

# Connections

Volume 8, Issue 2

Winner of the National Public Health Information Coalition's Gold Award

February 2008

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



Why are these familiar folks trudging through the State Capitol? Turn the page to find out! *Photo: Bill Wiley*

## Highlights . . .



From the CEO ..... page 3

Children and Family Kickoff

Conference ..... page 4

Sandwich Generation ..... page 5

Medicaid Front Liners ..... page 6

Way to Go!/ICE..... page 7

Helpful Tips ..... page 8

Special Observances ..... page 9

"In Their Own Words" ..... page 10

"Happenings"..... page 11

# DHHS in the News Update . . .

A small sample of news releases recently issued by Communications & Legislative Services about DHHS programs. A full text of all releases is available under "Newsroom" on the DHHS Web site listed below.

*Heating help! Coping with tragic mall shootings! State employee wellness!*

Just a few of the 25 media releases (some statewide, some localized) about DHHS programs issued in December 2007. Here are a few headlines of news releases DHHS sent to media in January 2008:

- **DHHS Unveils New Strategic Direction for Children and Adolescent Behavioral Health** January 4
- **DHHS: Test Your Home for Radon** January 8
- **Heads Up! Flu on the Rise, Says DHHS** January 24

You can check recent releases by going to the DHHS Website at [www2.dhhs.ne.gov/](http://www2.dhhs.ne.gov/), clicking on the "Newsroom" link and then on "News Releases." You can also listen to "sound bites" issued with releases by going to [www.dhhs.ne.gov/audio/](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/audio/).

Have a story idea you think DHHS should be sharing with media? Contact Communications & Legislative Services at (402) 471-9108!

## *make the connection . . .*

DHHS External Web site: <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov>

DHHS Intranet (Internal): <http://www2.dhhs.ne.gov>

DHHS System Advocate: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at [diana.duran@dhhs.ne.gov](mailto:diana.duran@dhhs.ne.gov)

*Connections* is published monthly for employees of the Nebraska Health and Human Services System by Communications and Legislative Services (CLS).

Governor:  
DHHS Chief Executive Officer:  
Behavioral Health Division Director:  
Children and Family Services Division Director:  
Developmental Disabilities Division Director:  
Medicaid and Long-Term Care Division Director:  
Public Health Division Director/Chief Medical Officer:  
Veterans' Homes Division Director:  
CLS Administrator:  
Editor:  
Graphics and Layout, Support Services:

**Dave Heineman**  
**Chris Peterson**  
**Scot Adams, Ph.D.**  
**Todd Landry**  
**John Wyvill**  
**Vivianne Chaumont**  
**Dr. Joann Schaefer**  
**John Hilgert**  
**Kathie Osterman**  
**Jerry Crisp**  
**Maisun Allahiq**  
**Judy Barker**

► **Readers are invited to submit news, photos & story ideas to the editor via:**

**Phone:** (402) 471-3995 **Fax:** (402) 471-3996 **Email:** [jerry.crisp@dhhs.ne.gov](mailto:jerry.crisp@dhhs.ne.gov)

**Interagency mail:** Nebraska State Office Bldg. 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor U.S. mail: P.O. Box 95026, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-5026

*Connections* can be made available in an alternative format for those with disabilities. Requests will be filled within 15 working days. Prior consent has been obtained for this publication to identify and publish photos of all individuals receiving DHHS services.



printed on recycled paper

## About the cover



**WALKING FOR WELLNESS:** Governor Dave Heineman and Dr. Joann Schaefer lead more than 75 state employees through the State Capitol on January 10 during the Governor's Walk for Wellness. Dr. Schaefer, the state's Chief Medical Officer and Director of the DHHS Division of Public Health, handed out apples to emphasize healthy eating as well as exercise. Dignitaries joining in included Lt. Gov. Rick Sheehy, State Senators Tim Gay, Patrick Engel, Tony Fulton, Kent Rogert, John Nelson, and Norm Wallman and State Treasurer Shane Osborn. The aim of the 30-minute walk was part of an ongoing effort to enhance awareness of wellness in our state, starting with state employees.

