

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services teammates closer together

Central Procurement Services Notches \$2.46 Million in 2019 Cost Avoidance

Central Procurement Services has announced a record breaking “cost avoidance” figure for 2019. The metric began to be tracked in the summer of 2017.

Greg Walklin, procurement administrator, said operations exceeded its goal, avoiding more than \$2.46 million it could have spent without Central Procurement Services actions.

“(The figure) has gone up pretty dramatically,” Walklin said. “We set a goal for \$500,000, so we went way over it.”

Tracked throughout the year, most of the cost avoidance amounted from many small

instances of using competition to drive down bid prices when awarding contracts for services.

In order to fulfil its mission of “helping people live better lives,” DHHS has to procure many services it cannot perform itself for citizens.

“Ensuring those services are subject to rigorous competition in the marketplace is just part of our ongoing commitment to finding the best value for Nebraska,” Walklin said.

Among the service contracts that saved money were projects involving consulting services, software systems, and video

production. Procurement Services also avoided significant costs through frequent and diligent sourcing of commodity purchases to take advantage of the best prices and offers.

Cost avoidance is best understood as purchasing commodities and awarding service contracts in a competitive, responsible and price-sensitive way, Walklin explained. Unused funding can either be saved or contribute to additional procurements that support DHHS’s mission in another way.

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Mary Boden Interviewed by *Lab Matters Magazine*



The building that houses the Nebraska Public Health Environmental Laboratory was built in the mid-1970s on the southwest edge of Lincoln, Nebraska.

They drink it and shower in it like the rest of us, but the Nebraska Public Health Environmental Laboratory (NPHEL) staff knows water in a deeper way, on a molecular level.

According to Mary Boden, NPHEL manager, about 1,600 public water systems rely on the lab for water analysis, and a sizable number of tests result from “walk-in” clients – about 9% of the total. Many are testing private wells or a water system following major

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Mary Boden, manager of the Nebraska Public Health Environmental Laboratory, was interviewed Dec. 6 by Virginia-based writer Nancy Mattox for an article for *Lab Matters* magazines, a publication of the Association of Public Health Laboratories. The article, one of a series of profiles on public health laboratories across the United States, will appear in the coming weeks.

Connections editor, David Hudson, provided photos for *Lab Matters'* piece and sat in on the interview, which occurred in Boden's office.

repair or construction.

Boden said the lab has nearly 9,000 walk-in clients in their Laboratory Information Management System. The most frequent request from private clients is for nitrates and bacteriological testing.

NPHEL is the primary lab for Nebraska's drinking water program, which means it tests

for all the substances currently regulated by United States Environmental Protection Agency for drinking water. The lab also analyzes surface water, ground water and wastewater for the Department of Environment and Energy.

Moreover, the lab processes all alcohol blood tests in the state, making up perhaps 1% of the lab's work. There are about 290 blood alcohol clients, including the state patrol, sheriff's offices and Nebraska police departments.

"And that's only on blood," Boden said. "We don't do blood alcohols by urine or any drug testing."

Boden's facility also certifies five smaller labs for water testing. Boden added that the lab does some air testing for the Department of Environment and Energy.

"And again that's about 1%," she said.

In total, the lab processes at least 65,000 tests per year, with the vast majority being water tests. The lab is largely self-supporting,

being entirely fee based, which is fairly unique, she said.

Water Laboratory Shares Space

The lab is housed in a 14,000-square-foot structure built in the mid-1970s on a grassy lawn in the southwest edge of Lincoln.

Most of Boden's staff and their equipment is housed in the basement. In addition to her office, the first floor houses the Department of Agriculture lab and the NPHEL's metals testing area.

Including temporary workers, nearly 20 work in the NPHEL, with the largest group being analysts.

"One employee has been here 38 years," she said, "and then there are fresh newbies, and not much in the middle."

A Little History

At one point four labs shared the space. Then, in 1997, the University of Nebraska Medical Center assumed responsibility for the clinical activities, and those

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Tara Wulfekoetter, lab scientist II, analyzes water for the presence of coliform and *E. coli* bacteria.



Dr. Jim Balk, chemist III, works at a terminal in the high-performance liquid chromatography room.

activities stopped being performed in the building. Concurringly, the lab was renovated and expanded to better focus on testing water, which included a ventilation system refresh.

