

Connections

Volume 8, Issue 3

Winner of the National Public Health Information Coalition's Gold Award

March 2008

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together



Every Woman Matters Program earns national recognition. See details inside. *Photo: Bill Wiley*

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DHHS in the News Update . . .

A small sample of news releases recently issued by Communications & Legislative Services about DHHS programs. A full text of all releases is available under "Newsroom" on the DHHS Web site listed below.

Flu! Radon! New direction for behavioral health! Just a few of the 52 media releases (some statewide, some localized) about DHHS programs issued in January 2008. Here are a few headlines of news releases DHHS sent to media in February 2008:

- * **Extra \$4.6 Million Available for Energy Assistance** February 21
- * **Substance Abuse a Problem in Nebraska, Report Finds** February 19
- * **You've Earned Those Tax Credits, Now Claim Them!** February 5

You can check recent releases by going to the DHHS Web site at www.dhhs.ne.gov clicking on the "Newsroom" link and then on "News Releases." You can also listen to "sound bites" issued with releases by going to www.dhhs.ne.gov/audio/.

Have a story idea you think DHHS should be sharing with media? Contact Communications & Legislative Services at (402) 471-9108!

make the connection . . .

DHHS External Web site: <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov>

DHHS Intranet (Internal): <http://www2.dhhs.ne.gov>

DHHS System Advocate: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at diana.duran@dhhs.ne.gov

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Governor:
DHHS Chief Executive Officer:
Behavioral Health Division Director:
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Veterans' Homes Division Director:
CLS Administrator:
Editor:
Graphics and Layout, Support Services:

Dave Heineman
Christine Peterson
Scot Adams, Ph.D.
Todd Landry
John Wyvill
Vivianne Chaumont
Dr. Joann Schaefer
John Hilgert
Kathie Osterman
Jerry Crisp
Maisun Allahiq
Judy Barker

► **Readers are invited to submit news, photos & story ideas to the editor via:**

Phone: (402) 471-3995 **Fax:** (402) 471-3996 **Email:** jerry.crisp@dhhs.ne.gov

Interagency mail: Nebraska State Office Bldg. 3rd Floor U.S. mail: P.O. Box 95026, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-5026

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.

EOE/AA/ADA



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About the cover



Every Woman Matters (EWM) was one of five programs recognized nationally for outstanding success and support of the National Breast and Cervical Cancer Early Detection program. Sixty-seven programs nationwide submitted overviews of their achievements. An excerpt from our EWM abstract reads: *Through integration, collaboration and sharing of resources, the EWM program delivers the most comprehensive public health care available, targeting women 40 to 60 years of age who are uninsured or underinsured. The program assists women in obtaining preventive, diagnostic and treatment services for breast and cervical cancer, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and colorectal cancer, providing education and opportunities for lifestyle behavior changes.*

Standing from left to right are EWM team members **Jennie Oliver, JoAnn Schlect, Cathy Dillon, Shelley Locke, Jianping Xue, Victoria Schwab, Pam Findley and Andrea Wenke**; Seated from left to right, **Michelle Heffelfinger, Margarita Allen**, Office of Women's and Men's Health Administrator **Kathy Ward**, EWM Program Manager **Melissa Leypoldt, Norma McClintock and Mary Lentini**. ☺ □

Photo: Bill Wiley

From the CEO

By Christine Peterson
Chief Executive Officer
Nebraska Department of Health and
Human Services

Every one uses a personal yardstick to measure the distance to achieving goals, whether it's saving for a new car, mastering a new language or making progress on the road to healthy habits.

Performance evaluations can be seen as yardsticks. They can help us know if we are achieving the goals of displaying good job skills, completing assigned duties, and having good interpersonal relationships at work.

One goal of our recent reorganization is to be more accountable to the public and those we serve. Performance evaluations can help us accomplish this. We will begin using these valuable job measurement tools for all employees this spring.

Performance reviews give supervisors and employees a chance to interact and get to know one another better. They make time for feedback and a chance to talk about growth and advancement opportunities. They give supervisors an additional opportunity to recognize all the good work being done. Just as important, employees will know their supervisor's expectations and whether they are meeting them.

Each DHHS employee will be given a performance evaluation at least once per year and at least once before completing an initial, transfer or promotional probation period.