The Walk for Wellness also promoted the 2008 N-Lighten Nebraska challenge. The N-Lighten program was developed several years ago by the Nebraska Sports Council, which also sponsors the Cornhusker State Games. The program's aim is to help co-workers, friends and families be more active, lose weight and develop healthier habits. During the past five years, more than 50,000 Nebraskans have participated. Last year, 140 teams of state workers were part of the program, racking up more than 140,000 physical activity points and shedding more than 1,600 pounds collectively. For more information, please visit

[www.N-LightenNebraska.com](http://www.N-LightenNebraska.com). ☞ □

Photo: Bill Wiley

## From the CEO

Health and human services issues are always of interest because they touch so many people. This means they are also often the basis for legislative bills, and this year is no exception. In fact, the DHHS Legislative Team has identified 172 bills – out of the 469 introduced this year – that could have an impact on our programs and services, and therefore our work.

Each of these bills is reviewed by at least one program area. Some, like LB 759, for example, was reviewed by several. LB 759 changes provisions relating to relabeling and redispensing prescription drugs. It was reviewed by staff in the Divisions of Public Health, Veterans' Homes, and Medicaid and Long-Term Care, because the bill could impact areas in each one of those divisions. It's important that our staff experts, who work with the programs every day, have an opportunity to weigh in on their impact.

This is the second year in the 2007-2008 biennial Legislature, and these bills join about 75 bills carried over from last year that we continue to track.

Joining me on the DHHS Legislative Team are **Bryson Bartels**, **Pat Craycraft** and **Kathie Osterman** from Communications and Legislative Services; **Jodi Fenner** from Legal Services, **Lynn Stone** from Financial Services; and **Bonnie Engel**, my Administrative Assistant.

The team meets with all Directors twice a week while Legislative Committee hearings are held, and once a week after that until the Session is over, to review bills and make decisions on our position and legislative activities.

Each morning during the Session, the Legislative Team, lead by Bryson, meets to review legislative action from the day before. On behalf of the Department, the team coordinates activities with the Governor's Policy Research Office and works with program experts to review bills and amendments, provide recommendations on positions, develop fiscal analysis of bills, advise me and the directors of upcoming hearings, draft testimony and letters, represent the Department at meetings, monitor floor debate, and anything else necessary to keep the process moving.

This is an important process because bills can significantly impact the work of the Department. The Legislative Team pays particular attention to the bills **Governor Heineman** and the Department have had introduced on our behalf. These bills are listed along with the Senator who introduced them:

#### 2007 Bills:

**LB 327 (Speaker Flood**, at request of the Governor) Change provisions relating to child care reimbursement.

**LB 29 (Sen. Friend)** Provide for court orders to direct financially able parents to pay for costs of care for state wards.

**LB 280 (Sen. Stuthman)** Provide for jurisdiction over custody proceedings of juveniles as prescribed.

**LB 599 (Sen. Aguilar)** Provide for process for HHSS Vital Statistics involving gestational surrogates.

#### 2008 Bills:

**LB 782 (Sen. Howard**, at request of the Governor) Allow disclosure of child abuse and neglect information.

**LB 749 (Sen. Stuthman)** Provide for electronic application submission and a civil penalty for manufactured homes.

**LB 796 (Sen. Johnson)** Change radiography and Radiation Control Act provisions.

**LB 797 (Health and Human Services**



**Chris Peterson**,  
DHHS Chief Executive Officer

Committee) Change provisions relating to health and human services—Clean-up Bill.

**LB 847 (Sen. Erdman)** Provide for notice of appointment of personal representative to DHHS.

**LB 882 (Sen. Johnson)** Change provisions relating to prescription medication of indigent persons.

**LB 906 (Sen. Pankonin)** Change provisions relating to laboratories regulated by DHHS.

**LB 1084 (Speaker Flood)** Change provisions relating to assault of an officer.

**LB 1120 (Sen. Johnson)** Change exempt provisions under the Nebraska Health Care Certificate of Need Act.

The list of bills we're tracking from the 2007-2008 Sessions can be found in the DHHS Lotus Yellow Pages under "Applications in Lotus Notes." This gives the status of each bill as it moves through the Legislative Process.

If you have any questions about the process or specific bills, you can contact Bryson Bartels, DHHS Legislative Coordinator, at (402) 471-0541.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Peterson".

