

CONNECTIONS

January 2015 VOLUME 15, ISSUE 1

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

You Spoke, We're Listening... 2014 Employee Survey Results

*By Alex Garcia, Administrator,
Human Resources and Development*

What ever happened to the employee survey I took in 2014? Great question! More than 2,800 of you spoke, and we're listening.

I wanted to wait to publish the results of the 2014 survey until our Statistical Analyst came on board, a person very important to this process, and thought that, really, it's never too late to share the valuable information we collected.

The results of the 2014 survey are especially important because it provides the fourth year of data we need to be able to start trending results and provide additional direction for future surveys. Overall, the satisfaction results were 3.72 (out of 5), compared to 3.39 in 2011, 3.73 in 2012, and 3.80 in 2013. In 2013, we peaked in almost all categories as a result of the Serving People with Excellence program which was specifically designed to address some of the low ratings in the previous

years. The slight decreases in the 2014 survey compared to the 2013 survey may be a result of the large volume of changes in DHHS over the last year and no major efforts to focus on low ratings from the previous survey. There were still some significant increases in the 2014 ratings compared to our 2011 baseline survey.

You spoke and we're listening... to what you feel are our highest rated areas. Over the last four years, DHHS has consistently scored high in areas such as: I have pride in my work; I can be counted on to follow through on promises and commitments; and, I fulfill my responsibilities even when obstacles arise. This clearly shows we enjoy the nature of work we do and have personal satisfaction in our jobs.

You have also spoke and we're listening as you consistently identified areas for improvement. The lowest ranked areas all four years were: Communication is clear; It is safe to voice my opinion; and, It is safe to be open and honest at work. Although the scores were the lowest, there were still increases in these ratings from the 2011 baseline survey. We are

heading in the right direction, but there is still work to be done.

It should be no surprise that communication issues received low marks in all of our surveys. Many large companies, especially those as diverse as DHHS, have this same challenge. That doesn't mean it is an acceptable norm or that we shouldn't do anything about it.

You spoke, we're listening... and are taking action! It is one thing to conduct surveys, but it's another to do something with the information you gather. Senior DHHS leaders agreed to support efforts to address and improve our organization's communication. We are developing a strategic communication plan to help identify gaps in communication and to create and/or enhance current programs to fill those gaps.

One enhancement already taking place relates to supervisor training. Supervisors have an important role in influencing our organizational culture and leading our workforce. Supervisor training provided by Staff Development is good, but we are making it even better.

These changes (that we'll talk about more in future issues of *Connections*), will help us directly address the low ranked areas in our employee survey.

I can't overemphasize the importance we place on finding out what really matters to our employees and to understand how they are feeling about our organization, their work centers, and their supervisors.

So...we're listening, and we encourage you to keep on speaking.



For more detailed information concerning the 2014 employee survey results, contact your [human resources' representative](#).

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make the connection . . .

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

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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

Showing a Spirit of Giving

Throughout the year, but especially during the holiday season, DHHS employees showed their creativity, their generosity, and their general spirit of giving by donating to various charitable organizations. All the [Charitable Giving stories](#) featured in Neat to Know are in one place on the employee website. Featured below are just a few of the many stories showing that the spirit of giving is alive and well at DHHS.

Collecting and Sending Holiday Cards to Show How much We Care, Dec. 8, 2014

DHHS employees from the Southeast Service Area in the Adult Protective Services unit collected unused Christmas and holiday cards from coworkers in the service area. More than 1,000 cards were collected which is an overwhelming response!

Andi Carpenter, Child/Family Services Specialist, Lincoln, said, "We wanted to give Christmas and holiday cards to residents in various nursing homes and assisted living facilities in our service area. The hope is to give cards to those



who may not receive any for the holidays. We're giving the cards anonymously, signed only as from "Santa's Helper." Cards were given to various facilities in Nebraska City, Beatrice, Crete and Lincoln."

