



## Director's Report

by **Connie Beck**

► Early on the morning of Jan. 23, I joined more than 125 volunteers who fanned out to locations throughout the county to participate in the Point-in-Time (PIT) count of people experiencing homelessness.



Volunteers from local human services organizations, DHHS staff and the community at large gathered in Eureka, Arcata, Redway, Fortuna and the eastern part of the county, where we were paired up and assigned to specific zones. Once the count started, volunteers approached homeless people and asked them a series of survey questions to help gather information. Those who were sleeping or did not want to answer questions are still counted.

The biennial count is a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requirement. Locally, it is a collaborative effort by the Humboldt Housing & Homelessness Coalition to conduct a county census of people experiencing homelessness. Numbers from the count are used by the State of California to allocate funding to counties to address homelessness and housing, and it is really important that we get an accurate

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count.

On that morning, from 7 to about 9 a.m., I had the opportunity to spend quality time with Chloe, an amazing, incredible young talent who works in our Housing, Outreach and Mobile Engagement program, and someone I had not spent time with before. For those two hours, we traveled around our assigned section of Fortuna interviewing and counting folks who had slept outside the night before.

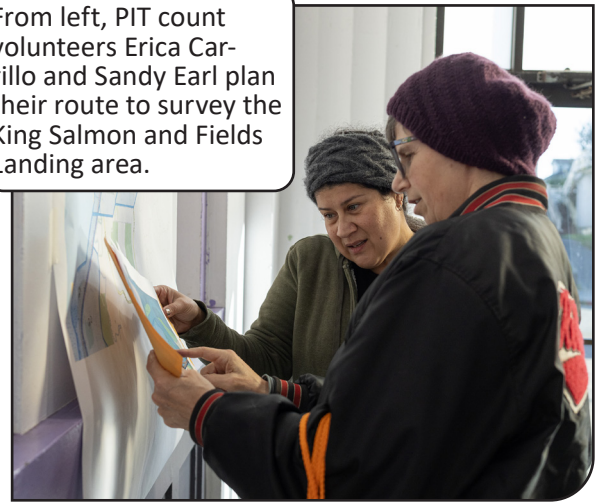
The first person we came across was just waking up and willing to answer our questions. Coincidentally, she was also named Connie, was close to my same age and was very open and friendly with us as we went through the survey questions.

One thing that really struck me while we spoke to her was what the elements do to our homeless population. She told us she had been homeless for 20 years, and you could tell living outside for so long had really taken a toll on her.

I have worked for DHHS for a long time and have been deeply involved in helping mold programs, bring to light issues and work with partners to help benefit our homeless community members for longer than I can remember.

This year there was a real need for PIT volunteers, and I participated in a boots on the ground role for the first time. It was an eye-opening experience, and I would recommend that anyone who has the opportunity should learn more about our homeless community and see how they live. ◀

From left, PIT count volunteers Erica Carrillo and Sandy Earl plan their route to survey the King Salmon and Fields Landing area.



## New Eligibility Specialists join the team

► In December, Social Services graduated a class of 11 Eligibility Specialists who will soon be on the front lines providing services to Humboldt County Residents. Congratulations and welcome aboard! ◀



Graduates and trainers pictured from left, Andre Vallin, Sean Bockmann, Shannon Kirke, Tucker Avenmarg, Erika Avendano, Jaime Graves, Laura Noland, Sarah Fine, Sandy Vang, Bryan Gray, Kelly Dunne, Andrew Felden, Tricia Whitener and Alexa Day.



## Social Services Report

by **Monique Upshaw-Smith**, Deputy Branch Director

► In the Social Services Branch (SSB), the Health and Nutrition Services (HNS) Supervisor Leadership meeting was created in 2019, starting off as a small meeting with only CalFresh and Medi-Cal Eligibility Supervisors along with their Program Manager. During that time, the focus was professional development—discussing topics that could assist supes with their supervisory skills. In 2020, it became a collaboration between two Program Managers and their teams, including a cultural coach. The focus then became implementing an organizational change, a journey towards equity.

