

# Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

September 2010

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 10



**Glen Pickel** (right), who served with the Air Force and now lives at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home at Bellevue, visits with two members from the Langley Air Force Base in Virginia. Major **Dave Skalicky** (far left) is a pilot with the Thunderbird precision flying team, and Staff Sergeant **Derek Hellman** is an aircraft maintenance specialist.

*Photo: Audrey Hester. More inside.*

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

## 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.

[Health Alert Issued for Kirkman's Cove, Red Willow Lake; Alert Continues for Merrit Reservoir](#)

August 20, 2010

[Child Support is an Investment in Our Children's Future](#)

August 17, 2010

[State Division of Behavioral Health Honored for Supporting National Guard and Reserve Employees](#)

August 2, 2010

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

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

### make the connection . . .

**DHHS Public Website:** [www.dhhs.ne.gov](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov)

**DHHS Employee Website:** [www2.dhhs.ne.gov](http://www2.dhhs.ne.gov)

**DHHS Helpline:** 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at [dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov](mailto:dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov)

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## The flu ends with U!

A message  
from **Dr. Joann  
Schaefer**, Director,  
Division of Public  
Health.



Your health  
is in your hands  
this flu season.  
You can protect  
yourself and  
your loved  
ones by getting  
vaccinated.

Getting vaccinated is easy, and it provides protection that lasts through the entire season. You aren't likely to get sick from the virus, and staying healthy means you won't infect your family.

This year's recommendation is simple and universal - everyone 6 months and older should get vaccinated.

While flu can make anyone sick, certain people are at greater risk for serious complications, and it's extremely important they receive vaccine: older people, young children, people with chronic lung disease (like asthma and COPD), diabetes (type 1 and 2), heart disease, neurologic conditions and certain other long-term health conditions, and pregnant women.

The seasonal flu vaccine is safe, effective and rigorously tested. It's updated each season to protect against flu viruses that research shows will cause the most illness. Even if you got the H1N1 flu vaccine last season, you'll want to get this year's seasonal flu vaccine. H1N1 is included in this year's vaccine, but so are two other flu viruses. You'll want to be protected against all three.

If you don't like needles, FluMist is a nasal spray available for healthy people 2-49 years old.

So step up and get your seasonal flu vaccine and make sure that this year, The Flu Ends With U!

For more information about upcoming state employee flu vaccine clinics, go to <http://www.das.state.ne.us/personnel/benefits/>.

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

## It's Employee Recognition Time



Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

By Kerry Winterer

October is State Employee Recognition Month, a special time to say *thank you* to all state employees.

It's also the time of year we pay tribute to those state employees who have reached

milestones in their years of service and those who have been chosen as Employees and Managers of the Year.

The October issue of *Connections* will recognize, by name, all of the DHHS employees who are being honored in these areas. I want to extend my congratulations now, and I look forward to doing so in person at several of the Years of Service ceremonies and the Employee and Manager of the Year events.

Even though this is the September issue of *Connections*, October is right around the corner. I want to devote my message this month to employee recognition and express my personal appreciation to DHHS employees. Employees are the backbone of any organization and I think that's especially true of the employees of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Being new to state government when I started with the department, I didn't know what to expect from employees. I can tell you honestly that from day one, I have been

impressed with the commitment and dedication of our employees. When I speak to groups across the state, I always talk about this and describe employees as being "mission driven," "committed to the mission of providing critical services to the people we serve.

We're about 5,800 employees strong. Whether you're a front-line staff member, a supervisor, manager or administrator, you contribute to the important work we do. Each and every one of you, through your contributions, helps us *help people live better lives*.

Sometimes that work is difficult. I hear about the challenges presented by some of the people with whom you work. Sometimes they're angry about their situations, maybe disrespectful and even physically abusive. Yet you meet your responsibilities head on and do everything within your power to make a positive difference in their lives.

I hear about instances where more or better resources might help you be more effective, but you find other ways to address those challenges so you can get the job done.

I read letters and e-mails from people who are unhappy with us, and then I read kudos from people whose lives you've touched and they want to make sure I know their lives are changed because of you.

I come to work everyday motivated by being the CEO of an organization where employees are meeting the challenges presented even in these difficult times.

On behalf of the Nebraskans you help, whether through one of our six Divisions or through Operations, thank you for your service.

# DHHS DIRECTIONS

The world is changing. It's fast-paced and people get their news in bits and pieces, so we're adding an easy-to-read column for employees to get a quick feel for the hands-on

work of co-workers. We'll try to cover more than one Division in each issue, with occasional appearances by other key areas like Operations.

A new series devoted to a quick-read of the nitty-gritty work of Department staff...



Todd Reckling

*Photo: Bill Wiley*

There's a lot going on in Children and Family Services. Get the scoop from Director **Todd Reckling**:

- Special celebrations are planned for November 20's National Adoption Day, when judges hold special adoption hearings for children who had been state wards.

