

CONNECTIONS

November 2012 VOLUME 12, ISSUE 11

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

Working with the Tribes in NE

Sherri Eveleth left an active practice of law to become a program specialist with DHHS to work with the tribes of Nebraska. Sherri has served as an expert witness, trains tribe members about Western-style courts, consults with child welfare workers and presents workshops for the State Bar.

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The Watch Your Mouth media campaign by DHHS' Office of Oral Health and Dentistry was recently recognized in a national competition honoring excellence in public health communication. The campaign stresses the importance of dental health and the connections between good oral health and overall well-being.

[read more >](#)



Innovative Video Helps Law Enforcement Respond to Mental Health Crises

By Marla Augustine

The Division of Behavioral Health has made a new training video available for rural law enforcement in Nebraska on how to respond to a person having a mental health crisis. The video was filmed and produced by DHHS' Communications and Legislative Services.

The content of the training was developed by law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, as well as people who have experienced a psychiatric crisis.

"This video will help rural law enforcement officers recognize and defuse a crisis related to a mental health disorder," said **Scot L. Adams**, director of the division. "It will help them learn skills to intervene in crisis situations they may face."

Mental health issues make up approximately 3 to 7 percent of law enforcement calls.

Three chapters of the training demonstrate three typical mental health conditions—psychosis, depression and mania. Actors provide life-like scenarios in which crisis intervention is demonstrated.

Officers from the Norfolk Police Department, the Hall County Sheriff's Office and a mental health professional from Behavioral Health Region 5 participated in the making of the video, which was made in partnership with the Nebraska Law Enforcement Training Center.

"Officers can build upon their skills in responding to a crisis or disturbance involving a person with mental illness," Adams said. "Many times a situation can be defused by using effective crisis intervention techniques, so that arrest or emergency protective custody can be avoided."

If an officer can get information from the person about people who can help, a family member, friend or mental health professional can be called to the scene. Some Behavioral Health Regions have mobile crisis response teams that



can be activated. (A map of the regions can be found at http://dhhs.ne.gov/behavioral_health/Pages/beh_nebhrbg.aspx.) Also, the person may have a Wellness Recovery Action Plan that provides information about what the person needs and what resources work best for them. A responding officer can gain access to the plan to find out what would be useful to the person in crisis.

"The best crisis resolution is that the person is safe to remain in the community with professional help," Adams said.

The training video can be found [here](#).

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DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees/>
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[DHHS' Employee Website...](#)

Looking for exclusive information about DHHS? Try the DHHS employee website. We add new information and photos every day, things that are relevant to you and the work you do

Here are some recent posts on the DHHS employee website 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

[Nebraska Family Helpline Receives 10,000th Call, Nov. 13](#)

Since its beginning in January 2010, the Nebraska Family Helpline has fielded more than 10,000 inbound calls from families seeking help for their children.

The Helpline, operated by Boys Town, is funded by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. The toll-free number is 1-888-866-8660. Trained operators are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

"A child's behavioral problems can take a toll on everyone in the family or household," said **Scot Adams**, director of DHHS' Division of Behavioral Health. "The Helpline focuses on reducing the stress of the crisis being experienced by the caller, identifying immediate safety concerns,



giving recommendations and linking callers to resources."

[Read more.](#)



Veterans Day Ceremonies at DHHS, Nov. 9

At all of the DHHS' veterans homes, a variety of special activities were scheduled throughout the month of November to honor the veterans and the sacrifices they have made to keep our nation free and strong.

All of DHHS' veterans homes produce newsletters for their members and employees alike. The newsletters are such a great source of information. They are filled with interesting stories, employee awards and welcomes, and colorful and captivating photos.

Newsletters available online:
 Grand Island Veterans Home's ["Liberty Express"](#)

Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home ["the Eagle"](#)

Norfolk Veterans Home ["Observer"](#)

The Western Nebraska Veterans Home in Scottsbluff's newsletter is not available online.

Recruiting Foster Parents Through Kidz Explore, Oct. 26

Gering Resource Developers attended "Kidz Explore" in Mitchell, Nebraska, on Oct. 20, to promote and recruit foster parents. Kidz Explore is a family festival weekend of fun and learning with hands-on activities for children ages 12 and under. Held annually the third weekend in October, this year more than 30 vendors came together for the weekend for the kids.

