

Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

February 2011
VOLUME 11, ISSUE 2



Loetta Raatz (center) recently celebrated her 65th anniversary with DHHS with a reception at the Thayer County Courthouse in Hebron. She is shown here with Ruth Vineyard, Administrator, ACCESSNebraska Customer Service Center, and Jeff Schmidt, Southeast Service Area Administrator. Read Loetta's story on page 4.

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DHHS now on and

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.

[Surveys: Behavioral Health Consumers Satisfied](#)

Feb. 2, 2011

[Don't Overlook the Earned Income Tax Credit: Claim What's Yours](#)

Jan. 27, 2011

In addition to news releases, many DHHS employees conduct interviews with broadcast media, as well. Here's one from Dr. Joann Schaefer, Director of Public Health, called the Power of Transplants. It was on KFOR radio. [Take a listen!](#)

Go to [DHHS In The News](#) on the Employee Home Page for links to *Omaha World-Herald* and *Lincoln Journal Star* articles involving DHHS programs and services.

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 Website: www2.dhhs.ne.gov

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About the Cover: Raatz Retires After 65 Years at DHHS



In 1945, 17-year-old Loetta Raatz started working for what would eventually become the Department of Health and Human Services. She is 82 now and recently retired after a record-breaking 65 years of service to the state and a life-long career of helping people.

Loetta was recognized Feb. 4 with an open house in the Thayer County Courthouse where she worked. Many friends, family and former coworkers came to help Loetta celebrate this milestone. In the conference room, there was a scrapbook full of newspaper clippings about Loetta's accomplishments, a basket full of cards wishing her well, a plaque from the county honoring her retirement and a certificate stating her appointment as an Admiral in the Nebraska Navy, an honor she's received a few times already.

Many people commented how incredible it is that Loetta served DHHS, the state and Nebraskans for 65 years. We all wish her well in her retirement.

See story on page 4.

The Good Life:

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



Photo: Bill Wiley

By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

Every step of the Legislative process affects the work we do at DHHS beginning with the first part of the session -- the 10 days when senators introduce bills. For example, of the 698 legislative bills introduced this session, 201 were assigned to division staff for review within DHHS. Of the 62 legislative resolutions introduced, 10 were assigned for review.

It's important for the Department to be involved in the legislative process because there are many bills that, if passed, will impact the Department and our programs and services for years to come.

Department employees provide a great deal of program, financial and legal expertise that comes into play when bills are analyzed for possible impact to DHHS. When bills impact several divisions, they are all involved in the review process.

Legislative committees began holding public hearings in January and they will run through at least mid-March. The directors and I meet regularly during this time, and DHHS employees help

prepare testimonies and letters for us when we've decided to take a position on a bill.

Floor debate has also started, and there will be times that the directors or I will be in the Capitol Rotunda and available to senators as they debate bills that are important to us.

Would you like to know more? The DHHS legislative tracking information is on our employee homepage and includes the list of the bills we're tracking, which divisions provided impact summaries, hearing dates scheduled and, once the hearing is held, copies of our letters and testimonies. This information can be found [here](#) and is also accessible from a link on the employee homepage. The information is in a spreadsheet that can be sorted so you can see just the bills assigned to your division. If you have questions, contact **Bryson Bartels**, our legislative coordinator, at 402-471-0541.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributes to the DHHS legislative process.

Here's the list of bills introduced on behalf of Governor Heineman regarding DHHS and those introduced on behalf of the Department:

Budget Bills introduced on behalf of the Governor related to DHHS

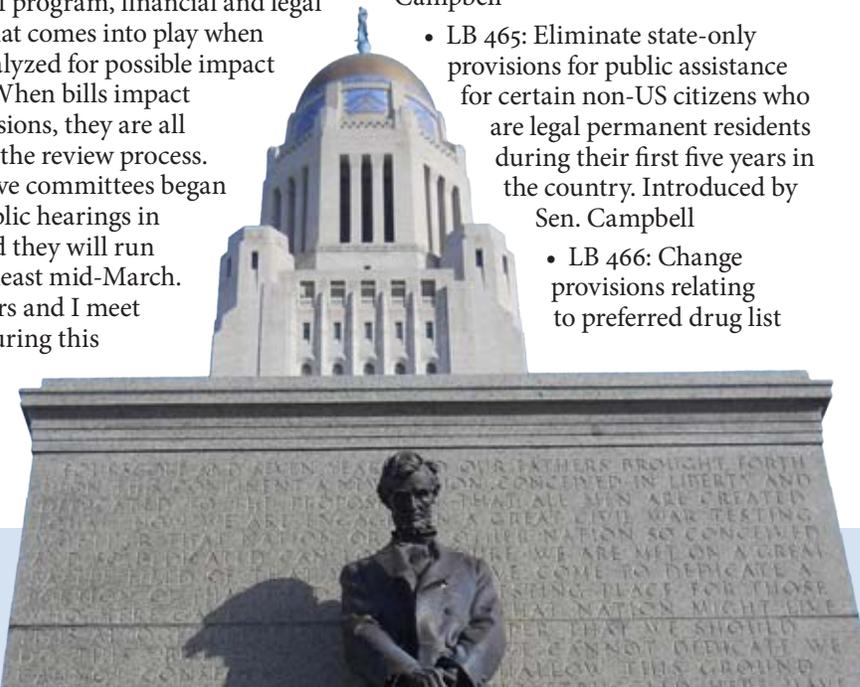
- LB 464: Removes the requirement for the Department to conduct a Market Rate Survey of child care providers and set rates based on a percentile of the results. Introduced by Sen. Campbell
- LB 465: Eliminate state-only provisions for public assistance for certain non-US citizens who are legal permanent residents during their first five years in the country. Introduced by Sen. Campbell
- LB 466: Change provisions relating to preferred drug list

under the Medicaid Prescription Drug Act by adding antipsychotic, antidepressant and anticonvulsant therapeutic classes. Introduced by Sen. Gloor

- LB 467: Change eligibility provisions relating to the medical assistance program by ending benefits for most adults who do not comply with mandatory TANF work requirements. Introduced by Sen. Campbell
- LB 468: Change the date for reporting provisions relating to co-payments in the medical assistance program. Introduced by Sen. Campbell

Bills introduced on behalf of DHHS

- LB 218: Change provisions increasing the number of discretionary employees exempt from the State Personnel System for agencies with 5,000 or more employees. Introduced by Sen. Karpisek
- LB 242: Change assault provisions by allowing a county attorney to file felony charges against a juvenile who commits an assault against Youth and Rehabilitation Treatment Center employee. Introduced by Sen. Hadley
- LB 265: Change provisions increasing child support enforcement petty cash funds to \$2,000 to account, for example, for increases in service fees. Introduced by Sen. Coash
- LB 339: Change provisions of the Juvenile Code relating to predisposition evaluations requiring the courts to make a general placement of a juvenile with DHHS rather than in a specific state facility. Introduced by Sen. Ashford
- LB 456: This is the DHHS "Clean-up" bill including a number of non-controversial technical changes to health and human services-related statutes. Introduced by the HHS Committee
- LB 591: Provide for a real-time syndromic surveillance program and authorize the use of a statewide immunization registry. Introduced by Sen. Gloor



Raatz Retires After Astonishing 65 Years at DHHS

By Dianna Seiffert



Photo: Marilyn Kimbrough

ABOVE: Loetta was recognized Feb. 4 with an open house in the Thayer County Courthouse where she worked. Many friends, family and former coworkers came to help Loetta celebrate this milestone. In the conference room, there was a scrapbook full of newspaper clippings about Loetta's accomplishments, a basket full of cards wishing her well, a plaque from the county honoring her retirement and a certificate stating her appointment as an Admiral in the Nebraska Navy, an honor she's received a few times already.

Loetta is pictured here with a gift from the Thayer County Courthouse. A former County Commissioner made the clock himself, making the gift extra special.

The year was 1945. WWII had ended, and servicemen were returning home to pick up their lives and start new families. Minimum wage was 40 cents an hour. A loaf of bread cost 9 cents, and gasoline was 21 cents/gal.

That was the year that 17-year-old **Loetta Raatz** started working for what would eventually become the Department of Health and Human Services. Now, at age 82 and recently retired, Loetta shares an amazing story about her record-breaking 65 years of service to the state and a life-long career of helping people.

"I really liked my job," Loetta says. "It was very rewarding, and there was always something happening." Sixty-five years at one place is a long stretch by any measure, but she said she felt her time went by so quickly.

Loetta started working on Nov. 1, 1945, as a stenographer clerk in what was then called the County Relief Office. She scored high on a state merit exam, and accepted the job in Hebron because her parents wanted her to stay close to home.

"I made \$75 a month and worked 48 hours a week," says Loetta. "We even worked on Saturdays, and there were no benefits. If we were lucky, the county board would approve a \$5 pay raise for the year."

