

# CONNECTIONS

August 2014 VOLUME 14, ISSUE 8

*Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together*

## DHHS Employees of the Year for 2014

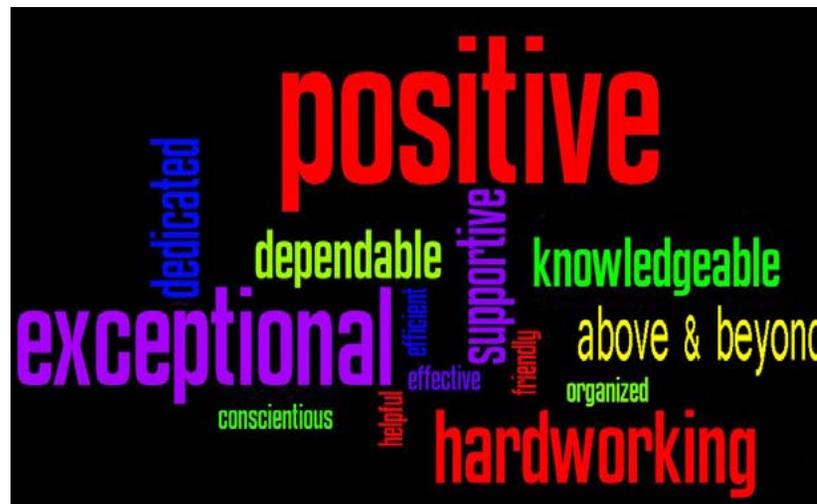
**Kris Azimi**, IT Business Systems Analyst/Coordinator, Medicaid & Long-Term Care, Lincoln  
**Bryson Bartels**, Legislative Coordinator, Director's Office/Communications & Legislative Services, Lincoln  
**Nichole Bouc**, DHHS Resource Developer, Children & Family Services, Southeast Service Area, Lincoln  
**Lynn Chelewski**, Training Specialist I, Developmental Disabilities, Beatrice State Developmental Center  
**Joan DeVries**, Safety Specialist, Behavioral Health, Lincoln Regional Center  
**Staci Ellermeier**, DD Service Coordinator, Developmental Disabilities, Ainsworth  
**Leona Groskopf**, Accounting Clerk II, Western Nebraska Veterans' Home, Scottsbluff  
**Kathleen Jankowski**, Child/Family Services Specialist, Children & Family Services, Eastern Service Area, Omaha  
**Susan Jensen**, Child Care/Services Inspection Specialist, Public Health, Grand Island  
**Danielle Larson**, Youth Counselor I, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center, Geneva

**Catherine Liberty**, Social Services Lead Worker, Medicaid & Long-Term Care, Falls City  
**Kelly Ostrander**, Administrative Assistant II, Behavioral Health, Lincoln  
**Mary Schwanke**, Social Services Worker, Children & Family Services, Fremont Customer Service Center  
**Angela Weis**, DHHS Staff & Partnership Development Systems Consultant, Operations/Human Resources & Development, Omaha  
**Elaine Wessendorf**, Switchboard Operator/Receptionist, Norfolk Veterans' Home

## DHHS Supervisors of the Year for 2014

**Denise Brill**, Social Services Supervisor, Children & Family Services, Scottsbluff Customer Service Center  
**Kim Collins**, DHHS Program Analysis and Research Administrator, Operations/Financial Services, Lincoln  
**Denise Drake**, Child Support Enforcement Supervisor, Children & Family Services, Lincoln  
**Dwana Flaig**, Social Services Supervisor, Medicaid & Long-Term Care, McCook  
**Catherine Gekas Steeby**, DHHS Administrator II, Medicaid & Long-Term Care, Lincoln

