

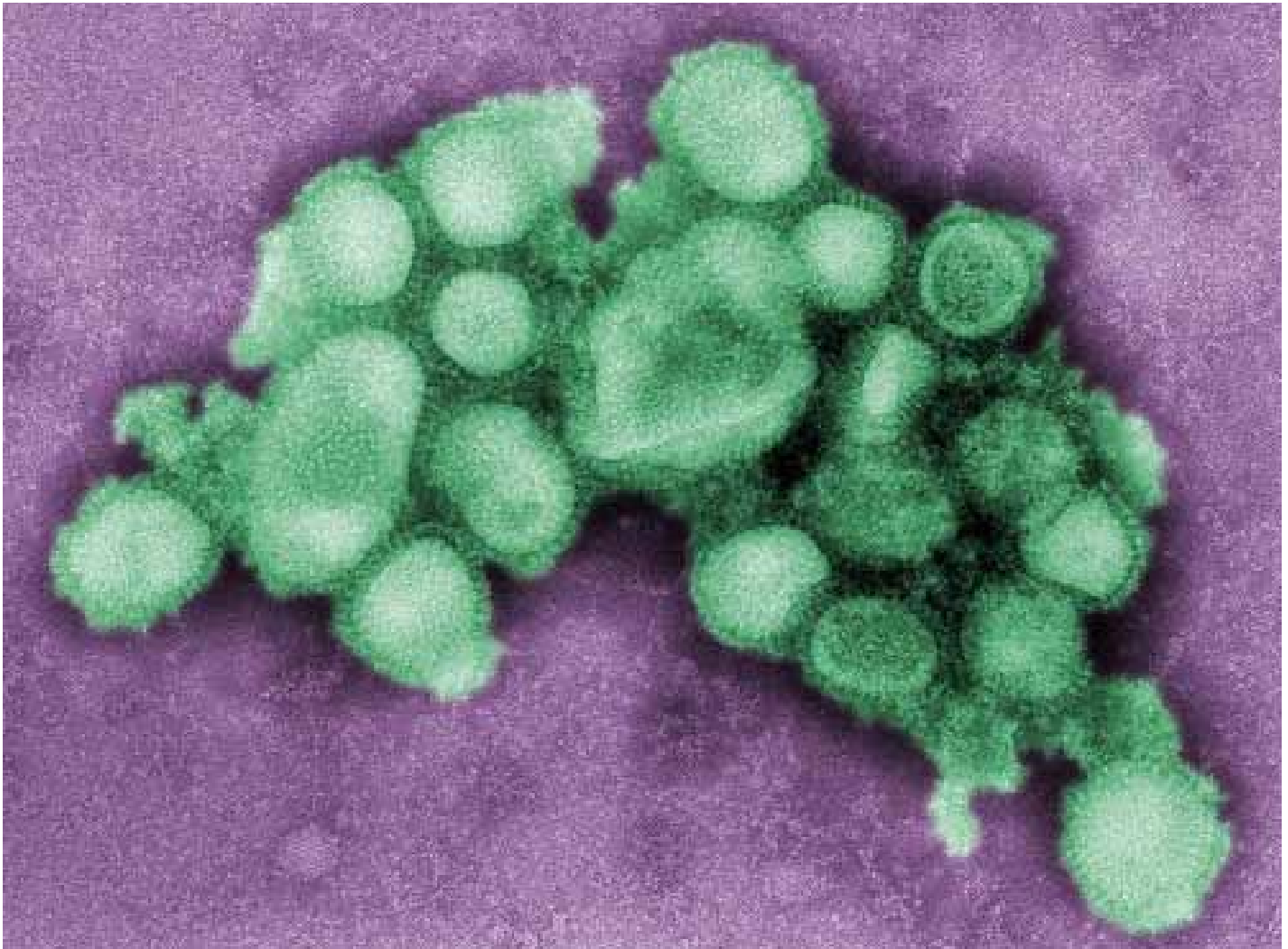
Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

September 2009

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 9



A recently discovered constellation? A newly unveiled masterpiece of abstract art? A new gelatin salad? Actually, it's the H1N1 flu virus.

Connections will now include regular H1N1 updates. See this issue's installment on next page.

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DHHS now on

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

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. .

[DHHS Schedules Town Hall Meeting on Peer Support and the Native American Community](#) August 18

[DHHS Follows CDC in Reporting H1N1—Level of flu activity to be tracked](#)
August 12

[Child Support Enforcement Collects Largest Amount Ever](#) August 7

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

make the connection . . .

