

CONNECTIONS

September 2014 VOLUME 14, ISSUE 9

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

Giving it Our All: Donations to 2014 Charitable Giving Campaign Show Heart, Creativity and Soul

When people raise money for charitable giving, everyone wins. The State's Charitable Giving Campaign gives us the chance to work together to help those in need, show off our creative ways to raise money, and have fun along the way.

Dr. Joseph Acierno, Chief Medical Officer and Director, Public Health, and **Thomas Pristow**, Director, Children and Family Services, were the team captains for Team One of this Campaign which included all DHHS employees.

The 2014 Campaign was especially successful as more than 400 charitable organizations throughout Nebraska will benefit from the generous donations of state employees. Even though the campaign officially wrapped up the end of August, the Department of Administrative Services staff recently revealed their top picks for special Campaign awards. DHHS employees received several of those honors and DHHS itself received two special honors:

- Champion of New Participants (with 56 new givers)
- Runner up for the Champion of Creativity Team Award

DHHS' Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care was recognized as an "Agency



1. Congratulations, all, for earning the 2014 Champion of New Participants trophy!
2. Serving up delicious root beer floats, from left: Joe Acierno, Thomas Pristow, Scot Adams, Kerry Winterer and Matt Clough
3. Charitable giving at the Norfolk Veterans Home--toilet paper and hula hoop contestants from a Penny War challenge. NVH won the "Agency" Champion of Creativity Award for, among other creative fundraisers, "Elephant Bowling."
4. The Hastings Regional Center's "Soak the Supervisor" Contest raised big bucks for the 2014 Charitable Giving Campaign.

All Star" and "Most Valuable Agency" for ongoing achievements of:

- increasing their dollar contribution to the campaign each year since 2009;
- increasing their dollar contribution this year by 20+ percent; and,
- increasing their dollar contribution by 56 percent from the 2013 Campaign. Congratulations!

Special thanks to the DHHS "All Stars" and "MVPs" for their dedication, outstanding efforts and help during this year's Charitable Giving Campaign:

All Stars: Stephanie Crouch; Vicky DeWald; Kristi Holmes; Sharon Kahm; Emily Meyer; Pepper Meyer; Margaret Murray; and Roxanne Rediger.

Most Valuable Players: Karen Berry and Amy Borer.

The [DHHS employee website](#) featured many Charitable Giving Campaign stories in Neat to Know. DHHS employees can access the stories by clicking on the links provided. Some favorites are featured above.

Stay Connected on



make the connection...

DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov

DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees/>

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

Chief Executive Officer:
Kerry Winterer

Behavioral Health
Division Director:
Scot Adams, Ph.D.

Children and Family Services
Division Director:
Thomas Pristow

Developmental Disabilities
Division Director:
Jodi Fenner

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CLS Administrator:
Kathie Osterman
Graphics and Layout:
Judy Barker

Editor:
Dianna Seiffert

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

Phone: (402) 471-1695 Fax: (402) 471-3996

E-mail: dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov

Interagency mail: Nebraska State Office Bldg. 3rd Floor
U.S. mail: P.O. Box 95026
301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-5026

[DHHS' Employee Website....](#)

New information and photos are added daily to the employee website. Here are some recent posts and the dates they appeared. Like what you're seeing and reading? Then check out the employee homepage every day! Got an idea or a photo you'd like to share for the employee homepage or *Connections*? Send it to Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.

Homepage Homeruns

[Resource Developers in Gering Promote Foster Parenting, Aug 15](#)

DHHS employees in Gering set up and staffed a booth for a National Night Out event on Aug. 5. Resource Development workers helped those in attendance make purses and dinosaurs out of paper plates while providing important information concerning foster parenting.

At least 500 people participated in this great event leading to several inquiries at the DHHS booth. **Caroline Cardona**, Resource Developer, said... "We hope to keep interest high in helping our foster children find safe homes."



In blue shirts, from left are Resource Developers **Valerie Cobos, Cathy Studt** and **Laura Person**.

She added that the event was so successful that we're planning to do it again next year.

[A Friendly Camel and Other Animals Pay a Visit to the GIVH, Aug. 27](#)

The Grand Island Veterans Home had some interesting visitors recently to entertain members and staff. A unique zoo dropped by as part of the home's celebration of the wonderful world of animals throughout the month of August.

