

CONNECTIONS

January 2012 VOLUME 12, ISSUE 1

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

New Look. New Contest. New Year. Make the Most of Connections and the Employee Website!

Connections is here! Read all about it!

For this first issue of the new year, we're introducing a new look and a new contest.

Connections goes horizontal.

Since *Connections* is available online, it makes sense to make the format of the newsletter fit your computer's horizontal screen. So that's what we've done.

Connections is more interactive, too.

Click on "Read more" to, well, read more about a story that interests you. New tabs at the top of the page will get you where you want to go, and, just as importantly, get you back to where you started. Try out the new features in this issue, and let me know what you think.

Connections contest rewards employees who submit stories

What makes *Connections* and the employee homepage interesting and fun to read? You do! We can't be in all places at all times, so getting information from you is one of the best ways we have to highlight all of the great work DHHS employees are doing around the state.

That's why we're starting a new contest...to say thanks to all the many DHHS coworkers who send photos and write articles for *Connections* and the employee homepage.

Here's how the contest works. Submit an article or photo for *Connections* or the employee website, and your name will be entered in a drawing. Every two months we'll draw a name, and the winner will get to choose from a grab bag of great prizes. We'll draw the first winning name (from all the names we've gathered since Jan. 1) on Wednesday, Feb. 29.

Keep looking to *Connections* and the employee homepage for interesting and insightful information about DHHS and the people who work here. And we'll keep sharing photos and stories from your coworkers around the state.

Dianna Seiffert
Editor, *Connections*

Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov
DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees.gov>
DHHS Helpline: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov

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Homepage Homeruns

The [DHHS employee website](#) has something for everyone. Only DHHS employees can access the DHHS employee website, and that's why it's designed exclusively for you. We add and share new information and photos every day, things that are relevant to you and the work you do here at DHHS. Missed a day of Neat to Know information? All of the Neat to Know blogs and

employee comments are categorized and saved by date.

Here's a recent post about the YRTC in Kearney. It was featured on the employee homepage on Jan. 20. Got an idea or a photo you'd like to share for the employee homepage or *Connections*? Send it to Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.

Field Day Fun at YRTC-K



Youth and staff at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Kearney had a field day recently when the facility's gym was filled with giant inflatable obstacle courses, slides and safe play areas. One City, a non-profit, spiritual-based organization from Lexington, Nebraska, led by Pastor Josh Erickson and volunteers, organized this event to celebrate the end of the School semester and the start of the holiday season.

The youth spent part of their day participating in organized field day events led by Pastor Mike Pearson and YRTC-K's Recreation Department. **Jana Peterson**, Facility Administrator, said the event was enjoyed by all. "It was a great way for the youth to burn off some energy and work off some of the good food they enjoyed over the holidays."

We're ready to respond to public health emergencies. Do you want to help?

In the event of a true public health emergency, the Strategic National Stockpile (SNS)* is a national resource of medical supplies ready and waiting to help states with their emergency response efforts. Receiving, shipping and storing the stockpile is a complex operation involving people from DHHS, other states agencies and the federal government.

We're looking for recruits to help with the stockpile process. Among other duties, DHHS employees unload the stockpile shipment, manage inventory, maintain quality control and repackage supplies for further distribution.

We train and practice handling the stockpile ahead of time to prepare us in the event of an actual emergency. But the commitment to be part of the stockpile team is minimal...one short training and one short exercise a year...all on work time. If the stockpile is ever needed for a real public health emergency, though, DHHS employees trained to help may be called to work with little notice.

During the last stockpile training in September, participants practiced unloading containers of mock medical supplies and repackaged those "supplies" for further distribution. Another training is scheduled for this April.

If you are interested in becoming part of the stockpile team and have your supervisor's approval to participate, contact Paul Jantzen at paul.jantzen@nebraska.gov or Russ Wren, russ.wren@nebraska.gov.

*The Strategic National Stockpile includes pharmaceuticals, medical supplies and medical equipment. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has these "stockpiles" located around the country so states can have access to the supplies they need within 12 hours of requesting them.

