

Connections

WINNER OF THE NATIONAL
PUBLIC HEALTH INFORMATION
COALITION'S GOLD AWARD

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

June 2010
VOLUME 10, ISSUE 6

A young artist in a recording studio contributes an inspirational song to the TUNE Project. Details on next page.



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You can follow DHHS at <http://twitter.com/NebraskaDHHS>

DHHS in the News Update. . .

Here are a few headlines of news releases recently issued by Communications & Legislative Services about DHHS programs. You can read and subscribe to all DHHS news releases from the DHHS [Newsroom](#). You can also listen to [sound bites](#) issued with releases.

Go to [DHHS In The News](#) on the Employee Home Page for links to *Omaha World-Herald* and *Lincoln Journal Star* articles updated daily involving DHHS programs and services.

[Agreement Reached Between the Department of Health and Human Services and Visinet Inc.,](#)

May 24, 2010

[Change Lives - Beome a Foster Parent](#)
[Hax la diferencia - Conviértete en padre tutelar](#)

May 10, 2010
May 17, 2010

[Underage Drinking Can Have Adult Consequences](#)

May 3, 2010

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



DHHS recently launched the TUNE project--Nebraska's first interactive health and wellness program aimed at helping young women make better choices and live healthier lives through music.

"Our goal with the TUNE project is to use music to empower young women, age 16 – 25, to choose a healthy lifestyle early on in their lives," said Chief Medical Officer and Director of Public Health **Dr. Joann Schaefer**. "The project includes a number of interactive and engaging elements to reach this group of women including: a custom website—www.tunemylife.org; social channels like YouTube, MySpace, Twitter and Facebook; and downloadable songs, events and concerts. All components of TUNE tie in health information and messages."

The TUNE music was selected through a contest that received more than 150 submissions of original songs and poetry. Eight finalists were chosen - five from Nebraska, two from Texas and one from Iowa. The project is managed by **Sue Spanhake** in the Division of Public Health's Lifespan Health Section.

Nebraska is one of 13 states to receive a federal grant to develop an information campaign to help young women and the men in their lives make healthy choices in order to prepare for their future role as parents. The TUNE project is intended to motivate young adults to take control of their lives and futures by making positive choices.

TUNE artists are participating at concerts and events throughout the state in 2010.

MORE ON THIS STORY ON PAGE 8.

make the connection . . .

DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov

DHHS Employee Website: www2.dhhs.ne.gov

DHHS Helpline: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov

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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.

The Good Life:

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



Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

DHHS – A Customer Service Agency

By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

Since joining DHHS almost one year ago, I've seen the Department's long history of service (the lifeblood of our mission) played out every day, and I'm reminded of the pride you have in your work and want you to know that I am proud of you and the work you do for the people of our state. We are making a difference in the lives of Nebraskans.

The majority of people we serve have good experiences and are grateful for our help.

Why do I say this? We get letters from clients and others telling us how we've made life for someone better. Several DHHS areas also conduct customer service

surveys and those results also support this.

But not all people have positive experiences. How do we know? They tell us that, too.

Many share their experiences broadly – with elected officials, with a letter to their local newspaper, and with family and friends – and those people often tell others.

Sometimes we simply cannot provide what people or organizations want, but sometimes they're unhappy because of poor customer service. *We – each and every one of us – can do something about that.*

Good customer service should be part of everything we do: every phone call, email, letter and face-to-face experience. Your customers are everywhere: our clients seeking services, your co-workers, the members of the public who are taxpayers and for whom we work.

I've been thinking about this quite a bit, especially as I've been out speaking to different groups about our mission and the importance of our work.

“Customer service begins individually with each one of our moment to moment interactions with each other and our customer.”

I've been reading about it, too. Much of what's written starts with courtesy that we can all practice with one another and those we serve.

Some basics of courteous customer service are:

- **Be a good listener.** Listen to your customers' words, tone of voice, body language, and most

importantly, to how they feel.

Beware of making assumptions.