About a year after that 2020 evolution, the meeting expanded and became the SSB Supervisor Leadership meeting. It has since grown to include

all Eligibility Supervisors, Employment & Training Supervisors, Program Coordinators, our Supervising Staff Services Analyst, our Social Worker Supervisor, all Program Managers and the Deputy Branch Director. Over the past year, or so, there were months where the meeting was cancelled or backburnered as we focused on our Alignment and Prioritization project. This year, it is being revived! The purpose of the meeting is to allow a space for collaboration with all SSB Supervisors and Managers. In this meeting, we will share workplace knowledge, enhance supervisory skills and focus on equity and inclusion. One of the ongoing desired outcomes is to strengthen trust and working relationships among our SSB leadership team through collaboration and nurturing a positive, supportive workplace.

In the January meeting, the team confirmed a list of leadership topics to discuss at future meetings. Some of those topics include:

- Retention
- Succession planning

- Addressing conflict
- Leading effective meetings
- Keeping staff motivated during challenging times
- The DHHS Practice Model
- Tech tools
- Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI)-Ableism

Although we are expanding the topics that will be discussed during the meetings, we continue to work on the five DEI goals we created back in 2024. Initially, there were six goals. After working on them, and getting details and feedback, the Scenario-Based Training was nixed, and that group now has something else in store for us. If you want more information on our DEI goals, please feel free to reach out to any SSB Program Manager or myself.

This meeting is a priority for me. It is my hope that these meetings are meaningful, inviting thoughtful and sometimes intense discussion and fostering relationship and trust building, while we all work at being the best supervisors we can be for our staff. ◀

## Sen. Padilla sends representative to tour Public Health’s Lab, learn about services offered

► Administration from DHHS’s Public Health Branch recently hosted Roberto Arteaga, Field Representative for Senator Alex Padilla, at Public Health’s main Eureka location. During the visit, Arteaga toured the laboratory and learned about the services lab staff provide to the community and neighboring counties. Staff also shared updates on the new lab which is in the design phase with plans expected to be finalized by the end of the year. ◀



From left, Humboldt County Health Officer Dr. Candy Stockton, Public Health Director Sofia Pereira, Arteaga and Public Health Laboratory Director Pepper Stockton.



# Behavioral Health Director's Report

by Jack Breazeal, Deputy Branch Director



► When members of the community need emergency psychiatric services, beds at the Crisis Stabilization Unit and Sempervirens (SV) hospital can be hard to come by. Part of this capacity issue has always been the lack of step-down units for Lanterman-Petris-Short (LPS) conserved clients. LPS conserved clients are those individuals we care for and have guardianship of, that as a result of their mental illness, are unable to provide for their basic needs such as food, clothing and shelter.

Many of these individuals on Sempervirens are ready for discharge, but there is a lack of appropriate long-term care facilities to help provide ongoing treatment and care for them. This “backlog” on SV has tre-

mendous impacts on the local health system, most notably the emergency rooms and jails, where individuals in need of emergency psychiatric care wait for beds to open. Many times, those same individuals waiting for a bed at the local ER will need to go out of county, facing significant travel and wait times. In an effort to resolve this, Humboldt County Behavioral Health staff continually look for suitable facilities to contract with to help get individuals the care they need at the level of care most appropriate for their condition including locked rehabilitation centers and skilled nursing facilities that specialize in caring for individuals with chronic mental health conditions and skilled nursing needs.

Recently, Behavioral Health has partnered with Windsor Care Center in Sacramento to provide long-term residential treatment for the LPS-conserved population. Windsor has recently opened and has several levels of care for LPS-conserved clients

including locked, unlocked and skilled nursing.

This contract was authorized, and a Letter of Intent was signed to begin placing individuals at the facility. So far, six LPS-conserved clients have been sent to this facility. This small level of movement has allowed for many systems to be impacted positively. Individual wait times at emergency rooms are seeing a noticeable decline. Folks who have been waiting for secured placement at the jail have seen movement for the first time in months. One individual who has been at SV for over a year will be transferring out within a few weeks.

