

# CONNECTIONS

Dec. 2013 / Jan. 2014

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

## *Here's to Year 2013, and to Looking Ahead*

**Editor's Note:** It's a new year! Time for a fresh start, building on the successes of the past, and finding new ways to do things better. It's also a good opportunity to reflect upon and celebrate the accomplishments of the past year.

The Department of Health and Human Services is a large agency—a third of state government—so there was a lot of good news to share in 2013, including new ways to improve our ability to help people live better lives. Throughout this issue of *Connections*, we'll highlight a few of our favorite stories from 2013. It was a tough choice since there were so many great stories from which to choose. So...let's get started.

*See Pages 4-5*

## January is Radon Action Month: Take Action Now to Prevent Lung Cancer Later

*By Sara Morgan,  
Radon Program Manager*

During National Radon Action Month the Department of Health and Human Services' Radon Program is once again spreading the word about the risks of radon exposure, and encouraging people to test their homes.

"Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer for people who have never smoked," said **Dr. Joseph Acierno**, the state's Chief Medical Officer. "It is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that is present in most Nebraska homes. Everyone should test their homes to determine if they have a high level of radon."

Because radon is radioactive, it is very damaging to lung tissue when people breathe it in. The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that approximately 20,000 lung cancer deaths per year are due to radon exposure, second only to tobacco-related lung cancer deaths.

People often don't realize that

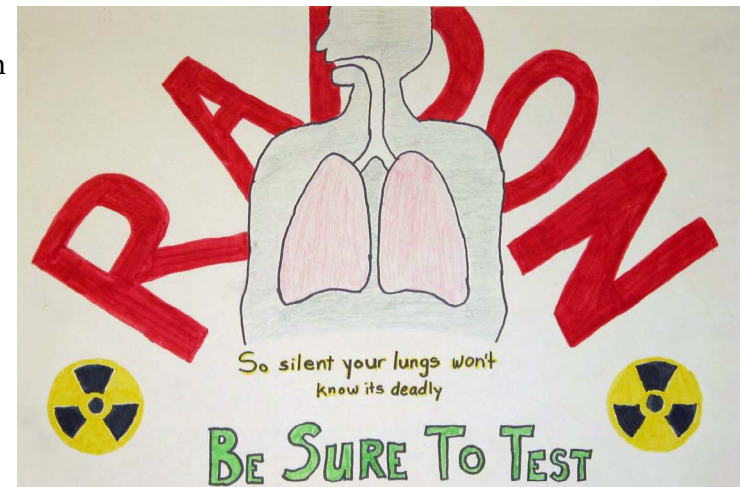
even if they don't smoke, they can still be at risk of lung cancer. Radon program staff really want everyone to test their homes for radon so they know what levels they are being exposed to. Preventing lung cancer should be a priority.

Radon levels are typically at their highest during winter months. Since people spend more time indoors with the home shut tight, it makes for an ideal time to conduct a test. Conducting a radon test is the only way to know what the levels are in your home.

To find out more about purchasing a radon test kit, go to: [www.dhhs.ne.gov/radon](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/radon) or find one on the shelves at most hardware stores/home centers.

Of course, just testing the home may not be the last step. DHHS recommends that homes with radon levels at 4 pCi/L or more be fixed to reduce radon exposure. Most homes can be successfully repaired using a standard radon mitigation system. A list of trained professionals is available [here](#).

For more information, visit the [Radon Program webpage](#).



*Winning Poster contest entry, 2013*

# Stay Connected on



## make the connection . . .

**DHHS Public Website:** [www.dhhs.ne.gov](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov)  
**DHHS Employee Website:** <http://dhhsemployees.gov>  
**DHHS Helpline:** 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via email: [dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov](mailto:dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov)

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Children and Family Services Division Director: <b>Thomas Pristow</b>	Veterans' Homes Division Director: <b>John Hilgert</b>
Developmental Disabilities Division Director: <b>Jodi Fenner</b>	Chief Operating Officer: <b>Matt Clough</b>

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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](mailto:Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov).