**Travis Harms**, Youth Security Supervisor, Behavioral Health, Hastings Regional Center  
**Howard Isaacs**, Health Program Manager II, Public Health, Lincoln  
**Jennifer Jennings**, Certified Master Social Worker Supervisor, Behavioral Health, Lincoln Regional Center  
**Deborah Kosmicki**, DD Service Coordination Supervisor, Developmental Disabilities, Omaha  
**John McArthur III**, Principal-West Kearney High School, Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center, Kearney  
**David Meyer**, Mental Health Security Specialist III, Developmental Disabilities, Beatrice State Developmental Center Bridges Program, Hastings  
**Rhonda Sherman**, Nursing Director/Associate, Grand Island Veterans' Home  
**Paul Thober**, Certified Master Social Worker Supervisor, Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home, Bellevue  
**Leo Vestecka**, Warehouse Manager, Director's Office/Information Systems & Technology, Lincoln  
**Rickie Wynne**, Child/Family Services Specialist Supervisor, Children & Family Services, Western Service Area, Gering



# Stay Connected on



## make the connection . . .

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

Medicaid and Long-Term Care  
 Division Director:  
 position is currently vacant

Public Health Division  
 Director/Chief Medical Officer:  
**Dr. Joseph Acierno**

Veterans' Homes Division  
 Director:  
**John Hilgert**

Chief Operating Officer:  
**Matt Clough**

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## [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](mailto:Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov).

## Homepage Homeruns

### [Keeping Cool this Summer! Here's One Squirrel's Trick, July 21](#)

Seen on the Lincoln Regional Center's campus. Photo below by **Tary Paris**.

Squirrels have several ways of chilling out on warm days. For one thing, they are more active in the morning and at dusk, making sure they avoid the hottest part of the day. During those stifling afternoon hours, they rest, which keeps them from overheating. Squirrels may also press themselves against the ground or a thick horizontal tree branch, stretching out so they are flat like a pancake.

This position helps to refresh them, especially when they rest against a cool surface, such as a shaded path.



### [BSDC Campus Blooms, July 18](#)

**"There are always flowers for those who want to see them" Henri Matisse**

These "Campus Bloom" photos and quote appeared in the July issue of the "Hub," a publication for DHHS employees at the Beatrice State Developmental Center. Our thanks to **Robin Curry**, Security Communications Shift Supervisor, for putting this publication together and for taking the flower photos.



### [Norfolk Veterans' Home Employees Donate to Tornado Relief Fund, July 9](#)

DHHS employees at the Norfolk Veterans Home contributed to the 14-county Northeast Nebraska Tornado Relief Fund in a big way. Through hard work, determination and creative funding for extra jeans days, staff raised a total of \$465 for this important cause.

**Linda Sparr**, Norfolk Veterans Home, wanted to share this information because she said she is awfully proud of her coworkers for their generous giving.

"We far surpassed what anyone could have guessed would be our total," she said.

### [Donations for Pilger, June 30](#)

**Patricia Ferguson**, Staff Assistant, Fremont Customer Service Center, writes...

The people of Pilger and surrounding communities have such a need for assistance to try to recover after facing unimaginable losses from tornadoes and severe weather. **Rhea Metschke**, Social Services Worker at the Fremont Customer Services Center, like many others, wanted to do her part to help the community of Pilger. Through her initiative and hard work, the Fremont Customer Service Center staff came together and the outpouring of donations was amazing.

DHHS employees at the Fremont Customer Service Center have already donated many supplies to Pilger and continue to support the community with a second load of items.



Pictured from left, are **Rachelle Christy**, Unit Manager; **Katherine Becker**, Unit Manager; and **Rhea Metschke**, Social Services Worker—all from the Fremont Customer Services Center.

### [MLTC Employees in Omaha Help Those Affected by Recent Storms, June 25](#)

In response to the recent tornadoes in Pilger and the surrounding communities, DHHS employees at the Omaha office of Medicaid and Long-Term Care filled a vehicle with donations. Nearly 600 bottles of water were donated, along with toiletry items, food, flashlights, and much-needed Gatorade for the survivors and volunteers who have been working tirelessly since the tornado struck.

We're proud of our coworkers! This is just another example of DHHS employees helping people live better lives on and off the job. Way to go!

# The Good Life:

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



The State's 2014 Charitable Giving Campaign is well under way. This year's slogan, "Over 400 ways to change a life...find one that speaks to you!" refers to the 400+ charitable organizations throughout Nebraska that count on our donations to help them serve those in need.

