



ISSUE NO. 2 ■ SUMMER ■ 2013



“I have a story to tell”

My name is Jason Gieschen. I’m a Global Messenger and a Special Olympics Athlete. Like all of the athletes, I have a story to tell, and Special Olympics Nebraska gives me a place to tell it. Special Olympics Nebraska—S.O.N.E.—also stands for **Super Opportunities New Experiences**. My first opportunity was when I was placed in foster care. I had been abused. I had been badly beaten. [Foster] Mom said she couldn’t pick me up without touching a bruise. The doctor thought that I had been forced to drink bleach since all of the skin had peeled off around my mouth. I weighed only 13 pounds at 13 months. Look at me now—I think my Mom overfed me!!

I had nightmares for nearly two years. After two years the court decided to end parental rights. That was when my nightmares stopped. Mom and Dad who were my foster parents were told they could adopt me. They knew I had disabilities. CONTINUE TO PAGE 2

Reflections on Special Olympics by Christina Mayer

**Community Liaison,
Developmental
Disabilities**



I have been a professional in the field of developmental disabilities for nearly eight years. I grew up as the daughter of a woman who chose to dedicate her life’s work to individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. In the years that I’ve served this population, I have never been witness to such an encouraging event as the Summer Games.

If I had to choose one word to define what Special Olympics is, it would be empowerment. Special Olympics not only empowers athletes to be great competitors, but to live healthy lives, to respect others, and the importance

of unity and friendship.

I attended the Special Olympics Nebraska Summer Games. The Opening Ceremonies were like nothing I had ever experienced. The ceremony began with a parade of athletes. Over 1500 athletes stormed the floor as the name of their team was called. It was very clear that those 1500 athletes were pumped to compete for the bronze, silver, and gold medals at the Summer Games. A Law Enforcement Torch Runner and two athletes presented

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Sower is published quarterly by the Division of Developmental Disabilities, part of the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services. It is a celebration of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, guardians, service providers, community agencies and services, advocates and other interested individuals.

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Readers are invited to submit time-sensitive news items for Sower’s monthly edition to Christina.Mayer@nebraska.gov or contact Christina Mayer at 402.440.4129.

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Be sure to let her know that you’re contacting her with an idea for the Sower, and give her your name and a way to contact you so she can find out more.
We hope you’ll enjoy reading the Sower. It’ll come to you quarterly. If you’d like to read it online, go to:
http://dhhs.ne.gov/Pages/newsletters_Sower.aspx

I have a story to tell

JASON GIESCHEN CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



Mom said they didn't want to adopt just any kid, they wanted me. I was safe. I was loved.

I attended and graduated from Ogallala Schools. I was teased a lot, but I still liked school. I was bullied. You might think, "Wow, you are such a big guy—how could you be bullied?" Believe me, it happens. Thankfully, there were a few good teachers and fellow students who accepted me for who I am.

God gave me a wonderful singing voice. Special Olympics gave me a chance to sing my first solo, *The National Anthem*, at opening ceremonies for State Unified Bowling. I've been

singing ever since. I have been honored to sing at Opening Ceremonies, at college baseball and hockey games, community events, weddings and funerals.

I joined Special Olympics in my freshman year when my principal, Pat Moore, invited me to go bowling. I compete in bowling, unified bowling, swimming, track, shot put, turbo jav, equestrian, basketball, volleyball, and this year I am competing for the first time in power lifting. I compete with the Scottsbluff Thunder Team.

Special Olympics has given me the opportunity to travel. I went to Washington DC to lobby for the 2010 National Games. I met Tim Shriver (Chairman of the Board and CEO of Special Olympics) there. I have also been to North Carolina for the Unified Sports Sub Committee, and to Iowa for the 2006 National Games

Special Olympics opened up a whole new life for me and my family. You see, in Special Olympics you are accepted just the way you are. It doesn't matter if you are short or tall, skinny or fat, fast or slow, or if your body doesn't work right. What matters is that I am accepted just the way I am—a big guy, in a big body, with a big heart, with big dreams—just like everyone else.