In 2015, the Nebraska State Patrol scientists moved into a dedicated crime lab.

"Technically, the drinking water program is under the Department of Health and Human Services," Boden said. "But the employees are now under the Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy per a MOA (Memorandum of Association). The lab staff are still under DHHS Public Health."

The facility maintains a Biosafety Level II designation. This biosafety level covers laboratories that work with agents associated with human diseases that pose a moderate health hazard. Boden said that that lab had a level three rating, but that level of security was unneeded and difficult to maintain.

Allowed to Shine During a Disaster

Asked about recent successes,

Boden hastens to mention the flooding that struck Nebraska last year.

"We handled a tremendous sample load," Boden said. "There was a lot of overtime to get those samples tested and out to the public. The worst of it was over a month period, primarily the whole month of April, and it's still an ongoing issue for many people."

The lab also recently upgraded its Laboratory Information

Management System.

"It looks totally different since it's now web based," Boden said. "It has different terminology. It was a huge change for the lab. It's kind of like starting over."

Boden has led the lab since 2013, after starting there in 1989 as a volunteer.

"I never dreamed I would be here this long, but I enjoy the work, the people and the challenges." Boden said.



Dr. Thulani Senanayake, chemist III, works in a room used to analyze water for the presence of volatile chemicals.

An Update on the 106th Legislature Second Session

The One Hundred Sixth Legislature, Second Session, started January 8, 2020. DHHS has requested senators to introduce the following bills on behalf of the agency:

Senator Geist has introduced LB 975, which changes provisions of the reporting of child abuse or neglect. Also, Senator Ben Hansen introduced LB 1043, which changes provisions relating to receiverships.

The Health and Human Services Committee has introduced LB 1185



which changes provisions relating to criminal record information checks for small home-based child care providers that participate in the federal subsidy program. Furthermore, Senator Crawford has introduced LB 1061, which includes language relating to alternative response (AR) to reports of child abuse or neglect.

If you have any questions, please contact Alan Kroner, alan.kroner@nebraska.gov, 471-1626, or Bryson Bartels, bryson.bartels@nebraska.gov, 471-0541.

\$2.46 Million in 2019 Cost Avoidance (continued from page 1)

Walklin said it's a little like buying a car.

"You negotiate down the price with them. Maybe go to another dealer and show them you have a better price from a competitor. That kind of thing," he said. "The avoided cost is the difference of what you spent with what you could have spent if you just bought one off the lot."

Walklin said the formula his office uses compares the winning bid contracted by his office to the average bid. A group of reviewers also evaluate the quality of the goods and services.

Tracking cost avoidance is fairly new. Support Services – which handled purchasing commodities, as well as handling office move logistics and office standards –

split into Central Procurement Services and Central Operations and Material Services, which now handle those respective duties.

Walklin has led the Procurement division for a little more than a year. Procurement has a services team, a commodities team, and teammates located in the DHHS 24/7 facilities. Running parallel with his work is a legal and a contract management team who review contracts for legal sufficiency to ensure the state receives the benefits of the bargain. Their teams contributed significantly to the cost avoidance in 2019 through stringent contract review and management practices.

Put in terms we can all understand, it's much like making sure that the car we paid for has all the options agreed upon. It's not a very far stretch. After all, Walklin said, the money the State spends comes from taxpayers.

"It makes sense that we are just as careful when we buy something," Walklin said.

This "bark" graph shows how much cost avoidance was achieved in the first year of the metric in comparison to the most recent year – and also serves to demonstrate the fun-loving attitude of the lower-level's Procurement team.



A Passion of the Canine Type: Raising Service Dogs Is her Calling

Carolyn Nash knows what she's supposed to be doing.

"My passion is breeding and doing beginning training for service dogs for autistic children and military veterans," she said. "And it's a major passion."

She recently started breeding Labrador service dogs for Retrieving Freedom, Inc., a nonprofit organization in Missouri and Iowa. The breed is used because they change allegiances more easily and bond with their veteran or child, she said. They are also "harder" dogs, she continued, better able to deal with high-stress situations.

"Retrieving Freedom is very important to me," Nash said. "Twenty-four to 26 veterans die by suicide every day. Too many."

She knows the dogs make a difference.



KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc.

Her passion had humble beginnings in 2002, when she began raising puppies one at a time at her Nebraska home for KSDS Assistance Dogs, Inc. in Kansas.