- YRTC-Kearney staff are excited about changes to their rehabilitation

program. Counselors "coach" and help youth believe they have the power to change themselves for the better and successfully return to their community.

- The child abuse/neglect hotline received over 30,000 reports of abuse and neglect in 2009. That's a lot of calls, intakes and initial assessments.
- Child Support Enforcement's made significant upgrades to their computer system, making it easier to establish and enforce child support cases involving other states.
- The YRTC-Geneva is undergoing extensive facility upgrades, with new heating and air conditioning equipment in three living units and replacement of the old boilers.
- More than 3.5 million pages from economic assistance case files have been scanned through the document imaging component of ACCESSNebraska. Scanning is more than 97% complete and ahead of schedule.
- Staff moved into the new location for the Lincoln Customer Service Center in July, and an open house is planned in October.
- Work continues on the new service model for child welfare and juvenile services, working differently with private contractors to serve children and families. The focus is on shifting from a high rate of out-of-home care to more kids served at home.



Dr. Joann Schaefer

*Photo: Bill Wiley*

Lots of exciting work is going on in Public Health. Here's a quick rundown from **Dr. Joann Schaefer**:

- It was another successful year for the Governor's Excellence in Wellness Awards. Thirty-three Nebraska employers were honored for their efforts in promoting workplace wellness. The award program is a partnership of the Office of the Governor, DHHS, and WorkWell, Inc.

- DHHS' TUNE project is Nebraska's first interactive health and wellness program aimed at helping young women make better choices and live healthier lives through music. Its goal is to empower young women, age 16 – 25, to choose a healthy lifestyle early in their lives. The project ties health information and messages with a custom website – [www.tunemylife.org](http://www.tunemylife.org); social channels like YouTube, MySpace, Twitter and Facebook; and downloadable songs, events and concerts.
- The Office of Epidemiology established an emergency room syndromic surveillance system in Nebraska and contributes to nationwide efforts for enhanced surveillance promoted by the CDC. Ten facilities representing nearly 25% of all emergency room visits in the state provided data to allow automated, real-time tracking of influenza-like-illness.
- The Investigations Unit opened 1,113 investigations of health professionals and completed 947 case reports in the last year. The Unit received 2,373 complaints. If there were possible violations of state statutes, the complaints resulted in investigations.
- The Centennial Mall Garden Market in Lincoln was a hit again this season thanks to the hard work of the Nutrition and Activity for Health Program. Not only did the market provide people with easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables, they could also get nutrition information and find healthy recipes further encouraging a healthy lifestyle.

# Medicaid to create “medical home”

*John is a Medicaid client. He has been to the hospital emergency room several times this month. He goes there because he doesn't have anywhere else to go for his health problems. He doesn't have a doctor to call his own.*

That will change because John is part of a pilot project and will soon get a medical home. A medical home is more a relationship than a place. It's a relationship with a physician who heads a team that coordinates care across the health care system.

“The client will have access to the services in his or her medical home 24/7,” says **Pat Taft**, Pilot Project Co-coordinator. “If a specialist is needed, the team will set up an appointment for the client and follow up afterwards.”

The team will develop a protocol with local hospitals outlining referral, follow-up care coordination, admission and discharge notifications. This will help reduce avoidable emergency room visits and hospital readmissions.

Clients will be given health education materials and encouraged to take responsibility for their own health.

The pilot was created after the Unicameral passed the Medical Home Pilot Program Act last year. The two-year pilot's goals are to improve health care access and health outcomes, and contain Medicaid costs. For the pilot, DHHS received a one-year technical assistance grant from the National Academy for State Health Policy.

The pilot will be in two or three medical practices that serve adults and children of all ages in non-managed care counties. The practices will be determined with the help



Vivianne Chaumont, Director of the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care (center), with Medical Home pilot project co-coordinators Pat Taft (at left) and Margaret Brockman.

*Photo: Bill Wiley*

of the Medical Home Advisory Council, made up of six primary care physicians and a hospital administrator. The Council assisted the Department in developing minimum standards and payment methodology, among other elements.

Practitioners of general medicine, family medicine, internal medicine or pediatrics, with a sufficient number of Medicaid clients, will be sought to transform their practices into medical homes. They will be paid a per-member-per-month fee, in addition to fees for any services provided.

“The medical home concept has the potential to improve health outcomes and reduce unnecessary health care spending,” said **Vivianne Chaumont**, Director of the Medicaid and Long-Term Care Division. “It will benefit Medicaid clients because they will have their own physicians and a team of people to help them achieve better health.”

## *Good Things Are Happening!*

For March, Medicaid exceeded the 30-day and 90-day requirements for prompt payment of claims for a 90-99% compliance ratio. Such high compliance qualified the program for an enhanced Medicaid match of \$11,706,405 through stimulus funding.