REFLECTIONS ON SPECIAL OLYMPICS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Flame of Hope. The arrival of the Flame was inspirational. The room became totally quiet as the cauldron was lit to symbolize the beginning of the Summer Games.

Some of the sports in which the athletes competed were volleyball, aquatics, gymnastics, power lifting, roller skating, and various track and field events.

While I was cheering on the athletes, I met some awesome people. I met two athletes who really stand out: Jason Gieschen, whose story is featured on the first page of this newsletter, and John Sherbert. Both of them carry the title of Special Olympics Global Messenger. I also met some wonderful staff, board members, and multiple volunteers from the Special Olympics of Nebraska.

★ *It was an experience I will never forget!* ★

Nebraska Drops the "R" Word from State Law

The Nebraska Legislature voted 46-0 to remove all references to the "R-word" from state law. Nebraska joins the federal government and more than 40 states in eliminating all derivatives of "retardation."

When testifying about the bill, Jodi Fenner, Director of the Division of Developmental Disabilities, said, "People with developmental disabilities in Nebraska have true value to our society. They are cherished family members and friends.

They have meaningful jobs and contribute through volunteer and social activities in our communities.

They are people who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect."

We want YOU!

Couple retires after 59 combined years at BSDC

Stan and Mert Miller recently retired from the Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC) after a combined 59 years of service. Stan worked in the Maintenance Department, and Mert was in the Custodial Department. The Indiana natives moved to an acreage outside of Beatrice in 1979 and established deep roots, including working at BSDC. "He has a smile on his face every time you see him," says Yvonne Eckhoff, an Administrative Assistant at BSDC. "They will be missed." Stan stated that the things he will miss the most are the staff who work at BSDC and fixing the wheelchairs. Stan and Mert plan on traveling in their retirement.



Invitation to participate in: Recreational options survey

If you are a person with an intellectual or developmental disability, or a family member/guardian who is responsible for a Nebraska resident who has an intellectual or developmental disability, you are invited to participate in this survey. The purpose of the survey is to identify recreational options available in various parts of the state. The results will be used to guide the Nebraska Planning Council on Developmental Disabilities in identifying gaps and barriers, and develop a plan that will improve opportunities. This survey is completely anonymous, and will only take about 15-20 minutes to complete. To access the survey, go to:

<http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/neiddrecsurvey2013>

Any questions or comments can be directed to Dr. Bob Pawloski at 402-559-8379 or rwpawloski@unmc.edu

Dr. Pawloski is a Project Director with the Munroe-Meyer Institute Interdisciplinary Center for Program Evaluation.

Quality Review Team

Do you have a desire to help ensure person-centered and quality services for persons with intellectual or developmental disabilities? We want you to be part of our team! Nebraska Quality Review Teams visit community based settings and make observations regarding the quality of life offered in those settings. If you are an individual receiving service, a family member or an interested community member, please contact us.

We want YOU!