Dollars raised by this campaign stay in our state and forever impact the lives of our family, friends, coworkers, neighbors

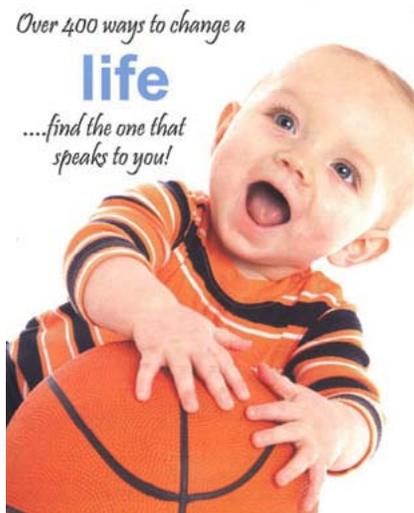
and communities. An example still fresh in my mind is the disaster relief work taking place in Beaver Crossing, Pilger and surrounding areas. Organizations supported by our Charitable Giving Campaign immediately provided disaster relief after tornadoes devastated these communities this spring.

The Red Cross, United Way, the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, Lutheran Family Services and more were on hand to support victims, first responders and the many volunteers helping those communities recover and rebuild. Those organizations and the important disaster relief they provide is a meaningful and direct example of our Charitable Giving Campaign contributions at work.

Our fundraising efforts here take place whenever there is a need, not only during the Charitable Giving Campaign. When people need help, we go above and beyond the job to provide whatever assistance we can. When the tornadoes devastated Nebraska communities this spring, several people donated supplies and money to the communities hit the hardest. It was inspiring to read the stories on the employee website.

If you want to donate to worthwhile organizations all year long, the State's Charitable Giving Campaign is the way to go. It's easy—all you have to do is

complete, sign and return your pledge card to your coordinator. And, it's convenient, too, because your donations come directly from your paycheck.



The campaign runs through August 29, and there are many opportunities left to donate. The [DAS Charitable Giving Campaign website](#) has more information. From bake sales to golf outings...find an idea that speaks to you.

*On a separate, but related note...* Since September is national preparedness month, and I've already mentioned the tornadoes and response work in Beaver Crossing and Pilger, I thought it would be a good time to talk about emergency preparedness.

After emergencies, like the tornadoes this spring, DHHS employees are always

on the scene working with other state and local agencies to provide recovery and relief efforts. We ensure there is safe drinking water; check on facilities the agency licenses; connect people to behavioral health; and provide information on available resources. Those who do emergency planning work always keep planning and response at the top of their "to do" lists.

What about you? What plans do you have in place to keep you and your family safe during a disaster? Emergency planning starts at home. There are things you can do to help become better prepared when disaster strikes. A good place to start is to:

- **Learn about risks and responses.** [Ready.gov](#) is a good resource for information about what to do before, during and after an emergency.
- **Make a Plan.** Work together with family, friends and neighbors.
- **Build an emergency supply kit.** Keep enough supplies on hand for you and those in your care. Think about what you need to do to maintain your health, safety and independence.
- **Get involved in preparedness in your community.**

As always, thanks for all you do every day to help Nebraskans live better lives.

## What Happened to You? Not, What's Wrong with You.

By Marla Augustine

No one asked Anna what happened to her.

They asked her what was wrong with her, but not what happened to her.

Dr. Ann Jennings was a speaker at this spring's behavioral health conference in Lincoln. Anna was her daughter.

Anna was a trauma survivor before the serious effects of trauma were known. She was sexually abused as a child by a caregiver for four years. But her mother didn't know.