*A good example of how doing any job right can pay dividends!*

# Way to Go! Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

## Senior Medicare Patrol honored for outstanding performance

Nebraska's Senior Medicare Patrol (SMP) received National Outstanding Performance Awards for 2009 in three categories at the SMP Regional Meeting in Kansas City in August. SMP educates seniors to prevent, identify and report health care fraud and abuse and is in the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care (MLTC).

The two Complex Issues Vigilance Awards were for the highest dollar amount referred for further action (also received last year) and the highest total savings. A Special Achievement Award was received because Nebraska's savings amounted to 57% of everything saved through the SMP programs nationwide.

Nebraska SMP referred a fraud case involving durable medical equipment (equipment used in the home, like wheelchairs or crutches) that eventually went to trial. The court settlement resulted in significant savings to Medicaid, Medicare and other insurance totaling \$121,450. That includes \$7,860 in savings in Medicaid that MLTC's Program Integrity Unit helped document.



Barbara Decker, Elder Rights Director with the Administration on Aging, presents the SMP award to Nebraska SMP Director Madhavi Bhadbhade and Tami Barrett, SMP Coordinator with Aging Partners  
*Photo: Ginny Paulson*



From left, Scot Adams, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health; CEO Kerry Winterer; "Admiral" Julia Schmitt; Lt. Governor Rick Sheehy; Dr. Joann Schaefer, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health. Schmitt is a Radiation Control Program Manager within the Division of Public Health  
*Photo: Bill Wiley*

## Public, Behavioral Health staff among these earning Admiralties

Nine DHHS employees were among a dozen state employees awarded admiralties in the Nebraska Navy by Lt. Governor **Rick Sheehy** for their efforts during this summer's flooding. They made up the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) assessment teams, which gauged damage to homes and property as well as addressing the psychological impact experienced by flood victims.

The following state workers are now officially "Admirals" in the "Nebraska Navy": **Jennifer Cimpl-Bohn, Amanda Longwell, and Jodi De La Concha** (DHHS Behavioral Health); **Stephen Schlife, Judy Anderson, Randy Fischer, Cynthia T. Smith, Julia Schmitt and Russell Wren** (DHHS Public Health); **David Atkinson and Janet Donovan** (Department of Corrections); and **Angela Hammond** (Nebraska Emergency Management Agency).

DHHS employees should be proud of themselves and each other. If you earn statewide or national recognition or know a co-worker who does, let *Connections* know, and we'll proclaim it here!

# Good Samaritan parable and DHHS credo share much in common

By Jerry Crisp

Anyone who believes that the story of the Good Samaritan is only an ancient parable doesn't know about employees like **Tony Martinez**, a Water Supply Specialist in the DHHS North Platte office. Oh, sure, he helps people live better lives by helping ensure the quality of water in the state, but he also lives that credo in his daily dealings with others.

**Kathy Ahlenius**, a project analyst with the Wyoming Department of Transportation, blew a tire on the Interstate about 30 miles east of North Platte. When she got out to examine the problem, she found "a very hot, smoking rim."

Then Kathy did what many of us do in the same situation—first reaching for the owner's manual in hopes of changing the tire and ending up by trying to contact a roadside service and preparing for an extended wait. As she did so, Tony Martinez pulled in behind her car.

"Thanks to Tony, I was back on the way within 15 minutes," Kathy says with a tone of gratitude. "He recommended that, instead of backtracking to North Platte for a new tire, I should go on to Gothenburg and get one there. As a result, what could have been a hot, nerve-wracking delay turned out to add scarcely more than an hour to my trip. Tony is my hero!"

According to Kathy, Tony could have done what many do and simply driven by in his air-conditioned car...but he didn't.

"Ever since I have known Tony, he has in many ways demonstrated a Good Samaritan attitude," says Doug Woodbeck, Tony's supervisor in the Division of Public Health. "He not only believes it, he lives it. A big demonstration of this was when he volunteered to go to Alamosa, Colorado, to help out that community when they had their salmonella waterborne disease outbreak several years ago. He's always there to help, especially on an individual basis."

So grateful was she that Kathy sent a note to Woodbeck.

"I can't tell you how much his help meant to me," said Kathy's note. "He stopped. He saved me time and money. People with heart and integrity are hard to find, and I want you to know that you have one working for you."

**Doug Woodbeck** probably already knew that, but we sometimes forget that the kind of employees who work for DHHS tend to be more other-oriented. That means that helping others live better lives is not an empty slogan but a way of life for many DHHS employees like Tony Martinez.



Tony Martinez

## Taking care of our own

### How some DHHS employees responded to furloughs



Furloughs posed a special challenge for one Case Aide who recently has had more than her share of medical bills. This Case Aide is highly esteemed by her co-workers because she has a knack for making them feel special.

When the Case Aide went into the hospital for several days, co-workers wanted to do something equally special for her. Several co-workers asked if they could take her furlough for her but were told that wouldn't be an option.

