Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

December 2009
VOLUME 9, ISSUE 12

November's National Adoption Month was celebrated in multiple loctions across Nebrasaka with a theme of "Heroes...Today and Tomorrow." Here, 2-year-old **Miley** places a balloon hat on adoptive mother **Michelle Lusero** in Omaha.

Douglas County celebrated its 10th year of this event, finalizing 44 adoptions on November 21. The Balloon Brigade was on hand, along with face-painting, air brush tattoos, a magician/juggler, a stilt walker, some Star Wars Storm Troopers and the Cat in the Hat. *Photo: Carrie Hauschild.* More inside.

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DHHS now on twitter

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.

Go to the DHHS Intranet home page, and click on "DHHS In The News" for links to Omaha World-Herald and Lincoln Journal Star articles updated daily involving DHHS programs and services.

DHHS Gets Dental Health Grant for Children	November 25
Annual Report Shows How DHHS Helps People Live Better Lives	November 9
Adoptive Parents Change Lives - November is National Adoption Month	November 2

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

make the connection . . .

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

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

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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.

H1N1 Update:

More H1N1 Flu Resources at Your Fingertips

DHHS Flu Information Hotline: Questions about the flu? Call the DHHS Flu Information Hotline at 1-888-541-5668 or 402-471-2579. Specialists are available to assist you Monday through Friday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Central time.

Flu Vaccine Clinic Locator: Finding flu vaccine and flu clinics just got easier with the new locator on the DHHS Web site. Go to http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/influenza/clinics.htm and type in your city and state or zip code and click "go." Information along with maps and locations appears within seconds.

H1N1 Self-Evaluation Tool: Feeling sick? Worried it's H1N1? Check out the H1N1 Flu Self Evaluation at http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/H1N1flu/. The self-evaluation provides information about what you can do to take care of yourself and identifies the warning signs of more serious flu symptoms that require medical attention. The H1N1 Flu Self-Evaluation is for people 18 years and up. It's designed for educational purposes only and isn't a substitute for your doctor's advice. The self-evaluation doesn't capture any identifying information and is completely anonymous.

What Pregnant Women Need to Know About H1N1 Flu: A six-minute video discussing what women need to know to protect themselves and their babies from H1N1. The video features our own **Dr. Joann Schaefer** and is available at http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/H1N1flu/ .

The Good Life

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

By CEO Kerry Winterer

Once again, I want to thank all of you who responded to the Five Star Metric Employee Satisfaction Survey earlier this month.

On December 16, I shared in an email the average score received for each of the survey statements. I also want to give you the actual number of responses received for each survey selection. This is in the table on the following page.

We're still reviewing the data and comments, but some preliminary conclusions can be made. For example:

- You clearly care about your co-workers, you have pride in what you do, and you believe the work you do makes a difference. These are excellent attributes of any work force, and this is something each and every one of you should celebrate!
- It's clear that communication is not as good as it could be.
- Many aren't sure that anything will change because of the survey results.
- Caring, genuine feedback and thanks for a job well done are not happening as frequently as you would like.

What are our next steps? The survey has provided a lot of information for us to digest. For starters, we'll continue to review the data and the comments, and that will take some time; however we can all begin addressing some things now.

Changing a culture must begin at the top, but it can only happen through the commitment of everyone. Let's begin today. I can assure you that the Directors and I will be doing the same.

Take some time today to thank one of your co-workers, or even your supervisor or manager, for something they've done that impresses you. If you are a decision-maker, take more time to explain the decisions you make, even if they seem clear to you. Begin conversations with your team members and look for opportunities to make DHHS a better place to work. These may seem like small things, but we all know that little things matter and small things add up.

Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

In the New Year, let's remember that it's important to support each other, in many ways, as we take care of those whose lives we touch through our work.

Thank you all for the work you do each and every day.

The following chart shows results of employee responses to the Five Star Metric Survey. We had a 61% response rate, meaning 3,530 employees responded out of the 5,825 sent.

Five Star Metric Survey for DHHS -- 2009

(data as of 12/15/09 -- 3,530 responses)

