

HHS A Connection

JANUARY 2009 A Monthly Newsletter for the Employees of San Diego County Health & Human Services Agency

“Little Bit of Comfort” Project Provides a Whole Lot of Love

When **Christine Bodle**, Office Support Specialist for North Inland Child Welfare Services, volunteered to help coordinate an effort to provide hand-knit blankets for foster children, little did she know the buzz it would create. In the seven months since the “Little Bit of Comfort” project started, over 170 blankets have been hand-knit by staff and community volunteers. When word of the project spread to fellow knitting co-workers and community members, the outpouring of support skyrocketed. One staff member alone knit 39 blankets. Community knitters included an 81-year-old foster grandmother, a 72-year-old who lost her home in the 2007 fires and several members of a local British Club.

Many of the blankets were given to North County foster children at a special event in Escondido on December 9. Social workers, staff knitters, community volunteers and **Aaron Byzak**, Policy Advisor for Supervisor **Pam Slater-Price**, all pitched in to tie ribbons and tags on the blankets. The remainder of the blankets were distributed to foster families by social workers during home visits.

This special project shows the deep-rooted caring of employees and their community partners for these most vulnerable infants and toddlers, particularly during the holiday season. For more information on the project call (760) 480-3404.



In the photo above, North Regions Assistant Deputy Director **Ruth Suranovich** (far left) and **Aaron Byzak** from Supervisor **Pam Slater-Price**'s office (second from left) were on hand to help North Inland Child Welfare Services staff and community partners distribute the hand-knit blankets to foster children. Below, **Rose Luna** from North Inland Child Welfare Services and Byzak help a foster child pick out a blanket. Luna knit 39 of the 170 blankets as part of the “Little Bit of Comfort” project.

HEALTH NEWS

New Year's Resolutions

VIDEO



INNOVATION

Leading Through Innovation at All Levels of HHSA

Anticipating problems in the workplace followed by proactively preventing them from taking place...“thinking out of the box” in improving our client services... seeking creative alternatives when faced with a crisis...these are just a few examples of the critical importance that innovation plays in our Agency’s ability to fulfill its mission of public service.

It boils down to a core belief we hold in the Agency – always discovering new ways to help those in need of our assistance. Along with the dedicated hard work that we continually invest into our Agency’s operating model, we have earned the reputation of being a truly innovative team. The Agency is an organization comprised of talented and committed public servants who make a positive difference in the lives of San Diegans each and every day. So, innovation as a cornerstone of our Agency’s success requires everyone’s constant vigilance and persistence in maintaining this forward-thinking practice.

Yes, everyone! No matter how small or noticeable the improved changes are to our customers, these changes add up. Imagine if we each came up with one improvement towards our operational efficiency. That would be over 5,000 innovations! These customer service opportunities are endless and many of them are from within our own organization. The challenge is for us to seek them out.

Now, we need a “can-do” state of mind to get there. HHSA Deputy Director **Pam Smith** often talks about thinking in an “aim frame” rather than “blame frame” state of mind. In a future issue of our newsletter, I’ll talk about what it means being a strength-based organization. But for now, consider this – we need everyone’s unique talents to thrive on formulating and introducing novel concepts of

doing business better (of course, based in today’s dry-eyed reality). Never before has it been more critical that we encourage and cultivate these attributes in ourselves. During this time, when resources are limited and there’s little light at the end of the financial tunnel (it’s more like a black hole at this point), we must take advantage of our greatest asset: brainpower from within each of us and our collective teams!

As much as I appreciate your ability to meticulously conduct your administrative tasks and duties while at work... your ideas are equally valuable to our Agency.

The County of San Diego rewards innovative thinking. Do you have a great idea that will make a difference to HHSA and to our customers? Speak up at your next staff meeting or submit a DIBBS (Do It Better By Suggestion) by [clicking here](#). Learn more about knowledge workers by [clicking here](#).

