

# Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

April 2009  
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**“ANSWERING THE CALL”** - second in the “Defenders of Our Freedom” collection of six paintings that found a home at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans’ Home at Bellevue. In this depiction of the U.S. Marine Corps in Iraq, artist **Teri Rosario** “chose not to represent a single battle but to try to capture the essence of what it’s like to be a proud Marine.” For more information about this painting and the entire collection, go to [www.terirosario.com](http://www.terirosario.com) .

Watch for a continuing parade of “Defenders of Our Freedom” paintings in upcoming issues of *Connections*.

# 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 Promotes National Native American HIV/AIDS Awareness Day](#)  
March 16, 2009

[New Behavioral Health "Network of Care" Website Launched by DHHS](#)  
March 17, 2009

[Men's Health Scorecard Available on DHHS Website](#) March 27, 2009

[Nebraska Improves in Child and Family Services Review](#) March 27, 2009

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

## About the Cover:



©Teri Rosario

Commissioned to paint a collection of six paintings portraying the six branches of U.S. military services, artist Teri Rosario launched the series with "You Are Not Alone," showing U.S. Army servicemen in the Vietnam War (featured in our previous issue), followed by "Answering the Call," the painting featuring the U.S. Marine Corps that appears on the front cover of this issue.

A young Marine just returned from his second tour in Iraq with a Purple Heart offered an initial response to this month's painting: "Wow!"

Watch for future installments featuring the U.S. Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard, and Merchant Marines in Connections' "Defenders of Freedom Parade" in upcoming issues!

## 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@dhhs.ne.gov](mailto:diana.duran@dhhs.ne.gov)

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Governor: <b>Dave Heineman</b>	Developmental Disabilities Division Director: <b>John Wyvill</b>	Director of Operations: <b>Bob Zagozda</b>
DHHS Chief Executive Officer:	Medicaid and Long-Term Care Division Director: <b>Vivianne Chaumont</b>	CLS Administrator: <b>Kathie Osterman</b>
Behavioral Health Division Director: <b>Scot Adams, Ph.D.</b>	Public Health Division Director/Chief Medical Officer: <b>Dr. Joann Schaefer</b>	Editor: <b>Jerry Crisp</b>
Children and Family Services Division Director: <b>Todd Reckling</b>	Veterans' Homes Division Director: <b>John Hilgert</b>	Graphics and Layout, Support Services: <b>Maisun Allahiq</b> <b>Judy Barker</b>

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

**Phone:** (402) 471-3995 **Fax:** (402) 471-3996 **E-mail:** [jerry.crisp@dhhs.ne.gov](mailto:jerry.crisp@dhhs.ne.gov)

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

*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

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# Meet Todd Reckling - New Director of the Division of Children and Family Services (CFS)

By Jeanne Atkinson

What do you get when the new Division director is a former front line protection and safety worker who has risen through the ranks? You get someone who knows the critical decisions staff are asked to make every day, but who also knows the satisfaction you get from helping improve the lives of children and families.

**Governor Dave Heineman** appointed **Todd Reckling** as the director of the Division of Children and Family Services (CFS) effective April 2nd. He takes over from former director **Todd Landry**, who has moved to Texas.

“Todd Landry was an incredible leader who built a solid foundation for Nebraska’s child welfare and economic assistance services,” Reckling said.

“I know I have big shoes to fill, but I have a great management team and incredible staff that can move forward with our priorities without missing a beat.”

Those priorities include getting kids to permanency, accelerating reform of child welfare services, improving outcomes on the federal Child and Family Services Review, keeping a high food stamp accuracy rate, increasing the TANF work participation rate, strengthening the Child Support Enforcement program, and enhancing programming and training at the Youth Rehabilitation and Training Centers.

Reckling’s vision is to create and deliver services so every family in Nebraska touched by CFS has the opportunity to succeed, and every child has a chance to reach his or her fullest potential.

