



HIGHLIGHTS

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Director's Report

by **Connie Beck**



► This year has started off so busy, it's difficult to believe we're already well into 2025, so before it's too late, here are some 2024 highlights.

DHHS

In mid-December, we had a ribbon cutting, officially celebrating our move to a new Hoopa location where we are co-located with the Hoopa Valley Tribe's Division of Human Services. The six DHHS staff housed in the Hoopa office live in the surrounding areas and offer services for Child Welfare Services, Behavioral Health and assistance with CalWORKs, CalFresh, Medi-Cal and General Relief and Transportation Assistance programs. The county and Tribe already work together and have a strong relationship, and this closeness in proximity will serve to make it stronger.

In early 2024, we opened our Redway office to the public. The office currently supports our Housing Outreach and Mobile Engagement program, Employment and Training and Social Services public assistance programs.



In mid-December, the Hoopa Valley Tribe's Division of Human Services and DHHS cut the ribbon on their new co-located space at 68 Orchard St. in Hoopa.

Social Services celebrates wins

by **Rachel Mackill**, Eligibility Specialist II

► When I was asked to write an article about a "Win" from 2024, I instantly thought, "That will be so easy!" There are SO



Behavioral Health

Our application for proposed construction of a new Sempervirens psychiatric health facility was submitted by staff to the state at the end of the year. In May, we expect to learn if we will receive Proposition 1 funding to build.

In early December, the design phase for the Behavioral Health Crisis Triage Center officially kicked off. Driven by the need for mental health crisis triage services in Humboldt County, the new facility will include a sobering center, mental health care and crisis stabilization. The facility will be built on Mad River Community Hospital's campus and serve people of all ages,

regardless of insurance, with stays ranging from less than 24 hours to 90 days.

Public Health

We officially closed escrow for the purchase of land that will house our new Public Health Laboratory. The two lots, located on I Street in Eureka. The design for the new facility is underway and expected to be a two-story building between 7,000 and 10,000 square feet and will house Biosafety Level 2 and Biosafety Level 3 laboratory spaces and associated office spaces with an emphasis on implementing advanced molecular detection with genomic sequencing

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many WINS! Little did I know that trying to pinpoint a personal "Win" would lead to me thinking about all the wonderful things we get to do as Eligibility Specialists for Humboldt County DHHS and reflecting on how amazing this job is, even on the worst of days. This also gave me a chance to really reflect on the impact we have as individuals in our community. I personally forget this from time to time

as I grind out one more case, fix one more thing, help one more person all while juggling my personal life—which isn't always easy as we all know.

With that being said, I wanted to focus on our customers who qualify for the Working Disabled Program and Medicare Premium Payment Programs. I know I am not alone feeling joy and satisfaction when we get to re-evaluate/start a customer on one

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testing and creating a cohesive space where staff can easily work together.

The Public Health Branch was also granted reaccreditation status for another five years by the Public Health Accreditation Board. This achievement is earned through a rigorous, multi-faceted, peer-reviewed assessment process and demonstrates that Public Health is working closely with partner agencies and has the capacity to become increasingly effective at improving the health of the community.

Child Welfare Services

CWS staff and our Tribal partners started participating in “Days of Joint Training.” The trainings came from discussions between our Tribal partners and Indian Child Welfare Act staff at CWS who all voiced the need to train together to help support a more common lens and language when assessing for the safety of children. So far, staff

have attended four trainings and two more are scheduled to take place this year.

Social Services

Social Services recently wrapped up a program through its Employment Training Division sector with funding assistance by the California Community Reinvestment Grant program. The program focused on assisting

those who were disproportionately affected by the War on Drugs. The grant provided job readiness, case management and re-entry services and subsidized employment opportunities to eligible participants. Nearly 110 individuals took advantage of the job readiness and case management services, 46 participants received re-entry services, 40 received subsidized employment services with the ultimate goal of gaining hands-on, tangible work skills in their desired employment fields and 36 individuals secured unsubsidized, permanent employment.