# Kickoff Conference marks beginning of new Children & Family Services review

By Jeanne Atkinson

Over 140 people met for the kickoff conference for Nebraska's federal Children and Family Services Review (CFSR). This was the official start to the State's self-assessment, due in May 2008, and the federal on-site review set for July 2008. This will be the state's second CFSR; the first was in 2003.

**Todd Landry** set the tone for the day by saying that he hoped participants go back to their work areas thinking, "Today is the day we'll help a child, today is the day we'll help a family live a better life." Landry is director of the Department's Division of Children and Family Services.

The meeting generated energy and enthusiasm for changing the child welfare system, and helped identify people willing to stay involved in the CFSR process and actively engage in longer-term systemic reform.

"It's remarkable that so many people want to help us get ready for the review of our state's child welfare system outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being," said Landry. "Over 40 people made a commitment at the kick-off to work with us to improve services and outcomes for children and families, and I know more will join in as we move forward."

Landry shared his belief that DHHS can achieve success with children and families and the CFSR outcomes, and that we can't do it alone.

Information from the day's 10 breakout sessions will be used in writing the statewide assessment. Participants will meet again to review information from the state's quality assurance team, review surveys of youth and others connected to child welfare, and serve as focus groups.

Participants included **Governor Dave Heineman**, Chief Justice **Mike Heavican**, state senators **Tim Gay** and **Gwen Howard**, DHHS staff and representatives from Child Advocacy Centers, Tribes, family organizations, CASA, the Foster Care Review Board, Voices for Children, providers, other advocates, the Governor's Office, the Legislature, Region VII federal HHS, Administration for Children and Families, Child Welfare League of America, and National Resource Centers for Organizational Improvement and Child Welfare and Data Technology. ∞



(Above) Todd Landry, on right, shares a laugh with Governor Dave Heineman, center, Supreme Court Chief Justice Mike Heavican and the audience at the November kickoff conference in Lincoln. (Below) Mary McGee (at left), Senator Gwen Howard and Margaret Bitz with the Division of Children & Family Services discuss the upcoming review. McGee is with the federal Region VII Administration for Children and Families. Photos: Jeanne Atkinson



## *Good Things Are Happening!*

Nebraska is meeting the National Standard for Safety (absence of maltreatment) for children in foster care. As of September 30, 2007, Nebraska was at 99.8% (national standard is 99.4%).

*Division of Children & Family Services employees helped make this progress possible!*

# Taking care of the "Sandwich Generation"

By Marla Augustine

Many DHHS employees are members of the "Sandwich Generation"—those sandwiched between aging parents and their own children.

Kids, of course, are a major challenge. Their day-to-day needs must be met. But becoming a caretaker to parents adds to those stressors—physically, emotionally, socially and financially.

Learning to cope with these challenges in a healthy way is important to ensure that you keep your equilibrium.

You may find yourself feeling trapped and guilty as you try to juggle the multiple demands, stresses and responsibilities.

This can tax your marriage, job, relationship with your children and financial security. Be on the lookout for signs of stress and burnout. These symptoms may include depression, constant fatigue, poor concentration, hostility, low self-esteem and/or physical illness.

"Recognize when you are wearing down and then take action to replenish yourself. The first step in wellness is to adopt new lifestyle habits that will increase emotional resilience," said Dr.

**Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer. "Reduce stress, eat right and exercise, be sure to get enough sleep, and don't be afraid to ask for help."

"Maintaining good mental health is as important as maintaining good physical health," said **Scot Adams**, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health. "It's important to seek help from others to reduce your stress level."

So what can a caregiver do in the face of multiple demands?

- **RECOGNIZE** that you don't have to shoulder the burden alone. It's OK to ask for help and admit that caregiving for parents is tougher than you expected. Reach out to other family members, as well as neighbors and friends, for help.
- **JOIN** a caregivers group where you can share ideas, information, concerns and support. This can be invaluable. A caregivers group can also help you develop skills such



Scot Adams, Behavioral Health Director, and Dr. Joann Schaefer, Chief Medical Officer and Public Health Director.  
Photo: Bill Wiley

as stress management and teach you how to express your feelings.

