

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together



Dr. Courtney Phillips, CEO

Courtney Phillip's Farewell: Build on What We've Accomplished

As I'm sure all of you know, I am departing DHHS to serve as the Executive Commissioner of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission. Frankly, it is a tremendous opportunity that will allow me to grow professionally, but leaving Nebraska and the friends I've made here feels like a blow.

I came to Nebraska on April 2, 2015, with a mandate from Governor Ricketts to aggressively carry out our mission, while making DHHS run more like a business. A major part of that initiative was the [\(article continued on page 3\)](#)

Vital Records Office Slashes Time Needed for Documents

After an innovation or invention, it's funny how it all seemed obvious. We wonder why it had taken so long.

Located in close quarters in Lincoln's Gold's Building, the Vital Records office of DHHS experienced this very phenomena the last week of July. A process improvement quartered the time required for certificates to be issued to the public, from 15 to 20 minutes to 3 to 5 minutes today. The public-facing clerk working at a customer window collects the required information, enters it, [\(article continued on page 2\)](#)



DHHS Vital Records staff assistant Tracy Beranek printing certificates

DHHS's Nicole Hampton and Partner Earn Gold at Seattle Olympics

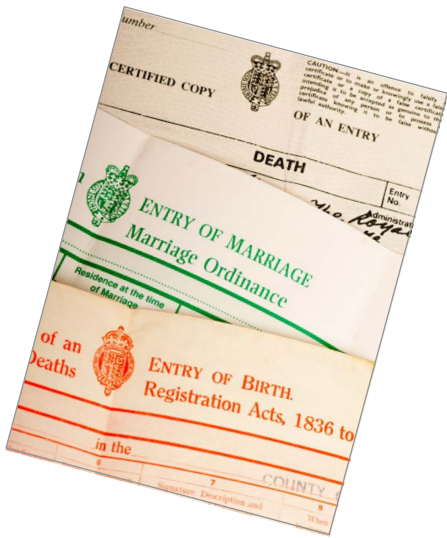


Nicole Hampton (right) with her bocce teammate Peggy

Nicole Hampton, a member of the Contract Monitoring Resource Development team in the DHHS North Platte office, and her bocce partner, **Peggy**, brought home gold medals in Unified Bocce at the Special Olympics USA Games in Seattle, Washington.

Related to bowling and having a common ancestry with ancient games played in the Roman Empire, Bocce is played with eight large balls and one smaller ball.

The gold medal was earned in "Unified" competition. Unified sports brings together athletes with and without intellectual disabilities as teammates, Hampton said. [\(article continued on page 4\)](#)



stands, takes a few steps to the printer behind her, takes the fresh, warm document and passes it to the customer for review.

“It all happens within 6 feet,” Interim Vital Records Director **Russ Fosler** said, adding that nearly all of the public work of the office happens there, including internet requests. When no one is at a window the clerk can begin working on those.

In the old process, information would be taken at the window and customers told to continue the process at Window D. The printers were in the back of the office. When the item was printed it was dropped into a tray and a desk clerk’s bell given a ding. A relic of the past, the bell sits on Fosler’s desk. It’s been retired. Only printing rare documents like microfilm require a process anything like that involved.

“Five people would touch the paper as it moved up,” **Sean Loving**, Program Analyst, Legal/ Training Support, said. “They looked for errors but it was largely duplication of effort.”

During peak times, there would be a line out the door.

Now that the printers have been moved forward in the office, the space in the rear will be used as a mail room. Contributing to the clumsy nature of the office’s operations, the office’s mail was opened in the space shared by the break room.

Mail and overall productivity had been the impetus of the project. CEO Courtney Phillips had challenged Vital Records to improve through the use of a Green Belt Initiative. But the concrete steps taken were Loving’s idea. He mentioned to Jesse Cushman that similar offices in South Dakota had designated a printer for each public window. In early June, the idea was the subject of a Lean Six Sigma process improvement plan.

Following that process, the plan was ready to be implemented, but

personnel shifts meant it wasn’t until Russ Fosler took over interim duties at Vital Records in early July.

