

Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

September 2008
VOLUME 8, ISSUE 9



What's this large group so happy about, and why is former HHS Director Nancy Montanez Johner cutting a cake? Turn page to find out!
Photos: Jen Rae Hein



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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. A full text of all releases is available under "Newsroom" at www.dhhs.ne.gov. Click on the "Newsroom" link and then on "New Releases." Listen to sound bites issued with releases.

[Five New Cases of West Nile Reported](#) August 20

[Members Sought for Health Boards](#) August 18

[Stay in the Game—Get Screened for Colon Cancer](#) August 7

[Disaster Food Stamp Relief Program Helps Thousands](#) August 6

[Scam Targets Child Care Providers](#) August 1

A full text of all releases is available under "Newsroom" on the DHHS Web site. Go to www.dhhs.ne.gov/, click on the "Newsroom" link and then on "News Releases." You can listen to "sound bites" issued with releases by going to www.dhhs.ne.gov/audio/.

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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Connections can be made available in an alternative format for those with disabilities. Requests will be filled within 15 working days. Prior consent has been obtained for this publication to identify and publish photos of all individuals receiving DHHS services.

EOE/AA/ADA

About the Cover:

On September 9, DHHS celebrated earning \$1,023,369 in high performance bonuses for processing food stamp applications from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). DHHS received its first bonus for payment accuracy and its fifth bonus in a row for its negative error rate. That's like a foot ball team winning the national championship five years in a row!

For the second year in a row, DHHS had a zero negative error rate and was the best in the nation. That rate measures a state's ability to correctly suspend or end benefits for households that don't qualify for the program.

Todd Landry, Division of Children and Family Services director, said, "We're number one in the nation because staff know that processing an application accurately means eligible families have help putting food on their tables."

Governor Dave Heineman praised staff's attention to details and making sure Nebraskans get the food they need for good health. **Nancy Montanez Johner**, USDA Under Secretary for Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services and director of the former Department of Health and Human Services, said she was proud of staff's commitment to the people being served.

Shown in the front cover photo from left: **Konnie Jividen, Michelle Buresh, Yolanda Nuncio, Linda Hart, Karen Heng, Mickey Kotlarz, Julie Shively, Mike Harris, Nancy Montanez Johner (USDA), Elaine Anderson, Governor Dave Heineman, Kate High, Jan Beck, Glenda Horst, LeAnne Cooper, Ruth Vineyard, Juanita Ewers, Mike Puls, Lori Posvar, Trish Bergman, Myra Hoffart, Barry DeJong, Jeff Schmidt, Kathy Lynch, Chris Peterson, Todd Reckling, and Todd Landry.**

From the CEO

This fall, the State of Nebraska will once again enter into collective bargaining with the Nebraska Association of Public Employees/American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, usually referred to as NAPE/AFSCME.



Christine Peterson
Chief Executive Officer,
Nebraska Department
of Health and Human
Services

This is a very important process because it defines, through a two-year contract that takes effect July 1, 2009, the relationship between labor and management and the expectations

and requirements of both.

In addition to the main contract, a number of agencies bargain an appendix containing issues specific to the work of that agency. Appendix C covers the issues that are specific to many employees within DHHS.

This year, we're using a new process to discuss and bargain issues in Appendix C, that **Mike Marvin**, Executive Director of NAPE/AFSCME, and I agreed on. The process is called Interest-Based Bargaining (IBB). It requires that all decisions be made by consensus, meaning that if any member of the team doesn't agree, there is no agreement on that particular issue. It came to my attention because the Department of Correctional Services is also using it on their appendix.

In late August, the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, an independent federal agency whose mission is to promote sound and stable

labor-management relations, trained the bargaining team and other key staff (about 50 DHHS employees total, both labor and management) in IBB principles. The directors and I attended the first days of training. As you can imagine, there were some interesting discussions, especially around the new Time and Attendance Policy. Everyone, however, agreed to go on with the process.

One of the agreements reached is that a newsletter will go out after each Appendix C bargaining session so that all employees can be aware of Appendix C activities. The team has sent two newsletters to you so far, one on August 29 and another on September 3.

I support the IBB process wholeheartedly because it's based on building relationships and agreements. The process:

- Focuses on the issues,

- Explores all interests underlying the issue,

- Is open to possibilities and opportunities,

- Satisfies other parties' interests as well as your own, and

- Uses mutually agreed criteria to reach the best solution.

Through the IBB process, outcomes should result in:

- Creative solutions that benefit the organization as a whole,

- Durable solutions that everyone is motivated to support, and

- An improved relationship between the parties.

The process and the process outcomes appeal to me for many reasons, some of the most important being that we are a young agency and we have clear priorities we've set out to reach; <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/images/toptenprioritiesposter/poster.pdf>.

Building labor/management relationships in an open environment is key to our overall success and the success of our priority initiatives, and I believe the IBB process is a good tool to use.

I hope that you will all take the time to review the IBB newsletter updates when they come out. In addition, please feel free to contact any member of the team if you have further questions. Thank you.

