

Connections

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Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

November 2010

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 11



Gang member, drug pusher or rehabilitated inspirational rapper? Find out inside.
Photo: C's Photography

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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.

[Emergency Medical Services Workshops Coming to your Community](#) October 25, 2010

[DHHS Announces Next Steps to Strengthen Child Welfare/Juvenile Services Reform](#) October 15 2010

[Norfolk Regional Center Celebrates 125th Anniversary](#) October 13, 2010

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

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

make the connection . . .

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Department of Health & Human Services



The Good Life: A reminder of what we all share and hope to provide to our fellow Nebraskans

By Kerry Winterer

I want to take this opportunity to wish you all a Happy Thanksgiving.

These words alone conjure up thoughts of family, turkey and pumpkin pie, traveling, and maybe a football game or two, along with our own very personal reasons for being thankful.

As I thought about what I'd write this month and I thought about what Thanksgiving means to me and my family, I realized how our work is connected with the idea of giving thanks. It came to me that many Nebraskans may be giving thanks for something that connects them very personally to the Department of Health and Human Services. In many instances, they might not even make the connection to us.

Consider the number of people who will be expressing thanks for their health or the healing they've received, but won't directly think about our oversight or involvement with their health care team, or the hospital or nursing home that's cared for them or a family member.

Maybe they're thankful for the wonderful care their children receive through a child care program, but they won't

necessarily connect that safe, caring environment to our work.

Of course there are areas that may be more obvious because of direct services. Many people will be thankful for the public assistance they receive that helps put food on the table,

provides clothing and/or heat for their family, helps pay for child care, reimburses their health care, etc.

And, thousands of families across the state have a connection to our ten 24-hour facilities and are thankful for the care and quality services either they or a loved one receive.

After you've enjoyed your holiday meal and basked in the comfort of family (and have maybe taken a nap), take a moment to consider that the work of the Department of Health and Human Services, and your involvement in that,

has made life better for many people. As I've said many times, you help people live better lives.

I wish you an enjoyable holiday, safe travels, and good (and mostly healthy) food. Again, Happy Thanksgiving.



Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

The world is changing. It's fast-paced and people get their news in bits and pieces. *DHHS Directions* provides quick info about current work of one or two Divisions in each issue.



John Hilgert, Director Photo: Bill Wiley

DIVISION OF VETERANS' HOMES

- The [Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home \(ENVH\)](#) and the [Western Nebraska Veterans' Home \(WNVH\)](#) at Scottsbluff both have received perfect scores on their last annual surveys by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This means the facilities had no deficiencies in the areas of life safety, environment, staff training/development, dietary-food service, finance-member banking and billing, recreation/activities, medical staff credentialing, social services, and areas related to quality assurance and care.
- The [Grand Island Veterans' Home](#) was recognized earlier this year by a legislative resolution sponsored by **Sen. Mike Gloor** for improvements in providing quality care to veterans.
- All four veterans' homes provide assisted living as an option for care for people who do not yet need skilled nursing care.
- The Grand Island Veterans Home was recognized by CIMRO, the State Quality Improvement Organization, for pressure ulcer and wound management care delivery.
- At WNVH, smallmouth bass were introduced into the Home's pond this summer. The fish were donated by the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission.
- The Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home at Bellevue is under consideration to be a filming site by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs for dementia training.
- The [Norfolk Veterans' Home](#) celebrates "Dollar Days" each November. Dollar Days

shows appreciation to all members from the American Legion, American Legion Auxiliaries, American Legion Riders and Sons of the American Legion. Each member receives \$5 that they can spend any way they wish. They can buy items from the Home's canteen, or buy craft items that members make, or to stores on shopping day outings.

DIVISION OF DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES (DD)

- The [Beatrice State Developmental Center \(BSDC\)](#) is working toward having five separately licensed and certified Intermediate Care Facilities (ICFs) on campus by June 30, 2011. Each one will have a specific population cared for by staff assigned only to that area.
- BSDC offers three distinct living environments for about 165 individuals: dormitories, cottages and apartments.
- All direct support staff at BSDC have now been assigned to one of five units on campus. Staffing will now be consistent, with improved training and support in the homes.
- People living at BSDC have more employment opportunities. More than 33 people have jobs ranging from working at manufacturing plants, car dealerships, or delivering newspapers to selling their own greeting cards.
- Our Bridges program is Nebraska's only community-based Center for Developmental Disability. Based on staff recommendations, our Capital Construction budget included a proposal to move from the Hastings Regional Center campus and construct a true community-based setting.
- A comprehensive overhaul of DD services is in process as we work on five-year waiver renewals. We'll go from 12 to 19 services, with more options for person-centered, flexible services.



