

CONNECTIONS

September 2016 VOLUME 16, ISSUE 9

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

A day in the life...of Envy, LRC's therapy dog

By: *Melissa Lindell*

(Editor's note: we are starting a new series, A day in the life. We will follow a DHHS employee around one day to see what it is like to 'walk a mile in their shoes' and then feature them in an issue of Connections.)

Envy the Golden Retriever may seem like any other dog when you first meet her; she's rolling around on the floor, playing with her toys, and greeting her friends at the Lincoln

Regional Center. But when her harness goes on and it's time to work, a change comes over her. Envy's no longer playful, running around with her toys, begging for a belly scratch. Instead, she's all business, ready to go work with some of the hundreds of patients at LRC.

September is National Service Dog Awareness Month and DHHS has its very own Therapy Dog. This month celebrates the hard work that Therapy Dogs and their handlers do. Originally known as National Guide Dog Month, National Service Dog Month was first established in 2008 by actor and animal activist Dick Van Patten.

We're spending the morning with two of the nine handlers that work with Envy at LRC, Jerri Anderson and Jennifer Bennetts. They have therapy sessions scheduled with Envy and some of the men and women who are patients at the regional center.

"Therapy dogs are a great therapy option for those

with debilitating mental illnesses. Sometimes they can reach those that can't otherwise be reached. She always seems to know who is sickest, who needs her the most, and she gravitates towards them," Jerri said.

Jerri is an Occupational Therapist at LRC. She works with men and women who have been committed by a mental health board due to mental illness and challenging behaviors. They have individual and group therapy sessions with Envy. This day I'm tagging along on a Life Skills session with five men. This group is working on planning a meal that they will make together later in the month. Envy will help them choose what they are going to eat and drink.

Jerri has put the options in large Easter eggs, along with a few treats for the men to give Envy when she makes her choice. They give her the command to go choose an egg, and off she goes.



Ready to get to work



Envy the pup

Once she has made her choice, she returns to the man who called her, dropping the egg in his hand.

"She knows 34 commands, but uses ten of them regularly," Jerri said. "We try to teach everyone the commands so that she doesn't get confused. Because to her, 'shake' means to shake off after she's gotten wet, but a lot of people think it should mean shake your hand. For Envy, that command is 'high-five,' Jerri said.

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Courtney PhillipsBehavioral Health
Division Director:
Sheri DawsonChildren and Family Services
Division Director:
Doug WeinbergDevelopmental Disabilities
Division Director:
Courtney Miller

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CLS Administrator:
Kathie OstermanEditor:
Melissa Lindell

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

Phone: (402) 471-4047

Fax: (402) 471-3996

E-mail: melissa.lindell@nebraska.govInteragency mail: NE State Office Bldg. 3rd Floor
U.S. mail: P.O. Box 95026
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-5026Medicaid and Long-Term Care
Division Director:
Calder LynchPublic Health Division Acting
Director:
Courtney PhillipsVeterans' Homes Division
Director:
John HilgertGraphics and Layout:
Judy Barker

During the session, the men's eyes go to her, even when she isn't an active part of the therapy. The demeanor in the room seems to change when they see her. They become calmer, more engaged in what they are doing. One young man seems withdrawn, he doesn't talk, doesn't add to the conversation. That is, until Envy walks to his side, and begins licking his fingers. A smile breaks out over his face, and he becomes more involved in the discussion.

"For some patients, she is a reward. If they do what they are supposed to, then they get to see her in their sessions. But if they don't do the therapies and things they are asked to do, then spending time with Envy is taken away. That can be a big motivating factor for some patients," Jerri said.

Envy might be the most popular employee at LRC! Nearly everyone we see stops to say hi and pet her, from staff to patient. They say that dogs have a sixth sense, and if that's true, then it must be elevated in Envy.

"She is all about being what people need," Jennifer Bennetts, Occupational Therapist, said. "We have a discharged patient who comes back just to visit Envy. She is a big support in her recovery."

