

CONNECTIONS

April 2012

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Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

Lexington Customer Service Center, Fourth and Final



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DHHS Happenings

A ground-breaking ceremony for a new beautification cemetery park on the Lincoln Regional Center campus was held March 29. The park is designed to help remember and honor those who died at the center. Norfolk and Hastings will include beautification parks, as well.



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Getting Ready for Open Enrollment

By Denise Uhing

Open Enrollment for the 2012–2013 Plan Year is just around the corner. Here are some tips to help you prepare for the upcoming event.

- **Tip #1:** Open Enrollment is the perfect time to update your Dependent and Beneficiary information including addresses, Social Security Numbers, etc.
- **Tip #2:** If you participate in the Flexible Spending Accounts (FSA) you can begin to prepare

for the amounts you will have withheld. The image below will assist you in calculating your annual estimated expenses eligible for the medical Flexible Spending Account.

- **Tip #3:** For up-to-date information add the [DAS Employee Wellness and Benefits](#) webpage to your favorites. Plan information will be posted to this website as soon as it is available. The DAS Employee Wellness and Benefits website is a valuable tool

in assisting you in making your Benefit election.

- **Tip #4:** Watch for email updates about Open Enrollment dates and benefit options available to you and your family for the 2012–2013 Plan Year.

If you have any questions about your benefit information, please contact the [Human Resources person designated](#) for your area.

FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS:

ASI Annual estimated expenses for services rendered during the upcoming plan year (July 1 - June 30, 2012) that will not be reimbursed by your medical and/or dental plans:

Deductible, copays & coinsurance	\$ _____
Routine office visits	\$ _____
Non-covered prescriptions	\$ _____
Hearing Aids	\$ _____
Over-the-counter medications	\$ _____
Chiropractic expenses	\$ _____
Eyeglasses/Contact lenses expense	\$ _____
Dental work	\$ _____

The Guide is **not** intended to provide in-depth information about the plans. For further details, consult Summary Plan Descriptions on DAS’ website: www.das.state.ne.us/personnel/benefits

TOTAL ANNUAL MEDICAL EXPENSES:

Amount Per Pay Period (bi-weekly 24 or monthly 12) \$ _____

State Employee Wellness and Benefits/Phone (402) 471-4443 (inside Lincoln) or (877) 721-2228 (outside of Lincoln)

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DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov
DHHS Employee Website: <http://dhhsemployees.gov>
DHHS Helpline: 1-800-254-4202, (402) 471-6035 in Lincoln, or via e-mail at dhhs.helpline@nebraska.gov

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Behavioral Health Division Director: Scot Adams, Ph.D.	Public Health Division Director/ Chief Medical Officer: Dr. Joann Schaefer
Children and Family Services Division Director: Thomas Pristow	Veterans' Homes Division Director: John Hilgert
Developmental Disabilities Division Director: Jodi Fenner	Chief Operating Officer: Matt Clough

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CLS Administrator: Kathie Osterman	Graphics and Layout: Judy Barker Robby DeFrain
Editor: Dianna Seiffert	

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

Phone: (402) 471-1695 Fax: (402) 471-3996

E-mail: dianna.seiffert@nebraska.gov

Interagency mail: Nebraska State Office Bldg. 3rd Floor
 U.S. mail: P.O. Box 95026
 301 Centennial Mall South, Lincoln, Nebraska 68509-5026

Homepage Homeruns

DHHS Employee Website... A DHHS Employee Exclusive

Looking for information that only DHHS employees can see? 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.

Origami Cranes and Brain Injury Awareness, March 19, 2012

The annual Sandhill Crane migration occurs in Nebraska every March, and so does Brain Injury Awareness Month. More than 36,000 Nebraskans have a disability due to a brain injury, and to represent those people, over 36,000 origami cranes were made by 1,863



Nebraskans. The cranes are on display at the Museum of Nebraska Art in Kearney. This red, white and blue "medal of honor" display is made of origami cranes. The display, located at the Nebraska Capitol, represents the 1,000 service members who have returned to Nebraska with brain injuries and now battle with brain injury every day.