Jodi Fenner, Director Photo: Bill Wiley

- The [Community-based Services Section](#) is completely overhauling Quality Assurance/Quality Improvement to develop a comprehensive process for community DD programs. Six new surveyors will certify providers as waiver providers and ensure people can choose from quality community programs.
- Communication, communication, communication! I've visited 20 of Nebraska's 70 community-based programs and will get to all the rest this year. BSDC holds monthly town hall meetings, and the *Sower* newsletter provides great updates.

Don't give up on your dreams:

Former YRTC youth believes dreams are the first step in turning any life around

By Jerry Crisp

Gang member. Drug pusher. Drug experimenter. Just a few of **Brent Lopez's** "accomplishments" before his own determination and helping hands turned his life around. Now 25, he's an inspirational rapper whose professional name is "**Binx Lopez.**"

More than just an up-and-comer, he's now committed to helping others live a better life.

Born in Lincoln but moving to Omaha at age 15, his "resume" includes detention centers, drug rehabs, and multiple stays at correctional facilities in four Nebraska counties. Maybe as a way of adjusting to institutional living, he wrote poems and rap music from when he was first incarcerated at age 12.

"I hurt a lot of innocent people, but music offered an opportunity to let people know that I exist in a positive way," Brent says. "I believe I can inspire and touch people of any age, any gender, and any race."

Brent was sent to the [Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney \(YRTC-Kearney\)](#) no fewer than three times. His experiences there helped make a difference in his life.

"I believe 100% in the way everything was run at Kearney," he says. "You would share problems in small groups and learn a lot about how to work toward solutions. You became brothers in a very raw and real way."

Rey Rodriguez, now Facility Operating Officer and then a Youth Security Specialist, worked with Brent during his third stay at YRTC-Kearney.

"Brent was selfish, resentful of authority and didn't trust many people, including himself," Rodriguez says. "But he showed leadership skills, slowly made value changes, and by the time he left, was leading group members in a positive way. Brent was always intelligent and creative, so everyone here knew he had the tools to be successful."

While still at YRTC-Kearney, Brent earned his General Education Diploma (GED) from Central Community College.

No longer committed to correctional facilities, Brent is now committed to realizing personal career dreams and helping others realize theirs.

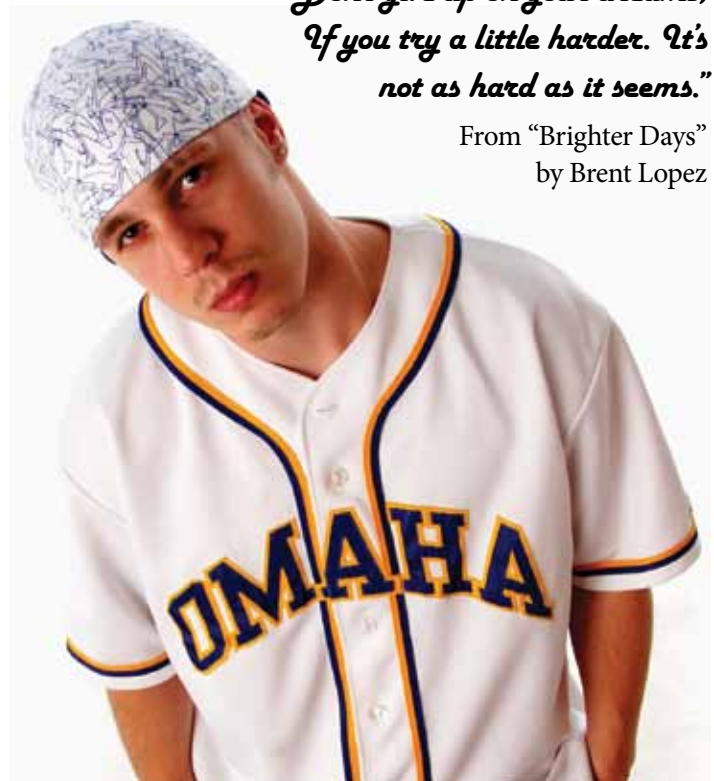
"When I was at the YRTC, I was known as the Misleader, but now I've taken off the 'mis-' part," says Brent. "My current dream is to travel the country speaking to and performing for at-risk youth."

Brent has spoken to at-risk youth around 15 times so far. His message includes the difference between friends and accomplices, the importance of family and school, and foremost, "what's your dream, and how believing in yourself is the key to getting it accomplished."

Brent now heads his own production company, Myrical Entertainment, and has cut an album titled "Myrical Child,"

*"Don't give up on your dreams,
If you try a little harder. It's
not as hard as it seems."*

From "Brighter Days"
by Brent Lopez



Inspirational rapper Brent "Binx" Lopez, now living his dream.