The Relief Office was one room in a corner of the basement in the Thayer County Courthouse, and the office staff consisted of Loetta and her director. The Thayer County Courthouse is where Loetta would work for the next 65 years.

Over the years Loetta held a variety of positions, from stenographer to case aide to income maintenance technician to county director to social service worker.

"In those early days we did just about everything ourselves," Loetta says. "We even had food commodities delivered to the office. We had to load and unload them every week for people to take home."

As Loetta changed jobs, the office changed, too. She went from working for the County to working for the State...from the Relief Office to the Welfare Office to the Social Services Office to the Health and Human Services System to DHHS.

When Loetta first started working, there were no food stamps, no nursing homes, no assisted living, no foster homes, no Social Security benefits or Medicaid programs.

"There was one telephone for the whole office," Loetta says. "I used a Woodstock typewriter and carbon paper. There weren't any adding machines. We had to do everything manually." Loetta says they went to people's houses to determine a budget and then used the typewriter to type individual assistance checks.

Loetta Raatz:
(continued from page 4)



Loetta greets guests at a reception held in honor of her retirement.

Photo: Marian DeBuhr

Loetta said back then she got to know the people who needed help personally...their families, their home situations, their living conditions. "There was so much to keep track of every time someone applied for relief," she says.

When the office got a computer, that was a highlight of Loetta's career, she said. "At first we were afraid of the computer, afraid it would bite us," Loetta jokes. "But computers made all of the hard work we had to do so much simpler."

Over the years government programs were added, and benefits for low-income and disabled people were expanded. Loetta's work changed to accommodate those revisions.

"When you think about a career that spans 65 years, it's hard to imagine just how much has changed," says Loetta's supervisor **Nancy Bettin**, Fairbury. "Loetta loves learning something new. And in 65 years, she's had plenty of opportunity to do just that."

Throughout her career, Loetta says she has many memorable moments. "Every case was different," she says. "We learned something from every single one. It was interesting. There was never a dull moment."

She said she fondly remembers all of the many employee recognition celebrations. Her first was her 40th anniversary recognition with Gov. Bob Kerry. For her 41st year, Gov. Kay Orr inducted Loetta into Nebraska's Hall of Fame. For her 55th anniversary, Loetta says Gov. Mike Johanns joked that

she must have started working for the state when she was in kindergarten. Loetta plans on attending the Governor's employee recognition event this October, where she'll receive her 65-year recognition award.

"We all like to feel like we have a purpose...something bigger than ourselves," says Nancy Bettin. "Loetta likes doing for others. She has been able to learn everything successfully, and we wish her the same success in her retirement."

"I can't believe how much people depend on you," Loetta says. "We had fun along the way, too, trying to lighten things up when we could."

For now, Loetta says she plans to spend more time with her son, Bob, his wife, Deb, and her grandchildren, Hayley, Brandon and Miranda. But, she added, that really, she'd just like to keep working.

"I've really enjoyed it," she says. "If you could help someone, why not do it?"

Special notes on the employee bulletin board

Several people used the bulletin board on the employee homepage to wish Loetta well, including this message from **Emily Walter**, in Human Resources.

"Wow, Loetta, 65 years of service with DHHS is absolutely incredible! While I don't know you personally, I wanted to congratulate you on this amazing milestone! Enjoy your much deserved retirement!"



Dr. Joann Schaefer

Photo: Bill Wiley

Lots of great work is going on in the Division of Public Health. Here's a quick rundown from **Dr. Joann Schaefer**:

- The Nebraska Cancer Registry received two achievement awards in 2010. Not only was the registry awarded the North American Association of Central Cancer Registries Gold Standard award for the 13th consecutive year, it was also awarded the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) National Program of Cancer Registries Award for National Data quality and Completeness Program and USCS Publication Standard.
- The Public Health Support Unit was awarded an \$81,950 grant from the CDC through the Council of State and Territorial Epidemiologists to link state-wide EMS, hospital discharge, and death data to provide essential information for cardiovascular disease intervention programs. Nebraska was one of only three states awarded this grant.
- Nebraska now has 43 designated trauma centers thanks to the concerted efforts of EMS/Trauma staff and health professional contractors.
- The Licensure Unit processed 99,286 applications for new and renewed credentials for people to provide health or health-related services and child care services in 2010.
 - New Credentials Issued—23,564
 - Credentials Renewed—73,925
 - Credentials Denied—557
- The Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity provided Cultural Competency Curricula training to the Behavioral Health Regions and several community colleges.
- The Office of Women's Health held its annual Breast Cancer Journey Across Nebraska in October. One event was a bus trip for cancer survivors and those battling the disease which traveled from Omaha to North Platte. Other events included the Breast Cancer Control Town Hall Meeting, survivor events, and a Health and Healing Workshop designed specifically for breast cancer survivors. The journey captured a lot of media attention using the social media tool Twitter.
- The EMS Program received the national gold standard for pre-hospital data collection and continues to help communities conduct EMS Assessments.
- Nebraska was one of only 14 states to receive component I and II funding for a "Strengthening Public Health Infrastructure for Improved Health Outcomes" grant from the CDC. The five-year grant (\$1.2 million a year) will strengthen public health infrastructure and increase performance management capacity so that public health goals are effectively and efficiently met.
- In the last fiscal year, the Investigations Unit performed 1,024 professional and occupational license investigations. This unit investigates complaints on licensed, registered or certified health care professionals and those in certain occupations, such as nail technologists and body artists.
- The Public Health Support Unit and Information Systems and Technology developed a web query system for the Nebraska Behavioral Risk Factor Survey System (BRFSS). It allows users to query BRFSS data through dynamic interfaces on the Web.
- "Kitchen Quarterbacks" is a cookbook by men for men. Its goal is to provide new recipes for healthier eating, with more than 90 pages of tasty recipes contributed by DHHS men and employees with male family members. The cookbook was developed by the Men's Health Task Force with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln Department of Nutrition and Health Sciences. It received national publicity in an Associated Press article on MSNBC.com.

Survey Results Show Positive Impact of YRTC Geneva and Kearney Staff

By Jeanne Atkinson

A recent survey shows that the youthful offenders at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Centers (YRTC) in Kearney and Geneva recognize and appreciate the impact staff make in their lives.

The youth survey is part of Performance-based Standards (PbS) for Youth Correction and Detention Facilities offered and monitored by the national Council of Juvenile Corrections Administrators. PbS helps facilities identify, monitor and improve conditions and treatment services provided to committed youth using national standards and outcome measures. There are 198 facilities across 28 states participating in PbS. The YRTCs have participated since 2000.

As a part of the PbS project, each youth who leaves a YRTC fills out an Exit Survey that asks: *“What was the best thing this facility did to get you ready to move to your next placement or to go home?”*

At YRTC-Geneva, 95% of the 57 youth surveyed responded positively regarding their stay. At YRTC-Kearney, 97% of the 129 youth surveyed responded positively regarding their stay.

Responses from youth at YRTC-Geneva included:

- They got me ready to be a good, successful young lady and helped me to follow rules and be a better person in the community.
- They helped me to find ways to cope with anger and disappointment.
- They helped me learn new positive things to deal with my behaviors.
- This facility helped me open my eyes to see that not only was I hurting myself, but I was hurting others, too. There’s no way that I would ever want to hurt my family again by choosing drugs over them. It has helped me focus on me.
- Helped me deal with my grief and helped me move on from my past.
- Helped me understand that there are better ways to

handle difficult situations and what I can do to stay sober.

Responses from youth at YRTC-Kearney included:

- Helped me find better ways of approaching situations.
- Controlling emotions and being accountable for my actions and not blaming other people.
- Helped me with my problems and helped me to trust people and to think for myself.
- It helped me to feel confident in my decision to stay on the right track and to deal with my “Thinking Errors.”
- Made it easy to communicate with people, to talk to people when I need help.

“We are very fortunate to have staff who really care about our youth and are dedicated to helping them make positive changes,” said **Todd Reckling**, director of the Division of Children and Family Services.



Foster Youth and Siblings Catch Up at Camp DEADLINE APRIL 1

By Jeanne Atkinson

A special opportunity is available again this year for foster youth and their siblings to spend time together at Camp Catch-Up.

Camp Catch-Up is a three-day camp that allows siblings separated by foster care or adoption a chance to “catch up” in a fun, supportive atmosphere. The camp is open to Nebraska children ages 8-19 years old who are currently or have been in foster care.

Workshops and camp activities can help siblings gain skills for successful

independent living and enhance supportive relationships with each other. The siblings will enjoy a variety of activities such as canoeing, tubing, archery, hiking, art, rope courses, zip line, and more. Staff participate in all activities and campers are never left unsupervised.

“If you know someone who’s a foster parent, think about sharing this information with them,” said **Todd Reckling**, director of the Division of Children and Family Services. “We want foster parents and foster youth to know about this great experience.”