DHHS Public Web site: <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov>

DHHS Employee Web site: <http://www2.dhhs.ne.gov>

DHHS System Advocate: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at diana.duran@nebraska.gov

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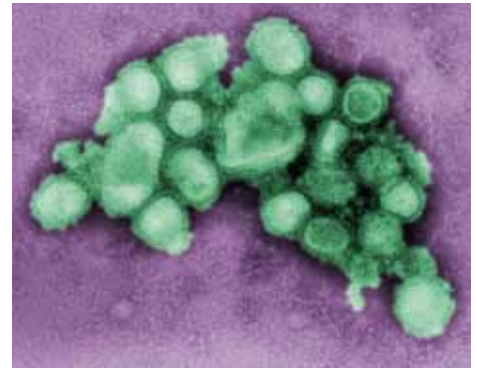
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Connections can be made available in an alternative format for those with disabilities. Requests will be filled within 15 working days. Prior consent has been obtained for this publication to identify and publish photos of all individuals receiving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

EOE/AA/ADA

About the Cover: H1N1 Update



Cases of novel influenza A (H1N1) have been reported throughout the state this summer. Health officials expect more cases with the start of school because kids congregate, share viruses and take them home. Cold weather is also a factor in the spread of viruses, which seem to thrive in winter. Officials expect an H1N1 vaccine to be available in October.

It's important to take precautions to prevent contracting the virus. The precautions include:

- **Avoid close contact with people who are coughing or otherwise appear ill.**
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth.**
- **Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue when you cough into your elbow.**
- **Wash your hands frequently.**

The symptoms of H1N1 include a fever over 100 degrees, sore throat, cough, runny or stuffy nose, body aches, headache, chills and fatigue.

If you are mildly ill, you don't need to see a doctor. If you are moderately ill, call your doctor. He or she might make arrangements for you to be separated from others in the waiting room. Or, the doctor might prescribe an antiviral over the phone, especially if you are pregnant or have an underlying health condition like, asthma, diabetes or heart disease. Stay home until you have been without fever for 24 hours.

Go to the DHHS Web site and subscribe to updates for more information: <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/H1N1Flu/>

The Good Life

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



Winterer meets with three dozen employees at the DHHS Gering office. He said he wants more feedback from employees. *Photo: Tom Lawrence/Gering Courier*



Kerry Winterer with Kari Calvillo, a nurse supervisor at the Norfolk Veterans' Home. *Photo: Linda Sparr*

By CEO Kerry Winterer

I have been in this position now just over two months and I have spent much of that time learning more about the Department and traveling around the state meeting employees.

One thing I have learned is that the Department isn't the faceless bureaucracy that some paint it to be. We have a face, and it's all of you. You are who our clients see. You are the face our partner organizations, our contractors, and anyone else who does business with us, sees.

We're some-6,000 strong, so you can imagine how many lives we touch in some way, every day. Not how many lives "the Department" touches, but how many lives its employees – you – touch.

There's a section in every issue of *Connections* called "In their own words." This collection of letters and notes is from regular people, recognizing DHHS employees for your good work or your personal touch. I've

taken a special interest in reading them. These notes of appreciation can be motivating and can also carry a person through challenging work situations.

Sometimes recognition comes from inside, too.

Next month is State Employee Recognition Month. I've learned that for years, October has been set aside as a time for the Governor, Lt. Governor, and agency leaders to recognize state employees for their milestone Years of Service and announce state government Employees and Managers of the Year. These are important events that should be recognized and celebrated!

I'd also like you to think about how you can recognize and celebrate what might be smaller milestones in your own offices and work areas. This kind of recognition shouldn't be overlooked.

All employees matter. Co-workers matter. Employee recognition can be practiced by everyone. It's a behavior that can touch every layer of an organization, all year long. It can acknowledge contributions, talents, and

even challenges that haven't yet been overcome.

Recognition doesn't have to be elaborate but it should be sincere. It can be as simple as a "thank you" or "job well done," to a surprise food day, or more. (Yes, I've already learned that food days are important!)

I mentioned in my article last month that we'll conduct an employee survey in the near future. Why? Because employees matter. And the Division Directors and I want to learn more about what you think, what's working, and what obstacles you face. We need to understand these things in order to provide every employee with what he or she needs to be most effective as we work together toward the future.

