

# CONNECTIONS

March 2013 VOLUME 13, ISSUE 3

*Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together*

## 95 Percent and Counting Receive Excellence Training

You've seen the congratulations notes on the bulletin board. You've dedicated yourself to improving your own service skills. You've even participated in a training session yourself. So...what is Serving People with Excellence all about?

***read more>***

## Sower Newsletter Has New Updated Look

The Sower newsletter celebrates people with intellectual or developmental disabilities and their families, guardians, service providers, advocates and supporting community organizations. It is published quarterly by the Division of Developmental Disabilities, and it's all new.

***read more>***

## Geothermal Video Wins Award

A documentary co-produced by the Office of Drinking Water and Environmental Health in the Division of Public Health has received a \$20,000 prize for its focus on the usage of underground pipes installed with a heat pump to keep buildings cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

***read more>***

## Pathways of HOPE

### "Thanks for Not Giving Up on Me"

Every day, DHHS employees help to produce good outcomes for children and families, making a difference in the lives of Nebraskans. DHHS is now sharing special stories on our Children and Family Services' website in a series called "Pathways of Hope". Read these inspirational stories at: [www.dhhs.ne.gov/pathways](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/pathways). A new story will be posted every two weeks.

These heartwarming stories are about Protection and Safety, Economic Assistance and Child Support Enforcement employees who made a positive difference in the lives of our children and families. Don't miss a single story! Anyone can subscribe to the page and receive notification when a new story appears.

*Here's the first story on the website.*

### A Cookie is Worth a Thousand Words

"Thank you" stated the words on the cookies presented to the case worker. With the teen hugging her, and siblings lovingly wrapping their arms around the case worker's legs, the teen said, "Thanks for not giving up on me."

The thanks were well deserved. The teen had been involved with the courts for shoplifting.

To make matters worse, the teen was keeping bad company, which resulted in truancy, increasing law violations and trouble at home. The case worker set up a treatment plan with goals to achieve. She also arranged individual and family

therapy that taught the teen how to apply therapy to everyday life.

Unannounced drop-ins by the case worker went well except for one instance when the teen was again in the company of others who were a bad influence. House arrest was ordered. The teen and case worker completed a plan to avoid those who would cause the teen trouble.

Soon, the teen was building positive relationships and gaining self-confidence. Not once did the teen test positive for drugs, and family relationships significantly improved.

"And, thanks for pushing me to be better," the teen said. For the case worker, no cookie ever tasted better. Providing pathways of hope. That's what we do.

.....  
*Be sure to let Russ Reno ([russell.reno@nebraska.gov](mailto:russell.reno@nebraska.gov)) know about the positive stories you and your coworkers experience.*

*Special thanks to Lindy Bryceson, Administrator, Children and Family Services, Lincoln, for asking her staff to bring positive stories to monthly meetings.*

# Stay Connected on



**make the connection . . .**  
**DHHS Public Website:** [www.dhhs.ne.gov](http://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](mailto:dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov)

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Behavioral Health Division Director: <b>Scot Adams, Ph.D.</b>	Public Health Division Director/Chief Medical Officer: <b>Dr. Joseph Acierno</b>
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Developmental Disabilities Division Director: <b>Jodi Fenner</b>	Chief Operating Officer: <b>Matt Clough</b>

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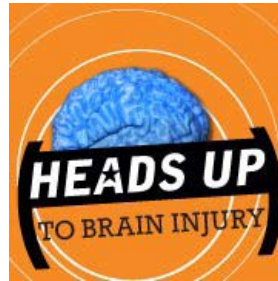
## [DHHS' Employee Website...](#)

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](mailto:Dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov).

## Homepage Homeruns

### [March is Brain Injury Awareness Month, March 14, 2013](#)

A traumatic brain injury can dramatically change lives. Help spread the word about the importance of identifying, responding to and preventing concussions and other serious brain injuries.



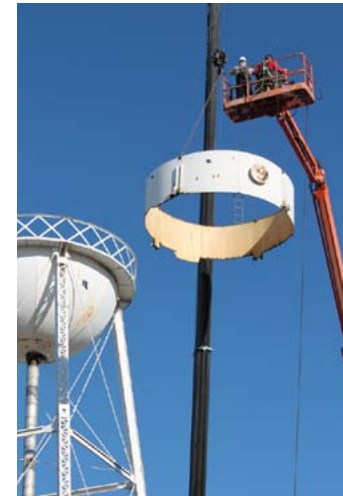
#### For more information:

Check out the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC's) Heads Up Facebook page; The CDC's website; and DHHS' Traumatic brain injury fact sheet that gives TBI prevention tips like:

- Always wear a helmet while playing contact sports, riding bikes, skateboards, or horses, using skates, skiing, or snowboarding.
- Keep firearms stored unloaded in a locked cabinet or safe.
- Make sure the surface of your child's playground has a shock-absorbing material.

