

Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

January 2010
VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1



Read on to find out what three DHHS employees did when greeted with a winter welcome to work like this one during recent statewide snow storms.

Photo: Janet Apfelbeck

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DHHS now on

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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.

[New Services Will Support Families of Youth with Behavioral Health Issues](#) December 31, 2009

[Division of Developmental Disabilities Waiver Programs Get High Rating](#) December 17, 2009

[DHHS Announces Further Details of "ACCESSNebraska" Implementation](#) December 8, 2009

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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:

A Message from Dr. Joann Schaefer,
Nebraska's Chief Medical Officer

H1N1 vaccine recently became available to everyone, and I've been encouraging Nebraskans to get vaccinated. Demand for the vaccine is still strong. More than 900 state employees and their dependents lined up to take advantage of the H1N1 flu vaccination clinics being held by The Benefits and Wellness Team in conjunction with DHHS in early January, and I applaud you.

We can't predict what the H1N1 virus is going to do next. But what we do know is getting vaccinated now will help stop the spread of the virus in the future.

H1N1 vaccine helps protect you. You aren't likely to get sick from the virus, and staying healthy means you won't infect your family members.

H1N1 vaccine is safe and effective. The manufacturing process is the same tried and true process that's been used to make seasonal flu vaccine for decades. It's made in the same factories that produce seasonal flu vaccine and has been rigorously tested..

If you weren't able to attend any of the state-sponsored vaccination clinics, I still encourage you to seek out vaccine in your community. Contact your health care provider or local health department or search for flu clinics in your area at <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/influenza/clinics.htm>.

So step up and get vaccinated against H1N1 flu. You'll be reaping the benefits for months to come, and your body will thank you.

The Good Life

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

By Kerry Winterer

Welcome to 2010! This year is already shaping up to be busy – keeping up with our current programs and services as well as starting new activities in several divisions. In that regard, it feels a little like we are already well into the new year!

I usually try to focus on one topic for these monthly commentaries, but this month I'd like to touch on several things because of their importance: our continuing work on the budget, the employee survey, and our 2010 legislative activities.

Budget update: Like all state agencies, we provided information to the Legislature's Appropriations Committee on January 15 about our plan to meet the across-the-board reductions passed during the special session. You might recall that I first mentioned this in the November Connections.

The good news is that I believe we will meet one of our primary goals, and that is to spare services. But we will face challenges in meeting the necessary budget changes in administrative costs, which includes how we do our day-to-day administrative work.

Our largest reduction for the current fiscal year is the elimination of 26.5 full-time positions. These positions are located across the agency but do not include direct care or service delivery. Because of our employee turnover rate, we should be able to accomplish this through attrition rather than through layoffs. Most of the positions are currently vacant or will soon be vacant. Those job duties have been, or will be, distributed among remaining staff on a permanent basis. In fiscal year 2010, an additional 12.4 full-time positions will be eliminated. At that time, we will again look at vacant or soon-to-be vacant positions.

Our report to the Legislature also includes reductions, in part, to computer costs, SOS/temporary employees, and travel. It also includes cuts for activities like student loans to medical students, cancer research funding to our states' research centers, and grants to communities for tobacco prevention.

Other reductions include general funds (with no service impact) to the Beatrice State Developmental Center, Medicaid, Child Support Enforcement, and the Tobacco Prevention and Control Cash Fund. We will also eliminate some costs for data collection.

Some of you will feel these reductions more than others. I appreciate everyone's help, your continued efforts to cut costs in any way possible, and especially your many suggestions for reducing expenses. These all have been provided to directors for consideration.

Employee Survey: I want to take this opportunity once again to thank everyone who took this survey and to everyone who provided comments. I shared the first set of data with you in the December Connections. The Five Star Metric administrators are compiling different data sets and the directors and I will meet with them yet this month to begin to better understand what it all means and decide how to move forward. Due to the large number of comments, it has taken us longer to compile and analyze the results than we expected.

Because the survey was confidential, we won't be able to respond individually to comments or questions, but we're reviewing them all. We want to be able to use

the comments, together with the survey results, to identify similar concerns, issues and trends, and plan accordingly.

Legislative Update: The 2010 legislative session began on January 6. As expected, fewer bills than usual were introduced – coming in at 427. The Department is following many carry-over bills from last year and is reviewing just under 100 from this session, which is fewer than most years.

Each year, the Department requests that bills be introduced on our behalf to assist our work. Legislation introduced on our behalf this year includes:

LB 698 (introduced by Senator LeRoy Loudon), to repeal a portion of current law that allows a Managed Care Program Premium Tax, to be administered by the Department of Insurance, on premiums paid by providers under the



Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

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Homelessness and HIV/AIDS

Conditions too important to ignore



(Left) Dr. **Jackie Miller**, Chief Administrator of the Community Health Section, helps sign in participants and provide direction for the first Project Homeless Connect in October in Lincoln.