## Homepage Homeruns

### [Helping to Make Forever Families Full, Dec. 2](#)

By Sara Jelinek, Beatrice



Adoption Day is such a special one for children across the state who are celebrating new beginnings with forever families to call their own. Adoption Day festivities were organized in Lincoln for Nov. 23, 2013.

It takes a lot of people working together to organize and create such an event. Many staff members and their families from the entire service area participated

and volunteered at Adoption Day in Lincoln. Because of the hard work of the SESA CFS Permanency Team, the entire service area, and all of the many partners we work with in the community, we were happy to finalize 46 adoptions and three guardianships. Sara adds...

"Adoption Day is one of my favorite days of the year. It's so wonderful to see all of the extended families come together and get involved with Adoption Day. It just goes to show that the whole family welcomes these kids into their lives."

### [Cloudy with a Chance of Tumbleweeds, Dec. 5](#)

Heavy winds caused a strange weather pattern at the Scottsbluff Customer Service Center. DHHS employees working at the center found their parking lot blocked and their cars buried in tumbleweeds.

**Kathy Carter-Shambaugh**, Scottsbluff CSC Administrator, joked... "Who knew we needed to add tumbleweed removal to our lease? Out here, you not only want a shovel in your car but a pitch fork comes in handy too!"





# The Good Life: *A reminder of what we all share and hope to provide to our fellow Nebraskans*



By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

I look forward to this time of year. I enjoy spending time with family and sometimes getting away for a few days of vacation over the holidays. While I'm not a "New Year's Resolution" sort of guy, I do like to take the opportunity to be a little philosophical while I rewind the past year and set course for the new one.

It's in that vein that I'd like to share a few thoughts with you as we, in

DHHS, set our sights on 2014.

- Celebrate your successes and those of your colleagues. Nothing is too small to recognize, and the dividends are great. We should all do this more often and recognize what we and those around us accomplish. I'm sure you've heard it: Success begets success.
- Don't dwell on the things that could have gone better. Remember them, keep them in perspective, correct anything that needs to be corrected, and definitely learn from them. Learning should be a never-ending process.
- Don't let the negatives you hear about DHHS outweigh the good that this agency does. Yes, we must be accountable and when we make mistakes, acknowledge them and correct them. If our good work received the same attention as the not-so-good, I can assure you that people would have a different perception of DHHS.
- Set some goals and do your best to reach them (and when you do, celebrate, and if you don't, learn from it). Don't be afraid to aim high.

I look back over the past 12 months and am impressed that so much has been accomplished across the agency. This issue of *Connections* includes many of those things – a year in review – but, honestly, I know there are so many more that never reach my desk.

As you meet and talk with people in the New Year, I hope you share your pride in where you work and what we strive to do – to help people live better lives. Tell them about the good

things that happen in DHHS. You know what you do, and this newsletter and the DHHS Homepage are good resources to learn about what's happening in other areas.

I wish you the best, personally and professionally, as we close 2013 and begin another year. Happy New Year and may we find many successes to celebrate in 2014.



*"Whether we want them or not, the New Year will bring new challenges; whether we seize them or not, the New Year will bring new opportunities." Michael Josephson*

## 2013 Year in Review...Celebrating Our Favorite DHHS Stories, Accomplishments



### Way to Go and a Hearty Congrats!

Since you are DHHS' most important resource, naturally, the top story of 2013 is honoring and recognizing DHHS employees. The [October issue](#) of *Connections* was dedicated to you—all the DHHS employees recognized as Employees of the Year and Supervisors of the Year and the many, many more who were recognized for special years of service awards. DHHS honored three employees for having completed 50 years of service! That's an incredible accomplishment for any organization!

Congratulations to all of you! DHHS' success depends on you and your abilities to help people live better lives.

### Survey Says...Behavioral Health Consumers Satisfied

The [annual survey of consumers](#) conducted in 2013 by DHHS' Division of Behavioral Health showed increased satisfaction in access, treatment planning, cultural sensitivity and services received from the state's behavioral health system.

The public system includes the state's six behavioral health regions, which offer direct services, and DHHS' three regional centers located in Hastings, Lincoln and Norfolk.

"Parents reported that they were quite satisfied with the services their children received," said **Scot L. Adams**, director of Behavioral Health. "The results show that services improved their kids' quality of life."

