

CONNECTIONS

June 2016 VOLUME 16, ISSUE 6

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

DHHS EMS Program Distributes LUCAS 2 To date, 16 lives Saved

By Judi Yorges

First responders found Greg Kotschwar collapsed, blue and unresponsive in his Nebraska City home bedroom on Halloween in 2015. His heart had stopped, and he was no longer breathing.

“Quite frankly, I was dead,” he said as he shared his story at a news conference with Lt. Governor Foley and DHHS.

But Kotschwar, a deputy with the Otoe County Sheriff’s Office, survived. He credits quick-thinking Nebraska City Police and Fire and Rescue who

began manual CPR immediately, then followed with the Physio-Control LUCAS 2 chest compression system.

LUCAS 2 is an external, mechanical device that provides automated chest compressions to an adult in cardiac arrest. The device is a consistent and effective way to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). LUCAS 2 is designed for use by first responders and hospital personnel and it enhances opportunities to improve outcomes for heart attack patients.

LUCAS 2 was used on Kotschwar for nearly an hour.

second year of administering the three-year grant which is being used to purchase LUCAS 2 to increase the chances of survival for Nebraskans having a heart attack.

The EMS program coordinates purchase and distribution of the devices as well as the appropriate training. Approximately 340 ambulance services and 85 hospitals in Nebraska will receive LUCAS 2 by the end of 2017. Each device costs about \$10,000.

LUCAS 2 enhances existing cardiac care efforts and continues to build on the good work already being done in Nebraska. In the past year, LUCAS 2 helped save the lives of at least 16 Nebraskans including the deputy sheriff.

So far, 150 LUCAS 2 devices have been distributed to EMS services and hospitals across the state thanks to an almost \$6 million grant from the Leona M. and Harry B. Helmsley Charitable Trust. DHHS’ Emergency Medical Services program is in the



Kotschwar returned to work in February and saw his daughter graduate from high school in mid-May.

“That meant everything to me, and I will be forever grateful to all of you,” he said to the Nebraska City team who helped save his life. “You’re my heroes.”

To see Deputy Sheriff Kotschwar and the Nebraska City Fire and Rescue and Nebraska City Police Department teams as well as Dr. Jonathan Stelling tell their story and the role LUCAS 2 played, click here. <https://vimeo.com/154646665>

Stay Connected on



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

Chief Executive Officer:
Courtney Phillips

Behavioral Health
Division Director:
Sheri Dawson

Children and Family Services
Division Director:
Doug Weinberg

Developmental Disabilities
Division Director:
Courtney Miller

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

CLS Administrator:
Kathie Osterman

Editor:
Melissa Lindell

Readers are invited to submit news, photos and story ideas to the editor via:

Phone: (402) 471-4047

Fax: (402) 471-3996

E-mail: melissa.lindell@nebraska.gov

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

Medicaid and Long-Term Care
Division Director:
Calder Lynch

Public Health Division Acting
Director:
Courtney Phillips

Veterans' Homes Division
Director:
John Hilgert

Graphics and Layout:
Judy Barker

Improving Outcomes with Data Management at Nebraska DBH

By Julie Naughton

The Division of Behavioral Health, in partnership with H4 Technology, has implemented COMPASS, a cutting-edge data management and business intelligence platform used to support the new DBH Centralized Data System (CDS).

The COMPASS-supported CDS went live on Monday, May 16th, completing a project which has been years in the planning. It allows DBH to effectively review, monitor, and report on programmatic, administrative, and fiscal accountability functions with all DBH and Regional Behavioral Health Authorities' (commonly referred to as Regions) contracted providers.

The implementation of a new platform will enable the DBH to have a flexible solution that allows them to provide the care needed to so many Nebraska mental health and substance use disorder patients and consumers.

"This groundbreaking system has been years in the making," said Sheri Dawson, director of the Division of Behavioral Health. "Replacing a core system within Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) was no easy task. Planning began more than 7 years ago." For

the past four years, Heather Wood, Administrator of Quality and Data Excellence within DBH, has led the DHHS project team, working through proposal stages, securing funding and a signed contract, and coordinating details necessary for a successful project development and implementation.

"Monday, May 16th will forever mark an incredible transition from one system to the next and this is just the beginning of the great things to come for Nebraska's Behavioral Health System," said Wood, who believes that "the CDS will be the change agent for how we operationalize our mission of helping systems that help people recover."

DBH selected COMPASS after a competitive Request For Proposal (RFP) process, and the customization work began in October 2014. The project, a joint effort between the Nebraska DBH, DHHS information systems and technology staff, Regions, Providers, Orion Healthcare Technology and H4 Technology, utilized healthcare technology standards to integrate EHRs with state systems, allowing for automatic authorization of services, management of operational duties, and real-time visualization of division data.