The Good Life: A reminder of what we all share and hope to provide to our fellow Nebraskans



Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

The Nebraska Unicameral is now in session, and there are many bills, that, if passed, will impact the Department and our programs and services for years to come.

Every step of the Legislative process affects the work we do at DHHS. Of the 468 legislative bills introduced during the first ten days of the session, 142 were assigned to division staff for review within DHHS.

Department employees provide a great deal of program, financial and legal expertise when bills are analyzed for possible impact to DHHS. When bills impact several divisions, employees from each of those divisions are all involved in the review process. This step is crucial, and I appreciate the expertise that staff provides.

During this session, legislation that focuses on child welfare reform in the state remains a priority. DHHS continues to

provide information about child welfare reform to state senators, and we recently testified against three bills that would impact DHHS' child welfare reform program, Families Matter. [Here's](#) a DHHS news release that summarizes the testimony.

All DHHS testimony is also available on the [employee website](#). Click on "Communications and Legislative Services" on the left side of the homepage, then on the link called "Legislation" on the left, or, use [this link](#).

Every step of the Legislative process affects the work we do at DHHS.

The 2012 bill tracking database on this page includes the list of the bills DHHS is tracking, which divisions provided impact summaries, hearing dates scheduled and, once the hearing is held, copies of our letters and testimonies. It's a great resource.

Legislative committee hearings will run at least through February. The directors and I meet regularly during this time, and we rely on the expertise of DHHS employees to help us prepare testimonies and letters on various bills that impact the Department.

It may be a short legislative session this year, but it's long on dedication and commitment of DHHS employees. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who contributes to the DHHS legislative process. If you have questions, contact Bryson Bartels, our legislative coordinator, at 402-471-0541.

Serving People with Excellence*

Tried and True Tips for Providing Good Customer Service

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not a single act, but a habit. -Aristotle

It's a new year. Time to refine and develop good habits. For work, that may mean making a habit of providing good customer service. It's not difficult to provide good customer service. It's usually accomplished by doing simple, common sense things. When interacting with customers, here are some tips we all know but sometimes forget:

- Always begin a conversation with a polite and friendly greeting. "Hey, how 'ya doing?" is not always the best way to start.
- You cannot do two things well at once. Stay focused. Pay attention to the call or the customer. Write down key information.
- "Please," "Thank you," and "You're welcome" are basic, common courtesies that will never go out of style.
- Smile. A smile conveys warmth, kindness and graciousness. People can hear it in your voice even if they can't see your face.

*These tips are taken from DHHS' Serving People with Excellence customer service training. We'll continue to feature more tips on the employee homepage and in *Connections*.

Structured Decision Making Training: Connecting the Right Child at the Right Time with the Right Services



Shannon Flasch, senior program specialist with the Children’s Research Center in Madison, WI, is participating with DHHS’ Policy Section to train Children and Family Services staff and informing Nebraska judges, attorneys and other stakeholders about Structured Decision Making, a new safety and risk model for identifying the needs of children.



By Russ Reno

A new assessment tool aimed at identifying the needs of children so DHHS can work with the “right child at the right time with the right services” is unfolding across the Department’s service areas, according to Child and Family Services Program Specialist **Sara Goscha**.

“This new tool is called Structured Decision Making (SDM),” Goscha said. “It helps caseworkers evaluate a child’s safety and risk for potential future harm during the assessment phase.”

SDM was conceived by the Children’s Research Center, which helps state and local social services agencies reduce child abuse and neglect by developing case management systems and conducting research that improves service delivery to children and families.

The SDM model incorporates a set of evidence-based assessment tools and decision guidelines designed to provide a higher level of consistency and validity in the assessment and decision-making process, Goscha said. It also provides a method for targeting limited system resources to families who are most likely to subsequently abuse or neglect their children.

SDM aligns with the federal Child and Family Services Reviews, which incorporates a set of performance standards in child safety, well-being, and permanency that all states are expected to achieve, she said.

The model has been applied successfully since the mid-1980s in more than 20 states by meeting the needs of children who need it the most, Goscha said.