score values	100	80	60	40	20	0	
	strongly agree responses	agree responses	slightly agree responses	slightly disagree	disagree responses	strongly disagree	average score
I care about the people I work with.	1457	1671	324	27	7	7	86
I have pride in what I do.	1683	1393	308	61	28	12	86
The work I do makes a difference.	1514	1356	538	62	41	14	84
I thank people at work for what they do.	1126	1874	405	58	17	6	83
I am open and honest at work.	997	1739	540	135	55	20	80
I give the people I work with caring and helpful feedback.	608	2158	644	56	18	6	79
I am provided challenges at work.	909	1714	605	126	86	42	78
I know what is expected of me at work.	882	1698	610	159	110	44	77
I share with others what they need to do their work well.	669	1939	648	142	71	17	77
I feel accepted at work.	691	1724	688	197	141	65	74
People I work with have pride in what they do.	796	1360	955	239	143	30	73
I know that people at work care about me.	578	1328	991	280	227	107	68
I laugh frequently and have fun at work.	495	1183	1096	349	247	116	66
I am not micro-managed.	780	1181	624	347	295	282	65
I look forward to going to work.	486	1295	927	382	247	164	65
When I make mistakes at work, they are not held against me.	356	1463	828	392	265	187	64
Learning and growth are encouraged at work.	418	1272	933	428	274	156	64
I can voice my opinions at work.	426	1207	907	404	312	246	62
I get the training and tools I need to do my job well.	333	1171	1051	457	339	163	61
I am thanked for what I do at work.	446	1030	1030	410	360	232	61
Feedback on how I'm doing at work is caring, helpful, and frequent.	414	1005	957	444	445	253	59
My workload is reasonable.	272	1278	712	468	368	386	57
I see good things in my future at work.	356	888	1000	559	355	326	56
Things get done very efficiently at work.	184	872	1147	625	429	235	55
Communication at work is open and honest.	260	878	993	578	459	336	54
We are headed in the right direction at work.	243	831	1061	530	443	390	53
I expect that positive change will take place in response to this survey process.	288	728	988	611	514	348	52
At work, I am kept in the information loop.	164	766	1055	628	480	391	50
At work, I get chances to understand why decisions are the way they are.	190	751	986	670	454	429	50

Adoption Day Heroes (Continued from front cover)

Adoption Day was celebrated in Grand Island on November 21 at Blessed Sacrament Church, where 24 children who have or will be adopted by 18 families this year were recognized. These adoptions were finalized through the DHHS Grand Island office. This year, children adopted in 2006, 2007 and 2008 and their families were also invited. Shown are **Jim** and **Deb Starr** with adopted children, **Alexis** (age "two going on three") and **Mike** (age "four going on five"). *Photo: Marge Creason*

Seven-year-old Riley Bristol was one of nine adoptions finalized at the Adams County Courthouse in Hastings on November 21st—the 5th annual event of happy endings for this community. Among entertainment provided were dance teams from three local high schools. *Photo: Christopher Tierney*

(Continued on next page)

Adoption Day Heroes (Continued)

Adoption Day was observed in Lincoln on November 14 at the juvenile courts in the Hall of Justice when 44 adoptions were finalized. **Judge Thomas Dawson** spoke to the group, followed by jugglers, face-painting and other fun activities.

In one of his weekly columns in November, **Governor Dave Heineman** said, "I especially want to thank the families who have opened their hearts and homes to children in foster care who are looking for forever families. Many of these foster parents have adopted the children in their care. They have made a life-long commitment that will absolutely transform the lives of children in our state.

"I'm pleased that Nebraska courts, advocates, caseworkers and others within the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services are working together to focus on finding permanent homes for the children who need them. Their efforts are evident in the more than 92% increase in adoptions of state wards during the past five years. Last year alone, there were 572 children adopted from foster care in our state. Those adoptions represent the most adoptions of state wards Nebraska has achieved in any year so far."

Shown (l-r) are **Dacoata Nelson**, age 9, and **Kadaysha Lashley**, age 4, who were adopted by **Jayne Triplett**. *Photo: Trevor Baer*

If you would like to make a difference in the life of a child who is a state ward, please call 1-800-7-PARENT for information about becoming an adoptive or foster parent. Adoptive families are needed for approximately 100 children in foster care who are available for adoption and looking for permanent families. Information about many of these children is available online at www.dhhs.ne.gov/adoption/children.htm and www.nebraskaheartgallery.org .

DD Director visits all BSDC homes, all shifts, to help ensure successful team effort in meeting federal standards

By Jerry Crisp

Jodi Fenner, Director of the DHHS Division of Developmental Disabilities (DD), is visiting all campus homes on all three shifts between September and the end of the year. Fenner administers the Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC) and publicly-funded community-based developmental disability services in Nebraska. **Delvin Koch**, Neighborhood Services Administrator, is also participating in these visits.

"I am responsible for ensuring that BSDC achieves and maintains compliance with the Department of Justice and Centers for Medicaid and Medicare requirements, and our front-line staff are an integral part of our compliance efforts," says Fenner. "It's important for me to meet with as many BSDC employees and residents as possible to get a better feel for BSDC strengths and challenges. BSDC is a 24-hour facility and to understand its needs requires its leadership to have a presence on all shifts."

Fenner believes her visits have provided additional assurances of a team effort already underway.

"I am constantly amazed by both the long-term staff we have in BSDC homes and also by the energetic new staff," says Fenner. "But I am most impressed by the team efforts in the homes to provide quality services."

In addition, Fenner will visit every service coordination office in the state in the next few months. Fenner recently began sending weekly e-mail updates to enhance communication with all employees at BSDC and throughout the DD Division.

"Ongoing communication is vital to make sure everyone is on the same page," says Fenner. "It's equally important to encourage a two-way flow of communication between those making policy decisions and those delivering services. Only then can we expect a successful team effort needed to get us to where we need and want to be."