Quilt Honors Fallen Soldier, Provides Support & Comfort, March 26, 2012



Kathy Fischer, Public Health, recently received a quilt from the "Home of the Brave Project" in honor of her son, Army Staff Sergeant Jeremy James Fischer who was killed in Iraq in 2004. The "Home of the Brave" Quilt Project is a nationwide movement dedicated to honoring fallen heroes from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan by making and presenting homemade quilts to their families. The quilts, carrying special inspirational messages and condolences, honor and show gratitude for soldiers' service while providing support and comfort to their families.

Teamwork Helps Tackle Backlog of Claims in Medicaid and Long-term Care, April 10, 2012

Employees in the Division of Medicaid and Long-term Care took a unique approach to effectively and efficiently handle a backlog of claims data entry work. By working together and putting aside other work, employees from various areas in Medicaid came together to form a Data Entry "super" team that entered claims for a day. The results were amazing. Between MLTC and NFOCUS claims, a total of 13,135 claims were entered in one day (March 29) by some 60-70 employees.

Hard work for all employees involved was a given, but added incentives and fun helped keep the competition lively. There were prize drawings for employees and the group celebrated their accomplishments with a special food day. **Karen Fischer** (left) is pictured here with **Vivianne Chaumont**, Director, Medicaid and Long-term Care.



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

We have just finished what will likely be one of the most significant legislative sessions for DHHS in recent years.

First of all, we were successful in gaining passage of all of our bills that we proposed to the legislature. These bills changed provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Radiation Control Act, the Behavioral Services Act and the Adult Protective

Services Act. Thanks to everyone who was involved in proposing these bills and working to get them passed. Getting all our proposals passed is quite an achievement.

Another reason is that, of the 247 bills that passed this year, 66 (26.7%) have something to do with DHHS. So, while the legislative session is over, our work is just beginning. Our employees are now in the midst of reviewing these bills to list the steps we need to take to implement them, and their

information will be folded into our agency-wide implementation plan and posted on our Employee Website.

The legislature early on identified this as the “year of the child” and it certainly was. Much of the public attention was focused on our efforts at child welfare reform, and the legislature passed a number of bills that will directly impact those efforts as well as other bills about kids and families, like ACCESSNebraska, lead screening and prenatal services.

It shouldn't be a surprise that our progress on child welfare bills will be followed closely.

The legislature has provided clear direction and we look forward to working with them as we move forward. There are high expectations and we'll meet them. In fact, we have been working on some of these issues over the past few months and I believe strongly that we have “turned the corner” in our efforts to improve the system. As our new Director of Children and Family Services, Thomas Pristow, has said, this gives us a great opportunity to work together with families, providers, advocates and many others to make important changes for kids and families.

With the public and legislative attention paid to CFS these days, it may seem that the other Divisions and their programs are getting less attention. I can assure you this is not the case; the Directors have done a great job of keeping me informed and involved, and with the hiring of a new CFS Director, I can again focus on helping each Division fulfill its mission and coordinate its programs and services with the other Divisions, as well as focus on the agency as a whole.

Thank you for everything you do to help people live better lives.

Lexington Completes the Final Four

With the addition of Lexington, the fourth and final ACCESSNebraska Customer Service Center is in place. Now nearly 400 employees respond to questions, make customer changes, conduct interviews and help process and approve requests for economic assistance services. The other customer service centers are located in Lincoln, Fremont and Scottsbluff. Twenty-seven more social service workers were added to ACCESSNebraska's phone lines when the service center opened in late January in Lexington. Phone wait times continue to drop for people calling ACCESSNebraska even as the demand for services remains high.

