

Connections

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

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

March 2009
VOLUME 9, ISSUE 3



DEFENDERS OF OUR FREEDOM UNVEILED; The "Defenders of Our Freedom," a series of six artworks commissioned for the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home (ENVH), was unveiled on February 6 at the Bellevue facility. From left to right, ENVH Deputy Administrator Bob Muthard; ENVH Administrator Howard Googins; John Hilgert, Director of the Division of Veterans' Homes; Teri Rosario, the artist; Brian Downey, the artist's husband; and J.D. Hutton with the Nebraska Arts Council. *Photo: Audrey Hester (More inside).*

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.

[Governor Announces Landry to Leave DHHS](#) February 3, 2009

[Beatrice State Developmental Center Meets Timeline for Transferring Medically Fragile Residents](#) February 6, 2009

[Beatrice State Developmental Center Gets Interim CEO](#) February 9, 2009

[DHHS Requests Bids \(RFP\) For Customer Service Centers in Economic Assistance Reform](#) February 13, 2009

[Joint Study Shows Positive Trends for Children](#) February 23, 2009

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

About the Cover:



This month's front cover kicks off our publication of the "Defenders of Freedom" paintings commissioned for the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home at Bellevue. See a close-up of the painting later in this issue.

Upcoming *Connections* issues will offer a parade of the other five paintings in the series by artist **Teri Rosario**. The paintings show scenes pertaining to the U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Navy, U.S. Air Force, U.S. Coast Guard and Merchant Marines.

Don't miss 'em!

make the connection . . .

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

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@dhhs.ne.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.

EOE/AA/ADA

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Foster Care Joint Study Shows Positive Trends for Children

By Jeanne Atkinson

Last July, **Governor Heineman** asked DHHS' Division of Children and Family Services (CFS) and the Nebraska Foster Care Review Board (FCRB) to work together on a special study of children in the state's care for two years who had a plan of reunification with their families.

Originally, the study was to focus on the cases of 550 children. By the time data collection began in August, plans had already changed to adoption, guardianship or other permanency for 320 of the children.

"It was gratifying to learn that so many had already moved toward permanency by the time the study began," said **Todd Landry**, director of CFS. "I want to thank everyone involved for working together to gather this important information, staff these cases, and focus on these children."

Together, the two agencies reviewed the cases of the remaining 230 children, looking at whether their plan was still appropriate and what barriers still existed to getting them to permanency.

Landry said the results show we're definitely moving in the right direction in finding children permanent homes and showed several positive benefits for the children. For instance:

- Services were provided within 60 days of removal for 83% of the children;
- Over half (50.9%) of the children had three or fewer caseworkers over the lifetime of the case;

- Children's court hearings are occurring every six months for 82.2% of the children; and
- An additional 111 children's plans were changed as a result of the study.

Several areas of concern were identified that need to have a

continued focus, including:

- There needs to be a focus on strengthening stability and safety of placements;
- In 52.6% of the cases, the number one barrier to reunification for children in out-of-home care for two years or longer was the parent not being able or willing to parent (121 of the 230 children); and
- For 18.8% of the children, safety concerns were identified despite visitation being supervised or monitored.



"In the past year, we've made a concerted effort to develop stronger relationships, particularly with the courts," said Landry. "I commend Nebraska's judges for their ongoing efforts to improve the welfare and safety of children and youth."

The study also provided critical information about parental compliance, placement issues, feasibility of reunification as a plan, lack of sibling contact, and identification of other barriers to permanency.

Right in Their Own Backyard

Norfolk Veterans' Home launches "Heroes Park" project

By Jerry Crisp

Plans are taking shape for a backyard at the Norfolk Veterans' Home (NVH) to be called "Heroes Park." The park is envisioned as an 8-acre area just south of the facility offering tranquility and enhanced recreational opportunities for veterans and their families.

The idea for Heroes Park started with the vision of **Duane Hodge**, former NVH administrator, shortly after the Home was completed in 2001.

NVH Volunteer Coordinator **Jenny Last** feels a real passion for Heroes Park and has been an enthusiastic participant in the project since its inception.

"The saddest thing is when we see a member's spouse pushing their loved one through the parking lot just to enjoy the outdoors on a nice day," Last says. "We wanted to have a place for members and their families to go outdoors and enjoy nature."