This wild animal display, sponsored by MARBU Farms, included zebras, camels and a 5,000-pound buffalo.



Mike Bursaw, Human Resources Director, Grand Island Veterans Home

As entertaining and enjoyable all of the animals were, it was one of the camels who stole the show, and when encouraged, took to nibbling on people's ears.

[Outreach to Siena-Francis House Continues to Grow, Aug. 28](#)

The Siena/Francis House, located in Omaha, is Nebraska's largest homeless shelter, providing food, emergency shelter and clothing, along with outreach/case management to homeless families and individuals from Omaha and surrounding communities.

On Aug. 3, 2012, DHHS employees in the Omaha office started serving the Siena-Francis House in an outreach project. During the past two years our outreach efforts have grown tremendously and in such a positive way.

Darla Berger, a Community Support Specialist in Papillion, writes...

"In total, we've seen more than 1,450 people. As our outreach grows, we learned more each day.

"About a year ago we brought in our partners at Food Bank for the Heartland. They are able to assist us with the SNAP application process. We are especially fortunate as the Food Bank outreach worker, Mayra, is bilingual.

"This outreach project keeps thousands of phone calls out of the ACCESSNebraska system. It has allowed more than 1,400 people who have limited access to phones, the ability to have their questions answered and their interviews completed.

"The first day we saw 13 people. We now see two to three times that number each and every week.

"Thank you to Mike Saklar and his staff at Siena-Francis House for their hospitality and to the Food Bank for the Heartland. This project shows how important collaboration is to the success of a project."



Mayra, Food Bank for the Heartland, is essential to DHHS' outreach program at the Siena/Francis House in Omaha.

All Four DHHS Veterans' Homes Receive Perfect Scores...AGAIN!

Congratulations! All four Veterans' homes have received perfect scores, for the second year in a row, on recent annual Health Care System Surveys from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. The four homes, all run by DHHS, include the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home in Bellevue, the Grand Island Veterans Home, the Norfolk Veterans Home and the Western Nebraska Veterans Home in Scottsbluff.

"Having all four homes receive perfect survey scores two consecutive years is an outstanding achievement," said Gov. Dave Heineman. "This accomplishment demonstrates the dedication of the employees of our Veterans Homes and the quality of care they provide to those

who have served our country. We are proud of our service to our veterans."

The facilities received top marks in life safety, resident care, environment, staff training and development, dietary-food service, banking and billing services for veterans, recreation/activities, medical staff credentialing, social work, and all areas related to quality assurance and care.

"Nebraska has a proud tradition of taking care of our veterans," said

John Hilgert, Director of the DHHS Division of Veterans Homes. "Achieving perfect survey scores demonstrates our commitment to providing quality care to veterans."



Survey teams from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are typically an interdisciplinary team comprised of three registered nurses, a registered dietitian and a life safety code expert from various parts of the country.

With a total capacity of 637 beds, the four veterans' homes provide a variety

of medical, nursing and rehabilitative services, tailored to the needs of their members. Services range from assisted living care for members able to essentially care for themselves, to skilled nursing care. The veterans' health care services are administered by dedicated nurses, physicians, dieticians, occupational therapists, speech therapists, physical therapists and other professionally trained personnel.

The four veterans' homes in Nebraska strive to serve the unique needs of each member by providing high quality services and holistic long-term care in a homelike veterans' community.



From Empty Pots to Gorgeous Greens and Beautiful Blooms: BSDC Greenhouse Enriches Lives

From the September issue of the Hub, a publication for the employees and the people of the Beatrice State Developmental Center

*By Robin Curry and Delores Marmon,
Beatrice State Developmental Center*

There are grapevines growing south of BSDC's greenhouse, pumpkins blooming, watermelon growing in buckets and pea plants sprouting. Pepper plants and tomatoes are producing, and **Carol Sykes**, Active Treatment Program Assistant at BSDC, and Susan deliver the produce, usually

green peppers and tomatoes, to the BSDC Snack Shack for sale.

Individuals from Sheridan Cottages come down on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays to help with repotting and other jobs, like painting stepping stones. The stepping stones and different plants were available for purchase during BSDC's Family Fun Day, Sunday, Sept. 28.



Carol Sykes, left, works with several individuals—volunteers and paid assistants—at the BSDC greenhouse. Susan, pictured above, right, works at the greenhouse on Fridays.