[\(View the latest information on decreasing call wait times here.\)](#)

ACCESSNebraska brings efficiencies to the system through online applications, and document scanning and retrieval of case files. Since the project began in September 2008, nearly 11.3 million pages had been scanned into the system making them accessible to all social service workers. People eligible to receive economic assistance

benefits like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (food stamps), Aid to Dependent Children, Energy Assistance and Medicaid can call ACCESSNebraska to arrange for an in-person meeting with a social service worker.

Calls made to ACCESSNebraska totaled 184,091 in March, and 39 percent of them were handled through the self-service interactive voice response system. The remaining calls were sent to the Customer Service Centers.

A total of 14,597 applications for public assistance were received online in March, which was about 1,500 more than received in February. Of all applications received, 61 percent were sent electronically. Children and Family Services' Director Tom Pristow said that staff is evaluating the number and location of field staff to be hired in the upcoming months to provide additional

help with economic assistance services.

More information about ACCESSNebraska, local offices, community partners and applications can be found online at: <http://accessnebraska.ne.gov/>. Computer kiosks, telephones and personal assistance are available in more than 100 communities statewide through 28 local DHHS offices and about 500 community partners.



Nathan Busch, Service Area Administrator, talks with staff at the Lexington Customer Service Center at a lunch in October before staff moved into their new building. **Alvin Zimmerman** is the Administrator at that site. *Photo: Alvin Zimmerman*

Hauschild is Barbara Scarbrough Trailblazer Award Winner

Carrie Hauschild, Children and Family Services Specialist Supervisor, Omaha, was recently selected as the recipient of the Barbara Scarbrough Trailblazer Award.

The Trailblazer Award recognizes the DHHS supervisor in the Eastern Service Area who performs outstanding and professional work with families and mentors employees. The award is named for Barbara Scarbrough, a woman who has dedicated her life to improving the lives of children and families.

Hauschild began working for DHHS in April 1999. She has worked in the areas of ongoing case management, adoption case load, and has supervised adoption and adult protective services teams, assisted with the DHHS-CFS Hotline and a variety of other projects.

“Carrie demonstrates solid leadership, flexibility and commitment to staff development,” said **Scot Adams**, interim director of Children and Family Services at the time of the

award. “She is an example of the pride that state workers feel for their profession.”

Scarbrough was a supervisor for DHHS until the late 1990s. She came to work every day with the sole intention of making a positive difference in other's lives - both staff and families served, said Adams.

Scarbrough traveled from Alabama to present the award March 30. She continues to work in the human services field by serving as field liaison/adjunct professor at the University of Alabama School of Social Work.



Case Management Transition Praised

By Russ Reno

After management of child welfare cases moved March 1 from KVC-Nebraska to the Department of Health and Human Services in southeast Nebraska, employees heralded the ease of the transition.

“The transition went very smoothly,” said Children and Family Services Supervisor **Leigh Loskill**. “Services to our families continued, and the day after the transition, staff showed up and performed their usual work. As far as our families were concerned, everything went very well.”

However, following the announcement, she was prepared for the worst, which she said didn’t happen. “I was here when cases transferred from the State to KVC, and I expected this transition to be like that one. It wasn’t.”

Loskill’s opinion was shared by others, including OJS Supervisor **Martin Jensen**, “Everything went

incredibly well, considering all the things that had to be done. Administration had everything planned well and made sure no services were interrupted.”

The only hitch in the transition, said Children and Family Services Supervisor **Kasey Stava**, was handling direct services for families. Former KVC-Nebraska employees who provided direct family services, called Family Support Specialists, moved to DHHS and then were hired over the next few weeks by service providers. “We had to track where they were employed and then linked them to the cases they had before, which required us

to get the approvals and authorization of the provider. It’s a different way of doing things for us, but everything is okay now. Providers geared up very quickly, and we didn’t have many problems with family visitations.”

