

CONNECTIONS

March 2015 VOLUME 15, ISSUE 3

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

Take Time to Nominate Your Coworkers. Employee/Supervisor of the Year Nominations are Due April 6, 2015!

"It's the ultimate 'At-a-boy,'" **Howard Isaacs**, Health Program Manager, said about being named one of DHHS' 2014 Supervisors of the Year.

"I was surprised and honored...shocked, really, when I found out," he said. Howard said he has worked at DHHS for more than 40 years and has received other recognitions before, but this was the first time he was named Supervisor of the Year.

"I was on Cloud Nine for the longest time," he said. "This was such a special nomination because it came from someone I supervise. The nomination itself was really, really nice and thoughtful. It truly reflected the attitude I have about supervising people."

Nominations for the 2015 DHHS Employees and Supervisors of the Year are due April 6. Any full-time employee can nominate another.

"It's a very simple process," said Howard. "If you've never done it before, it's worthwhile. If you've nominated people before but they haven't been chosen, keep trying. There are a lot of people at DHHS who deserve this honor."

DHHS Employees and Supervisors of the Year are recognized at special ceremonies held by the Governor and DHHS in October and awarded a \$500 bonus for this great honor.

More information and nomination forms are on the [Human Resources and Development website](#). Nominate a special coworker today!

The [October 2014 Connections](#) lists the 2014 DHHS employees and supervisors of the year.

It is important to recognize our employees for being exemplary and demonstrating the [DHHS Values and Core Competencies](#) with their coworkers and the people they serve daily.

A large, ornate award seal for the 2015 DHHS Employee and Supervisor of the Year awards. The seal is gold with a red ribbon across the middle that says 'Recognizing Excellence'. The top of the seal says '2015 DHHS' and the bottom says 'Employee and Supervisor of the Year awards'. The background of the seal has a red and white striped pattern.

Nomination forms are available online or in your local Human Resources & Development Office.

Facility, Customer Service Center, Local Office, and Service Area employees should send nomination forms to their Administrators.

Central Office employees should send the forms to Judy Hudgins in Human Resources & Development, 5th Floor, Nebraska State Office Building, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Department of Health & Human Services
DHHS
NEBRASKA

Nomination forms are due April 6, 2015

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

Acting Chief Executive Officer: Dr. Joseph Acierno	Medicaid and Long-Term Care Division Director: Calder Lynch
Behavioral Health Division Acting Director: Sheri Dawson	Public Health Division Director/Chief Medical Officer: Dr. Joseph Acierno
Children and Family Services Division Acting Director: Tony Green	Veterans' Homes Division Director: John Hilgert
Developmental Disabilities Division Acting Director: Jodi Fenner	Chief Operating Officer: Matt Clough

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DHHS' Employee Website....

New information and photos are added daily to the employee website. Here are some recent posts and the dates they appeared. Like what you're seeing and reading? Then check out the employee homepage every day! Got an idea or a photo you'd like to share for the employee homepage or *Connections*? Send it to Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.

Homepage Homeruns

[LRC's Therapy Dog Envy Visits with Coworkers, Feb. 6, 2015](#)

On a mission to help and heal, Envy, Lincoln Regional Center's therapy dog, visits with her coworkers **Lindsey Gonzales**, Human Services Treatment Specialist (left/middle) and **Caitlin Bartman**, Activity Specialist (right).



Envy officially started "working" at LRC in October, 2014. LRC therapists spent three days in training with Domesti-Pup staff to learn how to be Envy's handlers and to use her skills to help patients in their recovery. When not at work, Envy lives with her home parent, LRC Facility Operating Officer **Stacey Werth-Sweeney** and her family.

[DHHS, Dept. of Education Team Up to Promote Good Oral Health, Feb. 24, 2015](#)

In conjunction with National Children's Dental Health Month, DHHS employees chose February to share their important message of preventing dental decay.