This year’s camps are scheduled for:

June 9-12 Halsey 4-H Camp, Halsey, NE
June 23-26 Covenant Cedars Camp, Hordville, NE

Information and the application form are available [here](#).

Applications can be mailed to Alana Pearson, Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, 215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200, Lincoln, NE 68508 through April 1, 2011. For more information, contact her at (402)380-4552 or apearson@nebraskachildren.org.

Families Matter Update: Monitoring Goals to Gauge Progress

By Jeanne Atkinson

Families Matter is the reform of Nebraska’s child welfare and juvenile services and is driven by wanting to serve more children and youth safety in their own home, and to improve on the federal outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being.

Todd Reckling, director of the Division of Children and Family Services, recently met with 11 youth from the Nebraska Foster Youth Council’s Leadership Board who were from Scottsbluff, Grand Island/Hastings, Norfolk, Lincoln and Omaha and talked about Families Matter. These youth are honest, articulate, thoughtful, supportive of each other, and determined to make a difference for youth in foster care now or in the future, he said.

“I was totally impressed, and their comments reinforced our need to serve more children and youth in their homes,” said Reckling. “These youth especially emphasized the importance of staying connected with siblings. Their siblings mean the world to them and, if they have to be in foster care, they want to be together. If, for some reason, they’re not placed together, they want to see their siblings or talk to them so that they know everything is OK.”

The Division contracts with two lead contractors to serve children and families in the Eastern and Southeast Service Areas: KVC Behavioral HealthCare of Nebraska, Inc. and Nebraska Families Collaborative (NFC).

KVC, NFC and the Division are monitoring the following six goals that will provide information that will help to gauge progress:

- Increase the number of youth served in home and decrease the number of youth served out of the home;
- Increase the number of foster care youth who are placed with family;
- Decrease the use of congregate care placements (group homes or facilities);
- Decrease the use of out-of-state congregate care placements;
- Increase the use of aftercare services when children are no longer involved with the Department; and
- Decrease the number of youth entering the system and increase the number of youth exiting the system.

Newly enhanced, more user-friendly monthly reports showing the data gathered from monitoring these goals for KVC, NFC and DHHS will be available on the DHHS website in the near future.



Nebraska Child Welfare and Juvenile Services Reform
Safety • Permanency • Well-being

Preventive Screenings Save Lives MARCH IS COLORECTAL CANCER AWARENESS MONTH

Preventive screenings save lives - especially those for colon cancer. Colon cancer screenings can even find growths for removal before they turn into cancer. When cancer has already started, screening can find it at an early stage when treatment often leads to a cure.

Over the last 10 years, we've seen an increase in the number of Nebraskans screened for colon cancer. Screening can be done through different types of tests, but the colonoscopy exam has increased the most. Ten years ago, only 38 percent of Nebraskans age 50 and over had ever had colonoscopy or sigmoidoscopy. The latest data show that number has risen to nearly 59 percent.

Along with better treatment of colon cancer, screening means that far fewer persons are dying from

Special Observances



colon cancer. Colon cancer death rates in Nebraska have declined by 25 percent during the last decade. Although this is good news, the time to celebrate will be when a colon cancer death is a very rare event. That can happen if we all do our part by getting screened when we are 50 or older and by encouraging screening for family and friends.

Nebraska is one of 25 states with a program to help people with the costs of screening. Visit the [Colorectal Cancer website](#) for more information.

Besides screening, other steps to reduce the risk of colon cancer include being active, eating healthy foods, and quitting smoking. Wellness works, and it's the key to living the good life, and a longer life, in Nebraska.

Signs of Compulsive Gambling

- Increase in time spent gambling
- Working up special occasions for gambling (canceling other plans)
- Exaggerated display of money and other possessions
- Gambling when there is a crisis
- Frequent absences from home and work
- Withdrawal from family
- Diversion of family funds

Problem Gambling Prevention Month

By Marla Augustine

Nebraskans who gamble are racking up an average gambling debt of \$28,158, and some of them are experiencing significant financial difficulties.

The Problem Gambling Helpline handled over 2,000 calls during the last fiscal year, providing information, crisis intervention and referral services to people negatively impacted by gambling. The Helpline number is 1-800-522-4700.

Consumers receiving services had an average age of 43 years, with 59 percent being male and 41 percent female, according to the [annual report](#) of the Gamblers Assistance Program 2009-2010.