Let's remember to celebrate on many levels, from the formal State Employee Recognition ceremonies to recognizing every day accomplishments, all year long.

Thank you for everything you do to help people live better lives.

DHHS translators enhance communication by building bridges

By Jerry Crisp

A growing Hispanic population in both Nebraska and the nation helps explain why two translators in Support Services keep busy making information in one language understandable in another.

“We translate everything they send our way,” says **Josh Roos**, “from caseworker reports to forms to brochures and beyond.”

“Our workload isn’t only translating documents but also includes updating a translation for anything that undergoes revisions,” says **Lina Reznicek-Parrado**, “and there’s quite a bit of that.”

The translators take turns on who takes the first crack at a translation, with the other proofreading the translation and recommending any needed changes. Both agree that the toughest translation challenge is trying to put medical terminology or clinical notes in a specialized field into words that are easily understood in a different language.

“If we run into difficulties, we often contact the person making a request for translation to clarify a technical term or unfamiliar acronym,” Lina says. “This is absolutely crucial to ensuring a quality translation, which is always our goal.”

“In translating from English to Spanish, which comprises most of our work, we also need to be sure

to use consistent terminology in official DHHS documents to avoid confusion,” says Josh. “In addition, we maintain and regularly update a glossary of terms for this purpose.”

Perhaps the biggest myth about translation is that there is a one-to-one correspondence between words in



Spanish translators Josh Roos and Lina Reznicek-Parrado.

different languages.

“Often the meaning of a word in English requires several words in Spanish to understand, and vice versa,” Lina explains. “You really need to have a thorough understanding of the grammar, of course, and an awareness of the culture is often crucial to make meaning clear.”

Both Lina and Josh come to their work with solid credentials.

Josh lived in Mexico for much of his childhood and majored in Spanish at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UN-L) where he received a Bachelor’s degree. He has been a freelance translator for the past seven years.

Born in the Andes Mountains of Colombia, Lina spoke only Spanish until the 6th grade. She moved to Kearney, Nebraska, in 2004, where she served as a volunteer interpreter

for Kearney Public Schools, earned translation and interpretation certification through the University of Nebraska at Kearney, and received a bachelor’s degree from UN-L.

Both Lina and Josh believe that the benefits of translation go far beyond finding equivalents for words

in different languages.

“We all know how difficult it is to always be clearly understood in our own language, and that challenge is compounded when we must go from one language to another,” says Josh. “That’s why doing

professional-level translations that are clear and accurate is so important.”

“I’m struck by how grateful people often are when you’re able to help them understand another person better,” says Lina. “The better DHHS employees are able to understand their clients or customers, the better they are able to help them live better lives.”

According to Lina Reznicek-Parrado and Joshua Roos, translators and any other DHHS employees who strive to enhance communication ultimately build bridges that bring people closer together.

In spite of a busy schedule, the Spanish translators have contributed to a collaborative project with the University of Nebraska at Lincoln and several public agencies, translating a script and even doing the voice-

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Josh and Lina record an energy savings program at the Nebraska Educational Network (NET) studio. *Photo: Shirley Niemeyer*

(continued from page 4)

over for a DVD about energy savings for an energy savings program.

“Collaboration with other public agencies is wonderful, not only for us but for the people who now have so much more useful information available to them,” says Lina.

“I believe this is only the first glimpse of what the Translation Unit is capable of providing,” adds Josh.

Translation needs aren’t limited only to Spanish, of course.

“In addition to a growing Hispanic population, other ethnic groups are growing as well,” says **Amir Azimi**, Administrator of Support Services within DHHS Operations, where the translators are located. “Significant numbers of people living in Nebraska including many Iraqies, Kurds and immigrants from Sudan, have translation needs for the language they speak. As these and other populations grow, so does the need for communication, including translation, especially in emergencies such as natural disasters or pandemics.”

Azimi, himself an immigrant and member of the Multicultural Advisory Committee for the City of Lincoln, speaks several languages and dialects, and knows well the challenges that competent translation can resolve and has served as both interpreter and translator in court proceedings.

“We were one of the first state agencies to use the Language Line, how coordinated through the State Office of the Chief Information Officer (CIO), that enables people to use an 800 number to access interpretation assistance in 175 languages,” he explains. “By whatever means, using translation and interpretation to enhance communication is crucial to better understanding for all.”