Three different program areas in DHHS decided to team up and join forces with the Nebraska Department of Education to provide oral health kits for each and every child enrolled in Early Head Start and Head Start programs throughout Nebraska.



DHHS employees from Health Promotions' Office of Oral Health and Dentistry, Lifespan Health's Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) and Lifespan Health's Together for Kids and Families program assembled approximately 6,000 oral health kits. These kits containing oral health supplies (a child toothbrush, an adult toothbrush,

toothpaste and a two-minute timer) and important information on preventing dental decay, were delivered to Head Start educators across the state on Feb. 11.

[Surf's Up! NVH Members, Staff Share Fun, Fun, Fun at Beach Party, March 3, 2015](#)

Members and staff at the Norfolk Veterans Home thought, "Wouldn't it Be Nice" to get into the spirit of warmer weather? So they brought with them "Surf's Up" and "Good Vibrations" for a "Fun, Fun, Fun" Beach Party held Feb. 24.

All members and staff were encouraged to wear their beach attire for the day. Beach Boys music played in the background as members and staff enjoyed some fresh fruit and drinks in the Recreation Room. Members wrapped up the afternoon by playing some bingo.

For more fun photos, visit NVH's March newsletter, [the Observer](#), page 5.



New CEO Courtney Phillips to Start Work at DHHS April 2



Gov. Pete Ricketts named **Courtney Phillips** DHHS' new Chief Executive Officer (CEO). Courtney starts her new position with DHHS on April 2.

Courtney most recently served as Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Hospitals for Louisiana. As deputy secretary she was chief operating officer and chair of the department's Human Services Interagency Council. She also provided direct management and oversight for the department's major program offices, including behavioral health, aging and adult services, citizens with developmental disabilities and public health, as well as the Louisiana Commission for the Deaf.

"I look forward to working with Courtney," said Gov. Ricketts. "Her expertise will help state government work better for the children who are in the care of the state, for individuals who live in state facilities or through our support in the community, and for all those who rely on public services."

"I've heard so many good things about DHHS and Nebraska," said Courtney. "I can't wait to start my new job. I'm especially looking forward to meeting everyone and working together to help Nebraskans live better lives. See you on April 2!"

Introducing...DHHS' Center for Professional Learning

By *Kevin Hensel*,
Leadership Consultant

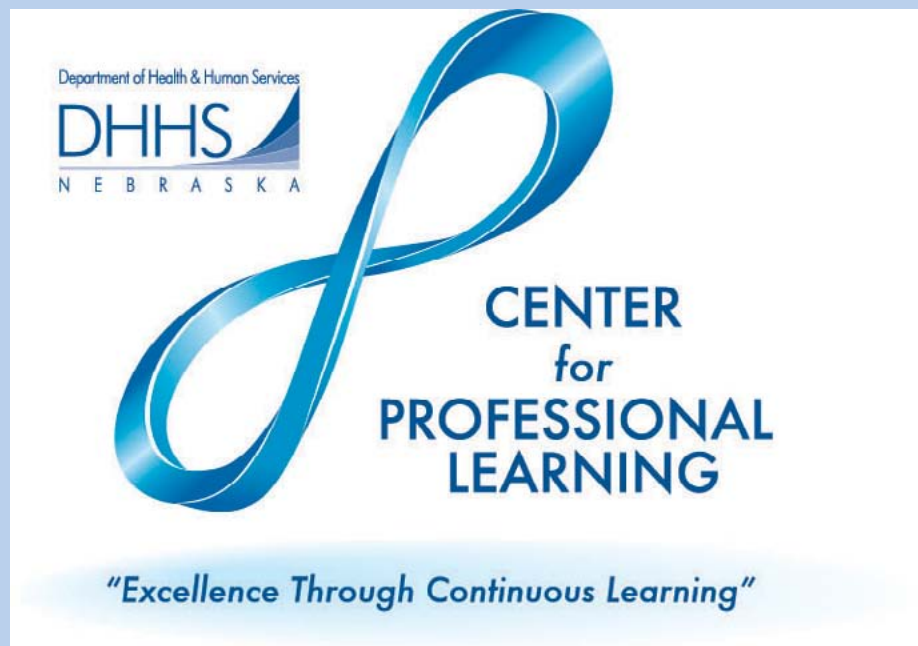
Spring is in the air.....and so are exciting changes within DHHS Staff Development in Human Resources.