My expectation is that every permanent employee will be given a

performance review by July 1, 2008. This gives several months for supervisors to list essential duties, develop expectations and complete the process. As we move forward, annual performance evaluations will be completed by the end of the month in which the employee has a service anniversary date, which means that some will be evaluated twice in 2008.

The 24-hour facilities and several other job classifications already use performance evaluations. Their forms may need to be modified a bit to make sure they fit the new format.

This new evaluation process will involve a lot of people. Anyone who manages a supervisor must make sure that the supervisor evaluates all of his or her staff by July 1. The completed evaluation will be reviewed and signed by the next level supervisor, then signed by the supervisor and the employee. Employees and supervisors will keep copies and the original form will go in the employee's personnel file.

There will also be processes in place to protect employees while encouraging better performance. For instance, if an employee falls in the "Needs Improvement" category, a plan to address those deficiencies must be developed within 30 days and a re-evaluation completed within 60 days.



**Christine Peterson (right) with Administrative Assistant
Bonnie Engel** Photo: Bill Wiley

A guide on the DHHS performance evaluation process and copies of the new forms will soon be available at www2.dhhs.ne.gov/PerformanceEvaluation.

Performance evaluations will help make supervisor expectations more explicit, help employees gain a clearer understanding of how well they are doing their work, and reassure others that we are truly accountable. Evaluations will do this by not only saying but showing that we really do help people live better lives.

Create change, providing hope in Behavioral Health Services

By Jeanne Atkinson

"Creating Change and Providing Hope" is the Department's plan for fundamentally changing behavioral health services for children and adolescents. This plan for mental health and substance abuse services was developed as required by LB 542, which passed in 2007.

"We want to keep kids at homes whenever it's safe and appropriate," says **Scot Adams**, Director of the Division of Behavioral Health. "We're going to be emphasizing in-home and community-based services where children and adolescents can be healthy, safe and in their own homes whenever possible."

This new direction fits perfectly with integrating children's behavioral health services into the Division of Behavioral Health, one of the Governor's top 10 priorities for DHHS. Last September, a new Children's Behavioral Health Section was created in the Division.

The Divisions of Behavioral Health and Children and Family Services worked together to write the LB 542 plan, which focuses on children and families already being served by DHHS. Children and adolescents who are state wards may have multiple needs that span behavioral health, child welfare, juvenile justice, and education systems.

Right now, about 70% of Nebraska's 7,000 state wards are in out-of-home care.

"We want to totally flip that around. By January 2011, we want 70% of our state wards to be safely living with their own families," says **Todd Landry**, Director of the Division of Children and Family Services. "We can make this happen by working with our partners to create a balanced array of community-based services."

Key elements of the DHHS plan include:

- Having a balanced array of accessible services;

- Using evidence-based approaches;
- Exploring new facilities and services to address the most challenging juvenile offenders; and
- Developing common language and goals.

The plan recommendations include collaborating with the DHHS Office of Rural Health to address the shortage of behavioral health professionals in certain rural areas. Telehealth does a good job with access to physical health professionals, and now that will be increased to include behavioral health professionals. DHHS has also had preliminary discussions with the City of Hastings about building a new facility to provide Level 5 highly secure services and chemical dependency treatment services for adolescents.

The full DHHS LB 542 plan for children and adolescent behavioral health can be found at <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/beh/mh/LB542.pdf>. ☺

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 better prepare yourself!

Build an emergency supply kit, often from items already found in your home that you use every day, like food, water and clothing. Add items you'd need for emergencies, like a flashlight, first aid kit, and a radio and batteries to keep updated about what's going on. Also, be sure to include any medications you take regularly!

If assembling an entire emergency kit seems overwhelming, divide it into smaller steps. Columbus Community Hospital has an online brochure with a weekly list of things to do to prepare a kit. Go to: <http://www.columbushosp.org/healthInfo.asp>, and click on the CCH Disaster Preparedness Brochure.

An emergency supply kit is unique to every person or family, so customize it to meet personal needs (pet supplies, maps, personal documents, etc.).

For more information, visit the DHHS emergency preparedness Web site at www.dhhs.ne.gov/emergency_preparedness, the Department of Homeland Security's Web site at www.ready.gov, or contact Public Information Officer **Dianna Seiffert** at (402) 471-1695 or dianna.seiffert@dhhs.ne.gov. ☺

Way to Go!