To access interpretation assistance, set up an account at <http://www.language.com>.

To request translation services from DHHS Support Services, go to <http://csupport/SupportServices/ContentPages/Home.aspx>.

DHHS Support Services

In addition to the Translation Unit, DHHS Support Services, located in the Nebraska State Office Building in Lincoln, also includes the following services:

Access Cards (photo access cards statewide)

Distribution (Lincoln & Omaha mailing, facilities, inventory supplies, vehicle purchasing statewide)

Forms and Publications Design (statewide printing, electronic publication, artwork, etc.)

Materiel Management (statewide buildings, communications, purchasing, recycling, transportation, etc.)

Safety & Security (statewide)

Service Contracts (statewide)

Records Management (statewide storage, retention, etc.)

Telecommunications (statewide phones, pagers, etc.)

Lincoln & Omaha Offices Word Processing

For information about any of these Support Services, call (402) 471-9601.

BSDC Outreach Treatment Services program reaches across state to help community clients live better lives



By Jerry Crisp

The Outreach Treatment Services (OTS) program at the Beatrice State

Developmental Center has been reaching out to benefit clients in communities across Nebraska since 1995. OTS teams respond to requests from community-based programs to share skills needed to serve difficult-to-treat clients.

OTS consultations provide positive behavior support recommendations to help clients with challenging behaviors maintain their community placements. Types of behaviors addressed in an OTS consultation include verbal and physical aggression, running away, stealing, property destruction, self-injurious behavior and inappropriate sexual behaviors.

OTS team members: (Seated L-R) Human Services Treatment Specialist (HSTS) **Amy Peterson**, Licensed Psychologist **Meredith Griffin**, PsyD, and HSTS **Angela Banker**; (Standing L-R) newcomer **Corinne Stoneking** and HSTS **Roger Geery**.

Photo: Julie Bratt

Since 2005, OTS teams have worked with approximately 179 clients and their teams. Clients are diagnosed with a developmental disability and

often present a wide array of psychiatric, behavioral, genetic, and/or medical issues.

In a case involving Donnai-Barrow Syndrome—involving impairment of nerve fibers connecting the two hemispheres of the brain and experienced only by a handful of people in the world—follow-up revealed that the OTS team had contributed to a significant improvement regarding behavioral functioning in a very challenging case. A later follow-up showed that improvements had been both positive and lasting.

(continued on page 7)



Cliff Lindell gives **Deb Wotipka** a certificate of appreciation for making the most OTS referrals within the past year. Lindell is Program Manager for BSDC's Outreach Treatment Services (OTS), and Wotipka is a Service Coordinator in the DHHS Wahoo office. *Photo: Roni Cundiff*

BSDC Outreach: (continued from page 6)

Over the years, OTS has produced a track record of successes and testimonials from satisfied customers including Services Coordinators, family members, guardians, community team members, and clients themselves:

- Great insight!
- Very thorough!
- Creative ideas!
- Focused on staff strengths and encouraged staff to focus on client strengths!
- Good at fitting in and not disrupting what they're observing.
- They bring knowledge of outside resources areas like ours don't really know about.
- OTS really worked WITH us.
- I would work with them again in a heartbeat.
- Expert in behavior. Fresh perspective on individual situation.

- *Flexible with follow-up.*
- *The commitment of the OTS to the client and the client's team is unbelievable. Their willingness to help at all hours of the night should be commended.*
- *OTS is always a great resource.*
- *Amy, Roger and Meredith were awesome! They did an excellent job of getting to know the client and the client's entire team. They were well-organized and listened to all aspects before they made any recommendations.*
- *OTS was prepared, responsive, helpful and informative...*
- *The client's team has already seen a positive difference in the client.*
- *The only improvement would be that they should become permanent members of the client's team.*

Satisfied customers like these offer convincing testimonials of which the Center can be justly proud.

The OTS Process

The OTS team is made up of a psychologist and human services treatment specialists. The team uses a comprehensive approach, which includes direct observations in the client's home and workplace/school. The OTS team uses standardized assessments and semi-structured interviews with the client, family, teachers, therapists, employers and others.

OTS consultations occur over a 3-day period. On the first day, the OTS team meets with the client's community treatment team to develop common goals. Following the meeting, the OTS team typically observes the client and completes assessments with the client and the community team throughout the rest of the day and again the following morning.