Coming from the field, he recognizes that strong supervisors are critical to making the Division’s priorities a reality.

“It’s important for workers to get immediate direction and feedback from supervisors,” he said. “Our supervisors are fantastic mentors to front line staff.”

Many local offices are doing certain things in great ways, and these practices will be shared statewide so they can become common practice.

“I recognize this is a time of change for all of us, and I know change is hard,” he said. “There are tremendous opportunities to impact change on a far-reaching level. This is a unique time, and I believe that together, we can accomplish tremendous results.”



**Todd Reckling**  
Photo: Bill Wiley

Reckling started with DHHS in 1992 as a protection and safety worker in northeast Nebraska. He’s held positions as a juvenile services officer, protection and safety supervisor, and administrator of the statewide in-home services unit, the Office of Protection and Safety, and the Policy Section in the Division of Children and Family Services.

Reckling graduated from Creighton University in Omaha in 1989 with a bachelor’s degree in psychology and received a master’s degree from the University of Nebraska at Omaha in 2006.

# WIC works wonders

By Marla Augustine

**Peggy Trouba** helps make sure that women and children in poverty in Nebraska have enough nutritional food to eat. She is the program manager of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants and Children (WIC). The program provides healthy foods and nutrition information to keep pregnant women, breastfeeding mothers, moms who have a baby less than six months of age, infants and children under five healthy and strong.

WIC helps prevent food insecurity—a situation where women and children do not have enough to eat, have a diet that is nutritionally inadequate or worry about having enough to eat.

Since 1974, WIC has combated childhood hunger, low birth weight, poor nutrition and iron deficiency.

“Moms and kids who have a good diet full of nutrients and fiber are healthier,” Trouba said. “Reaching kids early in life ensures that they develop properly. Without WIC foods, some children might go hungry.”

Poor nutrition during early childhood has been shown to increase the chance of anemia, adds to health care costs and limits a child’s ability to learn.

WIC is a great program that accomplishes great things, says **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health. “Pregnant women who receive WIC foods have fewer premature births and fewer fetal and infant deaths.”

The monthly WIC food package provides nutritious foods tailored to supplement the dietary needs of the participants, with high levels of protein, iron, calcium and vitamins A and C. The current food package includes milk, iron-fortified cereals, 100% fruit juice, dried beans, peanut butter, infant formula and eggs. In October, the WIC package will be expanded and improved to include:

- Fresh vegetables and fruits for women and children (1-5 years old);
- Canned beans;
- Whole grain bread and brown rice;
- Reduced, low- or non-fat milk for women and children over age two; and
- Additional foods for breastfeeding women.

In January, over 45,000 women, infants and children were served. Over half of Nebraska infants receive WIC benefits. Persons on WIC must be Nebraska residents who have an income less than or equal to 185% of poverty (\$39,220 annually for a family of four, for example) and have their nutritional needs assessed by a WIC nurse or nutritionist.

Fourteen local agencies operate over 100 WIC clinics statewide. At these clinics nutrition education, breastfeeding support and screening for low iron levels are provided. Referrals to community assistance providers are also made available.

“WIC and the local clinics serve a great need for food security among women and children. With good diets they will be healthier and happier,” said Dr. Schaefer.



**“Pregnant women who receive WIC foods have fewer premature births and fewer fetal and infant deaths.”**

*Dr. Joann Schaefer, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health*

# Taste testers help distribution program make good choices for schools

By Dianna Seiffert

With tasty options like cheese omelets, French toast sticks and chicken teriyaki, school food isn't what it used to be. It's better than ever, thanks in part to the DHHS Food Distribution Program and their annual food tasting event for school breakfasts, lunches and snacks.

About 30 students and school food directors from around the state were in Lincoln February 16 for a taste testing of school foods. By tasting and judging different food items, panel participants help decide what foods will be featured. The year's panel tasted and graded over 70 different items made from eggs, cheese, flour, turkey and chicken.