The 40 ft. by 140 ft. greenhouse was donated by Grand Island Veterans in December, 2009 and opened for individuals in April 2010. The greenhouse has concrete sidewalks wide enough for the largest wheel-chairs inside, plus sidewalks leading to it. The building has raised planting beds for vegetables and flowers, and wooden tables for plants. The greenhouse opened to the public in June 2010. Plants growing in the greenhouse and horticulture room are for sale to the public. In the spring, vegetables,

flowers and other plants are grown from seeds and sold to the public as bedding plants.

The horticultural room started in February 2010 at 401 Sheridan as a learning center to give individuals a chance to develop skills in planting seeds, watering plants, etc. This room was used when the greenhouse was too hot or too cold for people. Also, some plants grow better inside a building than in a greenhouse.



Can You Hear Me? “Huh? What did you say?”

By Tary Paris, Person-Centered Care Coordinator, Lincoln Regional Center

Do you think of listening as one of the five senses or do you consider it a way to build better relationships?

Some people think of listening as the absence of talking. They may practice listening by taking turns sharing with their talking partner. If they can hear you, they must be listening? Right?

We take speech class in school to learn how to be a better speaker. Have you ever taken a class in listening?

Do you think you could gain support from your team if you listened more? Try it and see! Think about who you turn to when you want to share some



good news. Who do you prefer? I am thinking you answered, “Someone who listens to me...” as opposed to “someone who just hears me,” “someone who interrupts me,” or “someone who keeps checking his or her phone.” You DO know the difference between hearing and listening, but what’s getting in your way of listening better? Here’s a fun acronym to get you started:

L = Like people. When you like folks, you are more likely to listen to them, because you truly care about their day and how they feel. You don’t have to be buddies outside of work for this to be genuinely effective. I know you can find something you like about everyone. We all have something we are good at or enjoy sharing – find that in others.

I = Interests. Establish a common interest in others. I ran into one of our employees at a baseball game the other night. Now every time I see Billy, he asks me how I am before I can ask him, and tells me if the Saltdogs won their last game and the score. Do I talk baseball with everyone? No, I have mutually interesting topics to share with different people. When I see them, it brightens my day when they ask me how things are based on something I told them earlier. They really know me as a person and it feels good!

S = Share. Share a little about yourself to build rapport with others. You can talk about your vegetable garden, your yard, your love of buying cute shoes, your pets, and of course, the Huskers! In New Employee Orientation, I coach new hires to have a few topics handy they feel safe talking about because we can’t talk about the weather in every conversation. Ok, you can if you are a meteorologist. Otherwise, I might revert to only hearing you...yawn. It’s o.k. to put yourself out there!

T = Talk. Tell people how you feel, what you think, and trust them with a little bit of yourself. When you talk, that helps them build their listening skills and you can develop your pocket full of safe small-talk topics. People don’t need to know your last name or address for you to have warm and friendly conversation that stays within boundaries.



E = Establish rapport. Did you know “rapport” is a noun? It’s a thing that no one can take away from you and you can’t lose unless you don’t practice it. Rapport is precious and will come in handy more times than you may realize. It will help you be safe, make your case, and make your day run more smoothly. It makes you likable, and that feels good.

N = Non-verbals. Pretend you can see yourself in the mirror. What is the message your body is sending? Is what you say, what you do, and how you hold your posture congruent? Ever notice how bad actors shake their heads side to side when agreeing with someone? Do you believe them? Do they believe themselves?

In Person Centered Care, our goal is to have our behaviors match our beliefs. I’m always saying that if I tested you today on the Golden Rule, which is what our list of PCC Behaviors looks like, we’d all get an A. My challenge is for you to look at that list authentically. When you take that PCC self-test, are you answering how you think you “should” behave? Those answers reflect your values. Your character is how you put that list into practice.

Meet Alejandro "Alex" Garcia, DHHS' New Human Resources Administrator

(402) 471-6605
Alex.Garcia@nebraska.gov

Human Resources is more than providing pay and benefits and hiring and retaining employees. It's about staff advocating for both DHHS and the people who work here. **Alex Garcia** became DHHS' new Human Resources Administrator on June 24. He brings to this position an impressive array of experience, knowledge and education. Let's take a look at his resume now.