At the age of 15, Anna entered the mental health system and stayed in it for

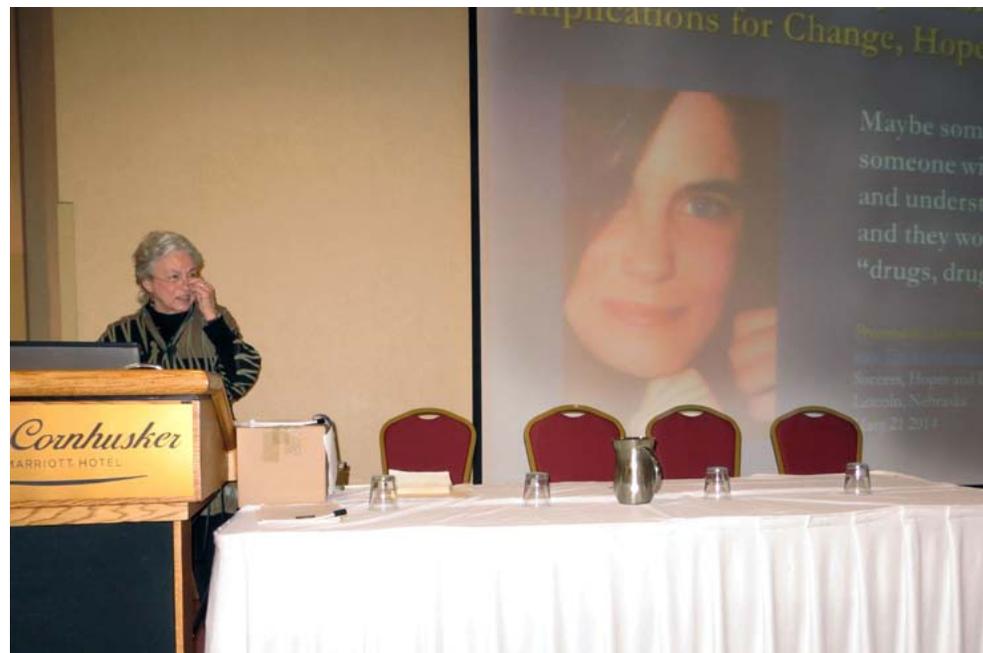
17 years, 11 of them in institutions. The drugs they gave her didn't help.

At the age of 23 Anna discovered that she wasn't the only one in the world to be sexually abused. She identified herself then as having post-traumatic stress disorder, but no one would listen. No one had trauma training back then.

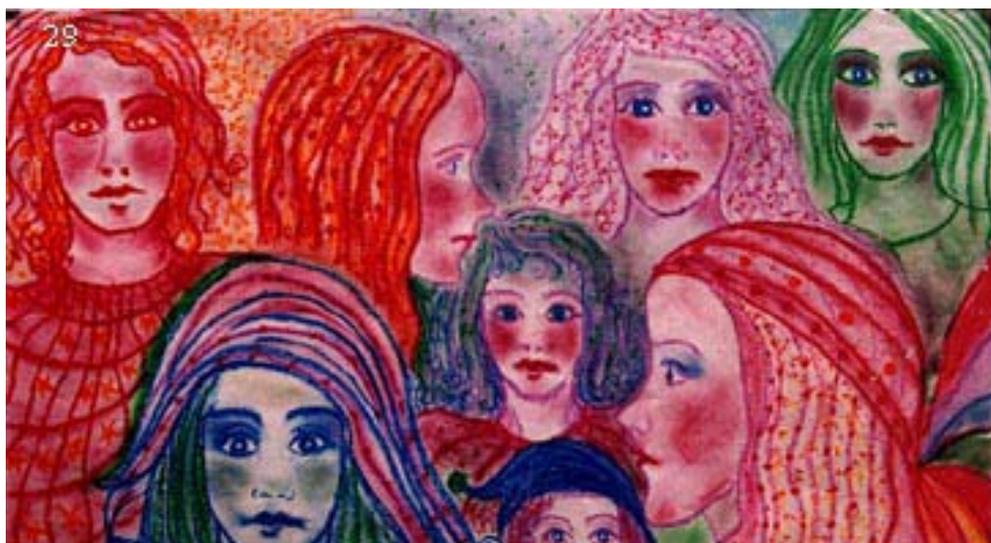
Anna committed suicide at the age of 32 while she was in a mental institution.

There were many missed opportunities, Dr. Jennings said, for mental health practitioners and others to have listened to Anna and tried to understand what she was going through.

Teachers, a family doctor, a school social



Dr. Ann Jennings speaks to participants at DHHS' Behavioral Health Conference in May at the Cornhusker Hotel about her daughter Anna. *Photo: Marla Augustine*



Dr. Jennings' daughter Anna was a prolific artist and frequently did self-portraits. The body of her artwork can be viewed [here](#).

worker, a child welfare worker, family, friends, a psychiatric nurse, a therapist, a psychiatrist—all failed to recognize the effects of trauma.

