

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services teammates closer together

Eastern Service Area Transitions to St. Francis Ministries

In June of 2019, DHHS announced that Saint Francis Ministries was selected as its new contractor for the Eastern Service Area (ESA). Since then, many DHHS teammates have worked to ensure a seamless and smooth transition. Several transition teams were assembled to manage every logistical aspect of the planning and coordination needed to ensure an expedient and efficient process.

Robust communication efforts have assisted with sharing updates with key stakeholder groups during this process, as a primary goal was to get it done right while focusing on

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Father Bobby (Robert Smith), St. Francis Ministries, speaks to a crowd at an August town hall meeting in Omaha.

Celeste Illian Recognized by the Safe States Alliance as a Rising Star!



Celeste Illian

Celeste Illian is an Epidemiology Surveillance Coordinator in the Epidemiology & Informatics Unit. She plays an integral role in providing data to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

(CDC), including injury indicators and annual progress reports; leads evaluation efforts; develops and maintains dashboards for teen driver safety, child passenger safety, and motorcycle safety; and makes data easily accessible and understandable for statewide partners to use in their injury prevention work.

The Nebraska Highway Safety Office said, "Celeste is always very helpful in providing data or analysis of any available data to better describe our traffic safety issues. She attends conferences and meetings that are available to her to better understand the problems

and learn how to better utilize data. She always goes the extra step to be sure she is making the best use of any available data. She is awesome!"

Celeste was awarded the Rising Star Award at the Safe States conference September 6, 2019. The award recognizes newer professionals in the field less than five years that are making great strides in the discipline of injury and violence prevention.

Safe States is a national membership organization whose mission is to strengthen the practice of injury and violence prevention.

Social Services Worker Searching for Birth Mother

She uses her experiences to better relate to DHHS clients



Adopted at 7 days old, Kristine Cornman has been using genetic databases to learn about her heritage.

Kristine Cornman, a social services worker located at the Lincoln Customer Service Center, was adopted at 7 days old and raised in the northeastern part of the state.

It went well for a time. She had a sister – the biological daughter of Kristine’s adoptive parents. Another point in favor of a smooth childhood, the extended family of her adopted mother valued adoption, and many of her relatives had adopted children. Unfortunately, her adoptive mother, a teacher, passed away from a

brain aneurism when Kristine was just shy of 3 years old. And at about the same time, her sister went away to college.

“Then it was just dad and I, and he wasn’t really equipped to raise a child alone,” she said. “But he did until he met my stepmother.”

Conflicts arose between Kristine and her stepmother – the second mother-figure in her memory – almost immediately. At 17, Kristine was pregnant. She put the child, a girl she named Amber Lynn, up for

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Lincoln Teammate Plays Buddy the Elf at Photo Shoot in Kansas

In mid-November Aaron Sweazy, a Public Health educator, worked in costume as an elf at holiday portrait photo shoots.

“I worked with so many little ones, from 4 years on down,” he said. “I also worked with three

separate sets of twins – girl-girl, boy-boy, and girl-boy.”

This isn’t the first time Sweazy has played a character in costume.

“It’s nothing new for me, as I also have been a mascot (Fighting Irish) at Chapman, Kan., a Grizzly



Photos courtesy of Dare to Dream Photography owner, Brianne Maior.

Bear at Butler County Community College in El Dorado, Kan., and the Energizer Bunny for regional talent work in the Oklahoma City area for Sam’s Club,” Sweazy said.

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adoption through the Child Saving Institute, in Omaha.

The child – now named Kristine, in a striking coincidence – is doing wonderfully.

“It was an open adoption, and I’m thankful that I have a relationship with her now. She’s married and has children and is doing well,” Cornman said. “I got to pick the parents. And I’m a part of her life. I let her make the decision about how much of a relationship we have.”

What she wants is a relationship with her own biological mother.

She learned she was adopted when she was a girl, and she began seriously looking for her birth parents a few years ago. It’s an emotional journey. According to Cornman, her mother might have been 21 when she was born, which would make her 76 now. There’s not much time left.

She has mostly searched by entering her genetic record into on-line databases.

When a website discovers a close match, it flags the matches. In that manner, she identified several fifth or sixth cousins, whom she contacted. One of those distant relatives pursues the hobby of genealogy on his own. He was able to give Cornman an unused genetic kit from Ancestry.com, which has the largest database of potential relatives.

“I’m finding more from that one, than from the others,” she said, adding that it has identified four second cousins, nearly all in Iowa. With second cousins, it’s your great-great grandparents that you have in common, she explained. “But they can’t tell you which side

of the family that’s on.”

She assumes her birth parents are from Iowa, and in many cases those she’s reached out to have tried to help, but she lacks a key piece of information she needs to solve the puzzle.

“I’m stuck for now,” she said. “I think I could upload the information to other databases. And of course I’ve put messages on Facebook and everybody shared it all over the place. I got nothing from that. Some people get a response in, like, five minutes. My family doesn’t know anything, either.