The members of the team are:

Ted Buri, NAPE/AFSCME

Angie Doyle, Omaha, Children and Family Services

Deanna Ewing, Beatrice, Children and Family Services

Jodi Fenner, Central Office, Legal

Linda Gerner, Central Office, Human Resources

Bill Gibson, Lincoln Regional Center

Karen Girch, Beatrice State Developmental Center

Roger Girch, Beatrice State Developmental Center

Linda Heller, Omaha, Public Health

Toni Hoefler, Norfolk Regional Center

Dirk Hood, Lincoln Gold's Building, Human Resources

Dianne Jones, Omaha, Children and Family Services

Dottie Meyers, Grand Island Veterans' Home

Peter Nielsen, Omaha, Children and Family Services

Scott Rasmussen, Lincoln Regional Center, Human Resources

Jeff Schmidt, Lincoln Gold's Building, Children and Family Services

Mary Shanahan, Central Office, Human Resources

Lonnie Starke, Western Nebraska Veterans' Home

Pat Trainer, Central Office, Human Resources

Paul Versaw, Lincoln Regional Center

Tim Urlaub, Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home

What's this intergenerational pair so happy about?



Six-year-old **Isabella Aviles** has no living grandfather, so she “adopted” her great uncle for that role. The story goes like this.

Isabella’s mother, **Wendy Aviles**, helped work her way through college in Wayne, Nebraska, by keeping house for her aunt’s former husband, **Robert Sheckler**. She often brought Isabella along, who got along famously with her great uncle.

When Sheckler got ill and later moved into the Norfolk Veterans’ Home, the group lost touch. But when Isabella and her mom later moved to Norfolk, they learned Sheckler’s whereabouts and visit him often.

When Isabella’s elementary school summer program toured the Vets’ Home, Isabella couldn’t wait to introduce her classmates to her “grandpa” but didn’t find him in his room. According to Administrative Assistant **Linda Sparr** who helped conduct the tour, “Mr. Sheckler uses a motorized scooter and is often out and about socializing around the facility.”

After a short search, “grandpa Sheckler” was found and introduced to her classmates by a proud Isabella. *Photo courtesy of Lincoln Elementary School.*

Be Smart - Be Prepared

Tornadoes, floods, fire and ice. From Chadron, across the state to Omaha, Nebraskans have faced these disasters in recent years.

Emergency professionals and every-day-people answered calls to help. Many Department of Health and Human Services employees responded when these tragedies struck – as professionals doing your jobs and as concerned citizens in volunteer capacities. Some are mentioned for their recent involvement in the ABCD recognition on page 4.

September is National Preparedness Month.

There is no better time for us to remember past disasters and the importance of preparing for the unexpected.

Awareness is important but it isn't enough. If you haven't already done so, please go one step further this month and take action to be better prepared.

Both the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and Ready.gov suggest a personal action plan:

- Get a kit
- Make a plan
- Be informed

Your emergency kit should include basics for survival for at least three days. Fresh water, food, something to keep you warm, and necessary medicines are examples of what your kit should contain.

Make a plan to include how you will contact your family or closest friends, where you'll meet, and how your plan might change in different situations.

Be informed. Have a radio with batteries. Pay attention to information on the radio and, if possible to TV, newspapers and credible websites. Watch for safety information, closings, evacuations, and other official information.

Being ready at home isn't the only focus. Planning on the bigger scale is also underway.

Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy is the state's Director of Homeland Security. He leads the Nebraska Homeland Security Policy Group, created to assess strategic alternatives and develop, coordinate and implement a comprehensive strategy for the protection of the citizens and assets of Nebraska. DHHS is a member of the Policy Group. Whether planning for a response to natural disasters or bioterrorism attacks, Lt. Gov. Sheehy is involved.

This month, Lt. Gov. Sheehy and ServeNebraska are recognizing seven recipients of Be Prepared awards to honor their efforts to enhance the safety of Nebraskans year-round through disaster preparedness, response, volunteer training and mobilization.

Making a plan is important for employers, too, and DHHS has started to develop Continuity of Operation Plans (COOPs). DHHS 24-hour

facilities have already done considerable planning because of their direct care responsibilities. The Division of Public Health was the first division to create a COOP, due to their responsibilities for bioterrorism and pandemic flu response. Operations has begun, and the other divisions will develop plans in the future.

Part of developing a COOP means taking a long, hard look at all work activities, and deciding which DHHS activities will be essential in the case of a massive emergency like a pandemic flu. Another step is deciding how those essential responsibilities can be covered around the clock, if that becomes necessary. Knowing what skills employees have, and how some staff can be redeployed in the face of an emergency, is part of the long-term goal.

Please take steps now to be prepared at home, and know that planning is underway, at different stages, within DHHS and state government.

For more information about preparedness at home, work and in the community, go to www.ready.gov/.