Statewide or national recognitions, awards, honors

Public Health worker helps kids live better lives

Jeff Hoffman, Early Hearing Detection & Intervention (EHDI) Program Manager within the Division of Public Health, is having national impact. More importantly, his work is helping children to live better lives.

Jeff's major contribution has been developing Nebraska's program that helps newborns and young children with hearing loss get identified early and into intervention services.

"Jeff is an awesome employee with real vision," says **Julie Miller**, Jeff's supervisor. "He has taken our state's Newborn Hearing Screening Program to the next level and helped make it one of the best in the nation."

As a result of his efforts, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Foundation gave Jeff its 2007 Louis M. DiCarlo Award for Outstanding Recent Clinical Achievement. He was chosen from among those nominated by state chapters across the country.

That Foundation also invited Jeff to serve on its national task force to develop guidelines for Early Hearing Detection & Intervention programs across the county. While tremendous progress has been made in screening newborns in the U.S. for hearing loss, a gap exists in documentation to show that needed follow-up evaluations or services were received.



Jeff Hoffman
Photo Jerry Crisp

Members of the task force of experts tackling this problem took part in face-to-face meetings in Rockville, Maryland, last month. They will continue to communicate through teleconferences and other means to develop practice standards that reduce this lack of documentation.

"Just another example of the outstanding expertise and leadership Jeff brings to EHDI," says Julie Miller.

Thanks to Jeff and the other experts across the nation, countless children identified with hearing losses through newborn screening will receive documented follow-up evaluations and services they need to live better lives. ☺

Customer Service Tip



Even when unable to accommodate customers in the way they might prefer, say it in a way that lets them know why. Taking time to briefly explain why certain policies are in place helps them accept those policies better than if simply told "that's the way it is." Understanding reasons behind the rules puts everything into perspective. ☺

March is Nebraska Brain Injury Awareness Month

Each year, 1.4 million Americans sustain a brain injury. Major causes are motor vehicle-traffic crashes, falls, and assaults. Blasts are a leading cause for active military personnel in war zones. Other causes of brain injury include tumors, strokes, infections and Shaken Baby Syndrome.

In Nebraska, more than 3,000 brain injuries occur each year. Long-term consequences include difficulty concentrating, organizing, and learning new information; loss of endurance and reduced coordination; and depression and difficulty managing anger.

For more information on brain injury, go to www.braininjury.ne.gov or call toll-free 800-742-7594. ☺

“Footsteps for Families” benefit both customers and employees

By Jerry Crisp

Tami Hilfiker believes in enhancing services and motivating the six Child Protective Services staff and two Case Aides she supervises in the Northern Service Area. Managed from the O’Neill office, Tami’s area covers eight counties.

Her latest strategy for furthering those goals is “Footsteps for Families” — paper footprints affixed on a poster to indicate when a Protection & Safety (P&S) Worker or Case Aide serves a customer successfully.

These tokens can be earned for such things as completing “priority one” intake assessments on time, completing all customer contacts, keeping contact narratives current, helping a child return home or facilitating guardianship or adoption. Footprints can also be added for keeping all intake assessments current, completing all court filings weekly, and taking on tasks above and beyond the call of duty.

While the poster is only displayed in the O’Neill office, Tami takes it to monthly staff meetings and sends out e-mail updates so that progress



Tammy Henery, Protection & Safety Worker in the DHHS Center office, stands by a poster of paper footprints that celebrate her success in serving families.
Photo: Tami Hilfiker

can be shared. The poster allows employees to earn recognition, and Tami gives prizes like gift certificates to those who earned the largest numbers of footprints.

Child Protective Services Worker **Tammy Henery** was the top footprint winner with 35 individual footprints earned. Case Aide **Teresa LeMunyan** came in second place with 29 footprints, and P&S Worker **Sally Davis** placed third with 25 footprints. When the first project was completed, Tami dug into her own pocket to take her staff out to lunch.

One staff member said that knowing their efforts are noticed

helps make a challenging job less stressful.

“Employees don’t do their work to get recognized, but we all like to know that our contributions are both valuable and valued,” says Tami. “I want people who do their work well to know that they are appreciated.”

Footprints might be only pieces of paper pasted on a poster, but they represent strides toward the goal of enhanced services that meet customer needs by helping them live better lives. In this way, Tami’s “Footsteps for Families” clearly seems to be making large strides in the right direction. ☺

March (and every other month) is “Brain Awareness Month”!