Special Olympics Nebraska. Each of the team members had special themed costumes like the Blue Man group featured below.

Carolyn Chamberlin, president and CEO of Special Olympics Nebraska, said the money allows more than 5,000 athletes to participate in 19 different sports across the state.



### [110-Year-Old Landmark Water Tower Taken Down at YRTC-G, Feb 11, 2013](#)

The 110-year-old water tower on the YRTC-Geneva campus was disassembled and taken down. The local landmark had sentimental value for many in the community and at YRTC-G.

The tower itself hasn't held water for a number of years. In 2000, YRTC-G was annexed into the city of Geneva and had access to the city's water supply. An accreditation auditor made a recommendation in the past to remove the tower, and DHHS agreed, making the ultimate decision to dismantle and dispose of the tower.

### [Taking the Plunge for a Special Cause... Nebraska Special Olympics, Feb 28, 2013](#)

People braved icy cold water at Homes Lake in Lincoln recently for the seventh annual Polar Bear Plunge, a fundraising event for Special Olympics Nebraska. More than 50 teams participated in this fundraiser that raised \$56,890 locally for



# The Good Life:

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



By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

One of the milestones in every odd-numbered legislative year is the Department's appearance before the Appropriations Committee. That occurred this week when the Committee set aside two afternoons to hear testimony related to our budget.

Different DHHS division directors appeared with me each day to discuss differences between the Committee's

budget recommendations for DHHS and the Governor's budget recommendations, and to respond to any questions Committee members had.

I appreciate having this opportunity. DHHS does important work. We rely on state general funds for more than 40 percent of our budget. The budget hearing gives us an opportunity to talk directly with State Senators to explain the work of the Department and why their support of needed funding is so important.

If you are interested in reading our testimony to the Appropriations Committee, you can find the complete testimony [here](#). Look under the heading of 2013 Legislative Session, under the dates March 25 and March 26, 2013.

The DHHS general fund appropriation for the current fiscal year is more than \$1.3 billion. Our commitment to taxpayers is to use these funds efficiently and judiciously. The Governor's recommendation for DHHS for fiscal year 2013-14 includes an increase of 7.3 percent. For fiscal year 2014-15, the Governor's recommendation is an increase of 13.7 percent over current appropriations.

DHHS' budget and the adjustments proposed by Gov. Heineman will give us the opportunity to continue our important work across the state. Soon we will know exactly how much money we will have in the budget for the next few years, an important resource, for sure. But money is not the only thing we have going for us. One of our most important resources is our employees and the knowledge, dedication and enthusiasm you bring to work every day to fulfill our mission of helping people live better lives.

One way we are fulfilling our mission is by serving people with excellence. DHHS' "Serving People with Excellence" training\* sets the standard for customer service and expands on the Values and Core Competencies to include ways to more effectively work with and serve people.

Thanks to your combined efforts, 95 percent of DHHS employees have already received "Serving People with Excellence" training and more sessions are already scheduled. That's an amazing number and a sure sign of a successful program.

We have received evaluations from Serving People with Excellence trainings

across the state, and the response and comments to these sessions continues to be very positive. Here are just a few:

*"Very good training with practical application"*

*"I feel it opened up my mind on how to perceive people and learning to understand problems and finding solutions."*

*"I can say this info will stick with me for life!"*

*"Liked thinking through how to use core values and competencies in serving people."*

*"This was useful and helped me take a step back and evaluate what I do."*

*"Positive attitude and respect is one of the keys to serve people with excellence."*

*"I am proud to be part of an organization that 'cares' enough to put on a class like this."*

*"Now it's up to all of us to make this work!"*

From the energy and enthusiasm created from these sessions, it's clear that each of you took the training to heart and made it fit your individual needs. Thank you for the work you do every day and for your efforts to help us continuously achieve excellence.

*\*You can read more about this training opportunity on page 4 of this newsletter.*



# Serving People with Excellence...It's What We Do!

You've seen the congratulations notes on the bulletin board. You've dedicated yourself to improving your own service skills. You've even participated in a training session. So...what is "Serving People with Excellence" all about?

As the largest Human Service organization in Nebraska, DHHS' sole purpose is to provide service to others. The goal has always been to make that service excellent which is why DHHS offers special "Serving People with Excellence" training.