Lottery is the preferred gambling activity for females. For men, it's betting on sports. The most frequent gambling activities were casinos, lottery, keno and sports.

Anyone can learn more about gambling's warning signs [here](#).



Earned Income Tax Credit Can Put Money in Your Pocket

Taxpayers who qualify for and claim the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) could pay less federal tax, pay no tax or even get a tax refund beyond the amount of tax withheld. EITC is a refundable tax credit for eligible workers with low to middle incomes.

“We want to help people get the tax credits they’ve earned through the EITC program,” said **Todd Reckling**, director of the Division of Children and Family Services. “EITC is a financial boost for working people hit by hard economic times. You earned it. Now file, claim it and get it.”

Earned Income Tax Credit is based on several factors including income and filing status. For example, childless singles making less than \$13,460 a year or married couples with two children making less than \$45,373 annually from

wages, self-employment or farming in 2010 could qualify.

You may qualify for the first time if your financial, marital or parental status changed in 2010. To help Nebraskans

take advantage of the EITC program, DHHS works



with community organizations to provide free tax preparation assistance by IRS-certified volunteers to low-income individuals and families. To locate a site near you, or if you have eligibility questions, call 2-1-1 or 1-800-829-1040.

Federal tax credits include:

Earned Income Tax Credit:	up to \$5,666
Child Tax Credit:	up to \$1,000 per child
Child and Dependent Care Tax Credits:	up to \$2,100

For more information visit the [EITC website](#).

Honor Your Co-workers for the Great Work They Do

2011 Employee/Supervisor of the Year nominations are due March 23!

Even though the work we do at DHHS can be very fulfilling, it's nice to hear kind words for a job well done. Know someone who goes above and beyond in their work at DHHS? Here's your chance to recognize that person for their special contributions to DHHS.

DHHS Employee/Supervisor of the Year forms have been sent to you on-line. You can also pick them up from your human resources office. You can recognize co-workers within your unit and outside of your immediate work area. But hurry! Nominations are due March 23.

DHHS employees are the core of our agency. Recognizing them for their good work gives credit where credit is due.

So, encourage excellence and share your thoughts about those who set a great example!

Helpful Hints from the Help Desk

When our computers aren't working the way they should, or we need help logging onto a program, the DHHS Help Desk is there for us. Help Desk staff respond to an average of 440 calls and emails per day, not including the weekend. That's a lot of help! There are things we can do for ourselves, though, that might save us a call to the Help Desk. Here are some general operation tips. Next month we'll feature tips specific to Outlook.

1. Save all files to H Drive or network shared drives. If your hard drive crashes or PC has to be re-imaged, the files on your C Drive or Desktop will be lost and not recoverable.



2. If your computer has been re-imaged, and you can't log on to your computer (your first logon), check the options box under the password box. If it does not say log on to 'BF200LNK', select the drop-down box beside the box and select BF200LNK.
3. Save early and save often. We cannot recover items that haven't been saved.
4. Three strikes, and you're out! IRS rules require we use a three-logon attempt before the account is locked out. You should know that inadvertently typing a wrong password when unlocking your PC contributes to the three strikes for the day.

Remember, You can contact the Help Desk at (402) 471-9069 or (800) 722-1715. Or, by email at: dhhs.helpdesk@nebraska.gov. The Help Desk is open from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. CST.

Meet Dianna Seiffert

DHHS Public Information Officer and the New Editor of *Connections*

I've been a PIO with the Department for a little more than 8 years now. When I started, I worked on disaster and emergency preparedness issues in communications, but now my focus is on employee communications. I work with a lot of people to provide new information every day for the employee homepage and now every month for our *Connections* newsletter. We look for information that people will find interesting, useful and fun. How are we doing?

I'm from Fairbury and went to school at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. After I graduated with a degree in Journalism, I stayed in Lincoln. My husband, Bob, graduated from UN-L, too, and worked for DHHS for more than 30 years. It's all in the family!

I've edited a lot of newsletters for many different employers. DHHS is one of the most interesting places I've worked. We



Photo: Bob Seiffert

offer such a wide variety of programs and services, and we're able to help so many different people. The people I work with here at DHHS are the best, too.

Here's a request to the best employees ever. I want to hear your thoughts and ideas concerning our employee communications. I'd like to find out what kinds of things you'd like to see in *Connections* and on the employee homepage. If you want to see more stories from around the state, send them in! Send in your photos, too. DHHS is a big organization with a lot going on, so use *Connections* and the employee homepage to tell others about the great work you're doing.