The OTS team then develops recommendations for an exit meeting on the third day. These recommendations are aimed at helping the client and community treatment team reduce problematic behaviors and improve quality of life. The community treatment team decides which, if any, of the OTS recommendations to adopt.

The OTS team continues to consult with the client's community treatment team for three months to monitor progress and answer any questions regarding adopted recommendations. A follow-up trip can be requested and would involve part of the OTS team returning to observe, collect information and provide refined or additional recommendations.

For more information or to request information about OTS, contact OTS Manager **Cliff Lindell** at (402) 223-7577.

Behavioral Health Consumer Liaison's dream of national cemetery memorial coming true

By Jeanne Atkinson

Dan Powers' vision to create a national memorial to recognize and honor people buried on the grounds of state psychiatric hospitals is coming true.

Dan has been a Consumer Liaison in the Division of Behavioral Health since 1991. The idea for a memorial came to him in 2004, after he'd visited a World War II memorial in Washington, D.C.

Why not also pay tribute to the thousands of people buried on state hospital grounds across the country, he thought. Because of the stigma often associated with mental illness, most of those graves are unmarked.

In 2004, Dan was immediate past president of the National Association of Consumer/Survivor Mental Health Administrators. He shared his idea, other members liked it, and several organizations began to work together to make it a reality.



Dan Powers, on left, and **John Allen** visit the cemetery on the grounds of St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C. Allen is head of the New York Office of Recipient Affairs.

Photo: James Hawkins

Dan attended the recent dedication ceremony of the site in June. The memorial will be located at the federal St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, D.C., where 4,500 psychiatric patients are buried. The University of Georgia's School of Environmental Design submitted the design for the National Memorial of Recovered Dignity. A steering committee representing seven

national organizations was formed to raise the more than \$1 million needed to build the memorial.

Nebraska is one of the states that have cemeteries located on the grounds of state psychiatric hospitals. The Hastings Regional Center cemetery has 1,341 graves; the Lincoln Regional Center has 717 graves in two cemeteries; and the Norfolk Regional Center has 375 graves in two cemeteries.

More people using online apps

By Jeanne Atkinson

Over 40,600 e-applications for public assistance were received in the first year that people could apply online through ACCESSNebraska. The online option became available on September 8, 2008.

That's about 16% of the total applications for programs like food stamps, aid to dependent children, energy assistance, Medicaid, Kids Connection, child care and aid to the aged, blind and disabled.

"About 32% of the applications are coming in online during non-work

hours, and that number is steadily going up," says **Todd Reckling**, director of the Division of Children and Family Services. "That highlights the biggest advantage, which is that people can apply when it's convenient for them. We get the information immediately, with no mail time delays, and there's no need to drop it off at a DHHS office."

There are 55 kiosk stations with computers for public use in DHHS offices across the state. Several community partners like community action agencies, libraries, and food

banks are also interested in helping provide online access for people.

The online ACCESSNebraska services include a screening tool so people can see what programs they may be eligible for and an application form to fill out and submit electronically. Everything is available in English and Spanish. Starting in November, customers will also be able to report a change in circumstance, like a new address or a job change, to DHHS online.

For more information, go to <http://accessnebraska.ne.gov/>.

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.

Keeping things in perspective

By Jerry Crisp

Many DHHS employees are working to achieve behavioral health reform in Nebraska, and **Sue Adams** is one of them. Sue is the administrator for the Network and Services Unit in the Division of Behavioral Health. She has been with DHHS for 23 years, in behavioral health for 10 and in her present position for one year.

Based on LB 1083 passed in 2004, behavioral health reform is designed to better serve people with mental health challenges closer to their families, friends and communities.

Sue's duties include budget planning, overseeing contracts with the six behavioral health regions, monitoring those contracts for compliance, and above all, working to be sure that legislation and policies result in effective and efficient services.

"I work with many constituencies and that alone keeps you on your toes," says Sue. "Everyone has their own perspectives and reconciling them into a coherent approach can be a real challenge."

Lots of meetings, conference calls and travel for face-to-face meetings are needed in this effort.

"Listening skills are required to understand all viewpoints, including consumers" she says, "and then we need to reconcile those various perspectives into a plan of action."

Sue's approach to her work is appreciated by those with whom she works closely.

"Sue has shared her knowledge generously and continues to be one of my best teachers and mentors," says Laura Richards, Region I

Network Director in Scottsbluff. "She understands the challenges of providing behavioral health care in rural areas and her guidance and encouragement during the busy days of behavioral



Sue Adams Photo: Jerry Crisp

health reform have been invaluable."