When the Case Aide returned to work and recently celebrated a birthday, she arrived to find a birthday cake and a card containing enough money to cover her furlough days. That money was donated by co-workers who were also facing furloughs and not getting raises but wanted to help a co-worker.

"It is so nice to have a family both at home and at work," said the birthday person.

This giving group wants no credit but urges others to pass along its message of caring. Chances are, they say, it will lighten someone's load and return in kind to givers.

"This is not the first time ESA employees have focused on someone's needs and shown remarkable generosity," says ESA Administrator **Barry DeJong**, "but the magic of this story is that it takes lemons and makes lemonade. I'm proud of all of them."

# 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

**Steve Hult** is a custodian with a big heart.

As a custodian at the Norfolk Veterans' Home (NVH), his day starts at 7:00 a.m. when he cleans the members' rooms while they're at breakfast. Throughout each day, he dusts, mops, empties trash and otherwise keeps the environment clean and safe. But as those who do custodial work at any other 24-hour facility know well, keeping a place clean isn't as simple as it sounds.

"People think anyone can do cleaning, but people who clean for a living know there's a big difference between cleaning and quality cleaning," Hult says. "What my colleagues and I do is quality cleaning."

Hult works on the special needs unit, home to up to 30 members with Alzheimer's and other forms of dementia.

"We don't just clean around members but interact with and relate to them," Hult explains. "That means getting to know them, understanding their special needs, and letting them know we not only clean but care."

Hult's sensitivity to the needs of those whose rooms he cleans comes in part from having been a psychiatric

technician at the Norfolk Regional Center for 14 years before coming to his present position seven years ago.

"You need to get to know each member as an individual, listen to what they have to say, and communicate with them in ways that are most comfortable to them," says Hult. "You also need to show them that you care."

"Steve voluntarily took Alzheimer's training to learn more about that form of dementia and is a member of a team of professional and line staff who brainstorm and problem-solve," says NVH Building Services Manager **Kim K. Davis**. "He has helped develop programs for some members to help them do small daily tasks like washing windows and sweeping carpet."

During a tornado drill, Davis observed Hult sit down and chat with a member confused by all of the commotion.

"Before the time the drill was over," Davis says, "Steve had calmed the member completely."

Hult is especially appreciative of life experiences members have to share.

"I'll never forget a member, now deceased, who told me about his experiences as a tank driver in WWII," Hult recalls. "Rather than bragging about war exploits, he told of a time when his tank veered from the road and crashed into a house. When he told me about that incident, he had tears in his eyes."

Hult is keenly aware of the very special population he serves.

"I consider it a privilege just to know these people who have done so much for all of us through their service to their country," says Hult. "When I see them smile, laugh or just be happy, that makes me happy."

The biggest changes Hult has witnessed in his more than two decades of service are vast improvements in the quality of care individuals receive at the two DHHS facilities at Norfolk where he's worked.

"That's why I firmly believe that the quality of care we provide, whether clinical or custodial, has a direct effect on the quality of life these people enjoy," he says.

That's also why people like Steve Hult who provide custodial services at all ten of the DHHS 24-hour facilities know there's a lot more to the work they do than keeping things clean.



Front Liner Steve Hult

Photo: Linda Sparr



# Children's camp gets off to a great start

By Jeanne Atkinson

Birthday parties don't get much bigger than the one Developmental Disabilities Service Coordinator **Mary Goodwin** threw for 20 children during the first Fremont-area Royal Family Kids Camp on August 2 to 6. Most of the children who attended were state wards who were placed with foster families.

"Some children have never had a birthday party, so we designated one day as 'Everybody's Birthday Party' and made it really special," Mary said. "We had a huge cake, a fire engine, karaoke, gifts and lots of laughter."

Mary thanked her coworkers for helping make the birthday celebration such a success. The karaoke machine, provided by **Bob Furr**, Social Services Supervisor in the Fremont office, was a big hit with the children.

Mary was a caseworker in the Child Welfare Unit for 17 years. After becoming a Developmental Disabilities Service Coordinator three years ago, she missed her contact with young children. Mary took advantage of the opportunity to lead the opening of this brand new camp, which is part of a network of more than 180 weeklong summer camps for children between the ages of seven and 11 nationwide.

"We've been getting ready for 14 months," Mary said. "Our goal was to treat the kids 'royally' and focus on giving them a week full of fun and activities."

There were almost as many volunteer camp staff as children, including one counselor for every two campers. Mary was the driving force in making this camp a reality, but she thanked everyone who helped with fundraising this past year.



From left, Camp Director Mary Goodwin, Scott Murrish from the National Office of Royal Family Kids' Camps, and Assistant Camp Director Kathy Howerton

Photo: Betty Novacek

## DHHS to survey youth in transition

By Greg Votava



DHHS wants to hear from kids - specifically state wards who are close to becoming independent.

As part of a national effort, DHHS will survey youth in foster care after they turn 17 years old to gauge the quality of services they received and assess the collective outcomes. The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) will collect information on youth in care, including services paid for or provided by state agencies that administer the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP), as well as the outcome information on youth who are in or who have aged out of foster care.