IS&T's Suite 350 Staff Donate Gifts and Food for People in Need, Dec. 12, 2014

DHHS employees in IS&T's Suite 350 in the Golds Building got into the holiday spirit by adopting a family of six from the People's City Mission and a group from an Assisted Living Facility for the holiday season. Suite 350 includes CHARTS, 24-hour facilities, MMIS and General Solutions.

Pam Farrens, IS&T, Lincoln, said, "I wanted to give a sincere 'Thank You' to all who bought gifts, raised additional money through jeans days, donated to the Lincoln Food Bank and were always available when I needed help."

YRTC-K Employees Donate 193 Pounds of Food to Those in Need, Dec. 15, 2014

Staff at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Kearney collected and donated food to the Salvation Army.

Arron Adams, Youth Counselor, YRTC-K, said, "Youth from the C1 area delivered all the food collected from our recent food drive to the Salvation Army. It was 193 pounds in total! The boys were shocked when they saw the stack of food that YRTC-K employees donated. They were also surprised to see the Salvation

Army food bank. At first the boys thought there was a lot of food at the food bank, but when they thought about it some more, one youth said this really isn't much food for everyone who needs it."

"Thank you to everyone who donated to the YRTC food drive and to all who have given to different charities over the holidays. It is a great teaching moment for these young men to learn citizenship."

Fremont Customer Service Center's Team Campos Adopts a Senior for the Holidays, Dec 19, 2014

Susan Campos, Social Service Supervisor, Fremont Customer Service Center, said, "For our team's holiday project we participated in "Be a Santa for a Senior." We "adopted" a man named James age 72. We completed all his requests and were able to buy a few more gifts for another senior in our area. The presents were dropped off for a wrapping party at the local Senior Center and then they will be delivered to the seniors in need. The team really enjoyed helping fulfill holiday wishes for James!"





A Note from...
Dr. Joe Acierno,
Director of Public
Health and Acting CEO

Welcome 2015. It's a new year and a time of transition at DHHS.

I'm proud of our DHHS team. I know we're all stepping up and doing our part to keep the agency running smoothly, and I deeply appreciate your efforts.

I see my role as acting CEO as a bridge to the future. My goal is to maintain continuity within DHHS until the next CEO is appointed and to give him or her and our new directors a solid foundation to build from. **John Hilgert** (Director, Division of Veterans' Homes) and I will work together to educate members of the new administration about the agency and what we do to help people live better lives.

I have confidence that our acting directors will do a fine job until new directors are appointed.

As more pieces fall into place and positions are filled, I'll be sure to share that information with you.

In the meantime, keep up the good work!

Questions about the 2015 Legislative Session? Find Answers Here!

The first session of Nebraska's 104th Legislature is in full swing. At 90 days, this one is known as a "long" session compared with the 60-day sessions held in even-numbered years.

[Tentative 2015 Session Calendar](#)

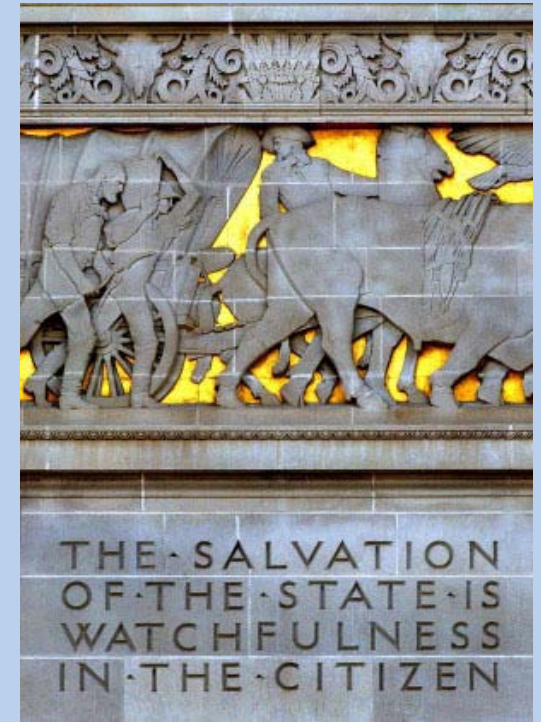
[2015 List of Senators](#)

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 site of the Nebraska Unicameral Legislature](#).