Staff Development is now the **Center for Professional Learning!**

The new name better reflects our on-going commitment to excellence through continuous learning with even more training and resource offerings for all DHHS employees.

"This is a very exciting time in regard to the changes within the Center for Professional Learning and within our entire DHHS organization," said **Mary Osborne**, administrator of the Center for Professional Learning. "With change comes new perspectives and new opportunities. We look forward to continuing to develop and implement innovative programs that inspire employee growth and development while reinforcing DHHS' values and core competencies."

The Learning Solutions Coordinators, Training Specialists, Training



Coordinators, Clinical Nurse Trainers and Leadership Consultants within the Center for Professional Learning are aligned to provide services that support and encourage excellence at all levels across the entire organization.

Visit our updated website [here](#). You can continue to find course offerings, registration information and continuous learning resources on the DHHS intranet within Link EDC or you can

contact the Center for Professional Learning at 402-471-9323.

"Never become so much of an expert that you stop gaining expertise. View life as a continuous learning experience." - Denis Waitley

A Day in the Life of... Danielle Larson, YRTC-G Mothers & Babies Program Coordinator

By Ashley Hartman

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This "Day in the Life" series highlights DHHS employees and how we help people live better lives in different ways, through diverse jobs, across the state, every day. The following story is only one of many positive stories to be told about DHHS employees. If you'd like to be featured in our "Day in the Life" series, email [Ashley Hartman](#) or call her at 402-471-9108.
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The roughly 40 young women at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Geneva (YRTC-G) were committed there by the state court system.

The mission of the YRTC-G is to teach these young women the skills they need to become "good, law-abiding citizens."

Danielle Larson's work at YRTC-G expands on that mission.

As coordinator of YRTC-G's Mothers and Babies program, Larson's job is not only to teach these women to be good citizens, but to teach them to be good mothers as well.

Mothers and Babies is a voluntary program open to all of YRTC-G's pregnant and parenting youth. The nationally-recognized program provides young women with education on prenatal care, labor and delivery, and parenting techniques.

Larson, a youth counselor, has been the program's coordinator since 2013.

"When I first started with the department, I didn't realize this is the path I would follow, but after accepting this role and immersing myself in the

literature related to child development, I have developed a real passion for the work I do," she said.

Larson started at YRTC-G after graduating from the University of Kansas with a degree in psychology. She knew she wanted to work with people, and human behavior had always fascinated her, so she thought YRTC-G would be a good fit.

She started at YRTC-G as a youth security specialist which allowed her to work directly with the youth in their day-to-day activities. From there, Larson moved into a supervisory role and then into her current position with the Mothers and Babies program.

In this position, Larson works with pregnant and parenting youth in groups and meets with them individually to provide parenting guidance and support. She also arranges and supervises visitation between the mothers and their children.

Mothers at YRTC-G are generally allowed three visits a week from their children. These visits usually last three to four hours but Larson also oversees an overnight visitation program. Youths in the Mothers and Babies program can earn the right to have overnight visits with their children that often last close to 24 hours.

YRTC-G staff supervise these overnight visits which are held in former staff housing that has been renovated into a living unit complete with a nursery.

During these visits, the mothers plan activities for the evening, prepare meals and coordinate bed and bath time.

These visitation programs give young mothers hands-on experience while they still have YRTC-G staff to provide guidance. For some, this is guidance they may not have received elsewhere.