Jennifer, Envy, and I head to a session on boundaries with a group of women. Today they're describing her personality traits, qualities that they love about her, and talents that make her special.



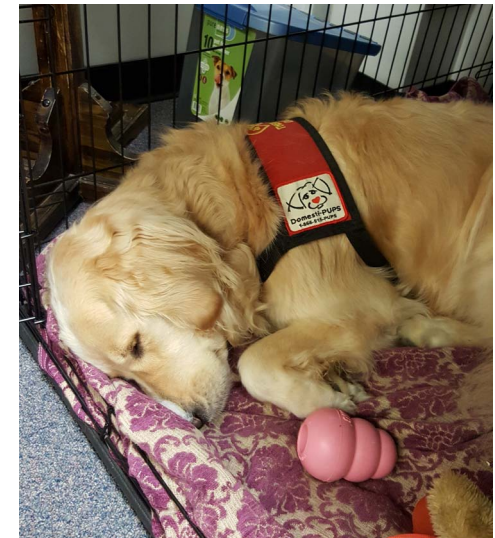
Working hard with a patient

"Spending time with Envy helps ground them, she brings out the compassion in people. They talk about the pets that they've had in the past, how they want to get a dog when they are discharged from here. In the next session, they'll have to answer those same personality questions about themselves. They find it easy to talk about Envy in a positive and loving way, but it's harder for them to say nice things about themselves," Jennifer said.

Before I know it, my time with this sweet pup has come to an end. And just like humans, Envy needs a break, so we head back to Jerri and Jennifer's office where her kennel is located. She patiently waits for the door to be opened and curls up for a quick nap before she returns to work, helping to rebuild lives at LRC.

Envy Fast Facts:

- Envy is a three-year-old Golden Retriever who came to LRC on October 3, 2014
- She was trained by inmates at the Lincoln Correctional Center through Domesti-Pups
- She works 8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday, with an occasional holiday or weekend event
- She loves freeze dried liver treats, squeaky toys, and chasing squirrels and ducks
- She has her own Facebook page: [click here](#) .
- She will start working with the juvenile boys at Whitehall soon
- She lives with Facility Operating Officer Stacey Werth-Sweeney and her family.



Dog-tired after a busy day



Courtney Phillips, CEO

Message from Courtney Phillips, CEO

Some of them have lost everything, and while this can't replace it all, it's a start. You truly embody the #TeamDHHS "Great Mission."

Between MLTC Director Calder Lynch, MLTC Deputy Director Rocky Thompson, YRTC-K administrator Mark LaBouchardiere, and myself - we have a number of Louisiana transplants who have come from the bayou to the plains. We all still have friends and family in the Greater Baton Rouge and Lafayette communities. They have sustained untold damages to their homes and communities. We want to thank you for your donations, your thoughts and concerns about our families and friends who still live there.

There have been at least 13 people killed, 60,000 people have lost their homes, 106,000 residents and households have registered for assistance from the Federal government so far, and more than 20,000 have been rescued from the flood waters across the area. Many of those impacted are in areas outside of established flood plains and thus do not have flood insurance.

The human devastation is incredible, and it will likely get worse.

That's why we need to be prepared. September is National Preparedness Month. The 2016 theme is "Don't wait. Communicate. Make Your Emergency Plans Today." The Ready campaign is



spearheaded by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and encourages all Americans to take steps to be prepared for emergencies, like the one that just hit Louisiana.

There is no way to ever be truly ready for every worst possible event, but our DHHS Emergency Preparedness team is hard at work, trying to think of every possible "what if" situation that we might come across. They are in the business of "all hazards planning" and one of the ways the agency is doing this is with our Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). This multi-year-initiative, coordinated through the Governor's Office, is an important one so that all of the state agencies have a plan to continue their essential functions. DHHS is working on a COOP plan as a department; one plan that integrates each division coop plan as well as operations. These plans are designed to make sure that the agency

can continue to operate in the event of a catastrophic emergency happening here in Nebraska.