"As a Nebraska resident, I am extremely honored to be a part of this innovative project whose primary beneficiaries are those most in need," said Chris Henkenius, president of H4 Technology. "Healthcare interoperability and analytics are critical to population health, and providing those features to the behavioral healthcare vertical ensure the entire system benefits."

H4 Technology is a Nebraska based, consulting and application development company with over 15 years of providing technology solutions for the healthcare field. H4 Technology's roots are in health information exchange, accountable care organization, and product development. They have also helped implement nine statewide and three regional HIEs, as well as numerous ACOs, HIOs, and hospital systems. For more information, please visit www.h4-technology.com



Courtney Phillips, CEO

Greetings #TeamDHHS:

Some exciting things are happening right now in the agency, and I want to share some good news with y'all. I am excited to announce that the Division of Public Health has achieved national accreditation through the Public Health Accreditation Board (PHAB). This is a first for us and Nebraska now joins 18 other state health departments that have achieved this distinction.

No matter how well we're doing, we can always do better so we challenged ourselves to become nationally accredited. Accreditation is a key

Message from Courtney Phillips, CEO

driver for public health departments to continuously improve their performance and the quality of the public health services they deliver and it demonstrates our commitment to Nebraskans and helping them live healthier lives.

All of #TeamDHHS and especially our public health team should take great pride in this accomplishment. This was a herculean effort and our Division of Public Health rose to the occasion. The accreditation process is a major undertaking. A health department must undergo a rigorous, multi-faceted, peer-reviewed assessment to ensure it meets or exceeds quality standards and measures.

To prepare for accreditation, the Division implemented several performance and quality improvement strategies including a State Health Improvement Plan. Nebraska has already accomplished almost 70 percent of the activities identified to help improve the health and quality of life for Nebraskans like expanding cancer screening programs and worksite wellness programs in the state. Stakeholder input

also resulted in a Division Strategic Plan and Quality Improvement Plan.

Achieving accreditation shows the strength of our entire team. I personally want to thank everyone who worked so diligently on the accreditation process, and for the wonderful jobs that you do every day. Your efforts are valued and appreciated.

This accreditation lasts five years, then we will apply for recertification of our program. That's because we can see what the benefits of having the PHAB accreditation are; it stimulates quality improvement and performance, pushes us for greater accountability and transparency, and it helps our Division of Public Health to see how effective they are at delivering public health services to our communities here in Nebraska.

This is much more than a plaque on the wall, this is a continuous quality improvement program that demonstrates our commitment to better protect and promote health in Nebraska.

Thanks for a job well done! Please join me in congratulating our public health team on this important milestone in our efforts to help Nebraskans live better and healthier lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Courtney Phillips', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

ACCESSNebraska Works on Process Improvement with UNL's Raikes School Design Studio

By: *Melissa Lindell*



There's an app for that. It seems like you can say that about most everything these days. ACCESSNebraska decided it was time to look for a mobile solution to simplify client communication. So, a partnership project was launched with UNL's Raikes School of Computer Science and Management's Design Studio to allow clients apply for and maintain benefits.

Today, we are hooked on being in touch instantly and having the world at our fingertips. ACCESSNebraska's clients in need of food, medical assistance, heating and cooling assistance, and child care are no different; and they're using mobile phones to look for resources as well.

ACCESSNebraska has been working on process improvement since May 2015. Last August, improving ACCESSNebraska's client communication was submitted as the State's fifth project with the UNL Raikes School Design Studio. ACCESSNebraska has 10 working groups on topics like document imaging, call management, policy streamlining, and workforce capacity.

Former Chief Operating Officer Felix Davidson, DHHS Chief Information Officer Chris Hill, DHHS-OCIO Applications Services Manager Don Spaulding, and Deputy Director of Economic Assistance Service Delivery Karen Heng formed the steering team on the communication improvement project and met with the design team weekly.

DHHS asked the Design Studio for help finding solutions to cut through the red tape for those who receive SNAP benefits. Although SNAP was the chosen program, the concepts and ideas apply to many other benefits programs such as Medicaid, Child Care, Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program and ADC/AABD payments.

The group spoke with clients, community support specialists, community partners, IT Business System Analysts and Supervisors Britton Gabel and Suzann Langner, and many others about communicating with the Department. The following issues were found:

- The system was complicated,
- It was always changing,
- It lacked transparency, and
- It was not a user-based design.

The students took a close look at those problems and designed a project that was easier to use, less complicated, and self-explanatory.