(Continued on next page)

Jodi Fenner (left) and Neighbor Services Administrator **Delvin Koch** chat with Developmental Technician **Rebecca Adams** in the wee hours of the morning during Fenner's recent visits to BSDC campus homes on 3rd shift.
Photo: Greg Butler

Bill West (right) offers to show J**odi Fenner** around his home at 411 State Avenue during her recent visits to 1st shift campus homes. Accompanying Fenner is BSDC Neighborhood Services Administrator **Delvin Koch**.
Photo: Jerry Crisp

During a stop at the 411 State Avenue cottage with West (2nd from right), **Fenner** met other cottage roommates like **Carl Vacanti** (far left) and was updated by direct care provider **Scott Parker** on occupational opportunities individuals enjoy, both on campus and in the community.

During another campus home visit, **Fenner** was charmed by **Gretchen Stauffer's** winning smile and outgoing nature at her 104 Kennedy Boulevard home.
Photos: Jerry Crisp

Full implementation of child welfare and juvenile services reform set for April 2010

By Jeanne Atkinson

Todd Reckling *Photo: Bill Wiley*

Better outcomes for children and families are at the heart of ongoing efforts to reform child welfare and juvenile services provided through the Division of Children and Family Services (CFS).

"Reform focuses on getting children to permanency and reducing the number of children in out-of-home care," said **Todd Reckling**, CFS Director. "For several years, 70% of the children involved with child protective services or Office of Juvenile Services were in out-of-home care. By 2012, we want the total number of wards to be down to 5,000 and we want 70% of the children to get services in their homes."

In November, contracts were signed with five private agencies that will provide in-home, foster care and family services. This allows DHHS to be responsive, more accessible and to have oversight of contractors.

"CFS staff maintain case management, and we're not transferring our cases to the private agencies," Reckling said. "What we're doing is giving the agencies responsibility for day-to-day tasks like arranging for visits and transportation to physician visits. This lets our staff focus on the 'big picture,' like seeing if the outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being are being achieved for each family and working with the courts and Guardians ad litem."

Under the new system, a Child and Family Services Specialist begins the process by completing a safety assessment of the child's situation. If legal or state involvement is needed, the child's family will be referred to one of the private agencies. The child can still become a state ward.

The agencies will serve the following areas:

• Southeast Service Area: About 1,230 families will be transitioned to Visinet, KVC Behavioral Healthcare Nebraska, and Cedars, which has partnered with Lutheran Family Services, Epworth Village, and Christian Heritage. Each of the three agencies will get every third referral.

• Eastern Service Area: About 1,973 families will be transitioned to Visinet, KVC, and Nebraska Families Collaborative, which is a partnership among Boys Town, Child Saving Institute, Heartland Family Service, Nebraska Family Support Network, and OMNI Behavioral Health.

• Central, Northern, and Western Service Areas: Boys and Girls Home caseloads will include 694 in the Central, 447 in the Northern, and 609 families in the Western service areas.

A quick timeline for child welfare and juvenile services reform:

• July 2008: Nebraska's reform began when DHHS moved from having over 100 contracts to contracting with five lead agencies for in-home and safety services to children and families. These services include intensive family preservation, transportation, foster care, family support, parenting education, and supervision of court-ordered visitation.

• September 2008: The next phase kicked off, expanding beyond in-home and safety services to also include non-treatment care, a performance-based approach to contracting for services and requiring lead agencies to provide coordination of services for children and families.

• December 2008: A request for qualifications was released.

• March, 2009: Private agencies were asked to submit implementation plans and negotiations continued.

• October and November 2009: CFS signed contracts valued at $106 million annually with five private agencies to provide a full range of in-home, foster care and family services across the state. The agencies are Cedars, Visinet, KVC Behavioral Healthcare Nebraska, Boys and Girls Home, and Nebraska Families Collaborative.

• Now to April 1, 2010: The transition takes place gradually, with the five lead agencies assuming service coordination and service delivery for children and families.

Behavioral Health Reform made a difference

By Jeanne Atkinson

Scot Adams *Photo: Bill Wiley*

Services for people with a mental illness or substance abuse problems have dramatically improved since passage of LB 1083 in 2004. The reform of behavioral health services focused on reducing an over-reliance on institutional care provided in Regional Centers and increasing and enhancing community services.

"Having more community services, closer to where people live and work, has improved the lives of so many people with a mental illness," said **Scot Adams**, Director of the DHHS Division of Behavioral Health. "All of the changes are based on the belief that wellness and recovery are possible, and that safety, dignity and recovery are real goals that can be achieved."