- **Identify and anticipate needs.** Customer needs are both emotional and logical. The better you know your customers, the better you become at anticipating their needs.
- **Make customers feel important and appreciated.** Treat them as individuals.
- **Appreciate the power of “Yes.”** Always look for ways to help.
- **Always do what you say you are going to do.**
- **Know how to apologize.** When something goes wrong, apologize. Deal with problems immediately and let your customers know what you have done. Value complaints. As much as we dislike it, it gives us an opportunity to improve.
- **Get regular feedback.** Encourage and welcome suggestions from customers and our co-workers.
- **Don't make promises unless you will keep them.** Reliability is one of the keys to good relationships.

Customer service begins individually with each one of our moment to moment interactions with each other and our customer.

I challenge each of you to look at the customer service standards above and start by incorporating at least one in your actions each day until they become a habit.

DHHS Helpline offers single point of access

Because DHHS is a large organization with many diverse services, people can be confused about where to go for help or answers to their questions. The DHHS Helpline (renamed from the Office of System Advocate) is a resource for their questions and concerns.

The DHHS Helpline provides a single point of access to efficiently respond to questions of refer callers to the appropriate resources. This Helpline is available at 1-800-254-4202 Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Central Time. Lincoln callers should use 402-471-6035 and emails can be sent to dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov.

During Fiscal Year 2008-2009, **Diana Duran**, who answers the Helpline, received more than 4,500 calls, emails and walk-in contacts. Since the line was renamed and publicized in May, the number of contacts has increased by 10 to 15 each day.

Our job is to provide the best public health and human services to citizens of Nebraska, and the new DHHS Helpline is a simple, effective way to help accomplish this.

We want to help!

Real Questions,
Real Concerns,
Real People.



Call the DHHS Helpline

DHHS Helpline: (800) 254-4202
In Lincoln call: (402) 471-6035
E-mail: DHHS.Helpline@nebraska.gov

Students learn about state government

CEO **Kerry Winterer** shares his Boy's State experience and explains DHHS purpose and structure to the Girls State youth June 10th. (Standing) **Sue Spanhake**, Health Program Manager with the Division of Public Health, waits to explain the "TUNE My Life" program to the group. Kerry is a former Boys State participant and Spanhake a former Girls State participant.

Beginning in 1937, Girls State and Boys State are summer leadership and citizenship programs sponsored by the American Legion and American Legion Auxiliary for high school students between their junior and senior years. Through these programs, students gain insights into the workings of state government. Famous alumni of Girls and Boys State include Neil Armstrong, **Jane Pauley** and **Michael Jordan**. *Photo: Mike Wight*



Checking out the Employee Homepage?

The DHHS employee Homepage has been designed exclusively with you in mind. It's interesting because the information changes every day. It's informative because it puts information at your fingertips with employee updates and links to the web pages you use every day. It's visual because it features interesting photos and videos. And it's fun with daily "Neat to Know" updates, inspirational quotes, and health and wellness tips.

We Want to Hear from You!

Have you seen all of the fantastic bulletin board posts from your co-workers across the state? Or maybe you've used the board yourself to congratulate a co-worker or welcome a new employee. Bulletins are a great way to recognize your fellow co-workers for all of the good work they do or to highlight a DHHS program or service activity. We've posted nearly 200 bulletins since the board opened in April. Submit a bulletin—yours could be the next one we post!

We're also looking for inspirational quotes and interesting story ideas for our "Neat to Know" section, and great photos, graphics and videos to showcase "In the Box." Send in your story ideas, quotes, etc. through the bulletin board. If you've got photos or other graphics you can e-mail them to Leah.Bucco-White@nebraska.gov or Dianna.Seiffert@nebraska.gov

Talking to Kerry Has Just Gotten a Little Easier...

DHHS.Talk2Kerry@nebraska.gov is a new e-mail address that makes it easier for you to contact **Kerry Winterer** directly. He wants to hear your ideas and suggestions on how DHHS can better serve our employees and our state. So, drop him an e-mail.

IN THE BOX

"In The Box"

Whatcha Doin? 20 in 20



Twenty ways to be healthy in 20 seconds.
[Whatcha doin?](#) One of this year's video finalists..

Click on arrow to go to Employee Homepage and view this video.

Good Things Are Happening!