Special thanks to those who have already given us ideas and photos. We appreciate the help and support.

Dianna Seiffert

402.471.1695

Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards HUFFMAN EARNS SPECIAL CERTIFICATION FROM THE FDA



Troy Huffman with Dr. Joann Schaefer

Photo: Bill Wiley

Troy Huffman, Food Safety Evaluation Officer and Swimming Pool Program Coordinator at DHHS, was recently awarded a certificate for the completion of Standardization of the FDA Food Code and was recognized by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Food and Drug Administration as a Certified Inspection/Training Officer. How did Troy earn this honor? Last August, through a series of standardization exercises, Troy demonstrated his knowledge to Cynthia Kunkel, Nebraska's FDA Regional Food Specialist, of the FDA Food Code, HACCP principles and methods of controlling foodborne disease through risk factors relating to food inspections. Way to go, Troy!

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!

Family Praises BSDC for Giving Son Better Quality of Life

This article originally appeared as “A Different Man” in the Jan. 22 issue of the *Beatrice Daily Sun*. It is reprinted here, in part, with permission.



Photo courtesy: Beatrice Daily Sun

By Chris Dunker

Todd Bright loves being in the water. Floating on his back, the 46-year old flashes his signature smile as he begins another lap across the pool. In the water, Todd recognizes the potential for unlimited movement. There, he is not confined to the wheelchair he has used his entire life.

Pulling himself across the water using a backstroke, he touches the far end of the pool.

“Holy cow!” he says. Each lap is special to Todd, who couldn’t reach his arms over his head a year ago.

Todd Bright is what BSDC is truly about: Helping individuals live a happy, fulfilling life. Todd’s parents, Ted and Rachel Bright, sit poolside to watch and cheer on Todd during his workout.

The Brights moved from Columbus to Beatrice seven years ago to be closer to Todd and his older brother Tim, who also lives at BSDC. Watching Todd’s progress over the past year has been something to see, Ted said.

“What more can you ask for?” he asks, “He went from nothing — couldn’t use one lung — to being able to do what he’s doing now. He’s gotten so strong and the doctors and therapists have been great.”

The Brights complimented the staff at BSDC and said they have the utmost respect and trust in the people who work with Todd every day. They have noticed how much stronger Todd has become, as well as the improved endurance he displays on their twice-weekly visits and the home visits Todd makes every other weekend.

BSDC’s clinical services director **Terri Lykins** said cases like Todd’s are just one reason she is a believer that things happen for a reason.

No longer do any of the therapies, doctors or specialists stand individually at BSDC.

Dr. Jeannette Lopez said in a single morning, Todd and many other individuals at BSDC will go through several therapies in a row, each building off the previous’ progress.

Neurologist **Dr. Nabih Ramadan** explained in October during a visit from the Nebraska Legislature’s special investigative committee on individuals with developmental disabilities that the way of thinking at BSDC has changed. Instead of one attending therapist assigned to a single individual, individuals now come under the care of multiple doctors and therapists who each apply their specific knowledge set to improving the quality of life of each individual.

After an hour of backstroking in the pool, Todd’s body is warm, his muscles responsive and his lungs more receptive to the respiratory therapy he has been doing several times a week for months. Down the hall from the pool, Todd sits upright against a specialized foam pad on a bed with a vest wrapped around his body. The white vest is connected by plastic tube to a machine that provides percussive therapy to the chest cavity, helping to further loosen and remove the mucus and other inhibitors to his breathing that build up in his body.

“Elvis,” as the machine is aptly named by Todd and respiratory therapist **Roberta Edwardson**, provides 10 minutes of percussive therapy — essentially drumming on Todd’s ribcage — while the King of Rock croons “All Shook Up” on repeat from a small CD player.

Todd loves Elvis and near the end of the session joins Presley during the chorus.

“I’m all shook up,” he sings with the King, his voice vibrating as the machine’s percussions pulse through his body.

Everyone in the room smiles.

In July 2010, Todd’s diaphragm — a sheet of muscles along the bottom of the ribcage that help control respiration — was all but non-existent. His spine, stricken with scoliosis, caused him to lean to the left, crushing his left lung into his ribcage. The problem, Physical Therapist **Stacy Schlichtman** points out, is Todd’s spine is working against his desire to breathe. So the staff has created a series of stretches and core strength exercises to combat Todd’s body posture.

Last July, when he first began his therapy, Todd was using 13 percent of his predicted lung capacity. By September, he had increased that to 21 percent. Now, Edwardson and Schlichtman say he has more than doubled his capacity to breathe.