Every hour of every day DHHS employees provide excellent customer service to the Nebraskans we serve, and to one another. Even though we do a good job now, we can always get better. "Serving People with Excellence" reminds us to: keep up the good work; continue to improve upon customer service and communication skills; and remember basic courtesies in the workplace.

Service is such an important part of our work at DHHS, **CEO Kerry Winterer** made it a priority to create a training opportunity and challenge each and every employee across the state to attend and participate in a session.

Getting more than 5,500 employees to attend a face-to-face session in less than a year is a big challenge. New employees receive service training as part of their new employee orientation. For the rest of DHHS, employees from every division were asked to step up and meet the challenge of delivering training

to all coworkers. And they did step up by providing training to 95 percent of the staff, so far, with more sessions scheduled.

Chief Operating Officer **Matt Clough** and employees from Human Resources and Development created the "Serving People with Excellence" curriculum, and, more importantly, developed an innovative new approach to deliver face-to-face training sessions. Nearly 130 employees were chosen as "Champions" to present "Serving People with Excellence" and guide their

fellow coworkers day by day in how we interact with the public and one another.

"Our Champions have done and continue to do a great job in presenting Serving People with Excellence training," Clough said. "These Champions have taken a leading role in making a difference in their respective work cultures. Their time, energy and devotion set the standard for how we deliver services at DHHS."

The response to these sessions continues to be positive. Here are some comments from participant evaluations:

- "Presenters are people who do the work and understand the issues."
- The training "promotes positiveness and reminds us to excel in what we do and how we need to serve our customers."
- "Great info." It "motivated me to be more helpful and understanding."
- "Now it's up to all of us to make this work!"
- "Excellent and I am 100% invested!"
- I learned "how effective communication can turn a challenge into a positive."



Serving People with Excellence Trainers **TiAnne Morse** and **TyLynne Bauer**, Norfolk Regional Center, made a special "Wall of Fame" where class participants wrote down and posted actions they will take in creating a better work environment. TiAnne writes, "Many staff reported this training was a great refresher course in revisiting the things we already do day to day."

"Serving People with Excellence" is about making DHHS a great place to work and to come to for exceptional service. When employees come from a good working environment they are more likely to provide exceptional service. Each and every employee contributes to the quality and success of their working environment.

"It's important to remember that as we foster excellence within DHHS we are in a better position to help others live better lives," Clough said. "And that involves treating all the people we encounter throughout our work days with respect and understanding. For many, "Serving People with Excellence" has been a turning point for new levels of dedication and commitment. Thank you for making a difference in the thousands of lives we impact every day."

# Disagreeing in the Workplace Skillfully



By Richard Mettler,  
Human Resources and Development

Well intentioned people at work can be expected to disagree from time to time. It's not the disagreement that's a problem, but how people sometimes disagree.

Handled skillfully, disagreements can lead to productive solutions, workplace improvements and strengthened relationships.

Handled poorly, with raised voices, anger and resentment, disagreements are unsettling for all concerned. People stop talking but the disagreement does not go away; it just goes underground where it does its real mischief.

Following are some tips to keep in mind to disagree skillfully with mutual respect.

(1) Listen to your coworker first with the sole intent to understand what

*"The secret of success in conversation is to be able to disagree without being disagreeable." ~Anonymous*

he or she is saying. Once you have heard him or her out, repeat what you heard to confirm that you do understand, and clarify any misunderstanding: **"This is what I heard you say."** If need be, ask, **"So what you are saying is..."** or, **"So, I hear your main concerns here are?"**

(2) Ask yourself if there truly is disagreement or if you and your coworker are saying the same thing in different ways, or are seeing the very same issue from two legitimate perspectives. If so, this isn't even disagreement but misunderstood agreement. Let the other person's perspective enrich your understanding.

(3) If you determine there is a disagreement, honestly challenge yourself by asking, **"Is this issue truly important enough for me to dispute, or am I more interested in just getting my way?"**

(4) Be clear that your disagreement is with the issues being discussed, not with your coworker. Avoid using words such as 'you' and 'your'.

(5) When speaking, use a softer voice than usual. This will reduce tension in both of you, encourage your coworker to listen more carefully, and invite your coworker to speak more softly in return.

(6) Explain your concerns openly and calmly, and then ask for feedback.

(7) Identify areas of agreement.

(8) Ask your coworker what is needed to move forward—if there is a resolution that will satisfy you both.

When a disagreement is resolved, put it behind you—let it go.

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Please email me your thoughts, concerns or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships at: [Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov](mailto:Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov).

I will email you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your ideas in a future column.

