

CONNECTIONS

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

Editorial: An impressive turnaround at Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center-Kearney

Omaha World Herald

Troubled institutions sometimes make a significant turnaround. That's been the story at the state's facility in Kearney for youth offenders over the past year.

The Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center-Kearney, operated by the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services, experienced a troubling series of problems from late 2015 to early 2016.

The facility, which houses and provides treatment for male offenders, saw a marked increase in escapes, assaults, suicide attempts and self-harming behavior.

An investigation and report last year by Julie Rogers, the Nebraska state inspector general for child welfare, explained the central reason why: The Kearney facility lacked a full-time administrator for seven months, and important management tasks were neglected.

Rogers' 2016 report described disturbing failures by the state. HHS administrators in Lincoln, she concluded, "were unaware of the specifics of programs and planning at YRTC-K that were unlawful and producing negative outcomes for youth.



Community service projects are part of the program for YRTC teens

Youth at YRTC-K, especially those living full-time in the Dickson Unit (for more challenging offenders), were continually subject to conditions that were not compliant with Nebraska law, DHHS regulations and operating procedures."

The positive news is that HHS, including Mark LaBouchardiere, named as the Kearney facility's administrator last year, had begun addressing matters even before Rogers completed her

investigation. In a report issued last week, Rogers described conditions at the Kearney facility as well as the center in Geneva for young female offenders.

HHS, she wrote, "has noticeably prioritized stabilization and improvement at the YRTCs." The Kearney center, in particular, reported "a significant decline in critical incidents ... suggesting a significant improvement in conditions at the facility over the past 12 months."

The Kearney center had 62 escapes in fiscal 2016, for example. For the fiscal year that ended June 30, the total was 16.

Rogers received 28 reports of "critical incidents" such as assaults and destruction of property for fiscal 2016, compared with one such incident in fiscal 2017.

HHS adopted all nine recommendations made by Rogers' office. Among them: disbanding or restructuring a disciplinary confinement program, implementing quality

assurance and data monitoring and adding administrative support from Lincoln.

Another recommendation adopted was appointing a full-time administrator to oversee the Kearney and Geneva centers. That administrator — LaBouchardiere, promoted to this position from the top post at Kearney — has begun digitizing information on facility incident reports and has independently initiated "a variety of projects to improve and standardize safety, security and care."

Although challenges remain for both facilities, Rogers wrote, HHS "has devoted resources and needed leadership to making important changes that will better serve the youth and staff at these facilities."

This progress helped the Kearney center achieve accreditation this summer from the American Correctional Association.

This is a welcome turnaround, made possible by HHS' focused attention and aided by Rogers' investigation and recommendations.

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make the connection . . .

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Mary Lanning and York General Hospital First to Achieve Safe Sleep Champion Status

There were 45 sudden unexpected infant deaths in Nebraska during 2012 and 2013. The deaths occurred in 16 different counties, covering both urban and rural areas. At least 35 occurred in an unsafe sleep environment.

The Department worked with the Nebraska Hospital Association, the Nebraska Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and the Nebraska Perinatal Quality Improvement Collaborative to launch the Nebraska Safe Sleep Hospital Campaign. The campaign provides evidence-based education and training to parents of newborns as well as birthing hospital staff.

“Providing consistent training and education on safe sleep for all hospital personnel caring for children under a year old ensures the same safe sleep message is shared with the parents of more than 26,000 babies born in Nebraska every year,” said Dr. Tom Williams, Chief Medical Officer and Director of Public Health for DHHS. “An increase in safe sleep awareness will result in more babies sleeping in safe

environments and reaching their first birthday.”

DHHS is pleased to announce that Mary Lanning Healthcare in Hastings and York General Hospital are the first Safe Sleep Hospital Champions in Nebraska and 30 other hospitals have pledged and are working through the process to become a safe sleep hospital.

“It was important for Mary Lanning to become a Safe Sleep Champion because we put a large emphasis on education for our patients and staff,” said Shana Schultz, Director at Mary Lanning Healthcare. “The benefits of having the formal education for the staff and patients allows us to reinforce best practices



York General Hospital. From left: Jenny Obermier, Chief Operating Officer/Chief Nursing Officer; Jim Ulrich, CEO; Nancy Hengelfelt, RN, Obstetrics Director; Laura McDougall, Executive Director, Four Corners Health Department; and Jackie Moline, Maternal Infant Health Program Coordinator, Department of Health and Human Services.

for safe sleep and helps us achieve the highest quality of care for our patients built on evidenced-based practices.”

