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HomeTalk

SPRING 2015

A magazine of the Nebraska Children's Home Society

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HomeTalk magazine is a publication of the Nebraska Children's Home Society.

This edition is dedicated to all NCHS employees.

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Front, inside cover and back cover photos by VWC Photography.

(Cover) Lexi, 5, daughter of Kris and Becky Wagner.

(Back) Gavin, 4, and Carson, 1, sons of Jeremy and Brooke Schwarz

(Inside cover) Kennedy, 1, daughter of Shawn and Kristen Phillips

The mission of Nebraska Children's Home Society is to provide safe and loving care to children of all ages.



Dear Friends of the Nebraska Children's Home Society,

You've probably read many times that the success of an organization depends on the performance of its employees. While this is true, at NCHS our employees are the heartbeat of the organization itself. It is only through their dedication, passion and hard work that we can deliver the outstanding results we do.



Let me tell you a little about them:

- They are educated: Of the more than 100 employees, over 40% have earned advanced degrees.
- They are dedicated: Many are on call 24/7 and will drop whatever they're doing and travel to wherever they are needed at a moment's notice to protect a child or help a family in need.
- They are statewide: We serve all 93 Nebraska counties out of 11 office locations statewide.

A few of the results:

- We have seen a significant growth in the number of kinship foster care placements.
- The number of families served by home visitation from July 1, 2014 - March 31, 2015 is 318.
- There has been a marked increase of support for families who have adopted a child or entered into guardianship. Currently, 50% more families are receiving post adoption services compared to this time last year.
- The number of teens served by our Teen Chat program has risen dramatically.

While these are some of the numbers, the true results are shown in the accounts you will read. In this issue of Hometalk you will hear some of the stories behind the people that make up the heartbeat of NCHS and their effect upon the children of the state of Nebraska. After reading them, I believe you, like myself, will be duly impressed with what they accomplish on a daily basis.

I could not be more proud to represent people of this caliber or be more humbled by the magnitude of their accomplishments. Please join me in recognizing the current staff for continuing to live up to the promise of NCHS for the last 122 years "providing safe and loving care for children of all ages".

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ed Cochran".

Ed Cochran, NCHS Board President, Nebraska Children's Home Society

Be sure to explore
the new NCHS website
www.nchs.org



HEALTHY BEGINNINGS



The Nebraska Children's Home Society provides home visitation services to support parents in creating healthy beginnings for their children. What started in Omaha has now spread to Beatrice and the opening of an additional NCHS office. NCHS currently has 169 active clients in all home visitation programming and serves Douglas, Sarpy, Gage and Jefferson counties.

The NCHS Children & Family Center (CFC) in North Omaha delivers two separate home visitation programs: Preventative home based services for teens and the Healthy Families America (HFA) program.

Through a contract with Early Childhood Services (ECS), NCHS has been working with teen parents in Douglas and Sarpy counties for five years delivering preventative home based services.

"A relationship has to be established with a family," said NCHS CFC Director Maria Nielsen. The average length of time a teen spends working with NCHS is 1.5 years, and that number is rising. "It shows that what we're doing is working," said Nielsen. "The relationships are making a difference." Teen clients in the ECS program also work to achieve goals and can acquire needed items such as diapers, dressers or cribs. They have access to the Learning Center, emphasizing a focus on graduating from high school and going on to college. According to Nielsen, the national average of teen parents that graduate from high school is 40%. At the CFC, 90% of the teen parents graduate from high school and go on to college.

(Left) NCHS Family Resource Specialist Alexis Woodward reads to Mia Avelino. (Right) Carlos Avelino's daughter, Mia, 19 months, shares a fist bump with Lovely Taylor, NCHS Mental Health Therapist, during a recent visit.



Contractual arrangements with Douglas County (Omaha) and Public Health Solutions (Beatrice) allow NCHS to deliver HFA programming in Douglas, Gage and Jefferson Counties. HFA strives to provide expectant and new parents the opportunity to receive the education and support they need at the time their baby is born. In Beatrice, children must be 4 months or younger to receive HFA services, and may stay in the program up to 3 years of age. In Omaha, children must be 3 months or younger and may stay in the program up to 5 years of age.

"We help with pregnancy, post-partum and connect clients to resources in the community," said Taylor Boyer, a NCHS Family Resource Specialist in Beatrice. "I enjoy going into the homes and having them say 'we did this activity together.' The clients are so grateful for our program." The activities that are a part of the program are fun, hands on and developmentally appropriate.

