

CONNECTIONS

February 2014 VOLUME 14, ISSUE 2

Bringing Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services employees closer together

Inside...



CEO Kerry Winterer highlights DHHS activity in the Legislature in his "Good Life" column.

[Read more](#)

Workplace violence is a real threat affecting approximately 2 million people a year. Read how you can recognize possible violence and what you can do to prevent it.

[Read more](#)

Medi-Tedi, a panda bear that provides comfort to children faced with emergency situations, is 25 this year. Read how the Medi-Tedi program got its start and how this Nebraska-made program has a national following.



[Read more](#)

Recognize Your Coworkers and Supervisors for the Great Work They Do!

2014 Employee & Supervisor of the Year nominations are due March 21!

By *Kaitlyn Betz,*
Human Resources and Development

Even though the work we do at DHHS can be very fulfilling, it's always nice to be recognized for a job well done. Do you know someone who is constantly going above and beyond in his/her work and truly exemplifies the DHHS mission of helping people live better lives? Here's your chance to recognize those people for their special contributions to this agency and the people we serve.

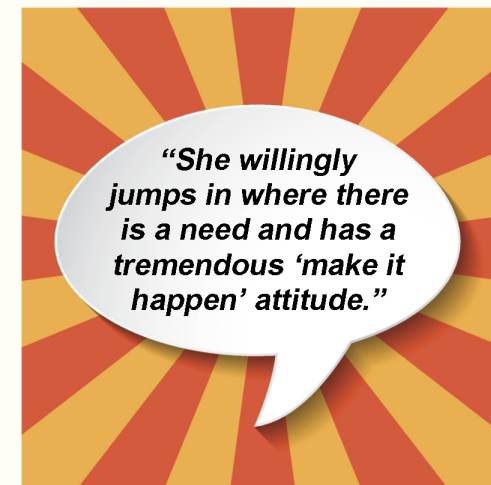
Nominations for the 2014 DHHS Employees and Supervisors of the Year are being requested. You can access the nomination forms on the [Human Resources and Development website](#). Nominations may be submitted for any deserving DHHS permanent employee.

Not only are the selected Employees and Supervisors of the Year identified

as superb employees, but they are also publicly recognized at ceremonies held by the Governor and DHHS in October and awarded a \$500 bonus for this great honor. This is a wonderful opportunity to reward your outstanding coworkers for a job well done. But hurry! **Nominations are due Friday, March 21, 2014.**

DHHS employees are the core of our agency. It is important to recognize our employees for being exemplary and demonstrating the [DHHS Values and Core Competencies](#) with their coworkers and the people we serve on a daily basis. Encourage excellence and share your thoughts about those who set a great example by completing a nomination form today!

The boxes to the right show what some of your coworkers said about a few of last year's Employees and Supervisors of the Year.



"She willingly jumps in where there is a need and has a tremendous 'make it happen' attitude."



"He is always looking for new ideas to improve patient care and the work environment for employees."

Stay Connected on



make the connection . . .

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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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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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[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

[Four-legged Friend Provides Comfort, Hope to Those in Need, Dec. 17](#)



Moses, a K-9 Parish Comfort Dog, is a regular volunteer at the Grand Island Veterans' Home. He is pictured with handler Jan Leth.

Moses is part of a team of comfort dogs at Christ Lutheran

Church. He and others bring comfort to members and staff of the church and to the community as a whole. He does a great job interacting with people at in all kinds of settings and was even featured in the Grand Island Veterans Day parade. Moses was recently deployed to Centennial, Colorado, to help the community heal from a recent school shooting.

Thanks, Moses, to you, your fellow Comfort Dogs and all of your handlers for the wonderful work you do!

[Lexington Customer Service Center Sends Hope to Philippines, Jan. 6](#)

Marnie Carr, Social Services Supervisor, Lexington Customer Service Center, writes...

"The season of Christmas allows us to be thankful for the simple things we are blessed with. The Lexington Customer

Service Center approached this holiday season with the spirit of giving, and, in lieu of presents within the office, we donated funds toward family members of one of our own.

Tanya Mayfield's (Social Services Worker) family lost three homes during the Philippine Typhoon in November. Tanya has several family members who were living in one of the areas ravaged by the typhoon, and their homes were leveled. One of the small children talked about the roof of their home just disappearing as the typhoon hit. Lexington employees raised enough funds to replace the roofs on two of the homes that they lost during the typhoon.

What an inspiration our employees are to show that they can rally together at such a time to help one another!"