Adams highlighted some of the results of behavioral health reform since 2004:

- Consumer participation at both the state and local level has never been higher and is increasing. The Division's Office of Consumer Affairs partners with local consumer networks in the behavioral health Regions. Each Region employs a Consumer Specialist as an equal on its management team to support other consumers. This structure is unique to Nebraska.
- More than three-fourths (79.8%) of consumers were satisfied with their level of involvement in treatment planning and 86.3% were satisfied with the services they received, according to the 2009 Behavioral Health Consumer Survey.
- Nebraska's housing-related assistance for people with a severe mental illness and an extremely low income has gone from serving 127 people in FY 2006 to 823 people in FY 2009.
- There are fewer Mental Health Board commitments and fewer Emergency Protective Custody holds since 2004.
- The Regional Centers' hospital readmission rate is less than one-half the national average.
- There are 6,000 more people being served in the community, going from approximately 32,000 served in FY 2004 to almost 38,000 in FY 2009.
- Over $30 million was redirected from Regional Center operational dollars to serve people in community-based services.
- The Division's Office of Children's Behavioral Health was created to work with families and advocates to improve Nebraska's children's behavioral health system.
- The new Network of Care Web site at www.dhhs.ne.gov/networkofcare/ gives consumers, families and providers easy access to treatment resources, advocacy tools, behavioral health research, regional and national Web sites, hotlines and supports.
- The new 64-bed Lasting Hope Recovery Center facility in Omaha offers access to clinical professionals, support staff, and peers 24-hours a day and a consumer council.
- The Division contracted with the Nebraska Coalition of Women's Treatment to create Trauma Informed Nebraska. This statewide, consumer-driven, recovery-oriented project focuses on wellness and recovery for trauma survivors, their families and treatment providers.

Good Things Are Happening!

823 adults with very low income and serious mental illness received state-funded housing related assistance for needs like rent, utility payments, and security and utility deposits in fiscal year 2009. Having stable housing is a key component in living successfully in the community.

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

June Ryan's job isn't herding cats but might seem like it sometimes.

She's the Comprehensive Cancer Control Program Manager within the Division of Public Health who coordinates a statewide partnership of more than 400 individuals representing 160 agencies and groups with a common interest in combating cancer. The program has only two staff members—Ryan and Community Health Educator **Jennifer Dunavan**—and is funded with $255,000 annually from the National Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC).

This is the program's only funding source to tackle more than 100 different kinds of cancer from diagnosis through treatment to end-of-life considerations.

The Nebraska Comprehensive Cancer Control Statewide Partnership Ryan helped build includes partners within DHHS like the Every Woman Matters Program and Tobacco Free Nebraska and partners outside DHHS like local health departments, nursing associations and hospitals.

"What makes my work especially challenging is that the partnership is a voluntary collaboration among people who have other priorities and sometimes even competing interests," Ryan explains. "Hospitals, for example, share a common goal of serving patients but still compete in the marketplace, and my job is to try bring folks like these together to combine and concentrate our efforts."

Ryan took on this tall task seven years ago.

"Nebraska was in the second wave of seven states to receive funding from the CDC in 2001, and I came on the scene a year later as the first full-time manager," says Ryan. "We began by inviting 62 people from many different groups to meet and help formulate an updated statewide plan, and it's a tribute to Nebraskans' willingness to help others that all 62 attended."

June Ryan *Photo: Jerry Crisp*

Going to any lengths to make her point, Ryan crawls inside a large mock-up colon at an Omaha mall to help stress the importance of colon cancer screening. *Photo: Holly Dingman*

The statewide plan these partners developed includes six goals for cancer control in Nebraska: eliminating disparities in both urban and rural areas; primary prevention; early detection and screening; treatment; quality of life and survivorship; and education and training. All of these goals are aimed at developing innovative actions to reduce the impact of cancer on Nebraskans.

As a result of the statewide plan and the collaboration it developed, Nebraska now enjoys several "firsts": first state to bring together the American Cancer Society and the College of Surgeons; first and only state to get 100% of cancer clinics and centers on board; and first state in the nation to identify a goal of eliminating cancer disparities in urban and rural efforts—one of Ryan's many passions.

"My job isn't bringing all of these folks together to tell them what the answers are but rather to build closer working relationships that tap into their expertise and creativity for the benefit of all," says Ryan.

An example of this can be seen in the first annual "Boxer 500" that took place in Omaha last August, part of

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the national "Undie 5,000" marathon, so-called because these are races in which participants run in their shorts.

"At first, I thought this a bit silly," says Ryan, "but it's ultimately a serious way to get businesses and industry even more involved in the battle against cancer.

Since Ryan and **Dr. Alan G. Thorson**, who co-chairs the Statewide Partnership, had no experience in organizing marathons, they turned to industry.

"Dr. Thorson, a runner himself, met **Kelli Sweet** through the Omaha Running Club, and she helped plan the event," Ryan explains.

As a result, $12,000 was raised for colon cancer screening in a single day.

"This shared creativity that benefits all is what it's all about," says Ryan. "There's no limit to what we can achieve when we work together."

Another recent success was the Cancer Bus Caravan across the state in October.

Three 50-passenger buses wrapped in colorful cancer screening and prevention messages began in Omaha, stopping for rallies along the way in Lincoln, Kearney and North Platte, and ending in Scottsbluff in time for the 5th Annual Nebraska CARES Cancer Summit.