ABCD Recognitions

The following employees are recognized by directors, administrators, supervisors and managers for exceptional contributions in support of the DHHS mission: Helping people live better lives. This is the final installment of Above and Beyond the Call of Duty recognitions. Employees will now be recognized through the DHHS Employee/Supervisor-Manager of the Year program, Length-of-Service Awards, Achievement Recognition Awards and other options outlined in the new DHHS Employee Recognition Policy.

Contributors to the Food Stamp Disaster Relief

In June 2008, a severe wind storm knocked out power to more than 126,000 households in the Eastern Service Area (ESA), and the ESA began issuing replacement and disaster food stamp benefits to more than 23,000 families. In all \$10.7 million in benefits were issued.

This was a monumental task, and many staff and volunteers answered the call issued by ESA Administrator **Barry De Jong**, **Bob Kubat** and **Linda Hart**. While no list could be complete, the following employees offer a sampling of the collaborative effort that made disaster relief successful.

In addition to ESA staff, Central Office staff were on site to offer support and leadership: **Mike Harris**, Economic Assistance administrator within the Division of Children and Family Services; **Trish Bergman**, Food Stamp/TANF Program Administrator; Program Specialist **Michelle Buresh**; Policy Section Administrator **Todd Reckling**; and Staff Assistant **Juanita Ewers**. **Suzi Skinner** and the Southeast Service Area team also played a key role in helping the ESA meet its challenge.

Jessica Rausch, Social Services Supervisor in a DHHS Omaha office, oversaw the Millard/FEMA Disaster site with little advance notice. Drawing on that experience, she also helped make the Family Resource Center site successful. When that site closed, she moved to the Salvation Army gym and then to the Pacific Street processing center, working until the job was done.

Mickey Kotlarz, ESA Payment Accuracy Specialist, worked from start to finish. There was no clock for her, and she maintained an upbeat attitude throughout.

Social Service Worker **Angie Ulrich** took charge of training many additional staff and volunteers on site. For her, nothing was too large or too small, and if something needed doing, she did it.

Eligibility Worker **Rosa Palos** was among the first to arrive each morning, making sure supplies were well-stocked, handing out applications to waiting customers and troubleshooting of any problems.

Case Aide **Vicki Parsons** used touches of both southern charm and a drill sergeant to keep things moving forward. If she noticed a need, she took care of business with a sense of humor and kindness.

A core team spent two full weeks and Saturdays at the Salvation Army site: Social Service Workers **Carmen Barnes**, **Joe Fuxa**, **Barb Hawley**, **Cori Ulane** and Client Intake Clerk **Ashley Thomas**. Their commitment was exemplary.

Case Aide **Amy Reed** introduced applicants by name to workers who interviewed them. All customers were made to feel special, resulting in many hugs for her each day.

The call center and processing area provided support, organization and policy assistance at all application sites: Administrator **Kathee Sanchez**, Social Services Administrator **Dianne Stewart**, and Social Services Supervisor **Lynn Banker** (all of Omaha); Administrator **Ruth Vineyard** and Administrative Assistant **Suzi Skinner** of Lincoln; and Child Support Enforcement Supervisor **Mary Becker** of North Platte.

A debt of gratitude is due these and all other employees and volunteers, whose contributions made the recent Food Stamp Disaster Relief effort successful for DHHS customers.



Members of the DHHS Emergency Response Team

During May and June 2008, 53 Nebraska counties were declared disaster areas due to tornadoes and severe weather. Several DHHS employees took their turn staffing the health and medical component of the state's emergency response at the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) operated by the Nebraska Emergency Management Agency (NEMA): Bioterrorism Surveillance Coordinator **Grey Borden**, Health Resources and Services Administration Coordinator **Ruth Cover**, Environmental Assistance Coordinator **Randy Fischer**, Attorney **Darrell Klein**, Administrator of Community Health Planning and Protection **Christine Newlon**, Administrator of Environmental Health Unit **Sue Semerena**, and Epidemiology Surveillance Coordinator **Russ Wren**.

Communications and Legislative Services Administrator **Kathie Osterman** and Public Information Officer **Mike Wight** helped with the public information response. A big part of this effort involved working with media to get out important information to area residents so they could remain safe and keep informed about their options.

DHHS workers got little notice, worked long hours and sometimes needed to report in the middle of the night, but the EOC remained open 24 hours a day until the situation was brought under control.

The EOC works to ensure a coordinated response at the state level, and along with other agencies like the State Patrol, Department of Roads and the American Red Cross, DHHS is an integral part of this response.

Employees of the Grand Island Veterans' Home

Moving day is always a challenge, but all the more when trying to move more than 80 members of the Grand Island Veterans' Home from one building to another—all within five hours! According to the family member of one of these veterans in an letter to the editor published in the Grand Island Independent (August 16, 2008), it was nothing less than "a miracle."