Pictured below, from left: **Caroline Cardona, Cathy Studdt and Amanda Mack**. Amanda writes, "We had quite a few kids and parents stop by our booth! We colored the DHHS House and handed out tattoos. The tattoos were a HUGE hit! Even the adults were wearing some."



The Good Life: A reminder of what we all share and hope to provide to our fellow Nebraskans



Kerry Winterer

Photo: Bill Wiley

By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

Thanksgiving is over and we're at the beginning of what many of us consider to be the holiday season. I want to take this opportunity to wish you the best and send a message consistent with our work of helping people live better lives: In the coming weeks, which can be full of activities and stress, take care of yourself, eat and drink sensibly, and set realistic expectations. I think these

are all important things to remember, and I'll do my best to stick to them, as well.

I'd like to take the rest of my column to share some current activities and information.

On November 9, I was happy to be able to join Director Hilgert in attending the Veterans' Day Celebration at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home. It was well attended by residents and representatives from the active military and community and provided a great opportunity to salute our veterans with a color guard composed of residents of the home and music provided by the USAF Heartland of America Band Ensemble New Horizons from Offutt, and, as Jeff Smith, the home administrator promised, no speeches.

Earlier this month I was able to travel to Washington, D.C. to join a group of my counterparts from other states in meeting with a number of members of Congress to talk about ideas to provide more flexibility for states in administering a number of federal benefit programs. It remains to be seen if anything comes of these ideas in Congress, but it was an

opportunity to make members more aware of concerns and ideas coming from the states.

As most of you know by now, Gov. Heineman has made the decision that Nebraska will be part of the federal exchange for the Affordable Care Act, also known as health care reform. He said the decision was difficult but the cost analysis shows that participating in the federal exchange, rather than developing and implementing a state exchange, will cost \$176 million, a savings to the state of \$470 million. The DHHS Division of Medicaid and Long-Term Care (MLTC) is now able to move forward with development of our implementation plans. In addition to MLTC, this involves many throughout the agency including staff in Children and Family Services, IS&T and Financial Services.

Our minds are also on the Legislature, and it'll be back in session in early January. We're currently meeting with the Governor's budget office staff on our budget recommendations and finalizing the bills we hope to have introduced on our behalf. We've also reached out to senators, inviting them to a tour of the ACCESSNebraska Customer Service Center in Lincoln and providing

a briefing to some of the new state senators. We're a broad and complex agency, and I think finding opportunities to share our work with senators is important.

Finally, the Children's Commission, created through legislation last spring, has been meeting since this summer to fulfill the requirements put before them. Their report is due December 15 and may result in additional legislation.

Again, I wish you the best during the season and thank you for the work you do every day.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kerry T. Winterer". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

Sherri Eveleth: Working with the Tribes in Nebraska

By Russ Reno

“I would like to work myself out of a job. Ultimately, that’s my goal.”

It’s not often one hears any employee make that comment out loud. Nevertheless, that’s how Indian Child Welfare Specialist **Sherri Eveleth** feels about her job. “That would mean that we have healthy children and families.”

After an interim study hearing in late September, her hard work is receiving a lot more attention. The Legislature’s Health and Human Services Committee received testimony on LR 578, to assess Nebraska’s compliance with the federal Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 and the Nebraska Indian Child Welfare Act.

ICWA was enacted to protect the best interests of Indian children and to promote the stability and security of Indian tribes and families by specifying and protecting rights of Indian children and their parents, Indian custodians and tribes. It grew from awareness that a disproportionate number of Native American children were being removed from their homes and placed in non-Native homes, she said.

Children and Family Services Director **Thomas Pristow** has integrated Eveleth

in Central Office work to address Native American issues involving child welfare and ICWA compliance. Besides the Department of Health and Human Services, others responsible for ICWA compliance are the courts, attorneys, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and other parties in child custody proceedings, Eveleth said.