The buses were designed not only to increase awareness as rolling billboards on the outside, but inside each bus, discussion leaders facilitated strategic planning sessions with riders as they traveled across the state.

The theme of the bus on which Ryan rode was "Nebraska CARES " (Cancer Awareness, Research Education and Service) as riders offered feedback on the statewide cancer program. The theme for another bus was "Stay in the Game," strategizing decentralized colon cancer screening by engaging local health departments. The theme for the third bus was Every Woman Matters, focused on breast and cervical cancer survivors.

Ryan knows she's on the right track when a partner in the statewide network says, "I've got an idea and wonder if you might be interested in working on it with me."

"That's what it's all about," she says. "I've even had people ask if their organization can contribute some money to the cause, and of course I assure them that they can!"

Many of the grants Ryan seeks and obtains are for community partners.

"Because of this," she says, "you could say that we are among their most effective advocates."

Ryan has seen a lot of progress in the past several years, and she's happy to have made a contribution.

"Over the years, I've seen a lot of silos that divide groups diminish or disappear, and I've been thrilled to be a part of that process," she says. "Above all, I like to think my efforts to build closer collaboration among DHHS and community partners have helped to lessen the burden of cancer on people's lives," says Ryan.

According to **Dan Cillessen**, Administrator of the Health Promotion unit, she has done that.

"June built the Comprehensive Cancer Program from a simple idea to a partnership of more than 400 committed people like her, and there's no doubt that our citizens are healthier because of that dedication."

One of three 50-passenger buses that crossed Nebraska this fall to raise awareness and design strategies to reduce the burden of cancer for all. *Photo: Bill Wiley*

DOCUMENT IMAGING - To boldly scan, store and retrieve where no document has gone before

By Dianna Seiffert

Document imaging – the use of scanners to scan, store and retrieve documents – is the technology DHHS is using to move ACCESSNebraska another step forward. The best part is it's happening right now!

A lot of good things happen when information we need is available to us electronically. Through document imaging:

- Documents can be retrieved instantly when and where they are needed;
- We save time searching for important information;
- Everyone has access to the same information stored in a common place;
- We all save time by not filing paper documents; and
- Customers provide information to DHHS only once.

DHHS launched a document imaging pilot project in the Beatrice local office on November 9. Staff there are scanning existing and new documents and testing the new system by retrieving and viewing stored file information. Network response time is also being tested during this pilot project.

"Using one office as a 'pilot' is good because it helps us make sure the process works before we expand it to the rest of the state," said **Todd Reckling**, Director, Division of Children and Family Services.

Eventually there will be two main Document Imaging Centers, one in Omaha and one in Lincoln. The staff at these centers will scan documents that clients send in the mail and also file paper and electronic applications into N-FOCUS. Although a lot of work has to be done with equipment and staffing, currently these two centers are scheduled to open Fall 2010.

Due to the sheer volume of paper DHHS employees work with and process every day, document imaging will be a big job. For example, approximately 40,000 pages need to be scanned every day to keep up with our case files. That's about 29 million new documents a year! The new scanners can scan both sides of a page at the same time. Our goal is to scan and store documents within 24 hours of receipt so DHHS employees have the information they need in a timely manner.

Along with the main Document Imaging Centers, some local offices will also have scanners. This will allow them to directly scan documents after the case manager has processed them.

Five regional scanning conversion hubs are also being established in order to mass convert the current economic assistance caseloads.

"It's a massive, manual process so it's going to take a lot of time and work," said Reckling. "It may take us six to nine months to completely scan and convert our current case files."

These five scanning hubs, located in Gering, Grand Island, Lincoln, Norfolk and Omaha, will be responsible for converting the case files for their own service area. The first hub will be piloted in Lincoln starting in January, and then we'll move to other locations in February 2010.

Along with the benefits mentioned earlier, document imaging gets us one step closer to universal caseload management.

"Universal caseloads will help us spread the work evenly across the state," said Reckling. "At DHHS, we're a team of professionals working toward a common goal. We're in this together. Sharing the load is the right thing to do."

Ready for document imaging?

For those who work with economic assistance cases, here are some tips to keep in mind when you're preparing files for the document imaging process.

• Start getting rid of unnecessary and duplicate information in clients' folders.

• Date stamp the front of the page, not on the back or on a blank page.

• Use only a yellow highlighter if you need to highlight something on a document. Yellow is the only color that shows through on a scanned document. All other highlighter colors look like black marks.

These tips and more can be found in past issues of ACCESSNebraska's "News and Tips" newsletters on the employee Intranet at: http://www2.dhhs.ne.gov/accessnebraska/index.htm .

Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

By Jerry Crisp

Kathy Karsting

Each year, the Nebraska Chapter of the March of Dimes confers Excellence in Nursing awards for outstanding contributions in the field. Among the 2009 honorees is **Kathy Karsting**, R.N., MPH. Karsting is the School and Child Health Program Manager in the Division of Public Health and serves as the state's school nurse consultant.

