

CONNECTIONS

June 2013

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Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

All Four DHHS Veterans' Homes Receive Perfect Scores



Congratulations DHHS employees! All four Veterans' homes have received perfect scores on recent annual Health Care System Surveys from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. Included are the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home in Bellevue, the Grand Island Veterans' Home, the Western Nebraska Veterans' Home in Scottsbluff and the Norfolk Veterans' Home.

The facilities had no deficiencies in the areas of life safety, resident care, environment, staff training and development, dietary-food service, banking and billing services for veterans, recreation/activities, medical staff credentialing, social work, and all areas related to quality assurance and care.

The inspections occurred between Aug. 16, 2012,

and June 13, 2013.

"Nebraska has a proud tradition of taking care of its veterans," said **Gov. Dave Heineman**. "I recognize that serving those who served our country is important and the right thing to do. Achieving perfect survey scores demonstrates our commitment to providing quality care to veterans."

Survey teams from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs are typically an interdisciplinary team comprised of three RNs, a Registered Dietician and a Life Safety Code expert from various parts of the country.

"To the best of my knowledge, this is the first time all four Veterans' homes have achieved deficiency-free surveys in less than a year," said

John Hilgert, Director of DHHS' Division of Veterans' Homes and Director of the Nebraska Department of Veterans Affairs. "It obviously represents extremely committed and competent staff members who live the mission of serving America's heroes with honor and respect."

With a total capacity of 637 beds, DHHS' four Veterans' homes provide a variety of medical, nursing and rehabilitative services, tailored to the needs of members. Services range from assisted living care for members able to essentially care for themselves, to skilled nursing care.

A few recent posts on the employee bulletin board deserve repeating here.

Congratulations GIVH on Deficiency Free Survey: A job well done by the staff and employees of the Grand Island Veterans' Home. GIVH joins the circle of Nebraska Veterans' Homes that are deficiency free. *By Ron Anderson, Grand Island*

WNVH Deficiency Free: Congratulations to the Members and Staff of Western Nebraska Veterans' Home for their 4th Annual Deficiency Free VA Survey! *By Brent Schneider, Scottsbluff*



Let the star-spangled celebration start early this year! Congratulations on your perfect scores.

Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

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

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Children and Family Services Division Director: Thomas Pristow	Veterans' Homes Division Director: John Hilgert
Developmental Disabilities Division Director: Jodi Fenner	Chief Operating Officer: Matt Clough

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[DHHS' Employee Website....](#)

New information and photos are added daily to the employee website. Here are some recent posts and the dates they appeared. Like what you're seeing and reading? Then check out the employee homepage every day! Got an idea or a photo you'd like to share for the employee homepage or *Connections*? Send it to Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.

Homepage Homeruns

[Losing 118 Pounds Isn't All Butterflies and Rainbows. It's Hard Work](#) *June 7, 2013*

Nina Fleming's incredible story about her recent weight-loss journey generated more comments than any other story we've ever featured on the homepage. Ever! For the two days Nina's story was showcased on the homepage, 39 employees took time to comment sending congratulations and positive notes Nina's way. **Here's part of Nina's original story.**

It was March 27, 2012... the day started like any other, except my mind set was different... I wanted to make a permanent change for myself, so I stepped on the scale to get my "starting weight" – and, to my dismay, it was the highest weight I had ever seen. I'm 5 feet, 6 inches tall and the scale screamed back at me: 271.2 pounds. This means that my BMI was at a 45.1 ... and at 22 years of age... this is a scary thing to face! So, on that March day in 2012, I started to transform into the "me" I knew I could always be!

I'm not going to lie and say it was all butterflies and rainbows. It was anything BUT that. It was HARD work. I started by walking with my husband around our block. In combination with walking, I started looking closely at the size of my portions. I decided that if I wanted this to work in a forever kind of way, that I needed to not limit myself in WHAT I wanted, but I needed to limit myself in HOW MUCH I wanted.



To make a long story short – I kept up my routine of eating portions that were manageable, not depriving myself of what I wanted (but not over-indulging either), walking and later running, and took progression pictures along the way.

With the loving support of my husband, family, friends, co-workers, and strangers, I was able to lose 118 pounds in 14.5 months! I went from 271 pounds to 152.8 pounds – from a size 24 pants to a size 8 pants! From a size XXL to a size small in shirts. From a BMI of 45.1 (which is MORBIDLY obese) to a BMI of 25 (which is HEALTHY).