A cross-department work group determined definitions of needs that would work best in Nebraska. The state’s SDM policy and procedure

model eventually will be available to employees on DHHS’ employee website.

Meanwhile, caseworkers are being trained, and stakeholders are learning about the new assessment tool. All caseworkers in the Eastern Service Area and two-thirds in the Southeast Service Area have been trained already. Overview explanations have been presented to judges, county attorneys and other stakeholders to make them comfortable with the SDM assessment method. Another overview is planned in February in Omaha, and a one-hour phone conference with other judges also will be held.

“With SDM, we will have one tool to apply throughout the life of a case,” Goscha said. “It is a true asset in our quest to better serve our state’s children.”

Introduction of SDM across Nebraska will be completed this spring. SDM’s approach will

be fully incorporated in assessments made on the Child Abuse Hotline.

While it’s too early to report results, the Children’s Research Center’s experience and reactions to the training and overview have been positive as noted at a recent presentation in Lincoln:

- “We are trying to empower children. I can see how SDM will balance the child’s opinion with the assessment.”
- “It’s time for this approach. I am in favor of this.”
- “I love this. We just need to get it implemented.”
- “I think this is wonderful and headed in the right direction.”
- “I agree that this model is good.”

Elder Issues Training Offered in Person, Via Satellite and through the Web

By Madhavi Bhadbhade

“A Comprehensive Look at Today’s Elder Issues” training was held recently via satellite at 15 locations across the state. The State Unit on Aging within DHHS’ Medicaid and Long-term Care Division partnered with the Nebraska State Bar Association to sponsor the training. The training was also available over the Internet giving people from all over the opportunity to participate. More than 680 people participated.

The day-long training featured topics like guardianship and conservatorship laws, identity theft and debt collection, ethical considerations in elder law, Medicare, and the Senior Medicare Patrol Program. Participants included attorneys, staff in the aging network, Adult Protective Services employees

and other professionals with responsibilities and interests in long-term care.

Madhavi Bhadbhade, program specialist, organized the training, and DHHS employees **Ed Finn**, Children and Family Services Supervisor for Adult Protective Services, and **Karen Heng**, Administrator – ACCESSNebraska, presented programs.

Other agencies provided staff to give presentations including consumers of the Aging Network, Better Business Bureau, Lincoln Police Department, Buffalo County Attorney’s Office, DHHS Senior Medicare Patrol, DHHS Long-term Care Ombudsman Program, CHOICES, Nutrition Programs, and Area Agencies on Aging.

The feedback from participants was very positive. Jane Prochaska, a retired judge from Omaha had this to say about the training: “I just wanted to let you know that the web conference was excellent! Not only was the information relevant for me as an attorney and probate judge, but also as an assisted living home owner dealing with vulnerable adults all the time. I watched from beginning to end, and absolutely every single topic was interesting and informative. The speakers were excellent... I hope you can

repeat this conference again in the future, as so much of this information changes all the time.”

The training gained national attention, as well, with officials from the General Accounting Office (GAO) in Washington, D.C., participating via the Internet. GAO committee members wanted to gather information from the training for a study they are conducting concerning financial exploitation. Committee members provided feedback stating they were “impressed with the training.”

Training handouts and video are available on [DHHS’ website](http://DHHSwebsite).

Gather Your Documents. It’s Tax Time Again!



By Denise Uhing

It’s tax time again! The most important step that you can take to ensure that tax time is as easy and stress free as possible is to begin gathering your forms now. The State of Nebraska has made accessing and receiving your W-2 easy. State Accounting again offered employees the option of receiving their W-2 electronically rather than through the mail. The big advantage of this option is that it will allow you to access and print your W-2 much sooner than if you are waiting for it in the mail.

More than 3,000 DHHS employees elected to receive their W-2 forms electronically. Even though the deadline to choose to receive an electronic W-2 has already passed, you might want to consider this option next year. Electing to receive your W-2 electronically does not mean that you have to E-file, it simply allows you access to a printable copy earlier than waiting for

it to arrive in the mail. Instructions for printing your W-2 can be found at the Employee Self Serve Work Instructions page.