Karsting was recognized for seeing the bigger picture for the Nebraska health care system and for demonstrating potential to contribute significantly to the U.S. health care system, particularly in the areas of school and child health in the public arena.

"Kathy has brought the School and Child Health Program up to a higher level," said a nominator. "She traveled across the state last fall and began to bridge school health programs with local health departments and districts. She receives positive feedback from school nurses and is well-respected by her peers."

In her three years in the Division of Public Health, Karsting has provided professional nursing consultation and continuing education events for nursing and other professional audiences on topics related to promotion of child health and educational success. She conducts a telehealth education series for health professionals, moderates a school health professional electronic discussion group, and has developed a school health Webpage at DHHS. She also publishes *Lamplighter*, a newsletter for community health nurses, educators and advocates.

Karsting was previously health services supervisor for Lincoln Public Schools for eight years. A registered nurse for 25 years, most of it in community health settings, she has enjoyed a nursing career as staff nurse, supervisor and administrator in community-based and public health settings in several states, the South Pacific and West Africa. She is a returned Peace Corps Volunteer and former Peace Corps medical officer.

Karsting earned a Bachelor of Arts from Johns Hopkins University in 1980, a diploma in nursing from the Mary Lanning Memorial Hospital School of Nursing in Hastings in 1984, and a Master's degree in Public Health from the University of Minnesota School of Public Health in 1992.

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!

January Observances

Healthy Heart Month

An "obesity epidemic" now threatens public health in the United States. Obesity is generally caused by too many calories eaten and/or too little physical activity. Obesity can lead to several serious and sometimes fatal diseases, including Type 2 diabetes, high cholesterol or triglycerides, heart disease, stroke, hypertension, and some cancers. It is estimated that 14% of deaths from cancer in men and 20% of deaths in women are due to overweight and obesity.

Maintaining a healthy weight can increase life expectancy, quality of life, and physical and mental well-being. As an individual, you can help maintain a healthy weight by eating the recommended number of calories each day and getting regular exercise.

Consult with your physician before making any changes to your diet or beginning a new exercise program. For more information about food choices and appropriate calories, visit www.mypyramid.gov .

DHHS Spirit of Holiday Giving!

We invited DHHS programs, offices and facilities to share holiday traditions, and here are their responses:

CLASSIC CARS, BIKES & SANTAS: Every year employees at the Grand Island Veterans' Home (GIVH) raise money for the Santa fund. The fund was set up to ensure that every GIVH member receives a special holiday gift chosen just for them, and each year staff members enjoy shopping and gift-wrapping for members.

Organizations and clubs raise money all year long to make all of these gifts possible and present checks to the facility at the Home's Classic Car and Bike Show, and a $10 entry fee for cars and motorcycles also goes to the Santa fund. In all, employees raised $6,851 at this year's Car and Bike show. That amount was the most ever! *Photo courtesy GIVH*

HOLIDAYS AT WHITEHALL: Every year, employees in the CEO and Directors' Offices, along with Communication & Legislative Services (CLS), give gifts to the Whitehall boys. The boys make paper ornaments with their wish lists on them, usually asking for video games, DVDs, clothing, CD players and other items. Whitehall is a community residential program for boys age 12 to 17 years located on the Lincoln Regional Center's east campus.

"It's nice to know that kids facing challenges know that people care about them," says **Marla Augustine**, Public Information Officer. "We all want the boys to have a good holiday."

Every year the boys send thank you notes. Last year one of them said, "Thank you. This was awesome! When I get older, I'm going to do something like this and give someone I don't know gifts, like you did."

Personal care items—lotions, lip balm, moisturizing shampoo, etc.—are also gathered for patients at the Lincoln Regional Center.

Marla Augustine and Whitehall Campus Manager **Wooly Wooldridge** place ornaments bearing wished-for gifts for this holiday season. *Photo: Jerry Crisp*

(Continued on next page)

DHHS Spirit of Holiday Giving! (Continued)

If your DHHS work group participates in charitable causes during the holiday season, don't keep your efforts a secret. The ways you give to others might inspire others with the same generous impulses. Send photos and a bit of background information to dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov , and watch for them in next year's installment of the "DHHS Spirit of Holiday Giving!"

BSDC Lady Scouts Spearhead Food Drive:

(At right) Thanks to individuals and staff members across campus like (l-r) Scout **Gretchen Stauffer, Dan Heeley** and Scout **Bernadette Dudgeon** at 104 Kennedy Boulevard on campus who donated $300, BSDC Lady Scouts were able to give 445 food items and $340 to a community food drive for those facing hard times around the holidays.
Photo: Jerry Crisp

(Below) Gathering food donations at various collection points across campus are (l-r) **Karla Bryant** and **Deb Swoboda**, Lady Scout Leaders and food drive coordinators.

The DHHS Spirit of Giving isn't limited to the holiday season. See next page for the "DHHS Spirit of Giving Year-Round!"