During a recent computer software upgrade for more than 6,000 computers, the DHHS Help Desk Team in the Nebraska State Office Building in Lincoln handled approximately 2,000 calls. According to Information Technology Manager **Joe Homan**, they handled the work load "in stride and with a smile."

Just goes to show that helping others applies to DHHS co-workers, too!

Customer Service Centers moving forward

By Jeanne Atkinson

ACCESSNebraska modernizes how economic assistance services are provided in Nebraska through three components: The ability to apply for services online at www.accessnebraska.ne.gov/; document imaging; and customer service centers.

Since September 2008, 104,990 Nebraskans went online to apply for economic assistance benefits like SNAP (formerly food stamps), energy assistance, Kids Connection, Medicaid, Aid to Dependent Children (ADC), and child care assistance.

“People are taking advantage of this big step forward in using technology to serve our clients more efficiently,” said **Todd Reckling**, director of the Division of Children and Family Services. “ACCESSNebraska lets clients check eligibility, apply for benefits and report changes in things like income, address or expenses when it’s convenient for them.”

As of May 2010:

- 32% of total monthly applications (both paper and electronic) were received electronically
- 36% of online applications came in outside of normal business hours

Document imaging is the use of technology to scan, store and retrieve documents from economic assistance case files. Approximately 72% of the case files have been converted to electronic files so far. Over 2.2 million pages have been scanned since last November in hubs located in Gering, Grand Island, Lincoln, Norfolk and Omaha.

Having electronic case files will be important to the operations of the four Customer Service Centers. The centers will provide a more efficient and effective way to process and approve requests for economic assistance services by using a universal case management system.



This means that instead of having an assigned caseworker, clients will call the 800 number and can be helped by whichever staff answers that particular call. People will still have the option of going to a local office in person, rather than calling the Customer Service Centers.

By 2012, Customer Service Centers will be up and running in:

- **Lincoln:** This center begins operating first, with approximately 100 staff moving to the new location during July or August.
- **Fremont:** Construction starts this summer, with a target date of March 2011 for approximately 150 staff to move in.
- **Lexington:** The floor plan is developed and approximately 50 staff are set to move there in the fall of 2011. The building will also have several other tenants.
- **Scottsbluff:** The building formerly housed a customer service center and only needs minor changes. Approximately 100 staff are targeted to move there in January 2012.

Cancer survivors share stories with DHHS co-workers

By Kathy Ward, Administrator
Office of Women's and Men's Health

In the fall of 2009, [Human Resources](#) Administrator **Mary Shanahan** suggested to **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Director of the [Division of Public Health](#), that DHHS breast cancer survivors be honored during October—National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. The [Office of Women's and Men's Health](#) sent a survey to all DHHS staff to ask who would be interested in self-identifying as breast cancer survivors.

The stories of the women who volunteered to participate speak of great challenges and even greater courage. The women who shared their stories did so with the hope that the lessons they learned will help others who face similar diagnoses. Here's the first of these stories, with a link to more:

When DHHS Human Resources Administrator Mary Shanahan was diagnosed with breast cancer the first time, she was grieving for her mother who had died from the disease less than a year before. At the time with a son who was a year old and her daughter who was 4 ½, Mary's greatest fear was that she would not live long enough for them to remember her.

The mammogram that led to Mary's diagnosis in 1989 was her first ever. While the initial plan called for lumpectomy and radiation, the doctor called her at work to say that she needed a mastectomy.

Nearly ten years later, Mary noticed a new spot and consulted her doctor again. Again the diagnosis was cancer.

Through both cancers, Mary appreciated how much her husband and other family members, friends and co-workers supported her. What meant the most was that instead of saying, "Let me know what I can do," people called to say they would bring dinner, shop for her groceries, clean her house, or take the kids to activities so she could rest.

Cancer gave her perspective on what is really important. She now pays closer attention to what it takes to be healthy, doesn't miss annual appointments and is diligent about self-exams.

When others are diagnosed with breast cancer, Mary is there for them. Knowing how much she appreciated the help she received inspires her to help others.

"You can never change what happens to you, but maybe you can make it easier for someone else," Mary says.

Follow this link to learn how other DHHS co-workers like those shown below survived the challenges of cancer: www.dhhs.ne.gov/CancerSurvivorStories .



