

# CONNECTIONS

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

## Front Page Teasers

### Inspirational Speaker Reflects on Journey of Recovery

Unloved by her alcoholic mother, molested by her mother's boyfriend, she started running away at age 9. When she wasn't jailed or institutionalized, she used heroin, lived under a bridge, and ate out of garbage cans.

That was Sharon Wise's life before 25. Then someone told her she could succeed. And thus began her journey of recovery.

"Everything you've gone through can be a training ground," said Wise in her keynote address at the 2013 Success, Hopes and Dreams behavioral health conference in May.

[read more>](#)

### The Citizen in the Room

Why are we here? For the citizens of Nebraska, of course! In a recent blog, Eric Henrichsen, Chief Information Officer, Information Systems and Technology, writes about why the citizens of Nebraska should be in our thoughts and actions each and every day guiding our decisions and discussions.

[read more>](#)

## Roll Out the Red Carpet

### DHHS Programs, Services Play a Part in Upcoming Hollywood Movie



By answering a simple request from Hollywood, DHHS programs and services will play a small but important role in the upcoming movie "Heaven is for Real."

Based on Todd Burpo's and Lynn Vincent's best-selling book of the same name, the movie features young Colton Burpo's life in Imperial, Nebraska, his near-fatal illness in the spring of 2003 and his journey to heaven during that time.

The movie is currently in the pre-production stage which means the producers, director and other crew members are preparing and planning by scouting locations, finalizing casting, perfecting storyboards and building sets.

One of the sets being built for the movie is of a rural Nebraska hospital since little Colton spends time there. Where does DHHS fit in to this picture? Movie makers called **Diana Duran** with the DHHS Helpline wanting posters that would likely be found on hospital walls. Several DHHS program areas and services came to mind including posters on Nebraska's Healthy Mothers/Healthy Babies Helpline, Text4Baby and the importance of good oral health from DHHS' Oral Health and Dentistry program.

Special thanks to **Tracy Moore**, Administrative Assistant, Public Health, for gathering such a large supply of posters. DHHS and their program areas will be proudly represented on the big screen. Produced by TriStar Pictures and Columbia Pictures, the movie is scheduled to be in theaters in April 2014. It stars Kelly Reilly and Greg Kinnear.



## Stay Connected on



### make the connection . . .

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

## Homepage Homeruns .....

### [North Platte Employees Make Lorax Float for Nebraskaland Days' Parade](#) *June 27, 2013*

Employees at DHHS' North Platte office did a nice job on this float for the Nebraskaland Days parade. It was a fun way to help raise awareness about a serious issue – the need for more foster parents in Nebraska. Thanks to all the employees who volunteered their time, supplies and even the truck and flatbed for the float! A local area business even donated candy for the people riding on the float to hand out to others.



**Calie and Eva** on the "Lorax" float at the Nebraskaland Days parade. The float was a fun way to highlight the need for more foster parents in Nebraska. One of these helpers is Yvette Troyer's daughter. Another is a friend of the family. Yvette is a Resource Developer in North Platte. *Photo: Theresa Davis*

### [Deer Oaks...Your New Employee Assistance Provider](#) *July 5, 2013*

Life can be hectic. Your Employee Assistance Program can help you find your balance. Deer Oaks is the new EAP provider for the State of Nebraska. EAP is a FREE confidential service to all DHHS employees and their family members. Deer Oaks provides completely confidential help with personal issues including, but not limited to, stress, depression, anxiety, workplace difficulties, substance abuse, marital problems, family or parenting conflicts, grief, violence, and unhealthy lifestyles. Confidential crisis and professional counseling services are available 24/7 by calling 1-866-792-3616. You can meet with a counselor face to face or talk with one on the telephone.

Additional information about counseling services and training opportunities can be found at [www.deeroaks.com](http://www.deeroaks.com). Click on 'LOGIN' in the upper left-hand corner. The Username and Password are: SON. In addition to confidential counseling services, you can explore a wide range of services and online training materials offered by Deer Oaks. If you have any questions, please contact your local HR representative or call 402-471-9240.



# The Good Life:

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



By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

## “The Only Thing That Is Constant Is Change -” Heraclitus

What was true for Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher who lived in the 5th century BC, is still true for us today. In the past several months and

continuing on through the next year we in the Department have and will be experiencing big changes.