In the coming months, as part of the General Management System (GMS) 2.0, you will hear about the concept of the “knowledge worker.” These are employees who:

- Stay current with information, technology and trends in their field and cross-disciplines;
- Remain flexible and adapt easily to job and workplace changes;
- Take personal accountability and pride in completing their work with quality and efficiency in mind;
- Use sound judgment at all times;
- Take personal responsibility for their own success, the success of the department and of the County;
- Recognize their job is a key part of

From the Director’s Desk

a coordinated system of individuals, teams, and departments working together with and in the community; and lastly,

■ Demonstrate drive and initiative – whatever it takes (legally and ethically, of course) to get the job done better, faster and more efficiently for the people we serve each day.



Nick Macchione

Imagine what we can accomplish when every employee is motivated and encouraged to demonstrate these attributes! True innovation is abundant where knowledge workers abound. Employees feel invested in our mission when ideas are not just heard – but solicited. This was evident on December 10th where I had the honor to witness eight of our HHSA employees receive awards from Chairman **Greg Cox** and Vice-Chairwoman **Dianne Jacob**. They were being recognized for their Do-It-Better-By-Suggestions (DIBBS) that lead to actual savings and improved services for the County. I hope to attend next year’s ceremony to an oversized crowd of HHSA awardees!

In that regard, it is my directive that all Agency executives, managers and supervisors initiate open dialogue with employees to gain input and ideas for improving the many different types of services we provide each and every day. Employees are expected to think beyond the scope of their position to explore how the Agency can change and improve. The best kind of change takes place when our employees on the front line discover, support and implement new ways of doing better business in serving our customers. Working together, we shall become truly innovative by adopting the mindset of the knowledge worker.



INNOVATION

Innovation for Transformation

By Alfredo Aguirre
Deputy Director,
Mental Health Services

As the old saying goes, necessity is the mother of invention. I think everyone will agree that the current financial situation is pushing all of us to face changes, whether we want to or not. It can be frightening, but it can also be a huge opportunity for innovation. Some of the best ideas come out of being forced to re-think and re-engineer our service models.

The County of San Diego, and the Health & Human Services Agency, is known throughout the state to be ahead of the curve when it comes to government innovations. Never willing to wait for the State to set the pace, Mental Health Services has been demonstrating new strategies since the mid 90's including: upgrading of our data system, developing an electronic health record serving 3,500 users (expected to be a national model), telepsychiatry (linking clients in North County to professional care via teleconferencing), and our "clubhouse," designed for 18 – 24-year old clients, to help bridge their needs in transitioning to successful adulthood.

In November of 2004, California voters passed Prop 63 (the Mental Health Services Act, or MHSA) to transform the community mental health system. One of the funded components of Prop 63, called "Innovations," will provide resources to develop innovative programs designed to increase access to underserved groups, improve quality of services, and strengthen interagency collaboration.

San Diego County already leads the way in a number of programs. By building on our momentum, MHSA will expand on our rich legacy of innovative care.

2008 HHS DIBBS Winners



*Beth Olin, center, received DIBBS awards of over \$3,000 from Agency Director **Nick Macchione**, left, and Board of Supervisors Chairman **Greg Cox**, right.*

Several Agency employees claimed DIBBS (Do It Better By Suggestion) awards, including one winner of over \$3,000. **Beth Olin** received a \$2,895 Tangible Award and a \$323.76 Productivity Award for her DIBBS suggestion that resulted in nearly \$26,000 in savings for the County.

Olin proposed having conservator reestablishment hearings conducted via closed circuit televisions from Superior Court locations to state hospitals. This eliminated the need to transport patients from state hospitals, saving staff time and associated costs.

The rest of the award winners claimed \$50 Intangible Awards:



**Deborah Jordan/
Judy Wonders (shared)**



Stacy Cox



Tracey Hazel



Warren Hoyt

Not Pictured: Yvette Navarro and Matthew Ray

DIBBS winners are awarded for achieving the following:

Tangible Savings: This category is defined as a reduction in a budgeted expense or as an increase in revenue. For example: a savings in the cost of supplies, equipment, materials or positions. The maximum potential total award is \$20,000.

Productivity Savings: This category is defined as a reduction in the amount of staff time needed to accomplish a particular task that can be reallocated to another task. The maximum cash award is \$1,000.