Part of the plan is a plaza that can accommodate more than 400 people for larger gatherings on Memorial Day and Veterans' Day. Also included in the plans are walking paths accessible by wheelchairs, gardens, an outdoor kitchen area, a child's play area, shuffleboard and basketball courts, horseshoe pits and a driving range.

Since veterans at the facility represent both older and younger generations, the Norfolk Veterans' Home Foundation chose the theme for Heroes Park—"From the Greatest Generation to the Latest Generation."

"The idea is that there will be something there for everyone," says Last.

Heroes Park will also include a windmill surrounded with native prairie grasses. **Marva Kasl**, State American Legion Auxiliary president, raised more than \$3,000 to move a 40-foot windmill donated by a couple of Legion members to the site.

What has made the dream a reality is the wide support this project enjoys.

"The Norfolk Veterans' Home Foundation was set up within the Norfolk Community Foundation, and it's the driving force," Last explains. "The group is made up of veterans' family members, volunteers and people from the community, all passionate about it and united in the effort to make this wonderful idea happen. It's great to find people who care so deeply about the men and women who gave so much for our country."



THE DREAM TAKES SHAPE: A mockup of what one part of Heroes Park might look like features an avenue of flags representing each branch of service, leading to a pavilion. The pavilion will accommodate more than 400 people for large group events such as musical entertainment and movies. *Design concept courtesy of Norfolk Veterans' Home Foundation*

According to Facility Administrator **Jerry Eisenhauer**, “Heroes Park will stand as an enduring symbol of the Norfolk Veterans’ Home’s dedication and appreciation of those who sacrificed so willingly to ensure our lasting freedoms.”

“The whole idea behind Heroes Park is to provide our veterans a place where they can participate in a wider array of social activities, find a quiet retreat to share with a loved one or family, or simply enjoy peaceful solitude, as they prefer,” says Last. “It’s the very least we can do for those who have done so much for all of us.”

The fundraising goal for the park is \$1.5 million. Construction is expected to begin this fall.

If you would like more information about Heroes Park, contact NVH Volunteer Services Coordinator Jenny Last at (402) 370-3102 or jenny.last@nebraska.gov.

If you would like to contribute to construction of Heroes Park, contact the Norfolk Veterans Home Foundation at 600 Benjamin Avenue, Norfolk, Nebraska 68701.



FROM THE GREATEST GENERATION TO THE LATEST GENERATION! No one illustrates the Heroes Park theme better than veterans like NVH member and former Marine James Kelley (seated) and Specialist Miles Nelson of the U.S. Army. Kelley served in World War II and Korea, earning a Purple Heart from both. Nelson served in Afganistan and is now stationed at Fort Riley in Kansas. *Photo: Jenny Last*

Good Things Are Happening!

In 2008, the Public Health Environmental Laboratory tested almost 50,000 water samples from public water supply systems across Nebraska, testing for contaminants regulated by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Another example of how public health efforts ensure the safety and good health of everyone!

Front Liners

By Jerry Crisp

Craig Thelen, Facility Engineer Assistant Manager with DHHS Operations, is a civil engineer who liaisons between Health and Human Services and the Department of Administrative Services (DAS). In this capacity, he works with all ten of the DHHS 24-hour facilities to oversee capital construction and repair.

Since Thelen visits each of the 24-hour facilities monthly—weekly or more during construction projects—he’s on the road a lot. Any facility project costing \$1,500 or more requires his attention.

“I stay in close touch with facility maintenance staff because they’re my eyes and ears,” Thelen says. “And I listen close to what they tell me because I consider myself their spokesperson. I try to be the go-to guy who advocates for them.”

Thelen takes a close look at all proposed projects to determine the need before approving them.

“I tell maintenance people to sell their ideas to me so that I can sell them to others,” says Thelen. “If they can justify a request and the justification is warranted, then I can fully support it and help secure funding.”

Thelen previously did the same kind of work for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

“Coming from a trades background,” he says, “I can relate to maintenance personnel and their needs easily.”

In his present position for five years and with the State of Nebraska for 20, Thelen sees himself as a facilitator, Mr. Fixit, and problem-solver.

“I like to think that there’s no such thing as ‘can’t,’ and our main aim should be how to overcome challenges,” he says. “The creative people I work with at all of the facilities help me prove that over and over again.”

Several successes prove Thelen’s point.