Photo: Judy Anderson



(Above) Judy Anderson Photo: Jerry Crisp

By Jerry Crisp

The recent holiday season was a time to celebrate giving and share joy with families and friends in the comfort of our homes. At times like that, “home for the holidays” is a nearly universal aim—except for the homeless for whom that’s nothing more than a fond memory or fading dream. But hope lives on, both in the hearts of people who are homeless and of those committed to helping make that dream come true.

One of those people devoted to that dream is **Judy Anderson**, Program Manager for the Housing Opportunities for Persons with HIV/AIDS (HOPWA) within the Division of Public Health.

“Hard work—not wishful thinking—is needed to make any dream a reality,” Anderson insists.

According to Anderson, data shows that alcohol and substance abuse, dual diagnosis and mental health problems account for approximately 75% of the reasons people are homeless and seeking assistance.

“Research shows that recent efforts that move homeless individuals and families out of shelters and off the streets directly into housing are cost-effective

and improve health outcomes,” says Anderson.

In April 2009, for example, “Project Safe Home” in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, placed 20 homeless individuals into housing. Following housing placement, Sioux Falls/Minnehaha County documented a 50% decrease in per person costs for health care, detox, law enforcement and other county services. Costs dropped from \$32,000 per person to \$16,000 with the most dramatic decline in health care costs that decreased from a total of \$109,000 in the first quarter of the pilot project to less than \$13,000 in the last quarter.

Anderson monitors multi-year studies specifically targeted towards homelessness and persons living with HIV/AIDS. A collaborative effort between HUD and the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) showed a strong connection between stable housing and improvement in overall health for previously homeless persons living with HIV/AIDS.

“The HUD/CDC study revealed a 34% reduction in emergency room visits, a 21% reduction in hospitalizations, and a 44% reduction in self-reported opportunistic infections,” Anderson reports.

Most importantly, she says, the study strongly suggests that housing interventions work to save lives and taxpayer dollars.

“Additional research has shown that prevalence of HIV/AIDS is up to nine times higher among persons who are homeless or unstably housed,” Anderson says. “The death rate among homeless HIV-positive persons is at least five times greater than the death rate among housed persons living with HIV/AIDS.”

Research conducted at the Columbia University School of Public Health over the past 15 years documents that people living with HIV/AIDS who receive stable housing are four times more likely to enter into medical care, and that homeless people living with HIV/AIDS who received a combination of stable housing and social case management were nine times more likely to enter into and stay in medical care, including adherence to HIV/AIDS treatment.

“A consensus seems to be building that homelessness is a major risk factor for HIV, and HIV is a major risk factor for homelessness,” Anderson says. “This suggests that the condition of homelessness and not simply the traits of homeless individuals, influences

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DHHS Hepatitis Coordinator **Kathryn White** (center) works with volunteer **Jamie Hughes** (left), Judy Anderson's daughter, and a participant to determine needed medical services at Project Homeless Connect last fall in Lincoln.

Photo: Judy Anderson

HIV/AIDS:

(continued from page 4)

risk behaviors and service utilization, making housing a key to a solution.”

One way of helping people find homes is “Project Homeless Connect” (PHC), an effort to connect homeless individuals and families with systems of care that help them move into permanent supportive housing. More than 200 communities nationwide conduct this event at least annually.

PHC is a one-day event that offers a one-stop access to information about needed services that include health and dental care, vision screenings, mental health and substance abuse services, housing, employment and job training opportunities, Medicaid, and SNAP (formerly food stamps). Government entities, non-profit agencies, local businesses, volunteer groups and others offer on-site, immediate assistance and referrals for homeless persons and their families, and medical and dental providers are on site to perform health care screenings, treatment and follow-up.

After learning of the first PHC in Omaha in 2008, Anderson worked with the Omaha project to identify services within the Division of Public Health that could support this event. Dr. Joann Schaefer, Director of the Division of Public Health and the state's Chief Medical Officer, identified stimulus funds to help support these activities.

As a result, DHHS support for PHC continues to grow, and Anderson worked hard to see that needed vaccines — including flu shots from a limited supply — and HIV counseling and testing services were available for the first PHC in Lincoln in October 2009. At that event, an estimated 60 area service providers were on-site to provide an array of medical and supportive services for approximately 225 homeless individuals. For her efforts, Anderson received the 2009 Service Award from the Lincoln/Lancaster Homeless Coalition.

On December 24, a PHC-Kids was held at the Civic Center in Omaha. Along with offering limited health screenings and immunizations, its main aim was to provide a festive atmosphere where homeless children and young adults were able to celebrate Christmas in a family, friendly setting.

As Judy Anderson's experience shows, helping people who are homeless provides a stable base for them to better address other challenges like alcohol and substance abuse, mental health issues and HIV/AIDS and ultimately live better lives.

For more information about homelessness, go to www.dhhs.ne.gov/fia/nhap/nhapindex.htm. For more information on the national homeless epidemic as well as housing related specifically to HIV/AIDS go to www.nationalaidshousing.org.