"I tried to taste everything and give my best effort in judging them," said

**Emma Young**, a fifth grader from North Platte. "It is hard to eat that much food and not get sick. We tasted food for over four hours!"

"It's an important job," said **Julia West**, DHHS Food Distribution Coordinator. "The panel helps choose the food that will be served in schools across Nebraska for the next three years."

Panelists judged each item on appearance, taste and texture on a scale of 1-5 with five being the best. "We also consider nutrition and cost before making any final food selections," says West.

Currently, 413 school districts receive commodity products through DHHS. Although the majority of food served in schools and daycares is commercially purchased, commodities account for 20% of what's available. For that 20%, schools get to choose what they want to serve. The key to keeping participation rates high is to serve nutritious foods that kids like to eat.

"Government commodity foods continue to improve in taste and nutrition," said West. "More than 50% of commodities available are grains, fruits and vegetables."

"I learned that these food items help make school meals better and help my Dad and food service directors in Nebraska reduce the cost of the meals," Young said in a presentation to her school. "I also learned that my opinions could possibly affect what a whole lot of kids, not just in North Platte, but all across Nebraska, see on their school lunch tray."

For more information about the DHHS Food Distribution program, visit [www.dhhs.ne.gov/fia/fooddistribution/](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/fia/fooddistribution/).



Panelist Emma Young traveled from North Platte with her dad for the second year in a row and earned this award, "World's Best Evaluation Panel Member." Photo: Dianna Seiffert



School Lunches ----- School Lunches -----

School Lunches ----- School Lunches -----

# New behavioral health website in place

By Jeanne Atkinson

There's a new, easy-to-use Web site that's helping people improve their lives and find the right service at the right time. The Behavioral Health Network of Care site pulls together information on mental health, substance abuse and gambling disorders that had been scattered on multiple other sites.

This comprehensive site gives a single point of entry to information, advocacy tools and a vast, easy-to-search library of resources. Many consumers, families and providers have expressed their thanks for having so much material pulled together in one place. This site gives people access to vital information about diagnoses, insurance, pending legislation, advocacy, and the latest research about mental health and substance abuse issues from around the world.

There are message boards and community calendars to help people connect with each other or share information. Consumers have the option of using the secure Personal Health Record section to organize and store medical and healthcare-related information. It's easy for providers to share challenges and ideas with each other and the people they serve, and to use the private message boards. Providers can even build their own free Web sites from Network of Care. All of this is available by going to [www.dhhs.ne.gov/networkofcare/](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/networkofcare/).

Resources on the site are organized by the six Behavioral Health Regions. Regardless of where you begin your search for assistance with behavioral health issues, the Network of Care helps you find what you need.



## WASTE NOT, WANT NOT!



According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Americans use enough plastic wrap to wrap all of Texas every year. If we recycled every plastic bottle we used, we would keep two billion tons of plastic out of landfills. In 2007, State of Nebraska employees recycled 44,502 pounds of plastics.

*What will YOU do at home with the next empty plastic milk container or scrap of plastic wrap—pitch it into the nearest wastebasket or garbage can?*

OR...

*AT WORK, take advantage of opportunities for recycling plastic bottles and plastic wrap in your workplace, or work with your recycling contact or anyone you think might be able to help create such opportunities; AT HOME, save unusable plastics to take to the nearest recycling center!*

For additional information about recycling, contact **Wade Remmenga**, Procurement Manager with Support Services in Lincoln, at (402) 471-0786 or [wade.remmenga@nebraska.gov](mailto:wade.remmenga@nebraska.gov).

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## Wellness Words: Myth information

Many ideas about health have been held so long or repeated so often that we accept them as so...even when they're not. Here's a commonly believed myth you need to know the truth about!

**“Spicy foods cause ulcers.”**



Eating spicy foods could aggravate symptoms in some people with ulcers, but they don't cause them. Typically, ulcers are caused by a bacterial infection or using too many pain medications, like aspirin or anti-inflammatory drugs.