“We chose to be a Safe Sleep Champion pilot hospital because we want to provide the safest care possible for our tiniest patients,” said Nancy Hengelfelt, BSN, RN, OB Director at York General Hospital. “Through the initiative our staff has completed Safe Sleep training and models the techniques for our patients. Our new parents see firsthand the proper way to put baby down to sleep, how to dress (continued on page 7)





Courtney Phillips, CEO

#TeamDHHS!

As we are wrapping up the Charitable Giving Campaign, I want to thank each and every one of you for taking part in the campaign. There are very few things that give you that great feeling that you get from giving back.

If you haven't yet turned in your pledge card, there's still time to do so. With over 400 charitable organizations participating in the campaign, this is a meaningful opportunity for us to give back to our local communities. All dollars raised as part of this campaign stay in Nebraska and have an immediate impact on the lives of our family, friends, coworkers, and neighbors.

I want to give a shout-out to all of the coordinators who helped make our campaign so successful. I also want to thank Sheri Dawson for leading

Message from Courtney Phillips, CEO

the charge on the campaign. All of your hard work is greatly appreciated!

Speaking of feelings, there is one that no one wants to feel and that's feeling sick. With flu season right around the corner, it's time to get your flu shot. There are good reasons to get your flu shot...

- The flu is dangerous. The flu is different from the everyday cold. It can last 2 weeks or more and cause serious complications such as pneumonia.
- It's very safe. Millions of flu vaccines have been given safely for more than 50 years. Your body's natural response to vaccination may result in common things like a little redness at the injection site or a slight fever, but these are usually mild and pass quickly.
- Getting a flu vaccine can prevent flu or may make illness milder.
- Getting vaccinated could protect your family and save someone from getting dangerously ill. Getting vaccinated reduces the spread of flu from you to them, which can protect your family members, co-workers, and all those around you.

The best way to prevent influenza is to get your flu vaccine. We are very lucky that our Wellness and Benefits team sets up clinics across the State for all team members and their spouses to use (see details on the side panel). The clinics have started and will continue during the month of October.

I've set up my appointment. Have you?

Schedule Your Flu Shot

It's time to take action and make plans to get your flu shot!

The State is pleased to offer onsite flu shot clinics at several locations across the State. You can schedule your flu shot on www.wellnessoptions.nebraska.gov.

Eligibility to Participate: Only State employees, spouses, COBRA, and retirees covered on a State employee health plan through United Healthcare (UHC) are eligible to get a flu shot at an onsite flu shot clinic. Children (up to age 26) are not eligible to participate.

Cost: No charge

How to Register for a Flu Shot:

1. Log into your wellNESSoptions account at www.wellnessoptions.nebraska.gov
2. Click on 'Wellness Programs' in the left navigation menu and the click '2017 Flu Shot Clinics'
3. Follow the link to access the flu shot clinic scheduler
4. Select your desired location, date, and appointment time and enter the required information
5. Complete the consent form and bring it to your appointment along with a photo ID

If you have questions, contact Employee Wellness & Benefits at 402-471-4443 or 877-721-2228 if outside Lincoln or email us at as.employeebenefits@nebraska.gov. For wellNESSoptions login support or assistance scheduling your appointment, please contact HealthFitness customer service at 866-956-4285, option 1.

In Gratitude

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



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



Office of Rural Health

My compliments to the division. This is one of the most well-organized and useful websites in state government. www.dhhs.ne.gov/orh

Kate Gaul
Legislative Research Office

Carrie Nielsen in Licensure

I received my license in the mail yesterday and wanted to send you a quick email just to thank you for making the process of getting licensed in Nebraska go so smoothly. I have been VERY impressed with you and your department for the efficiency and timeliness in getting everything processed, not to mention how easily I have been able to have questions answered via both phone and email throughout all stages of my involvement with DHHS over the past 1.5 years (getting provisional and full LP and LMHP licenses, getting postdoc supervision changes confirmed, etc). It has been a great experience working with your department and makes me proud to call Nebraska my professional "home." Please send my thanks to others involved.