Today it's recognized that trauma can have serious impacts on mental and physical health. Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), like Anna had, disrupt brain development and lead to depression, anxiety, impaired memory and problems with trusting relationships. ACEs can result in substance abuse, obesity, physical inactivity, self-injury and suicide.

"Early intervention and trauma-informed treatment might have helped her," Dr. Jennings said. "We need a shift in paradigm from 'what's wrong with you' to 'what's happened to you.' This will lead to compassion and understanding and help make survivors stronger at the broken places."

"Dr. Jennings' sharing of Anna's story shows her commitment to creating awareness of adverse childhood experiences and resulting trauma," said **Scot L. Adams**, director of DHHS' Division of Behavioral Health. "We can learn a lot from Anna's story."

## Send All Your **Gremlins** P.A.C.K.ing. Here's How!

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

Do you ever feel like you have a devil on one shoulder and an angel on the other? Is your devil telling you what to do? Or worse yet, what you can't do? How about that angel? Does it tell you to do it all, to achieve and to excel, to the point of exhaustion? As unique as we each are, it is not uncommon to experience internal conflict.

This little voice is like a gremlin inside us trying to sabotage our plans. We might have a great idea but then talk ourselves out of trying. The angel represents positivity and the devil represents the opposite. Together they can be used to explain how we determine and practice our character.

Be brave! You can do anything you set your mind to. Our internal voices can be there for protection and validation. We don't have to let them define us, but to cheer us on! Self-awareness helps us consider our options so we can do what

we feel is right.

Today, if I gave a PCC (Person-Centered Care) test, we would all score 100 percent! PCC is the same as the Golden Rule, and we all know what that means: treat others as you wish to be treated. So what gets in our way of practicing all 45 Behaviors?

Instead of talking yourself out of what you know is right for you, seize control. The magic is NOT letting the gremlins decide for you, but to "send them P.A.C.K.ing" as Valerie Cherneski, a professional coach, defined in this fun concept.

### **P = PERSONIFY**

Give your gremlin a name. Is You-Might-Fail-Frieda talking you out of pursuing your dreams? How about Perfectionist-Paul? Does he make you think if things aren't going to be perfect, why try anyway? Naming your gremlin gives you a voice.

Acknowledgement gives you power. Here at the Lincoln Regional Center, we

have made our gremlins out of craft supplies and shared stories about them with each other. Who gets to decide? We do!

### **A = ADMIT**

By admitting the truth, you will learn a lot about your values. Why is Sad-Sam appearing now of all times? If Cheese-Louise is telling you to not exercise because it will take time away from your work or your family, that might be your mind indicating to you one of your values. You know that exercise will improve your health, and being healthy for your work and family are your values. That means you can ignore that gremlin and just tell her thanks for letting you know how important you feel your family is: message received.

### **C = CHALLENGE**

Challenge Miss-Sassy-Pants. Tell her you ARE going to spend some time exercising because it's time well

invested. Your health and happiness will make you a more efficient person that can be stronger for your family as well as a positive role model for time management and fitness. You aren't going to just talk about it; you are going to do it! Tell Negative-Nelly you're going to get smelly, and go work out!

### **K = KICK**

Finally, it's time to kick Grumpy-Gus out of your way! You are going to put that gremlin in a box, and close the lid. He's going to sit right over there while you are on your way to achievement. He won't like it, and that's ok. A little discomfort now will reward you later. When you are the one making the decisions, not your gremlin, you can take all the credit, too. If a gremlin whispers in your ear, visualize slamming the door between you. Science says your brain doesn't know the difference between imagination and reality. Visualization is VERY powerful! Your brain will learn what you teach it.



## Building a Culture Where Respectful Disagreement is Valued

*“If you have learned how to disagree without being disagreeable, then you have discovered the secret of getting along—whether it be business, family relations or life itself.” Bernard Meltzer*

By Richard Mettler,  
Human Resources and Development



Considering the important decisions made in our workplace every day, it is understandable, in fact desirable, that we in DHHS have our occasional disagreements. Disagreement

happens when people see things differently, from different perspectives. The good news here is that when disagreeing, people are exchanging ideas about what’s best for DHHS, the work we do, and the public we serve.