Photo: C's Photography

available on iTunes, Amazon MP3, CDBaby, among others. He also developed a seminar on song writing and plans to offer it soon at the Douglas County Youth Center in Omaha.

Brent recently returned to YRTC-Kearney to inspire youth there to turn their lives around, too.

"It all starts with a dream," he told them. "I told them to write their dreams down, and YRTC-Kearney Administrator Jana Peterson told me she'd collected about 30 so far."

"When Brent spoke with youth at YRTC-Kearney, he told them he would have never went camping, to football games and done family things without his experience at our facility," says Peterson. "He said that when he was in their shoes, various presenters came to the facility, and he knew that one day, he would like to return and share his experiences, too."

Another helping hand in Brent's life came in the form of advice from Nebraska Arts Council (NAC) personnel in Omaha.

"**Deb Bunting**, NAC Cultural Heritage Manager, guided me through how to pursue music and speak to troubled youth as a career."

According to Bunting, "Brent came to us with a lot of enthusiasm, little experience and looking for suggestions. We guided him with suggestions for marketing himself and his message. Although NAC is often involved in offering grants, we also simply point people in the right direction, and Brent is a good example of that."

(continued on next page)

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Now a family man, Brent wants to be a positive role model for one son and another on the way.

“Their mom and I want five or six,” he says, “but two’s enough for now.”

Brent still has dreams about stardom, but his dream of getting his head on straight and helping others to do the same is being realized.

“If I had a million dollars, eight Ferraris and was heir to the **Warren Buffet** fortune,” he says, “the dreams I encourage others to share with me are still my most valuable possession.”

Not just a dreamer but a doer, Brent Lopez demonstrates what dreams and second chances are all about. Rehabilitation doesn’t always work, but he is living proof that it can happen. When it does, we’re reminded that the past influences the present but never determines our future.

To catch his rap, get a free download of his song, “Brighter Days,” or arrange for him to speak to youth needing guidance, check out www.myspace.com/binxlopez, or contact Brent “Binx” Lopez directly at myrical_ent@yahoo.com.

Community partners help clients *ACCESSNebraska*

By Greg L. Votava

Nebraskans who need to complete an application for economic assistance benefits now have an additional resource in *ACCESSNebraska*’s Community Partners.

Nearly 100 organizations across the state have volunteered to make computers and printers available and/or provide assistance to Nebraskans in completing the *ACCESSNebraska* online application.

According to **Kathee Sanchez**, Administrator with the [Division of Children and Family Services](#), “The goal is to provide assistance by expanding opportunities and accessibility for people to receive state services.” Partners have each agreed to different levels of help depending on their own resources.

Partner service levels include:

1. Providing a computer with Internet access for the public and/or their current client population to use;
2. Providing a printer;
3. Helping the customer log on to the computer;
4. Helping the customer complete the application.

Kiosks are also available in DHHS offices and are being placed in the Lincoln Food Bank, the Heartland Food Bank and in other food pantries across the state.

The Lincoln and Omaha Food Banks have been able to hire someone to assist people coming in to use the kiosks. Additionally, each DHHS Service Area has hired or will soon hire a Community Support Specialist to work with and support the Community Partners.

DHHS is also encouraging new organizations to become Community Partners by completing a survey on the website.

This list of Partners was developed by a work group with representation from DHHS, the Omaha Public Power District, Lincoln Area Agency on Aging, Nebraska Statewide Independent Living Council and the Lincoln Housing Authority. The group surveyed various organizations about the level of support they would be willing to provide and compiled the list.

A DHHS website can help clients find a partner that can best serve their needs at www.dhhs.ne.gov/accessnebraska/learnmore.htm.



GIVH Medical Director hailed for hospice care

By Jerry Crisp

Dr. Jennifer King, Medical Director at the [Grand Island Veterans' Home \(GIVH\)](#) for the past five years, was recently recognized for her hospice work with a Medal of Valor Award from the Nebraska Hospice-Veteran Partnership.

"Dr. King has provided strong support to members," says GIVH Administrator **Alex Willford**. "She's a strong advocate for their needs, listens to them and keeps their best interests at heart."

If parting, as Shakespeare said, is "sweet sorrow," then passing from life is even more sad but doesn't need to be filled with bitter regrets. That's what hospice, or end-of-life services, is all about.

"Patients are end-of-life when they have medical conditions that can't be cured and will eventually result in their death," explains Dr. King. "When they are ready for palliative or comfort care, they have decided they no longer want aggressive treatment for their conditions but just want to have symptoms treated to attempt to stay comfortable."

Our own mortality is one of the most difficult—if not the most difficult—challenges we all face, and misconceptions about it are common.