"We developed our online survey tool <http://dhhs.ne.gov/NYTD> to learn how our services have helped these kids and what we can do better to help others in the future," says **Sherri Haber**, Comprehensive Quality Improvement Unit Administrator with the Division of Children and Family Services.

States will survey youth regarding six outcomes: financial self-sufficiency, experience with homelessness, educational attainment, positive connections with adults, high-risk behavior, and access to health insurance.

The federal Administration for Children and Families also requires that states report independent living services and supports they provide to all youth in eleven broad categories, such as vocational training, money management and mentoring.

DHHS will collect information on youth after they leave the state's foster care system. Some of these youth will be contacted again when they turn 19 and again at 21 to complete the same survey.

The survey will occur every three years. This year's survey will begin in October 2010 and run through March 31, 2011.

# ACCESSNebraska celebrates two years

The ACCESSNebraska project to modernize delivery of economic assistance services was launched two years ago. “Many employees participated in building ACCESSNebraska, and I’d like to especially thank staff who served on the Transition Team,” said **Todd Reckling**, Director of the Division of Children and Family Services. “Their hard work and great input was invaluable as we developed ACCESSNebraska, and one of the reasons we’ve been able to successfully move forward.”



ACCESSNebraska Transition Team, left to right: Myra Hoffart, Cindy Sullivan, Darniece Amos, Alvin Zimmerman, Kathy Carter, Cathlene Callahan, Karen Heng, Debbie Moon, Claire Speedlin, Jan Spaulding, Dianne Stewart, Linda Hart, Sheila Bacon, Ruth Vineyard, Teri Chasten, Carole Steffen, Deb Steidley, Mike Puls, Jill Schreck. Not pictured: Ed Matney, Ann Kawata, Kathy Fiorelli, and Brenda Bender. *Photo provided*

## Grant offers YRTC-K youth more enjoyable learning opportunities

Open a book, and you can open yourself to the world. That’s what Media Specialist **Sue Divan** is helping youth to do at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney (YRTC-Kearney).

Sue applied for and received a recent grant that provides youth at the facility more reading options. The \$6,000 Laura Bush Foundation grant is designed to promote a love of reading and provide school libraries and students with books and magazines who need them most.

“The grant will allow us to broaden offerings and purchase many books the youth have requested,” Divan explains. “Our non-fiction collection is in need of updating in areas of science, social issues, careers, vocational education, history, biographies and sports, and we’d also like to add popular series books and multiple copies of young adult best sellers and award winners.”

Launched in 2002, the Laura Bush Foundation for America’s Libraries awarded 188 school libraries a total of over one million dollars in grants for 2010.

Thanks to Sue, the YRTC-K library is on the receiving end.



YRTC-K Media Specialist Sue Divan

# Bureaucratese or plain English ?

By Jerry Crisp

As employees in government or any large business, we express ourselves in a language that often makes sense to us but not always to others.

Is that a bad thing? The answer is yes, it usually is.

We all mean to speak and write clearly, but sometimes *Bureaucratese* or *Officialeze* undermine our best intentions. Too often, we use formal, legal or ornate language that sounds important but is confusing to the person for whom it's intended.

According to the federal Plain Language Website (<http://www.plainlanguage.gov>), your audience should be able to understand your information the first time they read or hear it. (Or, the rule used by one of our co-workers: "Would my grandma understand this?")

Why is this important? Because the information we provide is important!

DHHS programs can help people be healthier and more active by providing food, utilities, medical care and many other basic needs. But the very first step is making sure people understand what we're telling them or asking of them.

According to the Plain Language website: Plain language means your readers can understand your documents more quickly. Readers won't call you so much for explanations. They make fewer errors filling out your forms. They comply more accurately and quickly with requirements.

Though no one knows the total cost of poor communication, the information we do have suggests it's high. While writing in plain language isn't easy, it pays off in positive results.

Why do we say, "utilize" when we can say "use," or "desist" when "stop" will do?

How about "at this particular point in time" when we mean "at this time" or better yet, "now"?

Have you ever written "in order to" when you could say "to"?

Why do we insist on a five-syllable term like "approximately" when two-syllable words like "roughly" or "about" offer the same meaning?

There are many online resources that can help, and we all have Microsoft Word tools at our fingertips, such as the Thesaurus and Reading Level guides (aim for an 8th grade reading level). They make a world of difference.

On the federal level, presidential administrations from Nixon to now have encouraged government workers to express ourselves more simply, to use words as bridges — not barriers. While that war has not been won, it's a daily battle worth fighting.

Whether we rely on wise resources or willpower to rid our expression of deadwood and official-sounding fluff, we all need to speak in a clear, easily-understood voice that coaxes others to listen and understand or take action. When we do, we serve both our customers and ourselves better.