The problem is not that people disagree from time to time. The problem is in how we sometimes express our disagreements. It’s common for people to equate disagreement with interpersonal conflict, and then behave accordingly when discussing an alternative perspective or a differing opinion. This promotes a competitive, win-lose mindset about disagreements, where we feel the need to defend our thoughts as though they are under attack.

In reality, building a culture where respectfully-discussed disagreement is valued is a powerful way to prevent interpersonal conflict. People commonly fall into conflict when free, open and constructive communication is stifled and replaced with guarded, calculated and defensive exchanges. In time, this can result in a mutual seething silence—one form of interpersonal conflict.

In a culture of respectful disagreement, full and meaningful discussion becomes the norm, with greater creativity and improved planning and problem solving by getting everyone’s thoughts out in the open. After all, when people work together, it’s not agreement that should be the immediate goal, but the best ideas.

### Tips on Voicing Disagreement

- First and foremost, remember that respectful disagreement is never personal. You are not disagreeing with the other person, you are presenting another point of view.
- Listen to be sure that you genuinely understand what the other person is saying. Hear the other person out. For example, say, “I’d like to learn more about your thinking on this.”

- Respectfully ask the person, “Why is this important to you?” or, “What does this mean to you?” This validates the other person and invites a deeper conversation. You will likely gather important additional information that you otherwise would not have.
- Find points on which you and the other person agree or have common ground. You might say something like, “I think overall we want the same thing.” “I think we agree on several points. I’d like us to work together to come to agreement on the rest.”
- Finally, be a good team player. If everyone else is behind an idea that doesn’t happen to be your preferred choice, ask yourself if you truly have a disagreement important enough to voice.



Please email your thoughts, concerns, or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships to [Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov](mailto:Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov). I will email you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your idea in a future column.



DHHS’ It’s My Life! Conference is Sept. 22-24 in LaVista. The conference is geared toward people with developmental disabilities, their parents or guardians, service providers, community professionals, state staff and others working with or interested in serving people with developmental disabilities.

Highlights of the conference include keynote presentations by Cathy Ficker Terrill, Frank Pastizzo and Eustacia Cutler. Breakout sessions will address a wide variety of subjects within five general tracks—behavioral, habilitation, health, leadership and therap. There will be also be evening sessions of special interest to self-advocates and parents or guardians, artistic expressions by Nebraskans with developmental disabilities, exhibits by organizations and companies specializing in DD, and lots of opportunities for networking.

### Learn more:

- [One page conference flyer](#)
- [Registration booklet](#)
- [Register for the Conference.](#)

Contact: Russell Fralin at 402.223.6827.

# Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

## Dean Cole Receives Kenneth Kimball Award

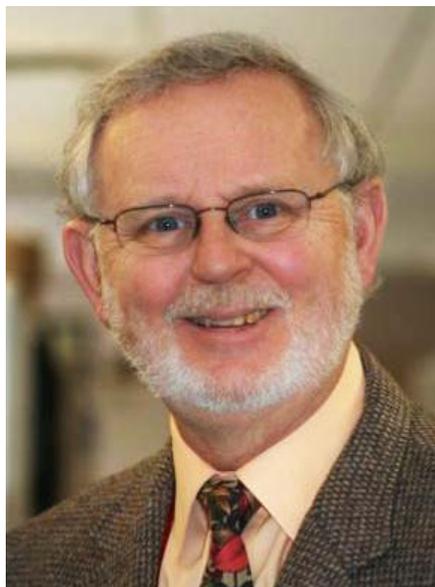
**Dean Cole**, EMS/Trauma Program Manager, was awarded the Kenneth Kimball Award at the annual Emergency Medical Services (EMS) conference in Kearney in July. The Kenneth Kimball Award is given to a person who has played an important role in improving the quality of the EMS system throughout Nebraska.

Dean started his career in EMS in 1976 when he took his first EMT-A training. In 1988, Dean started working for the state as the metro EMS specialist. He is currently the EMS/Trauma Program Manager in DHHS' Division of Public Health, a position he has held since 1994.