"Many people, even in the medical field, view a patient's inevitable decline and eventual death as a personal failure, and that can make us reluctant to address end-of-life issues head-on," says Dr. King. "While we make every effort to improve a patient's medical status, we also offer end-of-life services to those whose status can no longer be improved."

Both patients and family members sometimes interpret any consideration of end-of-life services as 'giving up' prematurely.

"I do my best to explain that hospice is a service provided only for people whose medical conditions cannot be cured and whose

primary goal is to be comfortable," Dr. King explains. "We are not giving up but rather facing unpleasant facts."

Dr. King believes that facing facts is at the heart of end-of-life issues.

"Open communication with members and their families is extremely important," says Dr. King. "Most patients are relieved when we address their situation because they may be tired of being hospitalized or undergoing aggressive interventions. They want to know what to expect, and we do our best to help them."

Dr. King strives to meet this challenge with extensive teamwork.

"It has taken me a while to realize that providing supportive medical care for a dying patient is just as important as healing patients."

Dr. Jennifer King



Dr. Jennifer King tends to a patient.

Photo: Nancy Klimek

"I utilize GIVH nursing staff, dieticians, social workers and a chaplain, and rely heavily on additional supportive services through local hospice agencies."

Dr. King's most challenging cases are also her most rewarding.

"This usually involves a member who still has fears about dying or unachieved goals or wishes," says Dr. King. "Helping them address those fears and achieve those goals or wishes is paramount."

Dr. King also relies on a grant from the Grand Island

Community Foundation to help members with an unfulfilled, end-of-life wish.

"This has included

everything from a trip to a drag race to visiting the family farm a final time," says Dr. King. "The grant also helps to pay travel expenses for family members to visit."

While most of us would prefer to die at home, the fact is most of us are more likely to die in a hospital.

"GIVH members view our facility as their home and staff members as their extended family," says Dr. King. "When offered the opportunity, most members are receptive to the idea of dying as symptom-free as possible in their home without regrets."

Hopefully, most of us will face our own fate with the same peace of mind.

DHHS dental director helps kids to better oral health, brighter smiles

By Bill Wiley and John Wenz

The Division of Public Health's Office of Oral Health and Dentistry (OOHD) has sought to improve the lives of Nebraskans since 1949 by promoting preventative oral care, particularly in young children. Under the direction of Dental Director **Kären Sorenson**, who came to this position a year ago, the Office has received a \$1.5 million Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) grant – enabling more robust programs focusing on children's oral health.

Now, for the fourth year in a row, low-income children in western Nebraska have received the dental attention they've needed, thanks to a partnership between the DHHS Office of Oral Health and Dentistry, One World Community Health and the Ronald McDonald House Charities.

The Care Mobile, a mobile dental van owned by the Omaha Ronald McDonald House Charities, spent September 20 through 24 in western Nebraska, providing necessary care to pre-screened children over the course of five days – three in Lexington and two in Grand Island.

Originally, the Care Mobile visited Omaha and Omaha area schools. When the Kearney Woman's Club heard about the program, they influenced the Care Mobile to make its way to the western end of the state, especially in towns with recent refugees and immigrants subsisting below the poverty level.

For the Lexington visit, Dr. Kären Sorenson was on hand to provide care to those children – and over two days, she and One World dentist **Katherine Meyer** performed 34 extractions, 25 fillings, five stainless steel crowns and three root canals.

"We treated a lot of children who desperately needed care," says Sorenson. "These kids had really extreme needs and a lot of them had active infections and active pains."

Prior to their appointments, the children were provided with antibiotics to help reduce already-existing infections. The day of, they were treated by the dentists and dental assistants, as well as many onsite volunteers to help efforts go smoothly.

According to Sorenson, about one-third of the children had basic Medicaid; many others had no dental coverage at all. All came from low-income backgrounds, often first generation immigrants to Nebraska.

In addition to the care received during the days the Care Mobile is in town, the children are given the tools and skills



SERVICE WITH A SMILE: Dr. Kären Sorenson (left) advises a patient and her mother when the Care Mobile visited Lexington, Nebraska, in September. *Photo provided.*

necessary to have healthy teeth and mouths, provided free of charge. With the event happening quarterly, it's hoped that they can sustain good dental health after realizing its importance.

However, in some of the more extreme cases, these children will need more care. As they had previously neglected oral health, many had long-term problems. Over the course of two days, Sorenson removed six teeth from one little boy.

As she put it, "I'm going to be seeing some of those children for some time to come."