"The CEO gave me a grand tour out of my wanting to understand helping folks with disabilities utilizing

service dogs," Nash said. "She was wonderful, and said, 'You will raise pups for me one day.'"

She turned out to be correct.

This training included teaching them to sit, stay, come, heel on a leash, and so on, she said. Eventually to become guide dogs for the blind, the dogs had to be trained to be comfortable in a kennel for as long as 12 hours, because of the requirements implicit in service.

"It was the growing-up time," she added, "The chewing-on-things years."

That volunteer role became a career in 2007, when she was hired by KSKDS as a guide dog instructor.

"I sold my house, and quit my job at the penitentiary (where she'd worked since 1999), and moved to Kansas," she said. "I had given up everything. I thought I was going to stay there until I retired."

But the illness of her mother – uterine cancer that spread to the lung – forced a return to Nebraska and continuing work with the state, but this time with DHHS, as a mental health security specialist II at Lincoln Regional Center.

'Gabriel'

She started volunteering with a new non-profit organization, too.

"I called Retrieving Freedom and volunteered to raise dogs for them," she said, adding that the nonprofit is focused on helping veterans and autism children.

They can pick things up and open doors, but they are mostly used to fight stress disorders, the symptoms of autism in children and post-traumatic stress disorder



Nash and a Labrador puppy, bred to be a service dog.

in veterans.

"They are trained to react to stress, trained to listen to it in voices," she said. The dogs are aware of many signs, including drinking alcohol. Nash added the dogs can help move the veteran out of crowds if they sense a problem brewing.

And if they suffer night terrors, "the dogs basically become a security blanket. The dogs just wrap themselves around them."

She said she knows her work is done when the dog bonds with its owner and begin ignoring you.

"Gabriel was the first one I raised. He graduated in 2016 with his veteran," she said.

Training dogs for the autistic is similar, but the process requirements more documentation to provide for the broader range of symptoms.

If you're thinking this sounds like the recipe for a very sad dog, you'd be wrong. The dogs get their share of fun, too. They are trained so that they know when they're on-duty.

"The dogs all wear vests when they're working. When the vests come off they know they can play and have a good time," she said.

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The 2019 Behavioral Health & Justice Conference: Building A Comprehensive Community Response

More than 450 probation, community corrections, and behavioral health (mental health and substance use disorder) professionals came together October 28-30 in LaVista for the 2019 Behavioral Health and Justice Conference. The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Division of Behavioral Health, in partnership with the Nebraska Administrative Office of the Courts and Probation and Mid-America Addiction Technology Transfer Center (ATTC) sponsored this statewide event.

Focusing on community-based supervision and behavioral health treatment as a means of reducing recidivism, this conference highlighted the importance of cross-system collaboration to improve responses and outcomes for criminal justice-involved individuals with behavioral health needs. Breakout sessions ranged from a number of topics such as emerging drug trends, treatment approaches, trauma, workforce development, and self-care.

Keynote speakers included: Dr. Robert DuPont, M.D., the second White House Drug Chief and a leader in drug policy, substance use prevention and addiction treatment for more than 50 years; Nic Sheff, subject of the movie *Beautiful Boy* and author of two memoirs about his struggles with addiction; Tonier Cain-Muldrow, founder and CEO of Healing Neen, Inc., educator on trauma, addiction, incarceration, and behavioral health; Dr. Richard Rawson,

Ph.D., Emeritus Professor, UCLA Department of Psychiatry, who presented on evidenced-based treatments for methamphetamine dependence; and New Hampshire Superior Court Chief Justice, Tina Nadeau, featuring the Judge's role in problem-solving courts.

Dr. DuPont applauded Nebraska's conference planning efforts stating, "Effectively and systematically linking behavioral health and criminal justice is an essential element in the nation's response to the drug epidemic. You are at the forefront of that vital connection."

The conference also represents a significant step in continuing strategic reform for behavioral health and criminal justice.

Research has shown that mental and substance use disorders affect people from all walks of life, with or without criminal justice involvement, and, with the services and supports of behavioral health providers, people can and do recover.

The networks of treatment and justice providers share a critical role in ensuring that every individual we serve receives the support, skills, and opportunity for recovery in order to live productively with dignity and respect. DHHS Division of Behavioral Health remains committed to enhancing and strengthening the mental health and substance use disorders continuum of services.