Her interest in Native American issues began at home in Maine. As a young girl, Eveleth’s mother lived in several homes after her father died when she was 9 years old. The state was not involved in her placements. Her mother has Native American heritage, but the loss of her grandfather, and many other circumstances faced by individuals searching for their tribal connections, left Eveleth searching for her heritage. She and her mother have yet to identify their tribal origin.

“My interest in ICWA was from the outside looking in,” Eveleth said. “After college, I planned to attend law school, but I refused to put my children in public housing that had been plagued with drug trafficking. I looked for a law school where my children would be safe. The University of South Dakota offered my family a more secure place to live and the faculty is nationally recognized for their knowledge of Indian law.”

She left an active practice of law for her current position. Her knowledge of the legal system, including the tribal courts, has increased her effectiveness, which has been noted by attorneys, judges and the tribes.

As the liaison with Nebraska’s tribes, Eveleth has served as an expert witness, trains tribe members about Western-style courts, consults with child welfare workers and presents workshops for the State Bar. Earlier this year, she was asked by the Nebraska Supreme Court’s Commission on Children Sub-committee on Tribal/State Relations to explain ICWA at a new judge orientation session.

After graduation from law school, she worked eight years as staff attorney/project director for Legal Aid of Nebraska’s Native American Program.



Sherri Eveleth

“I want the attention on law, cultural appropriateness and keeping families healthy,” she said. “Children are a tribe’s greatest resource. We need to allow tribes to govern themselves in traditional ways that include their children and families. It’s a different way of doing things.”

She added that Native Americans view their family differently than others. A friend could be adopted into the family as a sister or brother under many tribal cultures, just as a child can be adopted through county courts. Placement or adoption outside this environment can cause life-long trauma. *(continued on page 5)*

Sherri Eveleth continued...

What's the biggest reason for non-compliance with ICWA? She said it's a lack of knowledge of the act and tribal cultures, and the tribes are reluctant to challenge the courts about complying with it. To challenge non-compliance, a tribe must often appeal a state court's decisions, ultimately risking returning a child to an unsafe home. Tribes want compliance with ICWA, but they also want their children and families safe.

"We have a lot of room for improvement in ICWA compliance in Nebraska," she said. "There are many players involved, not just DHHS. Guardians ad litem can play a big role in keeping Native children who are in foster care in touch with their culture."

Eveleth said she sees Native children in state systems who become cultural and spiritual orphans. "They can't function. They grow up realizing they're different from their peers, often ostracized or experiencing racism, and they don't feel that they fit into their tribal culture, either." In these cases, children frequently turn to drugs and gangs to meet the need for a sense of belonging. When their care includes the

child's Native culture, it meets their needs. Tribal leaders say their cultural connection is more important than the food they eat or the air they breathe.

Another aspect of her work is protecting the rights of Native children. For instance, they have a lifetime of health care available to them. If they're raised in a non-Native home, they likely aren't aware of that benefit. In addition, Native children may be eligible for educational benefits, grants and scholarships.

Meanwhile, DHHS has work to do. Eveleth said CFS needs to capture the success and failure rates of DHHS' work with Native children and families as well as their tribal connections in order to evaluate improvements. "DHHS has had an interest in ICWA compliance for quite some time. We have a need to facilitate culturally appropriate services for Native children in foster care, and to ensure Native children's contact with their extended families and tribes."

"I want the attention on law, cultural appropriateness and keeping families healthy," said Sherri Eveleth.

Watch Your Mouth and Smile!

The Watch Your Mouth media campaign by DHHS' Office of Oral Health and Dentistry was recently recognized in a national competition honoring excellence in public health communication. The campaign, which stresses the importance of dental health and the connections between good oral health and overall well-being, won bronze honors at a recent National Public Health Information Coalition (NPHIC) awards program in the In-House Posters/Billboards category.

The Oral Health campaign was developed in-house, using staff from Oral Health and Dentistry and Communications and Legislative Services. Children of DHHS employees were photographed, and their smiley

faces have been featured statewide on billboards, newspaper ads and the DHHS website.

Many educational materials and resources for the campaign are available online at <http://dhhs.ne.gov/healthysmiles>.

NPHIC is the leading national organization for public health communication professionals. NPHIC's award program offers gold, silver and bronze awards in 17 public health communication categories. NPHIC presented 85 awards at its annual conference in Washington, D.C. NPHIC officials said there were a lot of high quality entries this year, making the competition "extremely close" in many categories.