This process of finding a facility and contracting takes many hands and hard work to make happen. Support staff in Behavioral Health provide a critical role, as well as the Public Guardian's office, County Counsel and Risk Management. We thank these individuals and teams for their efforts that impact so many people and systems. ◀

## CWS staff wears blue for Human Trafficking Awareness



► In January, staff from Child Welfare Services wore blue to show their support for Human Trafficking Awareness Month. ◀

Photographed from left, back row: Kaylee Steiner-Olson, Shandy Breese, Richelle Arche, Ivy Breen, Susan Crichton, David Seda and Natalia Flores. Front row: Joshua Harbin, Machi England, Jed Mefford and Kimberly Schneider.



## Public Health Director's Report

by Sofia Pereira

► Recently, I was in a meeting, and someone was sharing an update on one of their programs. They were sharing how they were working with their team to expand a much-needed program to even more families. According to them, once the expansion is implemented, our team will be able serve up to 200 families instead of 150. They then ended this update with “it’s not like we’re saving the world,” trying to humbly express that the need is greater than what we can offer.

Have you heard of the starfish story? According to the Starfish Foundation, it was adapted from the “The Star Thrower” by Loren C. Eiseley. Here’s how the Starfish Foundation tells the story:

“A young girl was walking along a beach upon which thousands of starfish had been washed up during a terrible storm. When she came to each starfish, she would pick it up and

throw it back into the ocean. People watched her with amusement.

She had been doing this for some time when a man approached her and said, ‘Little girl, why are you doing this? Look at this beach! You can’t save all these starfish. You can’t begin to make a difference!’

The girl seemed crushed, suddenly deflated. But after a few moments, she bent down, picked up another starfish and hurled it as far as she could into the ocean. Then she looked up at the man and replied, ‘Well, I made a difference for that one!’

The old man looked at the girl inquisitively and thought about what she had done. Inspired, he joined the little girl in throwing starfish back into the sea. Soon others joined, and all the starfish were saved.”

I first learned of this story when I was 16 years old, and it has stuck with me ever since. Often our conversations in these times of policy and fiscal uncertainty are about what we can’t do, either because we never received the support to do it, or we lost the funding to continue doing the work we were doing.



I understood what that person sharing in our meeting meant when they said, “We aren’t saving the world.” It can be hard to say, “This is all we can offer based on what we have,” but I believe that we should celebrate what we can provide to the community. I’d offer that we’re “People helping people lead better lives,” embracing our department’s vision, for each family we’ve helped, for each client we’ve served, for each person our staff has taken the time to support. Every person we work with brings their own strengths and skills, working collaboratively with our staff to achieve our mission of “people helping people lead better lives.” “Saving the world” is not done in one action, but us, collectively, acting together, just like making a difference for each starfish tossed back into the sea. When I think about our team in the Public Health Branch, I’m grateful for how each person on our team works to throw the starfish back into the sea, to make a difference in our corner of the earth. Our team is realizing a much bigger impact together, not just for each individual, but for Humboldt County as a whole. ◀

## VSO reminds veterans to stop by for assistance

► At a meeting in December, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors voted to send a letter of support for Senate Bill 694, the Veterans Benefits Protection Act of 2025, which strengthens consumer protections for California’s veterans. Veterans Service Officer Rena Maveety was in attendance to thank the board for its continued support and remind the community that DHHS’s Veterans Service Office (VSO) offers this assistance to veterans for free, saying, “We don’t want to see our veterans become victimized. Assistance with claims is offered by our office, free, at no charge. Unlike attorneys who meet a client maybe once by phone, the VSO is there all the way through the claim process to help them and help them know what it means afterwards and what the next steps are.”

If you know a veteran who may find VSO services to be helpful, have them contact the office by calling 707-445-7611 or visiting

[humboldt.gov.org/VSO](http://humboldt.gov.org/VSO). ◀



DHHS Veterans Service Officer  
Rena Maveety.