Here a group of DHHS employees from the Lexington Customer Service Center hold a sign that says "Merry Christmas" in the Filipino language.

The Good Life: *A reminder of what we all share and hope to provide to our fellow Nebraskans*



“Laws are like sausages, it is better not to see them being made.”
- Otto von Bismarck

Some of you may have seen the quote above. It’s a humorous bent to an important subject.

After following the legislative session closely for five years now, I see some truth to von Bismarck’s analogy: a lot goes into making both laws and sausage, and the process for both grinds along.

The truth is, Nebraska’s legislative process is important and it’s imperative for DHHS to be involved.

During the session, several DHHS employees track legislative activity on a daily basis, coordinate our actions and interact with division staff and the Governor’s Policy Research Office. The group includes staff in Communications and Legislative Services, Legal Services and Financial Services.

This year alone, DHHS division employees have analyzed over 100 bills and amendments that, if passed, could affect the work of DHHS and those who benefit from DHHS programs. Division staff provides their best analysis of the impact of bills on programs and works with Financial Services on fiscal estimates.

The directors and I review this information to decide whether DHHS will take a position at the hearing. Our position, which can include supporting or opposing a bill or providing information in a neutral capacity, is coordinated with the Governor’s Policy Research Office. So far, DHHS has provided 26 testimonies or letters for hearings. These are on the [DHHS public website](#).

Two bills were introduced for DHHS this year. Sen. Watermeier introduced LB711 for Public Health to change provisions relating to contamination of property due to clandestine drug labs (such as meth labs) and rights of property owners to have appeal

hearings. Sen. Harms introduced LB728 for Developmental Disabilities to make changes to the requirement for fingerprint background checks for employees of community-based certified DD providers. Both bills advanced from Committee and are on General File.

Since this is the second year of this Legislative session, we also follow bills carried over from last year. One is our bill, LB260, introduced by Sen. Gloor for Behavioral Health, changing requirements for a data and information system under the Nebraska Behavioral Health Services Act.

I’ll bring three other bills to your attention. LB887 would expand the Medicaid program under the Affordable Care Act. I testified in opposition for several reasons. In fiscal year 2013, Nebraska Medicaid covered, on a monthly average, 240,639 people at a total cost of more than \$1.8 billion. Under LB887, Medicaid would cover a new category of adults. Among other provisions, it would pay insurance premiums and provide wrap-around benefits that are not now part of Medicaid. Estimates we have been provided show that this will add 113,410 new Medicaid clients with a cost of direct services through fiscal year 2020 in excess of \$3.3 billion in state and federal funds, and an additional \$143 million to develop, implement and administer the complex requirements in the bill. While the federal government will pay 100 percent of the services

now, reduced to 90 percent in future years, all administrative costs are 50 percent federal and 50 percent state from day one. We believe this expansion is unaffordable and will result in less funding for other state priorities.

Also, an amendment has been added to LB503 allowing us to implement Alternate Response, a non-adversarial way to help families reported for abuse or neglect in five demonstration sites. CFS deputy director Vicki Maca testified in support. Currently, Title IV-E funds out-of-home care. AR is part of the Title IV-E Waiver we received in September from the federal HHS Administration for Children and Families, giving us flexibility to use federal funds to test new approaches to service delivery, such as alternative services in the home. The amendment also harmonizes the term “registry” in both adult abuse and child abuse/neglect statutes.

LB935, which could have affected the location of the Central Nebraska Veterans’ Home and processes used to site state facilities in the future, was not advanced from Committee. Prior to that vote, the retroactive wording that could have affected CNVH was amended out.

In addition to testimony posted on our public website, there is a legislative page on the [DHHS internal website](#). If you have any questions about our process or bills, contact **Bryson Bartels**, the DHHS Legislative Coordinator, at 402-471-0541 or bryson.bartels@nebraska.gov.

Medi-Tedi, A Bear on a Mission, Celebrates 25 Years of Comforting Children

By Leah Bucco-White

It was the late 80s and DHHS Emergency Medical Services Specialist **Debbie Kuhn** had an idea. What about having a soft, stuffed bear that EMS providers could give to sick, scared or injured children? Little did she know, that idea would change the face of pediatric emergency medicine literally and become standard practice for Nebraska and other states across the nation.

Research shows the use of stuffed animals has a calming effect on traumatized children. Kuhn picked a panda bear because she likes pandas and

found a woman who would make the first Medi-Tedis from her basement and things took off from there.

DHHS initially placed Medi-Tedis in all ambulances across the state as well as State Patrol and county sheriff vehicles and EMS providers and law enforcement gave them to children. Medi-Tedis quickly became a hot commodity and outgrew its basement operation.