Child and Family Services Supervisor **Trevor Baer** noted that the support of DHHS administration was key to a successful transition. “We instantly got their support and they are available to answer any questions we have.”

“Because a few people put in a lot of hours, the transition was easier,” Jensen said.

Loskill added that because the Department kept most of the workers’ tasks the same, it eased the transition. “We were told everything would be business as

“As far as our families were concerned, everything went very well.” Leigh Loskill

usual. The external service providers were ready to work with us on the first day. The only thing that changed was the switching of the name of the agency.”

Stava agreed, “All supervisors remained with the same case managers so there was consistency for the workers. They knew what was expected of them, and we know their cases. That was one of the best things that happened. Case managers kept their same cases and we all knew the history of those cases.”

Baer said employees were surprised at first by the announcement that the State was taking over case management, but the



daily meetings helped ease concerns. “The transition required a quick turnaround and we all got on board. Instead of providing services, we now have providers to do that. It was a very easy transition for my team.”

“Employees expected work would be different the next day, but everything ran as it did before,” Loskill agreed. “The most difficulty we had was learning the basics, such as timesheets, who to go to in HR, etcetera. But, those were small things that didn’t affect families, which was our biggest concern.”

All parents were sent a phone number to call with questions or concerns. About 40 calls were received, but few were concerned about the transition. Most parents asked the name of their case manager. Other calls were received from service providers, law enforcement and an employee.

Baer, Jensen and Stava also agreed that as State employees, they have more direct decision-making ability, and are able to move more quickly to aide children and families. “This change takes our work down to a personal level rather than one agency to another agency,” Stava said.

Looking ahead, Stava acknowledged there were positives that came from the State’s work with KVC-Nebraska, such as Structured Decision Making (SDM). SDM helps case managers evaluate a child’s safety and risk for potential future harm

during the assessment phase.

“Sometimes it’s easy to get wrapped up in family drama. We’re more focused on why we’re involved with the family. SDM is an efficient assessment tool, and we’re not spending as much time gathering information.”

Jensen said case managers no longer will worry about providing services, which is positive for families, and will be become more comfortable providing case management. “We’re able to think analytically about the family and what needs to be done.” He said both the State and KVC already had dedicated staff. “The combination of the two has been good.”

All told, 232 KVC-Nebraska employees accepted temporary employment from DHHS. That number was down to 189 at the end of March as 32 Family Support Specialists were hired by providers and 11 case managers found employment outside of state government.

By the end of April, 16 of the 17 permanent supervisor position were filled. There were 126 positions advertized and 27 job offers made. Interviews will continue into May.

DHHS is examining long-term office needs in Lincoln, York, Beatrice and Nebraska City. Space in Seward also is being pursued. In addition, the computer needs of the new employees are being explored.

Raising Awareness of Health Disparities: April is Minority Health Month

By staff from the Office of Health Disparities & Health Equity

Each year, the federal and state offices of minority health recognize a month to raise awareness of health disparities throughout the nation. April is Minority Health Month in Nebraska.

DHHS' Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity (OHDHE) is doing its part to let Nebraskans know that significant health disparities exist among Nebraska's rapidly growing minority population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, from 2000-2010, Nebraska's racial/ethnic minority population grew 50.7%, while the non-Hispanic white population had only a 0.4% increase.

The office's mission is to improve health outcomes for culturally diverse populations in Nebraska, leading to a vision of health equity for all Nebraskans. Staff members and volunteers work in offices in Lincoln, Omaha, Grand Island, and Gering. In September, the staff welcomed **Josie Rodriguez** as its new administrator.

In addressing health disparities, the Office's core functions are to:

- Promote and provide training on cultural competency to improve access to health services for racial ethnic minorities.
- Provide relevant statistical data to assess and identify health status of racial ethnic minorities.
- Increase awareness of major health problems of racial and ethnic minorities and factors that influence health.
- Identify needs and expand community-based health promotion and disease prevention outreach efforts.