- **CONTACT** the Employee Assistance Program for advice. They can help you cope with your stress. Their number is 1-800-666-8606.
- **SHARE** with your supervisor what you are going through, so that they can understand your situation.
- **GET IN TOUCH** with your local Area Agency on Aging Office. They can help with information about possible financial assistance and offer referrals for aging parents.

---

## *Good Things Are Happening!*

The Office of Consumer Affairs in the Division of Behavioral Health is developing a statewide network of mental health consumers. Consumer Affairs staff facilitated hiring Consumer Specialists in the six Behavioral Health Regions to provide peer support. Approximately 40 consumers are now trained to help behavioral health consumers around the state figure out needed supports and develop a personal action plan.

*This statewide network enhances chances for consumers to live successfully in their communities!*

---

Being a member of the Sandwich Generation has its upside. Caregiving can be demanding. But the interaction of three generations can benefit your family. It can bridge the gaps among generations, lead to better understanding and strengthen family ties. ☺ □

# Front Liners

There are thousands of stories to be told about DHHS employees who deliver direct customer services that *help people live better lives*. This is only one of them.

By Jerry Crisp

Ever have one of those days where the phone seems to jump off the hook all day long? For the folks who answer the Medicaid Inquiry Line, that's nothing more than a typical day!

Five DHHS employees work the Medicaid Inquiry Line to answer questions on a statewide, toll-free phone line from providers and clients regarding claim status, client eligibility and provider payments. Literally on the 'front lines' for questions about Medicaid claims, they each answer calls from 50 to 100 times a day, depending on phone traffic.

Previously only available on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays until 2001, the Medicaid Inquiry Line has been full-time ever since. According to supervisor **Bob Kane**, the highest number of weekly phone calls taken in 2007 was 2,286, with an annual total of 95,561.

"There are times when our call volume may rise dramatically," Kane says. "But we strive to provide helpful and accurate information in an attentive and courteous manner. Often calls are directed to others in DHHS, who will be able to resolve the situation successfully."

The challenges are many.

"One of the challenges we face is explaining procedures many people might not be familiar with," says **Heather Richey**. "That challenge is complicated when working through a translator with clients for whom English is a second language, but it's all part of customer service."

"Sometimes distressed callers want immediate answers, but we must refer them to someone else for a final decision," says **Eric Bachenberg**. "The pressure is really on when you're doing your best and you know there are many calls on



Medicaid Inquiry Line operators (l-r) Sarah Lacey, Eric Bachenberg, Layla Lamborn, supervisor Bob Kane, Joyce Dingledine and Heather Richey.

Photo: Jerry Crisp

---

*"Inquiry Line staff are definitely on the front lines, and our job is to provide customers with the right answers or refer them to the right place for those answers."*

*Layla Lamborn, Medicaid Inquiry staff*

---

hold waiting for you."

"Inquiry Line staff are definitely on the front lines, and our job is to provide customers with the right answers or refer them to the right place for those answers," says Staff Assistant **Layla Lamborn**. "Customer problems offer both our biggest challenges and, when we've served them well, our biggest rewards."

"Whenever I can inform or clarify something for a caller, I know that I've made their day a little better," says **Joyce**

**Dingledine**. "When that happens, then it's been a good day for me, too."

"I enjoy speaking with providers from around the state, and feel good when I receive positive feedback," says **Sarah Lacey**. "It makes me feel that I've done a good job when people express their appreciation of my services."

"It's a fast-paced and challenging task, and I'm proud of the efforts of Inquiry Line staff to provide answers and assistance to our customers," says Bob Kane. □

□

# Way to Go!

Statewide or national recognitions, awards, honors

## UN-L Extension honors three

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Extension recently recognized DHHS and employees from three Divisions with its Excellence in Team Programming Award: **Mary Gordon**, Program Administrator for the Developmental Disabilities Planning Council in Public Health; **Carol Lieske**, recently retired Program Manager for Adult Protective Services in Medicaid and Long Term-Care; and **René Ferdinand**, former Community-based Services Section Administrator in Developmental Disabilities (DD). The award pays tribute to their contributions as members of the Guardianship Training Team and its writing committee.