DHHS Helpline helps people with questions and concerns

By Bill Wiley

Whether you're a DHHS consumer, service provider, elected official or interested citizen, the [DHHS Helpline](#) will provide assistance when needed. Its purpose is to respond to questions, concerns and complaints related to services, programs and operations within DHHS. Until May 2010, the Helpline was called the Office of the System Advocate, which was established by the Legislature in 1997. The office was renamed in April of this year to better reach out to the citizens of Nebraska.

The new Helpline was promoted by distributing information to local DHHS offices and other partner organizations, while a news release and display filler were sent to media state wide. Also, a link was added to the homepage of the DHHS website.

This information service has shown a consistent increase in use since FY 2008, when 3,372 contacts were received. In FY 2009, 4,786 contacts were received and in FY 2010, 5,819 contacts were received. Since January 2010, we've exceeded 500 contacts per month!

The majority of contacts this fiscal year, 84%, were telephone calls with the remaining contacts made through e-mail, personal contacts, and letters. Most contacts came from citizens (41.4%) and clients (32.9%). Other contacts included businesses (6.8%), providers (5.9%), family/relatives (4.5%), associations/organizations (2.8%), state agencies from another state (1.8%), hospitals (1.7%) and DHHS employees (1.6%). A small percentage of contacts were from the Governor's Office, local officials, schools, Nebraska State Agencies and State Senators.

The primary reasons for contacts this quarter were requesting information (77.3%), expressing a complaint (2.6%), and requesting help (2.3%). Additional reasons for contacts were to report abuse/neglect and fraud and to offer a suggestion.

The most frequent contacts concerned financial assistance (40.8%), non-DHHS issues (16.1%), Children & Family Services (10.0%), Medicaid (7.6%), and Credentialing/ Licensure (7.2%).

Concerning referrals within DHHS, the majority of the questions/ concerns

were referred to [Children & Family Services](#) (17.9%), while 8.6% were referred to [Public Health](#), 4.2% were referred to [Medicaid & Long-Term Care](#) and 1.2% was referred to [Operations](#). Fewer than 1% was referred to [Behavioral Health](#), [Developmental Disabilities](#), and [Veterans' Homes](#). The Helpline addressed 51.3% of the contacts without further referral and 16.2% were referred to another state agency or community organization/agency.

Sometimes it's said that "the proof is in the numbers," and the information here shows how valuable the DHHS Helpline is in assisting Nebraskans with questions and concerns related to services, programs and operations within DHHS.



Diana Duran

Photo: Bill Wiley



Real Questions, Real Concerns, Real People

We want to help!

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DHHS Helpline:
(800) 254-4202

In Lincoln call:
(402) 471-6035

Department of Health & Human Services
DHHS
NEBRASKA

10-08

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

The Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney (YRTC-K) strives to turn lives around, and Health Education Teacher **Tyler Swarm** is deeply involved in that effort.

Eight years ago as the facility's first Health Ed Teacher, Tyler started teaching his class with a traditional lecture approach but soon realized that this style didn't fit the diverse needs within the group-based structure used within the YRTC-K treatment program.

"I found I was teaching to the middle ground, which didn't fully serve the higher or lower level student," he explains. "Once I individualized the curriculum, my students were able to work within their abilities."

A "portable curriculum" also allows youth to check out books and do homework while at their living units. The Health curriculum includes topics such as nutrition, dealing with stress or anger, socially-transmitted communicable diseases, and the consequences of tobacco, alcohol and drugs.

"Before any learning can really occur, one needs to establish rapport and build trust, so I try to recognize each youth daily in class," Tyler says. "If a youth is withdrawn or unresponsive, it's important to find ways to motivate this type of student. Little interactions can make a big difference."

Tyler also serves on the programming committee that researched and is helping implement new programming at YRTC-K. The program is designed to teach behavior accountability while providing social skills to better facilitate change over time. Staff role-modeling and peer group interaction are key components.

Tyler also is involved with additions being made to the discipline model at YRTC-K.

"The discipline model is in place to address behaviors that disrupt the treatment process," he explains. "We differentiate between major and minor incidents, depending on the severity of the offense. A youth who has a temper tantrum might lose a privilege; however, an assault might result in isolation in the security unit. The discipline model is designed

to set limits and redirect youth to focusing on their treatment process."

Tyler also serves on the Non-Violent Crisis Intervention team that trains all YRTC staff in non-violent ways of dealing with potentially dangerous situations.

"We train staff to use verbal and psychological responses that de-escalate situations and rely on physical response only as a last resort."