Connie Reinsch, Recreation Coordinator at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Kearney *Photo provided*



San-D Nolte, Eligibility Technician for Children & Family Services in McCook *Photo provided*



Sharon Davis, Social Service Worker at the Intake Center in a DHHS Omaha office *Photo provided*

TUNE project combines wellness messages and music

By Bill Wiley

The following captures the spirit of all of those who participated in the TUNE project.

Life is a big jumble of things, some I can control and predict and others I can't. Being in charge of my life is tough, but ultimately, it's my head and heart that determine which way I go. The more I search, the more I realize that good choices unlock other good choices. Like, deciding to do something good for myself today that will allow me to do something even better in the future. I believe it's never too late to dream, and the TUNE project provided me with a way to turn my inspiration into a song that may encourage others to take control, make good choices and live their lives to the fullest.

SONGS & INSPIRATIONS

● Changing My Ways

Marijke Jane from Texas said that "Taking this song into the studio was such a rush...it brought so much energy and life to the performance." Inspired by her own friendships and relationships in Changing My Ways, Marijke promised not to lose herself completely in relationships.

● Motion

Motion is about momentum, members of the band "Adelaide" say. It's knowing what you want and going after it. As one of the first songs the Omaha band wrote together, the guys came to realize that getting an education was a priority they all shared.

● Where You Are

Amy Schmidt said the TUNE contest prompted her to think about her own goals and dreams, and triggered a creative explosion in her songwriting. "Sometimes," Amy said, "the first step is simply to dream again."

● True Colors

Zach Svoboda wrote his song for anyone who feels like the world doesn't see past their skin. It was inspired by one girl's struggle with her weight and self esteem, often wondering if her weight and health were beyond her control.

● Warrior

Writing Warrior for her younger brother, **Aryn Michelle** wanted to send him a message about how much she believed in him and about all the things she knew he could accomplish if he put his heart into it.

● She Won't Take It

Nick Goodwin wrote his song for friends who've overcome addiction, abuse and neglect. His message is, "Don't give up. Don't back down. Don't be defined by this world."



● Light

Omaha native **Ally Rhodes** wrote *Light* for herself, to encourage her to get out of a bad relationship. “I made a world in the song and then all I had to do was build myself up to believe it. And that’s exactly what I did.”

● Girl vs. the World

David Potter imagined himself in some very different shoes, people who’d made bad decisions in their lives and ready to give up. His message is that every good thing, every real change, starts inside you. The biggest challenge, he states, is making sure that your head and heart are working together.



TUNE artists are participating at concerts and events throughout the state in 2010. For more information about TUNE, visit www.tunemylife.org.

Good Things Are Happening!

Support Services staff within Operations at the ten 24-hour facilities and distribution centers in Omaha and Lincoln, as well as dietary departments, have issued nearly 3.9 million supply items since a unified system for inventory transactions began in 2004. This system is used to update quantity on hand and balance sheet and budget reports to ensure an uninterrupted flow of supply items needed to serve DHHS customers such as food, clothing, and medical, recreational, and household items.

Thanks to those who implemented this system and keep it running smoothly, DHHS employees enjoy selection, availability and scheduled delivery of items that help their customers live better lives.



By Marla Augustine

Have you noticed the “[My Nine Months](#)” button on the [Employee Homepage](#)? It’s in the lower right corner.

It’s there for women of reproductive age who work at DHHS.

Developed by the March of Dimes, this button links to information to help women have healthy babies. “The March of Dimes has done a great job putting forth common sense recommendations for women that not only build the healthiest baby but keep mom healthy for a lifetime to enjoy that bundle of joy,” says **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Director of Public Health and Chief Medical Officer.

The website covers important items that a woman who is thinking about having a baby should discuss with her provider about before she gets pregnant: Chronic health problems; family medical history; medications; vitamins; weight; not smoking or drinking alcohol or using illegal drugs; unsafe chemical exposures; and lowering stress, among many other subjects.

The website also includes information for women who may wonder if they are emotionally, physically and financially ready for a baby?

There are things every woman can do before she’s pregnant to help her and her baby have a healthier pregnancy. These include...