The Nebraska EMS Program also adopted Medi-Tedi as the official mascot for its Emergency Medical Services for Children Program. You can see his likeness on the back of ambulance services that have completed the requirements to be pediatric

ready including: training, community involvement and having essential pediatric equipment. Medi-Tedi himself also makes appearances at schools and community events.

Over the last 25 years, the EMS program handed out around five thousand Medi-Tedis. That's five thousand children who have found comfort holding the black and white bear. Today Medi-Tedi is solely supported by donations from the Nebraska EMS Association along with various Nebraska businesses and organizations.

One employee. One great idea. And, a black and white panda bear who's somewhat of a legend himself.



Medi-Tedi as a cub. It all started during Nebraska Gov. Kay Orr's tenure.

*Happy Birthday Medi-Tedi!
Here's to another 25 years!*



Medi-Tedi celebrates his 25th birthday in Scottsbluff in November.



Medi-Tedi traveled to Carhenge near Alliance in September and shared his tourist photo on his [Facebook page](#).

Workplace Violence Can Happen Any Time, Any Where *...It affects two million people each year*

- Sept. 22, 2010—Officials identify the Lincoln man who shot and wounded three coworkers and then killed himself at a facility near Crete.
- Aug. 15, 2013—DNA evidence and a police interview point detectives to a former Creighton University pathology resident, in the 2008 killings of 11-year-old boy, a house cleaner and family friend, and the May 12 deaths of a doctor and his wife.
- Nov. 14, 2013—Man arrested in lawyer's death; suspect's ex-wife also found dead south of Kearney.

Not only can workplace violence happen here in Nebraska. If you follow the news, you know that it already has!

Listed above are three examples of extreme workplace violence. When you include assaults, threats and verbal abuse, workplace violence affects two million people each year, according to the U.S. Department of Justice.

Sgt. Craig Loveless, Nebraska State Patrol, was in Lincoln in January to talk about workplace violence and what one can do to help prevent it. Three presentations were offered to DHHS employees in Public Health as part of preparedness training, and 146 people attended in all. Here are some of the highlights of the training.

Workplace violence is reaching epidemic proportions. Although violence isn't appropriate or acceptable in the

workplace, employees are people and people face difficult situations every day.

Employees may have personal problems or face mental health issues. They may have recently experienced a traumatic event, have unmanaged conflict, or face a prejudice against someone. When you combine challenges people face at home with high-stress issues at work (too much responsibility, too many changes, too much time at work and devoted to work...getting ready...driving to and from work, etc.), a person may reach a breaking point and resort to violence.

Workplace violence is a complex problem, but the FBI has identified several behaviors of concern that it found when analyzing past incidents of workplace violence. Watch for these behaviors in others:

- Dramatic changes in attitude, behavior and work ethic;
- Intimidating, belligerent, harassing, bullying or other inappropriate and aggressive behavior;
- Direct or veiled threats of harm;
- Numerous conflicts with supervisors and other employees;
- Bringing a weapon in the workplace, making inappropriate references to guns, fascination with weapons;
- Fascination with workplace violence, statements indicating approval of the use of violence to resolve problems;
- Statements indicating desperation over family, financial, other personal problems, to the point of

- contemplating suicide; and/or
- Drug/alcohol abuse

Of course, people who exhibit these behaviors are not certain to become violent. But these behaviors may indicate that an employee is under a high-level of stress and more susceptible to losing control. Each situation is unique. Professional judgment and outside assistance may be necessary to determine if intervention is the best option.

Loveless says violence has warning signs, and preparedness and awareness are key to preventing workplace violence. He listed four important steps to intervention including:

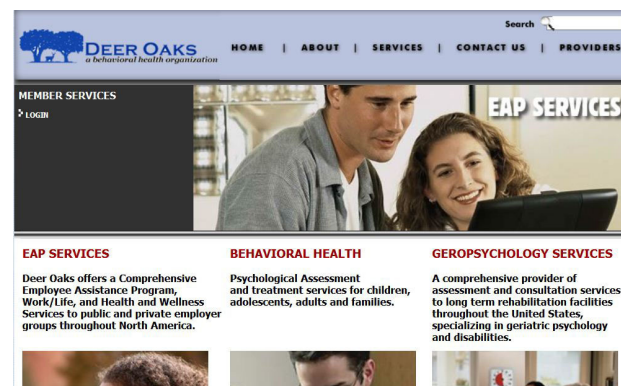
1. Observe changes in performance, attendance, personal grooming, etc.;
2. Document behaviors causing concern;
3. Tell others. Bring your concerns to management or your workplace threat assessment team, if you have one; and
4. Follow up to make sure that people are listening to your concerns.