Update Your Information

Just a reminder, if you did not elect to receive your W-2 electronically, please ensure that your mailing address is correct and current in order to get your W-2 form as quickly as possible.

In addition to your mailing address, it’s important to keep all of your information up-to-date, including: landline and cellphone numbers and person to be contacted in case of emergency.

Also consider...does the beneficiary named on your life insurance reflect your current wishes? Have you been married or divorced, or should your beneficiary be changed for some other reason?

If you have any questions please feel free to contact your Human Resources Representative.

Way to Go!

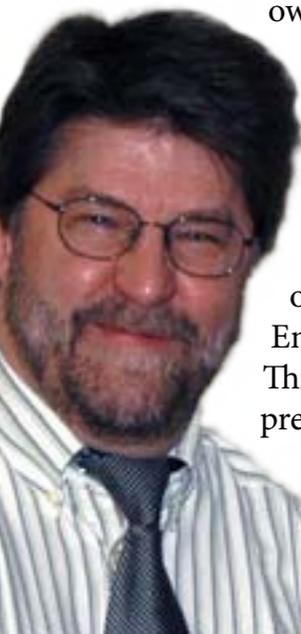
Klein to Speak at Special Preparedness Program

Darrell Klein, Assistant Agency Counsel, has been asked to give a presentation in February at the Public Health Preparedness Summit in Anaheim, California.

Klein's topic, "Navigating Legal Barriers to Effective Public Health Emergency Response," will be included to roll out several toolkits to help public health practitioners understand and overcome legal barriers during emergencies.

The Association of State & Territorial Health Officials and the CDC invited several public health practitioners, including Klein, to help develop these toolkits in response to public health efforts during the 2009-2010 H1N1 Influenza pandemic.

As part of Klein's program, participants will reflect on their own experiences during the H1N1 response and other response efforts. Darrell is a nationally-known resource on Public Health Emergency law. This will be his 3rd presentation at the Public Health Preparedness Summit.



Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

Stofer Named First Operating Officer at YRTC-G

Congratulations to **Mary Stofer**, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Geneva, who was recently named Facility Operating Officer. Stofer, formerly an Administrative Assistant at YRTC-G, has worked at the facility for 34 years.

Stofer serves as YRTC-G's first Facility Operating Officer, a position created to replace Assistant Facility Administrator. As Facility Operating Officer, among other duties, Stofer will supervise the head cottage staff, Officers of the Day, and the recreation department.

Stofer earned her Bachelor's of Science Degree in Paralegal Studies from the College of Saint Mary in Lincoln and has worked at YRTC-G as a secretary and then as an administrative assistant. According to the Geneva North High "Images" newsletter, Stofer said she applied for the position because she wanted to make a difference and be more actively involved with staff and youth on campus.



Creative Posters Highlight Radon Risks

By Sara Morgan

According to one 8th grade student in Nebraska, Radon is No Magic Trick. This simple yet powerful statement is the title of this year's winning entry in the Nebraska Radon Poster Contest.

"Radon is the leading cause of lung cancer for people who have never smoked," said **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, the state's Chief Medical Officer. "It is an odorless, colorless, tasteless gas that is present in most Nebraska homes.

Everyone should test their homes to determine if they have a high level of radon." Every year, DHHS' Radon Program holds a statewide poster contest for students ages 9-14. The winners of the contest receive a certificate, gift card prize, and are also submitted

for consideration in the National Radon Poster Contest, sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency.

