

HIGHLIGHTS

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Director's Report

by Connie Beck

► As 2022 winds down, I've spent some time reflecting on what we have accomplished here at DHHS over the past year. While we have many new things going on all the time, I am happy to say that this year we were able to finish some longer-term projects.



In late May, The Center at McKinleyville opened its doors. The Center has been in the works for years and is a partnership between the McKinleyville Family Resource Center, DHHS, Open Door, Cal Poly Humboldt Social Work Department, North Coast Children's Services and Trinidad Rancheria Tribal Social Services. Having so many agencies and programs under the same roof promotes warm handoffs and helps to break down barriers for our clients.

In Behavioral Health news, a location has been secured to open a local Crisis Residential Treatment facility for adults. This comes just over a year after the Board of Supervisors approved DHHS's request to allocate funding to establish and run a sub-acute transitional facility for adults experiencing mental health crises. The facility will be for people who need around-the-clock services to reduce admissions into Sempervirens (SV), the county's locked psychiatric facility, or people who need an intermediary place to go directly after being discharged from SV. Renovations on the 10-bed facility are expected to start soon, and the facility is expected to open in fall 2023.

Earlier this year, Public Health was [continued on page 2](#)



The DHHS Nurse-Family Partnership team gathers for a group photo with the Tooth Fairy at a graduation event for program participants earlier this year.

Nurse-Family Partnership guides eligible first-time families from pregnancy to age two

► Since the Nurse-Family Partnership program launched in Humboldt County in 2009, nearly 840 families have graduated, and program providers are encouraging new families to see if they qualify.

Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) is an evidence-based program administered by DHHS. The voluntary prevention program provides nurse home visitation services to income-qualifying, first-time mothers. Nurses begin home or field visits early in the mother's pregnancy and continue visitation until the child's second birthday.

Nurses provide support, education and counseling on health, development and self-sufficiency issues.

Previously a labor and delivery nurse, Public Health Nurse Michelle Mirallegro joined NFP about 3 ½ years ago because she said she wanted to be able to connect with families in a more meaningful way. "I really find the pregnancy and birth time in a woman's life so very transformative," she said. "I was looking to have a more lasting connection with these families." Currently, Mirallegro is working with 24 families

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Stay healthy this cold and flu season

by Gunnar Stoddard, Public Health Communicable Disease Investigator

► Cold and flu season has begun, and this year a viral triad of influenza (flu), COVID-19 and respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) is fueling increases in rates of reported respiratory illnesses nationwide, and some experts are warning of an impending "Tridemic." Most of us are familiar with COVID-19 at this point, but it is important to understand each virus, the illnesses they cause, the risks they pose and how

to prevent continued spread.

Influenza

Influenza is a contagious respiratory illness caused by influenza viruses. Illness can range from mild to severe and is usually associated with the following symptoms: Fever, cough, sore throat, runny/stuffy nose, body aches, headaches and fatigue. Anyone can get the

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Director's Report, continued from page 1

awarded a \$1.5 million grant for three years from the County Medical Services Program Local Indigent Care Needs Grant Program. This funding will support the expansion of the hepatitis C virus (HCV) testing program, make it possible to launch a second mobile van to bring outreach services, including syringe services, referrals for housing, medical insurance, health care and drug and alcohol treatment programs, and HCV and HIV testing to more parts of the county. The funding will also be used to hire a second HCV Care Coordinator.

In October, the Board of Supervisors approved equity increases for the Social Services Eligibility Specialist Series as well as incentives for three classifications of staff and for new hires once they pass probation. The classifications include the Eligibility Specialist, Integrated Caseworker and Employment and Training Worker series. We also changed the Eligibility series to continuous recruitment. Applicant interviews are now scheduled for every other week instead of every few months.