"I think highly of Sue," says **Scot Adams**, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health. "I respect her and admire her problem-solving tenacity."

The basic challenge, according to Sue, is to put responsive services in place while remaining true to federal and state guidelines and costs.

"We don't want to deny people services because they cost too much but can't provide services no matter what the cost," says Sue. "Therein lies the challenge for everyone involved in behavioral health reform."

Sue values the working relationships that have been developed in this ongoing effort.

"I'm a member of a great team that Scot Adams and my supervisor, Vicki Maca, have developed," says Sue. "I also

oversee a fabulous Network Operations Team, and I learn something from each of them every day."

Another thing that keeps Sue committed to the ongoing behavioral reform cause is an incident that took place during a meeting with behavioral health consumers. Sue was reading a report dealing with policies, procedures and budgetary concerns when a consumer who chaired the meeting reached down, removed her shoes and socks and advanced toward Sue.

"All of that is well and good," said the chairperson, "but just try walking a mile in these," as she thrust her well-worn footwear toward Sue.

"That gesture reminded me that policies, procedures and programs are all for the purpose of creating a more fulfilling, more productive and happier life for the clients, consumers and customers we serve," Sue says. "Whenever I think a task too difficult or demanding now, I'm reminded of that moment all over again."

Like many other employees working in behavioral health reform, Sue Adams finds the work challenging yet rewarding.

"Being consumed with policies and procedures, contract compliance and keeping costs in control are simply ways of making sure consumers receive the services they need to live more fulfilling, more productive and happier lives."

Keeping things in perspective means listening to the viewpoints of others, working with them to formulate a workable plan, and remembering that the aim of all planning is to produce the best quality of services possible to help consumers live better lives.

October Observances

Mental Illness Awareness Week

An estimated one in five American families is affected by mental illnesses such as major depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and post-traumatic stress disorder. October's Mental Illness Awareness Week focuses on reminding the public that mental health problems are real, common and treatable.

Scot Adams, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health, said recovery doesn't happen in isolation, and that friendship is one of the most important factors in recovery. He offered these tips on how to respond if a friend tells you he or she has a mental illness:

- Express your concern and sympathy.

October 2009

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

- Make sure your friend understands that you honestly care. Ask for more details about how he or she is managing, and really listen.

• Ask what you can do to assist, like providing rides to medical appointments or keeping the person company in the waiting room.

• Be sure to include your friend in everyday plans, like going out to eat or catching a movie.

The new Network of Care Web site provides vital information about treatment resources and diagnoses, insurance,

advocacy and other pertinent behavioral health Web sites. It can be accessed at www.dhhs.ne.gov/networkofcare/.

Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Data collected in 2008 by Nebraska's Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System show that nearly 73 percent of women age 40 and older had received a mammogram in the previous two years. In the last twelve years, since 1996, there has been a 14 percent improvement in mammography rates. The bad news is that mammography rates for women in Nebraska and in the United States as a whole have leveled off and even shown a slight decline in the last couple of years.

"It's easy to procrastinate on mammograms, but early detection does save lives," says 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." In the coming year the DHHS Every Woman Matters Program plans to conduct a media campaign to encourage more women to be screened. Women age 40 and above earning a moderate income are eligible for FREE or low-cost screenings through Every Woman Matters. For more information, call the Every Woman Matters program at 1-800-532-2227, or check the DHHS Web site at <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/womenshealth/ewm>.

Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Every person should consider what she or he can do to help end the epidemic of domestic violence that plagues our state and nation. Domestic violence is a pattern of coercive behavior used by a person against family or household members or dating partners to gain power or control over the other party in a relationship.

This behavior may include any of the following:

- Physical violence
- Sexual abuse
- Emotional and psychological intimidation
- Verbal abuse and threats
- Stalking
- Isolation from friends and family
- Economic control
- Destruction of personal property
- Animal cruelty.

The 22 Domestic Violence Prevention and Services programs across Nebraska have been busy planning events to raise awareness and support. Depending on the community, a variety of activities planned may mourn those who have died because of domestic violence, celebrate those who have survived, and connect those who work to end violence.