They are working on plans if our buildings are completely destroyed by floods or a tornado. This includes critical questions, such as, alternative work-sites, work from home capabilities, and ready-to-work status options. The biggest piece of these plans is accountability. Our team is working to make sure if a disaster hits, we are ready for it, and we know how to get ahold of 100 percent of #TeamDHHS.

While no one wants 100-year-floods, natural disasters, or catastrophic, life-changing events to happen where they live, it is so important that we always be prepared. By having this plan, and having intentional preparation about unexpected events, our Emergency Preparedness group is just another example of how we are helping people live better lives each day.

Again, thank you for your support and donations to the Louisiana flood relief. Your kindness and compassion have truly touched me and I can't thank y'all enough.

Please take some time to make a family emergency communication plan of your own. For more information visit <http://ready.gov>.

Greetings #TeamDHHS:

Once again, I am overwhelmed by the generosity, caring nature and spirit of the people of Nebraska. As news of the catastrophic floods in south Louisiana spread across the agency, #TeamDHHS has stepped up to show why Nebraska is truly the Good Life. A number of you asked me if there was anything you could do, or how you could contribute to the relief efforts, so we decided to collect gift cards for the flood victims.

So many of you showed that wonderful, giving spirit that Nebraskans have, and donated more than \$1,500 in gift cards. We will be sending these donations to our counterparts in the Department of Children and Family Services and the Department of Health in Louisiana.

Health and Fitness Tips

Strengthen and Define

Source: *Health Enhancement Systems*©

There are myriad benefits to muscle building: It burns fat, helps maintain weight, strengthens bones, reduces stress, and improves confidence. Generally, strength training focuses on the major muscle groups by completing 1 or 2 sets of 8–12 repetitions 2–3 days each week. But before you jump into the gym, mind these muscle matters:

- First things first: Check with your doctor before beginning a new exercise program.
- Get a personal trainer: Gym equipment isn't complicated, but a little instruction will help you get started right. Have a professional help you navigate the weight room. They'll also demonstrate proper form so you'll avoid muscle tears and joint damage.
- Warm up, cool down... rest: Completing 5–10 minutes of low-impact exercise — before and after each training session — will cut down on injuries and condition your muscles for future workouts. It's also important to rest; give each muscle group at least 48 hours off between strength training sessions.
- Use common sense: Challenge yourself, but don't lift more than you can handle. If you feel any muscle strain, stop the exercise and take a break. And don't forget to breathe.



Finding Fitness in Your Hometown

Source: *Health Enhancement Systems*©

While fancy gyms and fitness resorts definitely have something to add to your health, you don't have to make that leap if you don't want to. There are plenty of enjoyable fitness activities just waiting for you in your own town.

- Walking tours. Don't wait for out-of-town company to enjoy your hometown. Lace up your walking shoes and head out for an active day of sightseeing. Check with your local Chamber of Commerce or Historical Society — there may be walking tours you can take. You may even learn something new about your own town.
- Connect with nature. Get into the woods, out to the beach, or over to the field for a hike. Photograph or list the plants, animals, and insects that you observe. Take the family, and ask your kids compare the life forms they find.
- Go downtown. Treat yourself to attractions that you usually skip. Window-shop and enjoy the hustle and bustle of the city as you get your walking done. Go on a scavenger hunt with family or friends. Tackle stairs and hills at every opportunity.

There are opportunities for exercise all around you. Just be creative and try new ideas.

DHHS in the Lunchroom

By: *Melissa Lindell*



Did you know that DHHS is involved in helping low income Nebraska students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches? CFS has been working with the Nebraska Department of Education for some time to make the process easier for Nebraska families, and now MLTC has signed on to streamline the process even further.