- 1. Take folic acid.** Taking a multivitamin with 400 micrograms of folic acid every day can help your baby’s brain and spinal cord develop properly.
- 2. Get a checkup.** One of the most important steps you can take to have a healthy pregnancy is to see your health care provider before you conceive. Your provider can help you be as healthy as possible before and during your pregnancy.
- 3. Eat right and maintain a healthy weight.** You’ll feel better and start your pregnancy off right if you eat a variety of nutritious foods every day. Cut back on caffeine. It’s not safe to try to lose weight once you’re pregnant.
- 4. Stop smoking and avoid secondhand smoke.** Smoking may make it harder for you to get pregnant. If you smoke while you’re pregnant, your baby is at greater risk for being born prematurely or too small and the chance of SIDS (sudden infant death syndrome) increases.
- 5. Stop drinking alcohol.** Drinking alcohol can make it harder for you to get pregnant. Drinking alcohol before or during pregnancy can cause your baby to have birth defects.
- 6. Don’t use illegal drugs.** Taking illegal drugs during pregnancy is risky for mother and baby. If you need help to stop, ask your health care provider.
- 7. Avoid infections.** Wash your hands well with soap and water after using the bathroom, blowing your nose or touching soil. Wash all fruits and vegetables well. If you have a cat, ask someone else to change the litter box. Stay away from pet mice, hamsters and guinea pigs.
- 8. Limit exposure to hazards.** Avoid hazardous chemicals, like cleaning supplies and insect killers. Stay away from strong-smelling cleansers, chemicals and paint.
- 9. Learn about genetics.** Your health care provider will take your health history and ask about the health of members of your family and may recommend that you see a genetic counselor to learn about your risk of having a baby with a birth defect.
- 10. Avoid stress and get fit.** High levels of stress may increase the risk of preterm labor and low birth weight. Exercising for 30 minutes most days of the week is a good way to help maintain or lose weight, build fitness and reduce stress.

The website includes an ovulation calculator and a due date calculator. Every woman thinking about having a baby, who is expecting, or has a new baby would benefit from checking the My Nine Months information on the DHHS website.

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

John Naujoakaitis is a Program Specialist for [Medicaid & Long-Term Care](#) in the area of Acute Care and Physical Health Services. Funded jointly by the state and federal governments, the Nebraska Medicaid Program pays for covered medical services for those persons who are unable to pay for medically necessary services and who meet certain eligibility requirements.

Standing 6 foot 6 inches tall, John played basketball at Peru State College and Bellevue University, but feels more like a juggler now.

“I learned to multi-task until it became a routine thing,” says John. “I also find myself leaving the office thinking about what I’ll need to do so that I can hit the ground running the next day...often to find myself confronting a crisis and changing my plans on the run.”

John manages more than 20 contracts to see that patients receive medical, dental and vision services. He approves Ambulatory room and board rates. He works with 16 health departments and 25 public health nurses who provide medical and educational services in rural areas, and makes sure Medicaid clients have access to care.

John also approves and makes arrangements for room and board for parents to stay with a sick child being treated in a hospital in another part of the state or out of state. His responsibilities also include contributing information for reports DHHS sends to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services each year.

Working on policies, eligibility and responding to questions, concerns and complaints is also part of the job.

“I prioritize like crazy and then just dive in,” he says. “But I couldn’t do anything without my co-workers, and when writing contracts, Legal Services has been wonderful. I also receive invaluable help from other Medicaid program areas and public health departments across the state.”

One of John’s proudest accomplishments came when he and many others helped implement CHIP several years ago.

“I was one of those who traveled the state conducting focus groups to get potential client input. I had just had ankle surgery, was in a cast, on crutches, and doing my best to cram myself into a small state plane. That struggle was more than well worth it because the result was a more client-oriented program.”

The greatest rewards John enjoys from his work are the thank yous he receives from grateful parents whose child Medicaid was able to help.

“I also get thank yous even from people who weren’t eligible for services,” says John. “When I explained to one elderly woman in some detail why she didn’t qualify, she was grateful that I took the time and said, ‘God bless you for helping me’”

John makes a point of explaining to potential clients that not meeting Medicaid medical eligibility requirements doesn’t mean they’ve run into a brick wall.