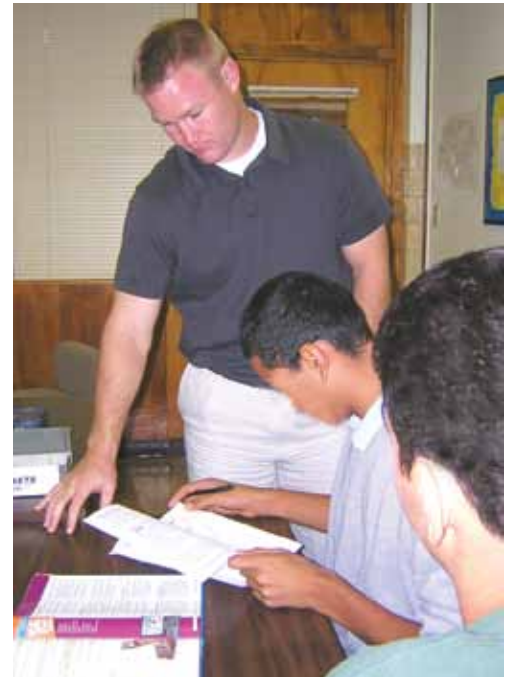
Tyler and his co-workers don't always know how youth turn out after they leave the facility, but they get indications.

"When an initially unreachable youth tells us before he leaves of his dreams or future plans, I feel confident we've done something right."

Tyler Swarm

I think we've made a difference. It's things like a noticeable change in a youth that keeps our staff motivated."

Tyler Swarm and his counterparts at both YRTCs in Kearney and Geneva know that their work is important because rehabilitation means that a life destructive both to self and others is redirected toward a more positive, productive future. It's hard to find any better example of *helping people live better lives*.



Tyler Swarm at work in the classroom helping make a difference in young lives.

Photo: Richard Wetjen

If a youth stops by to thank us before he leaves or even writes or phones later to update us on his progress,

We all love it when a plan comes together

The following article published in the *York News Times* on Saturday, September 4, describes a son's love for his parents, the respect we all feel for veterans who have served our nation, and the quality of services provided at the [Grand Island Veterans' Home](#). It's reprinted here with permission.

By Steven Moseley, York News Times editor and columnist

It was a big day for the Moseley clan. More specifically for my parents, **Russell** and **Ellamae**, the parents, grandparents and great grandparents of our considerable family. Retired for many years to Broken Bow and both in their 80s, Dad is a World War II veteran of the Pacific Theater. He can tell you all about the Battle for Leyte Gulf and, more specifically, the Battle of Surigao Strait that made up a key part of this epic struggle. Leyte Gulf, still considered the most massive naval battle fought in all of history, broke the back of the Japanese Navy.

While he was serving in the Pacific, my mother, who had yet to meet her future husband-to-be of 60-plus years and counting, was fighting the war in her own way by building bombs and shells for the war effort at the Grand Island ordnance plant. This was in the 1940s when young **Russ Moseley** was single and strapping and strong. Ellamae Spencer, "a looker" in Dad's words, was a vivacious, twinkly-eyed Rosie the Riveter.

They both helped save the world, yet neither has asked for a single thing in return for that monumental accomplishment. My parents, unlike most from that era, are fortunate to be alive and still together after all the decades since that era when all Americans closed ranks against unspeakable tragedy and turned it into incredible triumph.

Now for the best part: It took a while, but those days of ducking kamikazes and dodging torpedoes have been rewarded. Thursday — 65 years after 'The Bomb' abruptly ended the war in the Pacific — Russ and Ellamae were welcomed with open arms, courtesy, respect and appreciation to the Veterans Home in Grand Island.

What a wonderful facility the Veterans Home turned out to be. Staff professionals — each as friendly, sincere and helpful as the last — guided them through the hoops required to begin life

anew in a welcoming, yet still unfamiliar place filled with the faces of strangers.

I wager they won't be strangers for long. Their own 'drive-in' movie every Friday evening will, all by itself, make not getting acquainted impossible. At this 'drive-in with a difference' an enormous, wall-sized screen is unrolled so a projector bolted to the ceiling can fill the big dining hall with action and sound. Most movie-goers cruise to this special drive-in aboard wheelchairs. They even park in rows, just as they once did in their cars at drive-ins of old. The popcorn tastes every bit as buttery and light now, too, and it's served from a bottomless bowl.

Good Wife **Norma** and I couldn't be happier for them or more thankful to all the people who made this possible, the dozens of folks on the Vets Home staff who refuse to let anyone, apparently, pass by without a bright smile and a cheerful hello.

What better place for two wonderful people to share one final, great adventure together.

Don't you love it when people get what they deserve? Me, too.



From left, Russell, Stephen and Ellamae Mosely enjoy a family dinner at the Grand Island Veterans' Home.