Families can access services through the [Network of Care website](#), or by calling the Family Helpline at 1-888-866-8660.

All in all, Adams said approximately 35,000 or so people received help through the Behavioral Health division and its partners in 2013. "That is important work worth reflecting upon and taking pride in."

### More than 950 Attend Conference on Childhood Trauma, Stress

While early trauma may lead to mental health and physical health issues, attuned caregivers can meet the needs of children by providing the strongest reward—positive interaction.

Two DHHS divisions, Behavioral Health and Children and Family Services, sponsored a "Trauma Across the Lifespan" conference that was free for workers in child welfare

and behavioral health, and for the public, as well. More than 950 people attended the Sept. 12 conference in Lincoln, a record number that showed the importance of the topic.

This conference was a great example of collaboration between Behavioral Health and Children and Family Services. Working together makes us even more effective in serving youth and families and helping them become safer and healthier.

Conference speaker Sharon Wise, (pictured below) consumer, survivor, activist and artist, opened the conference with her talk on Trauma, Hope and Resiliency. Her journey of recovery from neglect, sexual abuse and substance abuse was featured in the [July issue](#) of *Connections*.

Nathan Ross, another conference speaker and survivor of horrific child abuse, shared his story and gave encouragement to those facing



similar struggles and challenges. Conference attendees listened intently to Nathan and how he came to the child welfare system where he was saved and adopted. At the conclusion of Nathan's moving presentation, he thanked all involved in the child welfare system.

[Read more.](#)



### Sower Celebrates People with Developmental Disabilities

There is always a lot going on in DHHS' Division of Developmental Disabilities. Now there's one good place to read about it all. With colorful graphics and photos, and short, easy-to-read articles, DHHS' *Sower* newsletter started up again in 2013 with an updated look and feel.

*The Sower*, published quarterly by the Division of Developmental Disabilities, celebrates people with intellectual or developmental disabilities and their families, guardians, services providers,

*Continued on next page*



## 2013 Year in Review...Celebrating Our Favorite DHHS Stories, Accomplishments, *continued*

advocates and support community organizations. This colorful newsletter is filled with good information and inspirational stories. Access current and past *Sower* newsletters [here](#) and subscribe to make sure all future issues are delivered right to your email box.

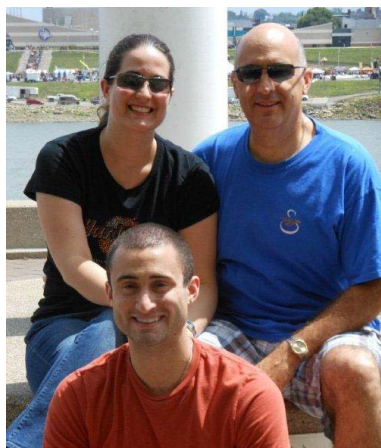
### Medicaid, Long-term Care Delivers

In 2013, one of the big stories for Medicaid and Long-term Care, was splitting the ACCESSNebraska customer service call centers between two DHHS Divisions—Medicaid and the Division of Children and Family Services.

Starting Sept. 30, 2013, Medicaid and Economic Assistance divided into different telephone numbers to help better serve our clients. Questions about Medicaid programs? Call 855-632-7633. Questions about Economic Assistance programs? Call 800-383-4278. (Lincoln and Omaha clients have different numbers to call, as well.)

DHHS Medicaid and economic assistance programs are complex. Focusing on these programs separately helps us be more responsive to client needs. There were a lot of issues to work through, but having two separate lines is already helping. Wait times on the

phone are down. Keep up the good work!



### Get to Know Public Health Joe

In the Division of Public Health, the year 2013 brought with it new ways to protect and improve the health of Nebraskans...stories and efforts too numerous to name. Keeping that in mind, the big story of 2013 was one of a change of leadership as **Dr. Joe Acierno** (pictured above with family) became DHHS' Chief Medical Officer and Director of Public Health.

"It's Joe."

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

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."