How it Works

To be able to participate in the free lunch program, children must be from households with incomes that are at or below 130 percent of the Federal poverty level. For a reduced-price meal, children must be from households with incomes between 130 and 185 percent of the poverty level. Instead of parents filling out several forms to verify their income, DHHS provides that information to the USDA Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) via records from programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

With the addition of MLTC, the program can directly verify even more children who are eligible to receive free or reduced price school meals using Medicaid eligibility data. This is the first school year that the Medicaid program has been selected by the United States Department of Agriculture to participate.

And there's more!

Did you know that DHHS also provides food for the schools that participate in the free and reduced price lunch program? According to Chad Mohr, CFS orders, stores, and distributes food through USDA's National School Lunch Program. In 2016, 412,602 cases valued at \$11.4 (M) are being provided to 435 Nebraska schools. The food includes domestically produced fruits and vegetables, ground beef, ham, diced chicken, and turkey roasts.

Keeping Talent at DHHS

By Melissa Lindell

How do you keep talented employees? That's the question that DHHS's Human Resources Department is trying to answer. They've been working hard on compiling information from their new Exit Surveys, designed to track a multitude of statistics for the agency and to drive future efforts.

When an employee decides to leave employment at DHHS, they are given the option to participate in the Exit Survey, and HR hopes they do. The survey asks them what their top factors are for leaving, and what the best things were about working for DHHS. The Human Resources team has been going through that data from the first six months of 2016 and has made some interesting finds.

Most respondents agreed, the top reasons they enjoyed working for DHHS were their co-workers and the benefits. Their main reasons for leaving included: salary, lack of advancement opportunities, and not feeling heard.

"We want #TeamDHHS to know that we are listening. We are working to improve the things that are under our control," said Johnny Saul, Deputy Director, Human Resources.

Salaries are something that HR does not have control over. Those are

tied to the State pay plan, as well as the legislature and its processes. But HR can do more to advertise open positions, and use the data to put new employee-focused programs into place, like the new onboarding program that is designed to better orient employees to DHHS and help reduce employee turnover.

"When we see that people think advancement opportunities are low, they may only be perceiving them that way. We can then provide more data to leadership to let them know that we need to more effectively communicate the available advancement opportunities," Johnny said.

There are more than 5,800 people that work for #TeamDHHS. Anywhere from 1,000 to 1,500 employees turn



over each year. About a quarter of those are at retirement age, which is 55, to begin receiving retirement benefits.

"When you have someone who retires after a 37 year career, that's awesome that they stayed. We're better for that. When we recruit for their position, we want to find someone like them, but with even more talents and things that they can add to the job," Johnny said.

All of this data is designed to, in part, help HR solve the turnover issue, or at least bring those numbers down. It is too soon into the survey process to tell if it is working yet, but they are hopeful.

"We're taking HR from a reactive to a proactive approach for the agency. We want to get to a place where we're

preventing turnover from happening, not just reacting to it," Johnny said. "We are trying to channel our efforts to things we can change and have an impact on. We want people to know that their concerns are being heard."

"We're taking HR from a reactive to a proactive approach for the agency."

"We want to get to a place where we're preventing turnover from happening, not just reacting to it."
Johnny Saul,
Deputy Director,
Human Resources



Nebraska Fall Prevention Initiatives: Reducing the Rate of Falls in Older Adults

By Peg Ogea-Ginsburg
DHHS Injury Prevention Program
Manager

Did you know that one in three older Americans fall every year? Falls are the leading cause of injury for people 65 and older and can result in hip fractures, broken bones and head injuries. Even falls without a major injury can cause an older adult to become fearful or depressed, making it difficult for them to stay active. As the population in the United States ages, the cost of falls is expected to reach \$54.9 billion by 2020, according to a study in the *Journal of Forensic Science*.

While falls are a threat to the health and independence of older adults, the opportunity to reduce falls among older adults has never been better.