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One thing you can do is wear a purple ribbon. Although the exact history of the purple ribbon is difficult to pinpoint, across the country families and friends of victims have adopted the purple ribbon as a visible gesture of support for survivors and victims of domestic violence and to remember and honor their loved ones who have lost their lives at the hands of a person they once loved and trusted.

In addition to demonstrating support for victims and advocates, the display of purple ribbons throughout a community conveys a powerful message that there's no place for



domestic violence in the homes, neighborhoods, workplaces or schools of its citizens.

For more information about domestic and sexual violence, or to find out about awareness month activities in your community, contact the local domestic violence/sexual assault program. Another resource is the Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition (402-476-6256 or www.ndvsac.org).

For information and ideas for Domestic Violence Awareness Month, go to the following Web sites: VAWnet, www.vawnet.org; National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, www.ncadv.org; and Family Violence Prevention Fund, www.endabuse.org.

Nursing Home Residents' Rights Week

Across the country, residents of nursing homes and assisted living facilities along with family members, ombudsmen, citizen advocates, facility staff and others will honor the individual rights of long-term care residents by celebrating Residents' Rights Week October 4-10, 2009.

"It is a time for celebration and recognition offering an opportunity for every facility to focus on and celebrate awareness of dignity, respect and the

value of each individual resident," says **Patty Pierson**, State Long-Term Care Ombudsman with the DHHS Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care.

This year's theme is "Hear Our Voice – Residents of Long-Term Care Facilities Speak Out About Residents' Rights." During Residents' Rights Week we recognize our local long-term care ombudsman program staff and volunteers who work daily to promote residents' rights, assist residents with

complaints, and provide information to those who need to find a long-term care facility.

We encourage you to visit someone you know in a long-term care facility, volunteer in a facility, participate in Residents' Rights Week events, or inquire about becoming a volunteer long-term care ombudsman. For more information, call 800-942-7830 or www.dhhs.ne.gov/ags/lcombud.htm.

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 22nd.

Now send your responses to **Dianna Seiffert** via e-mail at dianna.seiffert@dhhs.ne.gov or phone her at (402) 471-1695, and thanks for sharing your holiday traditions!

"DHHS Spirit of Giving Year-Round!"

If your area gives to others at other times than the holidays, tell Dianna Seiffert and *Connections* will publish it 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!

In their own words

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

Dear **Sandra L. Miller** (Technical Advisor/Consultant, Children & Family Services, Lincoln):

The behavioral health team here at Developmental Services of Nebraska would like to give **Tara Kelley** (Children & Family Services Specialist, DHHS Papillion office) a huge thank you for getting us information we needed about a youth who is residing here that is on her case load. We work with many caseworkers, and she is definitely one of the best we have had the privilege to work with!

Whenever we have questions or need additional records, she responds immediately, sometimes within the hour! Not only are we benefitting from her hard work, but most importantly the youth is benefitting from her dedication to him.

Thank you, Tara--we greatly appreciate you!

Jen Nelson, MA, LMPH
Director of Behavioral Health Services
Developmental Services of Nebraska, Inc
Lincoln, Nebraska

Dear **Marlys Schmidt** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Hastings office):

My purpose in writing is to let you know how much I have appreciated the efficiency and cooperation you have demonstrated in handling my father's application. Your consideration and concern for my father's situation with his advanced age, hearing and memory loss has been even more impressive.

You have far exceeded my expectations. Thank you very much for doing your work so well.

Family member of a Medicaid recipient

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

I hate to ask for help, but I have to. I wouldn't be alive without it. Thank you for always being kind to me, treating me with respect always and trying to help me any time I call you.

A Falls City area service recipient

Dear **Greg Votava** (DHHS Webmaster, Communications & Legislative Services, Lincoln):

I wanted to let you know how pleased I am with the verification portion of the Nebraska DHHS Web site for medical licenses. As a person who must verify all past licenses for practitioners applying to work at New Hampshire Hospital, I frequently find verifications difficult to obtain.

However, Nebraska is the exception. What a wonderful, easy-to-use web site with immediate results. Thank you!

Susan J. Searah, CPS
Medical Staff Coordinator
New Hampshire Hospital
Concord, New Hampshire

In their own words

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

Dear **Joan Schakat** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Omaha office):

I want to express my sincere thanks for your help with my food stamps over the years. I always look forward to our meetings because you give me such personal attention, advice and inspiration. That means a great deal to me.

An Omaha area service recipient

Dear **Brenda Bender** (Social Services Supervisor, DHHS Kearney office):

So often we forget to thank the people who help us. It seems that often we only remember to complain.