# 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

A premature baby with medical complications that prevent him from receiving care in a physician's office. An elderly woman recovering from surgery who is unable to leave her home but needs therapy and skilled nursing care to recover. These examples illustrate the wide range of people served by **Gaylene Jeffries** in her role of authorizing home health services. Gaylene is the Home Health RN Program Specialist within the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care.

With the Medicaid program for over 20 years and in her present position for 18 months, she assesses requests for assistance and authorizes Medicaid services for home health agencies, private duty nurses, and special needs nursing facility contracts. Among other duties are identifying opportunities for coordinating Medicaid services within DHHS to avoid duplication and providing consultation on Medicaid rules and regulations.

Gaylene has two computer screens on her desk and uses both when reviewing requests. The current process uses "E-Fax" software that allows her to review faxed messages on a computer screen.

"It's an almost paperless process," she says. "In addition, I often make or receive 20 phone calls a day, and hardly a day goes by that I don't phone or send a note to local DHHS office staff."

It's important to maintain a positive attitude when dealing with so many situations that involve medically fragile people in times of distress. Another challenge is helping clients see home health as one part rather than the whole solution.

"Sometimes people don't realize that they have resources available right in their own communities or even in their own families," Gaylene explains.

Her main reward is coming up with a workable solution for improving a client's situation. The team Gaylene works with most directly to accomplish the work includes another nurse, administrative assistant, Medical Director and supervisor.

"The extended team includes staff members in local offices across the state," Gaylene says. "All of these co-workers are needed to help me do my job well."

Perhaps the part of her job Gaylene enjoys most is assisting someone totally new to the system, who might even confuse the difference between Medicaid and Medicare.



With a phone nestled in her neck and keeping an eye on two computer screens, Gaylene Jeffries stays on top of requests for home and community health services. *Photo: Jerry Crisp*

"That's when I feel I probably make the biggest difference," Gaylene says, "because I'm clarifying a confusing situation and helping them reach a workable resolution."

A recent letter from a grateful service recipient addressed to Director **Vivianne Chaumont** on behalf of the Division of Medicaid & Long-Term Care illustrates that point:

"Since 2006, you have helped me with my illness, and we are so grateful. Without your help, we don't know what we would have done. We thank you from the bottom of our hearts."

"Gaylene is one of the most caring and compassionate people I know," says **Cindy Kadavy**, Gaylene's supervisor. "I have tremendous admiration for her professionalism and her ability to remain calm and courteous when faced with challenging situations. Her desire to ensure that people receive necessary care and services is incredible."

While some of her work consists of assessing eligibility and researching Medicaid policy and procedures, the thrust of everything Gaylene Jeffries does is to help people in stressful situations find the financial assistance they need to achieve a healthier life.

"When I'm able to do that," she says, "then I know that I am putting the DHHS motto of helping people live better lives into action."

# May Observances

May 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

## Vulnerable Adult Awareness Month

In Nebraska last year, there were over 10,000 reports of suspected abuse and neglect of a vulnerable adult. A vulnerable adult is any person 18 or older who has a substantial mental or functional impairment or for whom a guardian has been appointed under the Nebraska Probate Code.

An estimated 4–5% of older persons are physically or sexually abused, neglected, sometimes to the point of death, and financially exploited, often to the point of destitution. These various forms of mistreatment are largely carried out by the victims' own family members or other caregivers—the very people upon whom they must rely for care.

What does abuse, neglect, and exploitation look like?

- Repeated and unexplained injuries and bruises
- Absence of necessities including food, water, heat, eyeglasses, hearing aids, etc.
- Lack of utilities, sufficient space, and ventilation
- Unusual bank account activity
- Items missing from the home
- Lack of personal or medical care.