These are changes that are on my mind:

- Employees who work within the Office of Juvenile Services in the Division of Children and Family Services are affected by LB 561, which passed this year and transitions community-based juvenile services from DHHS to Probation, which is part of the Judicial branch of government. New juvenile commitments after October 1 will be the responsibility of Probation, while the youth committed to DHHS before October 1 will remain the responsibility of DHHS until at least June 2014.
- With the upcoming implementation of the Affordable Care Act, a decision was made to move eligibility determination for Medicaid programs from the Division of Children and Family Services to the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care. This move will put Medicaid policy and eligibility together. While this provides an opportunity for employees to specialize in eligibility determination for either Economic Assistance programs or Medicaid

programs, it's a change in work and “home” division for the employees who transitioned to MLTC on July 1. Most of the changes to the work will begin October 1 when people will begin enrolling in the health care exchange.

- LB 6 passed this year and moved the Gamblers Assistance Program from the DHHS Division of Behavioral Health to the Department of Revenue effective July 1. No longer will DHHS employees have responsibilities to manage the program or credential professionals in this field.
- Governor Heineman recently announced Kearney as the location for the Central Nebraska Veterans’ Home, a replacement facility for the Grand Island Veterans’ Home.

Change is often difficult and it isn't surprising that this is an anxious time for some. Yet, what I've seen are mainly positive, measured responses from employees who are asking the right kinds of questions in order to learn more about how change will affect them. That's been very evident to me over the past several months as changes have occurred or have been announced that affect some groups of employees

and their jobs. I was fortunate to be at the Grand Island Veterans’ Home with Director John Hilgert the day the announcement was made. GIVH employees asked, and continue to ask, thoughtful questions and I'm glad to have been there.

My experience and observation simply reinforces what I've said many times about how impressed I am with DHHS employees and the commitment and dedication you show to your work and our mission, helping people live better lives. At the end of the day, your focus has continued to be on serving the people who benefit from your work.

These aren't the first changes we've experienced and, even as Heraclitus realized, they won't be the last. I wish to thank the employees and managers who are working through them, including not only those in the program areas but also those in Operations, since it's common for staff from Human Resources, Support Services, and Information Systems and Technology to be working behind the scenes to make transitions go as smoothly as possible.

# Not Afraid to Show Scars of Neglect and Abuse

## Inspirational Speaker Reflects on Journey of Recovery

By Marla Augustine

Unloved by her alcoholic mother, molested by her mother's boyfriend, she started running away at age 9. When she wasn't jailed or institutionalized, she used heroin, lived under a bridge, and ate out of garbage cans.

That was **Sharon Wise's** life before 25. Then someone told her she could succeed. And thus began her journey of recovery.

"It's not what people call you but what you answer to," said Wise in her keynote at the 2013 Success, Hopes and Dreams Behavioral Health Conference on May 13-15. "Everything you've gone through can be a training ground."

Peers—fellow consumers of mental health and substance abuse services—helped her recover from the traumas—neglect, sexual abuse, street life, institutionalizations—she had experienced.

It's not about what's wrong with you, but what happened to you. "We are not our diagnosis," she said.

Trauma, she said, can reduce you to helpless and hopeless. It affects your ability to cope. Peers can help you cope. She sought to change suffering into a creative force with her art.

Being shown respect helped in her recovery, she said. Being part of something bigger—the consumer movement in mental health and substance abuse—also helped.

She went on to start the first consumer-run drop-in center in Washington, D.C. Now she travels all over the world as an inspirational speaker.



Photo: Marla Augustine

She calls herself an advocate, activist, artist and documentarian. She trains peers, government officials, educators, legislators and students on trauma-informed care.

"People with mental health and substance use disorders often

have experienced trauma," said **Scot L. Adams**, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health. "Services provided to them must be trauma-sensitive in order to help them effectively. When trauma is not addressed, care is less likely to be successful. Ms. Wise's experience is a positive example of the effects of both peer support and trauma-informed care."

Wise has 24 years of being clean and sober. Now she isn't afraid to show her scars, she said. They reflect what she has gone through.

She has a master's in business, in addition to being educated "in the university of the college of the streets."

Through recovery, she is her own dividend, she said.

*"It's not what people call you but what you answer to..."*

*Sharon Wise*

# The Citizen in the Room

By Eric Henrichsen  
Chief Information Officer,  
Information Systems and Technology



to remember to say “we are here for the citizens of Nebraska.”

So how does that matter to what we do each day? In the last year I have incorporated a new technique in many of the meetings I attend or lead. In each meeting, in an open chair in the room (or if the room is full, they are standing), is an invisible citizen of Nebraska.

Regularly in meetings I will look at the open chair, point, and ask what would the citizen think of the decision we just made or discussion we are having. The point is we should always be operating

like the citizen we are helping live a better life is there with us (p.s. there is one sitting next to you as you read this!). What would they think? If we would be uncomfortable or embarrassed if a citizen was in the room, we are doing something wrong.