[Read more.](#)

### DHHS Continues Proud Tradition of Caring for Veterans

Much ado about nothing? Hardly! This zero means everything! No deficiencies in all areas related to care, safety and quality of life at all four of the DHHS-run veterans' homes in Nebraska. DHHS received zero-deficiency or "perfect" survey scores at veterans' homes in Bellevue, Grand Island, Norfolk and Scottsbluff

on recent annual Health Care System Surveys from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

"The results represent extremely committed and competent staff members who live the mission of serving America's heroes with honor and respect," said **John Hilgert**, Director of DHHS' Division of Veterans' Homes.

DHHS employees at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home in Bellevue (pictured below) celebrate four deficiency-free surveys in a row by forming a "zero" on the lawn.



Well...that's a quick wrap up of 2013. We made great progress, and still have more work to do to help people live better lives.

What will 2014 bring? You tell me! I'm looking forward to receiving more news and views from all six DHHS divisions and Operations in 2014. Send me ([Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov](mailto:Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov)) your story ideas and photos, and I'll share them with your coworkers. Thanks, and Happy New Year!

## Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

### Palm Receives Award from Public Health Association of Nebraska



**Dave Palm**, Administrator of the Office of Community and Rural Health, and a recognized leader in public health, was chosen by the Public Health Association of Nebraska to receive the Jim Dills Distinguished Public Health Service Award. Palm received the award on Oct. 10, 2013.

Dave Palm has more than 30 years of experience in working on various public health and rural health issues for DHHS' Division of Public Health. Working with the Public Health Association of Nebraska and local areas, Palm wrote a grant that helped build the state's current system of local health departments.

Dave has served as a PHAN Board of Director member for six years. He works long hours, constantly going above and beyond in his work. Using his organizational and grant writing skills, Dave has helped bring millions of dollars of grant funds to Nebraska to "help people live better lives."

The Jim Dills award was named in honor of the late Administrator of the Health Promotion and Education Division at DHHS. Jim dedicated his nearly 30-year career to promoting public health in Nebraska. The award reflects the qualities of character that Jim Dills and award recipients share every year including: leadership, integrity, dedication and modesty.

Palm shares those qualities of character while maintaining a clear vision for the Nebraska public health system. His work has a positive and lasting effect on Nebraskans of all ages.

### Congrats, Pat Moeller, on your Excellence in Nursing Award

**Pat Moeller**, System Clinician at the Norfolk Veterans Home, was recognized at the March of Dimes Award Ceremony November 7<sup>th</sup>.

The Nebraska Chapter of the March of Dimes and Methodist Hospital System presented Excellence in Nursing Awards to 140 Nebraska and Southwest Iowa nurses for their dedication to the nursing profession and quality patient outcomes. Nurses were nominated by individuals who wished to recognize a nurse for their outstanding contri-

butions. Twenty-six of these nurses were selected for special recognition for their exemplary service in categories, including Rising Star, Academic Excellence, Clinical Excellence and Distinguished Nurse.

Patricia Moeller was honored for her work the past six years as the system clinician for the State of Nebraska Veterans Homes system. Pat was described as "the key player who has improved the quality in a state-wide system serving 650 long term care patients."

### Nebraska 103rd Legislature is Now in Session

The 103rd Legislature is now in session. At 60 days, this one is known as a "short" session compared with the 90-day sessions held in odd-numbered years. Want to know more about the DHHS legislative process and the bills we are tracking? It's all [here](#).

During each Legislative Session, DHHS employees review legislation that might impact our programs and services, and provide testimony and letters on select bills during the Legislature's public hearing process. Legislative bills and bill status can be found at the official website of the [Nebraska Unicameral Legislature](#).

Legislation that passed during recent Legislative Sessions and impacted DHHS and DHHS testimony and letters can be found [here](#).

**Bryson Bartels** is the Legislative Coordinator for DHHS. You can contact him at (402) 471-0541.





## Earning Trust by Assuming Good Intent in Others

*“The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.” Ernest Hemingway*

By Richard Mettler,  
Human Resources and  
Development

To have a culture of trust in DHHS, where we are trusted by others, we must demonstrate that we trust others as well—that we give other people the assumption of good intent.

This means giving people the benefit of the doubt initially, with the mind set that you have to earn my *mis-trust*.