DHHS Spirit of Holiday Giving Year-Round

DHHS employees not only give during holidays but throughout the year!

A Tall Tradition

Employees in Economic Assistance and Information Systems & Technology on the 4th floor of the Nebraska State Office Building in Lincoln have been giving for many years, and they like to have fun doing it.

A case in point is the apparently lanky gentleman shown here towering above five-foot cubicle walls.

"I'm a Vietnam veteran so a couple of seasons ago I recommended that our team donate to Operation Uplink that allows GIs to phone home for free," explains **Terry Salyer,** Senior Applications Developer with N-FOCUS. "We rented the Uncle Sam costume and everyone on my team sported a goatee to show support."

Other groups organized fund raisers for other military causes such as the Heartland Fund for Military Families and the USO.

A former electrician, Terry once wore stilts to reach overhead projects and thought the same technique might give his team's cause more noticeable stature.

As it turned out, such methods succeeded in drawing attention and motivating people to donate. The combined groups raised a total of nearly $1,000. *Photo: Rachel Shepherd*

(Continued on next page)

Tradition of giving lives on

A long tradition of giving continues for employees in Economic Assistance and Information Systems & Technology on the 4th floor of the Nebraska State Office Building in Lincoln. This year, this giving group kicked off a drive in November to raise funds for the Lancaster County Food Bank with a chili cook-off.

Chili cook-off winners were: 1st place - Software Mitigation Specialist **Prosper Vanderweijden** (center); 2nd place - Senior Analyst **Omelea Knuth**, both with N-Focus; and 3rd place - Business Systems Analyst **Gregg Shonka** with Operation's Information Systems & Technology. Knuth and Shonka each earned a sack of candy for their efforts, while Vanderweijden received a traveling trophy and an apple pie.

The 4th floor fundraiser continued with Thanksgiving and Christmas food days, after which a check with the grand total raised will be sent to the Lancaster County Food Bank. The ultimate winners, of course, were folks served by the Lancaster County Food Bank. *Photo: Bill Wiley*

Increases to Charitable Giving Campaign show DHHS employees' generosity

In 2008, DHHS employees contributed $97,713 to the Combined Charitable Giving Campaign. In 2009, employees contributed $117,447. That's more than a 20% increase!

Causes served by the campaign include the Community Service Fund, United Way, and Community Health Charities that provides support for numerous charities throughout the state. These organizations provide disaster relief, educational programs, and needed aid for those suffering from chronic illness. Donations stay in Nebraska and support local communities.

These efforts show clearly that DHHS employees help people live better lives both on and off the job and that the spirit of giving truly applies not only during the holiday season but throughout the year.

If your DHHS work group participates in charitable causes outside the holiday season, don't keep your efforts a secret. The ways you give to others might inspire others with the same generous impulses. Send photos and a bit of background information to jerry.crisp@nebraska.gov , and watch for them in the next installment of "DHHS Spirit of Giving Year-Round"!

In their own words

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

Dear **Marian Angelo** (Social Service Supervisor, DHHS Omaha South 31st Street office):

The past couple of years have been increasingly difficult, and state agencies are being asked to do more with fewer resources. I can only imagine how difficult and overwhelming the workloads of caseworkers are with the growing needs and mounting challenges. In spite of obstacles and complexities, **Donna Kudera** has gone out of her way to help my mom in her Medicaid application.

My mom was recently deemed unable to care for herself, and I've been named her permanent guardian. Living out of state and in a different time zone, it's been difficult to set my mom's affairs in order. Until recently, I didn't have most of her important papers and necessary documentation to complete the Medicaid application, but Donna was helpful in suggesting comparable forms and documentation and how to obtain them. She understood the complexities and legal limitations I encountered prior to having guardianship. She extended the application deadline as much as possible to allow us precious extra days to obtain bank records. She found a hard copy of my mom's birth certificate and mailed a hard copy to me. She helped confirm outstanding bills that would be covered by Medicaid and has been in constant communication when we encountered new difficulties.

Above and beyond these small acts, Donna was always gracious, patient and understanding. Donna was a sane voice in an otherwise overwhelming and potentially frustrating process. She's been my most accommodating and helpful contact. In spite of inherent pressures involved, I always felt relieved and positive after speaking with Donna. When I would thank her, she simply replied that it was her job, and she wanted to treat others as she would like to be treated. It's refreshing to know there are still employees who work and live by the Golden Rule!

The family member of a Medicaid client

Dear **Genevieve Sharp** (Eligibility Technician, DHHS Grand Island office):

I want to let you know that I will not be needing any services from DHHS. I was hired the day before I received the paperwork from you. I want to say thank you so much for helping me start the process to get assistance until I became employed. I know your position is a thankless one, but I wanted to let you know how much I appreciated all the work you did for me. It takes special people like you to take on the position that you hold.

You are truly an asset to DHHS. It was a pleasure speaking with you, and you deserve more than a thank you letter.