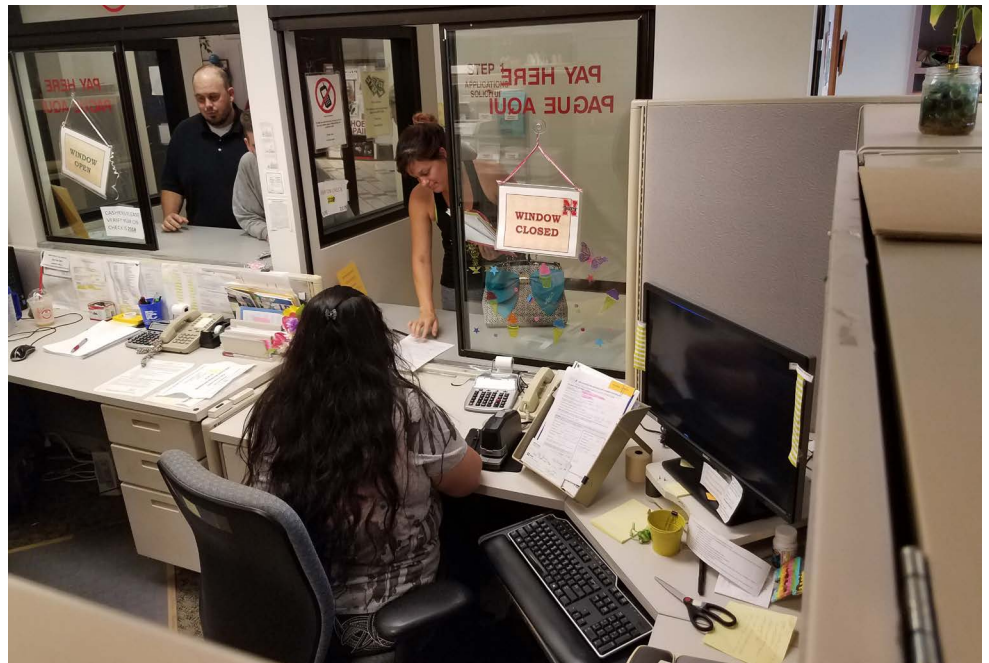
“I had nothing to do with it, except for saying: ‘Make it happen,’” Fosler said, adding that the process affected 18 or 19 people, who received a message describing how the process would change.

It wasn’t a completely smooth transition, Loving and Fosler acknowledged.

“It’s hard for people who have been here for 20 years to change their daily routines,” Fosler said.

So far, the customers love how quickly they can get what they need. Fosler said the mail backlog has also improved.

“It isn’t a magic bullet,” he said. “But I think the teammates here should be proud of what they’ve accomplished.”



DHHS Vital Record’s front desk in the Gold’s Building.

Courtney's Message [\(article continued from page 1\)](#)



Bo Botelho, acting CEO, with Courtney Phillips and Courtney's son at a reception in the Lincoln Foundation Garden

Together, we have rebuilt, reinvented, strengthened, and modernized Nebraska's Department of Health and Human Services.

We have confronted daunting impediments and followed paths that twisted and turned. I've seen our team clear these hurdles and climb these mountains in ways that have not only made our agency better, but also made all of us far stronger servants of the state.

Across the Department, our team is focused daily on executing our mission with dignity and grace, always trying to do the right thing for Nebraskans. Our many achievements are remarkable, and we should all be very proud. I want to sincerely thank every single team member for your contributions.

Although I won't be here to see it first hand, I'm excited for your future. And I'm excited for the future of this state. There are many projects left to see through to success. And after three and a half years of getting to know you

all, I know you'll do it. This is a great team, whose greatest successes still lie ahead.

It's been an honor to work with you all in making our mission -- helping people live better lives -- a reality for Nebraskans across the state.



Courtney Phillips receives Admiralship from Nebraska First Lady Susanne Shore

use of business plans to focus our efforts on measureable goals.