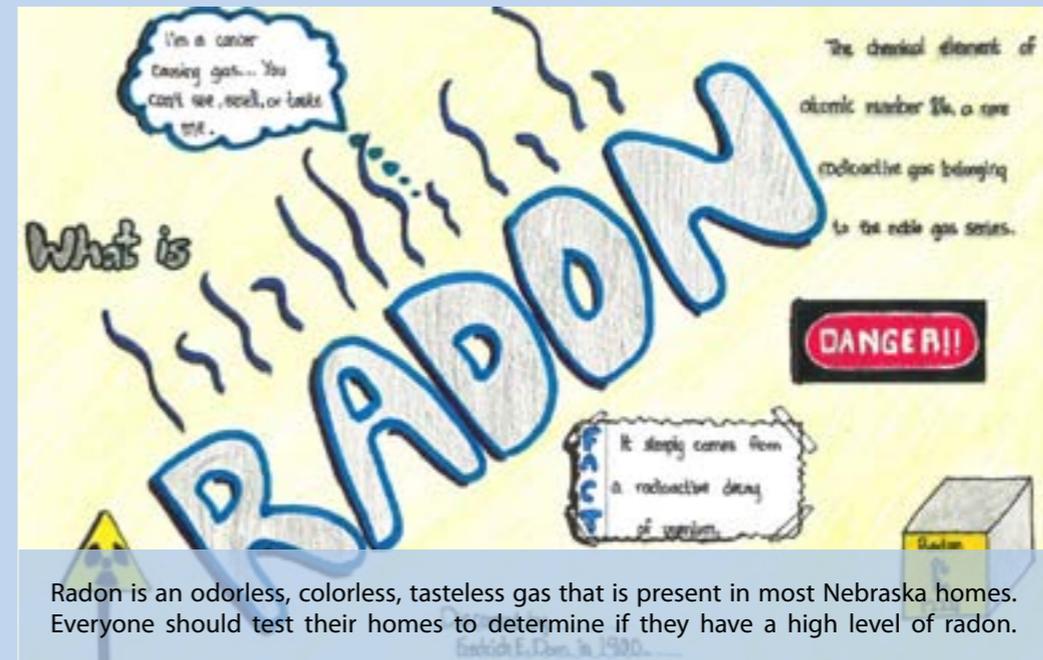
Makayla Snyder, a student at St. Patrick Junior High School in North Platte, created the first place poster, which features a

also awarded Special Mention in the national contest.

This poster contest is held each year to increase radon awareness among students, teachers, and parents in communities across Nebraska and to highlight the risks posed

by exposure to indoor radon. Nearly 500 students in Nebraska participated in this year's contest.

While radon is highly prevalent in Nebraska, many people are unaware of the risks. Radon causes



drawing of a magician's hat and lungs. Second place (pictured above) was awarded to Claire Moaliao of Perkins County Public School in Madrid, and in third place was Claire Lavender of Beveridge Magnet Middle School in Omaha. The posters can be found on the [DHHS website](http://www.dhhs.gov/radon).

Lavender's poster, "Radon Can Cause Lung Cancer," was

thousands of lung cancer deaths in the United States each year. Inexpensive radon test kits can be used to measure indoor radon, and there are also ways to reduce high levels of radon in homes.

To learn more, visit www.dhhs.gov/radon or contact the Nebraska Radon Program at 1-888-334-9491.

In Gratitude

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

Dear **Cherie Swanson** (Payment Reviewer, Medicaid and Long-Term Care, Lincoln),

I wanted to send you a quick note to say thank you for all your time and efforts in helping to figure out the payroll deduction. Thanks for your expertise during this confusing time. It was a pleasure talking with you.

A Grateful Client

To **Connie Johnson** (Social Worker, Hastings Regional Center),

You probably do not hear this often enough so I wanted to let you know about a conversation I had with a provider out of Omaha.

He said, "I enjoy working with HRC and have utmost respect for their discharge planner. I have worked with HRC on four kids recently, and they always contact me ahead of time to set the follow up appointment. Also, they bring the discharged youth directly to me all the way from Hastings. I wish all providers were that organized and efficient in making sure our youth get the treatment they need."

Keep up the great work, Connie!

From Magellan Health Services

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

On behalf of the entire membership of Kearney Elk's Lodge #984, thank you and your students for their assistance in helping us stage the "Elk's Hoop Shoot."

Having your guys keep the ball moving during the competition really helps us get things done in an efficient and timely manner, which is invaluable to the shooters and all involved. With over 60 kids shooting in each group, this is of great benefit.