### Pitfalls in requiring people to earn our trust:

When we withhold trust until another person proves to be trustworthy, we can appear distant, aloof or suspicious, which naturally triggers mistrust of us in the other person.

When we act on the assumption that another person may not be trustworthy, we can fall into ‘confirmation bias.’ We look for evidence, usually remote and imagined, that would suggest we were correct in withholding our trust, while ignoring real life encounters soundly demonstrating how trustworthy the other person truly is.



### Benefits of assuming good intent in others:

When giving another person the assumption of good intent, we relax around this person and look for the best in this person’s attitude and behavior toward us.

When we assume good intent in others, they notice, form a favorable impression of us, and are inclined to live up to the regard we show them.

Also, we are more inclined to speak openly to this person, share ideas, offer support and collaborate.

With the above, the other person tends to relax around us, making it easier to place his or her trust in us.

*“Trust is reciprocal . . . the more you trust others, the more you yourself are trusted in return.” Stephen Covey*

Please email your thoughts, concerns or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships to: [Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov](mailto:Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov).



## Monthly Newsletters Available from Deer Oaks, EAP

One of the many benefits available from DHHS’ Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is free monthly electronic newsletters—one for all employees and one directed specifically to supervisors.

Deer Oaks’ *Employee Enhancement* newsletter presents on a wide range of topics concerning employee health and well-being—physical, emotional, financial, and family living—providing helpful tips on living happier, healthier, more balanced lives.

The *Supervisor/HR* newsletter provides practical advice on numerous topics of interest to anyone who supervises employees, whether you are an experienced supervisor or new to

this role. Each newsletter concludes with a section called “Ask Your EAP!” featuring answers to common questions that supervisors ask.

Deer Oaks archives both newsletters by month. Use the following link to go directly to the newsletters.

<http://www.deeroaks.com/admin/viewcategory.asp?id=192&=&=>

You will be asked to log in. The username and password are each SON.

If you have questions please email or call: Richard Mettler, Human Resources and Development, [Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov](mailto:Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov), (402) 471-8103.

# In Gratitude

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

Sometimes we paraphrase letters and/or shorten them slightly in order for us to include as many as possible.

To: **Jana Peterson** (Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Kearney)

Today, we went for lunch at the Peterson Senior Activity Center. The meal was delicious, and it was served by volunteers and YRTC young men. They did a great job!

Thank you!



**Editor's Note:** This recent post on the employee bulletin board is worth a second look. It's from an employee who has since retired.

**Bulletin Title: It's been good to know you!**

It has been my pleasure to work for the State since February, 1991. It has kept a roof over my head and food on my table. I cannot complain about a thing. There is good in everything, if we just wouldn't focus on the negative so much. I enjoyed knowing all the people I worked with, and I wish you all the best life has to offer. One thing I know for sure is that our best days are ahead of us, so stay positive and keep up the good work of helping people. Be thankful you are on this side of helping. Take good care of yourselves and be good to yourselves, live in peace with each other.

Love, **Mildred White**

Dear **Melanie Standifer** (Manager COB/TPL, Medicaid and Long-term Care, Lincoln):

I am an attorney practicing in Omaha. I have represented numerous clients who have been injured in automobile accidents.

I'm writing regarding one of your extraordinary employees.

Mr. **Emil Spicka** (Medical Claims Investigator, Medicaid and Long-term Care) has been an excellent employee for your organization as long as I have been practicing law in my own office since 1998. He quickly and immediately responds to any requests for information. He is diligent and he has the ability to help resolve any problems or concerns immediately. In other words, Mr. Spicka is an excellent employee and a great representative for your organization. Please commend Mr. Spicka on the excellent service he provides on behalf of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services.

Thank you!

**Cris Henry** (Social Service Supervisor, Medicaid and Long-term Care, Omaha),

I have received a lot of positive feedback from our Medicaid clients on **Anita Hagerty's** (Social Service Worker, Papillion) quick response to correspondence and application processing.

Assigning facilities with a direct contact was a great decision and we feel fortunate to have Anita as our contact.

Have a great day,

**Hillcrest Health Services**



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

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