These are just a few of the wonderful things happening throughout the department. I will continue to share highlights and updates as time allows. I am continually grateful every day to our staff who show up and work hard to make things better for our clients and our community. ◀



From left, Vocational Counselor I Catherine Cassidy, Vocational Counselor I Vanessa Huerta, Administrative Analyst II Corrinne Haskins, Senior Vocational Counselor Jean Chiles, Employment and Training Program Coordinator Lynn Langdon, Program Manager Melissa Furbee, Administrative Analyst I Shawn Mulkey and Vocational Counselor II Jimmy Gorospe.

Social Services, continued from page 1

of these programs. Turn a Share of Cost to zero dollars or have a customer no longer have to pay their Medicare premiums. We are all aware that this demographic of Humboldt County citizens is at risk of many things but knowing we can help take the cost of health care off their plate is one just one of many “Wins” we have on a daily basis.

One case that comes to mind was a customer who had come into the office as they had received a notice

that they were no longer eligible for the Working Disabled Program and now had a share of cost of over \$5,700. Meaning they would need to pay that amount each month before their benefits would cover their health care.

They were also just informed that they were no longer in remission from cancer and after monthly expenses they did not have enough left over to pay for treatment. It took about a month, seven in-person visits and

more phone calls than I can remember to help them get all their ducks in a row to get them back on a No Share of Cost Aid Code. The day I called to inform them that I had completed everything will be a day I never forget. The thanks and gratitude that they expressed will be something that will forever be a “Win” in my book. Best part is I had only been processing medical benefits for about two months. It taught me a lot that I’ve continued to utilize to this day. ◀



Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services

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. ◀



CWS Report

by Ivy Breen, CWS Deputy Director

► Child Welfare Services throughout California will have some significant structural changes coming in the next few years. This includes the implementation of a new statewide case management system, the California Automated Response and Engagement System (CARES), which is scheduled to launch in fall 2026 to replace the longstanding state system of CWS/CMS.

Another significant change on the horizon is a complete restructure of foster care rates. The California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has been designing the restructure for foster care rates for some time and submitted its proposal as part of the 2024-25 Governor's budget in January 2024. In June 2024 the new Permanent Foster Care Rate Structure was passed as part of Assembly Bill 161. This new rate structure is slated to begin on July 1, 2027.

The new rate structure is intended to ensure that foster youth receive the support and care they need to thrive within families, ultimately leading to better outcomes for individuals, families and communities.



There are several significant changes with the new rate structure. The new Foster Care Rate Structure will have a Tiered Rate Framework with four different rate tiers. The foster rate "tier" for each child will be determined based on the child's assessed level of needs and strengths, as determined by the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strength (CANS) Assessment.

This is a huge shift from current foster care rates, which are determined based on the placement type. With the new structure, each child will be routinely assessed using the CANS assessment to determine which tier they fit at that moment, with a CANS done at least every six months. Each of the four tiers has a set "care and supervision" rate that is paid to the caregiver, and this rate increases up the tiers, with children with higher needs receiving higher care and supervision rates.

One other significant change is a new "strength building and maintenance" added benefit that is additional funding made available to cover enrichment activities that promote supportive social connections and provide opportunities for the child to develop valuable skills—i.e. music lessons, participation in cultural events, swim lessons, etc. The child and family will work with a state contracted

financial management coordinator to make custom plans for spending their strength building and maintenance funding.

The higher tiers also have different "Immediate Needs" rates, which cover county and/or contracted direct service providers that provide services aimed to address any immediate needs the child has. The immediate needs rate covers therapeutic services, peer support, mentoring and more as well as the facilitation of participation in those services.

This new structure will have significant impact on staff, clients, care providers and the community, and the CANS will have a critical role in the future structure of Child Welfare Services in California. In November 2024, Humboldt County CWS arranged for UC Davis' Regional Training Academy to provide in-person CANS certification training to more than 70 CWS staff.

As all CANS assessments need to be informed by the child's entire Child and Family Team (CFT), Humboldt County CWS has also arranged for two sessions of a multi-day in-person CFT meeting training which will take place in January and May of 2025.