Type 2 Diabetes Prevention is Proven, Possible and Powerful

*By Joshua R. Russo,
Diabetes Prevention and Control*

More than 115,000 children and adults in Nebraska have diabetes. And in recent years, there has been a substantial increase in the number of people diagnosed – up from 60,000 in the year 2000.

With the increase over the past decade, and with November being designated as Diabetes Awareness Month, DHHS' Diabetes Prevention and Control Program encourages everyone to learn about diabetes and take the Diabetes Risk Assessment at www.defendagainstdiabetes.ne.gov to see if they are at risk for Type 2 diabetes. The assessment test is free, takes less than a minute and serves as a “wake-up call” to people unaware that they may have diabetes or pre-diabetes.

Type 2 diabetes is a chronic disease marked by elevated blood sugar levels caused by the body not producing or properly using insulin. Insulin helps glucose (sugar) leave the blood and go into the body's cells to turn into energy. If not treated, the sugar that builds up in your blood can damage your heart, kidneys, eyes and blood vessels.

Many Nebraskans also have pre-diabetes, which is when blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not yet high enough to be diagnosed as diabetes. About 76,000 Nebraskans have pre-diabetes, although the total adult population with pre-diabetes—including diagnosed and undiagnosed cases—may be as many as 450,000.

Nearly one-fourth of those with Type 2 diabetes do not know they have it. Often, diagnosis comes seven to 10 years after the onset of the disease. Early diagnosis is critical to successful treatment, delaying or preventing complications such as heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, stroke, amputation or death.

DHHS and the American Diabetes Association, along with other diabetes-related organizations, encourage supporters to fight the worldwide epidemic of diabetes by helping to ensure that people with diabetes have access to care, treatment and education. Also, an increase in community awareness of risk factors and symptoms related to diabetes can improve the likelihood that people with pre-diabetes will get the attention they need before developing the disease and its devastating complications.

The Diabetes Prevention and Control Program promoted several events during Diabetes Awareness Month in November. The Program aired television ads on Channel 10/11 from Nov. 5-25 to bring awareness to the Diabetes Risk Assessment at www.defendagainstdiabetes.ne.gov. The ads feature a man who lost more than 100 pounds and reversed the effects of diabetes.

[Read Joey's success story here.](#)

Other events and information can be found at the Diabetes Prevention and Control Program webpage at www.dhhs.ne.gov/diabetes.



The Nebraska Lions Club helped illuminate the State Capitol in blue in honor of World Diabetes Day on Wednesday, Nov. 14.

Photo: Bill Wiley

Way to Go!

Statewide and national recognitions, honors and awards

Woods Awards and LRC... a Tradition for Over 60 Years

Woods Awards and LRC...a Tradition for Over 60 Years
The Thomas C. Woods family began an important tradition more than 60 years ago when they started an annual awards ceremony recognizing outstanding psychiatric aides at the Lincoln Regional Center.



Photo: Wayne Svoboda, Woods Foundation

Psychiatric technicians and security specialists are selected for awards by a committee of involved citizens. Nominations are made by fellow staff, patients and family members. This year's Woods Award recipients, pictured from left: **Lisa Maria Robertson**, Mental Health Security Unit Supervisor; **Haron Kohestani**, Mental Health Security Unit Supervisor; **Dave Reece**, Mental Health Security

Specialist; **Michael Pickett**, Mental Health Security Specialist; and **Susan Utoft**, Mental Health Security Specialist, **Nicole Demar**, Mental Health Security Specialist, is not pictured.

The Woods award ceremony takes place every year during National Mental Health Awareness Week in early October.

Congratulations to the award winners!

“Who gossips to you will gossip of you.” ~ Turkish Proverb

Rumors and Gossip Have No Place Here

By Richard Mettler
Human Resources and Development

Rumors spread unverified information, often from an unknown source, and usually contain bad news about the workplace. Gossip commonly spreads unflattering information about a person's personal and private life. This is where the differences between the two end.

Rumors and gossip are a distraction to our important work. They are poison to the atmosphere of our workplace and end up hurting all of us. Following are just a few of the destructive effects of rumors and gossip.