The Nebraska DHHS Injury Prevention Program has been working to support falls prevention education for Nebraskans and provides leadership for the Nebraska Older Adult Falls Coalition. We work to bring older adults, their families, stakeholders, community partners, and healthcare providers together, to discuss and share knowledge in an effort to reduce the falls rate in our state. We promote fall prevention programs that increase

knowledge, strength, improve balance, and overall confidence. As a result, we believe our communities experience better health and increased productivity.

“A fall is a common and serious health problem,” says Judy Stevens, PhD, senior epidemiologist in the Division of Unintentional Injury Prevention at the CDC who specializes in older adult fall prevention. She added, “A fall without injury still has a huge impact on quality of life, since falling aggravates a fear of falling, leading people to become inactive, which, in turn, only increases the risk of falling.”

The Nebraska Older Adult Falls Coalition is committed to helping older adults remain independent and reduce their chances of falling by promoting the following:

- Exercise regularly. It is important that the exercises focus on increasing leg strength and improving balance, and that exercises get more challenging over time. Tai Chi programs are especially good.
- Ask their doctor or pharmacist to review their medicines—both prescription and over-the-counter—to identify medicines



that may cause side effects or interactions, such as dizziness or drowsiness.

- Have their eyes checked by an eye doctor at least once a year and update their eyeglasses to maximize their vision. Consider getting a pair with single vision distance lenses for some activities such as walking outside.
- Make their homes safer by reducing tripping hazards, adding grab bars inside and outside the

tub or shower and next to the toilet, adding railings on both sides of stairways and improving the lighting.

Several studies indicate healthcare costs can be reduced by educating and involving older adults and their families in community-based interventions to promote better health. Several local Nebraska Public Health Departments, in partnership with HHS Injury Prevention Programs, offer Tai chi training and Stepping On workshops for residents in our communities. We hope through these efforts that older adults will live safer, healthier and more independent lives.

For more information on the Nebraska Older Adult Falls Coalition, contact Greta.Glenn@nebraska.gov or [click here](#).



Dignity for those buried at the Lincoln Regional Center

By Melissa Lindell

Nestled in a quiet southwest Lincoln neighborhood lies the final resting place of more than 250 former residents of the Lincoln Regional Center. From the 1920s to the mid-1950s, LRC residents who passed away were buried at the Haines Branch Cemetery under headstones with their medical record number on them.

DHHS's three regional centers are home to five cemeteries and more than 2,000 graves, most dug between the late 1800s and the 1950s. For decades, those with mental illness lived, died, and were buried in anonymity. Their graves are marked with modest headstones that simply have numbers on them. Anna Cox was one of them.

Over the years, several families have placed headstones on the gravesites of their family members at LRC's Calvert Cemetery in Lincoln, giving them a piece of their identities back. Recently, the family of Anna Cox did that for her at the Haines Branch Cemetery.

"She never had a lot of good things happen in her life I am sure, and maybe this could help a little," Tim Cox, Anna's great-grandson, said.

In 1904, at the age of 33, Anna was admitted to the Nebraska Hospital for the Insane, as it was called then. Her family says her records indicate doctors thought she suffered from mental illness. Anna spent nearly 44 years at what would eventually become the Lincoln Regional Center before she passed away.

At that time, if a person was buried in the hospital cemetery, it was protocol for them to be buried under their medical number. Facility officials say perhaps privacy, or fear associated with negative stigmas, caused them to do so.

LRC doesn't perform burials any longer, but if a family would like to improve an old gravesite by putting a new headstone with a name rather than a number on it, facility officials do what they can to help.

"At LRC, when a family approaches us to have a stone placed, we always offer a ceremony to have the stone blessed. We feel that the ceremony allows the family to have a sense of peace, it allows us as a facility to show our community and the family that there is no shame and that we embrace the fact that they had the generosity and compassion to come forward and give the patient their name back. The stigmatism that once existed is chipped away each and every time a family comes forward so we fully embrace it and do everything in our power to make that family know how much we appreciate their act of kindness," Stacey Werth-Sweeney, LRC's Facility Operating Officer said.