Co-Chairman of the Elk's Hoop Shoot

Yolanda Nuncio (Service Area Administrator, Grand Island),

I would like to commend **Lorie Hartzell** (Social Services Lead Worker, Hastings) and **Teresa Rivera** (Social Services Worker, Grand Island) for going above and beyond their regular workload. This success story really involves employees and their supervisors all working together for the best efforts of children. I was working on an ICPC case (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children) from Kansas that involved six kids. Their story moved me to tears. They are a Spanish speaking home, and Theresa Rivera was assigned to complete the ICPC home study. It was her first home study! She was a pleasure to work with, and she did a fantastic job. After the home was approved by Teresa I worked with Kansas to get the kids here. In November the three littlest children were placed with their aunt and uncle in Nebraska.

I was told to have the aunt and uncle apply for Relative ADC (Aid to Dependent Children) because three more children were coming in December, and there was no way this family could feed an extra six children without receiving ADC. I spoke to Lorie Hartzell to help make sure that this case got processed immediately. Lorie talked to the workers in Kansas and was able to get the necessary paperwork required to process medical! Lorie did not have to help this family it could have been assigned to the customer service center, however, when I personally asked Lorie to help she was more than willing.

Now all six siblings are home in Nebraska with their aunt and uncle. Without the cooperation of these staff members and their supervisors this might not have ever happened. These kids being placed with their aunt and uncle before Christmas just made my Christmas. I really appreciate the way these staff members came together. If at any point one staff said no, this is not part of my job I would not have been able to help this family. However, everyone came together and helped get these kiddos in a relative home where they will be together for Christmas.

Thank you.

Lisa Jurens, Resource Developer, Hastings

Editor's Note: Yolanda Nuncio added these kind words.

Teresa, Lori and Lisa,

This is just another example of how you have gone above and beyond in working together as a team for the benefit of the children and the families that we work with. Not only did you guys do outstanding problem solving and coordination within our own Service Area, but you were able to make all of this happen with another state!

In Gratitude

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

Editor's Note: The following is a message from **Lynn Folcik** (Mental Health Practitioner, Hastings Regional Center) regarding a word of thanks from the mother of a youth in treatment at HRC.

I received a telephone call today from a youth's mother. She called to thank all staff members who have worked with her son. She said her son has remained clean and sober since he left HRC in January 2010. Her son recently turned 18 and worked hard to earn his GED.

Dear **Vivianne Chaumont**, (Director, Division of Medicaid and Long-term Care)

This letter is to sing the praises of one of your staff members. **Stephanie Auschwitz** (Business Applications Support Technician, Medicaid and Long-term Care) has gone way out of her way to be of assistance. By the time she was done assisting me, I felt reassured and confident in the submission of future claims. She explained everything clearly. Her cheerful voice and attitude assured me that she wanted to help me. When we were through with my problem, I knew she would more than welcome any future phone calls and questions I may have.

Please take pride in knowing that you have excellent personnel on your staff. I haven't written a praise letter in many years but felt that you should know that you have excellent staff representing your agency.

A Local Billing Service

To the **Fremont Customer Service Center:**

Thank you all so much for the hard work you do to provide such outstanding service to the members of the community in their time of need. I know we could not have made it the past year without you folks, and I wanted to say how very grateful we are for the help we have received and the kindness you have shown us during this rough patch.

Grateful Clients

Andrea Rodriguez (CFS Supervisor, Kearney),

I just wanted to let you know that I worked with **Cody Struss** (Children and Family Services Specialist, Kearney) last night. He was ready and willing to help with anything in regards to the case I was working on. I wrote Cody and told him thanks but think that you need to know how professional he was when I was dealing with him. When others may have grumbled at the fact that they were needed to assist with a case that was not assigned to them, Cody did not. I think that it just goes to show what great character he has, the commitment that he has to children and families, and the team approach that he is willing to take at any cost. You are lucky to have him! Please extend my thanks again to him!

April Christensen, Children and Family Services Specialist, North Platte

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.