When veterans living at the former Thomas Fitzgerald Veterans’ Home moved to new quarters at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans’ Home at Bellevue, the project was completed on time and under budget by a half million dollars.

“That happened thanks to close attention to details during the planning stages by everyone involved because changes cost money and slow down progress,” says Thelen. “You could see by the smiles on the faces of the veterans as they moved into their new home that something had been done right.”

Something else that put smiles on the faces of veterans was the sight of an M-60 battle tank that made the move with them. A centerpiece of the landscape at their former home, it was no small feat to transport the more than 30-foot

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.

long, 11-foot wide, 12-foot high, 45-ton weapon.

“It took a lot of phone calls,” says Thelen, “but the 443rd Transportation Company of the U.S. Army Reserve volunteered to do the job and did it well. It just goes to show how working together can make the difficult easier and the unlikely possible.”

Successful efforts at one facility often benefit another.

“Working with maintenance personnel and others at the 24-hour facilities, we developed a safety program,” Thelen explains. “The plan called for documenting injuries, identifying problems and causes, developing environmental rounds and making needed changes to ensure safety of people served and staff members.”

Thelen believes that a key to success with such programs is being proactive rather than reactive.

“It’s better for all of us to think ahead, anticipate and take action instead of waiting for things to happen and reacting to them,” he says. “In the long run, that approach is more effective, less expensive and a lot easier on everyone.”

Another part of Thelen’s work is working with the federal government.

“Some grants received through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) were to repair damage done at the Hastings Regional Center and the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney during the ice storm a couple of years ago,” he explains. “I also helped write a grant through the Environmental Trust for dredging the lake at the Grand Island Veterans’ Home.”

While his biggest challenge is juggling his time equally among all ten 24-hour facilities, Thelen measures success by helping the people he works with succeed.

According to Bob Zagozda, DHHS Chief Operating Officer and Thelen’s supervisor, “Craig has a high level of concern for the 24-hour facilities and is very conscientious in advocating them.”

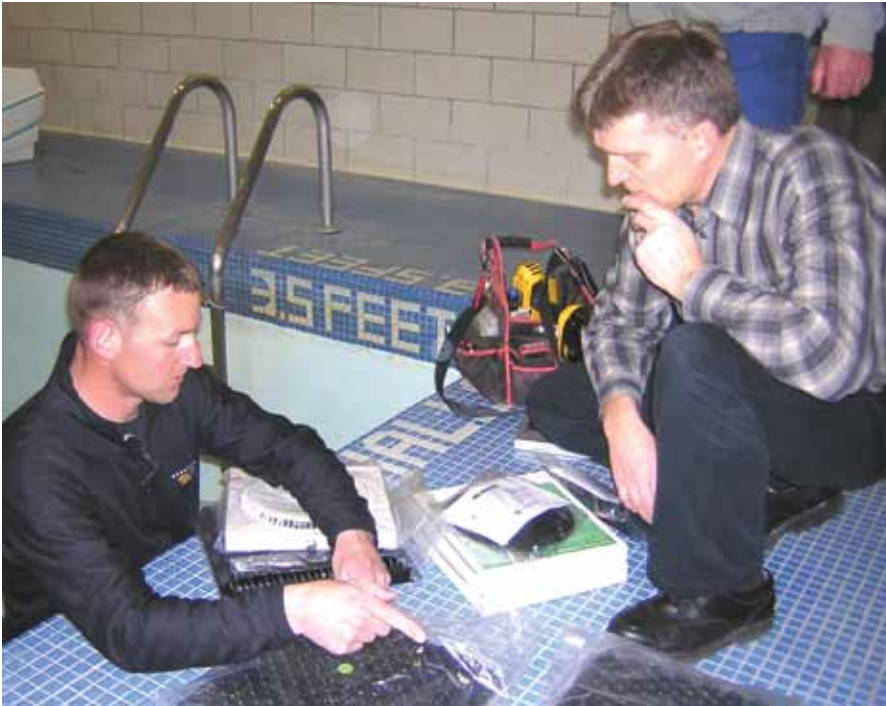


Front Liner Craig Thelen
Photo: Jerry Crisp

“They’re a great bunch of people who work hard without all the recognition they deserve,” Thelen says. “If I’m able to help them do their work more effectively or efficiently, that makes me feel good.”

Helping maintenance personnel do their jobs more effectively and efficiently at the ten DHHS 24-hour facilities also means helping people who live and work at those facilities to live better lives.