“I take the extra time to explain that a physician or dentist can always re-evaluate a patient’s condition and that eligibility requirements can change. I try to leave them with some hope.”

When John came to work here as a “temp” 15 years ago, he didn’t expect to stay long.

“What kept me here is that I find challenges invigorating, I like the people I work with, and I feel like I’m doing good for clients, for DHHS and for of Nebraska.”

“John has exceptional skills in working with the public, including both providers of medical services and Medicaid clients,” says **Margaret Booth**, his immediate supervisor. “He’s a team player and always willing to accept new assignments to contribute to the success of the program.”



John Naujoakaitis Photo: Jerry Crisp

Personal preparedness: Celebrate Summer Safely

By Dianna Seiffert

Summer is here, and nice weather and long days make it a perfect time to be outdoors. While being outdoors can be fun, there are things you should think about to help keep your summer safe...like summer cookouts and food safety, fireworks safety for July 4th celebrations, and protecting yourself against insect-related illness. Another critical summer safety topic, the one we're focusing on here, is the importance of keeping cool in hot weather.

Every year hundreds of people in the United States die of heat-related illness. Being out in hot weather for too long can result in serious health problems like heat stroke, heat exhaustion, heat cramps and heat rash. Infants and the elderly are especially at risk from high temperatures.

Here are some common-sense tips to stay cool and avoid heat-related illness:

- Drink plenty of water and don't wait until you are thirsty to drink;
- Avoid alcohol and drinks with caffeine;
- Wear loose, light-colored clothing;
- If outdoors, slow your pace and take frequent rest breaks in the shade to cool off;
- Limit your outdoor activity to morning and evening hours; and
- Since over exposure to the sun can cause skin damage, be sure to wear sunscreen that has an SPF of at least 15 and reapply frequently. Make sure children are also adequately protected.



The [National Safety Council](#) celebrates National Safety Month in June and has some great resources to help you enjoy the summer safely.

Remember...Put your health first and enjoy summer while it lasts!

Pony express riders promote children's mental health

By Jeanne Atkinson

Children's mental health got a boost from the Fraternal Order of Eagles motorcyclists. These "Pony Express" riders left from Scottsbluff on May 20, picking up more than 1,500 letters along the way from youth and families and delivering them to state senators and DHHS officials at the State Capitol in Lincoln on May 22.

The letters shared personal experiences and expressed thanks for support of [children's behavioral health](#). Shown being interviewed by KOLN/KGIN TV, **Stan Bills** led other Eagle Riders across the state to raise awareness about children's behavioral health.



Do people sigh when your emails show up in their in-box?

Email is a big part of our daily work which, if not managed well, will negatively affect work performance. Here are 10 tips to apply to your e-mail communications to help you and those you work with better manage email.

1. **Send only necessary, business related email.** Ask yourself if the email is necessary and has a business reason. Be sure you understand and follow the DHHS IT resources acceptable use policy.
2. **Be sure email is the appropriate way to communicate your message.** If there are high stakes involved, the message is controversial, or you anticipate a strong emotional reaction from an individual, your message will likely be more effectively and sensitively communicated in a face-to-face conversation or in a phone call.
3. **Make the “Subject” line summarize the body of the email.** Ask yourself, ‘will the recipient(s) know what this email is about?’ For example, Instead of Subject: Meeting, say Subject: Location of Email Etiquette meeting 03/23/2010.
4. **Don’t assume the recipient knows the background.** Include enough contextual information at the beginning of the email for the recipient to know what the matter is about. Use the reply option in your email. This will keep the message in the “thread” and make it easier for the recipient to follow.
5. **Keep messages as brief and to the point as possible.** If you have more to say than will fit into three paragraphs, consider using bullet points to separate your main headings. Begin each point with a summary of key information, or the action you want taken. It’s better to send separate emails if you have two or three unrelated issues to take up with the recipient.
6. **Try to reply within 24 hours, less if possible.** Get in the habit of replying immediately. The longer you wait to reply, the more likely you will forget or have a back-log of unanswered email.
7. **Layout message for readability.** Use spaces and breaks between paragraphs and long sentences to make it easier on the reader.
8. **Use the “priority” (!) mark correctly.** If something needs immediate attention, mark it as a priority. On the other hand avoid marking an email ‘high priority’ when it is really ‘normal’ priority.
9. **Eliminate superfluous text, graphics and animation.** Keep the focus on your business message and be as efficient as possible. Animated characters, graphics, and large inspirational messages detract from the message and unnecessarily clog email systems. Messages containing these superfluous additions waste paper when emails are printed as well.
10. **Keep your inbox clean.** Delete unneeded messages when you have finished reading them and set up folders to file messages that need to be saved. This way you will be able to see new messages at a glance and be able to locate older messages more easily.