Finally, earlier this year, Child Welfare Services' Stipulated Supplemental judgment with the California Department of Justice ended after implementing all corrective actions from the 2018 settlement. I appreciate CWS staff who have committed themselves to systems change for children and families. We are grateful to work closely with tribal staff, the Sheriff's Office and other law enforcement and community partners and will continue this work and these collaborations to build on the improvements we've made so far.

Our staff and partners' dedication to the children and families in our community makes me proud to be a resident of this county and the director of this department.

To learn more about our staff and what they do here at DHHS, [watch our Employee Spotlights on Youtube.](#)

I hope you all get some time to relax a little during the holiday and spend some time with those you care about. ◀

NFP, continued from page 1

who live between McKinleyville and Shelter Cove. She meets with them regularly in person and through telehealth.



From left, NFP participant Adamay Titus celebrates graduating from the program with her daughter Grace and her NFP Nurse Chanda Pifferini.

Supervising Public Health Nurse Kathryn O'Malley has been with the program since it began and said it is one of the most rigorously tested of its kind. She said NFP has repeatedly shown that mothers and children who have participated demonstrate significantly improved prenatal health, increased maternal employment, improved child school readiness,

Social Services Report

by **Ryan Bishop**, Deputy Branch Director

▶ The Social Services Branch (SSB) has placed extra emphasis on training our staff this quarter. We have committed additional time and resources to training and cross-training because we believe that effective training and development improves employee retention and productivity, and better enables us to respond to high turnover rates.



First, I would like to mention that we successfully conducted two separate Eligibility Specialist Induction Courses and one Welfare-to-Work Induction Course that provided a robust foundation to our brand-new Eligibility

reduced involvement in crime, and less child abuse and neglect and fewer injuries.

"For me, the most valuable part of this program is helping first-time families navigate the first years of parenthood," O'Malley said. "It's such a positive program."

For more information about NFP, or to find out if you are eligible, call 707-268-2105 or text 844-637-6667.

Mirallegro said she encourages anyone who is eligible for the program to learn more about it. "Nurse-Family Partnership is totally voluntary, so even if you think it's something you wouldn't be interested in, you should check it out. Give it a try, you won't be held to staying for the full time if you choose not to," she said, adding, "The program is really guided by the participant. We really try to allow the clients to guide the information and education we provide. We really try to help them reach a goal that is important to them." ◀

Specialists, Integrated Caseworkers and Employment & Training Workers. These classroom-style training environments give our new staff the knowledge, skills and resources they need to begin their career of public service in the Eligibility and Employment job classifications.

Next, our Vocational Counselors, who assist DHHS clients with workforce development needs, have spent a significant amount of time internally cross training this quarter to ensure our Employment Training programs remain flexible and prepared to assist DHHS clientele with a variety of employment-related needs. SSB staff also participated in another successful All Hands Training Day on Oct. 10. All Hands Training Day is a county-wide, all-day event that allows staff time to complete critical mandatory

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Social Services, continued from page 2

trainings and a variety of professional development sessions that assist us in maintaining compliance of various federal, state and local laws and provide our staff valuable professional growth opportunities.

SSB also developed a new refresher training schedule for our more experienced staff. This training schedule consists of more than a dozen new trainings to address regulatory changes and quality assurance needs in our benefit programs such as CalWORKs, CalFresh, Medi-Cal and General Relief. The majority of our training topics are developed using feedback from staff and the most recent error trends data from our quality assurance reviews. These trainings are also developed with a variety of learning styles in mind and provide visuals, lectures and hands-on training opportunities.



Humboldt County recently received a Certificate of Excellence from CDSS.

Another reason we place this level of emphasis on training and resources is because we know quality trainings help us ensure that we maintain compliance with the law, and it better enables us to provide excellent service and accurate benefits to our community. SSB is also proud to announce that our continued focus on quality training and resources has paid off, and as a result of our 2022 Management Evaluation, the California Department of Social Services has awarded Humboldt County with a Certificate of Excellence for our internal processes and procedures that resulted in minimal CalFresh case review findings. ◀

Cold and flu season, continued from page 1

flu, but those at highest risk for developing severe complications are adults aged 65 or older, children under the age of 5, pregnant women and anyone with chronic medical conditions such as diabetes, asthma or cardiovascular disease.