Photo: Norma Moseley

DHHS Veterans' Homes receive donated vans



John Hilgert, Director of the [Division of Veterans' Homes](#), addresses a group gathered at the Governor's Residence on October 22 to learn about five vans donated to the Department's four veterans' homes. With him (l-r) are **Governor Dave Heineman** and **John Liebsack** of the Nebraska Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW). "These vehicles will help veterans go to doctors' appointments and make trips to the Veterans' Administration hospital," Hilgert said. "They will also allow them to go on outings and attend events of interest to them." Each bus cost nearly \$44,500 for a total of \$222,280. The Nebraska VFW covered 20% of the total with 80% coming from a share of federal funding for a VFW program helping private, non-profit entities purchase vehicles to aid in transporting persons with

disabilities and the elderly. The [Grand Island Veterans' Home](#) is the largest and will use two buses with one bus going to each of the other homes at [Scottsbluff](#), [Norfolk](#) and [Bellevue](#).

Photo: Jerry Crisp

LRC staff honored for exceptional service



[Lincoln Regional Center \(LRC\)](#) held its 59th Thomas C. Woods awards ceremony recognizing contributions of mental health Security Specialists and Psychiatric Technicians at the facility. Recipients demonstrate outstanding service to patients, as evidenced by displays of kindness, commitment, imagination, initiative in performance and good work habits. (L-R) **Erin Johnson**, **Vincent Paul**, **Michael Gerdes**, **Hong-Hahn Le**, **Matt Ahlstedt**, **Dale Brondel** and **Dave Younger** (not shown, **Chuck DeGrave**)

Photo: Linda Jiskra

November Observance

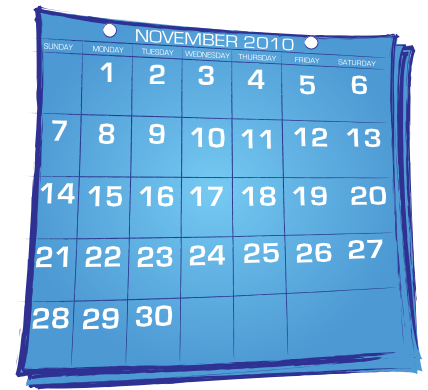
National Hand Washing Week (December 5-11)

Frequent hand washing is one of the best ways to prevent the spread of the flu and other diseases. Viruses and bacteria lurk on lots of things we touch—doorknobs, keyboards, toilet handles, food, dishes, etc.

“Dirty hands can make people sick,” says **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Director of the [Division of Public Health](#) and the state’s Chief Medical Officer. “If you’re not washing your hands, germs can be transmitted every time you touch your eyes, nose or mouth. Good hygiene habits lead to better health.”

Tips for proper hand washing:

- **Wet** your hands with warm, running water and lather well with soap.
- **Rub** your hands vigorously together for 20 seconds.
- **Scrub** all surfaces, including the backs of your hands, wrists, between your fingers and under your fingernails.
- **Rinse** well.
- **Dry** your hands with a clean or disposable towel.



YRTC-Geneva youth become fearsome funsters for Halloween

Several of the youth at the [Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center - Geneva](#) contributed to Halloween celebrations at the facility by helping plan and participating in the event. They set up stations in the campus school area that included activities such as the “Mummy Wrap” (girls wrapping each other in rolls of toilet paper for prizes) and “Worm Dig” (a relay in which girls dug for gummy worms covered with whipped cream) and donned costumes and masks of vampires, zombies and other ghoulish creatures to ensure thrills for a haunted hayrack ride around campus.

“I really appreciate the girls’ creativity and willingness to help plan and provide an enjoyable Halloween experience,” says Recreation Coordinator **Connie Reinsch**. *Photo: Connie Reinsch*



SPREAD HOLIDAY CHEER

The holiday season is heading our way, and your DHHS employee newsletter wants to spread the cheer around. Send photos of holiday activities in your work area to the editor at jerry.crisp@nebraska.gov, or phone (402) 471-3995, and watch for coverage in *Connections*’ December issue!



In their own words

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

Dear **Todd Reckling** (Director, [Division of Children & Family Services](#)):

For the past several years, my mother and I served as legal guardian for my aunt, who lived in a nursing home in Omaha. We occasionally had questions regarding the proper handling of my aunt's Medicaid business and our reporting duties as her guardian.

At these times, we called the case worker, **Tracy Miller**, in the Omaha office. My mother always spoke highly of her helpfulness. When I took over as my aunt's guardian, Tracy helped me understand the Medicaid process and how to complete necessary forms.

Eventually, my aunt's case was transferred to **Kathy Kinkade** in the McCook office. Although I frequently hear people complain about their treatment when dealing with state employees in my home state of Illinois, I was once again struck by her politeness, efficiency and knowledge of the Medicaid process.

My aunt died two weeks ago at the age of 86, so my dealings with DHHS are at an end. I want to tell you, however, how proud you should be to have two such wonderful employees representing the state of Nebraska. I most sincerely thank them for all of their kind assistance over the years.