Intangible Savings: This category is defined by benefits that cannot be calculated in dollars or time savings. For example: an improvement in a procedure or service to the public or improved employee morale. The award is a one-time cash award of \$50.



Promoting Preteen Health

One of the best ways to keep your preteen healthy is with a visit to the doctor at 11 or 12 years of age. Preteens need to have their immunization records checked to see if they are missing important shots, like those that protect them from meningitis and pertussis (whooping cough). Why? Immunity from some vaccines decreases over time, so preteens need a booster dose to stay protected. Also, preteens are at greater risk of catching diseases like meningitis.

Preteen (11-12 years old) Vaccine Checklist

- Tdap (tetanus, diphtheria, pertussis)
- Meningococcal
- Influenza (annually)
- HPV

If you're a parent of a preteen, make it a goal to schedule a visit with your doctor now, and urge other parents to do so, too. January 18-24 is Preteen Vaccine Week, a statewide promotion of preteen doctor visits and immunizations.

Have questions? Contact Melissa Crase, Health Promotion Specialist (619) 692-8805 or Melissa.Crase@sdcounty.ca.gov. Also, visit the San Diego Immunization Branch preteen vaccine web pages by clicking [here](#).

Agency Employees Hone Management Skills

The County of San Diego offers employees an opportunity to continue their professional growth and development through Dynamic Management Seminars (DMS). County leadership supports this training program and promotes the continuous development of skills, knowledge and abilities.

DMS is held every Friday for three months and participants attend courses on such diverse topics as coaching, Generation XY, Labor Relations, Political Dynamics and Customer Satisfaction.

In 2008, the Agency had several DMS graduates: **Jean Avila, Liza Cabigas, Denise Blaine, Paulina Bobenrieth, Joseph Coyne, Barry Fox, Deni Gradwohl, Laura Hattaway, Katherine Howard, Audrey Lopez, Linda Nuzzo, Savi Swick and Tonya Torosian.**

If you have any questions regarding the Dynamic Management Seminars, please contact the Employee Development Division at 619-578-5774.

Staff Toy Donations Fulfill Wish Lists



California Children Services (CCS) Central Administration staff, left photo, donated new toys to the CCS Medical Therapy Units, right photo. The units provide physical and occupational therapy for many disabled children throughout San Diego County. Each unit created a "wish list" of toys that could be incorporated into therapy programs for individual children.



Project Homeless Connect: a One-stop Shop for Those Most in Need

Free food, clothing, medical/dental exams, haircuts, entertainment, and services for pets – sounds like a good time, right? About 750 homeless individuals enjoyed a welcome reprieve from the stresses of their daily lives and a valuable link to needed services during Project Homeless Connect.

Project Homeless Connect is an annual event organized by the Regional Task Force on the Homeless. It serves as a one-stop shop for people living on the streets or in temporary shelters. Representatives from Behavioral Health Services participated in the community event along with a multitude of other service providers.

Shelly Tregembo and **Velia Fematt**, of Behavioral Health Services, were on hand to offer information about the full array of Alcohol & Drug and Mental Health Services. Clinicians from several Mental Health facilities provided screening and referral services on site, and Southeast Mental Health provided two San Diego State University social work interns who helped guests find needed information. Additionally, contractors including Pathfinders and University of California San Diego Dual Disorders Program had booths.

“It was a long day, but rewarding. There was a long line to get in all day.” - Velia Fematt



Other Agency staff were also on hand to help people with food stamps, general relief, housing information, employment services and childcare. Public Health Services donated 300 flu shots and provided STD and HIV testing. The event also featured help with social security, spiritual counseling, legal help, and info for veterans, women, GLBT, and youth.

Sally Dunn, left, from North Central Mental Health offered shelter and housing resources, and **Angela Simoneau**, Senior Psychiatric Social Worker with Southeast Mental Health provided mental health triage.

It's Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) Time

Did you know that January 30, 2009 is National Earned Income Tax Credit Awareness Day? The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) program was created in 1975 by the Internal Revenue Service to help lift low-income working families and individuals out of poverty.