Adult Protective Services can help. Report suspected abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult by contacting your local DHHS office, your local law enforcement agency, or calling the 24-hour, toll-free abuse and neglect hotline at 1-800-652-1999. To learn more, go to [www.dhhs.ne.gov/hcs/programs/aps.htm](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/hcs/programs/aps.htm).

## Foster Care Awareness Month



In January 2009, almost 2,700 Nebraska children had been removed from their homes and placed in foster care because their families were in crisis, and they couldn't stay at home.

Nebraska is fortunate to have caring foster parents who are ready to welcome these children into their homes. However, more foster parents are needed for children of all ages, special needs and backgrounds, and particularly for teenagers. Foster parents can be single or married, working couples or retirees, renters or home owners, military personnel, and from all ages and income brackets.

If you're interested in helping children who need a temporary, loving home, call 1-800-7-PARENT (1-800-772-7368) to get more information.

## Women's Health Week

National Women's Health Week (May 10-16, 2009) is sponsored by the National Office on Women's Health in partnership with several national, state, and local organizations.

National and local events will include the 10th annual Woman Challenge. This free eight-week challenge encourages women and girls to walk 10,000 steps or get 30 minutes of moderate exercise every day. Participants will receive a pedometer (while quantities last) and tracking log to record their progress. Beginning in April, participants can register online at <http://www.womenshealth.gov/woman/>.

Women's Health Week activities will also include National Women's Checkup Day on Monday, May 11, 2009. The day is dedicated to encouraging women to visit health care professionals to receive or schedule a checkup and promoting regular checkups as vital to early detection of many diseases. More information is available at <http://www.womenshealth.gov/whw/check-up-day/>.

For more information, or if you would like to sponsor an event for National Women's or Men's Health Week, please contact Andrea Wenke at (402) 471-2772 or [andrea.wenke@nebraska.gov](mailto:andrea.wenke@nebraska.gov).



## Older Americans Month

By 2030, one in every five Americans will be age 65 or older. Although the risk of disease increases with advancing age, poor health is not an inevitable consequence of aging.

Many illnesses, disabilities and even death associated with chronic disease are preventable. Prevent or control chronic disease by adopting healthy habits such as regular exercise, good nutrition, and avoidance of tobacco.

Americans of all ages and backgrounds can celebrate Older Americans Month. Contact your local Agency on Aging and volunteer for activities in your area; promote community, state, and national efforts to serve older adults; and find ways to enrich the lives of older adults who touch your life.

Additionally, actively search out ways you can involve your community's older adults in volunteer efforts, allowing them to share their wisdom and energy. By working together, we can improve the health and well being of our nation's older adults and pave the way for better health as we age.

# In their own words

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

EDITOR'S NOTE: The following letter was published in the on-line version of the Kearney Hub <http://www.kearneyhub.com/site/news.cfm?brd=268>, February 28, 2009:

THANKS, YRTC HELPERS

The cranes are here so it must be spring. Birdwatchers and other visitors are migrating along with the cranes to this part of Nebraska.

Rowe Sanctuary is getting busier. I was there Wednesday and saw a group of young men from the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center volunteering to get Rowe ready for the season.

In no time at all, the boys had a fresh coat of paint on a recently remodeled viewing blind. I have never seen a more energetic and enthusiastic bunch, and so polite. Afterwards they were treated to a nature walk and some bird watching.

Thanks, guys, for your help, and thanks to YRTC teacher John Murphy for once again exposing a challenged group of youths to the wonders of nature.

**Alan Bartels**  
Farwell, Nebraska

Dear **Judy Walters** (Social Service Supervisor, DHHS Ainsworth office):

I work with the ladies in Ainsworth on a regular basis, as we share a lot of clients. I have worked with many HHS offices over the years, and I just want you to know that consistently these women have shown great concern, caring, courtesy and a true desire to help clients and those working with them to become self-sufficient.

Even my supervisor, who covers when I am gone, commented about how great they are to work with. I really appreciate their efforts and just want you to know. I am so lucky to be able to work them for the benefit of our clients.