"The miraculous thing was that all moves seemed to come off without a hitch," said **Dori Bush**, whose father lives at the Home. "The reason, I soon learned, was that everyone on the veterans' home staff was pitching in...Teamwork was definitely evident and the word of the day! The best part was that I didn't hear a cross or unkind comment as beds, boxes, furniture and members were moved from place to place, up and down elevators and around tight corners! EVERYONE did their very best to tend to the members, regardless of the situation...Everyone seemed to rise to the occasion!"

According to this family member, "Thank you just doesn't seem to adequately express my feelings of gratitude to all of the wonderful staff members at the Veterans' Home... but you all made the best of what could have been a horribly disrupted day, and I know that all of us who have loved ones living at the Veterans' Home are so very grateful for the special attention you give our family members, not only on this moving day, but EVERY day!"

Developmental Disabilities Service Coordinators

During the past year, several Developmental Disabilities Service Coordinators have helped transition clients at the Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC) to the community, a move that means appropriate placements and enhanced quality of service for those still receiving services at the facility.

Among these Service Coordinators are **Rhonda Erikson** and **Monica Baete** in the DHHS Beatrice office, who in addition to their regular case loads have conducted more than 53 assessments of BSDC clients considering moving into community-based services. This process involves reviewing program information and interviewing BSDC staff to document skills for each individual. Once assessments are completed, the information is submitted to the Developmental Disabilities assessment staff and funding is generated. Community providers then assess whether or not they can offer needed services.

Thanks to Rhonda and Monica, other Service Coordinators across the state have saved travel and work time, mileage and costs. Their contributions have also kept the process more consistent. They have been assisted by many other Service Coordinators across the state and BSDC employees like **Nancy Mayfield** and other Center Social Workers and Transition Specialist **Sue Spitzer**.

Medicaid and Long-Term Care Pharmacy Staff

Several employees have been instrumental in facilitating a smooth transition between two contractors responsible for Medicaid pharmacy claims. Those employees are Pharmacy Consultants **Barbara Mart** and **Lisa deVries**; Pharmacy and Ancillary Services Administrator **Gary Cheloha**; and Staff Assistants **Sharon Gruhn** and **Colleen VonRentzell**. As a result, pharmacy services to Medicaid patients have experienced little, if any, disruption, and the transition has earned praise from pharmacies and clients alike.

Know-how, quick action “a real life-saver” at LRC

By Jerry Crisp

Lunch in a Staff Development break room wasn't routine on an otherwise routine day at the Lincoln Regional Center (LRC). On July 15, Statistics Coordinator **Leah Becker** stopped by to share lunch with friends before taking a brief vacation. She was munching on an entree when something got caught in her throat.

“I had just glanced at my watch and noted that it was 12:45 so I had 15 minutes before heading in to teach a class,” says **Tammy Foley**, Training Coordinator with Human Resources and Development. “The next thing I knew, Leah suddenly stood up and came toward me looking distressed.”

“I backed up into Tammy, knowing she would know I wanted her to do the Heimlich Maneuver on me,” Leah explains. “When you've worked together for 24 years, you just know each other that well. Tammy later said I was a model victim who did everything right!”

Being certified in CPR and having taught life-saving techniques for a dozen years, Tammy immediately applied the Heimlich Maneuver. This life-saving technique relies on sudden, sharp pressures to the abdomen just below the rib cage applied by someone standing behind the victim.



A grateful Leah Becker (right) with lifesaver Tammy Foley. Photo: Meloni Lines

“I started very gently, but time slowed down dramatically when application after application didn't work,” Tammy explains. “Time slowed down even more when Clinical Nurse Trainer **Emily Claussen**, also at the scene, exclaimed, ‘Tammy, she's turning red and looks faint!’”

“I'm not going to lie and say I wasn't scared, especially since I still wasn't getting proper air after several Heimlich applications,” says Leah.

Tammy applied the next couple of Heimlich applications “much, much harder!”

On the seventh try, Tammy heard Leah take a breath and was able to breathe again herself. Again glancing at her watch, it was 12:50. The event that made time seem to slow had taken less than five minutes.

“I am deeply and forever grateful,” says Leah. “It's nice to know that

there are truly qualified people around when help is needed. Tammy Foley is a real life saver!”

Tammy had performed CPR during her stint as a Registered Nurse in an Omaha hospital but never used the Heimlich during the dozen years she's been teaching it in LRC classes.

“Although my pulse was still rapid, I got to class on time, and several times thought to myself, ‘I can't believe

what just happened!’”

A relatively simple procedure, there's nothing ordinary about the potential of the Heimlich Maneuver and other life-saving techniques to prevent serious injury or death.

“Life-saving techniques are taught at all ten of the DHHS 24-hour facilities,” Human Resources and Development Administrator **Mary Shanahan** reports. “Most importantly, serious injuries have been prevented and lives have been saved at all ten facilities.”

Leah Becker is grateful to Tammy Foley, as we all should be for anyone who takes the time to learn life-saving techniques that makes us all safer.

For information on how to apply the Heimlich Maneuver, go to <http://www.heimlichinstitute.org/page.php?id=34>.