"What we are doing is bridging the gap between the State and program users," said Project Lead Maddy

Peterson, a senior. "The importance of communication between DHHS and program users became clear early on. Recipients would find their benefits reduced or discontinued and they didn't know why. Usually a letter was somewhere in the U.S. mail explaining the action. Those letters were often delayed and when they arrived, they were so dense and detailed that the user couldn't understand them."

The team used that information to develop a prototype Web portal and Android application that let users apply for and maintain benefits. It even handled notifications to DHHS of benefit-altering events. That solution also increased transparency and explained benefits decisions in a way that was easy to understand.

Once the team developed the app, they tested and modified it. The project was different from others that the group had done for the State because it gave them the chance to make an impact on the lives of vulnerable Nebraskans.

"When you peel back the red tape, it helps people in the field help program users. Working on a project that could really help people has been a great experience for me," Maddy said.

"I enjoyed working with the class and the energy they brought to the project," said Karen Heng. "We gained quite a few good ideas to make the technology more usable for our clients."

The team presented the final project to ACCESSNebraska group members

and others in early April. At the end of the month, the DHHS team attended the Design Showcase of all the student projects, where the app received many favorable comments.

Don Spaulding said, "I was impressed with the focus the students applied to understanding the problem at hand and especially the customer experience before designing a solution. The students worked hard at designing and refining a solution that was simpler to use and easier to understand for the customer."

"It was an incredible learning experience for me, from both the business side and the Design Think methodology," said DHHS Chief Information Officer Chris Hill. "The students' effort and diligence to understand the existing problems, gain perspective from our customers, and design a solution to address those problems was impressive."

DHHS is in the process of implementing some online web portal suggestions. A mobile platform to host mobile applications must be set up before the mobile application will be launched.

The project gave DHHS insight into the school's design techniques, which we are utilizing on other N-FOCUS projects.

Stop and Think Before Sending E-mails

“Diamonds are forever. Email comes close.” June Kronholz



By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources



E-mail communication is an excellent way to make it convenient and to the point. Used effectively, e-mail keeps people informed, expedites work, and connects folks across distance. However, poorly, often hastily written e-mail invites misunderstanding, risking damage to workplace relationships resulting in conflict.

A reader of e-mail does not receive sources of meaning available in real time face-to-face, or even telephone, conversations. E-mail does not convey conversational context—body language, facial expressions, verbal pacing, volume, vocal and emotional tone—all of which make intent more clear.

The mistake is in writing an e-mail as though we were having a real time conversation, and assuming that the other person will correctly gather what we intend. This often leaves gaps in meaning and tone for the reader, which are filled by the reader’s imagination based on the mood of the reader at the time—all without you’re being aware.

There are studies indicating that nearly half of all e-mails (44%) are misinterpreted. Don’t just think about what you’re writing, assuming that you’re being clear. Think also about what the reader will take away from your e-mail. Consider an example. Someone e-mails you about an alternative strategy to get something done, and you reply innocently: “Fine. Do it your way.”

This leaves plenty of room for the reader to perceive that you’re being disrespectful: dismissive, brusque, or sarcastic. The reader may respond in kind to you, leaving you puzzled and thinking, “What did I do to deserve this?” A cycle of mean spirited e-mail exchanges might now be set in motion.

Imagine how all of this misunderstanding might have been avoided with just a few additional words in your reply, such as: “I think your proposed strategy is a fine idea. I like it. Let’s move forward as you suggest. Thank you for the good thought.”

Three Quick E-mail Tips for all of us to Remember

- Be careful about the tone. Avoid emotion, humor, irony, or sarcasm, none of which convey well in a brief note, and can accidentally offend the reader.
- Keep the tone polite, friendly, and professional, including the social graces such as, ‘Please,’ ‘Thank you,’ ‘You’re welcome.’ Don’t forget a warm opening and closing, such as, ‘Hello Brenda’ and ‘I appreciate working with you.’
- Ask yourself, ‘Is e-mail the right choice? Would a phone call or in-person conversation with real time back-and-forth be a more efficient and relationship friendly way to communicate what I have to say?’

Before sending ask yourself, “How would I respond to this e-mail as the reader?”

Please e-mail me your thoughts, concerns, or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationship at: Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov. I will e-mail you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your thoughts, concerns, or questions in a future column.

Elder Abuse

By Madhavi Bhadbhade, Medicaid and Long-Term Care

The State Unit on Aging in Medicaid and Long-Term Care and Nebraska State Bar Association’s Elder Law Section are co-sponsoring a special training on elder abuse and financial exploitation. “Fundamentals of Protecting Seniors from Financial Exploitation” will be held June 22 from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (CDT) at NET in Lincoln. The training will also be offered via web streaming at 11 locations across the state and/or your personal computer.