# Public Health Launches Community Health Assessment Survey

by **Marian Strong**, Public Health Program Coordinator

► Public Health and Live Well Humboldt (LWH) are launching the Community Health Assessment (CHA). Every three years, local health jurisdictions evaluate the county’s overall health status. This assessment is an important part of national accreditation and improving the community’s health.

Live Well Humboldt is a collaborative network working to improve community health across Humboldt County by aligning efforts, centralizing data, engaging the community and advancing health equity. The CHA summarizes local health data and the factors influencing health outcomes to identify priority areas for improvement. The Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP) is a coordinated, county-wide action plan that addresses these priorities by reducing health disparities, promoting equity and improving population health. Together, the CHA and CHIP guide partners in working toward shared goals through aligned strategies and effective use of resources.

The CHA engages organizations, community members and partners in identifying key health issues and shaping community health priorities.

It is a summary of health data in the community, including primary and secondary sources, and the factors that influence these health outcomes. The CHA drives priority public health issues and informs the Community Health Improvement Plan (CHIP). The CHA is a process, not just a product.

The CHA collects both qualitative and quantitative data from the community through surveys, focus groups and key informant interviews. The information collected covers demographics, social determinants of health, health inequities, community strengths and assets, among other topics.

The 2026 CHA will reflect the most up-to-date and extensive health information on Humboldt County we have had since 2018. The CHA will be shared through the Live Well Humboldt Community Health Data Dashboard. The LWH Dashboard is a

digital resource for the community which gathers local, state and national data on myriad factors in Humboldt County.

The goal of the CHA is to capture the voices of the community and collect valuable data which will enable Public Health and LWH to address the issues that the community thinks are most important through the CHIP.

Your voice, and the voices of everyone in our community, matters. Please help ensure the viewpoints of our entire community are captured! The surveys are expected to take 10-15 minutes to complete. Please consider the following:

1. Visit [livewellhumboldt.org](http://livewellhumboldt.org) to complete the Community Status Assessment in early March
2. Share the surveys with your professional and personal networks
3. If you need help reaching out to a specific group or community

that you think might be interested, please contact [livewellhumboldt@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:livewellhumboldt@co.humboldt.ca.us).

Thank you! ◀



From left, Partnership HealthPlan of California Northwest Regional Director Vicky Klakken presents a grant check of \$100,000 to Public Health Director Sofia Pereira. The grant will be used to help fund outreach for the Community Health Assessment, Community Health Improvement Plan, and the Live Well Humboldt dashboard over the next three years.



**Be prepared**  
by Terrence McNally,  
Emergency Preparedness Coordinator

► More than two dozen Social Services staffers took part in a Jan. 30, shelter training at McKinleyville’s Azalea Hall, hosted by the American Red Cross. The event, full of good questions and comments, provided an overview of shelter responsibilities to a new crew of Disaster Service Workers (DSWs) and gave hands-on practice for things such as cot set-up and shelter registration procedures.

While we prioritize shelter training for our DSWs, any of us may be asked to deploy to several activities when our community is confronted by disaster. Staff from DHHS filled the majority of roles and positions during the county’s COVID activation. In December 2022, following two large earthquakes that impacted nearly a quarter of Rio Dell’s housing stock, DHHS DSWs were some of the first on the ground, providing resources to residents at Rio Dell Volunteer Fire Department while other DHHS staff were deployed to evacuation shelters.

But as in any other emergency, we need to prioritize our safety before we can adequately respond to community needs. That’s why we conduct evacuation drills throughout the year and why the final week of March will

include tsunami walks at DHHS buildings within the Tsunami Inundation Zone. Facilities at Koster, the Plaza, Second and D streets and Environmental Health will all hold walking drills to their higher-elevation assembly point during March 23 through 27’s Tsunami Preparedness Week.

Even if your DHHS building is well outside of the Tsunami Inundation Zone, you surely have concerns about the potential impacts from earthquake-generated waves. It’s important to keep in mind the distinction between near-source and distant-source tsunamis. A near-source tsunami would result from a major, local earthquake, leaving 10 to 15 minutes to get to higher ground. A distant-source tsunami may be generated elsewhere in the Pacific Ocean many hundreds of miles away and allow several hours of preparedness before waves are expected along our coast.