"Not every youth has had appropriate role models in their lives to teach them and demonstrate appropriate parenting," Larson said. "Oftentimes in my work with the youth, our focus becomes breaking the cycle and helping the youth learn to cope with their own struggles in life so that they can move forward as responsible and loving mothers."

Once the youth have faced their own shortcomings, their confidence in themselves and in their parenting abilities grow, Larson said. This is something she loves to see. It's what the Mothers and Babies program is all about.

"Helping to foster the mothers' growth as a parent is probably the most rewarding part of my job," she said. "My goal is for them to walk away as the best mommies they can be."

In helping YRTC-G's youth become better mothers, Larson believes the Mothers and Babies program has a lasting effect.

"With this role I have the opportunity to impact, not only the lives of the youth in our care, but also the lives of their children," she said.

That is one of the main reasons Larson enjoys working for DHHS.

"Even though the nature of our work comes with its good and bad days and challenges and frustrations, when you step back to reflect, we truly do make an impact in this world," she said. "I truly



Danielle Larson,
DHHS Employee of the Year, 2014

believe in everything that DHHS stands for. We have a great organization, and I am thankful for my experiences thus far and for the personal growth it has afforded me."

Last fall, Larson's coworkers honored her contributions by naming her one of the department's employees of the year. Her coworkers said they were impressed by her "energy level, motivation, conscientiousness and commitment to the facility's mission."

To learn more about Larson's work with Mothers and Babies program, read this [past news release](#) and visit the [Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center-Geneva page](#) of the DHHS website.



Inchworm Organization...

Consistency Over Perfection Can Lead To 'Change'

By Tary Paris,
Person-Centered Care Coordinator,
Lincoln Regional Center

"Mile by mile it's a trial; yard by yard it's hard; but inch by inch it's a cinch." –Anonymous

Do you count your accomplishments like counting coins? Setting goals is a key practice in breaking down complex tasks, but what happens when the to-do list is so extensive it needs a notebook?

Do you feel so overwhelmed you don't even know where to start? That is known as the "Centipede's Dilemma:" thinking too hard about a task that you are faced with causing paralysis by analysis – thinking so hard that you can't even get started.

There is a way to achieve balance, while still accomplishing. Since goal achievement rewards behavior, one can build rewards as well as breaks into a schedule. Nike made a fortune by saying "Just Do It." Why? Because taking the first step is the hardest – so start your focus there.

Goals can be broken down to smaller tasks, making them surmountable. Taking a walk, working a crossword puzzle, or listening to music on a break can provide a mental clearing. Like that inchworm, just put one foot in front of the other...

Regular goal-setting is an effective

strategy. An over-achiever can schedule the "achievement" of relaxation too. Super-achievers strive to feel enough accomplishment at work to allow themselves to go home. Over-working can make you ineffective, creating mental blocks and inhibiting creativity.

Taking a break at consistent intervals rewards high productivity and clears the mind. The sensation of too many tasks pulls your focus from the necessary ones. Keeping a journal of ideas that interrupt your concentration is a helpful strategy. If it's a good enough idea to interrupt you, it'll still be good later. Remaining on task chisels down your to-do list, which is very rewarding. Then you can reevaluate your thoughts and ideas before making them public as well.

Creativity creates goals that may be so fantastic they are impossible to achieve. Making a goal to finish what is started is going to create momentum from accomplishment. Narrowing ideas down to practical steps helps the achiever put one foot in front of the other, reducing overwhelming feelings while still feeding the need to get things done.

Person-centered care speaks to accountability. Writing down or saying out loud that you are going to do something increases your chances of actually doing it. Deadlines increase chances of accomplishing goals. Making a plan and taking the first step toward achieving it, leads to success.

Consistency over perfection gets you



results. When you get stuck, you can phone a friend. Or you can partner with a teammate to polish up a project when a dilemma strikes you.

Taking brain or walking breaks can give you a reward for task completion. Lists can be culled to three key things

you can do. You can "Do your best, and forget the rest." Sometimes writing it down or dreaming about it works, and so does tossing out the list altogether. Sometimes you don't have to do it all!