The training is free and open to staff in the Area Agencies on Aging, long-term care facilities, Adult Protective Services, program volunteers in the aging network, attorneys, bankers, law enforcement and other organizations. DHHS employees may also attend the training with supervisor approval and by registering in advance.

Amy Hochstetler, State Unit on Aging IT Systems Business Analyst in Lincoln will demonstrate the Aging and Disability Resource Center Website. Additional training topics for the day include Medical-Legal Partnerships and how they impact Seniors presented by Ann Mangiameli, J.D., a First Year Update from the Office of the Public Guardian by Michelle Chaffee, J.D., and an Identity Theft Panel featuring topics like Technology and Internet-related Scams, Trends in Banking and Financial Services Scams, and a presentation by the Attorney General’s Office about Identity Theft.

In the afternoon, Nora Dowd Eisenhower, J.D., the Assistant Director of the Office of Older Americans, Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), in Washington, D.C. will give you Tips and Strategies on Consumer Protection from the CFPB.

Cindy Koenig-Warnke, an Investigator with the Lincoln Police Department, will talk about Financial Exploitation Case Review. There will also be a presentation from Legal Aid of Nebraska on Emerging Trends in Consumer Law/Finance Issues for Seniors.

Click here www.dhhs.ne.gov/agingtraining for more information, including the agenda, registration form, and web streaming locations.



Way to Go!

Statewide and National Recognitions, Honors and Awards

Jean McNeil receives award

DHHS Hearing Officer Jean McNeil was recently honored by the Omaha Bar Association for devoting her legal career to helping others achieve social justice.

Jean McNeil has devoted her legal career to helping others achieve social justice. Her efforts have earned her the OBA Robert M. Spire Public Service Award.

This article was recently published about her award and accomplishments. Congratulations Jean!

The Daily Record

By John Benson

For Jean McNeil, serving the public has been a calling. From Scottsbluff to South Omaha, McNeil has helped Nebraskans gain access to justice for more than 20 years. In recognition of her dedication and hard work, McNeil will be honored with the Robert M. Spire Public Service Award, given annually on Law Day by the Omaha Bar Association to individuals and organizations that enhance the public's understanding of the law.

McNeil, a South Omaha native, has been involved in public advocacy ever since she participated in a Civil Clinic at the University of Nebraska College of Law in the early '90s.

After graduating, McNeil took a position with Western Nebraska Legal Services, which brought her time and talents to 56 counties in central and western Nebraska. In her role with the organization, McNeil dealt with a wide range of legal issues that affected small communities and poverty stricken areas. Whether it was working towards improving working conditions for clients,

dealing with landlord-tenant issues, or helping establish a telephone access line, the central thrust behind McNeil's work was providing those who are less fortunate with access to the courts and the tools necessary to effectively seek justice.

In recalling a saying borrowed from a fellow attorney, McNeil emphasized "keeping the doors to justice open, because but for the grace of God it could be me," referring to those among us who may need a helping hand from lawyers and other professionals.

In 2001, McNeil took on a new challenge as the Nebraska State Bar Association's legal services director. In her new role, McNeil ran the Volunteer Lawyers Project, utilizing a panel of over 1,000 volunteer attorneys to match clients and provide legal services in 400-500 cases annually. Seeing a need for additional legal services in the South Omaha area where she was born, in 2003 McNeil worked to establish and expand community clinics that helped Spanish speakers navigate the often-complicated legal landscape.

In 2004, McNeil teamed up with the Nebraska Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Coalition to obtain a federal grant to provide legal services to victims of domestic violence in what came to be known as the Nebraska LAPTOP program. The program and its volunteer lawyers have handled over 150 cases a year for clients who did not qualify for services at Legal Aid of Nebraska and would likely not pursue their cases but for the program.

Another program in whose formation McNeil played an integral role is the Self Help Desk. The program began as a pilot program in Lancaster County in approximately 2005, and became a fixture in six of the larger counties in the state.

Volunteer attorneys at various county courthouses staff the program three days

a week for four hours each day, providing walk-ins the opportunity to speak with a lawyer and be steered in the right direction. Legal situations that the Self Help Desk may tackle include domestic legal issues such as divorce, custody, visitation, or landlord-tenant disputes, or name changes. Volunteers can help determine if a lawyer is needed or if a client can handle it pro se.

