Family Action Support Team (FAST) pilot in Dodge County that reaches families that come to our attention with non-traditional help and/or connections with community resources.
- The transition of all individuals receiving DD services to the new federally-approved Day Services Waiver and the Comprehensive Waivers by September.
- DD eligibility determinations decreased from 69 days to an average of 16 days, and the team cleaned up the waiting list for services.
- Increased supported employment efforts for people with developmental disabilities and behavioral health needs that provide meaningful work, social interaction, a sense of purpose.
- Release of the Nebraska State Health Improvement Plan (SHIP) identifying key public health priorities for 2017-2021.
- Launch of an enhanced Prescription Drug Monitoring Program (PDMP) that is more user-friendly and accessible.
- Federal CMS approval on the Medicaid State Plan Amendment for the Health Insurance Premium Payment (HIPP) program, revising the cost-effectiveness test for individuals.
- From January through October 31, the three Heritage Health plans paid nearly 5.9 million claims on behalf of 230,000 Medicaid members, totaling over \$743 million.
- Commitment to the 20 new priority initiatives in our [current Business Plan](#).



## COOP (continued from page 6)

While the third looked at an extended period of off-site work because of the complete renovation of a damaged building.

It takes into consideration the possible effects of stress in these workers and the policies for reconstituting the full staff at some point. After each module and again after the end of all of them, participants were invited to comment about the COOP plan strengths the exercise revealed and the weaknesses, as well as the effectiveness of the exercise.

Echoed by many, the primary benefit of the exercise was that it was at least underway, giving the group a chance to make plans and coordinate with each other.

“I think the main thing would be to quote George S. Patton, who said, ‘A good plan today is better than a perfect plan tomorrow,’” said **Richard Mettler**, DHHS staff & partnership development systems consultant.

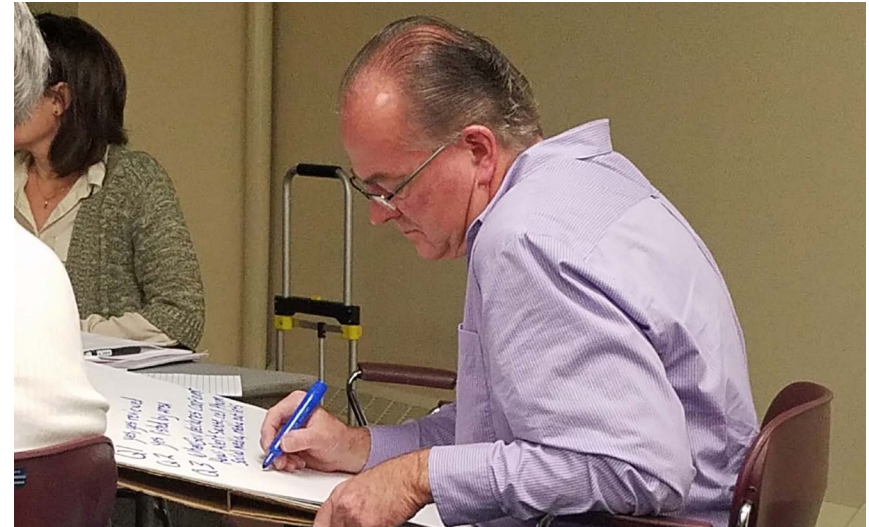
Some of the concerns raised were the fact

that so much of the success of the plan depends on maintaining Internet connectivity. Participants discussed the fact that old-fashioned “phone trees” may play a role. In addition, it appeared that many divisions hoped to use the same fallback (or “alternate”) site, which wouldn’t be able to accommodate that number of people. Possible space could be sought within University buildings.

The need for non-Lincoln fallback sites was also discussed.



Flanked by CEO **Courtney Phillips** and Chief of Staff **Lisa Taylor-Jones**, **Richard Mettler**, DHHS staff & partnership development systems consultant, gestures during the discussion.



**Matt Gelvin**, of Health Licensure & Investigations, serves as the secretary for his team of public health professionals.

Familiarity with the plan was also a concern. Paisley said he would like to see a relocation drill, where a team actually relocates. It would create a foundation of knowledge of the process, as well as test current plans.

Before beginning the exercise, Paisley said the goal was to accept the scenario without criticism and then try to make it as realistic as possible. He added that the key was to focus on essential services, many of which are required by law, beginning by moving a smaller group of employees. The rest would resume work as part of a “reconstitution” force.

“You might think of it as a fire situation for a firefighter,” he said. “He isn’t worried anymore about getting the cat out of the tree.”

According to Wren, **Gov. Ricketts** issued a memo in December 2015 which jumpstarted the planning for the COOP exercise for DHHS. Public Health in particular took the lead in planning the exercise.

“This agency is very complex,” Paisley said. “It’s taken a couple of years of planning to get to this point.”

Employees of DHHS should look to division leadership to learn about their specific plans.

# 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.

Kudos to **Marie Lafferty,**

I just had a visit from **Bryan Allen**, CFS worker expressing appreciation for **Marie's** work in getting lights turned on for a client with a 7 month old baby that they were doing an investigation for. The worker who had approved the LIHEAP had not notified the utility company of the payment guarantee. Because of Marie's quick action the utilities were turned on before Bryan left the house. Thank you for serving our clients well Marie!

**Brenda Bender**  
Social Services Supervisor, CFS

"Thank you so much for helping me in my utilities bill. I've been in the hospital since February. ... Still healing. You are angels. "

Sincerely, **a client**

Hi **Angie,**

I just wanted to email you the official notification that I have chosen to close my daycare down. After almost 19 years of caring for these precious children, every moment of which I have loved, I officially closed my business effective Nov 1st, 2017. Thank you for being such an amazing inspector and encouraging me all throughout my career. You made such an impact on me and I am so grateful for you! ... Thank you so much, Angie, for all that you have done for me.

God's blessings, **Kendra Worster**

- ❖ A note to Angie Lewis, Child Care Inspection Specialist, in Falls City, Nebraska, who notes she is "sorry to see this one close. Ms Worster does not have any licensing concerns and is in fact one of the best providers."