The Team designed the curriculum to be used by Extension agents around the state for people who have been named as guardians for the elderly, children and people with physical or mental disabilities. Many county judges require appointed guardians to take this one-day course, approved by the Nebraska Supreme Court and taught by volunteer attorneys from the Nebraska State Bar Association. ♪



Mary Gordon (l) and Carol Lieske. Photo: Jerry Crisp

## ICE can be a lifesaver: Saving lives one cell phone at a time

By Dianna Seiffert

We all know who we'd call in an emergency, but what if we were injured and unable to dial a phone? How would medical or emergency service workers know who to contact for us?

Ice in winter in Nebraska is one thing, but it means something completely different when a medical or emergency service worker finds ICE ("In Case of Emergency") on your cell phone.

"Adding an ICE contact along with a name and telephone number will help ambulance crews and police officers contact your family or friends in the event of an emergency," said **Barbara Thomas**, Executive Director of the Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission, which administers the State Citizen Corps community preparedness program. "Family or friends can then help emergency workers by providing vital

information, including details of any medical conditions."

The way to start is to ask potential contacts for their agreement and advise them about any medical conditions (allergies, current medications, etc.) that could affect your emergency treatment. Be sure to use ICE listings who are easy to contact—a home phone number could be useless in an emergency if the person works full time!

Then here's how ICE works:

- Type the acronym ICE followed by a contact name (for example, ICE – mom, or ICE – David) into the address book on your mobile phone.
- Enter and save the phone number and other contact information.
- Give your ICE contact an updated list of people to call on your behalf in an emergency, including your place of work.

You might also want to have your children designate ICE contacts in their cell phones. For children under 18, their ICE contact should be a parent or guardian authorized to make decisions on their behalf.

The Nebraska Volunteer Service Commission's Citizen Corps Program has developed a flyer promoting the ICE cell phone program. Limited copies are available by calling the Citizen Corps Program Officer, **Dennis Fowler**, at (402) 471-6226. Another option is to download the flyer from the Citizen Corps page of the Commission's Web site at [http://www.nvsc.ne.gov/content/cit\\_menu.html](http://www.nvsc.ne.gov/content/cit_menu.html).

"The 'In Case of Emergency' designation helps turn cell phones into lifelines," said Thomas. "When medical workers can reach family and friends quickly, it can help to speed up treatment, and that can be a major benefit to the injured person!" ♪ □

# Wellness Words: Think HEALTH



## Move more!

Make it a challenge to move your body, even if it's just up one flight of stairs. Walk your dog; chase your kids; mow the lawn; vacuum the floors. Anything that moves your limbs is a fitness step and a stress buster.

It doesn't have to be 45 minutes of jogging or an hour of aerobic exercise. Just think: Cha, cha, cha... ☺

*Dr. Joann Schaefer*  
Chief Medical Officer

## For What It's Worth



*A friendly tip from a  
DHHS*

*co-worker you might be able to  
use:*

To really listen to someone, we can't be consumed with what we want to say next. If we're formulating a response, we are listening with only one ear and can't process all of the information that enables us to fully understand someone else's meaning.

Refusing to formulate responses until the other person has finished talking is something we have to make happen and requires daily practice. But this conscious daily effort pays a double dividend by

making us better listeners and making our responses to what others say more responsive! ☺

## Personal Preparedness!

While many work behind the scenes to help residents of Nebraska and our nation be better prepared for emergencies, here's something you can do to be better prepared yourself!

Emergencies come in many different forms. Sometimes Mother Nature can cause the most severe ones.

According to the National Weather Service, each year Americans cope with an average of 10,000 thunderstorms, 5,000 floods, 1,000 tornadoes, and six deadly hurricanes. Severe weather can happen anytime with little or no warning, and you might need to act quickly.

By following three steps, you can help make you and your family better prepared to handle emergencies like severe weather.

**1. Talk with your family about emergencies, and make a plan.** Think about things like who you would contact during an emergency and how you would reach them.

**2. Make an emergency supply kit.** Such supplies would include clothes, radio or TV, flashlight, first aid supplies, prescription medications, canned food and water.

**3. Stay informed.** Listen to your radio and TV for changing weather conditions and the latest storm watches and warnings.