New research shows that there is a lot we can do to keep the “universe between our ears” healthy as we age. Here are some tips:

- * **Nourish your noggin!** Eat a brain-healthy, well-balanced diet high in omega-3 fatty acids (found in fish), protein, anti-oxidants, vitamin B, and fruits and vegetables, and low in trans fats.
- * **Use it or lose it!** Stay mentally active. Learn a new skill, complete crossword puzzles, learn to dance; all of these challenges will help maintain your brain.
- * **Work out for your wits!** Exercise increases circulation and blood flow to the brain.
- * **Stay social!** Interaction with friends and family helps keep our minds active and healthy.
- * **Rest for restoration!** Lack of sleep can negatively affect your brain health.
- * **Unwind for your mind!** Stress can destroy brain cells. Find ways to eliminate stress from your life.

Above all else, guard your gray matter! Wear your seat belt to protect your head from traumatic brain injury. ☺ ☐

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.

By Jerry Crisp

We all want the water our families drink to be clean and free of contaminants like E. coli, a bacteria that can cause diarrhea, fever, infection and even death. **Tom Christopherson**, Water Well Standards Program Manager within the Division of Public Health, helps ensure that.

When the Lincoln/Lancaster County Health Department (LLCHD) sampled a domestic water well last June, LLCHD found it contaminated with E. coli. The well was the source of drinking water for a family of four that included a 3-week-old infant, who was ill with an intestinal problem.

After warning the family not to drink their well water, LLCHD contacted Tom for technical assistance in identifying the source of contamination. The nearest "down-hole video camera," a winch-driven unit mounted on the back of a state pickup truck, was in Norfolk, and Tom had it on site within 24 hours.

The probe showed a defect in well construction, which a licensed well-driller repaired immediately. The well was then chlorinated and re-sampled before the family could use it again.

LLCHD Director **Bruce Dart** wrote **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Director of the Public Health Division and the state's Chief Medical Officer, saying, "I would like to acknowledge and thank Mr. Christopherson for his responsiveness and expertise in the quick resolution of this problem. Without a doubt, the quick collaborative intervention of both departments (LLCHD and DHHS), and especially the expertise and knowledge of Mr. Christopherson, prevented this situation from ending in tragedy."

"The reward I get from doing this job," Tom says, "is making a positive difference in the lives of others."

Among other duties within Tom's program is developing and conducting examinations for those who hold a license or certificate that allows them

to do such things as construct wells, install pumps, and remediate ground water contamination. As a result, nearly 900 people are credentialed each year. Tom's program also conducts inspections for compliance with standards.

"Three field representatives and I, all of whom are former water well contractors, total about 100 years of combined experience," Tom explains. "With each rep responsible for about 35 counties, that means lots of ground to cover."

As chairman of the National Regulators Interest Group, Tom works with other states as well. Each year, he also does as many as 10 presentations nationwide designed to educate others about water standards.

"As my supervisor, **Jack Daniel**, told me when I took my present position, *Educate, Educate, and then Regulate if necessary*," Tom says. "I live by those words."

Education is a major part of what Tom and his colleagues do, because they're educating a young industry. Before 1988, Tom says, water wells outside of Omaha and Lincoln were mostly unregulated.

Tom will never forget his first-ever presentation for the Nebraska Groundwater Association, with then-Governor **Ben Nelson** in the front row. As Tom stepped to the podium, an assistant dropped the carousel of slides and hastily picked them up. When the first slide came up, it showed an upside-down map of Nebraska, with similar snafus to follow.

"I knew that I had to rely on myself more than the technology of that time to make that presentation successful," Tom recalls. "When I finished, Governor Nelson told me that was one of the best examples he'd seen of someone thinking on their feet."