Sincerely,
Genevieve Maliszewski, PhD

Alanna Hoover in Children & Family Services Central Service Area

I would like to share my experience working with Alanna Hoover recently. We have worked together on a few new placements the last couple weeks and she has been a joy to work with. Alanna is great with communication and returns all phone calls in a timely manner. Along with that, she does an amazing job of returning e-mails, documents needing signed, and documents and information needed for our files. Most of all, she is very cooperative when working with foster families and meeting their needs. I really appreciate Alanna's willingness to work as a team and sort our issues and concerns as a combined effort.

In this line of work it is a breath of fresh air to come across professionals such as Alanna. It makes our jobs so much more enjoyable to work with people who are positive, caring, and real team players.

Cristy Brooks
Foster Care Specialist and Placement Supervisor
Building Blocks Foster Care

Fall Prevention Awareness



September 22 is the first day of fall! It is also Falls Prevention Awareness Day - a day to raise awareness about how to prevent fall-related injuries among older adults.

Nebraska is proud to support fall prevention efforts as part of our year-round commitment to the health and livelihood of older Nebraskans. The DHHS Injury Prevention Program works in collaboration with several local/district health departments around the state to implement two evidence-based programs to prevent older adult falls:

- Tai Chi Moving for Better Balance is designed to improve older adult's

balance. Practice of tai chi has been shown to reduce chances of falling, to help improve and maintain mobility, functional independence, and quality of life. It is a gentle form of exercise that is appropriate for older adults.

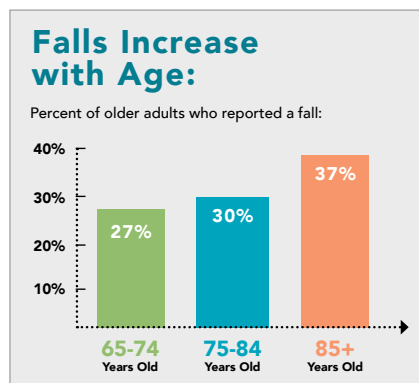
- Stepping On addresses multiple fall risk factors: improving lower limb balance and strength, improving environmental and behavioral safety in both the home and community, and encouraging vision and medical screenings to check for poor vision and possible medication problems.

With funding from the Public Health and Health Services Block Grant, these programs are being implemented by the following agencies: Elkhorn Logan Valley Public Health Department, Four Corners Health Department, Public Health Solutions District Health Department, South Heartland District Health Department, Scotts Bluff County Health Department, and Lincoln/Lancaster County Aging Partners.

DHHS Injury Prevention Program provides training and technical assistance and works with the local agency to ensure fidelity to the program. The local agencies work with local partners to offer Tai Chi and/or Stepping On classes to reach individuals in the communities they serve. At any given time of the year, there are approximately 30 – 40 classes going on.

Because both programs are evidence-based, we know that they are effective. Comments from the course participants have certainly reinforced the effectiveness:

- “At the beginning of the class, I had to come in with a walker or a cane. Now I don’t need assistance.”
- “Allows me to work in my flower garden and stand while I am doing my hair.”
- An 87 year old woman who is now a Tai Chi instructor reported that she had many falls in her 70s. She is very thankful that Tai Chi has helped her; she no longer falls.



Source: CDC National Older Adult Falls Reported.

The Hope of Recovery



Behavioral Health Director
Sheri Dawson

September is National Recovery Month.

“September serves to recognize and empower people who have changed their health by actively working on recovery from their mental illness or substance use disorder,” said Sheri Dawson, director of the Division of Behavioral Health. “September can also provide an opportunity to share the hope of recovery. It is critical that people experiencing mental illness and/or substance use disorders receive the support and treatment they need.” Just as people with physical health conditions can recover, so can people with behavioral health or substance use disorders.

During Recovery Month, DHHS aims to decrease the stigma often associated with behavioral health disorders, increase awareness and understanding of mental and substance use issues,

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DHHS/DOL Reemployment Program Launches in Columbus

Governor Pete Ricketts joined Matt Wallen, Director of the DHHS Division of Children and Family Services, and Randy Kissinger, Regional Workforce Development Manager for the Nebraska Department of Labor, to launch the SNAP/DOL reemployment program in Columbus on September 7th.