Want to know more about the DHHS legislative process and the bills we are tracking? It's all [here](#).

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.



Spirit of the Pioneers, North entrance of the Nebraska State Capitol building

A Day in the Life of... Sue Dempsey, Health Risk Assessor and Toxicologist

by Ashley Hartman

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This “Day in the Life” series highlights DHHS employees and how we help people live better lives in different ways, through diverse jobs, across the state, every day. The following story is only one of many positive stories about DHHS employees to be told. If you’d like to be featured in our “Day in the Life” series, email Ashley Hartman, public information officer, at ashley.hartman@nebraska.gov or call her at 402-471-9108.
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“It’s not about insurance.”

Sue Dempsey says that a lot. She has to. Her job title – health risk assessor and toxicologist at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services – inspires a bit of confusion.

“When people see ‘assessor’ they think of insurance,” she said.

But despite the word “assessor” in her job title and the misconceptions that arise because of it – Dempsey’s job doesn’t require her to deal with insurance. Instead, Dempsey spends her days protecting people from contaminants in the environment.

As the only health risk assessor at the state, Dempsey analyzes data she gets from samples of water, soil, and air and, based on this data, she makes exposure and risk calculations. These calculations help determine whether the levels of contaminants present in the samples could potentially pose health risks to the public.

A big part of Dempsey’s job is explaining health risks to people and letting them know what they need to do

to stay healthy. Dempsey said she does this type of risk communication every day and she enjoys it.

“I like condensing technical information and explaining it in terms that make sense to people so they can walk away from our conversation and say, ‘Oh that makes sense. That’s why they’re doing that,’” she said.

She said some of the first questions people ask when there is an environmental concern are: “Does the health department know about this?” and “What is being done to protect public health?”

Having the health risk assessor housed at DHHS helps relieve that concern for people. They know that the state is considering how the environmental concern could affect people’s health and they’re working to address it.

Though Dempsey works with a variety of environmental concerns, she always has one common goal: protecting people’s health.

In her 22 years at DHHS, Dempsey has kept that focus, despite how her job has changed over time.

Initially Dempsey started off as a health risk assessor doing Superfund Risk Assessments for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Superfund sites are described by the EPA as “uncontrolled or abandoned places where hazardous waste is located, possibly affecting local ecosystems or people.”

In addition to her work with hazardous waste sites, Dempsey’s job has evolved to include working with an

inter-agency group to issue annual fish consumption advisories and addressing citizen concerns associated with toxic algae alerts at Nebraska water bodies.

Dempsey also helps the Drinking Water Program determine if chemical additives (sometimes proprietary chemicals), for use in cooling systems, have the potential to impact drinking water.

To ensure she’s ready to handle a wide variety of environmental concerns, Dempsey stays up to date on the latest industry techniques by interacting with colleagues from other states. She is one of two original co-chairs of the State Risk Assessors committee, which was formed in 2011 by the EPA. The group’s goal is to ensure its members stay current with the latest science, federal regulation and approaches to addressing environmental risk assessment and toxicology.

Dempsey also keeps current by working with a variety of different agencies. In fact, most of her projects require her to work with other agencies or departments. In many cases, these agencies send her data to analyze and she gives them feedback about the level of contaminants and their possible threat to public health. In some cases Dempsey takes these samples herself. And in the case of former meth labs, Dempsey oversees the regulation and monitoring of these properties by working with local health departments, law enforcement and property owners.

Working with former meth labs is a



Sue Dempsey

relatively new part of Dempsey’s job, but some of the environmental concerns she deals with are decidedly old.

“Some people don’t realize that a lot of contaminants that go into ground water stay there for many years, so right now we’re cleaning up stuff from the 1950s and 1960s,” she said.

“I don’t think people realize all of the things the Environmental Health Unit deals with. I think there are a lot of issues that other people in DHHS deal with that we could help answer questions about,” she said.

Visit the [Environmental Health Risk Assessment Program](#) of Public Health website to learn more about Dempsey’s program and how it could affect the work you do for DHHS.