Submitted by *Mary Osborne*, Staff Development Administrator

Sources:

Rapid Learning Institute, *The Compliance & Management Update for Supervisors*, March 5, 2010.
David Tuffley & Griffith University, “Email Etiquette: Netiquette,” June 2009.

In their own words

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

Jan Hart, whose husband **Rolly** moved into the Norfolk Veterans' Home (NVH), sent these three emails:

To **Joan Hult** (Associate Director of Nursing & Admissions Coordinator):

I have to take a moment to thank you and the staff profusely for such a wonderful "move-in" experience! This was way beyond my expectations, and I think I can say that for Rolly, too. He had two main concerns: the food, and his roommate. I know the food was an A+, and from the short time I was there, I think the roommate will be also! EVERYONE was so kind, friendly, gracious and helpful to both of us. We have become two of your many advocates!

To Administrative Assistant **Linda Sparr** (who had asked permission to print the emails):

Thank you so much for this opportunity! We have very quickly become one of your best advocates. Since we have come from a private nursing home setting, we can't help but compare and wish the 'outside world' would take a few organizational lessons from you.

We have also said that the private sector should watch and listen as to how NVH handles their patients—with care, a smile, and thoughtfulness. What a difference that makes!

The transition from home to the nursing home setting is much quicker for the patient and the family when choosing words and actions to fit the patient. And I personally want to thank RoseAnn Ross for her tremendous help in this process.

To **Joan Hult** and **RoseAnn Ross** (Certified Master Social Worker):

I have to tell you that I was most pleasantly surprised by Rolly when I came up to see him yesterday. Molly, our dog, was soooo glad to see him.

I met 3 of Rolly's new friends! He showed me around the area. He had located a visiting room he likes and spends time there each day. He enjoys his roommate. AND, beyond my belief, he is going to play Bingo this week! Now that is truly unbelievable.

It is like he is blossoming! Thank goodness. Thank you both for hanging in there with us. I know I have been pushy, but we are so appreciative of this Home, and people like yourselves. It is like a miracle for Rolly and me! Thank you ever so much! I have encouraged three other families just this week to start paperwork, so look out!

Dear **Mary Guier**

(Social Service Worker, DHHS Omaha Pacific Street Office):

Thank you so much for facilitating a crisis payment on a client's electrical bill. You're awesome!

Tami Richmeier, RN, BSN
Case Manager
Eastern Nebraska Office on Aging

Please send letters from satisfied customers via any method listed in our editorial box on page 2, and we'll publish as many as space allows.

In their own words

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

Dear **Kerry Winterer**, (CEO, Nebraska Department of Health & Human Services):

Kerry, you were the guest speaker at the Sunrise Lions Club meeting last month, and I'm finally getting around to telling you how much I feel I learned from your talk. You are a wonderful ambassador for DHHS, and I applaud the work you are doing!

Kathy M. Byrnes, CEO
Prevent Blindness Nebraska, Omaha

(Editor's Note: As part of his statewide campaign to tell the DHHS story, Kerry Winterer has now spoken with more than 800 members of over a dozen community groups including Rotary, Kiwanis, Lions and Sertoma clubs.)

Dear **Lifespan Health Services**:

Enclosed FINALLY is my check for registration to the Lifespan Health Conference in Kearney. I am SO THANKFUL that I was allowed to attend, in spite of the fact that I forgot to mail my check with my registration. THANK YOU SO MUCH!