Granted, sometimes we have to make tough decisions that not everyone will like. But would we at least be able to have come to that decision if a citizen was in the room as we went through the decision-making process? If the answer is no, we need to think about reevaluating our decision-making

process. A citizen may not always like our decisions and actions, but I hope most citizens could at least begrudgingly say they understand and appreciate the challenges we faced when we made it and appreciate the care and thought we used in coming to the decision.

So the next time you are in a meeting or working at your desk, look for the invisible citizen to see if they are pleased with what you are doing. It might give you a whole new perspective on why we are here and how you go about your job.

Read more blog posts from Eric [here](#) .

Why are we here? No, this isn't going to be some Zen or Existential blog, but why are the workers at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services here?

I guess the answer is easy. The mission of DHHS is “Helping people live better lives.” Okay, but who are these people that we want to have better lives? I used to frequently say “we are here for the taxpayers.” But that is not really correct. We are funded by the taxpayers (see last blog on budget and whose money it is), but that is not necessarily the people we are here for. For example, children don't pay a whole lot of taxes, and a large percentage of the people we help live better lives are children. So, now I try



## A Positive Workplace is Everyone’s Responsibility

*“We have met the enemy and he is us.” Pogo Possum (by Walt Kelly)*

By Richard Mettler,  
Human Resources and Development

“We have met the enemy and he is us.” Pogo Possum (by Walt Kelly)

Pogo is the title of the newspaper comic strip created by cartoonist Walt Kelly.

The central character, Pogo Possum, is quoted on a poster designed by Kelly to help promote environmental awareness and publicize the first annual observance of Earth Day, held on April 22, 1970: “We have met the enemy and he is us.”

In the poster, Pogo is pictured holding a litter pick-up stick and a burlap bag. Pogo is preparing to clean up the garbage humans have strewn over Okefenokee Swamp, where he lives.

The poster highlights a key concept of environmental stewardship: we all share responsibility for littering planet Earth, so we should all do our share to help clean it up. It just won’t do to say, “They should do something about this,” and wait for others to do the work.

DHHS culture stewardship is along the same line: all of us individually share responsibility—we all play our part—for how it feels to be at work by what we do and what we say to one another every day, all day long. Again, it just won’t do to say, “When will they do something

*“We are here to awaken from our illusion of separateness.”*

*Thích Nhất Hạnh*



about what it’s like around here?” and wait for others to perform magic.

In each case, there is no “they.” To get things done with stewardship, and move in a positive direction, there can only be an all-inclusive “we.”

DHHS has its share of challenges and opportunities, which is ever more reason for us to appreciate all that we have in common and how much we depend on one another to do the work and get through the day on a positive note.

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



## Vacation Time... You’ve Earned it, Now Enjoy!

*Remember, the vacation carryover cap is 280 hours. So, use up those extra vacation days while you still have time.*

By Emily Walter,  
Human Resources and Development

Summer and vacations go hand in hand. If you have a lot of vacation time to use this year, start planning now for how you will use it. Want to know how many vacation hours you have left? You can review your vacation balance through the Payroll & Financial Center on the [LINK](#) website. Only 280 hours (35 days) of vacation leave can be carried over from Dec. 31 to Jan. 1. If you have a high vacation balance, please work with your supervisor to use enough hours to bring your balance down to 280 hours by Dec. 31. Any hours accrued and not used beyond 280 hours by Dec. 31 will be forfeited.

To calculate how many hours you will need to use, use your vacation balance on your Aug. 7 paycheck stub and add your expected leave earnings for the remaining pay dates this year. If that number is above 280 hours, subtract 280 hours to determine how many hours you must use before the end of the year.

Example: Jane Doe has a balance of 297.60 hours of vacation leave showing on her Aug. 7 paycheck stub. She earns 5.54 hours per pay period and there are 10 pay periods remaining in the 2013 calendar year (08/21/13, 09/04/13, 09/18/13, 10/02/13, 10/16/13, 10/30/13,



11/13/13, 11/27/13, 12/11/13 and 12/24/13) so she will be earning an additional 55.40 hours of vacation leave.  $297.60 + 55.40 = 353$  hours of vacation leave. That means that Jane will need to use  $353 - 280 = 73$  hours of vacation leave by Dec. 31st.

Many employees use separate tracking tools, such as the [HR15](#) spreadsheet, to keep track of their vacation and sick leave. This tool can be very helpful to employees in tracking leave usage. However, your carryover calculation is based on the balances listed on your pay stubs in the Payroll and Financial Center and these balances will be used by Human Resources to calculate any corrections to your vacation balance at the end of the year.

