DHHS is proud to introduce the 2017 Excellence in Leadership Award Recipients for DHHS. The following write-ups were taken from the nomination forms. Pictures were provided by the Department of Administrative Services.

**Melissa BeDunnah**  
*Children and Family Services*  
Melissa exemplifies the department’s core competencies and values. Melissa has taken on extra responsibilities in Medicaid eligibility by participating on the team developing NTRAC, the new eligibility system, and serving as a peer mentor for new employees and peer interviewer. Melissa is always willing to learn new tasks and assist the team. Examples of this include assisting in processing Spanish cases even though she does not speak Spanish, providing case management assistance to Public Institution cases, and participating on the Work Task Team. Melissa provides excellent customer service with her attention to detail and listening skills. It is a pleasure to work with Melissa in Medicaid eligibility.

**Bryce Blecha**  
*Behavioral Health*  
Bryce comes to work with a positive attitude and makes you feel like you are the only person he is talking to. He is always willing to step up to the plate and help out other staff. He is a positive role model, a great team player, and is always going above and beyond. Bryce serves as an MRT instructor with the youth. He has served as incident commander during severe weather and chose to come to work the night before a snow storm because he was concerned not enough staff would be able to get through and take care of the youth. He volunteered to take over staff training for the Elopement Performance Improvement Group. Bryce is a great example of the core values and core competencies for the State of Nebraska.

**Sandra Brandt**  
*Developmental Disabilities*  
Sandra has embodied the DHHS core values and competencies with her hard work, positive attitude, support of her team, and effectiveness in all she pursues. Sandra has completed white, yellow, and green belt trainings in Lean Six Sigma and has used her training to accomplish efficiencies throughout her team, the facility, and the department. Efficiencies included lowering the dollar amount for printing costs by reducing the state-owned laser printers and utilizing leased copiers, eliminating unused phone and fax lines, reducing the volume of products on hand in the facility storeroom, reducing service contracts, moving to online forms versus paper, viewing documents online versus printing, developing an internal tracking of state-owned furniture and equipment that are not fixed assets, and setting up a credit/debit charge system within the facility.

**Cindy Brown**  
*Developmental Disabilities*  
Cindy has worked as a service coordinator for over 21 years. Cindy exemplifies DHHS core values on a daily basis with her hard work, professionalism, and positive attitude.
attitude. Regardless of the changes, she never complains. She simply finds out how to do the job and gets it done. Cindy has so much knowledge that peers seek her out for advice and guidance on cases. She goes above and beyond in her working relationships with the individuals on her caseload. It is not uncommon for her supervisor to get a call from a provider agency or a family member saying how great she is. Cindy displays compassion on a regular basis as well. Several individuals on her caseload were able to purchase a home and live independently. Right before Christmas the past year, these individuals had a major plumbing issue. Cindy assisted them in securing resources to ensure they could stay in their home and enjoy the holidays! Cindy never seeks out praise for her work, though she is greatly deserving of the recognition.

Evelyn Desilets
Medicaid and Long-Term care

Evelyn has consistently provided excellent customer service, both internally assisting staff and leadership with quick and thorough information or answers when needed, and externally providing timely and accurate responses to both Medicaid and NFOCUS providers when research is required. She always conducts herself in a professional and pleasant manner when asked to assist someone, and is quick to deliver time sensitive or important research when other divisions, agencies, or organizations contact her for needed information. She has earned the respect and appreciation of both her peers and the public we serve as exemplified in her customer service skills.

May Faith
Medicaid and Long-Term Care

May goes above and beyond to not only help the service coordinators, but also the families we serve. If May doesn’t know an answer, she will seek it out for you. She tries to keep all of us informed of changes before they occur or as changes are happening. She exemplifies excellence in customer service and is a key part of coaching and developing team members, as well as engaging our teammates.
Ashley is extremely approachable and makes employees want to do the best job they can.

**Kathy Herian**  
*Behavioral Health*

Kathy makes new staff feel welcomed and like they could ask her anything, anytime. She is never too busy for a question and is a “walking book of knowledge.” She is very approachable to staff. She shows genuine concern for her staff and is always asking, “What can I do to help?” Kathy is willing to fill in any position at a moment’s notice to assist her fellow staff. Staff feel Kathy “has their back” in ALL aspects of her job. Kathy is a very caring nurse and encourages patients to reach the top of their potential. She is open-minded and always listens to patients and staff. She greets staff every day and always has a smile on her face. Kathy is a good choice to be supervisor of the year due to her dedication as a nurse.