(see [page 15](#) for related article)

HOPWA

HOPWA (Housing Opportunities for Persons with HIV/AIDS) is a federally administered grant program that provides resources to develop a range of housing assistance and supportive services for low-income persons living with HIV/AIDS and their families. HOPWA is administered by the Office of HIV/AIDS Housing within the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Affairs (HUD).

DHHS receives funding from HUD and contracts with the Nebraska AIDS Project (NAP) to provide direct client services. NAP serves all 93 counties in Nebraska with offices in Scottsbluff, Norfolk, Kearney, Lincoln and Omaha.

DHHS also contracts with Assistive Technology Partnership (ATP) within the Nebraska Department of Education to provide housing and supportive service resources to clients statewide. ATP also performs housing quality standards inspections and coordinates inspections with participating public housing authorities.

Norfolk Veterans' Home member experienced victories both on and off WW II battlefields



(Above) **Lt. Al Cerny** during WW II. (Right) Cerny today with his wife **Dorothy** and daughter **Alice Pracht** at the Norfolk Veterans' Home during one of their frequent visits. *Photo: Linda Sparr*

By Jerry Crisp

The story of **Lt. Al Cerny** is the story of countless other ordinary young soldiers during World War II who went to war and accomplished remarkable things. Cerny is now a member of the Norfolk Veterans' Home.

During World War II, Lt. Cerny was put in charge of a platoon of African American soldiers at Fort Riley, Kansas.

During those years, the military was still segregated. Knowing that black soldiers had no place to gather during off hours and were unwelcome in town, Cerny found an empty barracks and personally repaired a broken pool table so that this platoon could relax and have some fun.

Cerny also organized a class to help those in his platoon who weren't literate so they could send letters home and read any letters sent to them.



On the wall of that barracks, Cerny painted a world map and drew a bomber above both the European and Pacific theatres. Whenever one of his men bought a war bond, he would paint a bomb dropping out of one of the aircraft with the soldier's name on it. The men were encouraged to purchase war bonds, and this caught the attention of those in authority. Shortly thereafter, Lt. Cerny was promoted from Second Lieutenant to First Lieutenant.

Asked then how he liked being in charge of black soldiers, Cerny said that they were among his best friends.

Cerny had good rapport with his platoon in Kansas but when shipped overseas to Italy where lives were on the line, he sensed they might not be as willing to follow as they had before. All that changed one day when the platoon moved into combat.

Unsure about his men's security, Cerny went ahead on his own to check

out the situation. When he returned, the men were impressed that a white man would risk his life for them. After that, he said, they would follow him into the jaws of hell.

"Dad was in a transportation group, which is funny since he didn't know how to drive when he entered the military," says **Alice Pracht**, Cerny's daughter. "His group was assigned to tear apart a jeep and put it together again. He said they succeeded, even though they had a handful of extra bolts when they got done."

The task for Cerny's platoon was to supply the front lines and return with dead or wounded soldiers. One time, a bomb fell directly in front of Cerny's jeep but did not explode.

"Otherwise, I wouldn't be telling you all this right now," says Pracht.

After Italy fell to the Allies, Cerny's platoon moved north with the advancing front line. As they advanced, his platoon helped move liberated prisoners of war back to their homes throughout a Europe that lay in ruins.

Cerny also had an artist's touch and sketched many scenes and portraits of his comrades. After the war, he earned a degree in Art at South Dakota State University and a Master's degree at Drake University in Iowa. His post-war career included teaching art in Iowa and supervising the art program in the Sioux Falls, South Dakota, public school system.

An ordinary man like countless others who went to war, Lt. Al Cerny created a record to be proud of by demonstrating leadership, helping break down the color barrier in the U.S. military, and exhibiting a talent for rendering his experiences through art and teaching others to do the same. Like all veterans, he also helped ensure the freedoms we all enjoy today.

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Al Cerny:
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Cerny's sketch of President **Franklin Roosevelt** that bore the inscription, "Our Commander-in-Chief, 60 Years, January 20, 1942."



African American servicemen enjoy a game of pool in an area Lt. Cerny made possible for them.



Lt. Cerny conducts a reading class for members of his platoon in 1943 at Fort Riley, Kansas.



Cerny's sketch of **Richard Lewis**, member of the platoon Cerny commanded.

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.



Joe Homan

Photo: Jerry Crisp

By Jerry Crisp

As Information Technology Manager of Customer Services within Operations, one of **Joe Homan's** many duties is overseeing the Help Desk, consisting of Levels 1 and 2, Direct Support (Hardware), Facility Coordination, and Warehouse.

Level 1 refers to those helpful folks who offer quick but effective fixes when their co-workers phone about computers that are misbehaving, and Level 2 refers to those equally helpful folks who take calls requiring extra time or expertise to solve your technological problems.

The Hardware Team comes to your work site to fix your computer or printer that can't be handled over the phone. Customer Services has taken and closed more than 31,000 Help Desk calls in the last six months!