“That’s what it’s all about,” says Thelen.



(Top) **Craig Thelen** confers with pool specialist **Chris Handon** about modifications needed in swimming pool drains at the Rehabilitation & Treatment Center at Kearney. *Photo: Richard Wetjen*

(Bottom) **Thelen** consults with window company and construction firms representatives about more energy-efficient windows installed at the Beatrice State Developmental Center. *Photo: Jerry Crisp*

Office of Minority Health on front line of effort to eliminate health care disparities



Minority Health Administrator Raponzil Drake, PhD.
Photo: Bill Wiley

By Mike Wight

April is when minority health issues in the U.S. are brought to the public's attention through efforts of federal, state and local groups. In Nebraska this effort is spearheaded by the Office of Minority Health within the Division of Public Health.

The health of the residents of this country has improved dramatically over the last hundred years, but race and ethnicity have always made a difference. African Americans have always experienced worse health outcomes than whites. Hispanic Americans also have poorer health than whites, although better health is found in Cuban and Mexican populations than in the Puerto Rican population. Asian Americans experience relatively good health in comparison to the other minority populations except for the Samoans and Native Hawaiians.

Native Americans also experience worse health outcomes than the majority population. Some differences are due to social issues, including socioeconomic levels, high-risk behaviors, and environmental circumstances. Other factors include occupational risk, stress and poor access to care. Diseases that are the most statistically significant in this disparity include diabetes, cancer, infant mortality, substance abuse and violence, cardiovascular disease and AIDS.

The health disparity between majority and minority populations has existed for hundreds of years. An example of early documentation of disparities in health dates back to 1914, when **Booker T. Washington** started a project to "conserve the health in order to preserve the future of the race."

The recognition of civil rights for all Americans of all races, ethnicities, and genders, along with presumed equal access to services such as education, health care, and even housing and employment, is a very recent accomplishment. Not until the late 1960s were the final laws adopted to guarantee civil rights to racial ethnic minorities. It was only 40 years ago that people who were non-white were barred from certain jobs, certain neighborhoods, hospitals, and schools. Discrimination was not only the social norm but the legal practice of realtors, bankers, insurance companies, schools, hospitals, every job industry, and the government!

That's right: federal laws that created programs such as social security and Aid to Families with Dependent Children legally excluded types of labor where African and Mexican Americans worked like farming, railroads and domestic work. Even after laws were passed, poverty prevented many of these racial and ethnic minorities from attaining services that others had. Poverty within these groups was far more widespread than for whites.

In 1985, a Report of the Secretary's Task Force on Black and Minority Health identified the relative health status of the minorities and whites. The report also chronicled the consequence of early death due to the disparity.

Also significant was the creation of the federal Office of Minority Health by the Secretary of U.S. Health and Human Services. The Office was charged with the goal of addressing the disparities that exist between the health status of minorities and whites.

The DHHS Office of Minority Health and Health Equity works with health agencies statewide, other state agencies, faith-based organizations, community-based organizations, and others to assist in eliminating disparities in health through outreach, education, and training.

Way to Go!

Statewide or national recognitions, awards, honors

Colorado honors DHHS for assistance during recent salmonella outbreak

When Alamosa, Colorado, experienced a water-related salmonella outbreak last spring, the community needed help fast. Salmonella can cause diarrhea, fever, abdominal cramps and even death.

For 24 days, residents of the community of 8,600 couldn't drink the water or use it for brushing their teeth, washing dishes or cooking. Because of the contamination, schools and restaurants closed, and the National Guard handed out bottled water.

As soon as the salmonella problem was detected, the city called on the Mid-America Alliance for help. The Alliance is a group of 10 states that includes Nebraska and Colorado, which agree to come to each other's aid without a federally-declared emergency.

Among those responding was DHHS Water Program field staffer **Tony Martinez** of North Platte.

The Alamosa community had to ensure that chlorine sufficient to kill pathogens was reaching every spot in the water system. Tony was part of a four-member team assisting in flushing samples out of valves at designated parts of the water system for testing.

After working three 12-hour days, Tony was glad to get home.

"Alamosa needed help, and Tony's know-how was important in getting the city back on track," says **Jack Daniel**, Administrator within the Division of Public Health.