[More information about the rate restructure and the role of the CANS assessment is available at the CDSS website at \[cdss.ca.gov\]\(https://cdss.ca.gov\).](#) ◀

Earthquakes and other natural disasters: Be informed, be prepared

by Terrence McNally, Emergency Preparedness Coordinator



► It's not yet a seismological term but Dec. 5's earthquake was a "doozie." Who didn't begin to wonder as the rolling quake continued churning when enough was enough?

Thankfully, DHHS facilities suffered minimal damage, and no one was injured. Better yet, the department evacuated buildings once the shaking

stopped and supervisors conducted head counts of staff to confirm that everyone had exited.

Of ongoing concern was the potential for a near-source tsunami resulting from such an earthquake. Last March, staff conducted walking tsunami evacuation drills at the 10 DHHS buildings located within the Tsunami Inundation Zone comprising approximately half of the department's employees.

When those West Coast alerts were issued from the National Tsunami Warning Center in Palmer, Alaska, staff in those inundation zones did as they prepared and marched to their assembly points until the warning was canceled. Staff made the long walks,

avoiding being caught in car traffic as happened for Humboldt residents at too many locations in low-lying areas.

That was a win and a credit to workers keeping their heads on their shoulders after a traumatic shaker. Not ones to rest on our laurels, we'll be doing walks again during Tsunami Preparedness Week, March 24 through 28. The events will double as evacuation drills and tsunami walks, helping us build muscle memory and respond as safely as possible to localized disasters.

Lots of county residents were concerned about their location's proximity to the inundation zones. Understandably, many of us were simultaneously concerned for the wel-

Earthquakes, continued from page 3

fare of family members. If you haven't done so yet, check out the mapping posted at the Redwood Coast Tsunami Work Group site so you can determine where your home and schools are located in proximity to zones.

Many staff were released to continue their work from home following the earthquake, but an important thing to keep in mind is if a trip home or to a child's school requires you to travel through an inundation zone to get there, it's safer

to hang tight until the tsunami warning is lifted.

Additionally, depending on the magnitude and duration of the earthquake, facilities may need to be inspected for structural damage prior to being reoccupied. That was a point of confusion following the Dec. 5, quake and DHHS is dialing in its procedures to have inspections done as

efficiently as possible. But next time a quake happens— and after you've dropped, covered and held on— make sure to evacuate with those crucial items such as car keys, jackets and purses that you'll need for an extended delay. And supervisors,

Red Cross in shelter operations. As many of you know, Social Services is responsible to assist in evacuation shelters and the Red Cross is again sharing its expertise in all things sheltering. Should sheltering be required, we anticipate under most conditions



In late January, Social Services Disaster Service Workers (DSWs) took part in the American Red Cross' latest shelter operations training at Azalea Hall in McKinleyville. While all DHHS staff are DSWs, this specialized group will be the first called to assist the local Red Cross Chapter in administering help to evacuees who've been forced from their homes.

that the Red Cross will open them with our trained DSWs backing them up as needed. Emergency Preparedness staff also maintains DHHS shelter supplies should we need to open one independently.

Finally, and it can't be stressed enough, preparing for

unexpected events requires you to be as informed as possible. If you haven't already, please make sure to have someone lock the facility doors on the way out.

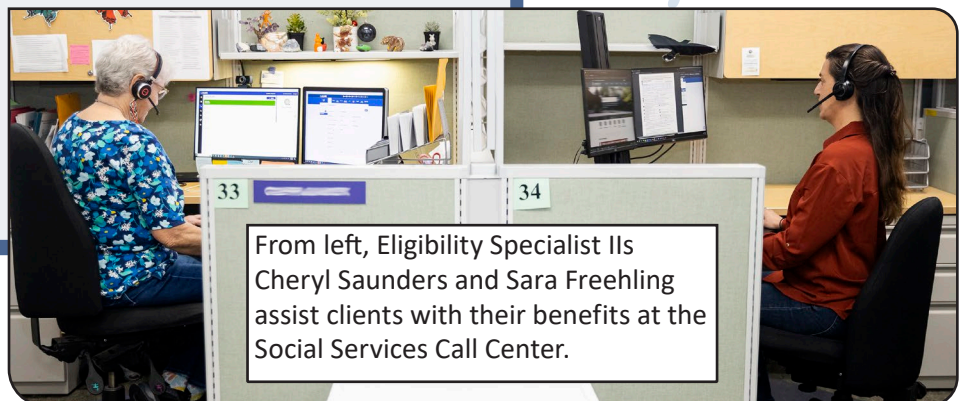
We're all Disaster Service Workers (DSW) and the earthquake was a potent reminder that the community may need our help to recover following a disaster. On Jan. 31, a new crew of Social Services Branch DSWs were trained by the American