**Molly Herman**  
*Medicaid and Long-Term Care*

Molly provides excellent customer service in Medicaid eligibility. Molly is bilingual and serves multicultural families working with the department. Molly has excellent interpersonal skills which allow her to connect with clients and quickly identify barriers to receiving services. Molly participates on the state-wide Priority Group Committee. This team collaborates to determine possible solutions that will streamline and improve overall customer service for our clients and ensure that benefits are processed with high quality and accuracy. Molly's insights have led to process improvement and have improved the communication among team members. Molly is invested in DHHS and the clients served, she believes in “Helping people live better lives.”

**Amy Lauritsen**  
*Children and Family Services*

Amy embodies all of the qualities that help people lead better lives through DHHS Division of Children and Family Services. Amy is a leader and inspires her team to excellence in their jobs. Amy has worked her way up through the ranks of the child welfare profession. She started with the Foster Care Review Board, worked as a case manager for ICCU through Region V and HHS, then provided service coordination through Cedars and KVC and worked at KVC as a family permanency specialist. Amy’s team benefits from her experience. She inspires confidence and fosters excellence on her team by being a strong coach; having empathy; possessing a clear vision; and being open-minded, decisive, passionate, and patient. She empowers her workers and the families and children whom we serve with her positivity, generosity, and great communication skills. Amy is known for her ability to retain workers in a profession with a high turnover rate because of her commitment to excellence and the trust her workers and team place in her judgment. Her standards are high and her spirit of service goes beyond the daily requirements of the job.

**Eve Lewis**  
*Public Health*

Eve has implemented process improvements in the Long-Term Care (LTC) Office by increasing the use of technology and electronic communications. These improvements have empowered her staff to take ownership and maintain timely processing of their daily work which has been well received by customers. Eve and her staff have made significant improvements in meeting performance standards set out by CMS. Eve is skilled in bringing groups of stakeholders together to share information and reach consensus on issues. She conducts a quarterly LTC provider group to keep providers informed of changes in state and federal requirements. Eve participates in stakeholder groups addressing legislative bills that impact LTC in Nebraska. Eve is skilled in implementing process improvements in meeting performance standards set out by CMS. Eve is skilled in bringing groups of stakeholders together to share information and reach consensus on issues. She conducts a quarterly LTC provider group to keep providers informed of changes in state and federal requirements. Eve participates in stakeholder groups addressing legislative bills that impact LTC in Nebraska. Eve supervises a team of 36 staff that includes a training coordinator, healthcare facility surveyors, and staff assistants. It is challenging to accomplish the large workload of surveying LTC and assisted living facilities. Eve has had to realign surveyor territories and shift responsibilities of staff to make the best use of the limited resources available. (Eve passed away suddenly on November 11, 2017. Our thoughts are with her family and friends.)

**Paige Lott**  
*Children and Family Services*

Paige is a productive and helpful member of her team. For two months in a row now, she has been the top processing Social Services Worker (SSW), processing over 200 cases. For March, Paige set a goal of processing 300 cases, which she was able to meet and far exceed by processing 394 cases. Paige does not sacrifice quality either in order to reach her goals. She continues to look for ways to increase her productivity even though she always meets expectations. For November 2016 - January 2017, her overall accuracy was 91%. Paige is always willing to share her tips for productivity with others to help them reach their goals as well. Paige has served as mentor to new co-workers. She is always willing to help out when asked, whether it is for an absent co-worker or helping with a special project. Paige is an asset to her team and the agency. Paige has a positive attitude and loves to challenge herself to continuously improve.

**Kristin Luebke**  
*Operations*

Kristin is the customer services level 2 help desk team lead for DHHS. Kristin is always looking at the big
picture and how she can improve what she and her team do to support our customers. Kristin is the go-to person for all things unresolvable. If Kristin doesn’t know the answer to a question, she finds the documentation or someone who knows the answer. Kristin walks users through the steps, explaining the process and educating them for self-resolution in the future. Kristin follows up with all of her customers, ensuring the problem is resolved and the customer is happy. Kristin has collected her own personal notes on different technologies, software, and hardware which she has complied in documents. Kristin shares these documents with her entire team and encourages them to use and improve upon the documents. Kristin trains all new hires on her team, sharing her knowledge, mentoring, and providing assistance as they grow in their roles. In the past year, Kristin was instrumental in identifying a cost saving idea involving the use of secure e-mail accounts. Kristin researched how the accounts were being used and recommended changes, which resulted in a cost savings to the agency.