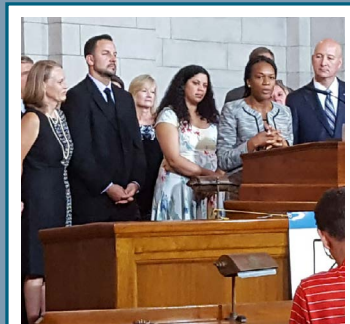
Our business plans fostered greater discipline, which has led to a better, higher level of service to Nebraskans.

I am proud of that work, and you should be too.

FROM OVER THE YEARS



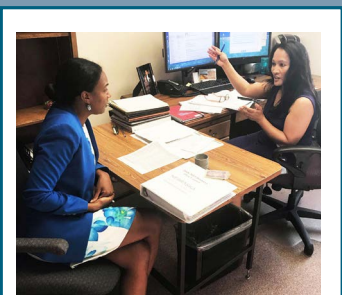
Broken Bow Office



Bring Up Nebraska



Lincoln Regional Center



North Platte Office

HERE'S JUST A FEW PHOTOS

Phillips

Vital Records

Olympics

Falls

Gratitude

Dempsey



The basic concept is that training together and playing together can create a path to friendship and understanding.

Her partner, competing on her own in a singles division, won silver.

“Peggy has been an athlete with Special Olympics for over 15 years,” Hampton said, “but even so she was so excited to use those years of training and practicing to compete on a National stage.

Marking the 50th anniversary of the Special Olympics, the Seattle USA Games begun June 30 and closed July 6. The event drew 4,000 athletes and coaches from 50 states and the District of Columbia, and with more than 15,000 volunteers ready to lend their support. Total attendance across all 14 venues was 101,500 people.

Housed mainly on the campus of the University of Washington (UW), the 2018 USA Games were called the “Walking Games” because competitors walked from housing to the venues and back again several times a day, logging 15 to 20 miles.

Despite the hiking to and from, Hampton loved Seattle.

“Seattle was a welcoming city for us all,” Hampton said. “It’s a City of Inclusion, where everyone is embraced. From the time we landed to the time we departed, the city included each and every one of us and made sure we were supported.”

“This was an experience of a lifetime!” she continued. “I was determined to bring home a medal with my bocce partner, and we did it. We had some tough competition and made a comeback on two occasions when we found ourselves trailing in points. In the end, we were the only team to win all of our matches and came away with the most points scored not only in our division but in all six Unified divisions.”

Hampton also has a personal connection to Special Olympics. Her son, Jared, 18, has been involved

with Special Olympics for five years. He was chosen along with a peer from North Platte High School to represent Nebraska as Youth Leaders and participate in the Youth Leadership Experience during the USA Games.

Jared has also been interested in the history of Special Olympics, Hampton reported, and was honored to meet Dr. Tim Shriver, chairman of the board of Special Olympics while in Seattle. Shriver’s mother, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, began Special Olympics 50 years ago in their backyard.

“Needless to say, we were all very impressed with Dr. Shriver and the time he took to make sure four Nebraskans have a voice and that we can make a difference in our community!” Hampton said.

“Having a son with an intellectual disability there are times where you feel alone and that no one fully understands the uncertainty of having a child with a disability,” she continued. “This event opened my eyes and heart that we are not alone in this and that there is no room or time to feel isolated.”

“There’s a population of people with intellectual disabilities that don’t see themselves in that manner,” she added. “They focus on their abilities, choose to include everyone and

focus instead on all that is good in this world.”

She said her passion for inclusion has reached a new level and is even more hopeful that change can and will happen if she does her part.

Hampton and her husband, Rob, are the Heads of Delegation for the Special Olympics Team in North Platte, Nebraska. Heads of Delegation are responsible for the coordination and management of all aspects of their local delegation, which includes coaching, athlete training and fundraising.

Hampton has worked for DHHS for 6 years. Initially hired as a Foster Care Resource Developer, she moved into her current position in 2017.

“Working with providers that take care of our families is one of the most important aspects of the work we do,” she said. “It’s about making connections and building partnerships for our families which only strengthens them to succeed in many realms. It’s also imperative that we make sure our tax payer dollars are being invested wisely into supporting Nebraska families.”