All of the speakers were great, as were other presentations, the meals, and organization of everything else. Thank you all for the planning, efforts and vision that guided you in presenting the conference.

A Grateful Conferee

Dear **Rey Rodriguez** (Facility Operating Officer, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Kearney):

Thank you for allowing us to tour the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center (YRTC). The youth who led tours were an excellent way to view your facility.

This provided a realistic, close-up view of day-to-day activities. We especially appreciate the openness and willingness of the youth to share their experiences with us.

Amherst High School Sociology Class

Dear **Eldima Him-Osorio** (Supervisor of Certification & Birth Registration Sections, Vital Records, Lincoln):

I wish to thank you for your diligence in safeguarding my son's identity by verifying the requester's photo ID. I am relieved to know that our local and state governments are doing all they can to provide protection from identify thieves.

A Satisfied Customer

WNVH Employees Among Biggest Weight Losers

[Western Nebraska Veterans' Home](#)

(WNVH) employees entered the *LiveHealthyAmerica* 100-day weight loss challenge and more than met it. As a result of losing a collective 175 pounds, the team came in first for DHHS out of approximately 80 teams—in the top four teams for the entire state—and 15th out of nearly 4,000 teams nationwide.

“The team total was over 14%, and Administrator **Lonnie Starke** was our ‘biggest loser’ by shedding more than 21% of his previous weight,” says **Todd Kraus**, WNVH Supply Supervisor and weight-loss team leader. “Living healthier can really become a beneficial addiction.”

According to the Nebraska Sports Council, which sponsored the event, Nebraskans participating statewide lost a total of 17,498 pounds during the 100-Day weight-loss challenge. The top ten teams were also recognized on May 24 on the KOLN-KGIN TV morning show.



Standing from left to right: **Yvonne Hill, Todd Kraus, Lonnie Starke and Sandy Schuldies**. Seated (l-r): **Cathy Fillinger and Leona Groskopf**.
Photo: Leticia Ramirez-Gurney

Contributing to the Community

Carla Crook, [Children & Family](#)

[Services](#) Specialist Supervisor, challenged co-workers in the DHHS Seward office to give to the State’s Campaign Against Hunger. As a result, the Butler County and Seward County Blue Valley Community Action groups each received a full box and a full bag of grocery items for their food pantries.



Standing (left to right) are: **Mary Seip, Kasey Starva, Pam Evans, Tamie Kocian, Jodi Fransen, Linda Swanson and Janis Schmieding**; Kneeling (l-r) are: **Rose Harnly and Tangie Gropp**. *Photo: Jackie Hoeft*

First Reunification Day celebrated!

Nebraska courts in Omaha, York and Hastings celebrated National Reunification Day in June through their “Eyes of the Child” teams. Reunification Day celebrates families who’ve overcome challenges to safely be reunited with children. Their stories can inspire other parents and let them know it’s possible to confront and resolve the issues that led to separation from their children, and to being reunited with them.

From left: **Judge Curtis Evans** of York, National Reunification Day sponsor for the 5th Judicial District; **Beth Wissing**, Program Director for CASA of South Central Nebraska 10th Judicial District; **Governor Heineman**; and, **Todd Reckling**, Director of Children and Family Services in DHHS.



From left: **Judge Curtis Evans**, **Beth Wissing**, **Governor Heineman** and **Todd Reckling** Photo: *Janet Bancroft*

BSDC Greenhouse helps people blossom

By *Jeanne Atkinson*

A 40’ x 100’ greenhouse is letting people at the Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC) get into gardening in a big way.

“There’s something therapeutic about working in a garden that benefits both mind and body,” says Vocational Services Coordinator **Nancy Sedlacek**.

The greenhouse has paved paths and raised beds. It accommodates up to 60 people at one time and will be available year round. People raising flowers or vegetables can use them themselves, give them away to friends, or even take them to the Beatrice Farmer’s Market to sell. People can also learn skills that may develop into paid jobs in the community.

BSDC and the local Chamber of Commerce are partnering on a ribbon cutting ceremony at the open house on June 24.



Carl Vacanti tenderly waters a sprout at BSDC’s new greenhouse. Photo: *Ryan Broker*