Seasonal flu vaccines are updated annually to protect against the most recent strains in circulation.

COVID-19

COVID-19 is a highly contagious respiratory disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus. COVID-19 illness can range from mild to severe and is typically associated with the following symptoms: Fever, cough, shortness of breath, fatigue, body aches, headaches, new loss of taste or smell, sore throat, nasal congestion, nausea, vomiting and diarrhea.

Those at highest risk for developing severe COVID-19 disease include adults over the age of 65, and individuals who are immunocompromised or have underlying medical conditions such as chronic heart, kidney or lung disease. Pregnant women and women who recently gave birth are also at higher risk for developing severe COVID-19. Safe, effective vaccines and boosters are available to protect children and adults against severe COVID-19 disease.

For individuals who cannot receive a COVID-19 vaccine or do not mount a sufficient immune response against COVID-19 after vaccination, a pre-exposure, monoclonal antibody injection called EVUSHELD may be an option. The local test-to-treat site operated by OptumServe can also assist those infected with COVID-19 in acquiring free oral antivirals that can significantly reduce the chances of severe illness leading to hospitalization or death.

RSV

RSV is a respiratory virus that typically causes a mild, cold-like illness. Symptoms associated with RSV may

include runny nose, decreased appetite, coughing, sneezing, fever and wheezing. Most people infected with RSV will recover in one-to-two weeks, but RSV poses a significant risk to infants, young children and older adults. Premature infants, children under the age of 2, and children with pre-existing neuromuscular or immunocompromising conditions have the highest risk of developing severe illness from RSV. Progression of severe RSV in infants and young children can result in small airway inflammation and pneumonia.

There is currently no FDA-approved vaccine for RSV, but pre-exposure options are available for infants at high risk.

Adults at highest risk include people 65 and older, those with chronic heart or lung disease and those with weakened immune systems. RSV can also exacerbate pre-existing conditions such as asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and congestive heart failure.

Respiratory illnesses like flu, COVID-19 and RSV can be prevented with good respiratory hygiene including regular handwashing, avoiding close contact with individuals experiencing cold or flu-like symptoms, covering coughs and sneezes with a tissue or shirt sleeve and disinfecting high touch surfaces. Masking is also an effective countermeasure, with N95 or KN95 respirators providing the highest degree of protection. Babies and toddlers under 2 years old should not wear a mask.

Getting a seasonal flu shot, staying up to date on COVID-19 vaccinations, practicing good respiratory hygiene and masking offer several layers of protection against the three viral threats posed by this year's "Tridemic." To schedule a flu shot, contact your local pharmacy or primary care provider. To schedule a COVID-19 vaccine or bivalent booster, visit [MyTurn.ca.gov](https://www.myturn.ca.gov). ◀

Help Wanted

▶ DHHS is currently recruiting qualified applicants for a variety of positions. For a list of job opportunities, visit humboldt.gov/jobs and click Job Opportunities, or contact Employee Services at 707-441-5510. ◀



Peer Support recognized nationally

by Jack Breazeal, Behavioral Health Deputy Branch Director

► In September 2020, Governor Gavin Newsom signed into law Sente Bill 803. This bill allowed for the service



of peer support to be included as a Medi-Cal reimbursable intervention to assist those with behavioral health symptoms. Peer support has been recognized across the country as a vital and innovative way to help those suffering from mental health concerns. Peers are defined as those staff with lived experience who assist individuals in their journey toward recovery. Often this is done by offering strength and hope to the individual through the peer's own journey, in order to create a sense of resilience that fosters lasting change.