Becky Hansen, Public Health Solutions Program Supervisor, said the HFA program in Beatrice is going well. "This prevention program encourages parents to be the best parents that they can be." All NCHS home visitation programs are voluntary and referrals are welcome.

06.06-06.08



June 6-8th, 2014
Sand In The City®

Over 25,000 people attended the 11th annual event and saw downtown Omaha transformed into a sand-sculpture wonderland. The event brought in more than \$150,000 in proceeds and donations for Nebraska Children's Home Society.

07.13



July 13, 2014
Kids & Dreams Dinner

Over 200 guests gathered at the Younes Conference Center in Kearney for the 1st Annual Kids & Dreams Fundraising Banquet which raised over \$17,000 for NCHS.



BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING FAMILIES

One thing that NCHS has always been committed to is providing the highest quality services to our clients. NCHS is unique in that, as an organization, we ensure that all employees have the opportunity to take a Circle of Security®-Parenting (COS®-P) class. Through the class, employees gain a better understanding of the attachment process and path to security in relationships. In our daily work we will be better equipped to recognize how our own past experiences may impact our current relationships and how to respond to our clients' needs. In turn, this will enhance our interactions with each other and support personal growth. This speaks to NCHS's commitment to better understand ourselves and our clients and illustrates our dedication to providing quality services. To date, staff in foster care, permanency services, early childhood education, home visitation, pregnancy and adoption services, and parenting support and education have attended COS®-P classes facilitated by NCHS staff.

The COS®-P program is an 8-week program based on years of research about

how to best support and strengthen parent-child relationships. It is designed to help parents give their children a feeling of security and confidence so their children explore, learn, grow and build positive relationships. Parents who complete the class say their children are now more understanding of other's emotions, have stronger self-esteem, and have happier, more positive relationships with their parents and other children.

NCHS has 8 registered facilitators in COS®-P across the state. NCHS is dedicated to bringing continued support to caregivers and providing the opportunity to learn this evidence based approach to building secure attachments in their relationships with their children.

NCHS Lincoln Caseworkers Becky McElhose and Bobbi Richard are trained as Circle of Security®-Parenting facilitators and have taken the class outside the agency to communities across Nebraska.

"When you go through the Circle of Security Training it makes you take a hard look at your own parenting and how you were parented which can get uncomfortable sometimes. But having this happen makes you empathetic when you watch participants each have their own "ah-ha" moment during

NCHS Mental Health Therapist Lessa Dzuris, LMHP (above), trains the foster care team during a recent Circle of Security®-Parenting class at NCHS Leopard Conference Center. Below from left: Sue Ann Tripp, Auburn Head Start Center Manager and NCHS Caseworkers Bobbi Richard and Becky McElhose work together to provide COS®-P classes to families in Auburn, NE.

the course of the classes," Richards said. "The beauty of it is that you also learn it is NEVER too late!"

Becky and Bobbi have worked with teen mothers at the Youth Rehabilitation Center in Geneva, NE. They also partnered with Early Head Start in Auburn, supporting parents as they navigate the joys and challenges that go along with raising children. "I enjoy hearing the circle stories that they come back with each week!" McElhose said.

Meeting weekly not only allows for continued learning, but also creates an environment of trust. Participants build relationships with the facilitators and each other, allowing them to support one another after the 8-week session is completed.

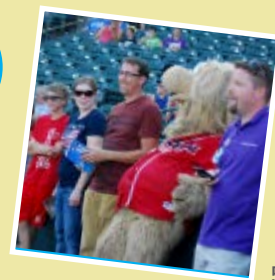


07.14

July 14, 2014
Kearney Golf Outing
 Greg Ernst, Nick Erdman, Tim Valleau and Kurtis VenJohn were the 2014 Fairways & Greens for Kids & Dreams Golf Tournament winners.

07.25

July 25, 2014
Saltdogs baseball
 Friends and families enjoyed NCHS night at the ballpark while cheering on the Saltdogs.



PATHWAYS TO THE FUTURE

Right Turn® is expanding and serves ALL Nebraska adoptive families. Families formed through international, domestic infant, private or foster care adoption now have full access to Right Turn's® adoption-specific supports and services.

Families served by Right Turn® have received quality support and 98% share that they would refer a friend.