Red Cross in shelter operations. As many of you know, Social Services is responsible to assist in evacuation shelters and the Red Cross is again sharing its expertise in all things sheltering. Should sheltering be required, we anticipate under most conditions that the Red Cross will open them with our trained DSWs backing them up as needed. Emergency Preparedness staff also maintains DHHS shelter supplies should we need to open one independently.

Preparedness makes us all safer. Thank you for participating. ◀

New Social Services Call Center hours in effect

▶ Starting at the beginning of February, the Social Services Call Center and main Social Services Koster Street locations hours are 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. The new hours reduce the time open to the public by 30 minutes at the beginning and end of each day to help address budget issues, meet critical mandates and better serve the community. To apply for and manage benefits, visit BenefitsCal.com or contact the Call Center at 877-410-8809. ◀



From left, Eligibility Specialist IIs Cheryl Saunders and Sara Freehling assist clients with their benefits at the Social Services Call Center.

Behavioral Health Director's Report

by Emi Botzler-Rodgers, LMFT

► I often speak about stigma and discrimination in my role as Behavioral Health Director. It feels important to me, and I have a lot of passion about it. I emphasize the importance of ending stigma and discrimination toward people suffering from mental illness. I believe in this wholeheartedly. I believe all people have a right to kindness, compassion, respect and dignity. I do wonder sometimes, however, what it means to people when I say these things. How do we truly end stigma and discrimination? Reflecting on this prompted me to think more deeply about what stigma and discrimination really are.



The definition of stigma is “a negative attitude or belief about a person or group of people based on a partic-

ular characteristic or attribute (such as skin color, cultural background, a disability or a mental illness).” It can also refer to the negative treatment that results from those attitudes. The effects of stigma include people being treated negatively or excluded from opportunities. This is called discrimination. This can further result in individuals believing they are flawed or can't improve their situation and not getting treatment for fear of being stigmatized (or discriminated against). In some cases, people may experience being bullied, harassed or physical violence perpetrated against them. When we see people struggling with mental illness, we may get uncomfortable, turn the other way, cross the street or ask them to leave our home or place of business.

I don't believe ending stigma and discrimination is a big event. I believe it is all the little decisions we make along the way. It is truly seeing someone for the complex, unique, valuable individual they are and accepting them exactly as they are.

It is recognizing and acknowledging that asking for help is a strength not a weakness. It is not avoiding someone because they are acting “differently” or assuming someone is dangerous or will become violent because they are mentally ill. It is not using words like “crazy”, “psycho” or “loony”, even when joking around. It is looking someone in the eye, speaking to people when you pass them on the street and offering kindness even to those you are uncomfortable around. Ending stigma and discrimination starts in our day-to-day lives, when we have opportunity to see people who are suffering as whole human beings worthy of love and respect. It is understanding that we all are complex and multi-faceted individuals, with physical, social, spiritual and mental health needs and challenges. It is believing that everyone is deserving of support to address their wellness and recovery and to develop into their own full potential and the versions of themselves, they most aspire to be. ◀

Long-time Child Welfare Services Social Worker retires

► At a meeting in early December, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors celebrated the retirement of Trevlene Blood, Social Worker Supervisor II, who began her career with DHHS as a Social Worker I in 1998. Several of Trevlene's former co-workers showed up in support and shared personal stories that reflected on how meaningful their time working with her was. ◀





Equity Update

by Neftali Miller-Rubio, Racial & Cultural Equity Manager

► A key focus of DHHS's Racial

Equity Strategic Plan is ensuring our supervisory-level staff have the resources, skillsets and support needed to advance equity work across the department and sustain structural change. 2024 brought a few new initiatives which aim to empower supervisors and staff to more confidently address microaggressions, dismantle systemic racism and further embody anti-racist values.