Currently, there are Self Help Desks in Buffalo, Douglas, Hall, Lancaster, Madison and Scotts Bluff Counties. At its peak, the Self Help Desk was helping over 3,000 clients a year. As the coordinator, McNeil worked with volunteers and court personnel to staff the help desks and develop program policies and procedures.

The Douglas County Self Help Desk received the Omaha Bar Association's Robert M. Spire Public Service Award in 2011. Retired Nebraska Supreme Court Justice Richard Sievers chaired the Court's Pro Se Committee in 2011. In a story written about the Self Help Desk, he said, "Especially in today's budget challenges, any member of the bar should be involved in things like the Help Desk. And Jean [McNeil] does an excellent job of managing this program."

The Future

In 2015, McNeil got a taste of private practice when she joined friend and former VLP Committee Member Vanessa Gorgen in her family law practice. While she enjoyed the work, the stay would be short-lived as a new opportunity in the public sector again came calling in early 2016 – this time in the form of a position with the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. As a hearing officer in the legal services division, McNeil now



reviews DHHS decisions to ensure that the regulations promulgated by the department are followed, an essential role in the department's mission of "helping people live better lives."

"I just like working in the public sector," McNeil said. "It's not about the money, it's about providing a service. It's part of social justice and giving back."

While McNeil has personally dedicated her professional life to helping others, she is quick to give credit to those who have helped make the many programs with which she has been involved a success. She credits the late former NSBA executive director Jane Schoenike with having the leadership and vision to make many of the volunteer programs successful during her time with the NSBA, as well as former VLP director Kathryn Bellman "who helped make the program an overwhelming success."

McNeil also always wants all of the volunteer lawyers around the state to know that they are the ones that make everything possible. "Programs aren't successful without the bar and their commitment," she said. "There are a lot of great volunteers out there in the legal community."

When she is not working, McNeil enjoys spending time with her 13-year-old daughter, Mazie, and has recently been spending a considerable amount of time cheering on the seventh-grader as she plays select softball.

(Way to go continued on page 8)

(Continued from page 7)

Way to Go!

Jada Venezia Honored



L-R: Jada, Megan, Ann

Jada Venezia, Economic Assistance Social Services Supervisor (North Platte, McCook, Ogallala and Imperial) was recently recognized by the Army National Guard for her supervisory support of Megan Meuser-Baker, Lead Worker. Megan's husband was deployed out of the country, during this time the family depended on Megan to keep things at home running.

Jada was able to support Megan with her work schedule and the time she needed to take care of her family. The award was presented on May 12 by Ann Kawata, Economic Assistance Administrator.

In Gratitude

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



Source: ThinkStock

Here are some letters & notes DHHS employees have received thanking us for the work we do every day to help people live better lives.

Dear **Donna Kudirka,**

Thank you so much for resolving the issue of my subsidiary check for the month of May. I was thrilled that you knew exactly what I was calling for, when I called you on Monday, May 9, and that you were already working on the situation. Thank you again for your prompt action. Please pass this note on to your supervisor or manager as they need to know how wonderful you are at your job.

Sincerely,

A Grateful Client

Hi **Stacey Werth-Sweeney,**

I just want to tell you how very much I enjoy seeing pictures of Envy...they make my day☺! I also wanted to tell you that I saw your "happy birthday" wish to Envy... I love how you call her your "sweet girl". This really touches my heart...as I also say this to all the dogs that I love.

You are so blessed to have her & we are very much better to know Envy...even if only through your pictures of her☺. Please keep them coming.

Enjoy your day.

Tracy Miller

Dear **Amber Sterkel,**

I am writing you in regards to **Marisa Sullivan**. I had the wonderful pleasure of doing business with her on the phone the other day.

I called in regards to Energy Assistance. I had called previously to the toll-free number and spoke to another worker. I was not satisfied with the outcome. After explaining the situation to Marisa she understood and immediately took action. She resolved the issue at once. As a result of applying for Energy Assistance the other work had found I had been removed from SNAP incorrectly which Marisa saw. Instead of putting me off, as the other person had, Marisa took care of it. I received my back benefits directly and was approved for the future as well. I was also approved for Energy Assistance promptly which had been cancelled to due cancellation of SNAP.

What is so inspiring about Marisa is that she does this confidently, competently and with compassion. It was a great pleasure to be treated with respect and concern.

Sincerely,

Donna

SESA March Employee of the Month is **Connie Nemec**

Connie was nominated & recognized due to response from client: "Client expressed how thankful she was for Connie, stating that Connie was so incredible from the moment she came down to help her. Connie was pleasant, efficient and professional. The client explained that she recently had to go through a few agencies and it was a breath of fresh air to get someone who cared and was pleasant. She was very impressed by her."