Since its inception, Right Turn® has become a leader in post-adoption

services, supporting adoptive and guardianship families, plus identifying gaps and barriers to services and responding to those needs. Originally designed as a support service primarily for families who adopted or took guardianship of children formerly in the foster care system, Right Turn® has grown to include six core services: Permanency Support Services, Respite Care Connections, Mental Health Connections, Parent2Parent Network, Training and Education, and Support Groups and Family Activities.



08.14

August 14, 2014

Book Signing

NCHS hosted a book signing featuring authors Nancy Kacirek Feldman and Rebecca Crofoot. The former client and former NCHS caseworker teamed up to share their story in *Family Medical History: Unknown/Adopted- How a routine inquiry led to unexpected answers for an adopted woman*. The book is available for purchase at BecknanBooks.com, Amazon, or contact the NCHS, Durham office.



Right Turn® helps families stay together. All children in the Nebraska foster care system have experienced extensive trauma and loss in their lives. The symptoms of trauma and loss often interfere with healthy adjustment and stability. Despite these challenges, 99% of the 730 families who participated in Permanency Support Services (just one Right Turn® service) say they received the support they needed to remain together as a family. In total, Right Turn® served over 150 families in Permanency Support Services in 2014 alone.

Not only does Right Turn® work to improve the lives of individual families, program leadership has focused on creating long-term impact by building a powerful statewide adoption community through education and support for professionals working with adoptive families. Because adoption is such a specialized field, Right Turn® now offers regular and consistent training opportunities across Nebraska—from Omaha to Scottsbluff. Right Turn® has implemented 'Training for Adoption Competency' (TAC), a national program that trains mental health practitioners to better understand adoption as a specialty. Training for Adoption Competency has been offered in Omaha, Kearney, and is currently being offered in Lincoln. The training has been made possible through a partnership with Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska and the Center for Adoption Support and Education.

“I loved your program! Your staff was very helpful and very respectful to our situation.”

-Parent, 2014

“In Right Turn, I found a “safe” place to talk about our issues to someone who had real strategies to help us deal with and understand our son’s issues. Staff did an amazing job of listening and at the same time, helping us understand our son.”

-Parent, 2014.

In 2014 alone, other individual family successes include:

- A family got an accurate mental health diagnosis for their child and was able to connect to a therapist who is making a difference.
- A child who did not like to be touched now asks for hugs from his mother.
- A family struggling financially was able to access community resources to alleviate the stress.
- A child received answers to unanswered questions about his/her birth family.
- A teen is now on track to graduate high school with some additional school supports.
- A parent struggling with a health condition obtained respite to have additional time to rest and recover.

to the post-adoption and guardianship issues that arose from Nebraska’s original Safe Haven law in 2008. Right Turn® is a program of Lutheran Family Services of Nebraska and Nebraska Children’s Home Society.

More information regarding Right Turn® is available at www.RightTurnNE.org.

The Right Turn team is made up of employees from Lutheran Family Services and Nebraska Children’s Home Society.

Right Turn® was created in response

09.14-
09.15



September 14-15, 2014

Birth Mother Retreat

Birth mothers met for the highly anticipated retreat held at the Leadership Conference Center in Aurora. The weekend includes support, activities, learning sessions and s’mores! Special thanks to the generous donors who allow NCHS to provide the retreat every other year at no cost for our birth mothers.



ENGAGING COMMUNITIES

By Tonya Moore

My journey with NCHS began in 2006. My position was to do Outreach in the North Omaha Community and to serve as a trainer for our prospective adoptive families. We were known as the “house on the hill” but no one really knew what we did in this house. Many people thought we still had children who lived here and that we were affiliated with the State of Nebraska due to the name “Nebraska Children’s Home”. This had a negative connotation to it due to some of the mistrust the community had for the state when it came to the children who had been involved within the system.



I worked diligently to build relationships within the community and joined many outreach efforts within the North Omaha district. In 2008 a leadership team was formed to conduct a Fontenelle Needs Assessment with community members and stakeholders who resided in zip codes 68104 and 68111. The needs assessment was made possible by a grant from the Compassion Capital Fund of the AIM

Institute. Our intent was to involve the community in what services we were planning to offer at the historical NCHS Fontenelle site. The needs assessment showed a need in four areas: employment, education, crime/incarceration/re-entry into the community and parenting. The education component included parents, youth, grandparents caring for their grandchildren and teen parents. The unemployment and poverty rates in the target area are very high.



09.22

September 22, 2014

Celebrating Miles

Miles Havekost, NCHS Chief Resources Officer, retired after 13 years in the finance and human resources department. Thank you for your service Miles!