AEDs in DHHS buildings across state could make life or death difference

By Kari Majors and Bill Wiley

Imagine yourself working in a DHHS building and suddenly going into cardiac arrest. You slump to the floor and hope that someone nearby knows CPR or calls 9-1-1, and that the ambulance comes quickly.

Your chances of surviving and recovering more completely from such an experience are now much better, thanks to nearly 100 automated external defibrillators (AEDs) recently installed in DHHS buildings across the state.

According to the American Heart Association® (AHA), sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) or massive heart attack kills approximately 365,000 people in the U.S. alone each year and can strike anyone. Even a seemingly healthy person can suffer cardiac arrest without warning. Moreover, 15% of all workplace fatalities reported to OSHA in recent years are attributable to sudden cardiac arrest.

The only definitive treatment for SCA is a defibrillation shock — an electrical pulse through the heart — which restores a normal heart rhythm. The chance of an SCA victim's survival decreases by 10% for every minute that passes, so in order to be effective, defibrillation treatment must be administered within the first few minutes.

The presence of AEDs in DHHS buildings now makes this possible. About the size of laptop computer, AEDs analyze the heart's rhythm for any abnormalities and, if necessary, directs the rescuer to deliver an electrical shock to the victim or delivers the shock automatically.

Easy to operate, it uses voice prompts, lights and text messages

to instruct the rescuer. The rescuer will be prompted to apply the two pads provided with the AED to the victim's chest. It is always necessary to apply the chest pads, as the AED will not do anything without the pads applied.

Once applied, the AED will begin to monitor the victim's heart rhythm. If a "shockable" rhythm is detected, the machine will charge itself and instruct you to stand away from the victim and automatically administer a shock or prompt you to press the shock button. After the shock, the unit prompts for CPR with a built-in metronome that sets the pace for proper chest compressions.

We all hope that the AEDs won't have to be used. But if an employee or visitor to a DHHS building should suddenly



experience a cardiac arrest, the new AEDs could mean the difference between life and death.

For more information about sudden cardiac arrest and AEDs, contact the Nebraska Cardiovascular Health Program at 402-471-2101 or CVHProgram@dhhs.ne.gov. To locate the AEDs in your building, contact the building administrator.

Good Things Are Happening!

Previously, only 8 newborn screening tests were required by state law, and the other 20 tests for metabolic conditions were optional. As a consequence, 2 to 3% of babies were at risk of harmful effects of many metabolic disorders. Untreated babies with these conditions can develop chronic illness, seizures, irreversible brain damage or even die. A new law now makes sure that every Nebraska baby now benefits from screening for 28 metabolic, endocrine and hematologic conditions, as well as cystic fibrosis.

Last year, 41 Nebraska babies were detected with these conditions and received early treatment, consequently avoiding mental retardation, chronic health problems or even death!

ACCESSNebraska! On-line application tool enhances customer service



By Dianna Seiffert

Applying for economic assistance from DHHS is about to become a lot easier and much more convenient. Through *ACCESSNebraska*, an on-line screening tool and application process, low-income Nebraskans can apply for economic assistance anytime and anywhere from any computer that has Internet access. The Web-based application—which has taken more than a year to create—is being introduced in September to Nebraskans across the state.

People will be able to apply on-line for Medicaid, Food Stamps, Aid to Dependent Children benefits, Aid to Aged, Blind and Disabled, Low-Income Energy Assistance, Kids Connections and Child Care assistance. They will also be able to use a screening tool that helps them see what assistance is available.

“A project of this magnitude takes a lot of planning, preparation and hard work,” said **Todd Landry**, Director of the Division of Children and Family Services. “It’s a big step

forward in the way we do business by helping us serve our clients more efficiently and effectively.”

On-line applications submitted during business hours will be received in the local DHHS office that same day. Since people will be able to apply on-line 24 hours a day, seven days a week, applications submitted after hours, on weekends and holidays, will be received in the local office the next business day.

Once an *ACCESSNebraska* application is submitted it goes to an application management box. Each office will assign staff to take the application, connect it with an N-FOCUS case, and forward the application to an assigned caseworker. Caseworkers will then receive an alert that an online application has been tied to a case they’ve been assigned to work on.

“Being able to apply on-line makes DHHS more accessible to clients and that helps improve our outreach efforts,” said Landry. *ACCESSNebraska* simplifies the application process as well because clients are only answering questions

relative to the situation they’re in and the assistance they are applying for, said Landry.

People don’t have to own their own computers, either, to be able to use *ACCESSNebraska*. DHHS is working with community partners that offer Internet access like libraries, and Senior Centers. Many DHHS offices will have computers for clients to use as well.

Many DHHS employees have worked very hard to get this project ready for the September launch. Caseworkers have had opportunities to test *ACCESSNebraska* and many have already been trained on this new way of doing business.

Even though workers are focusing on getting the *ACCESSNebraska* application on-line and in the hands of all Nebraskans, they also have many enhancement is planned for the future. For example, a Spanish version of the Web application and screening tool will be available in November 2008. Another enhancement planned is for *ACCESSNebraska* clients to be able to check their case status and report any situation changes on-line.