In fall 2024, the Racial Equity Leadership Institute began with 44 participants ranging from supervisors, managers and deputy directors to directors. The intensive quarterly

coaching series is tailored to expand upon concepts found in previous DHHS racial equity trainings and developed and facilitated in partnership with Stepping Stone Consulting. The institute includes an interactive mix of learning modules and team-building workshops intended to provide skills, resources and activities participants can replicate with their own staff between sessions. Exit surveys have captured participants' common request for more time together and how much they value breakout sessions with peers. Others name their key take-aways as tools to effectively interrupt bias in the workplace and techniques to evaluate their own power and privilege. A new series will be offered in the coming fiscal year, so please keep an eye out for announcements!

In 2024, the Racial Equity team also began offering a periodic series called

Mid-Day Movies, an opportunity for staff to watch short films related to racial equity during the lunch hour, teaming up with both the Queer and Indigenous Peoples affinity groups over the year. The film series will continue through 2025—our next event is planned for February to commemorate Black History Month. Please keep an eye out for announcements on upcoming Mid-Day Movies made via e-mail, the DHHS BulletinBoard and flyers posted at DHHS locations.

All DHHS staff are welcome to reach out to the Racial Equity Steering Committee or the Racial & Cultural Equity Manager with questions, ideas and/or feedback at DHHSRacialEquity@co.humboldt.ca.us. Additionally, supervisory-level staff are welcome to book time for coaching with the Racial and Cultural Equity Manager through this booking link or by emailing nmiller-rubio2@co.humboldt.ca.us. ◀



Public Health

by Dr. Candy Stockton, Humboldt County Health Officer

► To date, we haven't had any confirmed cases of avian flu in humans, dairy cows or poultry flocks in Humboldt County, but we have been preparing for the possibility since we started seeing wild birds test positive in 2022. The DHHS Public Health Branch, the Agricultural Commissioner's Office, the California Department of Food and Agriculture's (CDFA) Regional Veterinary Medical Officer and the Humboldt County Farm Bureau are all involved.

The Public Health Emergency Preparedness program has connected local dairies with PPE that will help keep their employees safer when we have an outbreak. Our Communicable Disease nurses have trained on how to collect eye swabs, which are better at diagnosing human bird flu infections than nose and throat swabs, and our Public Health Lab is prepared to test those swabs for the H5 variant

influenza A viruses, so we can identify outbreaks more quickly.

Across California, over 700 dairy cow herds, 58 commercial flocks and 10 backyard flocks have been impacted since August 2024. Most dairy cows have been mildly to moderately ill, with a significant decrease in milk production that can take a long time to recover. Poultry are extremely susceptible, and most infected birds die. You've likely seen evidence of this already; it's harder to find eggs in stores, and they are more expensive. Several recalls for infected raw milk have also been issued.

Most cases of bird flu in humans have been mild and were caused by direct contact with sick animals. We haven't seen any person-to-person spread.

What can you do to help protect yourself, your family and our community?

1. Get your annual flu vaccine. It will not protect against this strain of avian influenza, but it does reduce your risk of other seasonal strains of influenza. This helps us in two ways. First, it is easier for us to identify human cases of avian

influenza when there are fewer overall cases of flu to investigate. Second, if you get infected with a regular seasonal strain of flu and bird flu at the same time, those viruses can mix and may produce a bird flu virus that can spread from human-to-human.