Know where you would take shelter if a storm threatens – no matter where you are. Office buildings and schools have shelter and evacuation plans. Learn what those plans are.

For more information on severe weather preparedness, go to the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency's Web site at [www.nema.ne.gov](http://www.nema.ne.gov). ☺

## Customer Service Tip



Being willing to apologize can result in good will. It doesn't have to mean admitting failure or fault. An apology can simply be a sincere regret that a person is unhappy or frustrated. If a person expects to get an apology and won't settle for anything less, expressing that regret is not just a good idea but maybe even necessary to a satisfactory resolution.

## Worth Considering...

*Most of the important things in the world have been accomplished by people who have kept on trying when there seemed to be no hope at all.*

**Dale Carnegie**

---

If you have a tip to share with DHHS co-workers across the state, send it to *Connections* by any means listed in the editorial box on page 2.



# March Observances

## Problem Gambling Month



- Gambling for longer than you planned to.
- Having made repeated attempts to stop gambling.
- Gambling until you've lost your last dollar.

Fortunately, a problem gambler doesn't need to wait to hit bottom before asking for help, and many people who seek help do recover. A single phone call to the 24-hour toll-free helpline at 1-800-522-4700 can provide the information to make a difference in someone's life.

For more information contact **Eric Hunsberger** at (402) 471-7822. ☎

## Mental Retardation Awareness Month

In Nebraska, approximately 4,800 individuals with developmental

disabilities receive DHHS funding for supports in their home communities. DHHS also operates the Beatrice State Developmental Center, a 24-hour facility serving approximately 319 persons with developmental disabilities.

Mental retardation and related developmental disabilities are not diseases, nor should they be confused with mental illness. They begin before the age of 22 and significantly affect both intellectual functioning and behavior. Causes of mental retardation and other developmental disabilities include genetic conditions; or problems during the mother's pregnancy, labor, or birth; and health problems such as disease, malnutrition or exposure to poisons.

For more information, go to [www.dhhs.ne.gov/dip/dipindex.htm](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/dip/dipindex.htm), and click on Developmental Disabilities. ☎

A preoccupation with gambling may cause some people to risk more than money. They may be gambling away their health, happiness and their family's welfare. Estimates show that over 41,000 Nebraskans will experience problem gambling behaviors in the coming year. Signs of a gambling problem include:

- Having thoughts of gambling that caused you to lose sleep.

## Dispelling myths about colorectal cancer

*By Jennifer Dunavan,  
DHHS Nebraska CARES*

**MYTH:** Only men get colorectal cancer.

**TRUTH:** Colorectal cancer is the 2nd most common cause of cancer death among men and women.

**MYTH:** Colorectal cancer is not preventable.

**TRUTH:** Regular screening can detect colorectal cancer in its early stages or identify colorectal polyps (a small growth in the colon) before they become cancerous.

**MYTH:** Physical symptoms accompany colorectal cancer.

**TRUTH:** People with colorectal cancer often do not have outward symptoms that something is wrong. If you do have unusual pain, bleeding, change in bowel habits or unexplained weight loss, schedule an appointment with your health care provider.

**MYTH:** One screening test is better than another.

**TRUTH:** The best test is the one that gets done. Talk to your provider if a colonoscopy, sigmoidoscopy, or fecal occult blood test is right for you. Screening should begin at age 50, or earlier if there is a family history of colorectal cancer.

For more information about colorectal cancer, contact **Jennifer Dunavan** at (402) 471-0505. ☎

## Nominations for Governor's Affirmative Action/Diversity Awards open soon

Nomination material will soon be available for the 2008 Governor's Affirmative Action Awards. These awards honor outstanding achievements in affirmative action and diversity by state employees and teams throughout Nebraska.

"This is your unique opportunity to recognize and reward your co-workers and work teams for their hard work and dedication to diversity in the workplace," said **Charles Roberson**, Affirmative Action Specialist with State Personnel.

The Governor's Affirmative Action Awards program began in 2001 as a way for the State Affirmative Action Committee to recognize employees, departments, divisions, and teams demonstrating leadership in promoting the state's equal employment opportunity and affirmative action efforts.