- Establish and strengthen networks, coalitions, and partnerships to identify and address health problems.
- Collaborate with public health partners to develop and promote programs and practices to achieve health equity.

To achieve its vision of health equity for all Nebraskans, OHDHE is dedicated to enhancing collaborations with partners within DHHS. On the national level, the office collaborates with the U.S. DHHS Office of Minority Health and individual state offices of minority health to support a systems approach for eliminating health disparities. In Nebraska, OHDHE collaborates with the Minority Health Council, community- and faith-based organizations, Tribes and Tribal organizations, local public health departments and several other partners.

The office has several important projects to accomplish its mission and vision. The projects are supported by:

- Minority Health Initiatives – The funds from the Nebraska Legislature encourage the development or enhancement of innovative health services or programming to eliminate health disparities that disproportionately impact racial ethnic minority populations. Funds are used to combat obesity,

cardiovascular disease, infant mortality, diabetes, and asthma.

- Every Woman Matters – This funding from the Office of Women's and Men's Health is used for health promotion and education efforts.
- Preventive Health and Health Services
- This block grant from the federal government supports data collection, evaluation, and reports.
- Maternal Child Health – This federal funding helps to improve the health of mothers and children, and to promote access to health care.
- State Partnership Grant – These federal funds focus on several efforts, including cultural proficiency, data collection, collaborations and efforts to enhance partnerships.

Learn more about the Office of Health Disparities and Health Equity's programs by visiting www.dhhs.ne.gov/healthdisparities.



Gov. Dave Heineman signed a Proclamation recently announcing that April is Minority Health Month.

“The future health of the nation will be determined to a large extent by how effectively we work with communities to eliminate health disparities among those populations experiencing a disproportionate burden of disease, disability and death.” – Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

What are Health Disparities?

A disparity is simply a lack of similarity or equality. Disparities in the United States include those in economics, education, gender, and geography; and in criminal justice, income, ability, or opportunity, among others.

A health disparity occurs when one racial/ethnic group, gender, or group sharing a socioeconomic or geographic designation has poorer health outcomes – higher rates of morbidity (occurrence of disease) and mortality (death) – when contrasted with another group.

Conditions Influencing Health

In the United States, health disparities manifest along categories of race and ethnicity, due to socio-economic determinants of health: poverty, housing, education, income, insuredness, uninsuredness, racism, discrimination and history of segregation, among other factors.

LRC Beautification Project Helps Remember, Honor Those Who Died

A groundbreaking for a new cemetery beautification park on the Lincoln Regional Center campus was held March 29. Staff in hard hats with shovels turned the sod to mark the occasion.

New beautification parks, which will include plants, flagstones, markers of remembrance and benches, will be

established at the cemeteries of each regional center in Nebraska—Norfolk, Hastings, as well as Lincoln. The reason for creating the parks is to honor people who died while at the regional centers. Most graves have only a stone and a number or are unmarked.

The cemeteries are closed now to new burials.



Craig Thelen, State Building Division operations manager, DAS; **Carol Coussons de Reyes**, administrator, Office of Consumer Affairs, Behavioral Health ; **Scot Adams**, director, Division of Behavioral Health; and **Stacey Werth-Sweeney**, LRC facility operating officer. *Photo: Marla Augustine*

Generous Donation Keeps WNVH Members in Touch with Technology

Anton Koncaba, a member of the Western Nebraska Veterans Home, surfs the Internet on one of four computers donated to the facility by the Nebraska Vietnam Veterans Association and Bytes Computer. Don Gable, of the Nebraska Vietnam Veterans Association, said funds raised during the Vietnam Veterans Reunion helped to purchase the computers. **Lonnie Starke**, administrator of the Western Nebraska Veterans Home, said providing computers helps residents stay in touch with family, see photos of grandchildren and even pass the



time. With the donation of the computers and another project scheduled for May, the donation from the groups and the business will total \$4,000.