An ability to think on one's feet is one way to make presentations successful. But education, modern technology and close collaboration with others are keys to ensuring water quality and averting possible tragedies. That's why Tom Christopherson relies on them daily. ♣



Tom Christopherson (above) uses a "downhole camera" like this (below) to probe a water well at a Lincoln site. Photo: Dale Chandler



Governor unveils workplace wellness recognitions

By Bill Wiley

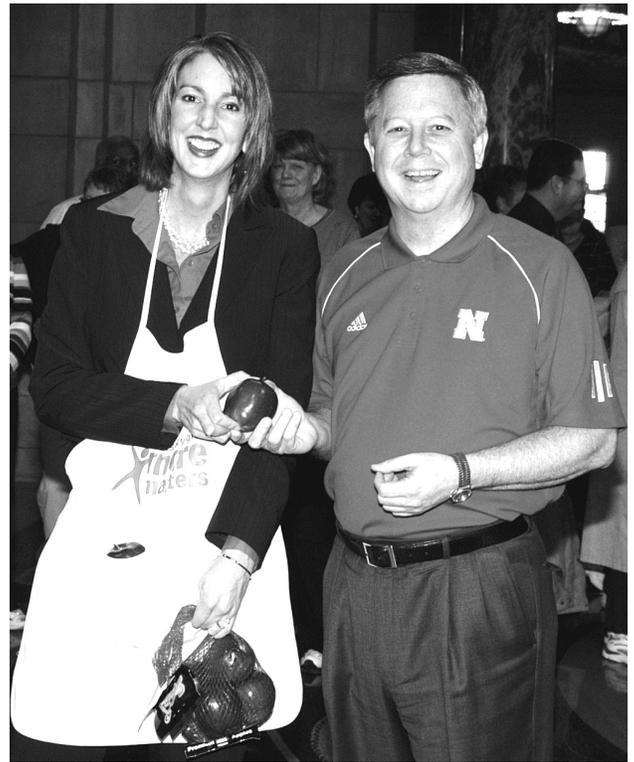
Governor **Dave Heineman** recently introduced a new initiative aimed at encouraging businesses to develop worksite wellness programs. The Governor's Award of Excellence will recognize businesses that have "planted a seed for wellness."

"Organizations that help employees lead healthier lives see real benefits in the form of increased productivity and greater employee satisfaction," Governor Heineman said. "The Excellence in Wellness Award will help identify successful programs that can serve as models for others. By putting an emphasis on worksite wellness, individual employees can take steps to become healthier while also helping employers manage health care costs."

The Governor's Award of Excellence in Wellness is divided into two categories. The Sower's Award is intended to recognize organizations that have developed quality wellness programs. The Grower's Award will honor businesses and organizations that demonstrate significant improvement in employee health behaviors.

"Nebraska ranks Number 10 this year in a health survey conducted by the United Health Foundation," said **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Nebraska Chief Medical Officer. "On average, Nebraska men and women live approximately 30 years longer than a century ago. I encourage everyone to develop a wellness program at their worksite, and create a culture that fosters good mental and physical health."

Nebraska was one of several states to receive funding from the National Governors Association in recent years to begin a state employee wellness program. Those participating in the 2007 wellness



Dr. Joann Schaefer offers Gov. Heineman an apple as token of the new emphasis on workplace wellness.

Photo: Bill Wiley

challenge lost nearly 1,650 pounds combined.

The state used a program developed by the Nebraska Sports Council. The N-Lighten Nebraska challenge is open to any business or organization in the state. Nebraska workplaces can join state government in a new challenge for 2008 that began in February and runs through May 1.

More information is available online at www.N-LightenNebraska.com. ☞

Good Things Are Happening!

Eighty-four Nebraska communities will have more secure water systems, thanks to grants from DHHS totaling \$344,800.

These funds will be spent for security fencing, alarms, lighting, reinforced doors and locks, generators, chlorinators and other equipment. "Generators purchased with this funding mean that during natural disasters, water systems will have power to maintain their supplies and provide water to consumers," said **Dr. Joann Schaefer**,

Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health.

Another example of how the Division of Public Health partners with communities to make our water systems safer and more secure!

Voc Rehab clients a great resource for DHHS offices

By Jeanne Atkinson

Talk about a win-win! The Lincoln Local DHHS office gets reliable employees at no cost from a virtually untapped labor source. People who need to freshen job skills, change careers or get job experience in a new area get great on-the-job training for their resume.

Even better, the collaboration between DHHS and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) in the Department of Education could be replicated all across the state, according to **Darla Atkinson**, VR Service Specialist.

“All you have to do is contact an Employment Specialist in one of our 11 field offices to see if this arrangement can work in your office,” said Atkinson. “About 75% of the time the job being filled is temporary, but sometimes our clients evolve into a permanent job with an organization.”

Clients earn paychecks from the Nebraska Department of Education during their Voc Rehab training.

Lincoln Local in the Southeast Service Area has two great examples of Voc Rehab clients who participated in on-the-job training, increased their skills, and became competitive applicants for full-time, permanent jobs.