Later, **Ron Falco**, Drinking Water Program Manager within Colorado's Water Quality Control Division, sent a letter to DHHS, saying, "On behalf of the citizens of Colorado and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, we thank you for your support and generosity during the salmonella outbreak in Alamosa this spring. We appreciate that you responded so quickly to this emerging need.

"The unexpected contamination of the municipal water supply affected nearly 10,000 people. The support offered by your organization made a significant difference to



Tony Martinez, Water Supply Specialist with the Division of Public Health, displays a plaque from the State of Colorado proclaiming "You Make A Difference." The plaque recognizes DHHS's role in responding to a call for help from our neighboring state during last year's Salmonella outbreak. *Photo: Doug Woodbeck*

this community and its ability to function throughout the time necessary to disinfect the water system. The people of Alamosa were grateful for the enthusiastic support during their time of need.

"Colorado is proud to have partnered with you during this crisis."

As this case illustrates, DHHS employees not only help Nebraskans live better lives but their neighbors as well.

"The whole point of the Mid-America Alliance is to help our neighbors in need," says **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer and Director of the Division of Public Health. "I'm proud of our staff for doing so."

ACCESSNebraska Update

By Dianna Seiffert

We've all been hearing about DHHS' *ACCESSNebraska* and the success we've had with on-line applications and screening for economic assistance benefits. As of February 28, more than 13,000 applications have been submitted on-line, with 38% coming in after normal business hours.



But *ACCESSNebraska* is a lot more than the on-line application process. It's DHHS' new economic assistance service delivery system, which includes on-line applications and screenings, electronic records, universal case load management and customer service centers.

On February 13, DHHS took a huge step forward with customer service center plans by issuing a Request for Proposal (RFP) to regional and local economic development entities interested in developing customer service centers.

As a result of the bidding process, DHHS will choose three to six locations for customer service centers. The centers will be operated by trained DHHS employees so clients can access case-specific information quickly and accurately, in

one phone conversation whenever possible. Retaining trained, quality, experienced staff is crucial to the success of this project.

"*ACCESSNebraska* will help us improve the way we provide economic assistance," said **Todd Landry**, Director of the Division of Children and Family Services. "Customer service centers will give us the ability to better coordinate and centralize our work and respond to clients in a timely and consistent manner. Even with a customer service center approach, people will still be able to personally meet with a caseworker if they need to."

The deadline to submit a bid in writing is April 15, 2009, 2 p.m., CST. Other detailed requirements for submitting bids can be found on the Department of Administrative Services' Website at <http://www.das.state.ne.us/materiel/purchasing/2818.htm> and/or DHHS' Website at

http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/Children_Family_Services/. Feel free to let people know about the RFP, and direct them to either of these Websites.

After a detailed RFP process which will include information about available workforce, technology and building costs, customer service centers will be selected and announced this summer (around July 1).

More updates to follow!

Wellness Words: Personal Preparedness for People with disabilities

For people living with disabilities or chronic diseases, everyday challenges could become overwhelming in an emergency. That's why people with disabilities or those taking care of people with disabilities need to customize their emergency plans and supply kits to fit their specific needs and situations.

For example, all emergency supply kits start with basic, every day items like food, water and clothing. Then we add things like flashlights, first aid kits, and radios and batteries so we can keep informed about what's going on.

People with disabilities may need additional supplies like medications taken regularly, extra eyeglasses or hearing-aid batteries, extra wheelchair batteries and oxygen, and a list of the style and serial number of medical devices.

For more information about emergency preparedness for people with disabilities, visit the Department of Homeland Security's Website at www.ready.gov. For additional information about personal preparedness, contact Public Information Officer **Dianna Seiffert** at (402) 471-1695 or dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov.



April Observances

April 2009

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30		

Public Health Month

“Public health means healthy people in healthy communities,” says **Dr. Joann Schaefer**, Chief Medical Officer.

Most of the improvements in life expectancy that have been achieved since the turn of the last century are due to public health activities. In 1900, the average age at death was 47. Today, the average age is 77. That’s an increase of 30 years!

Public health has contributed to declines in heart disease and stroke, infectious disease, and environmental and occupational diseases and injuries. Public health efforts have contributed to the control of childhood diseases, declines in dental problems, and reductions in childhood lead levels. Public health also keeps our drinking water clean and our food supplies safe.

April is also an opportune time to recognize DHHS employees who are dedicated to public health.

Child Abuse Prevention Month

Did you know that there were 2,707 substantiated cases of child abuse or neglect in Nebraska in 2008?