An initial eight percent increase may seem small, but with Todd’s continued improvement, it has opened up his life. He can take part in musical therapy courses and even sing along with Elvis. He visibly enjoys the process of his therapy — the swimming, Elvis and teaching his body how to be better.

Once more, he gives a big grin that lights up the room.

“Because he can breathe, he can sing,” Lopez said. “He’s a different man.”

In their own words

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

Editor's Note: Every year, employees in Communications & Legislative Services (CLS) along with the CEO and Directors' Offices, give gifts to the boys on the Whitehall campus. We also donated money so the kids could enjoy a special pizza party over the holidays. Whitehall, located on the Lincoln Regional Center's east campus, is a community residential program for boys age 12 to 17 years. Every year, after the holidays, we receive many thank you cards and notes from the young men we serve at Whitehall. We wanted to share a few of those cards here:

"Thank you for the Husker blanket you provided me. I really appreciate the fact that you kept me in mind during the holidays. I know that a lot of people think we don't deserve gifts however you kept us in mind and still got us presents."

"Thank you so much. I love my radio. I listen to it all the time. It helps me cool down and fall asleep. I hope you had a merry Christmas. I know you sure did cheer mine up."

"I had a great Christmas and New Years because of the pizza."

"That you for all your help with the presents this year, and thank you for the body pillow and Eragon books. I am going to take very good care of them and keep them very nice. Thank you."

"Everything that you do changes lives forever."

Mary McWilliams

Personnel Manager II, Omaha:

I just wanted to let you know that I worked with **Christine Harrison** (Human Resource Manager, Omaha) as I moved into my promotion to Lead Worker. I am sure you already know but I wanted to remind you of how wonderful she is. She stayed on top of everything and was wonderful about helping me to get all of my questions answered during the move. She was so professional, kind and friendly, she made the move so much easier on me. During this hectic and sometimes stressful time, it is so reassuring that someone like Christine is around to back us all up!

Dawn Peatrowsky

Payment Accuracy Specialist, Fremont

Thanks to **Audrey Hester**, Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home, who sent us the following note from a family of one of our veterans who recently passed away.

To the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home Administrative Staff, Physical Therapy Staff and Social Services Staff: We would like to thank you for the exceptional care you gave our father and compliment you all for the beautiful and extremely well-run facility and the care for our veterans.

Grateful Veteran's family

Happy Holidays, Sonya! (**Sonya Gugelman**, Social Service Worker, Lexington)

Thank you for all that you do for my family! Your hard work and dedication has helped us tremendously, as well as the entire Omaha area in general. Truly, thank you so much!

Grateful Clients

Editor's Note: Other DHHS newsletters offer words of thanks and encouragement to our DHHS employees. A recent Hastings Regional Center (HRC) newsletter had some great letters, for example. Here are some excerpts:

One from the parents of a youth recently discharged from HRC: I thank you not only for your time, caring and work this year but for what you do with all of the youth you encounter and their families. It's amazing really, you change people's lives every day and give them hope, encouragement and guidance.

Parent

Sherry Block (HRC) received two emails from staff at the downtown DHHS office expressing thanks including this one:

Everybody hits hard times in their lives in one way or another. The opportunity to improve one's outcome is always there, and sometimes it takes special people (like all of you) to guide them in the right direction.

Karen Hawthorne (Social Service Worker, Omaha),

Thank you for everything you've done to help my mom and me. I will always be grateful.

A Thankful Client

Janice George (Social Services Supervisor, Omaha):

I wanted to report the wonderful help I have received from **Terri Henning** (Social Service Worker, Omaha). She is always helpful even if it's something she's not involved with. Terri always follows up to make sure my questions are answered. She is such a delight to work with. Her cheery attitude shows she works hard and takes pride in her job. I believe this needs to be documented. Everyone wants to report the bad service, but I want to be sure the good service is reported too.

Danielle Figgins

Boys Town, Youth Medical Benefits

Dear **Jana Peterson**
(Administrator, YRTC-Kearney):

I wanted to thank you for allowing Holy Cross Lutheran Church to participate with YRTC in the Christmas Cookie Ministry for the students. It could not have been a better evening for the event.

The students were wonderful and so grateful. Nearly every young man looked me in the eye, shook my hand, and said thanks. You staff was very willing in their helpfulness to see that the evening went together smoothly.

Kim Sheldon

Holy Cross Lutheran Church
Kearney, Nebraska

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.