Christina Mayer,
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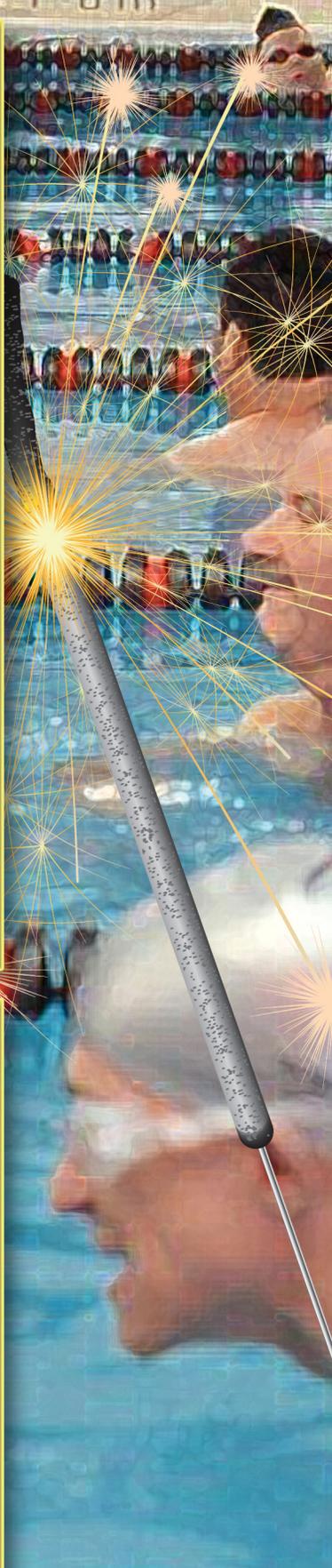
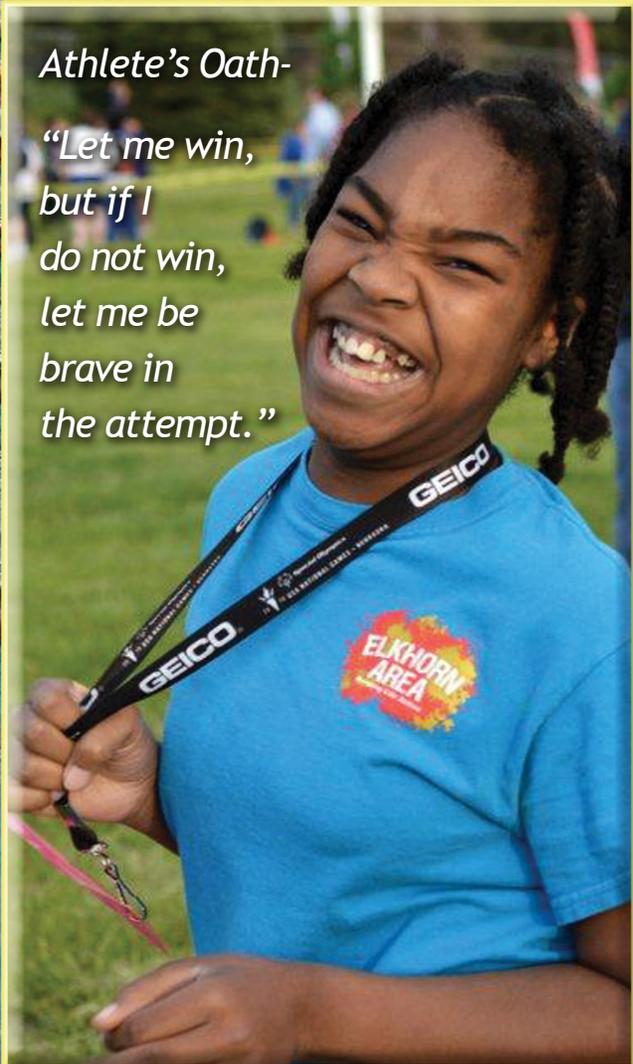
Or by mail:
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Special Olympics



Athlete's Oath-

*“Let me win,
but if I
do not win,
let me be
brave in
the attempt.”*



Special Olympics



Making a difference

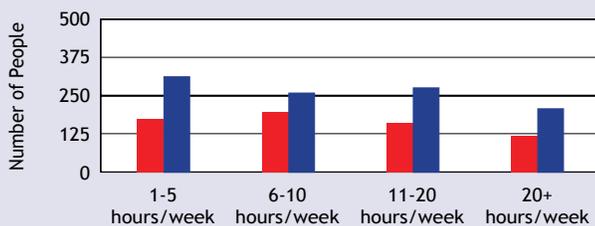
Do you know someone who is making a difference and should be recognized for the amazing work they do? We want to know about them!