I'm now 23 years old, been with the Department almost two years, am a Children and Family Services Specialist on the Permanency Unit in North Platte... and am the healthiest ME I have ever been!"

[Remembering Generations of Nebraskans for Their Service](#) *May 24, 2013*

In honor of Memorial Day, the employee website's "Box" featured a mural from the Capitol's Memorial Chamber. The mural, called the Ideal of International Law, shows generations of Nebraskans in the United States military.



The Capitol's eight-sided Memorial Chamber is located in the central room of the 14th Floor Observation Level. It sits atop the square office tower of the Nebraska State Capitol. The 14th floor observation decks are located around the perimeter of the Memorial Chamber.

The eight murals—four military themed and four civic themed—represent heroic enterprises associated with Nebraska history. The murals, added to the Chamber in 1996, were painted by Nebraska artist Stephen Roberts.

The Good Life:

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



By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

The results of the 2013 DHHS Employee Satisfaction Survey are in. The annual, confidential survey, conducted online in March, received **3,779 responses—a 36.92% increase** in responses from the 2,760 received in 2012, and a 66.11% increase from the 2,275 received in 2011. This is good news,

and I want to share some of the results.

If you recall, the survey asked whether people strongly disagree, disagree, slightly disagree, slightly agree, agree, or strongly agree with 41 separate statements and provided space for open-ended comments. Some highlights of the results include 98.4% of respondents agreeing (picking one of the three “agree” options) that “I have pride in what I do,” 96.3% of respondents agreeing that “I like the work I do,” and 95.8% agreeing with “My job helps DHHS achieve success.”

And “DHHS makes a difference” isn’t just something we say—DHHS employees believe it! 97.8% of respondents agreed with the statement “The work I do makes a difference.” In addition, 97% agreed with the statement “My work is very important to the community,” showing that DHHS employees believe and know that they really are helping people live better lives.

Not only did this year’s results show strong agreement on all 41 statements (the lowest was 71% agreeing), but the results also increased compared to both 2012 and 2011. While last year’s results were presented on a scale of zero to 100, this year’s results were analyzed on a scale of zero to five with zero being strongly disagree and five being strongly

agree. The 2011 and 2012 results were also reanalyzed for comparisons.

The average score for the 2013 DHHS Employee Satisfaction survey was 3.80, compared to 3.73 in 2012, a statistically significant increase. Both were higher than the average from 2011, 3.68. The statement with the highest average score was “I have pride in what I do,” with 4.47 (out of 5). “I thank people at work,” “I think about ways to do my job better,” “The work I do makes a difference,” and “I like the work I do” round out the remainder of the top five.

Average scores were also calculated for each DHHS division. The scores ranged from 4.09 to 3.69, showing that, on average, respondents in all divisions tended to agree with the 41 statements. Compared to 2012, this year’s average scores were statistically significantly greater for Children and Family Services, Operations and Public Health.

The 41 statements were also grouped into 12 categories representing dimensions related to work at DHHS. The findings from this year’s survey demonstrate improvements in dimensions in initiatives such as the *Serving People with Excellence* training and the DHHS Values and Core Competencies.

For example, a significant positive change was seen in the Workplace

Communication dimension, where the statement “communication is clear” saw a significant increase. Likewise, the Nature of Workplace dimension saw a significant positive change, where the statement “it is safe to be open and honest at work” saw a jump.

A focus on customer service – and offering customer service training to every employee – has been a priority for me. We accomplished the training this year, and the results of the survey and survey comments suggest that the training was well received.

Another important part of the survey is the opportunity for employees to comment. This is helpful because it offers the opportunity to capture your thoughts in another way.

The survey results and comments will be given to each division director for review and further discussion. It bears repeating that all survey responses, including comments, are anonymous.

Thank you to all who participated in this year’s survey and to all DHHS employees for making a difference for the people we serve!

Let the Games Begin! Reflections on Nebraska Special Olympics 2013



By Christina Mayer,
Community Liaison,
Developmental Disabilities

Editor's Note: The Special Olympics Nebraska Summer Games took place May 22-25, 2013, at various venues in Omaha. It's a big sporting event with stories of courage and inspiration surrounding the participants, their families and all who have come together for this special experience. This year's Special Olympics was the first one that Christina Mayer attended. Christina's account of the Special Olympics appears in the [summer edition of the Sower newsletter](#). **Christina says...**

If I had to choose one word to define what Special Olympics is, it would be empowerment. Special Olympics not only empowers athletes to be great competitors, but to live healthy lives, to respect others, and the importance of unity and friendship.