Raising kids and managing a household can be a real challenge, and day-to-day stress builds up. Children are especially sensitive to your moods, words and actions.

Find positive ways you and your family can manage stress as a team:

- A healthy sense of humor really helps when life gets complicated.
- Keep the lines of communication open and connect with your kids.
- Reaching out for help or advice is good parenting. Teachers, doctors, other parents and family members can be a great sources of information and encouragement.

We can all reach out to parents around us who may be struggling. Be supportive, especially to new parents. Offer to baby-sit. Donate your children’s used clothing, furniture and toys to another family.

Any suspected child abuse or neglect should be reported to law enforcement, a local DHHS office, or by calling 1-800-652-1999.

Infant Immunization Month

“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,

mumps, diphtheria and rubella, are now rare.

In Nebraska, 83% of two-year-olds are age-appropriately immunized, ranking Nebraska 5th in the nation. Infant Immunization Week is a reminder to parents that their children’s lives may depend on getting vaccinated.

Alcohol Awareness Month

It’s estimated that 90,000 Nebraskans (7.5% of the adult population) abuse or are addicted to alcohol or other drugs. The good news is that treatment works and that recovery is possible.

If you answer “yes” to any of these questions, you may have a problem with alcohol:

- Do you drink alone when you feel angry or sad?
- Does your drinking ever make you late for work?
- Do you ever drink after telling yourself you won’t?
- Do you ever forget what you did while drinking?

For information about treatment options in Nebraska, go to <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/beh/treatment.htm>.

Good Things Are Happening!

The Lincoln Regional Center received a perfect score on a recent federal survey, passing an early December 2008 Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) survey of general psychiatric services with no deficiencies. State CMS surveyors interviewed patients and staff and reviewed all internal investigation reports, all incident/accident reports, all restraint/seclusion reports, and ten patient records.

An example of how meeting standards of service delivery helps people with mental health needs live better lives!

June 2009:

Deadline for paper food stamps and name changes

By Kathi Tiede and Tom Ryan

Since Nebraska implemented Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) in 2002, we've barely given a thought to paper food stamp coupons. Now, the old paper food stamp coupons have a termination date of June 17, 2009. After that date, retail food stores cannot accept the paper coupons, according to the Farm Bill of 2008. Local DHHS office staff should be aware that clients must spend any food stamp coupons on or before June 17, 2009, or the coupons will be worthless.

This spring, 8 1/2" x 11" posters noting the redemption deadline will be available on the [DHHS EBT Website](#).

Local offices should print copies of the posters and post them in DHHS facilities. Information regarding this deadline is also being supplied to certain community organizations who also work with clients. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has already notified retailers of the deadline.

The Farm Bill of 2008 also changed the name of the federal program to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or "SNAP." The new program name reflects the national focus on nutrition and putting healthy food within reach for low income households. LB 288 was introduced in the Legislature at the Department's request to change the program's name in Nebraska also.

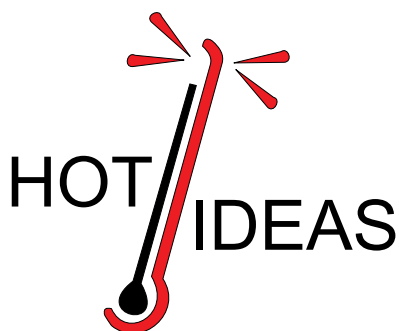
Clients' EBT benefits are secure (never lost in the mail) and issued electronically over the first five days of each month (on the same day of the month regardless of weekends or holidays). Nebraska has not issued paper food stamps since August of 2002.

EBT benefits can be used in any state of the USA, as well as Washington DC, Guam, and the Virgin Islands.

Nebraska DHHS's EBT Website is <http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/fia/ebt.htm>



The Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) card replaces paper food stamps.



Have a **hot** or **cool** idea for an upcoming issue of **Connections**?

Contact Jerry Crisp, Communications and Legislative Services

In their own words

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

Dear **Pat Carpenter** (Teacher at the Youth Rehabilitation & Treatment Center-Geneva):

If it wasn't for you, I wouldn't have gotten this far! I have learned a lot in your class, and it was very helpful to me.

As you know, I am on the release process and very soon will be going home. There were a lot of things I didn't understand, but you always helped me so I could understand it. I am glad I had you as a teacher. It was a good semester.