# Sower Celebrates People with Developmental Disabilities

With colorful graphics and photos and short, easy-to-read articles, DHHS' Sower newsletter has an updated look and feel. The Sower celebrates people with intellectual or developmental disabilities and their families, guardians, service providers, advocates and supporting community organizations. It is published

quarterly by the Division of Developmental Disabilities.

This quarter's issue is filled with good information and inspirational stories like:

- A Polar Bear Plunge to raise money for the Special Olympics of Nebraska;
- Quality Review Team in need of new members;
- The importance of dropping the "R" word from state law; and
- A message from Division Director **Jodi Fenner**.

Anyone can access the Sower and past issues of the newsletter [here](#):

With your help, the Sower can continue to spotlight the needs and potential of Nebraskans with developmental disabilities. Be on the lookout for encouraging and inspirational stories and send them our way. We will use future issues of the Sower to share the good things happening in Nebraska.

Story ideas, "Making a Difference" nominations, comments and photos are always welcome! Send your ideas to: **Christina Mayer**, Community Liaison, Lincoln, or call her at (402) 440-4129.



# Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

## Geothermal Video Wins Award

By Marla Augustine

A documentary co-produced by the Office of Drinking Water and Environmental Health in the Division of Public Health has received an award for its focus on the usage of underground pipes installed with a heat pump to keep buildings cool in the summer and warm in the winter.

The American Clean Skies Foundation awarded a second place energy visions prize to “Geothermal: Energy from the Ground Up.” This Nebraska documentary features efficient geothermal technology. In addition to the Division of Public Health, other co-producers are NET Public Media and the Nebraska Well Drillers Association.

The \$20,000 prize will be used in Nebraska for future training videos on how to harness geothermal energy, according to **Tom Christopherson**, manager of the DHHS Water Well Standard Program.

“We had a really great crew at NET, along with our homeowners and contractors, and we’re happy to be able to get information about

geothermal technology out to Nebraska citizens,” Christopherson said.

Geothermal technology uses energy from underground to heat and cool homes and businesses. In the summer, the coolness of the ground is used to air condition. In winter, the warmth of the earth is used to provide heat.

“The success of the documentary is the result of a great working partnership with NET and the Well Drillers Association,” said Jack Daniel,

administrator of the Office of Drinking Water and Environmental Health. “Airing on NET2 World has brought the video statewide and nationwide interest. It’s being used by members of the water well industry and others to educate professional heating and cooling contractors and consumers.”

“Geothermal: Energy from the Ground Up” will air on NET2 World Thursday, April 4, at 8:30 p.m. CT and Sunday, April 7, at 2:30 p.m. CT.

According to the American Clean Skies Foundation, its prizes are awarded for works that advance a vision for America’s energy security and a cleaner, low-carbon environment.

**“...we’re happy to be able to get information about geothermal technology out to Nebraska citizens.”**

## Advance Health Equity Now for All

By Josie Rodriguez, Administrator  
Office of Health Disparities  
and Health Equity

**Advance Health Equity Now** is this year’s theme for National Minority Health Month. In light of this, the Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity (OHDHE) would like to invite everyone to learn about health equity and how we can work together to reach our vision of Health Equity for all Nebraskans.

Although some of you may be familiar with our Office, others may not be as familiar with what we do. The mission of OHDHE is to improve health outcomes for culturally diverse populations in Nebraska, leading to a vision of health equity for all Nebraskans. The Office plays a vital role in increasing awareness of health disparities of racial and ethnic minorities in Nebraska. We also focus on improving access to culturally and linguistically appropriate health services, expanding health promotion and disease prevention outreach, advocating for cultural awareness, and providing relevant statistical data to assess the health of

Nebraska racial ethnic minorities, Native Americans, refugees and immigrants.

Our Office’s overarching goal is to be a respected leader in cultural intelligence, health disparity data, and community engagement to address the needs of minority populations in Nebraska. One of the most important ways to do our work is through collaboration with partners within DHHS.

We invite you to learn more about what we do through upcoming presentations in your region. Our first presentation, to be held in the month of April, will focus on race and ethnicity. We will discuss the definition, significance and how it is used in the work we all do. Future topics will include cultural intelligence, stereotypes and their effects on people, the perception of power and its impact working with others, communication norms, differences among generations, effects of the past on the present and future, health beliefs, and social factors that affect health outcomes.

For more information on upcoming presentations, please refer to our website at [www.dhhs.ne.gov/healthdisparities](http://www.dhhs.ne.gov/healthdisparities).