Posing in Seattle, from left, are Nicole’s husband, Rob Hampton; her son, Jared Gies; Special Olympics Chairman Dr. Tim Shriver; Nicole Hampton; and Unified Partner/Youth Leader Nathan Franz.

Older Adults, Medications and Fall Risk

One day every year across the country, thousands of educators, caregivers, health and aging professionals, and older adults focus their efforts on one goal: preventing falls. September 22nd, the first day of fall, marked the 11th national Falls Prevention Awareness Day (FPAD).

Nebraska is proud to support fall prevention efforts as part of our year-round commitment to the health and livelihood of older Nebraskans. We want older Nebraskans to stay active, independent, and safe in their homes and communities. Falls are a leading cause of injury for people aged 65 and older, but they do not have to be a “normal” part of aging. Through practical lifestyle adjustments, evidence-based programs, and community partnerships, the number of falls among seniors can be reduced. There are steps to help lower the chances of falling. Here are six of them:

Six Steps to Prevent a Fall

- 1) **Find a good balance and exercise program** – Look to build balance, strength, and flexibility. Find a program you like and take a friend.
- 2) **Talk to your health care provider** – Ask for an assessment of your risk of falling. Share your history of recent falls.
- 3) **Regularly review your medications with your doctor or pharmacist** – Make sure side effects aren’t increasing your risk of falling. Take medications only as prescribed.
- 4) **Get your vision and hearing checked annually and update your eyeglasses** – Your eyes and ears are key to keeping you on your feet.
- 5) **Keep your home safe** – Remove tripping hazards, increase lighting, make stairs safe, and install grab bars in key areas.
- 6) **Talk to your family members** – Enlist their support in taking simple steps to stay safe. Falls are not just a seniors’ issue.



Medication management is a focus area of Fall Prevention Awareness Day this year, and one of six proven steps to prevent a fall. Regular review of medications with a doctor or pharmacist may potentially prevent or reverse medication use as a risk factor for falls. To learn more visit: <https://www.ascp.com/page/fallstoolkit> and <https://www.cdc.gov/steady/patient.html>



In Gratitude

Here are some letters & notes DHHS employees have received thanking us for the work we do every day to
Help people live better lives

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

The following was sent to MLTC worker **Teri Stukenholtz** in the Nebraska City Office from a family of a nursing home resident.

"Thanks so much for all your help these last few months! I really appreciate your willingness to help since I had no clue what to do next. I hope your boss knows how good you are at your job!"

Received at the **ACCESSNebraska** email address:

"Dear Sirs,

I wanted to let you know that I recently paid my bill on the OPPD website. I noticed that the money necessary has been designated to my account. I just want to thank you for helping. I am an individual who is depressed and although I am able to both write and translate, sometimes have difficulties with the daily life issues. I guess that I am worth about sixty to eighty thousand a year (however on Social Security I receive about seven hundred and sixty dollars a month.) Paying for my cooling bill allows me to pay for a resume, donate four hundred dollars a year to Legal Aid of Nebraska, keep a hearing/vision dental insurance policy, keep nine hundred dollars in T-notes, and pay for various memberships...all of which help keep me going. I am an individual who said 'no' to publication out in Seattle and having learned my lesson the hard way (the editor really teaches you up when you do something like that) and have since published on the issue. I also was in an academic credit dispute and published because I was smarter than the educational system was willing to award me (this happened in Seattle also) as a result I have some notoriety in the writing and translating arenas (or am I just a writer/translator of note?) I am unsure. Anyway It helps a lot to be able to save over eighty dollars a month in order to pay of the other expenses that I have. I did pay off this month's bill, though I noticed that the LIHEAP allotment had already been assigned...consider it gratitude money and thank you so much for the help!"