I attended the Special Olympics Nebraska Summer Games. The Opening Ceremonies were like nothing I had ever experienced before. The ceremony began with a parade of athletes. Over 1,500 athletes stormed the floor as the name of their team was called. It was very clear that those 1,500 athletes were pumped to compete for the bronze, silver and gold medals at the Summer Games. A Law Enforcement Torch Runner and two athletes presented the Flame of Hope. The arrival of the Flame

was inspirational. The room became totally quiet as the cauldron was lit to symbolize the beginning of the Summer Games.

Some of the sports in which the athletes competed were volleyball, aquatics, gymnastics, power lifting, roller skating, and various track and field events.

While I was cheering on the athletes, I met some awesome people. It was an experience I will never forget!

[Read more.](#)

Photos by: Jody Hansen



Athlete's Oath-
"Let me win,
but if I
do not win,
let me be
brave in
the attempt."



How to Compliment Someone to His or Her Supervisor

*“The only people with whom you should try to get even are those who have helped you.”
John E. Southard*

By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources and Development

Every day in DHHS there are employees who make a great contribution to our mission—Helping people live better lives—sometimes through exceptional knowledge, skills, and abilities; sometimes through enormous effort.

When simply thanking a coworker for a job well done does not seem enough to show your appreciation, consider also complimenting this person to their supervisor.

Below are tips to keep in mind for making such a compliment truly meaningful, with impact.

Be Specific

Don't simply say that your coworker “was very helpful” or “is a great guy.” Make the compliment into a verbal photograph by describing and highlighting important details of the contribution so the supervisor feels as though he or she were there to see it.

“Showing gratitude is one of the simplest yet most powerful things humans can do for each other.” Randy Pausch



Be Brief

To make a compliment truly memorable, get right to the point. You will probably have a minute or so of the supervisor's undivided attention. Choose your words and use this time wisely.

Be Timely

Compliment an important contribution as close to the event as possible. Give the supervisor a reason to act on this compliment in a way that celebrates the coworker.

Be Professional

Speak in a way that reflects properly on you and the coworker.

Be Sincere

Do not exaggerate, and avoid dramatics. Let the truth calmly speak for itself. Your honest, grateful attitude will tell half the story anyway.

Put it in Writing

Send the compliment to the supervisor in an email note which you copy to the coworker. Alternatively, you can send a hand written note which you ask the supervisor to share with the coworker. Finally, don't forget the DHHS Employee Intranet Home Page, Employee Bulletin Board for complimenting a coworker for all of DHHS to see.



Please email me your thoughts, concerns, or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships at: Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov. I will email you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your idea in a future column.



Nebraska Drops the “R” Word from State Law

The Nebraska Legislature voted 46-0 to remove all references to the “R-word” from state law. Nebraska joins the federal government and more than 40 states in eliminating all derivatives of “retardation.”

“People with developmental disabilities in Nebraska have true value to our society. They are cherished family members and friends...”

When testifying about the bill, **Jodi Fenner**, Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities, said, “People with developmental disabilities in Nebraska have true value to our society. They are cherished family members and friends. They have meaningful jobs and contribute through volunteer and social activities in our communities. They are people who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect.”

Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

Jessica Feller Has Heart

DHHS Children and Family Services Specialist **Jessica Feller**, Beatrice, recently received the Heart Award from the Child Advocacy Center. Executive Director Lynn Ayers said Jessica was nominated by CAC staff because she

is a strong advocate for treating kids sensitively who enter the system. Lynn said Jessica also is passionate about following through with her commitments and ensuring others follow through on theirs.



Shown tying blue ribbons, representing children who spoke up about abuse, and white ribbons for those who haven't spoken, are, from left, Lynn Ayers, Courage Award winner Taytam Rollins, and Jessica. The annual awards are based on a Wizard of Oz theme. The third award for Wisdom was presented to Lancaster County Sheriff Terry Wagner.

Melissa Smith Earns Special Leadership Award



Melissa Smith, Children and Family Services Specialist Supervisor, North Platte, received the Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association Commitment to Excellence in Leadership Award at a recent NJJA conference. Melissa started working for DHHS in October, 1997.

The Nebraska Juvenile Justice Association works to improve services to youth by being a resource for juvenile justice system professionals.

The NJJA Commitment to Excellence in Leadership Award was established in 2011 to recognize executives and managers in the field who have provided exemplary integrity and leadership serving youth, families and staff.