On this day, a group of 20 or so people gathered around Anna's grave to learn more about the woman that history had long ago tried to sweep under the rug. Rachel Johnson is the Religious Coordinator at LRC. She

led a service and the blessing of the headstone for Anna Cox.

"Most people say, 'how sad!' But we should think about her as a mental health pioneer in recovery. This is a great way to honor Anna and those like her," Rachel said.



Giving her a name

Tim Cox is Anna's great-grandson. He says he was curious to know more about a woman he was told so very little about. Tim and his wife Pam live in Virginia now, but Tim's family is originally from the Pawnee City area. A few years ago, Tim went to the Pawnee City Courthouse to see what he could find out about his family. There he found his great-grandparents' divorce papers. His search then took him to the website findagrave.com, where he discovered that Anna lived most of her life in an institution. Anna was admitted into the Nebraska Hospital for the Insane only four months after giving birth to her youngest child, Tim's grandfather.

"At that time [1904], women had no rights. She could have been put in there for any reason. But it looks like she lived a pretty normal life," Tim said.

Anna worked in the dining rooms and enjoyed sewing. She also worked in the kitchen, snapping peas and peeling potatoes. One of her jobs was to polish doorknobs and dust the common rooms.

"Despite having everything taken away from her-her children and her freedom-Anna had a very full life inside the walls of the Nebraska Hospital for the Insane," Rachel said.

After Tim and Pam discovered that Anna was buried in one of the Lincoln Regional Center's cemeteries, they made the trip to Lincoln to see her in 2015, and were impressed by the tranquility of Anna's final resting place. That's when they put the wheels in motion to honor Anna.

"We wanted to acknowledge her as a family member. She didn't have a lot of good things happen in her lifetime. We're just happy to help her reclaim her identity," Tim said.

Tim and Pam contacted Speidell Monuments and had a new headstone made with Anna's name, birthdate, and the date of her death on it. On a sunny and peaceful day in August, nearly two dozen people came to remember the woman that most of the Cox family spent decades trying to forget.

"This is just something that families do for each other," Pam said.

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.

Deanna Ewing, MLTC Social Service Worker

Thank you for your assistance in getting R's Medicaid reinstated. You are a huge asset to the DHHS. I will be taking the time to write a personal letter to the Director of the DHHS praising your dedication, professionalism, etiquette, service, and caring attitude. I feel that you more than deserve this, its personnel like yourself that are find examples of what a great public servant you are.

Sincerely and Respectfully
A grateful father

I received a call from a client. She started off by expressing how completely in shock she was with how helpful Tiffanie was. She stated **Tiffanie Powell**, Social Services Worker, was very very helpful and wanted to make sure she receives some type of recognition. She continued to say that Tiffanie is someone who cares about her job and the people she is helping. She was understanding and did not rush her off the phone. No one has gotten her case right but Tiffanie took the time to make sure she did what she could.

I thought I would pass this forward as Tiffanie did an EXCELLENT job with this case. There are multiple narratives from the previous 3 days that the client has called in and Tiffanie handled this client's concerns very professionally.

-Mari Gurrola, Social Service Worker Lead

DHHS Nursing Office,

Thank you so much for all of your help. Your office has been so nice and so helpful. I'm a travel nurse and I have several RN license for other states, and, it's not always easy to even get someone to talk to on the phone. Your office definitely went above and beyond the process of issuing my temporary license. I'll be sure to share this with my travel agency and other RNs. Have a great week and I look forward to my assignment in Omaha! I love my career as a RN and I always enjoy taking excellent care of my patients wherever I am working. I'm excited to see the state of Nebraska, as this is my first time in the area.

Wanda Boone, RN

Dear **ENVH staff,**

We want to take this opportunity to thank you for the loving daily care given to our father over the past 3 ½ years. It was our observation that his care at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Homes was the best possible. We will always remember and be forever grateful for these years.

The Charles Davis Family