Received by **Courtney Phillips**

"Hello Ms Phillips, I have no idea if this email will ever reach you but I wanted to tell you about a DHHS employee that always goes above and beyond the call of duty. I have taken care of my handicapped sister for the past 18 1/2 years. I have seen so many changes in the dhhs and in my opinion, most don't make sense but that's an entirely different conversation. My purpose today is to let you know that **Joy Rhan** who is in West Point Ne is awesome!. I deal with so many dhhs employees especially through the years and in nearly 19 years and 2 different states, Joy is by far the best employee I've ever come across. She is kind, patient, sympathetic, knowledgeable and always has time, even if I just want to rant or cry about the latest changes. I strongly feel that she needs to be recognized. She deserves praise for her outstanding service to others. Should you get this email, please send her a note, a plaque or something special to let her know that you see her and others see her great work! Thanks."

A note received in praise of **Danielle Dickman**, a Lexington Social Services Worker.

"Good morning. I am the Authorized Representative for my mother-in-law. Yesterday, June 13th, I asked Josh Lacy to have someone call me to speak about her case. I had received a Notice of Action and wanted to speak to someone about the notice. Josh sent an email to a supervisor at the Lexington CSC. I had the opportunity to speak with Danielle about the case. I am appreciative of Danielle's customer service. When I received the phone call from Danielle, she had already taken action on the case. She contacted the insurance company and got the information that was needed. Danielle told me what she had done and what action steps she had taken to get my mother-in-law back on full Medicaid. As a result my time on the phone was very short. Thank you Danielle. You were very proactive in reviewing the case, deciding what needed to be done, and then you completed the work on the case. After Danielle explained what she had done, she asked me if I had any questions. My response was "No". She had taken care of everything prior to the call. This is excellent customer service. Danielle you are to be commended for your excellent work. Thank you. Your hard work is appreciated."

Phillips

Vital Records

Olympics

Falls

Gratitude

Dempsey

Sue Dempsey Appointment



Sue Dempsey

Sue Dempsey, of the Division of Public Health, Risk Assessment/Toxicology, was appointed in March to a two-year term on the Environmental Protection Agency's Science Advisory Committee on Chemicals (SACC). The SACC provides independent scientific advice and recommendations to the EPA on the scientific and technical aspects of risk assessments, methodologies, and pollution prevention measures and approaches for regulated chemicals.

The 26-member committee meets as many as four times each year in

Washington D.C. and is composed of members from academia, industry, and other government agencies.

Dempsey said, "Members are tasked with independently answering certain questions related to a risk assessment, for example, and then these comments are compiled and published in the Federal Register."

Much of the work would necessarily be done on committee members' home territories with the three- or four-day D.C. trips used for peer review meetings. The first such trip is expected for November.

Dempsey was first contacted last year by the EPA, which said she had been nominated (by whom is a mystery) and asked if she was interested in participating as a reviewer. Completing the application meant requesting letters

of recommendation from colleagues, as well as other materials related to her experience and education.

"I received several wonderful letters from colleagues that I read later in the Register," she said. "I was very touched by what they had to say."

Dempsey said most of those appointed appear to be from academia. She is the only member from the state level. Having worked in support of public health for more than 25 years, Dempsey said she's honored to be representing Nebraska and her teammates at DHHS and NDEQ.

She said she has been through orientation and ethics training related to participation on the committee, and she is looking ahead to November, when she'll really learn what it's all about.

"Perhaps we ought to talk again after November."



Division of Public Health - Risk Assessment/Toxicology TWO YEAR TERM: EPA Science Advisory Committee on Chemicals

Make the Connection...

DHHS Public Website: 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

Connections is published for employees of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services by Communications and Legislative Services (CLS).

Readers are invited to submit news, photos and story ideas to the editor via:

Telephone: (402) 471-6585 **Fax:** (402) 471-3996 **E-mail:** dhhs.pio@nebraska.gov

Interagency mail: Nebraska State Office Building, 3rd Floor

U.S. mail: P.O. Box 95026, 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, NE 68509-5026

Communications Director:
Matt Litt

Editor:
Dave Hudson

Graphics and Layout:
Judy Barker

Stay Connected with:

twitter

facebook

YouTube