Facility Coordinators are located at each of the DHHS 24-hour facilities. This group of professionals coordinate 24-hour facility projects or initiatives and provide Help Desk support for their facilities.

On top of these duties, Homan also oversees the warehouse operation, which handles every piece of equipment used by DHHS from acquisition to disposal or recycling.

Another aspect of Homan's work is overseeing e-mail support for side-by-side Lotus Notes and Outlook applications. This group is responsible for maintaining all

of the mailing lists, applications, mail-in databases, and is constantly researching ways to leverage e-mail to meet business needs.

"In addition to serving DHHS employees," Homan explains, "we probably spend as much or more time with community partners, who also require access to applications, databases and security maintenance."

Homan also oversees "Change Management," a process that plans, pilots, implements and maintains servers, software and networking so that continuous upgrading occurs with as little downtime for DHHS employees as possible.

"Employees throughout Information Services & Technology participate in this ongoing process to make it as seamless as humanly possible," says Homan.

"I couldn't fulfill all of these commitments," says Homan, "without supervisors in each of these areas who bring out the best in more than 50 employees in Customer Services who do such an outstanding job."

Homan sees the ongoing challenge of doing something better or entirely new in all of these areas as an opportunity to share what he and his staff learn with customers.

"It's like an extended family," he says. "When we are doing a large project like converting from Lotus Notes to Outlook, we pull together to plan, pilot and put into action in a way that minimizes disruption and downtime. Once the new system is fully operational, we can look back with a lot of satisfaction and pride."

"When we solve a problem or help an employee do something more easily or effectively, their positive feedback is an immediate reward that tells us we're being successful," Homan says. "Because of this, I enjoy going to work each day, and judging by the fact that my staff has very little turnover, I think they do, too."

Homan takes pride in the close working relationship enjoyed by staff in the various facets of Customer Services.

"Once each year, my supervisors and I bring everyone from across the state together in one place," Homan explains. "It's an opportunity to remind ourselves that we're all part of the same team and to express our appreciation for the outstanding job they all do."

According to **James Ohmberger**, former Administrator of DHHS Information Systems & Technology, "Joe is a team player whose very nature and willingness to pitch in to help others makes him a great customer services manager."

If your computer, printer or other equipment is working just fine, you have Homan and his crew to thank. If your computer, printer or other equipment acts up, you can be glad that Homan and his team are ready to get you back into action quickly.

New behavioral health services for children and teens



Scot Adams

Photo: Billl Wiley

By Jeanne Atkinson

Multiple new services are up and running for youth with behavioral health and other needs. They were developed in response to Nebraska's safe haven law, which received national attention in the fall of 2009 and revealed gaps in services.

"We're making progress on several fronts," said **Scot Adams**, director of the Division of Behavioral Health. "We took a major step forward when the Governor and Legislature provided additional services and professional resources to Nebraska families last year."

LB 603, passed in 2009, now provides the following supports:

- The statewide **Nebraska Family Helpline** is operated by Boys Town and began on January 1st.

It's available 24/7 for families facing a behavioral health crisis and is staffed by professionals trained in mental health assessment.

- Helpline operators can then connect eligible families with **Family Navigator Services** within 24 to 72 hours after the Helpline referral to identify existing community services and provide family peer support.
- LB 603 changed Medicaid eligibility so children under age 19 are eligible if their family income is equal to or less than 200% of the federal poverty guideline. Former eligibility was based on 185% of the federal poverty guideline.
- LB 603 established the Behavioral Health Workforce Education Center at the University of Nebraska Medical Center to recruit and train more psychiatry residents and develop six behavioral health training sites across the state.
- The **Right Turn** program is provided by Lutheran Family Services and the Nebraska Children's Home Society. The 3000+ families who have adopted or are legal guardians for a child or teen through the state's foster care system can receive services on a voluntary basis.

"Right Turn is a great resource for families who have adopted or are guardians for children who were state wards," said **Todd Reckling**,

director of the Division of Children and Family Services. "When needed, families can be connected to services like respite care, mentoring, counseling, classes and support groups."

The new [Network of Care Web site](#) includes treatment resources, advocacy groups and other behavioral health information. Just Google "Network of Care" and click on Nebraska's information.

Nebraska also recently received a three-year federal Suicide Prevention grant. DHHS will receive \$500,000 per year to increase awareness of suicide as a preventable public health problem as it works to make measurable decreases in Nebraska's youth suicide rates.



NE Family Helpline

888-866-8660

Right Turn Program

888-667-2399

www.networkofcare.org

First ACCESSNebraska Customer Service Center to open in Lincoln

By Dianna Seiffert

Lincoln, Fremont, Lexington then Scottsbluff is the order that future customer service centers will come up across the state. The Lincoln center will have 100 employees and will be located at 340 Victory Lane.

The Lincoln center will start taking calls this fall, after which one will open about every six months. By 2012, all customer service centers will be open, and a single phone number will allow people all across the state to call for services and information.