"We are all so proud of Melissa, our supervisor on the Office of Juvenile Services team here," said **Katie Groves**, Children and Family Services Specialist/Juvenile Services Officer, North Platte.



Front row, from left: Jennifer Johnson, CFSS, Lexington; Kelly Nelson, CFSS, North Platte; Melissa Smith, CFS Supervisor, North Platte; Danielle Dickman, CFSS, Lexington; and Sara Cross, Case Aide, North Platte. **Back row, from left:** Jennifer Calvin, CFSS North Platte; Melissa Betts, CFSS, North Platte; Katie Groves, CFSS North Platte; and Darren Duncan, CFS Administrator, Gering.

In Gratitude

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

Dear **Stan Cooper** (Vital Records Administrator, Lincoln),
 When I needed a passport fast and was unable to find my birth certificate, I went online to fill out a request for one and mailed it overnight with an overnight return mailer.

Worried I won't get the birth certificate in time, I called the number on the application and got a recorded message and stayed on the line for the operator. In a minute or so she answered.

She was very polite and told me that she could connect me to the emergency service. The line was picked up almost immediately. I again was greeted by a polite and helpful lady who took the necessary information. We agreed that I would send the ID, and other information via email and that it needed to be sent by 3 p.m. for next day delivery.

I had to get to my office to do that. Living in Los Angeles and being 50+ mile from the office, I knew the 3 p.m. deadline would be tight but hopefully not impossible. Well, I sent it at 2:57 p.m. When I called to make sure the email went through, I talked to a gentleman who was, like the others on your staff, very polite and checked for me. The email had gotten there, but I had forgotten to give my address, so he took it over the phone and asked me to email it as well, which I did.

Today I received not only the birth certificate which came as part of the emergency service but also the one I ordered through the mail.

I want to say thanks. My experience with your staff was exceptional and far beyond my wildest expectations.

A Grateful Client

Joe Homan (IT Manager, Lincoln),

I've been on the job for three months and in that time have called the Help Desk a number of times. I have to tell you that the help I get from the coordinators is awesome! They're always pleasant, patient and extremely helpful. In my previous life, I taught in higher ed for a number of years at various places and never experienced the level of help you folks provide.

Thanks so much!

Donna Handley, MS, RDN, Program Specialist,
 Medicaid & Long-Term Care

Received through the **DHHS HelpLine** email address:

I just wanted to take a moment to thank whoever is responsible for alphabetizing the Medicaid excluded providers list! This is very helpful and a great time saver for us when we need to verify that our healthcare practitioners are in good standing for credentialing purposes.

I know it seems like a small thing, but I just wanted to let you know how much we appreciated it.

Medical Staff Office Manager,
 Good Samaritan Hospital



Mark Darby (Youth Counselor, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Kearney),

I wanted to thank you for bringing out the young men to assist us and participate in the Children's Mental Wellness celebration at Yanney Park. They were very helpful and respectful. It was a pleasure having your group there! The banners designed by the boys are awesome, and we are proud to take them on to Lincoln with us tomorrow to share at the State Capital and with other organizations, families and youth from around the State!

It is nice to collaborate and include young people from the community. Thanks for being a part of the Children's Mental Health Awareness efforts this year!

Karla S. Bennetts, Executive Director, Families CARE

Jana Peterson, YRTC-K Administrator adds... "Mark Darby (Youth Counselor) and Bo Whaley (Youth Security Specialist) went to the Children's Mental Health Celebration with the B-3 youth group. Holly Fletcher (Food Service Cook) was also helping to lead this effort as well as Derek Rusher (teacher) and his art students. Great Job! The youth and the banners made an impact!"



HAVE A SAFE AND HAPPY



In Pursuit of Happiness

On the 4th, if you and your family are gathered around a picnic table, and if you're feeling a little patriotic, here are some ideas for a toast:

One of the Founding Fathers, John Adams, made a toast on July 4, 1826, on his deathbed. He proclaimed: Independence Forever! This saying is perfect for an old revolutionary like Adams. And it might sound mighty smart during your July 4th celebration, too.

The Declaration of Independence gives us another suggestion for a cheerful toast on the 4th. How about this...to the pursuit of Happiness! According to the Declaration, the Creator gave every person certain unalienable rights, among these, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. These gifts are for all people, the Declaration says, and can't be taken away by kings or politicians. So on the 4th, raise your glass to the pursuit of happiness, and have a safe and happy 4th of July!



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

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