“I get so emotional working with these people. I try not to cry on the phone with the clients,” she said. “Because I really understand a lot.”

“Another person (at the customer service center) just found her birth mother about two years ago, because Washington State opened up their records. Well... I’m still waiting. I’m not going to give up hope. I don’t give up easy.”

Going forward, Cornman said she’s going to stay in touch with the second cousins she has already identified. It’s a waiting game as far as the records themselves.

“I worry the only way I’ll find anything out is if she passes away,” Cornman said. “I would love to be face-to-face with her, if she wants it. I’d ask her about her life.

I don’t care why she gave me up. It doesn’t matter to me because I know there’s so many different reasons why people do that.

“I’d just like to ask if she wanted to contact me. If she was scared herself. And find out if she wants to meet me. That would be awesome. I think to myself, ‘Why wouldn’t she want to meet me,’” she continued. “I’d want to meet you. But everyone is different.

“I just knew I wanted a mom, you know,” she said. “I didn’t get to have a mom. If my adopted mom had lived it would be totally different.

“And even with my work here... I have to deal with people every day who’re putting their parents in the nursing home, and it’s like, well, you’ve had your parents... I told you I was going to cry... I’m real jealous of people who’ve had their parents, because I didn’t.”

Her experience as an adoptee enables her to forge a stronger connection with those she helps.

“I get so emotional working with these people. I try not to cry on the phone with the clients,” she said. “Because I really understand a lot.”

“At least I was able to know my nationality,” she continued. “I guess I’m mostly from England, Wales and Northwest Europe. MyHeritage.com, on the other hand, says I’m mostly Scandinavian, which I always thought because I’m tall. And that’s important. That’s who you are.”

Cornman had worked at DHHS for a little more than six years.

the date of January 1, 2020, as it marks the beginning of the new contract.

“I am excited about the opportunity to collaborate with Saint Francis as we work to be more innovative in our approach and we move in this new direction,” said CEO Dannette R. Smith. By mid-October, tremendous progress had been made. “We are working well with Saint Francis, constantly engaging and communicating,” Smith told members of the Legislature’s HHS committee during a briefing on the transition. “Those connections include bi-weekly DHHS/Saint Francis executive leadership meetings,

weekly CEO/CFS meetings, daily communication between CFS and Saint Francis staff and daily communication between my office and CFS staff directly involved in the transition.”

PromiseShip CEO Ron Zychowsky, General Counsel and VP of Legal Services Monika Anderson and the team led the commendable effort to help with transitioning approximately 1,500 cases to Saint Francis. In the first week of case transfer, 20 PromiseShip workers became Saint Francis workers and the roughly 300 cases they managed transitioned with them. DHHS workers have assisted, as well,

to ensure caseload ratios are maintained appropriately.

“We are greatly appreciative of the work of everyone involved in this transition,” said Smith. “From DHHS teammates to Saint Francis leadership and new Nebraska workers to PromiseShip workers who have become Saint Francis employees, everyone has given this transfer 100%, all with a focus on a smooth transition and improving outcomes for children and families.”

A new era of child welfare in the Omaha area, with a continued focus on better outcomes, has begun in Douglas and Sarpy counties.

Tracking Keys Used at Lincoln Regional Center Saves Thousands

A Kaizen project led by Aaron Gropp recently transformed how security keys are issued and returned at end of employment at the Lincoln Regional Center (LRC), saving thousands in new key purchases. Rework, hand-offs and delays also plunged.

Teammates are issued keys when they begin New Employee Orientation at LRC and use these keys in combination with other security measures to move patients through buildings and maintain the safety and security of the facility. In the past, keys weren’t identifiable from each other. The keys were only marked to identify what door they fit.

Following the process improvement initiative, each key was imprinted with a three-digit serial number before being issued. The updated key assignment policy made it possible for LRC to recoup the cost of replacement

through a final payroll deduction process, using the following contract language:

“2.2.8. For any temporary professional staff provided by Contractor that does not return their facility keys upon vacating or completing their assignment, Contractor shall credit DHHS a total amount of \$5 (five dollars) per unreturned key”

The process of borrowing keys also changed.

Before the improvements, if staff forgot their keys at home, they would have to leave their assigned building and be processed through the high-security building where they could borrow a set of keys. On average, it took a staff member 70 minutes to travel to the other building, wait for the current shift change to complete, obtain a set of keys, return to their assigned building, and then repeat this process at the end of their shift.

More than 100 staff per month had to borrow keys in this manner. In the new process, Building Incident Commanders (BICs) are issued log books and registered keys for use during each shift as loaner keys, reducing the amount of travel necessary to receive loaner keys. The issue of loaner keys was reduced from 70 minutes to 10 minutes.

Assigning individually numbered keys to LRC staff has resulted in a 90% return rate of keys by exiting LRC and agency employees over the last eight months. Keys can now be reused/reissued removing the need of ordering 200+ sets of new keys each year, resulting in a financial savings of more than \$2,700 in new key purchases. Reductions were made in rework (100%), hand-offs (100%), and delays (100%).