My caseworker, **Maria Lafferty** (Social Worker, DHHS Kearney office) is a jewel. She is so caring, compassionate and knowledgeable. She truly knows her job and how to help her clients. She goes the extra mile and is so patient about answering my questions.

I don't believe you could have a better representative for your agency. I'm truly glad she is my caseworker.

A Kearney area service recipient

Dear **Vicki Victor** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Albion office):

I have to let you know what the doctor said about Dad. He said that Dad is 'flourishing' at the nursing home. Dad and Mom are looking so much better and seem to have adjusted to their situation. They have a nice room and have both decided they will stay, as they are no longer able to be at home.

I think about you often, how nice you were to Dad and I and how helpful you were. Thanks so much for everything you did for my parents, and I mean this from the bottom of my heart—you made the process go smoothly.

Family member of an Albion area service recipient

Dear **Sue Kopera-Crumb** (Health Licensing Specialist, Division of Public Health, Lincoln):

Thank you very much for your help and timely responses during the licensing process. Having worked with other states, my expectations were low, and you completely exceeded my expectations and made getting a license in Nebraska the least stressful part of relocating! Thank you very, very much.

Allison Wolak Quadhamer
Washington, D.C.

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.

Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state



(Above) Administrators and eight of 15 supervisors pose with plaques given to workers for success in Food Stamp payment accuracy. (L-R): **Susan Klein, Lesli Hopeman**, SESA Administrator **Jeff Schmidt, Teri Chasten**, Economic Assistance Administrator **Ruth Vineyard, Shannon Grotrian, Will Varicek, Nicole Morrison, Carole Steffen** and **Anna Barragan**.

Photo: Karma Hanke

Fun is good!

Hard work by Economic Assistance staff in the Southeast Service Area (SESA) paid off in accurate and timely benefits for clients and earned two awards from the Division of Children and Family Services: “Most Improved in Payment Accuracy” and “Leaders in Food Stamp Payment Accuracy.” Celebrations throughout the Service Area offered food, fellowship and a “Fun is Good” presentation by the Employee Assistance Program.

SESA Administrator **Jeff Schmidt** and **Ruth Vineyard**, Economic Assistance Administrator in the SESA, kicked off celebrations on June 12 in Seward for the Seward, York and Wahoo offices. Celebrations continued in Lincoln that afternoon. Then on June 24, Beatrice hosted staff from Fairbury, Hebron, Geneva and Crete at the Homestead National Monument. Celebrations concluded in Nebraska City, where Falls City, Auburn and Tecumseh staff enjoyed a picnic and homemade goodies provided by supervisors.

Success should be celebrated and besides, “Fun IS good!”

(Near Left) Supervisor **Nancy Bettin** was among those who dressed western at the Homestead National Monument near Beatrice. *Photo: Ginny Betzer-Ough*

(Far Left) Totin’ a toy shootin’ iron and astride a pretend pony, SESA Administrator **Jeff Schmidt** rode into town spearheading a western theme. *Photo: Marilyn DeBuhr*



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If you have a photo of a DHHS activity you'd like to share with coworkers 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.

All for a good cause



(Left) Wrapped up in a plastic jacket and hair net, **Maria Lavicky**, SESA Children and Family Services Administrator, looks a bit hesitant as she stepped up to meet some meringue head on.



(Right) Social Service Worker **Angelina Krotz** seems to take more than a little delight in seeing that her pie hits its target—Human Resource Manager **Dirk Hood**—squarely in the kisser.

Happenings:
(continued from page 4)
Giving Campaign, and even going beyond sending a

DHHS employees have been contributing to this year's Charitable

check or having a regular amount withdrawn from their paychecks. The Southeast Service Area (SESA) came up with a silent auction, which included purchasing the right to pitch a pie in the face of some willing "victims."



(Left) Never one to ask any of his staff to do what he wouldn't do himself, SESA Administrator **Jeff Schmidt** gets a snoot full of the white stuff, courtesy of his son, **Tony**, age 7. Social Service Workers in the Nebraska City and Plattsmouth offices paid for the pie, but since they weren't able to be on hand, Tony volunteered to do the honors with no coaxing whatsoever.

Photos: Lisa Hopwood

Thanks to good sportsmanship and the generosity of these SESA employees, \$503 dollars were raised above and beyond what was contributed through regular donations.