“*ACCESSNebraska* is an investment in technology that we just had to make,” Landry said. “It will help address the needs of Nebraskans today and in the future, and I want to thank all of the people who have worked so hard on this project to make it a reality.”

For questions about *ACCESSNebraska* contact **Karen Heng** at (402) 471-9219 or at karen.heng@dhhs.ne.gov.

Striving for *purrfection!*

By Jerry Crisp

The creative crew in the DHHS O'Neill office is at it again. Earlier this year, Connections reported on "Footsteps for Families," a strategy Children and Family Services Specialist Supervisor **Tami Hilfiker** used to motivate her staff in eight counties in the Northern Service Area. Paper footsteps were affixed to a poster indicating her staff's success in serving customers.

These prints of progress could be earned for such things as completing "priority one" intake assessments on time, completing all customer contacts, keeping contact narratives current, helping a child return home or facilitating guardianship or adoption, or taking on tasks above and beyond the call of duty.

The newest reincarnation of Hilfiker's motivational creativity is "Striving for Purrfection." This time, staff earn paper cats on a poster for similar accomplishments.

"Staff worked really hard, as you can tell by our having two 1st-place winners with a total of 19 cats," Hilfiker explains. "Two more tied for 2nd-place with 15 cats, and the only difference between the 3rd-place winner (14 cats) and 4th-place finisher (13 cats) was one cat!"

Winners earned small gift certificates paid for by Hilfiker, but the real reward was knowing that they were being recognized for enhancing the quality of services they provide.

"I believe strongly that staff should be recognized whenever possible," says Hilfiker. "It helps them keep a positive attitude while doing a difficult job when they know that someone appreciates the good things they do."

Photos:

TOP: 1st place winners left to right: Case Aide **Teresa LeMunyan** and Children and Family Services Specialist **Prairey Walking**. Photo: Tami Hilfiker

MIDDLE: 2nd place winners left to right: Case Aide **Nancy Turpin**, and Children and Family Services Specialist **Sally Davis**. Photo: Tami Hilfiker

BOTTOM: 3rd place finisher **Mark Tyrrell**, Adult Protective Services Worker. Photo: Ross Tomjack



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

For 23 years, Nurse Consultant **Margaret Van Dyke** has been working in Medicaid. Now with the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care, she advises clients and their caseworkers about how to access medical services. She also enrolls providers such as hospitals, physicians, and licensed psychologists and therapists, and advises them on how to get their Medicaid claims paid.

As a result, Margaret's work helps Medicaid clients receive medically-necessary mental health and substance abuse services for adults, children and youth.

A typical day for Margaret includes claim reviews, meetings and many hours on the phone. Approximately 90% of her time involves cases within Nebraska, and 10% with other states, where wards receiving treatment in Nebraska might reside with relatives or where out-of-state services might need to enroll in Nebraska.

"The major challenge I face is trying to get it all done," Margaret says. "There always seems to be more to do than hours in a day!"

Learning to do things a bit differently after DHHS restructuring also presented an initial challenge but now makes Margaret's job easier.

"Medicaid used to be something of a silo," she says, "but we get great Medicaid administrative feedback and have more frequent communication with the Divisions of Behavioral Health and Children and Family Services, with whom we work closely."



Margaret Van Dyke (at left) collaborates on a claim review with Payment Reviewer Tonye Eisenhauer. Photo: Jerry Crisp

The biggest reward Margaret receives from her work is when "a client receives a needed medical service that makes their life better, or even when I'm able to explain a policy to someone and you see a light go on. In either case, their appreciation is an added bonus."

In her many years of service, Margaret has seen many changes.

"In an earlier era, we used to travel the state to offer informational presentations to providers, and that face-to-face, in-person contact was wonderful," Margaret says. "Now we tend to communicate more via e-mail or the Internet, but that's less expensive and more convenient for all involved. I guess there's always a trade-off."

Throughout the technological changes, one thing that never changes is Margaret Vandyke's commitment to serving her clients to the very best of her ability.

"Margaret is known for her cart on wheels that she takes with her whenever she leaves the office," says **Roxie Cillessen**, Behavioral Health, Pharmacy and Ancillary Services Manager and Margaret's supervisor. "Maybe she just wants her office to look less cluttered in case **Vivianne Chaumont** (Director of the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care) drops by, but the real reason is that Margaret can never tell when the urge to enroll a Medicaid provider will strike her."

Wellness Words: *Personal Preparedness!*

While many work behind the scenes to help citizens of Nebraska and our nation be better prepared for emergencies, here's something you can do to be better prepared yourself!

When we prepare for emergencies, we often think about large-scale disasters like tornadoes and floods. Fires aren't often considered disasters, but they are equally devastating to those whose lives they destroy. According to the American Red Cross, fire is the third leading cause of accidental death in the United States.