Lincoln was chosen as the first site due to proximity of DHHS central office staff and other state agencies that will provide technical support and install necessary equipment.

The centers will be operated by trained economic assistance employees able to access case-specific information quickly and give clients timely, accurate, and consistent information.

Customer service centers are only one part of ACCESSNebraska. ACCESSNebraska started with on-line applications and screenings and continues with ways to improve how we provide economic assistance like universal case load management and document imaging (electronic scanning, storing and retrieving of documents).

If people don't want to apply on-line through ACCESSNebraska or over the phone through a customer service center, there will still be opportunities for face-to-face interviews.

"We expect more people to access services in these new ways as they see how convenient it is not to have to drive long distances or only be able to apply for services during traditional work hours," said **Todd**

Reckling, Director of the Division of

Children and Family Services. "Now more than 30% of our electronic applications come in after traditional hours."

Additional information about ACCESSNebraska can be found on the DHHS employee Intranet at: www2.dhhs.ne.gov/accessnebraska/index.htm.



Radon: Leading cause of lung cancer in nonsmokers

By Sara Morgan
Indoor Air Quality Program Manager
Nebraska Radon Program

Most people know that smoking is the leading cause of lung cancer. However, nonsmokers are also susceptible to the disease. Exposure to radon can lead to lung cancer and is the primary cause of that disease for nonsmokers. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that approximately 21,000 lung cancer deaths per year are due to radon exposure.

Radon is a colorless, odorless, naturally occurring gas that originates in the soil and builds to dangerous levels in homes. In Nebraska, half of the radon tests conducted yield elevated

levels of radon. We clearly have a high incidence in our state, and that drives our educational and outreach efforts.

Recently the Nebraska Radon Program helped sponsor and staff a booth at the *Free to Breathe* event held at Holmes Lake in Lincoln. This fun run/walk raised over \$20,000 for lung cancer research and awareness and had over 370 attendees.

Katie Holle, organizer of the local event, initially became involved after losing her father to lung cancer.

"My father was a non-smoker who developed stage IV lung cancer abruptly which was shocking and upsetting. I had to do what I could to raise awareness that this disease is not exclusive to smokers and that everyone should test their households."

For nonsmokers, the best way to reduce risk of lung cancer is to test for radon, and if levels are high, to mitigate the home.

One aspect of the Nebraska Radon Program is to offer low-cost radon test kits in an effort to encourage people to test their homes. We also work to provide technical assistance to those who need a mitigation system installed.

To purchase a short-term radon test kit for \$5, send a check or money order with your name and mailing address to:

Nebraska Radon Program
301 Centennial Mall South
Lincoln, NE 68509.

To learn more about radon and the Nebraska Radon Program, telephone 1-800-334-9491 or visit the Web site at www.dhhs.ne.gov/radon.

Grant awarded to enhance cancer screening

One million dollars for the first year of a 5-year grant has been awarded to the DHHS colorectal cancer screening program by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

According to **Kathy Ward**, Administrator of the Office of Women's and Men's Health, "This is thanks to great work done by staff members in the Colorectal Cancer Demonstration



Program. With the state funds that have also been received and the partnership with Nebraska CARES, our state will make great progress in addressing incidence and mortality from colorectal cancer."

"Thank you for all of your work," said **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health. "You are all so amazing, and it gives me chills to think of how much you care!"

Grant awarded to enhance children's nutritional health

Nebraska has been awarded a 2-year Team Nutrition Training Grant for \$326,635 from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) to help children develop good nutrition and physical activity habits for healthier lifestyles. This amount is part of \$5.8 million granted to 18 states.

This funding provides schools with nutrition education materials for children and parents as well as technical assistance for communities and school food service providers. The grants also support efforts to help schools reach out to parents, teachers, caregivers and

others to capitalize on the positive role-model potential they have for children.

DHHS Public Health Nutritionist **Holly Dingman** and Physical Activity Coordinator **Brian Coyle** worked with the Department of Education to apply for the grant.

Wellness Words: *Personal Preparedness*

While many work behind the scenes to help citizens of Nebraska and our nation be better prepared for emergencies, here's something you can do to be better prepared yourself!

Want to make a New Year's resolution that sticks? Instead of trying to do too many self-improvement projects at once, take one that is critical to your health and well being, and tackle it first.

How about preparing for an emergency? Emergencies can happen to any of us, so it's up to all of us to prepare.

There are three basic things you need to do to prepare:

1. Assemble an emergency supply kit starting with basic things that you use every day, like food, water and clothing;
2. Develop a family communication plan; and

3. Be informed about the potential emergencies that could happen where you live and the appropriate way to respond to them.

If doing all of these things at once seems like too big of a task, break it down into three manageable steps. The Department of Homeland Security's Web site at www.ready.gov is a great place to start. Ready.gov has a list of emergency kit supplies and instructional videos that are really helpful. There are also templates you can download to document your emergency communication plans.

Remember to stick to your New Year's resolution, it's important to visualize the end result. Being prepared helps you and your family face challenges and gives you some peace of mind. Have faith in yourself. You can do anything if you set your mind on your goal.