Objective: Alex said he values the importance of developing strong relationships with stakeholders and staff and looks forward to spending time getting to know everyone.

Experience: Six months before becoming Human Resources Administrator, Alex was the Staff Development Coordinator for DHHS' Human Resources and Staff Development, providing supervisor training and coordinating Economic Assistance program training. As a trainer, Alex held meetings and visited with staff across Nebraska.

"It didn't take me long to realize that people around here work really hard," Alex said. "And they have passion when it comes to helping people. I want our H.R. department to help employees keep that passion going strong."

Before coming to DHHS, Alex served a long and distinguished career in the U.S. Air Force, retiring as a Lieutenant Colonel in December 2013. Alex said his 30 years of military experience in leadership positions taught him many things about people and work. In the military, it's all about planning, he said. You strategize and plan for new opportunities as leaders and priorities shift and change over time.

Alex's last five years of military service were with the U.S. Air Forces in Europe and NATO. While at NATO, Alex's international team worked directly with the 28-Nation Military Committee to provide guidance on major organizational and human resource issues.

Education: Alex has a degree in psychology, a Master's degree in Counseling, he is Certified as an Executive Coach, and has extensive leadership training. Alex said he choose to work at DHHS because he wanted to put his experience, education and counseling skills to good use.

Priorities and Goals: Alex said he has already talked and visited with many people in Lincoln and throughout the state and can't wait to meet more. All of the conversations help give him a better idea of what needs to be accomplished here and what our priorities should be.

"I want people to be involved with Human Resources in a positive way," he said. "We need to keep looking at employees from a whole-life perspective. After hiring, we need to focus on developing staff on a personal level."



Alex Garcia, continued

Hobbies, Interests:

Growing up in a military family combined with his own military experience gave Alex the opportunity to live and travel extensively in the United States and abroad. Alex has lived in New Mexico, Germany, North Dakota, Idaho, Nebraska, Hawaii, Alaska, Florida, Germany, Iraq and Belgium (for NATO). The list of places he has visited is ten times longer.

Alex chose Nebraska as his most recent "home" because of family. Alex and his wife, Christine, met in the Air Force and they have been married for 29 years. They have a daughter, Toni, who lives in Lincoln, and a son, Alejandro III, who lives with his wife and son, Alejandro IV, in Omaha. Toni is back in school now but worked for DHHS in the past as a social worker.

Alex said that throughout most of his years in the Air Force, his family was by his side. There was a brief period when Alex lived in Belgium and his family lived in the states. That's when Alex started running half marathons in order to keep busy and pass the time.

During Alex's last year in Belgium, he ran one or two half marathons a month. Altogether, in his 2½ years there, Alex ran 21 half marathons in 12 different countries.

A Culture of Accountability

“Accountability breeds response-ability.” Stephen R. Covey

By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources and Development

A ‘blame culture’ is found wherever it’s common for individuals to look outwardly to other people and external circumstances as the cause when something goes wrong.



Successful organizations work hard to create the opposite of a blame culture—a culture of accountability—where people look within themselves and ask, “What could I have done differently to bring about results that we want?”

The following are signs of a culture of accountability at work.

A Culture of Accountability

- The focus is on the here and now as well as the future. People learn that mistakes are opportunities for improvement and then move forward.
- People are clear about the expected results and focused on doing their part to achieve great results.
- The tone is positive and directed to solutions and results.
- People hold themselves accountable to their responsibilities.
- People act on the deeply-held belief that individual effort makes a difference.
- People are fully engaged in their work, and continuous improvement flourishes.

- There's a shared mind-set of 'We're in this together.'

Examples of when we are participating in a Culture of Accountability

- We publicly acknowledge our mistakes and do not look elsewhere to place blame. We model open discussion of mistakes made, what we learned from those mistakes, and what we will do differently in the future to not repeat them.
- We frequently consult our coworkers as to where things stand currently in our corner of DHHS—what's working well and where there's room for improvements. Then we take it upon ourselves to achieve these improvements.
- It's truly important to us to earn the reputation as someone who works to fix problems, and not fix blame.
- People frequently ask, “What can we do to get a better result?”
- We encourage coworkers to reframe from blaming and making excuses for the past, in favor of corrective actions in the present and future.

*“At the end of the day we are accountable to ourselves—our success is a result of what we do.”
Catherine Pulsifer*

Please email your thoughts, concerns and suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships to: Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov. I will email you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your ideas in a future column.

Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

Food, Snacks Help Make the Wait More Bearable

Waiting can be hard. Especially if you’re a child, waiting in an office, going through a difficult time, tired and hungry.

“We’ve had kids waiting around for hours in our building,” said **Benita Steffes**, Children and Family Services Supervisor, Fremont. “Sometimes they’re waiting while we find safe places for them to go if they’re not able to stay in their own homes, or they are waiting for rides or waiting to attend team meetings, and so on.” When kids wait for hours, DHHS employees at the Fremont office need to find something for them to eat. That’s where **Nancy Wright**, Child/ Family Services Specialist, Fremont, and her Girl Scout troop come in.

Nancy volunteers as a Scout Leader for Troop 40050. The Girl Scouts came up with a great idea to benefit kids who face long waiting times at the office. Troop members spent 50 hours fund raising and putting together snack packs and meals that contain juice boxes and items like granola bars, fruit snacks and snack crackers, along with a mini color book and crayons. The Girl Scouts earned their Silver Award in the process! The Fremont office now has 400 Snack Packs

and Meals Ready to Eat available to give to children to replace missed meals.

The Silver Award is the highest award a Girl Scout Cadette can earn. It’s all about helping Girl Scouts learn about themselves and the world around them focusing on an issue they care about and making a difference in their community. And, what a difference they have made!

A big thank you to Nancy and Girl Scout Troop 40050 for providing this great service to help people live better lives.



Pictured from left: Ashley Staver, Kylie Schurz and Elena Wright with Snack Packs and MREs (Meals Ready to eat). Photo: Nancy Wright

In Gratitude

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

Sometimes we paraphrase letters and/or shorten them slightly in order for us to include as many as possible.

Shari Rayburn (Social Services Supervisor, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Hastings),

I wanted to write to let you know what a wonderful job two of your workers do every day to help our patients. **Leticia Torres** (Social Services Worker, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Grand Island) and **Idalia Urbina** (Social Services Worker, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Grand Island) are fantastic, generous and wonderful assets to the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. Leticia and Idalia are always pleasant and kind on the phone; you can hear their smile through the phone line. We know that they care about our patients as much as we do.

Too many times in our world all we hear are the negatives, please let them know that all of the Patient Advocates at St. Elizabeth Regional Medical Center appreciate them and all of their hard work. Kudos to them! If there was an award through your Department, I would gladly love to nominate them for Outstanding Customer Service.

St Elizabeth Regional Medical Center

Jenny Prentice (Social Services Lead Worker, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Lexington) writes...

I just took a call from a client asking to speak to a supervisor about **Sarah Seberger** (Social Services Worker, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Lexington). The client wanted to compliment Sarah for being "efficient," "knowledgeable," and "kind." She also said that she used to be a social worker so she knows how demanding the job is and that she appreciated how she was treated. Wonderful job, Sarah!

Brenda Brooks (Children and Family Services Specialist Supervisor, North Platte) writes...

I received a phone call recently from the Rape/ Domestic Abuse Program (RDAP). We are working a challenging domestic violence case where a mother had previous contact and out of home placement for her children due to domestic violence issues. Staff at RDAP contacted me to say that **Cindy Swanson** (Child/Family Services Specialist, North Platte) took the time to listen to this mother and she said she felt as though Cindy had helped her. RDAP staff said that this mother's entire demeanor changed for the better after her conversation with Cindy.

I always like to hear when we are treating people with respect.

Thank you, Cindy, for all that you do!

Dear **Helen Meeks** (recently retired Administrator of Licensing at DHHS) and staff,

I wanted to pass along my sincerest praises of **Michelle Humlicek** (Health Licensing Specialist, Lincoln). She has been amazing to work with.

In my profession, I deal with state boards quite often, and my pleasant interaction with Michelle over the last week more than warranted me passing an email along to make sure you know what a prize you have in her.

Michelle was not only personable and professional at all times, she went above and beyond the call of duty to help with a situation, and worked fast toward a resolution. I am from Nebraska originally, and it goes to show that there is no place like Nebraska, and that is thanks to the people who live there. I look forward to recommending Nebraska as a state for Occupational Therapists to obtain a license, and I look forward to any future interaction with Michelle.

National Therapy Recruiter



The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' mission:

Helping people live better lives.