

CONNECTIONS

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Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

State Fair Window Decorating Contest Promotes Need for Foster Parents

By Nichole Eilenstine, Resource Development Supervisor, Grand Island

The Nebraska State Fair is more than rides and rodeos, more than shows and ribbons, and even more than corn dogs and cotton candy. The State Fair is a place where thousands of people gather for food, fun and friendship making it a great opportunity to promote Nebraska's need for foster parents. Nearly 335,000 people attended this year's 11-day event. To take advantage of the large crowds at the Nebraska State Fair and to raise awareness about the need for foster parents, the Grand Island Resource Development Unit decided to participate in this year's Window Painting Contest focusing on Foster Care Recruitment.

The window painting contest has been a part of Grand Island's community since the State Fair moved in 2010. Employees from local businesses participate in the contest. Windows are judged on originality/creativity, appearance, font/text, use of theme and overall impression.

Casey Smith, Children and Family Services Administrator for Central Service Area, had the idea to promote foster parent recruitment through this contest. DHHS employees from Grand Island's CFS Resource Development unit including Resource Development Supervisor **Nichole Eilenstine** and Resource Developers **Cody Van Winkle** and **Beth Darling** took on the project and ran with the idea.

They combined the theme of this year's fair, "the thrill of it all," into the excitement of being a foster parent and the lasting impact children make on foster parents' hearts. The brightly-colored window stated "fostering the thrill of it all leaves a lasting hand print on our hearts." The display also showed two children and a foster parent with a quote above the children's heads that stated "Foster dad is taking us to the...." In yet another window, the dates for the Nebraska State Fair were given.

Staying with the theme of "fostering the thrill of it all..." 3- and 4-year-old

children from the YMCA's daycare came over and added their little handprints as a border on the windows.

(Continued on page 4)



Pictured from left: Beth Darling, Nichole Eilenstine and Cody Van Winkle

Connections
Looks
Ahead
to October



Next month, *Connections* will feature Employees and Supervisors of the Year, a listing of employees with significant years of service awards and favorites like Homepage Highlights, Making Courtesy Common and letters of appreciation for the work we do.

Don't miss this special issue as we honor the people who have devoted their careers to serving Nebraskans and making such a difference in the lives of so many people.

Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

DHHS Public Website: www.dhhs.ne.gov
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[DHHS' Employee Website...](#)

New information and photos are added daily to the employee website. Here are some recent posts 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.

Homepage Homeruns

[ENVH Employees Celebrate Fourth Deficiency-free Survey in a Row](#) **September 19, 2013**



DHHS employees at the Eastern Nebraska Veterans' Home in Bellevue recently received a "perfect score" on the annual survey by the U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

This was the fourth year in a row of perfect scores for ENVH. A perfect score, or zero deficiencies means that the facility had no deficiencies in the areas of life safety, environment, staff training/development, dietary-food service, finance-member banking and billing, recreation/activities, medical staff-credentialing, social services, and many areas related to quality assurance and care.

The VA survey team praised ENVH staff as "wonderful, compassionate, caring and that you make ENVH like a home for the members" and that "it is evident the members are very happy and love what you do and provide for them."

[Don't Be Sidelined. Mental Illness is Treatable. Get Back in the Game](#) **September 6, 2013**

Mental illness affects nearly one in four Americans – people of all ages, across all walks of life. There are many types of mental illness and those affected may be your friends, neighbors, a family member or even you.

Mental illness isn't something to be ashamed of or ignored. It's real and more common than you may think.

The consequences can be serious. If you or someone you know is showing signs of persistent sadness, excessive fear, worry, anxiety or other troubling behaviors, don't be sidelined. Mental illness is treatable. The first step is to ask for help.

DontBeSidelined.com is a website with helpful information about mental illness and how mental illness is treatable. The picture shows the "Don'tBeSidelined.com" ad that was displayed in Memorial Stadium during the first Husker game.

The Don't Be Sidelined campaign is sponsored by the Kim Foundation, in partnership with DHHS and many other non-profit and health and human service organizations.

[YRTC-K Youth, Staff Help with "Color for a Cause" Fun Run](#) **August 22, 2013**

Youth with the Bryant Living Unit at the Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center in Kearney along with Bradley Stolcpart, YRTC-K Youth Counselor, and Jana Peterson, YRTC-K Administrator, helped with the "Color for a Cause" Fun Run on Aug. 17. The fun run was a fundraiser for the Family Advocacy Network.

One of the staff members at the Family Advocacy Network thanked YRTC-K for helping to make the fun run successful. **Jana Peterson** added, "The youth did a great job and had lots of fun! They represented YRTC-K well."



The Good Life:

A reminder of what we all share and hope to provide to our fellow Nebraskans



By Kerry T. Winterer, CEO

Congratulations! It was another record-setting year of donations to the Charitable Giving Campaign. State employees are so generous and, together, raised more than \$560,000 to support programs and organizations that make a difference in the lives of Nebraskans in need.