For more information, visit the DHHS emergency preparedness Web site at www.dhhs.ne.gov/emergency_preparedness, or contact **Dianna Seiffert** at (402) 471-1695.



In their own words

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

Dear **Taryn Struthers** (Infection Control Coordinator, Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home, Bellevue):

Thank you for going above and beyond to protect the lives of staff, members and staff members' at-risk children by developing a wonderful working relationship with the Cass/Sarpy County Health Department. Due to your active participation and constant communication with the Health Department, you were able to vaccinate pregnant women, nursing mothers and at-risk children of ENVH staff for H1N1 in early October.

Thanks to your tireless efforts, you have protected more than 20 high-risk people who might otherwise been left at risk. As a pregnant woman, I can't begin to relay my gratitude. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Brenda Knutson
Director of Nursing
Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home

Dear **DHHS Webmaster**:

I was just going on your ACCESSNebraska Website to change some information for assistance I am receiving, and I want to commend you on how easy it was to change the information. Thank you so much for getting that Website going. It's much easier doing it online sometimes rather than face-to-face or by mail.

A Lincoln client

Dear **Jessica Rausch** (Social Services Supervisor, DHHS Omaha Pacific Street office):

I would like to express my appreciation for the wonderful help I received from **Donna DeRusse** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Omaha Pacific Street Office). She made me aware of benefits I did not know were available. I could tell Donna was very happy to explain all of the benefits in detail with a very kind and sincere demeanor.

What makes the United States of America the greatest country in the world is people like Jessica Rausch and Donna DeRusse doing their jobs with heartfelt pride. That makes everyone involved feel great.

An Omaha client

In their own words

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

Dear **Helen Meeks** (Administrator, Licensure Unit, Division of Public Health):

It is my honor and privilege to send you a note in regard to my interaction with DHHS today. Like many, I cringe at the thought of dealing with any government agency. Due to a poorly-timed vacation and some absentmindedness, I allowed my license to expire. When I called to make sure I had taken care of everything, I was directed to Credentialing Coordinator **Vonda Apking**. I hadn't taken care of it properly, and Vonda was patient in explaining what needed to be done.

She e-mailed me the form I needed and made sure I knew everything I needed prior to making a trip to your office. When I arrived, she was friendly and efficient. She got my request processed while I waited, and sent me with a letter so I knew I could practice this afternoon.

It was a breath of fresh air working with Vonda. She was helpful, kind, and most importantly, efficient. It is my opinion that DHHS is lucky to have an employee like Vonda. She certainly made my unfortunate and stressful situation easier. I am grateful to your department and especially to Vonda for the help I received today.

Erin Hoffman
Omaha, Nebraska

Dear **Mary Koester** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Beatrice office) and **Kim Adams** (Case Aide, Beatrice office):

Thank you for all you did in helping me with my mother's application. A difficult time was made easier by your willingness to go the extra mile.

You are both angels in my book. Words cannot express my appreciation for your service.

The daughter of a nursing home client

Dear **Laura Slack** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Omaha 73rd St. office):

Thank you so much for all your help. It's greatly appreciated! I called and they are working on getting me approved for help with my first two month's rent.

I hope everything works out. Being diagnosed with FMS a couple of months ago, getting foreclosed, getting a notice at work, and getting shut-off notices all in the last week and one-half! I am so grateful for the extra time you are taking to help me. I thank you so much and know you are going above and beyond.

An Omaha 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.

Letters from YRTC-Kearney students earn response from soldier in Afghanistan



About 40 students at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney (YRTC-K) wrote letters and sent care packages to soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan in December. The care packages included school supplies for Iraqi children, blankets, books, movies, toiletries and snacks.

“This is the second year I have organized this project using www.anysoldier.com,” says **Shantel Eatherton**, Speech Language Pathologist at YRTC-K. “It’s a good teaching tool for both letter writing and patriotism.”

Since some of the cards and packages were air dropped in very remote areas, Eatherton was surprised that the letters and packages produced a response within a couple of weeks.

“Students were excited to hear from a soldier, especially since I cautioned them that they might not get any response at all,” Eatherton adds.