## *Good Things Are Happening!*

Nebraska ranks first in the nation with a negative error rate of 0.00% in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) distribution and fifth in the nation for payment error rate (payment accuracy), according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). As a direct result of an outstanding job done by DHHS employees, Nebraska will receive a performance bonus of \$850,986!

*The SNAP Program helps people live better lives by helping children, older adults and people with disabilities meet their nutritional needs.*

More than 800 people with developmental disabilities in Nebraska waiting for services are now receiving those services, thanks to state funding appropriated by the Legislature. The Division of Developmental Disabilities is now offering options to those who have been on the waiting list longest and working its way up the list.

*833 individuals are receiving services right now, and the rest are working with their Service Coordinators to find appropriate services that will help them live better lives.*

# October Observances

## Breast Cancer Awareness Month

Over the past year, mammography guidelines have been confusing and controversial. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force, an independent panel of experts, revised its breast cancer detection guidelines last fall to suggest a patient/doctor discussion on risks and benefits before starting mammography earlier than age 50. Other credible organizations disagreed and continued with their old guidelines. For example, the American Cancer Society continues to recommend annual mammography for women 40 years or older. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends screening mammography every one to two years for women 40 and older.



“A conversation with your medical provider can help you decide when to begin mammograms and how often to have them,” said Kathy Ward, Administrator of the DHHS Office of Women’s and Men’s Health, “but the important message continues to be that mammograms save lives.”

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 <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/womenshealth/ewm>.

## Domestic Violence Awareness Month

Any month is a time to reflect on costs of crime to children exposed to domestic violence and promote programs that serve victims, hold offenders accountable and prevent domestic violence in our communities. When people intervene for the good of others, it creates a safer community.

“Engaging Bystanders” is a prevention approach that assists Nebraskans to recognize that we all have opportunities to intervene for prevention of domestic violence. Some ways everyone can take steps to be an active bystander: Listen and be open to a victim seeking help; Ask yourself, ‘If I were in this situation, would I want someone to help me?’ Even small interventions such as simply checking in with someone can make a big difference in a questionable situation.

To learn about domestic violence awareness activities in your community, contact your local domestic violence/sexual assault program or the Nebraska Domestic Violence Sexual Assault Coalition (402-476-6256 or <http://www.ndvsac.org>).

## Nursing Home Residents’ Rights Week (October 4 - 10)

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

This year’s theme is “Defining Dining...It’s About Me!” Long-term care residents deserve the same high-quality dining experience as anyone else.

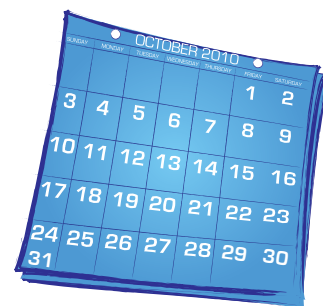
Residents should be given choices about the kinds of food they eat, and those foods should be tasty, well-prepared and visually appealing.

For more information, or to volunteer to become a volunteer ombudsman, please call 800-942-7830 or email **Patty Pierson**, DHHS State Long-Term Care Ombudsman, at [patty.pierson@nebraska.gov](mailto:patty.pierson@nebraska.gov).



Governor Dave Heineman with Geneva Pratt, a 100-year-old resident of a long-term care facility, at last year’s Residents’ Rights proclamation signing in Lincoln with Aging Partners

*Photo: Tami Barrett*



## Mental Health Awareness Week (October 3 - 9)

Did you know:

- One in four Americans experiences mental illness at some point in his or her life.

- 10% of children and youth have serious impairments from mental illness that impact their day-to-day lives.

It's important to know how mental illnesses can affect individuals, families, and communities. Mental health problems are real, common and treatable.

Caring friends can make a real difference, and we all can learn how to support our friends who are living with a mental illness. Just being there and offering your reassurance, companionship, and acceptance can help your friend throughout the course of his or her illness and beyond.

Go to the Network of Care website at <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/networkofcare/> for information, including treatment resources and diagnoses, insurance, and advocacy.



## Infant Mortality Awareness Month | September 2010

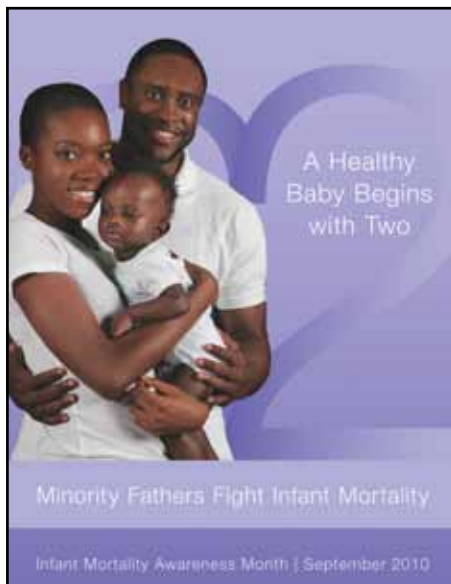
### What is Infant Mortality?