This year's campaign theme, "Serving the public beyond the job," could have been written just for DHHS. I've seen people work hard at their jobs every day and then go on to host creative and successful fundraisers for local food

banks, schools, city missions, and so on. It makes me proud that our fundraising efforts take place all year long, whenever there is a need, not only during the Charitable Giving Campaign.

I'm proud that nearly 1,270 DHHS employees contributed \$149,480.69 through personal contributions and fundraising efforts. Because of the efforts of employees, we received several special recognitions at the Governor's recent Giving Campaign luncheon:

- The Division of Developmental Disabilities was recognized for increasing their dollar contributions by 20 percent;
- Medicaid and Long-Term Care was one of four divisions/agencies recognized for consistently



Travis Harms & Heather Sidders in Hastings Regional Center's "Kiss the Pig" contest.

increasing contributions since 2009;

- The Norfolk Veterans' Home was recognized as a Divisional Champion of Creativity for their "Give It to Win It" week; and
- The Hastings Regional Center was recognized as a Divisional Champion of Creativity for their "Kiss the Pig" contest.

The photos on this page reflect our efforts and were featured throughout the campaign on the DHHS employee website.

Not only were your fundraisers successful, they were also very creative! **Kaitlyn Betz** in Human Resources deserves a lot of kudos for keeping track of all of DHHS' donations and of the special fund-raising events happening

across the state. Kaitlyn put together a list of events (see link listed under the photo below) that people shared with her. It's fun seeing what others have done and it's also a way to share good ideas for next year's campaign.

I want to thank **Thomas Pristow**, Director of Children and Family Services, and **Dr. Joe Acierno**, Director of Public Health, for being the DHHS Team Captains this year, and thanks to everyone for all the work you do here and for all you did to make this Charitable Giving Campaign a success! Your hard work, creativity and dedication to all of these worthwhile charities is appreciated!



DHHS employees kick off "Give it to Win it" Week at the Norfolk Veterans' Home.

<http://dhsemployees/NeatToKnow/Lists/Photos/DHHS%20Charitable%20Giving%202013.pdf>

Window Decorating Contest (continued)

The children really seemed to enjoy helping complete the display.

How did the DHHS do in the contest? Great! DHHS employees in Grand Island were awarded third place for their window display and have hopes to do even better next year.



The best news wasn't the ribbon and recognition, though, but the inquiries from possible future foster parents! The display received a lot of great comments from the community, as well.



Pictured from left: Cody Van Winkle, Beth Darling and Nichole Eilenstine hold their winning certificate.



Risky Conversation Topics at Work

“The real art of conversation is not only to say the right thing at the right place but to leave unsaid the wrong thing at the tempting moment.”

Dorothy Nevill

*By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources and Development*

It's healthy for coworkers to know each other as people on a richer level than just job duties. We welcome conversations with coworkers about our lives away from work. This promotes respect, communication and trust.

However, we must beware of a potential pitfall: We spend so much time with coworkers that a false sense of familiarity and permission can develop if we aren't mindful. It's possible to become too comfortable with coworkers.

When we aren't careful about our conversations we can unwittingly offend and alienate coworkers.

Examples of risky conversation topics that can cause regret include:

- Religious beliefs, whether affirming your own or denying those of others.
- Political and social issues can quickly be perceived as provocative. Don't assume you know where a coworker stands on an issue; you'll be wrong half the time.
- Judgments about how people conduct their personal lives are almost guaranteed to offend a coworker when you least expect it.
- Intimate details of your personal life are all best stored in the TMI (Too Much Information) file.



- Organizational rumors and gossip have a perfect record: They are always harmful!

If you are put off by non-work related comments by another, you have the right to say, for example, “This is not a topic I want to discuss at work.” or “We won't come to agreement here, so let's leave this subject alone.”

If you are unsure about whether a non-work related topic of conversation is safe or you notice your coworker begin to bristle, move on to something else.

When in doubt, talk about Nebraska football, lunch or puppies. These conversations never go wrong.



Please email me your thoughts, concerns or suggestions about workplace courtesy and workplace relationships at: Richard.Mettler@nebraska.gov.

I will email you a response, and perhaps anonymously feature your idea in a future column.

“Even a fish wouldn't get into trouble if he kept his mouth shut.” Anonymous

950+ Attend Conference on Childhood Trauma, Stress

By Marla Augustine

Every single child can and should be given a chance. Don't write them off as "damaged goods."

That was the message of **Nathan Ross**, a survivor of child abuse. He told his story to an audience of over 950 people at a conference on trauma in September. They were there to learn about adverse childhood experiences, their negative mental and physical health effects, and the importance of trauma-informed care and services.