A Former Applicant

Dear **Dawnette Bredberg** (Nurse Director/Associate, Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home, Bellevue, Nebraska):

I want to thank you for sharing the Oak Ridge Boys' song, "GI Joe and Lillie," with my dad. It was forwarded to me by a friend, and I usually don't pass things like that on, but you were right—it made me think of dad and that generation of men and women.

With the connection in the song with the Veterans Administration, I thought of the work you do with the veterans at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home. Thank you. I believe they are all heroes, and I'm glad they're being provided with such good care.

Bill Rentschler, Jr.

In their own words

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

Dear **Brenda Coufal** (PRAMS Project Coordinator, Lincoln):

On behalf of the Baby Blossom Collaborative (BBC), I am writing to let you know that the Pregnancy Risk Assessment Monitoring System (PRAMS) data has been very helpful to the Prenatal Work Group (PWG). The PWG has been researching best practice for screening and identifying risk factors for pregnant women, as well as the issue of timely entry into care. This includes review of research, articles and Web sites, along with conversations with health care providers and women of child-bearing age.

The review of PRAMS allowed us to shift our emphasis so that we will be able to maximize the health of women of child-bearing age in Douglas County. The benefit of this information will greatly enhance our ability to make a positive impact on our community.

Teresa Eirinberg
Coordinator, BBC Prenatal Work Group
Douglas County Health Department

Dear **Scot Adams** (Director of the DHHS Division of Behavioral Health):

I own a company in Grand Island. Recently I worked with one of your staff, Administrative Assistant **Kelly Ostrander**, and I just wanted to make you aware of what outstanding service she provided my company. She went above and beyond.

I have been working on a problem with receiving a check for services my company provided since May 2009. Kelly followed it through until the end. She was able to contact the company, and today, I finally received the check. She would call me back when she said she would, she would follow through and do what she said she was going to do, and if it wouldn't have been for her, this issue could have gone on forever.

Too many times, people only complain. I just wanted to let you know how much I appreciate Kelly and all that she did.

A Satisfied Customer

Dear **Marilyn Kudera** (Social Service Supervisor, DHHS Norfolk office):

I want to compliment one of your caseworkers, Social Service Worker **Peggy Garrod**. She made a process very easy for me, and I don't think the caseworkers hear a lot of compliments. I want to say what a thorough job she has done helping me out and how polite she is.

She is very accessible every time I call, whether first thing in the morning or last thing in the afternoon. She is able to either answer my call or get right back to me in a timely manner. I have dealt with others who have not been that thorough so I wanted you to know that we appreciate what she has done.

A Satisfied 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.

A Christmas Tree for Amanda

When **Bobby Ragan**, member of the Norfolk Veterans' Home, received a Christmas card from an elementary school student, it not only warmed his heart but spurred him to action. The young girl, whom we will call "Amanda," wished him a merry Christmas and hoped he could be with his family during the holiday and have a Christmas tree. She wished him that because, as she explained, "I will not have a Christmas tree this year because my mom doesn't have the money for one."

Ragan, who served in the Air Force in the 1950s, was not about to leave that situation as he found it and vowed to see that Amanda not only had a tree but gifts as well. Sharing Amanda's story with other veterans and staff at the Norfolk Veterans' Home, Ragan collected more than one hundred dollars. Shown holding the card from Amanda, Bobby Ragan banks collected donations with Accounting Clerk **Angie Janssen**.

"Thanks to all of the other members and staff who opened their hearts and wallets to help this little girl have a Christmas," Ragan said. "We members of the Norfolk Veterans' Home get so much, and it's good for us to give back."

In seeing to it that Amanda will have a tree and gifts for the holidays, Ragan and the other contributors at the Home demonstrated what the special spirit of holiday giving is all about. *Photo: Linda Sparr*

Public Health group plans survey

Dr. Joann Schaefer

By Marla Augustine

Scavenger hunt, anyone? How about a potluck or a health fair?

These are three of the events that have been suggested to bring the Division of Public Health (DPH) together.

Last fall, **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Director of the Division, commissioned work groups to target achievement of the Division's priorities—one of which is devising a media and education plan.

The Media/Education Work Group decided to focus its efforts first on internal communications. The group determined, through an analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, that good communication with outside stakeholders (the public, the media, advocacy groups, others) can only be accomplished when we effectively communicate internally.

"A better appreciation for public health's wide range of programs and activities will enable employees to more effectively present to those outside of the Division who we are and what we do," Dr. Schaefer said.

To get more input, the work group plans to conduct a survey of all DPH employees. The survey, which is targeted for January, will ask division staff about how they would like to celebrate Public Health Month in April, and what ideas do they have for bringing DPH people together?

"The survey results will be invaluable in helping the Media/Education Work Group determine what its next steps are," said **Paula Eurek**, Administrator of Lifespan Health Services Unit and chair of the work group. "After strengthening internal communications, we will be able to speak with a common voice to our outside stakeholders."

The survey will be conducted electronically and take about five minutes to complete. There will also be space for comments so that people can contribute ideas.

Study results will be published in an upcoming issue of *Connections*.