The Importance of Leading From the Front

by Tary Paris,
*Person-Centered Care Coordinator,
Lincoln Regional Center*

Everyone is capable of leadership! Not all leaders are supervisors. Where there are leaders, there are followers, and with that comes responsibility.

Effective leaders lead their teams from the front. They are role models and mentors. Leaders teach more than they tell, and they pay knowledge forward without hoarding information. Effective leaders stand in front of their teams and demonstrate the organization's desired norms.

Effective leaders ask the questions that lead to mutual and supported decision making. They are life-long learners: they are inquisitive, curious, want to know more and seek new information. They ensure the organization's managers have the tools they need to successfully practice their jobs. This support helps managers direct their own teams.

Staff look to their leaders for guidelines as well as a sense of safety to share their knowledge, experiences and aspirations. Active and regular role modeling is very important to an organization. All can be lost as soon as staff see their leaders behave in a way they don't expect. That can be one-sided as not all the information may be known, so perceptions can run rampant. When they don't know the many sides to each story,

their imaginations can fill in the blanks and gossiping can fuel any fires started. Staff who don't know their leadership or have limited experience with them will not offer the benefits of any doubts, and followership is at risk.

Leaders who visit work areas by making rounds can counteract this effect. Visits can be officially scheduled, or leaders can pop in on a drop-in basis. Staff may respond well to feeling like their voices, thoughts and opinions regarding how they choose to perform their work is heard and appreciated. It gives them the opportunity to share their obstacles or barriers and feel supported while they get to "show off" the pride they have in their department.

Leaders who put themselves "out there" empower staff to step up and achieve more. Leaders can encourage staff to become stakeholders –the "owner-operators" of DHHS that we are, being both taxpayers and state employees.

Making rounds can be rewarding because it can diffuse some bad practices, such as coworkers pressuring others to "not" be over-achievers, implying it makes them look bad by comparison. When leaders listen to their staff in their own areas, they can undo some of the rumors and bad practices that may currently be squelching any future attempts at creative problem solving.

Making rounds provides opportunities to demonstrate how the "walk is talked" by a leader. Supportive leaders encourage their leading staff to do what they already know, but are sometimes hesitant to try. Visiting staff and coworkers role model positive interactions. Rapport can be established. Small-talk and other appropriate social behaviors are demonstrated,

modeling positive interactions between supervisors and staff.

During leadership rounds, names can be learned. After making rounds, leaders can take notes of the key learnings of any unique experiences to report to their senior management to further growth and communication in both directions.



When sunflowers grow, the sunflower heads face and follow the path of the sun. Once sunflowers are fully open, most face east where the sun rises each morning.

Tary Paris painted this sunflower in 2007, on a 24 in. by 36 in. canvas, from a bit of a different perspective. Her sunflower appears to be leading the others and showing the way to the light.

Accountability at Work is a Conscious, Personal Choice

“Once you make a decision, the universe conspires to make it happen.” – Ralph Waldo Emerson

By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources

One of [DHHS' Core Competencies](#) reads:



Demonstrates Responsibility and Accountability:

- Cares for and maintains equipment/facilities
- Conserves supplies and funds
- Takes responsibility and is reliable for completing assigned tasks
- Acknowledges and corrects mistakes
- Adheres to the expectations of their supervisor

Accountability is not something that can be done to us or forced upon us. Accountability is a conscious, personal choice that we make to play our part fully in bringing about the desired results expected of us at DHHS—*helping people live better lives.*

Acting on this personal choice is a way we declare to everyone (most importantly to ourselves) that we choose to carry out our job duties correctly and with integrity, and always with an eye

toward continuous improvement.

Following are ordinary examples of what we can do that make a huge contribution to our culture at work.

Actions we can take to cultivate accountability:

- The personal choice to be accountable for what we do at work is made easier by simply committing ourselves to perpetual awareness of how what we do fits into the big picture. Ask, *“What can I do better to get the result we want? How can I improve on the work that I do?”* Encourage this awareness in others.
- When something goes wrong we can ask ourselves honestly, *“What was my part in this? What can I do differently to prevent this in the future?”*
- Engage coworkers in concrete discussion about how accountability and continuous improvement look and feel in your area. For example, making a conscious decision to follow through on all commitments.