Moving forward at any pace, is still moving forward!

Offboarding: An Employee's Reflection of Employment with DHHS

By Alex Garcia, Administrator
Human Resources and Development

We've heard about 'onboarding,' but what is 'offboarding?' Just as onboarding is the process of transitioning new people into our organization, offboarding is the process of closing out a person's employment time with us.

Onboarding's focus is to introduce new employees to our organizational culture, structure, policies and procedures, in addition to setting up their access to systems, making sure they have work space and supplies, and providing other important information about their work areas (like the nearest bathroom).

Offboarding's focus leans toward transferring duties to a new person or interim person to cover the work until a new person is hired and also takes care of the administrative actions needed to end an employment, such as turning in badges, completing a performance review, cancelling access to systems and processing the final paycheck.

Leaving a job is also a time for reflection of the employment experience. One way to do this is by conducting an exit survey.

We used to do this using paper surveys that often were not filled out. Paper made it harder to analyze, too. During this past year, we transitioned to an automated process where a departing

employee receives a link to an online survey. Now, it's easier to analyze, and, with a 49 percent return rate, we can spot some trends which I would like to share with you now.

Of the more than 430 surveys we received in 2014, more than 80 of them were people who were retiring. This is interesting information that we are keeping an eye on. There were another 80 or so who left for other jobs outside of state government, and the remaining (around 270) left for personal reasons. Wanting to know more about why people were leaving, we asked some follow-up questions.

When we asked for the reason for leaving for another job, the top ranked reasons were: to have better hours/working schedules; higher salary; and the job duties of the new job.

Forty-eight percent of the respondents left because they were dissatisfied with their job. When we asked them to rank what dissatisfied them, they identified: supervision; too much work; and salary as their top reasons, in that order.

These results were somewhat expected, since the nature of the work we do is challenging. Many jobs require us to provide our services across a variety of shifts. It is also often hard to compare/compete state salaries with other organizations. For similar organizations,

these results reflect similar industry trends.

However, this concrete information provides great insight of where to focus our efforts. We are currently assessing ways to address these areas. For example, on page three in this edition of *Connections*, you can read about a new supervisor program designed to provide additional training and resources to supervisors, understanding the major level of influence and impact supervisors have on their teams.

Regardless of the reason for leaving a

job, the final workdays should leave someone generally happy about the experiences they've had with the organization. There were a couple of other pieces of information we received from the exit surveys. Of all the respondents, more than 68 percent said they would return to DHHS if they were eligible for rehire, and more than 73 percent would recommend DHHS as a good place to work.

So if you find yourself in a situation where you are leaving us, rest assured, we want your feedback, and *we are listening!*



LEAVING A JOB CAN BE A TIME OF REFLECTION.

Working With People Who Insist on Having Their Way

“The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is the knack of getting along with people.” – Theodore Roosevelt

By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources

Sooner or later most of us will encounter someone at work who doesn't seem open minded to our point of view. Maybe the person doesn't even seem willing to consider that differing opinions can result in a win-win.



It's easy to get along with people who see things as we do. But we have to work with all kinds of folks, including people we find challenging, if not exasperating.

Below are some suggestions for working with people who try your patience.

(1) **Separate the other person's point of view—the idea being expressed—from the delivery.** A person may be disagreeable in how things are said, but have good ideas. Be clear that you are not confusing the content of what the other person is saying with the other person's communication style. Know what you are disagreeing about. As the saying goes, “10% of conflict is due to a difference in opinion. 90% is due to the wrong tone of voice.”

(2) **Check for understanding frequently.** Be clear that you are truly dealing with a disagreement, and not simply different ways of saying compatible things. Ask open-ended questions to ensure you are hearing the other person correctly. Spend less time trying to make the other person understand what you think, and more time making the other person feel understood. Remember, “One of the best ways to persuade others is with your ears—by listening to them” (Dean Rusk).