One of the best things you can do to prepare for a fire is prevent it from happening in the first place. Take the time to inspect your home for possible safety hazards, bare wires, and improperly operating heating equipment. By carefully inspecting your home for possible hazards, you may prevent a major catastrophe later on.

- For early detection of fires, install smoke detectors near all sleeping areas. Install smoke detectors at each level in a multi-story home.
- Test those smoke detectors monthly and change batteries at least twice a year.
- Design a home fire escape plan, and practice using it. Remember to designate a meeting place outside the house.

In a fire, seconds count! If a fire should occur in your home...



1. Get out of the house, using exits you've already identified and practiced using.



2. Gather at your designated meeting place outside the house to be assured everyone is safe.



3. Phone the fire department from a neighbor's house.



4. Stay at the meeting place and wait for the fire department. Never go back inside the house for any reason!

For additional information about personal preparedness, contact Public Information Officer **Dianna Seiffert** at (402) 471-1695 or dianna.seiffert@dhhs.ne.gov.

Too early to be thinking about the holidays? *Well, maybe not...*



Are you in the holiday spirit? Probably not quite yet, but whether celebrating Christmas, Hanukkah, Ramadan or Kwanzaa, many employees give to others during the holiday season. *Connections'* December issue has special pages spotlighting the "DHHS Spirit of Holiday Giving" but can only do so when you tell us about it. Simply answer the following questions, and we'll print as many as space allows.

- WHAT do you and your co-workers do that demonstrates a "spirit of giving"?
- HOW LONG have you been doing this?
- WHY did you start doing it?
- HAVE A PHOTO that shows this "spirit of giving" in action? If so, please send it along!

DEADLINE is Wednesday, October 15th.

To share your holiday traditions, send your information to **Dianna Seiffert** via e-mail at dianna.seiffert@dhhs.ne.gov or phone her at (402) 471-1695.

"DHHS Spirit of Giving Year-Round!" If your work area gives to others at other times of the year, tell Dianna Seiffert, and *Connections* will publish your story in a companion piece, "DHHS Spirit of Giving Year-Round." Both of these features show that DHHS employees not only help people live better lives as part of their job but as caring citizens of their communities, too!

Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state



Luggage Makes A Difference

How would it feel to have all your worldly possessions thrown in a plastic garbage bag as you move to a foster home? That's what many children experience when they're removed from their homes because of abuse or neglect.

When **Claire Aguilar**, Director of the St. Francis Foundation, learned of this dilemma, she immediately began to try to find a solution. DHHS staff in the Central Service Area were very excited when Aguilar delivered over \$550 worth of suitcases of all sizes to the Grand Island DHHS office. These suitcases were generously purchased and donated by **Mike Morledge**, owner of Credit Management. Central Service Area Administrator **Yolanda Nuncio** (left) accepts the luggage from Aguilar. *Photo: Andrea Rodriguez*

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.

In their own words...

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

A retired physician and retired nurse married for 47 years wrote these notes about the quality of services and care they receive as members of the Western Nebraska Veterans' Home

Dear **Lonnie Stark** (WNVH Administrator):

It is with great pleasure that we write you concerning the most wonderful experience we are having at WNVH. Everything is tops—the kitchen fellas and their fine food—housekeeping is outstanding—maintenance folks are very helpful—nursing and activity services are all so caring and fine. We can only say that we are most happy and fortunate to be here.

Joan and Gunter Nashelsky

To the **WNVH Activities Department**:

CRAFTS * SCRABBLE * BINGO * ICE CREAM!

We watch you people and are amazed at your continued and constant love and caring attitude. We, the members, are very grateful for your consistent reaching out to us. Gunter and I thank God every day for allowing us this experience. Attitude is the key, and yours is top notch.

WARMTH * CARING * LOVING * WALKING THE EXTRA MILE!

Joan and Gunter Nashelsky

To the **WNVH Dietary Department**:

Once again, **Janet Boyer** (WNVH Dietary Director), you and your staff are outdoing yourselves! We appreciate each and every one of you, and we want to thank you for taking such good care of our kids last week. You are all GOOD people, and we thank God every day for allowing us to be here. Each one of your staff worries about and is gentle with the members here, and we are all so grateful for the continued love and care.

THANK YOU * THANK YOU * THANK YOU!

Joan and Gunter Nashelsky

In their own words continued...

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

Dear **Monty Shultz** (Child & Family Services Specialist, DHHS Kearney office):

The visit has been very good. No major disruptions, issues or confrontations! He's been on his absolute best behavior. It's been a vacation for all of us...

Hopefully, he'll take advantage of his new start. He knows what got him in there. He knows what could earn more visits home with good behavior, meeting goals, better attitude, etc. Know that what you are doing makes a huge difference in the lives of a lot of people. A heartfelt thank you.

The family of a Kearney client

Dear **Vicki Schindler** (Social Service Worker, DHHS O'Neill office):

Thanks for all the help you have given in the last couple of weeks. It has been a JOY to work with you. If it wasn't for you, I don't think I could have gotten this far.