Send an email to:
Christina Mayer
christina.mayer@nebraska.gov
 including the person's name
 and a short description of
 how they make a difference.
 You can also go to:
http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/MakingADifferenceNomination

Please include your contact information in case we need to contact you for a little more information.

Great news about integrated activities in Nebraska

EMPLOYED in Integrated Setting



	1-5	6-10	11-20	20+
2007	171	196	163	121
Current	312	256	268	214
Difference	141	60	171	93

There's good news for Nebraska. People with intellectual or developmental disabilities are experiencing increased participation in integrated employment, volunteer and recreational opportunities! An integrated setting is one in which persons with disabilities interact with persons without disabilities who are not paid service providers. The data for this project was collected by Division of Developmental Disabilities Service Coordinators, who collected data from 2007 to the present.

According to the 2013 survey, there has been significant improvement in integration for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Nebraska. For instance:

- 1,050 people are employed in an integrated setting in 2013 compared to 651 in 2007 - an increase of 399 people or 61%.
- 1,082 people are volunteering in an integrated setting in 2013 compared with just 380 in 2007 - an increase of 702 people or 185%.
- 2,964 people are involved in recreational activities in an integrated setting in 2013 compared with 1,510 in 2007 - an increase of 1,454 people or 96%

Service Coordinators gather for training

Like the people they serve, service coordinators need ongoing education. At the end of April, almost 250 service coordinators from across Nebraska gathered in Lincoln for two days to learn ways to even better support individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities. They participated in workshops that will directly relate to working with individuals who receive services. In addition to learning from presenters, service coordinators learned from each other.

One service coordinator said, "I really enjoy getting the opportunity to meet with my colleagues from around the state and really enjoy the overall experiences of the conference. I look forward to attending next year!"

Another service coordinator summed up the conference and the work, saying, "We appreciate this opportunity to learn and interact with our peers who love working with individuals we serve. As I looked around the room, I realized that each of the persons there carried a caseload like mine with people who are special to them and who they hold in their hearts."



Making a difference

Kathy Mann

Kathy Mann established True Buddy Farms, home of Luv A Lamb, Inc. in 2010. She was enlightened by the way her 4-H sheep responded to people with disabilities at the county and state fairs. The mission of the farm is to encourage and teach life skills to youth and adults with intellectual, developmental, and physical disabilities through animal therapy and recreational farm work. They also build relationships among youth in our community.

My daughter Jessica has been a part of the True Buddy Sheep Club since before its beginning. She loves being around the sheep and the others who are at the farm. She truly has a special bond with these sheep. She remembers each week which particular sheep she worked with. Her life has been greatly enhanced



Jessica Nolte with her 4-H sheep.

by being able to participate in this wonderful program. Kathy continues to work toward her vision to give these individuals a place to learn and grow in a beautiful, clean, and loving environment. Kathy has made a huge difference in my daughter's life and in many others' lives. I am grateful for all she has done.

-Sherry Nolte



Kodjo Paintsil



Kodjo Paintsil, an Extended Family Home (EFH) provider, has made—and continues to make—a difference in our entire family's life. We first met Kodjo several years ago when he came to stay with our son, Zachary Thelen, who was a Region V group home resident. After a few years in this setting,

Kodjo asked Zachary to come live with him, his wife, and their small son, in an EFH. They even had to move to a different home in order to meet Zachary's needs. Zachary requires 24 hour a day care, and Kodjo gives the best care. Kodjo includes Zachary in everything he does. To all of his basketball buddies Zach is simply one of the guys. Zachary is always dressed to the nines, just the way he likes it. Recently Kodjo and Zachary flew to Vegas, Zach's favorite place. They spent FOUR days out on the town! Although it is sometimes exhausting for Kodjo, he goes out of his way to ensure that Zachary has the time of his life and experiences as many things as possible. Kodjo knows what Zachary thinks and wants, and understands him completely. Kodjo and his family spend holidays with us and have truly become part of our family. We all love him and can't imagine life without him. I thank God for Kodjo every night. Thank you Kodjo for being so very special, you have truly blessed our lives!