Death of a baby from birth to its first year birthday (Neonatal & postnatal deaths combined).

### What group of people is most at risk?

African Americans have 2.4 times the infant mortality rate as non-Hispanic Whites.

They are four times as likely to die as infants due to complications related to low birth-weight as compared to non-Hispanic White infants.



### What can be done to help all women avoid Infant Mortality?

While no one can promise a healthy pregnancy and healthy baby, you can improve your chances of having a healthy baby by:

- Taking folic acid pills before, during and between pregnancies.
- Starting prenatal care early, as soon as you think you're pregnant.
- Getting regular prenatal care.
- Avoiding alcohol, tobacco, and drugs while pregnant.
- Breastfeeding your baby.
- Placing your baby on his/her back to sleep on a hard firm mattress in a crib.

### A Father's role involves his capacity to:

1) Promise; 2) Provide; and 3) Protect.

Fathers must be willing to make a pledge to be the best parent they can possibly be which means learning from mistakes and understanding his influence on the well-being of his children.

Remember - women need to be loved, honored, protected, nurtured and helped, not just during pregnancy but during the full spectrum of motherhood

# In their own words

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

Dear **Ruth Vineyard** (Economic Assistance Administrator, Division of Children & Family Services, Lincoln):

I am writing to let you know how much we have appreciated the services of **Verdell Bohling** (Social Services Supervisor, DHHS Lincoln office) during the three years he was responsible for administering the case of my daughter. I always felt that his kindness and patience were unusual in my experience of dealing with agencies.

My daughter has been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome (adult autism). It has always been difficult for her to communicate, engage in social interactions and respond appropriately. These behaviors made our visits to various offices uncomfortable because most people are put off by her. But Verdell remained calm and patient, and the visits always went well. His knowledge about the benefits available from various sources helped a great deal because this was all new to me.

People like Verdell are worth their weight in gold, especially in times of cutbacks and stress in the social services area. Change is tough on everyone, and we will miss the chance to work personally with Verdell, but I'm sure that whatever he does, many will benefit.

**The mother of a service recipient**

To Whom It May Concern:

We just want to say thank you for helping us in processing our request for assistance through Kids' Connection for our prematurely-born baby. **Theresa Davis** (Social Service Worker, DHHS North Platte office) was very helpful and prompt in getting our paperwork done. We are so grateful for the help we received and how fast it was handled—Thanks Again!

Our baby is doing well and gaining weight fast. He is still on a heart/lung monitor but had had no alarms since being dismissed from the hospital. He should be off the monitor in about a month.

**The baby's parents**

To Whom It May Concern:

I appreciate you putting me on the caseload of **Barbara Wolcott** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Omaha Pacific Street office). She's a beautiful human being, and somebody needs to recognize her because she goes beyond and beyond and beyond her call of duty to help a person out with any matters they may be having.

I appreciate Barbara. I've been on her caseload for a long time, and I appreciate you for putting her there for me.

**A client**

Please send letters from satisfied customers via any method listed in our editorial box on page 2, and we'll publish as many as space allows.

# In their own words

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

Dear **Glenda Horst** (Social Services Supervisor, DHHS Pierce office):

I would like to tell you that **Kristine Silhacek** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Pierce office) has been a godsend to me. She was right there when I needed help with my mother-in-law's application. It was all new to me, and she was very helpful. We should have more people like her, and thanks to you also.

**A client's daughter**

Dear **Dan Scarborough** (Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Geneva):

As mayor of the great city of Geneva, I would like to thank you, your staff and youth for participating in the Discover Geneva Summer Celebration events held in July. The community support that this event receives every year is impressive. We appreciate your willingness to volunteer with the "inflatable games" in the Fillmore County Courthouse square.

Geneva is a very active community that bands together with support and volunteerism throughout the year for several worthwhile events. Again, thank you for your support.

**Rodney D. Norris**  
Mayor, City of Geneva

Dear **Dan Theobald** (Training Coordinator, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Kearney):

I want to thank you again for the time you and the youth spent with our class from Missouri Western State University. The youth did a great job on the tour. This was actually the first facility we visited that allowed the youth to do this.

The class commented on how they loved the involvement of staff at every level of the youth's progress. Seeing this in action hopefully showed these future professionals a best practice in action.

**Greg Lindsteadt, PhD**  
Criminal Justice & Legal Studies Department  
Missouri Western State University

Dear **Cindy Wiesen** (Accountant III/Lead, Child Support Enforcement, Lincoln):

During a CHARTS training I was giving, we were talking about how some of the new processes were working. Several of the Customer Service Representatives asked if I could let **Mike Wolverton** know how much they appreciate what he does.

They said he is very prompt—many times their request is handled the same day—and he's thorough and always gets answers. They had a lot of praise for his work.

**Janet Gill**  
Nebraska Child Support Customer Service Call Center

# A Century of Service

## *Congratulations*

Two DHHS employees are retiring. What's so unique about that? Each has served the state for 50 years!