ENVH Hires New Director of Nursing

By Audrey Hester

Dawnette Bredberg was recently selected as the new Director of Nursing at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home (ENVH) in Bellevue.

Dawnette has nearly 20 years of experience as a Registered Nurse in different areas of the nursing field. She has previously worked as a Pediatric ICU nurse, case manager for home health, Assistant Director of Nursing, Staff Nurse at UNMC, charge nurse in long-term care facilities, MDS coordinator, and a staff nurse in a psychiatric hospital. Before being selected as the Director of Nursing, Dawnette was the Motivation Unit Manager at the Veterans' Home.

In Gratitude

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

Editor's Note: The following Letter to the Editor was printed in the Bellevue Leader, March 14, 2012, from the son of an Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home member. It is reprinted here with permission.

My 93-year-old father, William K. Warnes, passed away this past week after a stay of a year and a half in the Bellevue Eastern Nebraska Veterans Home. My father was a career Navy man and a hero in his own right having survived the sinking of not one, but two ships -U.S.S. Langley and the U.S.S. Pecos. But, Bellevue is filled with many veteran heroes like my father.

This tribute is not to him, but rather to those I call modern day heroes, those health care providers that tend to the veterans as they age in their "golden years."

Bellevue is blessed to have a modern equipped and wellstaffed veterans home in its community. Most notable to me is the high quality of care that is given to the veterans here at the Bellevue home. The workers at the ENVH seem to really care about the residents.

A prime example of the un-sung heroes at the ENVH is Dr. Tom Cotton, the primary care physician at the facility. This man is available 24/7, and I developed total confidence in his medical opinion. He was always professional, thorough and understanding.

Of course it takes the entire staff at the ENVH to make everything come together. Each person there is a vital link in the chain of success for caring for our veterans. I thank all of those at the ENVH who cared for my father. I know he appreciated all of your efforts.

When my father's ship, the U.S.S. Langley sank, his one greatest sorrow was the loss of his newly-built ham operators set. His call sign was WI-JRX and with that call sign I now sign him "over and out."

William C. Warnes, Bellevue

A youth who was recently discharged from the Hastings Regional Center (HRC), Hastings Juvenile Chemical Dependency Program submitted the following note:

"This place helped me graduate and get my college started! Big thanks to Dr. Judson (Psychologist, HRC) and the teachers at the Nebraska Youth Academy."

A Grateful Client

Scot Adams (Director, Behavioral Health, and, at the time, Interim Director of Children and Family Services),

I want to extend my compliments and my gratitude to you and thank you specifically for three employees at the State Office Building in Omaha. **Karen Marquez** (Administrative Assistant, Children and Family Services), **Mary Eledge** (Staff Assistant, Children and Family Services), **Sheryl Carpenter** (Administrative Assistant, Children and Family Services) for the countless hours these individuals have spent with the general community and myself. For always being very professional answering questions and saving lives especially my own (heart issues). I want you to know of the fine job these individuals have extended to the people of Omaha and the outlying community in the state of Nebraska. It has been a pleasure for me, and I speak for countless other citizens in Omaha and extend on my behalf and theirs, thanks to these three employees.

A Thankful Client

P.S. There could not be any finer employees that are employed by your agency. You, Mr. Adams, should be proud of these three people.

Scot Adams (Director, Behavioral Health),

I would like to thank **Kelly Ostrander** (Administrative Assistant, Behavioral Health) for her assistance today. Also...**Mike Baumfalk**, (Social Services Supervisor, Lincoln) graciously welcomed us into his office and helped us resolve many discrepancies in the records for my daughter and my niece. (The client's daughter needed financial assistance because she was taking over care of the client's niece's two children.) We were pleased with the results and very appreciative for Mike's assistance. Again, thank you for your help today. I only hope that others that are facing similar situations will be able to also get their issues resolved as easily.

A Grateful Parent