### What is Health Equity?

Health Equity is the “attainment of the highest level of health for all people. Achieving health equity requires valuing everyone equally with focused and ongoing societal efforts to address avoidable inequalities, historical and contemporary injustices, and the elimination of health and health care disparities.”<sup>1</sup>

### What are Health Disparities?

“Health disparities are differences in the incidence, prevalence, mortality, and burden of diseases and other adverse health conditions that exist among specific population groups in the United States.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Minority Health

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Health



## Artists of the Arboretum Series Focuses on Art, Hope and Recovery

The Artist of the Arboretum is a monthly art show at the Lincoln Regional Center designed to attract artists interested in showcasing their work and their story of recovery.

The art displayed reflects hope and the important role of art in recovery for consumers of mental health services. Every month a new Artist of the Arboretum will be featured at LRC.

Photographer Deborah Hahn, from Kearney, was the first artist to participate in this new program. Deborah's photography, featured at LRC throughout the month of March, reflected her personal journey to recovery after once being a patient at LRC. Deborah said she hopes that the exhibition of her work will deliver the message of the importance of faith and love.

### Artist to Speak about Art and Recovery

The next Artist of the Arboretum will be John D. Friday. John, a peer support and wellness specialist, will talk about art and his recovery on Tuesday, April 2, at 9:30 a.m. in the lobby of LRC's Administration Building.

John works at Safe Harbor in Omaha, which is a peer-run hospital diversion program. Peer support and wellness specialists work with others who have behavioral health issues to help them achieve recovery.

Four of John's watercolor paintings will be on display at LRC for the month

of April. John said he uses his art to "draw out the poison of my mental injury, and heal the interior wounds left by my traumatic encounters. Through the use of color, I want the viewer to experience vicariously the emotions I experienced directly."

The art exhibit is open to the public from 8:30 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

### Photo at left:

Deborah Hahn, LRC's first Artist of the Arboretum. Deborah's story is reprinted from the February issue of [LRC's Reality Check newsletter](#).

### Deborah says:

I love God, nature and the potentials of an open life. What a blessing to be a part of it. I have always taken pictures as most folks have since childhood. Even though a fine art photographer for 8 years while in the Panhandle of Nebraska, this is my first show, and to me, a very important one. When the forces of evil prevailed, my equipment, possessions, health, home, family, environment wiped out, leaving me traumatized to the point of entry into Lincoln Regional Center. This show reflects literally, human resilience, as well as the capacity of the "system" to do things right, supporting recovery. Thank you to Lincoln Regional Center for its adoption of Trauma Informed Care and to those in Kearney, Region III and the



ACT team for fertile soil. I remember the day I met with **Louise Stone** (Mental Health Practitioner) in 2011 at Lincoln Regional Center, sharing the poem "OF LOVE" by Kahlil Gabran. It solidified a mustard seed in my soul and connected me with a process which, even though I am but a small part of, is the essence of the dynamics of real life. It gave me

hope as in all, there is a purpose of long-term value and ultimate peace from life's complexities. In summary, this work represents a journey, a mustard seed in progress. The greatest blessing is being in position to give back. Express outwardly, being open, knowing how to bend, love through suffering.

# In Gratitude

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



**Helen Meeks** (Administrator, Health Licensure & Investigations, Public Health),  
Regarding: a routine investigation at a local hospital

**Billye Jo Bignell, RN** (Nursing Services Surveyor Consultant, Fremont), and **Mary Kulhanek** (Health Facility Surveyor Consultant, Lincoln), were very professional and courteous throughout the investigation. We appreciate this opportunity to improve our patient services!

Thank you!  
**Gothenburg Memorial Hospital**

**Jana Peterson** (Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Kearney)  
On behalf of the entire membership of Kearney Elk's Lodge #984, thank you and your students for your assistance in helping us stage the "Elk's Hoop Shoot."

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

**Co-Chair, Elk's Hoop Shoot**

**Cherie Swanson** (Payment Reviewer, Medicaid and Long-term Care),

Wow! Way to make my day!  
Thank you for prayers and words of encouragement!

**A Grateful Client**

Dear **Melissa Kratky** (Community Support Specialist, Omaha),

My dad wanted to send you this card. He was so impressed with you when he came to your office a few weeks ago, sat on the floor, spread out all the papers from his two sacks and started working through them. This is a very hard time for us and its people like you that make it easier.

**A Thankful Daughter of a Client**

**Emily Walter** (Human Resources Manager, Lincoln),

I have needed help with several things over the past year and Christine Silvey (Human Resources Assistant, Lincoln) has been very pleasant to work with, and it shows that she really enjoys her job. Christine usually has the answer to your question within a few hours. I know that she has worked with some of my other staff and they are very happy with her getting things done in a timely manner also. I just thought a note for her would be good.

**Tracy Polage**, Youth Security Supervisor,  
Hastings Regional Center

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

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