Now I am going into the real world and trying it on my own. I will use everything I have learned from my journey to help me make better choices in my life. I am eager to use what I have learned here on the outside.

Thank you for help me with my journey. I will always remember what I learned and who I learned it from!

A YRTC-Geneva girl

Dear **Cindy Janulewicz** (Social Service Worker, DHHS Broken Bow office):

I believe you are the exception rather than the rule. You have been most helpful from the beginning. When I couldn't get answers (or even replies) from others, you stepped right up and got things under control in a timely manner.

Thank you for being so helpful, caring and prompt. You are definitely an asset! It has been wonderful working with you.

A Satisfied Customer

Dear **Traci Fox** (Child & Family Services Specialist, DHHS Norfolk office):

Thank you for being there for our family in this time of need. Thank you for being there at the memorial service. It was greatly appreciated.

It's a pleasure having you work with our family. Thanks for keeping us in your thoughts and prayers.

A Northern Services Area family

Dear **Jackie Fairbanks** (Administrative Assistant, Vital Records, Lincoln):

When I called today, I spoke with **Tracy Beranek** (Vital Records Staff Assistant). I asked for your name as her supervisor.

I found Tracy very helpful and so willing to be of help in answering my questions, and she did do cheerfully (not too common here in California). Just wanted for you to know what a nice experience it was in speaking to Tracy. Excellent!

A Satisfied Customer

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 publish as many as space allows.

Happenings!

Photos spotlighting DHHS activities around the state



Juanita Bax, a client at the Beatrice State Developmental Center, is doing her part in a facility-wide recycling effort by recycling cardboard boxes at the campus thrift shop, "Treasures Unlimited." The boxes come from donations to the thrift shop given by both employees and members of the local community. According to Vocational Coordinator **Lois Oden**, who supervises the thrift shop, "We take a laundry cart full of cardboard to the recycling bin several times a week." *Photo: Jerry Crisp*

If you have a photo of a DHHS activity you'd like to share with co-workers across the state, contact *Connections* by any means listed in the editorial box on page 2, and we'll publish as many as space allows.

Defenders of Our Freedom Parade

Here's the first from the "Defenders of Our Freedom" series of artwork by **Teri Rosario** that has found a home at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home at Bellevue. Already gracing the front cover of this Connections issue, we thought you might appreciate a closer look. Watch for the other five paintings in this collection featuring other branches of U.S. military service that will appear in upcoming issues of this publication.



"You Are Not Forgotten" depicts Army servicemen in the Vietnam War. According to artist **Teri Rosario**, "I knew that it would be the most difficult one to create. I wanted this painting to first and foremost honor the people who served in that war. I remember the awful treatment of our service personnel at the time, and I wanted to show some of the adversities that those same servicemen endured. I hope that "You Are Not Forgotten" accomplishes at least some of both those tasks."
©Teri Rosario.

For more information about the painting and painter, go to www.terirosario.com.

Watch for more "Defenders of Freedom" paintings in upcoming issues of this publication.

Am I blue?

Not blue as in sad but blue to create awareness of the 1st annual “Dress in Blue Day” on March 6. With **Kathy Ward**, Office of Women’s and Men’s Health Administrator (front row center with sunglasses), leading the way, these 25 or so state employees wore blue on a recent stroll from the State Office Building in Lincoln to the State Capitol Building. Thanks to the American Cancer Society, even the State Capitol Building itself turned blue that evening and stayed that way throughout the weekend.

The purpose of this event was to enhance awareness of the need for colon cancer screening for all Nebraskans over 50 to save lives. People with a family history of colon cancer or with specific medical conditions should be seen earlier by their doctor or other health care provider. In Nebraska this year, about 1,000 persons will be diagnosed with colon cancer, and 350 or more are expected to die from it.

“The good news is that colon cancer is preventable, treatable and beatable when diagnosed early,” says Chief Medical Officer **Dr. Joann Schaefer**. “Nebraskans can also reduce their risk for colon cancer if they exercise and eat more fruits and vegetables.”

For more information about the Nebraska Colon Cancer Program, contact Health Program Manager **Michelle Heffelfinger** at (402) 471-0595 or michelle.heffelfinger@nebraska.gov. For more information about colon cancer in general, contact **June Ryan**, Comprehensive Cancer Control Manager, at (402) 471-0369 or june.ryan@nebraska.gov.