-Kimberly McKay

Staff Members Making a Difference Beyond Nebraska

The Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC) Physical and Nutritional Consultative Services (PNCS) team has been working hard to keep individuals safe from choking, aspirating, and any other issues related to their physical and nutritional safety. The team originated in 2009 and has evolved into six full-time members, and an assistant, who meet daily to review the changing needs of BSDC individuals. Four members of BSDC's PNCS team presented at the Developmental Disabilities Nurses Association (DDNA) conference in Philadelphia, PA on April 28, 2013. The presenters were Terri Lykins, Marcia Regier, Debi Rinne, and Yvonne Parde. Terri Lykins is a registered dietitian with 23 years of experience. She has been at BSDC since 2009 serving as the director of the PNCS team. Marcia Regier is a Registered Nurse (RN) who has been employed as a clinical nurse trainer since 2002. Debi Rinne has been a nurse at BSDC for more than 35 years in various positions and is now a member of the PNCS team. Yvonne Parde is an occupational therapist who has been with BSDC for 10 years. These women, as well as the rest of the PNCS team, are making a difference in the lives of the people they serve.

Jottings from Jodi

Jottings from Jodi Fenner



**Director of DHHS
Division of
Developmental
Disabilities**

This issue of the *Sower* celebrates the many ways people with intellectual or developmental disabilities are involved in their communities.

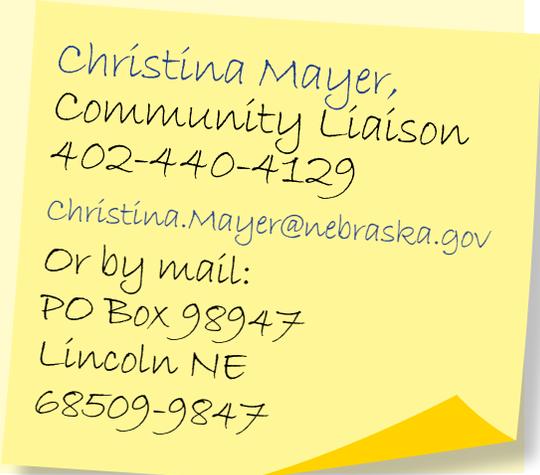
At the end of May, many individuals participated in the Special Olympics summer games. You'll read about Jason Gieschen, a Global Messenger with the Special Olympics, and you'll see pictures of athletes and participants. It is evident that Special Olympics offers opportunities not only for competition in sporting events but also for personal growth, leadership and camaraderie.

You'll also read results of a survey undertaken by the Division of Developmental Disabilities. That survey shows that Nebraskans with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) are increasingly active in their communities!

The state is benefitting from people with IDD who are employed, volunteering and participating in recreational activities in integrated settings (side-by-side with people who do not have disabilities). As people work, volunteer and participate in recreational activities together, they learn from each other, develop a deeper respect for each other and enrich their lives. It's a win-win for everyone.

As always, we want your input. If you know an individual doing something fun or inspiring, someone making a difference in the lives of others or about an event or resource that others would like to know about, let us know.

Simply contact:



We respect your wishes. If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter, or would like to receive it electronically or at a different mailing address, please contact Christina Mayer. See Christina's email and mailing address above.

BSDC P.R.I.D.E.

People who live and work at the **Beatrice State Developmental Center (BSDC)** have a new publication to keep them informed of what's happening. The first issue of P.R.I.D.E. was published mid-May. It offered contests, information about Nurses Week and Staff Assistant Day, a calendar of events and announcements of births and graduations. The newsletter helps connect people and keeps everyone informed of things going on both on campus and in the lives of people involved with BSDC. The newsletter's masthead sports another meaning for the acronym BSDC: Best Support for Dignity and Choice—and learning for life.