- Needless suspicion and worry.
- Pointless embarrassment, hurt feelings, and harm to people, including reputations.
- Disruptions to work.
- Reduced trust among co-workers.
- Obstacles to open and productive communication.
- Increased interpersonal conflict.
- Damage to employee motivation and morale.

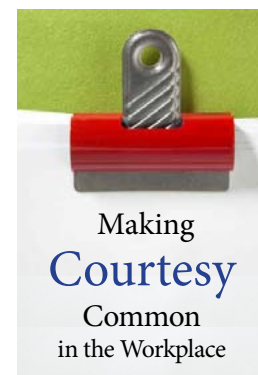
Each of us can take individual action to end rumors and gossip. Here are three important steps you can take when rumors or gossip come your way.

- (1) **Simply don't believe what you hear.** Remember how many times you believed rumors and gossip in the

past that turned out to be false, and how that made you feel misled and even a bit foolish. Try saying to the person spreading tales:

- *“I don't have time for gossip. It's none of my business anyway.”*
 - *“I've been fooled by rumors too many times to take one more rumor at face value. I'll believe it when I see it.”*
- (2) **Let the rumor or gossip stay with you—don't spread it to anyone else.** You might say:

- *“I'm not going to pass this along to anyone else because it's not verified and I don't even believe it.”*
 - *“I've seen what gossip can do to a person, and I'm not going to play a part in this.”*
- (3) **Directly confront the person spreading rumors or gossip.** You might say:
 - *“This is something I don't want to hear or discuss. Let's talk about something else.”*
 - *“Let's not talk about this. It's not helpful.”*
- *“I like her. She's always been nice to me.”*



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

In Gratitude

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

Jana Peterson (Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Kearney) and **Ron Cox** (Youth Security Supervisor, YRTC-K),

I just wanted to say thank you for giving me the opportunity to tour the YRTC facility. It is a very impressive facility, and having the chance to visit with the youth regarding their experiences was great, as well. You should be proud of the incredible and valuable program that you have built. It truly is an asset to our state, and it does provide an opportunity for the youth that have made some bad choices, redeem themselves and see the chance for change and growth in themselves. Congratulations, on such great accomplishments on your part.

Thank you again!

Nemaha County Court employee

Nelda Rosenbaum (Social Services Worker, Norfolk),

I am so glad the Medically Handicapped Children's Program is able to help out a family in the area who has a special place in our hearts here at the pharmacy. I felt so bad for the mom when she came in the first time to pick up her son's medicine. She had no insurance and no money. The medicine totalled over \$1,200. She just burst into tears at the counter.

Since then, one of our pharmacists called in a lot of favors with wholesalers trying to help her out where we could.

Yesterday when she came in to pick up test strips for her son, she had her paperwork from you guys. She cried again when she found out that all she needed to do now was come in when her son needed diabetic supplies and we could charge them to Medically Handicapped Children's Program. She was so relieved. I just wanted to say thank you!

A Grateful Local Pharmacy

Lori Rowley, RN (Community Health Nurse, Alliance),
We wanted to say thank you! We are blessed to have had the privilege to work with several folks at the Alliance office. Thank you for being willing and flexible, straight forward and cheerful. We are blessed to share our adoption as final.

Thankful Parents

Dear **Brooke Wright** (Mental Health Practitioner, Hastings Regional Center),

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your role in getting a young man to the Bryan Independence Center. We were so appreciative of all the ground work you did before he actually got here and staying with him while he met with the doctor. It was a smooth transition, thanks to you.

**Director, Independence Center
BryanLGH Medical Center**

Heather Stryker (Social Services Supervisor, Fremont),

I called ACCESSNebraska yesterday with questions and concerns on four different clients.

Stacey Huffman (Social Services Worker, Fremont) was very professional and courteous during our phone conversation. There was one client question she couldn't answer.

Not only did she call me back timely, but she left a voicemail summarizing our conversation on all four accounts and had an answer for me on the one she couldn't answer previously.

Please accept our appreciation of her outstanding customer service. It's wonderful to "work together" on assisting patients in need of assistance.

Hillcrest Health Systems

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

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