After a successful pilot in Grand Island, a reemployment



CFS Director Matt Wallen and Governor Pete Ricketts

program aimed at helping working recipients of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) funds find better-paying jobs has been launched in Hastings and Columbus.

After a one-year pilot, results of the program in Grand Island showed that of the 27 families involved, 14 SNAP clients changed jobs and are now earning

an average of \$6,900 each. They are either receiving fewer SNAP benefits, none at all and all are enjoying an improved home life with regular hours and benefits.

The program also involves the Department of Labor (DOL). Clients work with the Children and Family Services team and DOL to identify and provide assistance to overcome barriers to their success, while enhancing their lives at home. A plan is

developed and the DHHS case manager coaches and supports clients. DOL provides training in resume writing, job searching, job interviews and working with employers for on-the-job training.

In Hastings, clients also are served online to test its viability for clients in rural areas. The program was launched in Columbus in September, and will be started in May in Norfolk. Eventually, it will operate statewide.

New Face on the Leadership Team



Karen Gatherer, Chief Financial Officer. *Karen joined DHHS as Deputy Director for Finance & Program Integrity with MILTC, then became the Deputy Director of Operational Finance within Financial Services and served as interim CFO since February. She became CFO August 31.*

Recovery

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celebrate the people who recover, and acknowledge the work of prevention, treatment, and recovery support services.

In the context of healthcare, recovery means a process of change through which individuals improve their health and wellness to reach their full potential.

“Before finding recovery, I felt ashamed and disconnected from everything,” said Tommy Newcombe, a consumer specialist for Region 4 Behavioral Health Services in Norfolk. “Recovery Month gives me the chance to speak up and stand up against shame, to be a part of the world again.”

Supporting recovery strengthens families and communities, encourages public awareness, and helps people begin their recovery journeys. If you or someone you know is in need of support please know you are not alone. Please visit one of the following resources for more information:

- o Call 1-800-662-HELP for free and confidential information in English and Spanish for individuals and family members facing substance abuse and mental health issues. 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

- o [Visit the Network of Care](#)
- o [Visit the Nebraska Family Helpline](#) or call the Nebraska Family Helpline at 1-866-8660



Dedicated work results in large child support payment



From left: Breanna Anderson, County Attorney and Diane Thress of #TeamDHHS.

Diane began working with the Platte County Attorney’s office in 2008. That’s when she began working on one of the largest arrears cases in her caseload.

From then until 2015, she did as much as possible to collect the child support. The non-custodial parent moved out of state and an arrest warrant was ordered. When the non-custodial parent’s father died, Diane worked with law enforcement and the non-custodial parent was arrested following the funeral.

The parent’s siblings paid more than \$9,000 so the custodial parent could get out of jail.

The father who had passed, had a sizeable estate and a lawsuit was filed regarding the child support that was owed. It was a big day for Diane when, after many hearings, phone calls, letters and emails, a check was received from the estate for more than \$90,000.

After many years of persistence, Diane’s hard work allowed the custodial parent to receive the money owed while raising their children.

Child support worker Diane Thress recently enforced a large child support case that had been pending for years.

Safe Sleep

(continued from page 2)
baby so they aren’t too warm and what a safe sleep environment looks like. It has been beneficial to staff as well as our patients.”

The Safe Sleep Campaign starts within the hospital setting, encouraging all Nebraska birthing hospitals to become a Safe Sleep Hospital Champion. To be considered a Safe Sleep Champion, the hospital signs a pledge, creates or updates a Safe Sleep Policy, provides yearly education to hospital personnel, models safe sleep recommendations, and educates

parents with evidence-based safe sleep materials in accordance with Nebraska Revised Statute 71-2103 and the 2016 American Academy of Pediatrics Safe Sleep Recommendations.

Resources are available to help hospitals become [Safe Sleep Hospital Champions](#) including a Safe Sleep Toolkit.

Learn more about safe sleep and how to create a [safe sleep environment](#).



Mary Lanning Healthcare. From left: Michele Bever, Executive Director of the South Heartland District Health Department and a Board of Trustees member for Mary Lanning Healthcare; Shana Schultz, RN BSN, Director of Material-Child Nursing at MLH; Jamie Tinsman, RN BSN, Manager of the Family Care Center at MLH; and Jackie Moline, Maternal Infant Health Program Coordinator, Department of Health and Human Services.