SB 803 defines peer support services as culturally competent services that promote engagement, socialization,

CWS Report

by Ivy Breen,
CWS Deputy Branch Director

► As Child Welfare Services begins to develop our agency's next five-year System Improvement Plan (SIP), I can't help but reflect on the last four years and think about the incredible accomplishments Child Welfare Services (CWS) has achieved.



There is always more work to be done, and in this discipline, the work cannot be paused or remotely slowed down, so when we are implementing new processes, we're required to build the plane as we're flying it, and that can be challenging! CWS staff's dedication and commitment to children and families has been evident through their resilience and fortitude to do the work on top of the work.

recovery, self-sufficiency, self-advocacy, development of natural supports and identification of strengths. These are provided through structured activities such as group and individual coaching, prevention services and education.

Humboldt County has long been a leader in its advocacy for peers and the valuable work they do. Most identifiable is the Hope Center, which is a peer-led program that is designed to promote recovery and strength while creating a support system for individuals in the community who need it most of all. Humboldt County has also strategically used peers in various other programs, including the Mobile Response Team, Comprehensive Community Treatment Team and the Transition-Age Youth program. In addition to this, Children's Behavioral Health has employed Parent Partners, who offer services to parents/caregivers of children needing services in order to help them better navigate the system and offer support and encouragement.

Since the rollout of this bill, Hum-

boldt County has been working both internally and with state-level partners on its certification process and overall implementation plan to allow for this service. Many of the Peers and Parent Partners are beginning the process of either getting certified through a "Grandparenting" process or starting their training and education requirements with the intent of certification once complete. Peers and Parent Partners will also need a minimum number of direct service hours to get certified. Through this effort the hope is to continue providing this valuable service to those in the community seeking Behavioral Health care, as well as to generate additional revenue through this billable service.

This new certification process and making peer support an eligible Medi-Cal intervention was the result of much advocacy and hard work at the state level. The great work our Peers and Parent Partners have done in this arena is recognized and appreciated, as is the ongoing efforts by Peer Support Specialists to get this certification. ◀

In June, Humboldt County CWS met all of the requirements within the Attorney General (AG) Stipulated Judgment, and court jurisdiction was lifted after a four-year period of being monitored by the AG and an external monitor. The system reform changes that CWS implemented under the Judgment were vast. To just mention a few: deploying an electronic cross reporting system with law enforcement; ensuring cross reports were successfully transmitted to law enforcement; transitioning from a paper-based intake system to an electronic intake system; immediate contact with Tribes when reports are received involving a Tribal child; making good-faith efforts to develop government-to-government protocols with Humboldt County Tribes; developing a formal complaint procedure with the launch of the CWS Ombuds Office; holding quarterly Community Task Force meetings; closing and reducing the number of

investigations that remained open longer than statutory timeframes; developing and conducting continuous quality improvement activities in several areas of performance; revising and developing new Policy and Procedures (P&Ps), and then implementing those new P&Ps and building a process to measure our implementation of the P&Ps. As the timing for our last SIP overlapped with the AG Stipulated Judgment, our last SIP also included many of these same goals and objectives.

Our next SIP will be informed by both qualitative and quantitative data, as well as input from our staff and community. Earlier this year, CWS conducted a peer review, where social workers from other California counties reviewed a sampling of cases and interviewed staff to provide feedback on our strengths and areas of opportunity. Additionally, several focus groups and community feedback sessions

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were held to gather additional input and insight into our system. CWS will work in partnership with Tribes, the community and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to use this qualitative data, along with several other data sources, to select priority goals for the next five years and identify the best strategies to reach those goals.

Public Health Director's Report

by Sofia Pereira

► This fall we submitted our application for reaccreditation by the Public Health Accreditation Board.