"Maybe if we could spot something troubling and do something about it to help, we could prevent workplace violence," Loveless said. "It might be as small of an action as saying a few kind words to someone."

Loveless said we should make the effort with our coworkers now to create a safe environment and zero-tolerance policy on workplace violence. He also said that he believes strongly in the resources that Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) have to offer.

At DHHS, employee assistance is provided through a contract with [Deer Oaks EAP](#), which offers a remarkably wide range of services. Deer Oaks provides information, referral, and support, free of charge, to you and your dependents during times of need. Benefits of Deer Oaks Employee Assistance Program were explained in detail in a recent article in the [Connections newsletter](#).

"Everyone has a breaking point," said Loveless. "EAP works. It's there to help us. Use it if you need it."



[Deer Oaks EAP](#)

User name = son; Password = son

The Gentle Art of Forgiveness

“Life is too short to hold a grudge, also too long.” Robert Brault

By Richard Mettler,
Human Resources and Development

Positive, productive relationships among employees are important to organizational success. Too often, relationships are damaged by misdeeds or perceived injustices between employees. Sometimes these take the form of ‘grudges’—continuing resentments that can interfere with effective, productive work.

Some grudges last so long the people involved no longer remember how they got started.

When we find ourselves having bad feelings about another person, the first step is to recognize it and ask, ‘What part did I play in this, and how can I make this better?’ There is a saying, “That which we cannot stand in others, we cannot see in ourselves.” With a long, drawn out grudge with another person, there’s a good chance that we’re accusing the other person of faults we have ourselves.

Try the following: Privately, think of someone against whom you’ve been holding a long-time grudge. Think about things that this person does and says that bother you most.

Now, being as honest with yourself as you are able, ask: ‘Do any of these traits remind me of myself?’ There’s a good

chance that you will see glimpses of yourself in this other person as if a reflection in a mirror. As Carl Jung said, “Everything that irritates us about others can lead us to an understanding of ourselves.”

The real work of forgiveness begins at the individual level of self-awareness. Accordingly, before we are able to forgive others for their faults, we must be prepared to examine the faults that we find in ourselves.

Forgiveness need not involve conversation with the other person. Forgiveness can be a private act that we do for ourselves to reclaim personal power.

*“Forgiveness is not something we always do for other people. Sometimes we do it for ourselves to get well and move on.”
Kemmy Nola*

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

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



Cultivating Happiness in Life with Activities Small and Large

What is happiness, and how does it happen? Some might be sad to find out that happy doesn’t just happen, it has to be made, according to Kevin Daum. Daum is not a psychologist, minister or personal consultant, but he is an Inc. magazine top 500 entrepreneur and a bestselling author.

Happy people have several things in common, said Daum:

1. They clearly define happiness. They know what makes them happy and focus on making those things happen. Happiness is a personal objective reached by knowing what it looks like.
2. Little things please happy people. They are not waiting to win the lottery to be happy, truly happy people find joy in the small events and the world around them like spending time with family and friends, watching sunsets, enjoying their pets, etc.
3. They cultivate self confidence and focus their time and energy on opportunity and relationships.
4. Personal growth makes them happy, and they are committed to learning and personal development. They want to discover and challenge themselves.

5. They have a positive effect on people around them. Some create a happy atmosphere, but they try to brighten the day of others and inspire them with entertaining activity and conversation.
6. Happy people live in a state of constant gratitude and recognize their many blessings. They appreciate the people and opportunities that have come their way and demonstrate their gratitude generously and often.

Daum says being truly happy is not easy. But all efforts are worthwhile even when the path is slow.



In Gratitude

Letters to DHHS employees
helping people live better lives

Anita Haumont (Recreation Assistant and Volunteer Coordinator, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Geneva) in reference to a former YRTC-G youth and Project Everlast member,

This young woman has been an extraordinarily impactful and involved member in our Lincoln council and statewide work since her time on the Project Everlast- Geneva council. Just a few of her contributions include:

- Being elected by her peers as a representative to the statewide ELITE board (essentially, Project Everlast's Board of Directors);
- Serving on one of three Citizen Review Panels, where she reviews and makes recommendations on DHHS policy and practice;
- Helping guide activities and recruitment of the local Lincoln council;
- Speaking at a number of events including probation officer and foster parent trainings; and,
- Serving on the core committee for the DHHS System of Care for Youth and Children with Severe Emotional Disturbance, where she helps gather youth voices in an effort to create a state plan for serving youth with behavioral health concerns.