Division of Behavioral Health Director, Sheri Dawson, kicks off the opening ceremony.

In Gratitude

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

Here are some letters & notes DHHS teammates have received thanking us for the work we do every day to help people live better lives:

Jana J. Peterson, social services supervisor, sent the following note to Nichole Fiene, social services worker:

Nichole,

I received feedback from a client, C Jackson today referenced a call you responded to this afternoon. She advised she admired your tenacity. You were determined to find out the answer to her questions. She stated that Miss Nichole handled a very difficult problem with her case. It was a pleasure to work with you. She described the call as being long and she had a lot of stuff to go over. It really meant a lot to her how you handled the call. You were patient, diligent and gave her the correct answers, even though it was not what she wanted to hear. You displayed empathy while you delivered the message.

She wanted this message to go into your file. She stated, "Fantastic she is and great job she has done talking with me. She stated she sincerely appreciated you today!"

Nichole, this is nice feedback for you and I listened to the phone call and could not agree more with the words she described that you displayed. Thank you for that!!!

Jana

An email received by Chris K. Johnson, social services worker, from a client:

Hello Chris

I just wanted to reach out and tell you thank you so much again for helping me in such a timely manner. Your compassion really meant a lot to me. So thank you for being such an amazing person. And helping me during this time! God bless.

The transcript of a voicemail about Jackie Neujahr, social services worker:

Hello there. . . I just wanted to call to let you know that I spoke with Jackie on Friday. . . Who helped me with the process of getting my recertification submitted for Medicaid so it's taken care of. Jackie went the extra mile to get my health insurance guy's phone number. Allowed me to process. . . I just wanted to let you know she needs to be recognized . . . For going that extra mile, she made me feel like a human being because having very few income and being on benefits. . . And I think just give her a pat on the back. Helping this lady out here who she doesn't know very well and treated me well. Give her a pat on the back for me. Have a great day

THANKS

CPS

Boden

Legislature

Canines

BH&J

Gratitude

Supervisors

A Passion of the Canine Type (continued from page 5)

'Spirit'

She began breeding dogs after Gabriel. Spirit lives closely with her but won't be her dog until her breeding days are done.

"A breeding dog just about has to be perfect," Nash said, adding that Spirit has had one litter so far.

"And right now Spirit is at the vet's being inseminated," she said, adding that she will be due April 5th. In the case of Spirit's next litter, the male that was to

be part of the equation was up in Michigan.

"A C-section will be done on April 3rd if the ultra-sound of March 6th or the x-ray a week before due date shows any problems for her to give a natural birth," she said.

The puppies will stay with Spirit and Nash for eight weeks. And Nash may be awake for two or three days caring for them. There's not much down time before training begins either. Nash begins training

at four weeks, and Spirit begins training even sooner.

Nash also has pets of her own: a 10-year-old dog, Spice, and a cat, Amos. They are a great help to beginning to train the young puppies, she said.

"I love breeding and there will be more dogs after Spirit, and who knows where retirement will take me in the future," she said.

Good Morning from Josh Lacy's Service Delivery Supervisors Team

Meet Josh Lacy's supervisor team from DHHS Service Delivery! Their QDIP (Quality-Delivery-Inventory-Productivity) board has been active for some time and is very instrumental in the success of their day-to-day activities.

Currently the Quality, "Q" area, of the board measures the accuracy of their day-to-day interactions with the citizens of Nebraska.

The Delivery, "D" section, measures the amount of telephone calls that are handled on a daily bases.

The Inventory, "I" section, measures staffing levels. In order to be as productive as they are they need to get staff on board and trained as soon as possible.

And the Productivity, "P" section, measures the amount of work tasks completed.

Team Members: Mike Lohr, Amy Baugh, David Solomon, Steff Bishoff, Rose Haas, Peyton Lantz, Amber Root Johnson, Luke Bremer and Verdell Bohling present from the Lincoln CSC, Cynthia Yelm and

Chelle Cox are not present. Emily Burch is onscreen from Fremont CSC. The team also huddles with Lexington CSC, who participated remotely. They include Michelle Eby, Shannon Clifton, Sonya Gugelman, Sandra Reyes, Jana Peterson, Deysey Zamora and Darcy Schneider.



Make the Connection...

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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

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