A Grateful Customer

Dear **Mona Kramer** (Aged & Disabled Waiver Services Coordinator, DHHS Dakota City office):

I just want to thank you for all you have done for our family over the past few years. I greatly appreciate your guidance and going out of your way to help us afford our child's health care needs. Although we no longer qualify for services, we are excited that this is an indicator that our daughter's health is now doing well.

A Grateful Family

Dear **Shirley Deethardt** (Community Health Educator III, [Division of Public Health](#)):

Thank you so much for the smoking cessation package you sent. I really like the hand sanitizer and squishy stress ball. I have read some of the booklets you gave me, and there is a lot of interesting information in there.

The people I talked with at the Quitline are very understanding and supportive. I thought they would be more judgmental and opinionated. It's been nice talking with them about my smoking issues.

I have cut down quite a bit since I first contacted you. I haven't felt this confident about quitting in any of the times I tried to quit in the past. Thank you for your help and encouragement. It's much appreciated.

A Smoker Trying to Become an Ex-smoker

Dear **Janice Wittwer** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Falls City office):

For all you do and for all you accomplished to better the lives of so many lives in Falls City, a small thank you for such a big task. My family and I appreciate you. Thanks loads!

A Satisfied Customer

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 **Marlene Janssen** (Health Program Manager,
DHHS Office of Rural Health)

I want to sincerely thank you for assistance in repaying my student loan. I have received my final loan repayment check. Both the hospital I work at and the state have provided a great service by promoting and supporting continued health care in rural areas.

A Thankful Student

Dear **Kathie Osterman** (Administrator, DHHS
Communications & Legislative Service), **Jeanne Atkinson** and **Marla Augustine** (Public Information Officers III):

My last day with the Associated Press is near, so you can remove me from your email list. I've enjoyed working with each of you, and thanks for all the help and information you've provided the last several years. Sometimes requests can seem hurried or just plain unreasonable, but your office does a particularly good job of responding promptly.

Nate Jenkins
The Associated Press

Dear **Jana Peterson** (Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Kearney):

On behalf of the Great Plains Hunting Retriever Club, please accept our deepest gratitude for your support of our Hunt Test in Wood River. This was a great group of youth; they were polite and acted like gentlemen.

We are dedicated to training retrievers, their handling and care, so that they may be the best in their breed in hunting situations faced in the field today. Our hunt tests are designed to allow handlers and retrievers to achieve a mark of excellence by training for and competing in hunt tests such as the one we sponsor. The dogs receive points toward their titles in the Hunting Retriever Club when passing tests such as these.

These tests would not be possible without the support of sponsors like you. Thank you again for making this year a great success.

Jack Lindstrom, President
Great Plains Hunting Retriever Club

Dear **Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Geneva** :

Thank you for the recent tour of YRTC-Geneva. The Rotary Group Study Exchange team from Pakistan enjoyed learning about and seeing the YRTC facility, as did the accompanying Geneva Rotary hosts. The tour provided good will and understanding between people of both nations, and we appreciate your willingness to help with this worthy cause.

The Geneva Rotary Club

Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state



For the past five years, the DHHS Omaha office at 1821 North 73rd has hosted a “Chili Cook-off.” The brainchild of Development Disabilities Service Coordinator **Lana Frazier**, competition has increased annually with a growing number of participants. Winners of the best brew earn a crown and bragging rights for the next 12 months. According to Service Coordination Supervisor **Cheri Rychly**, “Lana gets this event together on her own and deserves a vote of thanks for all the work she puts in to make this event so enjoyable and anticipated.” Seated left to right: 1st place winner Cheri Rychly, 2nd place winner **Dave Cornwell** and 3rd place winner **Lannie Doffin**. Standing left to right: **Deb Bigando**, **Amy Lutt**, **Gayline Brill**, **Pam Koziel-Thomas**, **Ron Semerena**, **Janey Ulmer** and (foreground) **Lori Albrecht-MacPherson**.

Photo: Lana Frazier

If you have a photo of a DHHS activity you'd like to share with co-workers across the state, contact *Connections* by any means listed in the editorial box on page 2, and we'll publish as many as space allows.

National Adoption Day kick-off



From left, **Maralee, Daniel, Brian** and **Joshua Bradley** are shown here with **Margaret Bitz**, an administrator in [Children and Family Services](#). They were at the Capitol for a proclamation signing that declares November as Adoption Month. The Bradleys gave their boys a permanent home through adoption. The family most recently adopted Daniel, a ward of the state.

Photo: Dianna Seiffert

Watch for coverage of DHHS Adoption Day activities across the state in *Connections'* December issue!