(3) **Earn yourself a hearing.** Demonstrate that what the other person thinks is important to you. Say, “You seem locked into this way of thinking. I'd like to learn your reasons to help me understand.” Emphasize areas of common ground where the two of you share agreement. Then ask, “May I tell you my reasons for thinking as I do? Maybe we can come up with an alternative way to go that we both like.”

(4) **Do a reality check on yourself.** Ask yourself two questions: “What are the facts in this exchange with the other person?” and “Am I telling myself a story about the other person by adding my own assumptions?” It's not fair to hold someone else accountable to our imagination, for example that the other person “deliberately disagrees

about everything and is just trying to make me angry.”

Also, ask yourself if the issue is worth arguing. If it's a question of best services, then clearly your answer must be ‘Yes’. If you are in disagreement over pizza toppings, let it go, for your well-being if nothing else.



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Please email your thoughts, concerns, or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships to Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov. I will email you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your ideas in a future column.



“Every person you fight with has many other people in his life with whom he gets along quite well. You cannot look at a person who seems difficult to you without also looking at yourself.” – Jeffrey A. Kottler

In Gratitude

The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' mission:

Helping people live better lives.



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

To the Staff at the Grand Island Veterans' Home and the Lancaster County Veterans Service Office:

Thank you for your help in our efforts to place our mom in a Veterans' facility. Our mom moved to the Grand Island Veterans Home's Anderson Building. She has made the transition, and we are so pleased with the loving care she received from all of the staff (housekeepers and maintenance men included).

Keep up the good work you do for our Veterans and their families. We appreciate you!

A Thankful Client

Joan Thompson (Social Services Lead Worker, Fremont Customer Service Center),

I wanted to share this with you and the team. The day we came home, I cautiously looked at the house before I pulled in our driveway, to see any signs of lights on. What a load of stress was lifted when I saw a light shining through the window. I'm beyond grateful, that once again, you have helped my family in a major way. I felt in my heart, since moment one, that you were genuinely, lovingly fighting for us. The way you treated me, made me feel better, even if the answer was no, I would have walked away feeling better, because you helped put me in a calmer state of mind. Thank you to the team of people who have to make tough decisions. Thank you for helping me again and giving lights and heat to my kids. Thank you for advocating and helping my family.

A Grateful Client

Joette Novak (DHHS Administrator, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Lincoln),

I just want you to know how much I appreciate **Greg Carlson** (Staff Assistant, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Lincoln) letting me know per the authorization process when our clients have waiver workers or have been Medicaid managed care. This information is so helpful to me. I just wanted you to that I appreciate him going the extra mile to let me know. I think that will certainly help all of us to serve our clients better.

Thank you again

**HealthConnect at Home/
St. Elizabeth Hospice**

To DHHS Webmaster (**Greg Votava**, Public Information Officer, Lincoln),

Thank you so much for the information! My mother and I are gathering helpful information so if she needs it, it's only a bookmark away, and we found your page <http://dhhs.ne.gov/medicaid/aging/pages/UsefulLinks.aspx> to be extremely helpful. We really want to thank you for all the work you've done to put so much great information in one spot!

A Thankful Customer

Debbie Kuhn (Emergency Medical Services Specialist, Lincoln) and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services,

The Tri-Mutual Aid Association and its Fire Fighters and Paramedics would like to extend our "Personal Thank You" to you, for your generosity and participation in our 2015 TMA "Annual" Training Day. We were able to successfully train over 150 participants on Saturday—the biggest attendance on record!

You are a true friend of the Tri-Mutual Aid and your helping hand is greatly appreciated. It's people like you who are willing to step up and help that make our training programs such a success. It's a "win-win" for our members, first responders, fire fighters, paramedics, law enforcement agencies and the communities we work for.

You have our deepest gratitude!

Director, Boys Town Department of Safety and Fire

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