If you need assistance with your calculations, please contact your [Human Resources Representative](#).

If you can’t use all of the vacation leave you need to use, consider donating some hours to a fellow DHHS employee in need of catastrophic leave donations. Your [Human Resources Representative](#) can help you find an employee in need of donations, or, watch for agency-wide emails asking for donations. Don’t wait until the very end of December to donate hours as there may not be anyone in need of hours at that time.

# Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

## ENVH Human Resources Manager is “One in a Million”

Omaha Northwest Rotary Club recently honored **Rudy Avila**, Human Resources Manager with the Eastern Nebraska Veterans’ Home, as the 2013 recipient of the Club’s Vocational Service Award for his outstanding service to the members and staff of the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home.

“Rudy’s commitment to the Eastern Nebraska Veterans’ Home and his willingness to truly go the extra mile to support the DHHS and ENVH missions, staff and members makes him ‘one in

a million,” said **Jeff Smith**, ENVH administrator. “Under Rudy’s watch the facility has made remarkable progress in the areas of reducing turnover, recruiting qualified staff, improving staff and member safety and making ENVH a better place for members and staff.”

Mike Wilson, Rotary Club President and Kenneth Backman, Vocational Committee Chair, presented Rudy Avila with a plaque acknowledging his dedication and contribution.



Pictured from left: Rudy Avila, ENVH Human Resources Manager, Mary Shanahan, Human Resource Administrator, DHHS Human Resource & Development, and Jeff Smith, ENVH Administrator. *Photo: Audrey Hester*

## Cozad Resident and Long-time DHHS Employee Receives National Award

**Mike Swanda** of Cozad served as a pharmacy inspector for the State of Nebraska for 32 years from 1980 to 2012. According to the Cozad Chamber of Commerce Newsletter, Swanda was recently awarded the John F. Atkinson Service Award by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy.

After graduating from Hastings High School in 1945 he joined the U.S. Navy and in 1951 graduated from the University of Nebraska College of Pharmacy. He opened Swanda Pharmacy in Cozad in 1955 which was later named S&S Pharmacy.

Swanda has received other awards over the years, including the National Pharmacy Association Award and Cozad Community Health Care Hall of Fame. Swanda was selected for the John F. Atkinson Service Award for his exemplary service in protecting the public health through his work as a pharmacy inspector for the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Public Health, Licensure Unit. His area covered the western two-thirds of the state.



# In Gratitude

A letter to a DHHS employee who is *helping people live better lives*

## Horses Help Teach Life Lessons

Winston Churchill once said, “There is something about the outside of a horse that is good for the inside of a man.” Indeed working with horses seems to increase people’s self-esteem and self-confidence while improving critical thinking skills.

That’s why staff at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Geneva started an Equine Program in June. The program, which uses horses to help teach youth life lessons, is being used as an additional treatment resource at YRTC-G.

“Through the girls’ experiences with the horses, the program allows them to develop and use personal management and critical thinking skills,” said **Anita Haumont**, Recreation Assistant and Volunteer Coordinator. Participants experience “hands on” work with horses and, by the end of the program, have more knowledge of animals, feel more comfortable around them, feel a sense of accomplishment, and most of all, take what they have learned and apply it to life, Anita said.

Five girls are currently participating in this pilot program. The youth will not ride the horses as part of this program but will help train them and learn more about equine safety and



equine psychology through discussions, demonstrations and instructional videos.

Equine psychology revolves around the scientifically-researched principles and theories of equine behavior. People must learn how to most effectively communicate and train horses because horses are prey animals and think differently than us, and that creates a lot of opportunities for discussion.

There is a lot to learn in horsemanship. In order for the girls and horses to absorb what they are learning, Equine Program lessons are 1 to 1½ hours long, two to three times a week for three to four months. After the

program is over, participants will have an opportunity to show others, like family members, staff, volunteers and other youth, what they have learned and accomplished.

In addition to the participants, **Jacki Wilkins**, a trained volunteer and Haumont helps facilitate each session. **Dan Scarborough**, Facility Administrator and **Sandi Renken**, Business Manager worked with J Bar D Ranch to make arrangements and finalize a contract for the program.

Dear **Mr. Scarborough** (Dan, Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Geneva),  
 Equine Training is helping us girls by teaching us about horses’ emotions and how they relate to human behaviors. Every day we write down our life lesson we learned. We really like the program. We work to our potential and very hard.

**Thank you from the Equine Program Girls**



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

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