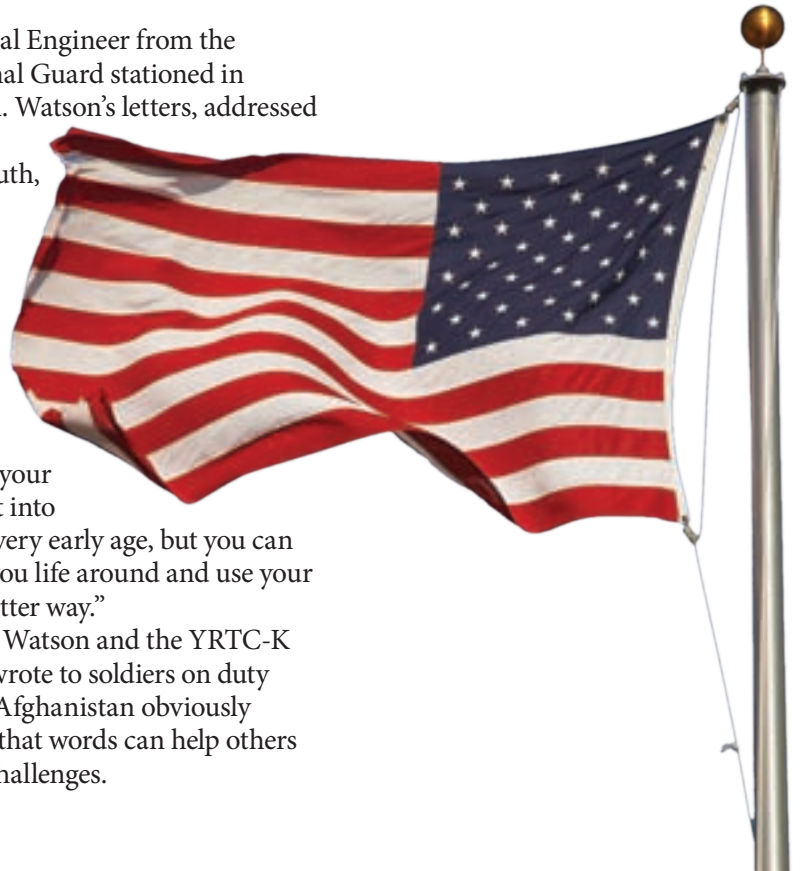
The response came from **Libya Watson**, a U.S. Army Staff Sergeant

Sergeant **Libya Watson** (second from right) with some of her fellow soldiers in Afghanistan.

and Technical Engineer from the Ohio National Guard stationed in Afghanistan. Watson’s letters, addressed to several YRTC-K youth, expressed gratitude for their letters and packages, along with words of wisdom:

“Time is on your side. You got into trouble at a very early age, but you can easily turn you life around and use your skills in a better way.”

Both Sgt. Watson and the YRTC-K youth who wrote to soldiers on duty in Iraq and Afghanistan obviously understand that words can help others meet their challenges.



DHHS employees help brighten the holidays for homeless children and families



Approximately 230 homeless children and their family members found the Omaha Civic Auditorium on Christmas Eve filled with a holiday spirit and toys.

Ed Shada, a Bellevue University employee who coordinated the Project Homeless Connect-Kids event, said “No kid should be without a gift for Christmas.”

According to **Judy Anderson**, “My van was completely filled with toys DHHS employees in Lincoln donated, and Omaha provided a dozen large boxes of toys that were distributed to kids on Christmas Eve as part of the Toys for Tots campaign.” Anderson is a Program Manager for the Housing Opportunities for Persons with HIV/AIDS (HOPWA) in the Division of Public Health,

Each child at the one-stop event saw Santa and received three toys. While inclement weather prevented an expected 500 to 1,000 people from attending the one-stop event and caused it to end early, leftover clothing and toys were delivered to area shelters to

Even the very youngest had an opportunity to visit with Santa Claus at the Project Homeless Connect-Kids event in Omaha on Christmas Eve, as mom and an unidentified volunteer look on.

Photo: Janet Shada

brighten the holiday season for many more.

The aim of the event wasn’t just about gift-giving but to provide as many things as needy families might need under one roof, such as H1N1 vaccinations, dental care, donated clothing and the like. More than 90 people visited the health care area, where 67 medical and 37 dental forms were filled out, 56 children and family members received the H1N1 vaccine, and 25 received the seasonal flu vaccine.

“I’d like to extend a huge thank you to all of the DHHS employees who donated toys and clothing and to **Sandy Klocke**, HIV/AIDS Program Administrator; **Dan Cillessen**, Health Promotion Unit Administrator; **Dr. Jackie Miller**, Chief Administrator of the Community Health Section; and **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Division of Public Health Director, for their strong support,” Anderson adds.

Many DHHS programs also contributed to the success of the Project

Homeless Connect-Kids Project.

The Smoke-Free Nebraska Program provided children’s activity booklets; the Medicaid Kids Connection Program provided application instructions and informational packets; the Dental Health Program provided toothbrushes, toothpaste and mouth rinses; and the Health Promotion Unit provided funding for an array of childhood vaccines.

Judy Anderson’s role in all of this is also appreciated.

“I am proud of Judy’s efforts to make this a memorable Christmas for homeless children and of all of the other staff members who provided gifts that brightened the holiday season,” said Dan Cillessen.

“Judy Anderson is one of the most professional, caring, give-you-the-coat-off-her-back individuals I have ever met,” says Ed Shada. “She is special—she’s an angel.”

How the YRTC's celebrated the holidays



YRTC-KEARNEY Thirty youth were able to go home on furlough for the holidays. Credit for this goes to the youth who made significant progress and staff members who helped them make that progress.