2. Don't consume raw milk products or feed them to your pets. Numerous tests have shown that pasteurization is effective against this virus, and that pasteurized dairy products are safe. We know that raw milk from infected cows has a very high viral load. We aren't sure yet if humans can get sick from drinking infected milk, but we know that they can get sick when it comes into contact with their eyes. (Think children who use bottles or sippy cups, and how many times most of us touch our faces over the course of the day.) We also know that cats can get bird flu from drinking infected raw milk, and several have died.
3. Don't handle sick or dead wild birds. If you hunt gamebirds or waterfowl, avoid any sick or dead birds you find, wear disposable

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gloves and eye protection when handling birds, and wash your hands thoroughly after removing gloves. You can report dead birds on the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's website.

The types of birds that frequent backyard bird feeders don't seem to be impacted by bird flu, so you can leave your bird feeders up, unless you have a backyard poul-

try flock.

4. If you have a backyard flock, notify Public Health at 707-268-2182 and CDFA's Sick Bird Hotline at 866-922-2473 immediately if your birds become ill or die unexpectedly. Don't handle the birds, and keep others away from them, until you've received guidance on how to dispose of them. Cooked eggs are safe to eat.

Our world is connected in so many ways. Working together to minimize the spread of bird flu is important to help protect our local dairies and the backyard flocks that are a part of our daily lives and history in Humboldt County. If you have specific questions about how bird flu affects your work or hobbies, reach out—we'll be happy to answer them. Public Health can be reached at 707-445-6200. ◀

CWS staff collaborates with Tribal partners for joint training days



► In mid-December, staff from Child Welfare Services and members of the Yurok Tribe, Karuk Tribe, Bear River Rancheria and Trinidad Rancheria participated in a three-day "Stronger Together" joint training. Attendees held discussions and learned more about each other's perspectives to enhance collaboration and communication, increase knowledge and understanding and improve safety and well-being outcomes for native children and their families. Each day of training featured guest speakers from partner agencies including the National Indian Child Welfare Association, Evident Change and the California Tribal Families Coalition. ◀

Humboldt County Veterans Service Office

The Veterans Service Office (VSO) assists veterans, their dependents and survivors, and the general public in obtaining benefits from federal, state and local agencies administering programs for veterans.

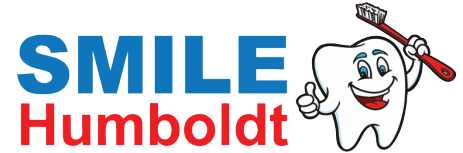
- Stop by: 1105 Sixth St., Suite F, Eureka
- Call: 707-445-7611
- Visit for more information: humboldt.gov.org/VSO



National Children's Dental Health Month recognized

► At a recent meeting, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors recognized National Children's Dental Health Month with a proclamation. DHHS's Oral Health Program Coordinator Sarah Vogel and staff from Open Door's Dental Van were present to accept the proclamation.

February through March, Humboldt County's Dental Advisory Group is coordinating a supply drive to collect dental hygiene products for children, teens and adults who have limited access. Last year, Humboldt County's inaugural "Smile Drive" collected more dental care items than any other drive held across the country! Donations can be made through the end of March. For more information, visit smilehumboldt.com/SmileDrive2025. ◀



Smile Drive 2025 drop off locations

- Grocery Outlet*
625 Commercial St., Eureka
- Redwood Community Action Agency
904 G St., Eureka
- McKinleyville Library
1606 Pickett Road, McKinleyville
- DHHS Administrative Offices (Professional Building)
507 F St., Eureka

*Only supplies purchased at the Eureka Grocery Outlet accepted at this location, through March 15.



From left, Open Door Mobile Dental Services Program Coordinator Ana Rodriguez, Vogel, Registered Dental Assistant Angel Rist, First District Supervisor Rex Bohn and Lead Registered Dental Assistant Cori Anderson.

DHHS staff helps collect food for annual holiday drive

► The ninth annual Humboldt Holiday Food Drive hosted by Sen. Mike McGuire brought in more than 45,000 pounds of food and over \$56,000 to directly benefit Food for People Inc. that's food pantries serve more than 21,000 people in our community each month. ◀



From left, Food for People Executive Director Carly Robbins, Santa Claus, Sen. McGuire, DHHS Director Connie Beck and Policy and Legislative Manager Nancy Stark.

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.



Elder Abuse Reporting Hotline available 24/7

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