**Angela Tyrrell**  
Employment Specialist  
Vocational Rehabilitation Services  
Nebraska Department of Education  
Norfolk, Nebraska

Dear **Melissa Haecker** (Program Specialist in the Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care):

I wanted to take a minute to thank you for all your help and guidance. Your patience with me has been particularly kind, and I wanted to let you know it didn't go unnoticed. Not many times is someone willing to take the time to teach and give of themselves.

Anyway, just wanted to say thanks again!

**Krista Medearis, R.N.,**  
Director of Nursing  
Willingham Health Services

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

# Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state



## CHEERS FOR OUR PEERS RECOGNITION EVENT

The Central Office Recognition Committee and other helpful volunteers popped popcorn for DHHS employees at the State Office Building, the Gold's Building and the 220 Building in Lincoln on March 25 and 26. It was the Committee's way of saying "thanks" for all employees do.

(Above) Committee members **Renee Faber** and **Dianna Seiffert** (left to right facing camera) dispense popcorn and encourage employees to write and post notes of appreciation about their co-workers. (At right) **Luetta Sinner**, Staff Assistant in Operations' Support Services, reads some of those notes of appreciation.

*Photos: Jerry Crisp*

DHHS Service Areas and 24-hour facilities recognize employees in unique ways, too, and *Connections* wants to hear about them. Send in your photos and stories, and we'll publish as many as we have room for.

To learn more about employee recognition, visit the DHHS recognition Website at <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/hur/recognition>.



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.



# Celebrating People in Action

National Volunteer Week | April 19 – 25, 2009

The theme for National Volunteer week is “Celebrating people in Action.” The theme captures the meaning behind this signature week - honoring the individuals who dedicate themselves to taking action and solving problems in their communities. The total benefit to DHHS is approximately \$1.6 million a year!

National Volunteer Week or any other week presents an opportunity for everyone to celebrate the ordinary people who accomplish extraordinary things through service to others. DHHS employees are grateful to all those who help them *help people live better lives.*

**DHHS VOLUNTEER HONORED:** One of many DHHS volunteers across the state is **Paul Beck**. Among volunteer duties he provides for the Seward office is delivering hot meals to DHHS clients. Beck delivers the meals to those eligible to have meals paid for through the Social Service Aged and Disabled Program, as part of a contract with Seward Memorial Hospital which prepares the meals. (Above left) Beck delivers a hot meal to **Marie Coufal**. *Photo: Brenda Coonrod*

“One week each month, Paul delivers meals to clients who live in Seward,” says **Brenda Coonrod**, Resource Development/Volunteer Coordinator for Butler, Polk, Seward and York Counties. “For a few hours each month, He also answers the phone, takes messages, and greets customers. Paul loves volunteer work and always has a positive, happy attitude.”

Beck volunteered a total of 111 hours last year, 90 of them delivering meals and 21 of them helping front office staff.

(Above right) Paul Beck (center) is honored by the DHHS Seward office in March as Southeast Service Area Volunteer of the Month. Shown with Beck are **Mike Baumfalk**, Resource Development Supervisor, and **Brenda Coonrod**. *Photo: Rose Harnly*

Thanks to all DHHS volunteers, and thanks to DHHS employees who volunteer in their communities!



# Celebrating National Nurses Week!



National Nurses Week begins each year May 6th and ends May 12th - **Florence Nightingale's** birthday. National Nurses Day is celebrated on the Wednesday within National Nurses Week.

If you have ever been hospitalized or in need of health care, you probably recognize the huge role that nurses play in keeping people healthy, assisting with recovery from illness or injury, and providing support at the beginning and end of life. National Nurses Week or any other week is a good time to show our appreciation for their skills and dedication to the well-being of others.

DHHS has many nurses serving in 24-hour facilities, program areas and offices. Next time you see one, say thanks!