“I work closely with Vocational Rehabilitation staff to identify strengths and skills of clients to prepare them for future employment,” said **Eike Marthaler**, DHHS Resource Developer. “This collaboration has proven to provide positive outcomes for all those involved.”

Christopher Wipf has a degree from Hamilton College but had



(Front row) Christopher Wipf and Anna Blazer; (Back row l-r) David Hauswald, Eike Marthaler, Darla Atkinson and Mel Ramsey Photo: Deb Malousek

never held a full-time job. Because of his education, Marthaler worked with **Duol Rut** at Voc Rehab to move beyond the standard on-the-job training plan for Chris. After the first eight weeks, Chris was providing complete support for the Income Maintenance Foster Care Payment team and learning skills that made him a competitive job applicant. Chris was moved into another training program that made him eligible to apply for several positions ranging from Intake Clerk to Social Worker.

Voc Rehab client **Anna Brazer** turned on-the-job training into a full-time, permanent job with DHHS. Anna had 25 years experience in baking and kitchen help but needed to change her career direction. She was placed with DHHS to learn office skills and was a hard worker who was approved to attend the same training provided to DHHS support staff and Social Workers. She excelled during the training period, and in February was hired as a Protection and Safety Case Aide in the Lincoln DHHS office.

“Getting this hands-on training and realizing I could do the work is totally a miracle,” said Brazer. “**Mel Ramsey** has gone above and beyond to help me and communicate what I need to know to do the job.”

Ramsey is a Social Services Supervisor in the DHHS Southeast Service Area.

“This collaboration works because Voc Rehab clients are given real work and training opportunities that result in marketable skills,” said Ramsey. “Because applicants for most state jobs are scored based on knowledge and experience, going through on-the-job training provides an understanding of job requirements that make Voc Rehab clients competitive job applicants.”

Staff at Voc Rehab can also supply ergonomic chairs, computer stands, a TDD for someone who’s deaf or other, assistive technology that help their clients succeed in the work place. For more information go to www.vocrehab.state.ne.us. ☞

April Observances

Public Health Month

This year's focus in Nebraska for Public Health Month is wellness. An active life, eating the right foods and not smoking can add years to your life and life to your years, according to **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer.

"As we get older, we can get better," she says. "Advancing age doesn't have to mean a decline in energy and activity. Staying active, even in small ways, can help keep us young."

Taking the stairs, parking the car further away and walking to your destination, doing vigorous housework and yard work, taking the dog for a walk—these are things that can contribute to your activity level.

Eating fruits and vegetables is important, too, Dr. Schaefer says. "They add fiber and vitamins to your diet and can help protect you against cancer, diabetes and high blood pressure."

If you smoke, quitting can be the most important thing you can do for your health. Tobacco use is related to numerous kinds of cancer and can take years off your life.

"There are smoking cessation products that can help you quit, and there is the Nebraska Tobacco Quitline (1-800-QUIT-NOW or 1-800-784-8669) for support," she says.

Public health includes all of us and helps each of us to stay younger and live longer! ☺

Child Abuse Prevention Month

Child Abuse Prevention Month focuses on recognizing abuse

and neglect, and on reminding the public to report it to law enforcement or to the Child Abuse Hotline at 1-800-652-1999.

Calls to the abuse/neglect hotline increased from 24,111 in 2004 to 28,358 in 2006, partly because of increased awareness.

Warning signs of neglect or abuse can include clothing that is dirty or not suitable to the weather, bruises, cuts, broken bones, burns, injuries explained away as accidents, or sexual acting out. Remember, you have the power to protect a child! ☺

Minority Health

Did you know that infant mortality rates are twice as high for African Americans as for white Americans? Or that the prevalence of diagnosed diabetes is higher for African Americans and Hispanics than for whites across all age groups?

National Minority Health Month gives us an opportunity to address racial and ethnic health disparities, one of **Dr. Joann Schaefer's** top priorities for the Division of Public Health.

National Minority Health Month goals include:

- encouraging cultural competency training and health education among health care providers; and
- providing leadership in the monitoring and reporting of the health status of all vulnerable populations.