In 2016, DHHS's Public Health branch was among the first of the rural public health departments in California to become nationally accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board. Over the past six years, the public health accreditation process has supported our branch in the delivery of programs and services by driving performance improvement to better serve Humboldt residents. Public health accreditation measures our branch against a set of nationally recognized, evidence-based standards and benefits our organization and community. As of October, we submitted our application to maintain our status as an

Our SIP is an important plan and roadmap for facilitating continuous quality improvement activities within CWS. Our SIP acts as the agreement with CDSS and our community about our commitments and shared goals and objectives for the next five years. Following the finalization of our SIP, CWS will begin to implement the strategies outlined and monitor our progress towards our established

goals, sharing our progress with CDSS and the community. SIP planning and development is beginning and meetings with community partners, CDSS and Tribes are currently being scheduled for (later this winter depending when we issue newsletter December or January). We are excited to embark on developing our next SIP, while sustaining and building off the changes and accomplishments made over the

accredited public health organization to support our continued growth.

Public health organizations that sustain reaccreditation over time report a wide range of benefits from accreditation. Ninety-five percent of accredited public health agencies report that accreditation stimulated quality improvement and performance management within their organizations, and 90% reported that it improved their ability to identify and address gaps in employee training and workforce development. In the community, public health accreditation strengthens relationships with key partners, supports and operationalizes health equity and increases accountability and transparency.

The health system is essential for ensuring healthy, safe and equitable communities. Public Health is a vital part of this system, and positively impacts the health of Humboldt County residents, through essential services such as vaccination, food facility inspections and health education. Public health accreditation contributes to the



advancement of public health practice and system improvement to support all people in living their healthiest lives.

It will take some time for PHAB to review our application and determine any next steps, but this is an important milestone we've reached in submitting our application. I want to acknowledge our PHAB accreditation coordinator Megan Montgomery and Deputy Director Lara Weiss who worked closely with our team to complete this heavy lift. Great job Public Health team! ◀

Behavioral Health Director's Report

by Emi Botzler-Rodgers, LMFT

► A number of years ago, I was sitting in one of the conference rooms at the Humboldt County Office of Education dis-



trict office feeling the awkwardness and the tension between county staff and education staff. There were walls between us and so much misunder-

standing about what each of us did, didn't do and/or refused to do. There was absolutely assumption of ill intent. We weren't working well together, we weren't coordinating services and we definitely weren't serving the community in the ways that we needed to be.

There are often so many barriers, regulations and requirements that feel impossible to navigate and are misunderstood by one another that historically it felt easier to just give up. It was through years of sitting in rooms like that and feeling that awkwardness that got us to a much better

place today. I now feel very good about the relationships that Humboldt County Behavioral Health has with our education partners. That doesn't mean we don't have challenges or gaps in services, but it now feels that we are allies in addressing these issues. I use this as a reminder when I find myself in other similar situations.

Today we are faced with tension due to the profound lack of mental health crisis resources in our community, which creates stress for Behavioral Health, local hospi-

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tals and for law enforcement. More importantly, it impacts the community, those struggling with mental illness and those who care about those struggling. I am heartened, however, by the strong commitment of our partners and the history of problem solving this community has shown it is able and willing to do.

Navigating and coming out the other side with our education partners and creating so much positivity in how we work together reminds me of what is possible. I have found commitment, dedication and genuine assumption of good intent with our local hospitals, law enforcement, community providers and others, and consis-

tently experience a willingness to lean in and find a way through these challenges. These profound partnerships and the collaborative efforts underway are the only way we will get to a place of providing the critical, comprehensive and effective services needed by our community. I am very grateful for this. ◀

CIT training provides increased knowledge of mental illness

► Nearly 30 law enforcement officers and mental health service providers from agencies across the county participated in a five-day Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training in October to learn strategies to better respond to people experiencing mental health crises.

DHHS has been collaborating with law enforcement agencies and other community organizations to hold the state-certified CIT trainings since 2007.