For additional information, visit the Website at: <http://www.das.state.ne.us/personnel/aa/> or contact Charles Roberson at [charles.roberson@nebraska.gov](mailto:charles.roberson@nebraska.gov) or 402-471-3678. Updated nomination forms will be available in March. ☎

# *In their own words . . .*

Letters to HHSS employees who are helping people live better lives

Dear **Dave Kreutzer** (Director of Social Work, Grand Island Veterans' Home):

My mother is a member at the Veterans' Home in Grand Island. As I live in California and am so far away, I worry about mom. **Brenda Paro** (Social Worker, DHSS Grand Island office) has eased my worries significantly. Her level of professionalism and helpfulness goes way above and beyond. She could sure teach the Social Workers in California a thing or two about service delivery.

**Jack Trew**  
Selma, California

Dear **Christine Mead** (Protection & Safety Worker, DHHS Lincoln office):

I just wanted to send a note to thank you for your encouragement and for everything you have done these past months. I also want to apologize for those dark days when emotions overtook our senses...I finally have peace in my heart, and I know there are sunny days ahead!

...You are a special lady who is a wonderful role model, who inspires and empowers children to succeed in life. Keep up the good work, and again thanks for all of your support.

**A family member of a Lincoln service recipient**

Dear **Joanne Baier** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Wayne office):

Thank you so much for your professional help over the years with my mother and her sister. Your patience and thoughtfulness have always been appreciated, and you helped both to have comfortable, rewarding lives until the very end.

**A family member of a Wayne area service recipient**

While *Connections* receives more letters from satisfied customers than we can ever publish, please send letters via any method listed in our editorial box on page 2, and we'll print as many as space allows.

# Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state

**BAGS OF LOVE:** (left to right) Lincolnites **Lucille Schwark** and **Barbara Burton** recently received the Governor's "Points of Light" Award, recognizing volunteers who give their time, talent and energy to help Nebraskans build stronger communities. These friends have volunteered for DHHS for three years and decided to provide a gift of love to children removed from their parents' care and placed into foster homes. After learning that children often



come to foster homes with only the clothing on their backs, they initially decided to make quilts but wanted to do more. Word spread and businesses and organizations began donating funding and goods that resulted in "bags of love."

Barbara and Lucille used donations to buy toys and sundries for the children. The need became so great that they found an apartment in which to keep supplies. Hundreds of bags are given away annually to children throughout the Southeast Service Area.

*Photo: Eike Marthaler*

**STUDENT VOLUNTEERS:** Also recognized at the Governor's "Points of Light" awards were student volunteers from the College View Academy in Lincoln. They have come to the local DHHS office twice yearly for about seven years ready to do whatever is asked of them. They assist by filing, cleaning out files, stuffing packets and even cleaning break room refrigerators. The students come in groups of 15 to 20 and work approximately four hours. "They provide



quite a gift to DHHS and restore my faith in today's youth," says Resource Developer **Pat Pittman**. "DHHS staff miss them as soon as they leave and often ask when they will return." Shown left to right are, Principal **David Branun**, **Page Hornby**, **Governor Dave Heineman**, **Seth Gaskin** and Nebraska's First Lady, **Sally Ganem**.

*Photo: John Treolo*

If you have a photo of a DHHS activity you'd like to share with co-workers across the state, contact *Connections* by any method listed in the editorial box on page 2, and we'll print as many as space allows.

# Turkish Guest

**Dr. Hulya Sirin** (center), newly appointed by the Ministry of Health in Turkey to head up their newborn screening program, recently visited the U.S. to learn how it's done here. After spending two weeks in Texas with the National Newborn Screening Center, Dr. Sirin spent a month with DHHS, followed by a week in Atlanta at the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

"It's pretty flattering that she spent most of her time here in Nebraska," says **Julie Miller**, who manages the DHHS newborn screening program, shown (far left) with Dr. Sirin and **Dr. Joann**



**Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health. *Photo: Mike Wight*

*HHSS employees should be proud of themselves and each other. If you earn statewide or national recognition or know a co-worker who does, let Connections know, and we'll proclaim it here!*

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



P.O. Box 95026  
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-5026

25-78-00

PRSRT STD  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
LINCOLN NE  
PERMIT 212