Nathan's mother abused him, his sister and triplet brothers. She beat them and used starvation as punishment. The abuse went on for years. Nathan thought his family life was normal, just like other people's.

One day when he was 10, his mother told him to draw a hot bath. She dragged two of his brothers into the bathroom and plunged them in the water, then put them in a broom closet. They died within two weeks.

Nathan and his remaining siblings went to live in a foster home for two years. He was angry (but not at his mother) and acted like a "terror." He said he didn't want to connect with anyone. He wanted to keep himself

from wanting others, expecting only disappointment.

With the help of a therapist and his foster parents he started to let down his guard and make strides. Then suddenly he and one of his siblings were placed in an adoptive home that already had 12 children. He thought he was in an orphanage. He decided he wouldn't let anyone get close to him.

At the Ross house, Nathan was told he was part of the family, that he could make something of himself. The wall started falling. In love with his new family, he wanted them to be proud of him so he started to make changes. His adoption was a start-over for him.

As a youth who was in foster care and then went on to be adopted, he knows the struggles that children go through in looking for their forever families. Today he runs the youth mentoring program for the Midwest Foster Care and Adoption Association.

Children's trauma experiences do not mean that they are beyond repair, according to **Dr. Bruce Perry**, a neuroscientist and author who also spoke at the conference. The brains of children who have experienced trauma differ from the brains of other children. But the brain can be

changed, he said. While early trauma may lead to mental health and physical health issues, attuned caregivers can meet the needs of children by providing the strongest reward—positive human interaction.

The Trauma Across the Lifespan conference was sponsored by the Division of Behavioral Health, the Division of Children and Family Services, the UNL Public Policy Center and the Early Development Network.

"This conference is a great example of collaboration of DBH and CFS," said **Scot Adams**, director of the Division of Behavioral Health. "We share the goal of providing trauma-informed services to our consumers."

"The conference provided a launching point for greater understanding of trauma and trauma-informed care for CFS



Nathan Ross is pictured here with Ivy Bloom, Program Specialist, Children and Family Services, and one of the staff who helped organize the conference. Photo: Russ Reno.

employees and others involved in the child welfare system," said **Thomas Pristow**, director of the Division of Children and Family Services. "We appreciate the cooperation of DBH in working with CFS to build on their experience in trauma-informed care so we are even more effective in serving youth and families and helping them become safer and healthier."

In Gratitude

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

Irene Eckman (Health Licensing Specialist, Public Health, Lincoln),
 I am a military spouse who has recently moved and needed paper filled out for the state of Illinois to apply for my RT license here. Every move seems to get more complicated, and I just wanted to send a very thoughtful thank you for completing my paperwork and returning it to me so promptly. Wish every state was as fast. Again my sincerest thanks!

A Grateful Client

Jackie Rapier (Program Specialist, Medicaid & Long-Term Care, Lincoln),
 The State of Nebraska is very fortunate to have you as their representative to help distressed poor widows as me. You, and you alone, were the only person who followed through and treated me with respect and dignity even though I was a bit verbal, I am sure. Blessings and gratitude for everything you've taken time to research and do for me.

A Thankful Client

Praise for **Barb Stone**, Children and Family Services Specialist, Children and Family Services, Lincoln) as relayed from **Amy Sharpnack**, (Service Coordinator, Developmental Disabilities, Lincoln)
 I wanted to pass along that I heard high praises about you from a client recently. I had an older man ask me what he could do about his ex-wife and daughter living in bad conditions, experiencing some mental health issues, etc. The client and I talked about Adult Protective Services, the police, etc.
 I have since heard that you got involved in the case and that now things are changing for the better for these women. It sounded like this ex-spouse and dad, as well as brothers and sons are really pleased something is being done to help the family.

Starting September 30, 2013 MEDICAID and Economic Assistance (EA) will each have their own telephone numbers.

<p>MEDICAID</p> <p>Questions about Medicaid programs call: 1-855-632-7633</p> <p>Calls from Lincoln local numbers call: 402-473-7000</p> <p>Calls from Omaha local numbers call: 402-595-1178</p> <p>TTY: 402-471-7256</p> <p>Fax: 402-471-9209</p> <p><small>Customer service hours for Medicaid: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday - Friday Closed weekends & federal and state holidays</small></p>	<p>EA (SNAP, Energy, Child Care, ADC)</p> <p>Questions about EA programs call: 1-800-383-4278</p> <p>Calls from Lincoln local numbers call: 402-323-3900</p> <p>Calls from Omaha local numbers call: 402-595-1258</p> <p>TTY: 402-471-7256</p> <p>Fax: 402-595-1901</p> <p><small>Customer service hours for Economic Assistance: 8:00 am to 5:00 pm Monday - Friday Closed weekends & federal and state holidays</small></p>
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The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services' mission:
Helping people live better lives.

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