Due to severe weather this year, fewer families were able to join youth who remained at the facility for Christmas dinner, but each youth was allowed an opportunity to phone their families. Each youth also received three presents.

Living unit staff, Counseling, Spiritual and Recreation staff also planned an array of activities for the holidays, including Wii bowling tournaments, sledding, ping pong, movies, chess, trivia and team work activities. The gym also offered swimming, inner tube regatta and basketball. Those who got into the community also enjoyed touring the Nebraska TV and fire stations, taking in movies, and eating out.

Living units also entered into a friendly decorating competition during the holiday season. Five Advisory Board members and youth from one of the living units judged holiday decorations at the facility. Shown right are (L-R) **Steve Andrews, Kerri Andrews, Greg Johnson, Ann Tvrdik** and **Donna Bamford.**

Photo: Leslie Holman

YRTC-GENEVA "Dreaming of a White Christmas" goes on in Geneva just like anywhere else, but "Be careful what you wish for" is equally good advice in the wake of the snow storm that visited Geneva, too.

"In the true spirit of the season, staff pulled together to ensure that the youth were well taken care of during blizzard conditions," says Administrative Assistant **Mary Stofer.** "In order to provide coverage, many staff stayed overnight, worked double shifts and worked in areas to which they weren't normally assigned. Maintenance staff also came in from vacation leave to provide around-the-clock snow removal."

With two expectant mothers on campus, it was especially important to ensure that emergency routes were kept open, that potential power outages could be dealt with, and that facility operations maintained.

"In the midst of all this, the youth were still able to celebrate the holiday season," Stofer adds. "They frosted cookies with the Community Advisory Board, and enjoyed Christmas dinner on December 20 with 151 family members attending, and opened presents and enjoyed holiday snacks on Christmas Eve.

Photo: Mary Stofer

More DHHS holiday celebrations



A REALLY SWEET DEAL (Above) A suggestion from **Helen Meeks**, Administrator of the Licensure Section within the Division of Public Health, for a friendly competition of holiday gingerbread houses produced this winning entry from Program Specialist **Craig Erickson**.

"The Licensure Unit staff really got into this fierce but friendly contest and produced some very creative gingerbread art," Meeks said. "Our judges—**Roger Brink, Ruth Schuldt, Pam Harris, Donna Jobman and Rita Watson**—did an excellent job of selecting a winner."

"Our group decided to create a winter scene," says Erickson. "All of us had a hand in the final display."

Erickson made the log cabin out of gingerbread, rolling the dough to 1/8th of an inch thick and cutting to a 10-inch length. He filled spaces between logs with frosting and coconut.

"It took some practice," Erickson admits, "but mistakes taught me what I needed to know."

The rest of Erickson's team made the street from Twizzlers, the pond from a pie tin covered with blue gel frosting and the snow was frosting with coconut sprinkled on top.

Sweet!

Photo: Jerry Crisp

GENEROUS GIVING (Below) Christmas

stockings and other gifts made the holiday a little brighter for children in the Department's care. The Omaha Quilters Guild members made and donated stockings and \$14,251 in cash for stocking stuffers and Wal-Mart gift cards. Children & Family Services workers began selection by submitting names of five children so they could be sure to help their neediest families first. DHHS received 363 stockings and money, another 215 children received gift bags, and the quilters donated six totes for youth transitioning into independent living.

Photo: Kim Cooper



DHHS offices weather the storm!



This scene at the DHHS Beatrice office was like the one that greeted many employees arriving at work across the state during the recent statewide snow storms.



Stalwarts make their approach, proving once again that where there's a will, there's a way.



All's well that ends well, as Social Service Workers (L-R) **Diana Blythe**, **Pat Gomon** and **Jackie Kimes** arrive at work safe and sound.

Photos: Janet Apfelbeck

The Good Life: *(continued from page 3)*

Medicaid Managed Care program. The federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services has found that this type of provider tax is not permissible.

LB 737 (introduced by **Senator Russ Karpisek**) would remove the title of Director of Nursing from the state's classified system and allow agencies to hire these employees as non-classified to allow for the flexibility to fill these positions in a timely manner and compete with the private sector.

LB 849 (introduced by **Senator Tim Gay**) is the Department's "clean up" bill providing technical changes in Medicaid, Developmental Disabilities, Child Support Enforcement, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.

LB 939 (introduced by **Senator Arnie Stuthman**) changes Child Support provisions related to review and modification of child support orders, allows the Department to collect on other monetary judgments (such as genetic testing), and adds the requirement that financial institutions also remit a delinquent obligor's account balance to the Department.

Bills introduced on our behalf last year and carried over to this year include:

LB 319 (introduced by **Senator Mike Flood**) changes provisions related to child care reimbursement.

LB 38 (introduced by **Senator Mike Flood**) changes assault provisions on DHHS employees working at Regional Centers and YRTC's.

LB 341 (introduced by **Senator Tanya Cook**) changes provisions relating to tuberculosis and its prevention.

Once again, thank you for the work you do each and every day.