CIT gives law enforcement officers and administrators tools to use in the field to identify major mental health disorders and other challenges, such as substance use disorder, intellectual disabilities and neurodevelopment and neurocognitive disorders like dementia and Alzheimer's. These tools can help de-escalate a crisis and divert

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From left, DHHS Senior Program Manager Kelly Johnson, CIT Responder of the Year Humboldt County Sheriff Lt. Dennis Griffin, Undersheriff Justin Braud and Sheriff's Correctional Capt. Duane Christian.

Elder Abuse Reporting Hotline available 24/7

► Following the Humboldt County Grand Jury's recommendations to its report, "Silver Tsunami Warning: Safeguarding Our Seniors," DHHS is launching a marketing campaign to educate community residents about the signs of elder abuse and how to report it.

If you suspect that you or someone you know is the victim of elder abuse, call Humboldt County Adult Protective Services 24/7 reporting hotline at 707-476-2100. ◀

At least 1 in 10 Americans aged 60 and older have experienced some form of elder abuse.

Elder abuse comes in different forms:

- Neglect
- Physical abuse
- Sexual abuse
- Abandonment
- Emotional or psychological abuse
- Financial abuse
- Self-neglect.

If you are worried that you or someone you know is experiencing elder abuse,

call the Humboldt County Adult Protective Services 24/7 reporting hotline at 707-476-2100.



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 those experiencing behavioral health crises away from the criminal justice system and into treatment.

Law enforcement professionals, service providers and nationally recognized experts led this week's training where participants learned tips on how to recognize when a person is experiencing a mental health crisis, what specific mental health disorders look like and how they may influence an interaction between an officer and someone in crisis. Participants were also taught techniques that can keep officers and subjects safe during an encounter and had the opportunity to take a virtual tour of local mental health programs to increase awareness of available resources.

DHHS Behavioral Health Senior Program Manager Kelly Johnson said, "I'm honored to work collaboratively with our stakeholders to train law enforcement, Behavioral Health staff and other community providers to effectively interact with people experiencing behavioral health crises with dignity and respect from a trauma-informed lens. I'm so proud of this team and the work we do together."

The Humboldt Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Ill-



From left, Humboldt County Behavioral Health Board member Tim Ash, Eureka Police Sgt. Leonard LeFrance, Rio Dell Police Chief Greg Allen, DHHS Senior Program Manager Kelly Johnson, Arcata Police Sgt. Heidi Grozsmann, Humboldt County Chief Probation Officer Shaun Brenneman, Humboldt County Sheriff's Correctional Capt. Duane Christian, Yurok Tribal Police Chief Greg O'Rourke, Humboldt County Undersheriff Justin Braud and Eureka Police Department Assistant Chief Brian Stephens and EPD Chief Todd Jarvis celebrate the nearly 30 people who graduated from this year's CIT training in October.

ness, Arcata, Eureka, Rio Dell and Yurok Tribal Police departments, the Humboldt County Sheriff's Office, Humboldt County Probation and DHHS collaborated to offer this year's CIT training.

Following this training, more than 550 people have completed the course locally, including representatives from law enforcement agencies, law offices, parks systems, ambulance services, DHHS, tribes and medical facilities. ◀

DHHS IS HIRING Eligibility Specialist Trainees/I/II

Benefits include:

- \$500 hiring bonus
- Additional \$1,000 plus pay increase after probationary period
- Paid training, starting at \$17.73/hr
- Health, dental, vision, life insurance
- Paid personal and family sick leave.

APPLY TODAY



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 or call 707-441-5510.

Now Hiring

▶ DHHS is hiring Eligibility Specialist Trainees to support people in need and help determine what type of assistance they may qualify for. Paid training, starting at \$17.73 an hour, \$500 hiring bonus and additional \$1,000 plus pay increase after probationary period.

Scan the QR code below, or visit [the position's detail page at governmentjobs.com](http://the_position's_detail_page_at_governmentjobs.com) to learn more and apply.

To learn more about other open positions at DHHS, visit humboldt.gov/jobs. ◀