LET'S TALK TOUR:
Developmental Disabilities Stakeholder Input Sessions

📅 Sep. 19 - Oct. 26 📍 Multiple Locations Across Nebraska

NEBRASKA
DEPT. OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

DD Let’s Talk Tour

Courtney Miller, director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities at DHHS, may soon come to a location near you – and she wants to know what you think about DD services in Nebraska.

Miller is traveling statewide in September and October seeking feedback.

“DHHS team members are motivated by our great mission - helping people live better lives - to develop high-quality, efficient, and customer-friendly services,” said Courtney Phillips, chief executive officer of DHHS. “Meeting with people across the state is a key part of our plan to be responsive in serving all of Nebraska, particularly our state’s most vulnerable citizens.”

All interested persons are encouraged to attend and share their thoughts about what works with the current system, including both community-based services and state-operated facility services and opportunities for improvement.

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Suicide Prevention Awareness Month

In Nebraska, 175 men and 46 women completed suicide in 2015, the most recent year for which data is available.

“September is a time to share resources and stories on this stigmatized topic,” said Sheri Dawson, director of the Division of Behavioral Health, who added that September is Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. “Our goal is to reach out to those affected by suicide, raise awareness and connect individuals with suicidal ideation to treatment services. We also want to make sure individuals, friends and families have access to the resources they need to discuss suicide prevention.”

These prevention resources include Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) which has trained 2,801 Nebraskans in the past two years, and four active Local Outreach to Suicide Survivors (LOSS) teams, comprised of survivor and mental health professionals who provide support for those who have had a loved one complete a suicide.

A number of things may put a person at risk of suicide, including:

- **A family history of suicide.**
- **Substance abuse.** Drugs and alcohol can result in mental highs and lows that exacerbate suicidal thoughts.
- **Intoxication.** More than one in three people who die from suicide are under the influence of alcohol.

- **Access to firearms.**
- **A serious or chronic medical illness.**
- **Gender.** Although more women than men attempt suicide, men are four times more likely to die by suicide.
- **A history of trauma or abuse.**
- **Prolonged stress.**
- **Isolation.**
- **Age.** People under age 24 or above age 65 are at a higher risk for suicide (in Nebraska, the highest number of suicides are found in the 20-24 age group.)
- **A recent tragedy or loss.**
- **Agitation and sleep deprivation.**
- **A prior suicide attempt.**

Warning signs for suicide in any age group include:

- Threats or comments about killing themselves, also known as suicidal ideation
- Increased alcohol and drug use
- Aggressive behavior
- Social withdrawal from friends, family and the community
- Dramatic mood swings
- Talking, writing or thinking about death



- Impulsive or reckless behavior

Any person exhibiting these behaviors should get care immediately:

- Putting their affairs in order and giving away their possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Mood shifts from despair to calm
- Planning, possibly by looking around to buy, steal or borrow the methods they need to complete suicide, such as a firearm or prescription

Individuals and families and friends of those with suicidal thoughts can call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-TALK (8255.) Those uncomfortable talking on the phone can also text **NAMI to 741-741** to be connected to a free, trained crisis counselor.

Let's Talk Tour

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“Individuals, their families, friends, providers, and advocates are critical voices in the programs that serve Nebraskans with developmental disabilities,” said Miller. “That’s why it’s essential to have these dialogues with the public. We look forward to receiving feedback.”

Meetings will be held in the following locations (all times local):

- Oct. 3, North Platte: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., North Platte Library, Meeting Room, 120 West 4th St.
- Oct. 4, Scottsbluff/Gering: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Gering Public Library, 1055 P Street
- Oct.5, Valentine: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Mid-Plains Community College, Valentine Campus, 715 East Highway 20
- Oct.10, Wayne: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Northstar Services, 1202 E.14th St
- Oct.11, Columbus: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Columbus Public Library, 2504 14th St.
- Oct.17, Omaha: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Autism Center of Nebraska, 9012 Q St.
- Oct.19, Lincoln: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Walt Branch Library, 6701 S.14th St.
- Oct.24, Beatrice: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m., Beatrice State Developmental Center, All Faiths Chapel, 3000 Lincoln Blvd.
- Oct.26, Kearney: 7 to 8:30 p.m. Holiday Inn, 110 2nd Ave.