We've very much enjoyed having her so involved and are eternally grateful for the fire that was sparked and stoked while at YRTC-Geneva.

Thank you for all you do!

Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

Patricia Heimes (Social Services Worker, Omaha),

I realized after hanging up the phone with you last week that I did not thank you for your help. Or if I did say it, I want to reiterate it again.

You were incredibly kind and understanding to me during what I consider to be a time of crisis for me. Providing the information on how to access help with the rent, utilities bill, and SNAP benefits took so much stress and pressure off my heart.

You were also kind in directing me on how to access Medicaid for the girls.

A Thankful Client

Jana Peterson (Administrator, Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center, Kearney),

The Kearney Area Concerned Citizens (KACC) would like to thank you for your help with the annual KACC Free Thanksgiving Dinner. The entire dinner relies totally on volunteers, donated items, services and monetary donations. Thanks for all of the help of the boys! We appreciate everything you did.

Without the continued support of our wonderful community and neighbors, we would not be able to provide meals to those who do not have the funds to make a dinner or who have no family or place to go on Thanksgiving Day. Truly, without your continued support, this dinner would not be possible.

Thank you again!

Kearney Area Concerned Citizens

Delvin Koch (CEO, Beatrice State Developmental Center),

I am a sister and guardian of a resident of BSDC. I am writing to let you know about a couple of the direct-care staff employees who work with my brother.

Amber Lovitt and **Cassie Wallman** (both Developmental Technician IIs) have demonstrated professional and caring qualities on numerous occasions while caring for my brother. I have seen them at work in the apartment, off campus shopping or dining out with my brother, and in hospital or doctor office settings. They both show caring and compassion. My brother is in good hands while with them! They know how to keep him safe, warm, entertained and challenged.

I know there are many others who are involved with my brother's care. It takes a team of people, for sure! **Barb Coleman** (Interdisciplinary Team Leader/Qualified Developmental Disabilities Professional) and **Joleen Pike** (Nurse Practitioner), just to name a few. On behalf of my family, we are grateful to know that my brother is in a good place, surrounded by many caring people.

A Thankful Sister and Guardian

In Gratitude

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

Sometimes we paraphrase letters and/or shorten them slightly in order for us to include as many as possible.

JerriAnne Snyder (Social Services Worker, North Platte),

There are no words to tell you how much it means to me that you took the time for me. This card says it all.

The card reads...Every kindness has a part in bringing joy to someone's heart. It's sometimes easy to forget that there are nice people out there doing nice things for others. Thanks for being such a special reminder.

A Thankful Client

Emailed to **State Sen. Harms** and copied to others at DHHS:

The application online to apply for services was extremely easy to understand. I am on Social Security and I receive Medicaid, SNAP and Energy Assistance. I have called ACCESS many times in the last few years. Every single time I have called, I got through immediately, and I always spoke with a knowledgeable, friendly, courteous person who solved my problem, answered my questions or referred me correctly.

I had to write after seeing an article in the JournalStar online regarding problems with ACCESSNebraska. While there may be problems that I have not encountered, I wanted to add my voice. I have been very happy with ACCESSNebraska. It is very hard to be low income and to have to rely on public services to survive.

It is a bit embarrassing to have to call someone for help, especially in this environment when many public officials express so much hostility to poor people. Therefore, when I call and find friendly, helpful people who respect me and want to help, it is very gratifying. I trust that these employees are people who are trying very hard to do a good job and to do the right thing. I appreciate them for the help they have given me.

A Grateful Client

Michelle Eby (Social Services Supervisor, Lexington),

Today I called in for help to verify my case status and to see if there have been any changes. I got greeted by a friendly employee named **Deb Svoboda** (Social Services Worker, Lexington). She went above and beyond to figure out what my case was all about.

Deb understood exactly what was needing to be done and helped to relieve my stress for my upcoming delivery. I just wanted to take the time to let you know how much she (and the service she provided today) has been appreciated.

Thank you for hiring such a wonderful employee to assist others like me!

A Grateful Client

Diana Duran, DHHS Helpline, Lincoln

I want to say thank you for your work on [DHHS In the News](#), I look forward to this, and it has helped me do my job more effectively by knowing what is going on and what the public might bring up to me. In particular, I am sending this today, because I enjoyed the article from Dr Schaefer.

Cohen-Nelson,
DD Service Coordinator, Dakota City

Department of Health & Human Services



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

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