- Be aware of the many choices we make each work day for which we are accountable. For example, how we communicate with coworkers respectfully, in a way that builds mutual respect.

When we practice determined awareness, correct, accountable choices with predictable consequences occur to us with little effort. As with so many other of our behaviors, being accountable can become a habit.

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Please email your thoughts, concerns, or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships to Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov.

Keep Your Brain Young, Get Enough Sleep

As you close your eyes and drift into sleep, your brain springs into action.

Specialized parts of the brain get busy when we sleep. There’s chemical housekeeping to be done, information to be processed, filed, or discarded, and diagnostics to be completed.

Sleep rejuvenates bones, skin, muscles and the brain itself. Researchers at the University of Pennsylvania say there is evidence that chronic sleep deprivation ages brains. A sleep-deprived 20-year-old has a brain that works like a much older person.

Sleep can improve your concentration, sharpen planning and memory skills and maintain fat-burning systems that regulate your weight. But sleep only works well if we get enough of it. How much sleep we need varies between individuals but generally changes as we age. The [National Institutes of Health](#) suggests that, on average, school-age children need at least 10 hours of sleep daily, teens need 9-10 hours, and adults need 7-8 hours.

To improve sleep, the National Sleep Foundation suggests:

- Go to bed at the same time each night and rise at the same time each morning.
- Exercise every day.
- Avoid alcohol, nicotine and heavy meals in the evening.

“We are free to choose our actions, but we are not free to choose the consequences of these actions.”

– Stephen R. Covey

New Websites Help Keep Nebraskans Safe, Healthy

DHHS' Division of Public Health recently launched two new websites with resources to help keep Nebraskans safe and healthy.

Injury Prevention Program



Although injury is the fifth leading cause of death in the state and the leading cause of death for people ages 1-44, most injuries are preventable.

A new website from DHHS' [Injury Prevention Program](#) provides resources on preventing injuries in four priority areas: [prescription drug overdoses](#), [motor vehicle safety](#), [concussions/traumatic brain injuries](#) and [older adult falls](#).

Sleep Safe, Little One

Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) is the sudden, unexplained death of an infant under one year of age and it's the leading cause of death among children aged one month to one year.

The term "SIDS" may sound scary, and the death of a baby is always heartbreaking. But there are a number of ways people can lower a baby's risk of SIDS, and Public Health's [Maternal and Infant Health Program](#) developed a [new website](#) with videos, brochures and other resources on this subject.

Adopting safe sleep habits is one of the most important things people can do for their babies. Research shows that babies sleep safest on their backs in uncluttered cribs. Here are some additional guidelines:

- Always put your baby on his/her back to sleep.
- Use a crib that meets current safety standards. Cover the firm mattress with a fitted sheet.
- Remove anything soft or loose from your baby's sleep space, including pillows, blankets, bumpers and stuffed animals. (Use a Sleep Sack to keep your baby warm.)
- Never place your baby to sleep on a soft surface (bed, cushion, comforter, etc.) or use wedges to position him/her.
- Keep the room temperature comfortable for light clothing to ensure that your baby doesn't get hot during sleep.
- Do not ever fall asleep with your baby in a bed, couch or chair.
- Consider room sharing: Place your baby's safe sleep space near your bed to help you protect him/her and make breastfeeding easier.
- Breastfeed your baby when possible.
- Once nursing is well-established, offer a pacifier when you lay your baby down.

Working Together to Treat Flu and Prevent Complications



By Bill Wiley

Early in January, a veteran at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home in Bellevue was diagnosed as having the flu and other members were demonstrating flu-like symptoms. As a result, a decision was made to provide all members at the ENVH with an anti-viral drug known as Tamiflu as a preventive measure to protect their health before the flu spread throughout the facility. Antiviral drugs can be used to treat flu illness and prevent serious flu complications.