Retiring after no fewer than 50 years of service at the Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC), Business Manager **RoJane Meyer** has seen much in the past half century.

"The biggest change," RoJane says, "has been seeing the facility evolve from an institutional environment into a homelike residence for individuals who live here."

What she will miss most are her co-workers, "without whom 50 years would never have been reached. I am richly blessed to have had fine support from Lincoln employees as well as BSDC staff."

Her co-workers will miss her, too. According to Buyer **Pam Gerdes**, "It has been a great pleasure to work with RoJane for many years and share an office with her for the past year. She's always upbeat and has a kind word for everyone. She has taught me to be a better person."

Asked what advice she would offer people just starting their careers at BSDC, RoJane said "Treat others as you would like to be treated, and you will develop a work environment to be proud of."

Leaving the stress of completing budgets within timeframes behind her, RoJane plans to spend more time with her seven grandchildren, who range in age from two to 15 years old and include a set of twins.

RoJane Meyer will miss her friends at BSDC, and BSDC will miss her. As CEO **Dan Howell** puts it, "RoJane's commitment to both BSDC and the State of Nebraska speaks volumes as to who she is as a person. I have seen her compassion and hard work ensuring that individuals who are supported at BSDC are well-served. She will be missed by all of the people she has touched over the past half century."



RoJane Meyer

*Photo: Nancy Sedlacek*

The biggest change **Bernice Russell** has seen in her 50 years of service as a Social Service Worker in the DHHS Sidney office has been the coming of the computer age.

"Oh, but I remember doing everything by paper," she says. "I also remember earning only \$180 a month when I started in 1960!"

Bernice says, "I'll miss my co-workers, the elderly and people with disabilities I've worked with for so many years, as well as the many medical providers who have been so helpful to me in serving those in need."

"When she leaves, Bernice will take a wealth of knowledge with her," says Social Service Worker **Sandy White**. "She will be truly missed, both as a co-worker and a friend."

"After 27 years of supervising her, the thing that stands out most in my mind about Bernice Russell is her commitment to and advocacy on behalf of people who are elderly or disabled," adds Social Services Supervisor **Phyllis Greenwood**. "She has made a positive difference in hundreds of people's lives."

After retiring, Bernice plans to sleep in for a few weeks and then will volunteer at a nursing home.

"There are so many people in nursing homes who never have any visitors, even if they have family locally," she says. "It has been very rewarding to me to serve people. You have to like people from all walks of life, be understanding and compassionate to work with people in need."



Bernice Russell

*Photo: Jennifer Hellie*



# Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state



**HEADING FOR THE WILD BLUE YONDER:** (Above) The Thunderbirds precision flying team takes to the skies in August for a performance at Offutt Air Force Base in Omaha. *Photo: Sarah Sovereign*

(Below) Veterans **Ken Todd** (l) and **Denis Moon** were among 16 members of the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home at Bellevue enjoying the show. *Photo: Pat Hopp*



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.

# Happenings!

Continued from previous page

**CORN DAYS:** Just to have some corny end-of-summer fun, the Norfolk Veterans' Home (NVH) hosts annual "Corn Days" activities for about a week.

"Corn Days are different every year, but we do keep a few favorites such as the Farmers Breakfast and the Corn Auction," says Volunteer Services Coordinator **Jenny Last**.

The corn auction offers members an opportunity to purchase items of interest with points earned by attending activities.

Another activity Last thinks likely to become an annual favorite is a corn-eating competition to see which staff members can eat the most corn on the cob in five minutes.

Chowing down on an ear at right is NVH Administrator **Jerry Eisenhauer**, who competed for top honors unsuccessfully.

*Photo: DeAnn Stodola*

Shown below are all of the contestants. From left, Jerry Eisenhauer, Certified Master Social Worker **RoseAnn Ross**, Food Service Supervisor **Dani Fischer**, Housekeeper **Crissy Ferris**, Staff Care Technician **Tammy Thompson** (2010 Champion), Administrative Assistant **Linda Sparr** and Activities Supervisor **Deb Becker** (2009 Champion). Eisenhauer vows to be the 2011 Champion. *Photo: Jenny Last*



# Happenings!

Continued from previous page



## A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE:

That was the theme of the annual World Day on the Mall festival of ethnic foods, music and entertainment on September 16th in Lincoln's Centennial Mall.

For the second year, Channel 10/11 anchorwoman **Serese Cole** (at left) MC-ed the event, held on Centennial Mall and open to the public.

CEO **Kerry Winterer** (at right) offered the keynote address, paying tribute to contributions of all state workers and celebrating differences among people.

World Day on the Mall is made possible by a multi-agency collaboration of state agencies. *Photos: Jerry Crisp*



**Send your story ideas or special interests by any means listed in the editorial box on page 2, and remember that you're *always* welcome to submit photos and information from around the state.**

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