Kelly Mand
Developmental Disabilities

Kelly was nominated for supervisor of the year by her entire team. Kelly is a compassionate and gifted leader. She is focused on meeting the individual’s needs and expectations. She is driven to build on the strengths of others. Here are a few of her team’s comments. Kelly is fair and she trusts our ability to do our job! Kelly is professional, well informed, willing to seek out information when needed, has a good working relationship with her team, and is just a pleasure to work with. Kelly has offered extra training sessions to make sure everyone is informed so any transitions can be implemented smoothly. Kelly is able to calm the storm for many of the difficult and stressful situations we deal with on a daily basis. Kelly is a great teacher as she always gives the information of the operational guideline or the policy behind any questions that I have. Kelly is dedicated to the success of others. I am so grateful to know her, work alongside her, and learn from her.

Scott “Tanner” Mitten
Behavioral Health

Tanner is an excellent supervisor who consistently emulates the value of dedication to the success of others and constant commitment to excellence. Tanner helped the Lincoln Regional Center (LRC) be a top performer with the Joint Commission three years in a row and pass the Performance Improvement and Quality Assurance areas of the most recent Joint Commission survey. Tanner is greenbelt certified in Lean Six Sigma and has been instrumental in LRC being able to utilize data in meaningful formats that help articulate the various monitors and quality driven areas we are focusing on. Tanner is currently helping the other two Regional Centers to be able to capture their data in a meaningful format. He is always willing to help find ways to improve and is currently instrumental in the six QDIP projects LRC has in process. LRC has benefited greatly from Tanner’s leadership and dedication to the success of the Division of Behavioral Health.

Melissa Pratt
Children and Family Services

The quality of Melissa’s work has been apparent throughout her time as an ongoing worker, a children and family outcome monitor, an initial assessments worker, and most recently as an alternative response worker. Her work speaks for itself and Melissa consistently goes above and beyond while serving Nebraska’s youth and their families. She holds herself to a higher standard than most and isn’t satisfied with average. Her commitment to her job and to vulnerable children is commendable. Melissa is very thorough in the assessments of her cases and not only writes about what was discussed, but includes observations and responses from the families. This enables 3rd party viewers to get a clear picture of what is happening in the home. Her documentation is always on point and compliant with statute and policy. Melissa is devoted to helping families, has high energy, and is very driven to do the best she can. She works extra hours to do her job. She has long standing relationships with community professionals, county attorneys, and juvenile court judges. She consistently meets deadlines and has excellent performance measures.

Rhonda Reiber
Developmental Disabilities

Rhonda has been a direct support professional at the Beatrice State Developmental Center for eight years. Rhonda individualizes the services she provides to each individual she works with by ensuring she implements daily goals while ensuring the safety, dignity, and respect of each individual. Rhonda knows the likes, dislikes, and preferences of each individual she works with. She is looked up to by not only staff in the home but also leadership. She is frequently asked to train and mentor new staff and provides training and guidance to each staff in a positive manner. Her communication and assistance fosters teamwork amongst both new and veteran staff. Rhonda's approach to training is a "do together" approach. This approach helps the individuals she serves establish comfort and trust with the new staff. It also helps new staff develop relationships with the individuals.

Janet Reigle
Children and Family Services

Janet is the child support enforcement supervisor for the Norfolk and Fremont offices. She oversees 14 Northeast Nebraska counties. She has an
outstanding knowledge of child support policy and procedures. She allows staff to approach their workload independently and her door is always open to assist staff with any situations that arise. She provides a listening ear and provides solid direction and support, encourages her staff to become active in work groups, and informs staff of available trainings. Under Janet’s leadership, staff have acquired certificates of achievement for Paternity Establishment, Most Improved Court Orders, Meeting Goals for Arrears Cases, and Meeting Goals for Current Support. Janet provides excellent customer service to clients. She is courteous and thorough when dealing with clients and follows through with commitments. She maintains a good working relationship with other agencies and department staff. She has worked her way through DHHS as a receptionist, child support enforcement worker, and as a child support supervisor for the last 11 years. She has earned the respect of her staff and co-workers through her approachable supervisory style and her commitment to excellence in all she does.

Nikki Roseberry-Keiser
Behavioral Health

Nikki was nominated because of her openness to new ideas. She is always willing to take initiative and often carries out additional responsibilities with little or no supervision. Nikki has bridged several new partnerships and collaborations while training others in Mental Health First Aid. She regularly assists others with their own tasks and offers creative ideas. She should be commended for her solution-oriented attitude and organizational skills. Nikki embodies the quality of someone who is dedicated to the success of others.