For more information, talk with the DHHS' Office of Minority Health and Health Equity staff members, who work to equalize health outcomes and eliminate health disparities in Nebraska. ☺ ☐

Alcohol Awareness Month

Did you know that alcohol is the #1 drug of choice for children and adolescents? The seriousness of this problem is seen in the numbers: Children who drink alcohol before the age of 15 are five times more likely than those who start after age 21 to have alcohol problems as adults.

Here are three things parents need to know about alcohol use by young people:

- Drinking in childhood is a serious problem.
- Warning signs can help parents spot a problem.
- Parents can take action and make a difference in their child's health and well-being, now and in the future.

For more information, go to <http://ncadi.samhsa.gov/seasonal/aprilalcohol/>. ☺ ☐

Infant Immunization Week (April 19-26)

"Vaccination is one of the most important ways that parents can protect their children's health," says **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer. Vaccines are one of history's most successful and cost-effective public health tools for preventing serious disease and death. Diseases that were once commonplace like polio, measles, diphtheria and rubella, are now rare.

Such success can mean that some parents take for granted the importance of childhood immunizations. In Nebraska, 75% of two-year-olds are age-appropriately immunized. That means that 25% don't have all the vaccinations they need. Infant Immunization Week is a reminder to parents that their children's lives may depend on getting vaccinated. ☺

In their own words . . .

Letters to HHSS employees who are helping people live better lives

Dear **DHHS Omaha office:**

I want to write you a letter about **Angela Mitchell** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Omaha Intake Center South) and the difference she made in my life. A few years ago, I decided to continue my education. I enrolled as a full-time student to receive my nursing license. Going to school full-time made it difficult to make ends meet, but I knew I was making a good choice for the kids and myself. I wanted to be able to provide a good future for them and show them that it is never too late in life to follow your dreams.

Being a single mom with two children, it was a financial struggle. There was tuition, books, lab fees and many other bills, in addition to everyday things like food, rent and utilities. I applied for energy assistance and Angela was my caseworker. She was wonderful! Angela was always willing to help my family and me. She was always available when I called and walked me through the whole process. She went above and beyond, and I just want to say thanks. Too many times people are quick to complain but seldom remember to praise people who have helped them along the way.

Angela is a wonderful asset to you, and I hope you pass this message along to her. Her thoughtfulness and willingness to help really made a difference in my life.

An Omaha service recipient

Dear **Lynn Cooper** (Protection & Safety Worker, DHHS Kearney office):

I'm so grateful for everything you have done. You treated me with so much respect. I will never forget you. You truly saved my life!

A Kearney service recipient

A February 7 blog on www.nebraska.net titled "Nebraska Health and Human Services" offered this:

I never really noticed it before, but my parents are actually getting pretty old. I spent some time talking to them over a meal about how my job hunt was going (which could be summarized in three words: 'not very well'), when I looked at them. I really LOOKED at them. And I realized that there were more wrinkles on them than I thought, just a bit more difficulty in moving around for them.

At that point I realized that I was never so grateful for the Nebraska Health and Human Services (also known as the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services - DHHS) as I was at that moment. I'm pretty sure that without them and the kinds of service they offer to citizens of this state, I would have freaked out in a second.

DHHS, for those of you who don't know...has one of the best programs for senior or aging citizens of the state. I didn't think about it much before, since I only used to contact DHHS to get copies of my birth certificate, but looking at it now, I'm relieved to know that my parents will be taken care of in the future, just in case I really screw up.

A Nebraska citizen

While *Connections* receives more letters from satisfied customers than we can ever publish, please send letters via any method listed in our editorial box on page 2, and we'll print as many as space allows.

Winner named in Adoption Day poster contest

Jordan Miller (at left below), 13, of Axtell, Nebraska, won a pizza party for her 7th-grade class for submitting the winning entry in a DHHS-sponsored poster contest (far right). The aim of the competition was to urge people to consider adopting a child and was open to elementary students through 7th grade in 21 counties of the Central Service Area (CSA). State Senators **Joel Johnson** and **Ray Aguilar** chose the winning poster.



On hand to congratulate the winner was **Marylyn Christenson**, Resource Development Supervisor in the DHHS Pine Street Grand Island office. “We put these posters up all over the place and already had some phone calls from interested people,” she said. “This pizza party is our way of saying thank you to the winner and all of the other students who participated.”

“This is the first year of the poster competition,” says **Yolanda Nuncio**, CSA Administrator, “but we hope to do it again next year.” *Photo courtesy of Kearney Hub*



The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services mission:
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