Dean has been intricately involved with many important programs such as Critical Incident Stress Management, EMS for Children, Medi-Tedi and the Trauma Program, to name a few. Dean continues his involvement with many boards, conferences and trainings, promoting and improving EMS and assisting EMS personnel throughout the state every day.

Letters came in from all over Nebraska nominating Dean for this award. Here are some of the comments received.

- "I simply cannot think of an individual who has done more to promote, encourage and enhance EMS in Nebraska."



- "Dean has earned the respect and gratitude of coworkers and peers as well as every first responder, EMT and paramedic."
- "Dean has always risen to the demands placed before him, working diligently and tirelessly to support the state's EMS professionals."
- "Dean's commitment and contributions to enhance the Nebraska EMS system and improve patient outcomes is commendable."

Way to go, Dean! Thanks for all of your hard work and dedication to Nebraska's EMS program.

## Immunizations: Important for Babies, Adults and Every Stage in Between

By Sara Morgan  
Program Manager, Immunizations

August is National Immunization Awareness Month, and DHHS is using this opportunity to highlight the importance of immunizations, one of the top 10 public health accomplishments of the 20th Century, according to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention.

While immunizations have significantly reduced the incidence of many serious infectious diseases, vaccination rates for some diseases are not meeting national public health goals. And we need to remind people that immunizations aren't just for children. They are needed throughout our lifetime.

Many people may not know what the current recommendations are for immunizations because those recommendations have changed over the years. Currently there are more recommendations for adolescents and young adults, including vaccines to prevent meningitis and cancer. In addition, many adults need vaccines to prevent tetanus, pertussis, shingles and pneumococcal disease. Finally, everyone should get a flu shot on an annual basis.

Talk to your provider to find out if you are current with your vaccinations, or if you have questions about which vaccines are needed for you or your family.



# 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.

**Ruth Jones** (Social Services Worker, Lexington Customer Service Center),

**Brenda Kincanon** (Social Services Worker, Fremont Customer Service Center), and

**Jenny Rappley** (Social Services Lead Worker, Omaha),

The greeting card read... *Can't thank you enough for being so kind, your thoughtfulness will be remembered for quite a long time! Thanks again!*

I would like to thank all who helped me with my phone application and who helped me get approved for Medicare Part B premiums.

**A Thankful Client**

**Jana Peterson** (Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Kearney),

Thank you, Jana, for allowing us to hold our YMCA Summer Adult Boot camp at your facility's Confidence Course.

What an incredible experience! We appreciated the opportunity to use the Confidence Course and could not have done it without the amazing YRTC staff and residents. The boys who were on the course demonstrated maturity and teamwork. Our adults were relying on their help to get through the course, and the youth encouraged and helped them out so much along the way! I know the adults were very impressed with what they saw in the kids, and what a great way for the boys to give back to the community. What a great group of kids!

**Fitness & Wellness Manager, Kearney Family YMCA**

Regarding **Patty Callahan**, Child Support Enforcement Worker, North Platte):

*A coworker received a telephone call at the Child Support Enforcement Call Center for Patty Callahan.*

The customer wanted to thank Patty so much! She said she just got paperwork from Hawaii stating that her child support had increased. She wanted Patty to know that she really appreciates her and all her efforts in helping her.

**A Grateful Customer**

**Janie Bryer** (Social Services Worker, Grand Island),

The greeting card read... *You've helped out in so many ways. Your time, your effort, and, most of all, you, are very appreciated.*

Janie, Thank you for all your help on my son and I's case. I hope one day we will get to meet you.

Best wishes,

**A Thankful Client**

**Rajeana Harris** (Community Support Specialist, Lincoln),

I had a phone message from a woman with the Society of St. Vincent DePaul in Lincoln.

She said that because of you going above and beyond, a mother and her two children will not be homeless this weekend. Your help made this possible.

Your contribution helped this family live a better life.

Thank you!

**Jill Schreck, Deputy Director – Economic Support, Children & Family Services**

**Nicole Britten** (Child and Family Services Specialist, Lincoln),

*I am finding you to be the speediest and most efficient CFS worker there is. I hope we can work together on any complaints assigned to me. Keep up the good work.*

**From a DHHS Coworker in Developmental Disabilities**



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