09.30

September 30, 2014

Beatrice Open House

NCHS and Public Health Solutions staff and friends joined in a ribbon cutting ceremony during the grand opening of an additional NCHS office in Beatrice.



The Teen Chat program in North Omaha was developed in 2008 as a result of this assessment. I began to serve as the Lead Facilitator for this program and truly found my passion! The program supports development of self empowerment with emphasis on goal setting, self efficacy, and prevention of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases. We utilize two evidence based curriculums that cultivate personal and collective strengths. We have built positive and trusting relationships in this program which has proven to be effective. We have several young ladies that have attended in the past and now their younger siblings and relatives are joining us! Teen Chat graduates also provide peer-to-peer education and our facilitators provide one on one mentoring and support after the young ladies have finished the sessions. We serve 200 teen girls annually aged 13 to 18 years.

We have recently expanded the program to include South Omaha, Grand Island, Hastings, Kearney and Norfolk. Stakeholder advisory meetings are being held to engage the community members to discuss the implementation of new programming in their areas.

Teen Chat participants Emily Hatcher (left) and Rashawn Sweet.
The NCHS Teen Chat team: Back row from left; Megan Wulf, Kat Jarvis (Replication Coordinator) and Teri Wendel. Front row from left; Esmeralda Bravo-Ramos, Tonya Moore (Youth Education Supervisor CFC) and AshLynn Samuel. Not pictured, Sara Sanson.

THIS IS WHAT PAST PARTICIPANTS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT TEEN CHAT...

1. You have to love yourself and respect yourself before you can love and respect someone else.
2. What I have learned is that I am beautiful. I am unique and different and that there is no one else like me.
3. This program really empowers young ladies to be strong.
4. I loved my teachers, the conversation was real.
5. You have inspired me to do many things. You're a great person with a huge heart. Thanks for giving me a place to come and be open with my problems.
6. How can I sign up for the next session?



10.03

October 3, 2014
Homegrown
 The NCHS BRANCH Board hosted the 8th Annual Homegrown at Regency Court in Omaha. The evening featured local beer and wine tasting along with a photo exhibit of NCHS clients by Valerie Wallace-Camp.



10.10

October 10, 2014
NCHS All-Staff Retreat
 Employees gathered at Camp Carol Joy Holling in Ashland, NE, for the 1st Annual All-Staff Retreat. The day included team building activities in the morning, lunch, and time in the afternoon to explore, take a ride on a zip line, hike or brave the ropes course.

SAND IN THE CITY® 2014

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Give Days

Please consider making your appeal gift through one of the 3 days of local on-line giving happening during May.



Go Big Give – Grand Island

May 1, 2015
gobiggive.org



Omaha Gives – Omaha

May 20, 2015
omahagives24.org



Give to Lincoln – Omaha

May 28, 2015
givetolincoln.razoo.com/giving_events/g2115/home

Each May, National Foster Care Month provides an opportunity to shine a light on the experiences of the children and youth in the foster care system. Our goal is to raise awareness about the urgent needs of these young people and encourage citizens from every walk of life to get involved—as foster or adoptive parents, volunteers, mentors, employers or in other ways.



11.22

November 22, 2014 National Adoption Day

Children across the country joined their forever families on National Adoption Day. NCHS staff, from across the state, were present at celebrations, including foster care team members in Omaha (left). At right, Kate displays her new initials, freshly painted on her cheek, with mother Stacey Tams.



Save the Date

NCHS's Sand in the City® – Omaha
 Sand Sculpting Competition – June 5, 2015
 Family Fun Days – June 6-7, 2015

Annual Meeting of Trustees
 June 25, 2015

Fairways & Greens for Kids & Dreams – Kearney
 Dinner – July 12, 2015
 Golf Tournament – July 13, 2015

Neighborhood Celebration – Children & Family Center – Omaha
 August 1, 2015

Saltdogs Baseball – Lincoln
 August 21, 2015

Special Event - Details coming soon! – Omaha
 September 17, 2015

Homegrown – Omaha
 October 9, 2015

Thankful Hearts – North Platte
 November 14, 2015

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12.00

December 2014
Project Elf
 Project Elf celebrated 125 years. Over 1,500 gifts were donated and distributed to NCHS clients across the state to ensure a merry Christmas for all.

01.08

January 8, 2014
Arbor Street Open House
 NCHS staff, board members and friends gathered to tour the new NCHS Foster Care facility in Omaha.





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