Jacqueline Schmucker
Children and Family Services

Jackie has become the primary staff assistant responsible for the processing of national criminal history background checks completed on foster families. She has shown a constant commitment to excellence by working efficiently and keeping herself organized to reduce the processing time for these background checks. In 2014, the time to process these checks took close to 3 - 4 months. As of February 2017, the process now takes around 14 days on average. Jackie has taken ownership of this process and initiative to learn the policies and laws that surround the national criminal history checks. She has demonstrated responsibility and accountability to conserve funds as well. In December 2016, DHHS was alerted that the price to complete national criminal history checks through the Nebraska State Patrol (NSP) would be increasing by 57% at the start of 2017. Jackie contacted the NSP to determine which day was the last day to have background check requests submitted to ensure DHHS paid the lower rate. The last day was in the middle of the holiday season, and Jackie drove her own car to hand deliver as many background check requests as she could to save the agency over $2,000 at the end of the year. Jackie’s work does not go unnoticed and is deeply appreciated.

Heather Stryker
Children and Family Services

Heather has been a dedicated employee with DHHS for over ten years. She is currently a child care resource development supervisor. This was a newly created position and Heather’s ability to jump right in, self-teach, and supervise staff statewide has been beyond impressive. She provides supervision to over 20 workers who manage child care service contracts with providers who serve one of Nebraska’s most vulnerable populations. Her current role requires her to effectively communicate, both written and verbally, to her staff, child care providers, co-workers, and administration within DHHS. This position also requires Heather to multitask and prioritize, both of which she does well. She has demonstrated flexibility, creative thinking, ability to address and resolve conflict, and positive response to changes. She has been successful in creating and implementing streamlined processes and adding consistency to statewide work. She is an excellent supervisor and is a positive role model. Others can benefit from her experiences in leadership, policy, ethics, and much more.

Jodeen Swartz
Children and Family Services

Jodeen has worked at the YRTC-Geneva for several years and has been an integral part of the underlying functions of the facility. She has contributed to several different roles while working at YRTC-Geneva. She keeps track of important data on the youth and staff in addition to other roles that benefit Geneva. As one of the prior Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) managers of the facility, Jodeen helped establish PREA guidelines and training for both staff and youth. She coordinates the training for all staff on campus and makes sure the facility is meeting American Correctional Association (ACA) requirements. Jodeen is also responsible for collecting certain data that is used for Performance Based Standards (PBS) bi-annually. Jodeen passes along her knowledge in the different areas without hesitation and is always positive with her interactions and more than willing to help. She is not only a team-oriented individual, but she goes above and beyond her job duties to ensure others are successful as well.

Congratulations to all of our honorees!
Greetings #TeamDHHS

In October and November, Gov. Ricketts recognized state agency team members from across the state for Excellence in Leadership awards and for milestone years of service. I want to congratulate our DHHS recipients who are featured in this issue of Connections.

The Excellence in Leadership award allows us to recognize and celebrate the professional achievements of our 24 team members who were nominated because their performance and customer service exceeds all expectations. We are also fortunate to have honored 407 team members, with a combined total of 8,735 years of service, as part of State Team Member Appreciation Month at ceremonies across the state. Amazing.

Each and every day, members of #TeamDHHS work to provide exceptional service to Nebraskans. Each of you has a strong commitment to help make lives better and build on the talents, skills and abilities of others to positively impact as many people as possible.

I want to send a heartfelt thank you to everyone for making #TeamDHHS an awesome agency and place to work. I am privileged to serve alongside you as we work toward our mission of “Helping People Live Better Lives.”

Once again, congratulations to those whose names fill the following pages.

“...”

Courtney Phillips.
Recognition for Years of Service 2017

DHHS teammates help people live better lives every day. Each October we recognize DHHS team members who have reached years of service anniversaries. Here is a listing of those teammates and their years of service. They are broken down by their division. We hope everything is spelled and listed correctly. If it isn’t, please let us know and we will pass that information along to Human Resources. Congratulations to all of these teammates and thank you for your dedication to DHHS!

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- Shane Krause
- Michael Ramsey
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- Crystal Hier
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- John Hayden

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- Diane Lowe
- Dianne Harrop
- Patrice Budenholzer
- Edilma Him-Osorio
- Patricia Lemke
- Patricia Owens
- Donna Jobman
- Billy Knoell

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- Patricia Lemke
- Patricia Owens
- Donna Jobman
- Billy Knoell
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