Since the program's countywide implementation in 2003, more than \$57 million federal and state tax dollars have been returned to our communities. The EITC program remains one of the most effective anti-poverty strategies, helping individuals and families achieve self-sufficiency and greater financial stability.

For tax year 2008, individuals and families may receive between \$438 and \$4,824 from the IRS by claiming the credit. Single filers who earned less than \$12,880 may receive as much as \$438. If your family earned less than \$41,646 and you are married and filing jointly with two or more children, you may be eligible for \$4,824 in credit. Many families may also qualify for up to \$1,000 for each child in Child Tax Credit. To find a no-cost tax preparation site near you call 2-1-1.



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We're Prepared! Contest Winners Announced

We have heard it a thousand times: it's not **if** the next disaster will hit - it's **when**. With the ongoing threat of wildfires, earthquakes or flooding, it becomes increasingly important to prepare ourselves and our loved ones for an impending emergency.

Several Agency employees, including **Lora Guillen, Rudy Pallares, Jenny Pietila, Lisa Purser** and **Harold Toothacre**, took this to heart by participating in the 2008 HHSa We're Prepared! Contest. Each completed a family disaster plan and gathered enough food, water and supplies to ensure that they and their family can survive for at least three days in their home and vehicle without assistance. Each participant won a great prize for completing the contest.

The overall contest winner was Jenny Pietila, from Strategic Planning & Operational Support. She enlisted the help of her husband and two young sons and submitted photos of them completing the plan. "I have always felt that failing to plan is planning to fail," said Pietila. "My family's safety and security is number one and of course being a disaster service worker, there may be a need to leave them to help others

and I want to make sure they are safe and secure."

Harold Toothacre, from Central Region, agreed and added, "I realize that it may not be feasible to have to rely on others to help me or my family in an emergency."

Lisa Purser learned first-hand how important planning is. A week after completing her emergency kit with her family, she and her husband went to dinner on a rainy night. While her kids were at home with the babysitter, someone hit an electrical pole and knocked out the power to the whole street. The babysitter called Lisa at dinner and she could hear her boys crying in the background. She told the babysitter to have the boys go to the emergency kit and get the flashlight. Her boys knew exactly what to do.

Jenny, Harold, Lora, Rudy and Lisa each found important reasons to prepare for an emergency. Have you thought about your reasons to complete a family disaster plan?

[Click here for information on creating a family disaster plan.](#)

Do you work with someone who deserves to be recognized in the Employee Spotlight?

Each month the HHSa Connection Employee Spotlight will feature one of your co-workers. If you know someone who provides excellent customer service, works hard at their job or is just an interesting person with a story to tell, you can submit their name for the Employee Spotlight.

To nominate someone for the Employee Spotlight, simply send an email to thomas.christensen@sdcounty.ca.gov with Employee Spotlight in the subject line.

Tell us the employee's name, where they work and why you think they should be featured in the employee spotlight. It's that simple!

Employee Spotlight

For most Californians, when they hear the name Arnold they automatically think of Governor Schwarzenegger. Not around HHSa. Anytime anyone mentions the name Arnold, they think of **Arnold De Guzman**, Graphic Design Specialist with the Office of Media and Public Affairs. He also handles all the audio-visual duties.

De Guzman has been a lifesaver for many HHSa employees making presentations, giving trainings or conducting press events.

"He did an exorbitant amount of work on the Administrative Secretary's appreciation event," said **Jenny Pietila**, Administrative Secretary III, Strategic Planning and Operational Support. "He brought all the equipment and set it all up. Everything went smoothly and he went above and beyond the call of duty."

De Guzman's job includes a wide variety of duties. He provides audio-visual consulting and support, graphic design materials, HHSa website content support, backs up the audio/visual services at County Board meetings and more.

The newest addition to his workload is video production, which has him excited.

"It's new for HHSa and I'm looking forward to producing videos for the Agency," said De Guzman. "My background is heavily in video production and I'm glad I'll get to share my talents with HHSa."