A Northern Service Area client

Dear **Kris Chiles** (Section Administrator, Licensure Unit, Division of Public Health):

It's rare that I am able to enthusiastically state without qualification that an employee is commendable. This is most definitely the case with Credentialing Specialist **Cindy Kelley**. She had helped me with my licensure requirements for the state of Arizona and has remained professional, totally competent and extremely pleasant to work with.

Since moving to Arizona, I have had quite a time with this state's licensing requirements, mostly because of the way that information must be handled. I am not allowed to open any envelope that needs to go to the State of Arizona with my license packet. It's therefore impossible to know if the necessary information is enclosed or not. Cindy has helped me get the required information in an efficient and expedited manner.

Please accept this letter as a formal endorsement of Cindy's personnel skills, as well as her job knowledge and desire to go above and beyond whatever is required...Kris, you have a fabulous employee in Cindy Kelley, and I sincerely hope you realize this.

Rodney M. Bass, MA, LMPH, CPC

While *Connections* receives more letters from satisfied customers than we can ever publish, please send letters via any method listed in our editorial box on page 2, and we'll publish as many as space allows.

October Observances

October 2008

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	

Mental Illness Awareness
Breast Cancer Awareness
Nursing Home Residents' Rights

Mental Illness Awareness Month

The more we all know about mental illness, the more we can work together to reduce the stigma associated with it. Check out these common myths:

MYTH: Mental illnesses don't affect me.

FACT: Mental illnesses are surprisingly common. Studies show that one in five Americans suffers from a diagnosable mental illness in a given year. You probably know someone with a mental illness and don't even realize it.

MYTH: There's no hope for people with mental illnesses.

FACT: Mental health problems are real, common and treatable. There are more treatments, services and community support systems than ever before.

MYTH: I can't do anything for a person with mental illness.

FACT: You can do a lot by reaching out to those around you with mental illness. Understanding and support can make a real difference in the life of a person who needs them.

MYTH: People with mental illnesses can't work.

FACT: With appropriate treatment and support, people with mental illnesses lead active, productive lives.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Data collected in 2006 by Nebraska's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System show that 73% of women age 40 and older had received a mammogram in the previous two years. In the last ten years, since 1996, there has been a 15% improvement in mammography rates. The bad news is that mammography rates for women in Nebraska showed a slight decline between 2004 and 2006.

"It's very important that women don't become complacent about having regular mammograms," said **Kathy Ward**, Administrator of the Office of Women's and Men's Health in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). "The Preventive Services Task Force recommends screening mammograms every one to two years for women age 40 and older."

Women age 40 and above earning a moderate income are eligible for FREE or low-cost screenings through the DHHS Every Woman Matters program. For more information, call the Every Woman Matters program at 1-800-532-2227, or check the DHHS Web site at www.dhhs.ne.gov/womenshealth/ewm.

Nursing Home Residents' Rights Month

Residents' Right Month highlights the fact that residents of Nebraska's 231 nursing homes have rights to privacy, choice, individualized care and dignified treatment.

"People living in nursing homes are our family members, neighbors and friends," says **Patty Pierson**, Long-Term Ombudsman with the DHHS Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care. "Understanding our past gives us a solid foundation for approaching our future."

Long-Term Care Ombudsman staff and volunteers help ensure that residents' voices are heard and their rights safeguarded. Residents' Rights also offers an opportunity to commend those who contribute to the well-being of residents. They can be reached at 800-942-7830 or www.dhhs.ne.gov/ags/ltcombud.htm.

Face Your Fears

The best way to address your fears and overcome chronic concerns is to dive right into them. Volunteering to do activities that make you anxious will give you experience that eventually alleviates your fear of failure. For example, if your desire to escape others' notice leads you to avoid speaking up during meetings, set a goal to offer at least two comments during every session you attend. Even if your comments are not always well-received, you will learn from the experience and hone your technique.

*Adapted from "How to Make a Friend Out of Anxiety,"
Wallace Immert,
The Globe and Mail, www.theglobeandmail.com*

Another Happening!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state

Mining for Recruits:

Nancy Klimek, Activities Manager at the Grand Island Veterans' Home (GIVH), offers a presentation on activities therapy for human services students at Central Nebraska Community College. Her aim is to acquaint students with the range of activities that contribute to a client's quality of life...and to encourage students to do their 30-hour internship at GIVH and consider activities therapy as a career goal.

This year, two members of Klimek's activity staff helped offer hands-on examples of GIVH activities. **Larry Molczyk**, Activity Assistant who instructs in the occupational therapy crafts wood shop, showed students how building a birdhouse can enhance both physical dexterity and creative impulses. Activity Assistant **Dottie Menke** facilitated several group activities such as musical bells, trivia and tabletop races.

"The students really enjoyed participating and learned about the benefits of endorphins firsthand," said Klimek. "Hopefully they also learned that quality of life is as important as physical care for the clients we serve." *Photo: Larry Molczyk*



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