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Out and About with Our Partners: The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department Division of Dental Health



The Dental Health Program provides complete dental care on sliding fees from infancy.

The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department's Division of Dental Health and Nutrition Services provides Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and Dental Health services.

The Dental Health Program includes a dental clinic that serves children beginning at age 1, providing preventive and routine dental care. Of the clients served, 70% of the dental patients are children and 85% of the patients are racial and ethnic minorities and White non-English speaking. Patients pay for the dental care they receive on a sliding fee scale based on the household income and number of household members serving clients up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

The dental clinic is funded through city and county tax dollars, revenue generated from Medicaid billings, clinic fees and grant funds. The Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department contracts with 12 community dentists, including one pediatric dentist, providing dental care in the clinic. The dental clinic has six dental hygienists (both full- and part-time) providing clinic and community based preventive dental care, including WIC, Early Head Start and Head Start dental screenings and fluoride varnish applications and school based dental screenings.

The WIC and dental staff provide collaborative community outreach and referrals targeting at-risk populations. Visit the

Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department website <https://lincoln.ne.gov/city/health/index.htm> and the Dental Health and Nutrition Services webpage for more WIC and Dental Health program information.

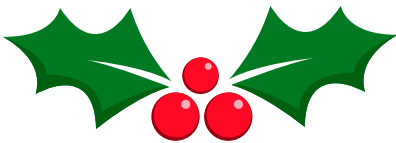


Norfolk Teammate Brings Family to Meet Governor Ricketts



Karen Johnson, training specialist I at Norfolk Regional Center, took her family to the Governor’s mansion on December 6 to meet Governor Ricketts at his annual holiday open house.

In addition to the Governor and First Lady, they are, from left, Shelby Johnson, 11, Tate Johnson, 8, and Karen Johnson holding Emmett Johnson, 5.

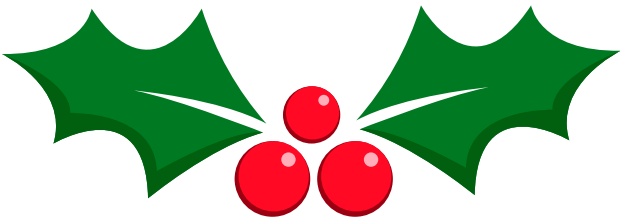


Fremont Customer Service Center Celebrates Team Building



Fremont Customer Service Center celebrated with a potluck breakfast to enjoy during the meeting along with a holiday sweater contest. Theresa Kratochvil won the sweater contest. Each brought a white elephant present, too. Pictured standing are Jennifer Kiefer, Theresa Kratochvil, Maggie Zarate, Katelynn Jones, Amanda Barry, Cheryl Horner and Catherine Heyne. Adam Johnson is seated. Not pictured: Gisella Hernandez, Brenda McCombs and Mary Schwanke.

Merry Christmas from LaVista DHHS



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In Gratitude

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

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

From China Christiansen, a social service worker based in Lexington:

I received a call in October from a gentlemen I helped back in March of this year. At that time his application was over 90 days and was incorrectly denied. I was able to open [his Medicaid]. He stated when he called me that he was so thankful to speak to me as he had been trying to reach me by calling the call center for a few weeks now and finally a worker gave him my information. The man stated that he wanted to speak to me as I was super helpful and informative in March when I helped him. He said he had a surgery coming up and wanted to know if Medicaid could help him. I explained System of Care to the man, as he was SLMB (Specified Low-Income Medicare Beneficiary) at the time.

I guess this just kind of reminds me of why I do my job. This guy remembered me from nine months ago and exactly how I helped him. This shows that as an SSW even in this role, we do make a lasting impression on people.

An email from a guardian received by Christy Reeson, developmental disabilities service coordination supervisor, regarding Jessica Bock, service coordinator:

I appreciate Jessica's professional and caring way of carrying out her duties as a Developmental Disabilities Service Coordinator. Jessica's succinct and very informative choice of words provides information for my niece in a way she can understand. And my niece listens to Jessica and takes her messages to heart even though others have provided her with the same information. As my niece's guardian, I also appreciate Jessica's responsiveness to my questions and her resourcefulness in helping me with problem-solving.

Thank you.
Nancy

THANK YOU!

Kimberly Noack, social services supervisor, sent the following note from a client to Connections:

She explains: "My worker Bambi Mattheis took care of this client for SNAP and was also helped with cooling and additional cooling supplement so "overall" accolades to DHHS for helping our Senior Citizen population."

Oct 3-2019

Dept of Health & Human Services,

I would like to Thank you
for Helping me get my
~~Stable~~ Assistance + SNAP
Housing

This Service for Seniors
like me has Been So Helpful
to me

To Be Able to Stay in my Home
By myself + Carefully + Safe

means A lot to me + my
family to know i take your
Services + And use them.

Thanks Again

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

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