A single call to the Chief Medical Officer's office at DHHS set the process in motion. Input was provided by a DHHS Epidemiology Surveillance Coordinator, the infectious control nurse at the Grand Island Veterans' Home and a community health nurse with the Central District Health Department. At that point the ENVH contacted the Omaha Veterans Affairs Medical Center (OVAMC) to see if Tamiflu could be obtained.

"Within hours of our request the drug was delivered," explained **Thomas Cotton**, M.D., Medical Director at ENVH. "That enabled us to administer the Tamiflu anti-influenza drug to every member before the workday was over. It was a proactive effort to ensure the health and safety of the veterans at the ENVH, and a single phone call initiated a collaborative effort that worked quickly, smoothly and efficiently."

This is a good example of people working together across the Divisions of Public Health and Veterans' Homes and with various federal, state and local agencies to protect our veterans. Way to go to all involved!

Flu activity is currently widespread in Nebraska, and the flu season will probably continue for several weeks. In addition to getting a seasonal flu vaccine if you have not already gotten vaccinated, you can take [everyday preventive actions](#) like staying away from sick people and washing your hands to reduce the spread of germs. Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth. Germs spread this way. And, remember, if you or someone in your family is sick with flu, stay home from work or school to prevent spreading flu to others.

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.

To the staff at the **Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home**. The following paragraph was taken from an obituary from a member who resided at the ENVH for 4 years:

Toward the end of his life, Harold became part of a second family as a resident of the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home. The morning of his passing, several of the Home's staff members were with him to provide comfort and support. The Hyland family will always be grateful to the compassionate care, kindness and respect everyone at the Home showed for Harold. Night, Dad.

To: **Kaylene Finney** (Administrator of Resources, Developmental Disabilities, Lincoln),

I understand that "Amy" will remain on a wait list for residential services and my hope is that she will continue to grow and prosper and will be ready for "a sorority house" soon. "Amy" has recently been going to activities with others like her for the first time in her life and seems to be flourishing with it all! Getting financial help with her day services is really a great start to what I hope becomes a very full and independent life!

Kaylene, I so appreciate the help you have given me and the respect you showed "Amy" and me during our visit down to your office.

Amanda Pokorski (DD Service Coordinator, Plattsmouth), and her supervisor, **Ashley O'Neill**

(DD Service Coordination Supervisor, Papillion) have also been so amazing through this whole process and should be "trainers" for the entire department in how you can treat a person kindly and respectfully even when you have to give them unfortunate news about lack of funding or wait lists! That really went a long way in helping me at some low points in the past 13 months!

Again, thank you so much for your professionalism, your knowledge of the programs, funding, etc...and by going the extra mile to give me names/numbers of other services, etc... to look into while "Amy" was on wait list.

I have a new respect for the difficult jobs you have... and wish you all the best! I appreciate all that the DHHS staff has done to help me! **A Thankful Client**

This letter is for the staff with the Electronic Health Record Incentive Program in Medicaid and Long-Term Care.

To **LaRue Cole** (Medicaid IT Initiatives Administrator, Lincoln),

Please share with the rest of your office staff.

You are all so wonderfully helpful and willing.

From a Chief Information Officer at a Nebraska hospital

To: **Sarah Jameson** (teacher), **Marvin Carr** (Youth Counselor), **John Ross** (teacher)—all from the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Kearney,

Thank you for your assistance in helping the youth of the B2 group in serving a special Thanksgiving meal to area senior citizens. Our seniors were so impressed by your group (especially with their work ethics and politeness) and they wanted to say thank you for all you do.

A Grateful Senior Services Coordinator

To: **Sheila Bacon** (DHHS Service Delivery Administrator, Children and Family Services, Lincoln), and **Jill Schreck** (Deputy Director – Economic Support, Children and Family Services, Lincoln),

We just wanted to thank everyone working for DHHS doing Economic Assistance work. Today expedited applications are moving really quick and it is wonderful to see benefits getting approved before the holiday. We have a lot of happy clients who have had wonderful help from your customer service centers.

The SNAP Outreach team at the Lincoln Food Bank and the Food Bank for the Heartland