And not all tsunamis will be the same. Created by local resident Jay Patton, Ph.D., of the California Geological Survey and years of detailed research in the making, the yellow zones of our Tsunami Inundation Maps represent the furthest flooding from a catastrophic earthquake, anticipated to follow a Cascadia earthquake 9.0 magnitude. As we’ve

American Red Cross Disaster Program Manager Janeen Hess shows attendees the process of shelter cot construction.



witnessed during recent tsunami warnings, the wave impact will be limited following most shakers.

Still, when and if a tsunami warning is issued, and you’re already outside of those inundation zones, it’s important to not endanger yourself by heading back into an inundation zone to travel home or to a child’s school until the all-clear is issued. That problem was witnessed throughout coastal areas during the Dec. 5, 2024, earthquake as residents packed Samoa Bridge, U.S. Highway 101 and Broadway, despite schools throughout the county having solid tsunami response plans to keep children safe. So, this is a great time to [check out the maps](#), see if your typical driving routes force you into inundation zones and plan alternates.

Thanks for doing your part to keep yourself and co-workers safe. When disaster strikes, we’ll all get through it together by being smart and looking out for ourselves and others. ◀



Staff from throughout Social Services gather at the Red Cross’s McKinleyville trailer location to go through contents and organization process.



## Equity Update

by Lara Zintsmaster, Staff Services Analyst III

► Welcome to 2026! Along with the new year, our resolve to champion equity stays strong.

As you may have read in a previous e-mail to all staff, our Racial and Cultural Equity Manager, Neftali Miller-Rubio moved closer to family, thereby ending her role with DHHS. While her presence is missed, we remain as committed as ever to advancing equity efforts and dismantling structural and systemic racism. The work continues, both to meet equity-related mandates and to improve the experiences of systemically marginalized DHHS staff and our interactions with clients and our community.

The current focus in this work is the development of an updated Racial Equity Strategic Plan. Racial Equity Steering Committee (RESC) members have facilitated feedback sessions to determine what staff think about the racial equity work we have been doing as a department—what have you been glad to see, what is missing, what should be prioritized in the next Plan?

Through initial feedback sessions

with DHHS leadership, five themes emerged as areas that need attention within the department:

- Support and Community for BIPOC and Systemically Marginalized Staff
- Recruitment and Retention
- Community Outreach and Partnerships
- Structural Accountability Mechanisms and Internal Communication
- Training and Coaching.

The RESC recently held several more feedback sessions open to groups that are likely most impacted by equity efforts—BIPOC staff, neurodiverse and disabled staff and queer staff. Sessions were also held with committees that are dedicated to equity-related work. The RESC has received lots of excellent feedback from the participants of these sessions that will help inform priorities for the updated Plan.

While staff feedback is being explored, it is important to note that it is imperative that the Plan is realistic to implement given staff capacity and budget limitations. The current Plan has many crucial goals, but while determining implementation, we realized we didn't have the staffing or funding to implement it as it was written. This will be further impacted by our inability to hire a new Racial and Cultural Equity

Manager right now, however, despite noted challenges, many efforts have continued and will continue with other staff stepping in to fill roles.

For example, the RESC is continuing to meet monthly to support development and eventual implementation of the new Plan. Several DHHS staff have been identified and trained to facilitate the live, four-hour “Foundations of Racial Equity” training to ensure we can continue to provide it quarterly for new staff, and the Racial Equity Leadership Institute will move forward as planned as well. Branch coaching, DHHS leadership coaching and Admin coaching are continuing as well (currently focused on supporting Employee Services).

While the new Plan may look a little different and scaled back, it is because we want to commit to a Plan we can actually implement in its entirety. We know there will be goals in the current Plan we will be unable to get to, but that does not mean they aren't important. It just means we have more work to do when we can get to it, and we will!

If you have any questions or feedback regarding racial equity work within DHHS, the DHHS Racial Equity email: [DHHSRacialEquity@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:DHHSRacialEquity@co.humboldt.ca.us) continues to be monitored, and we invite your input. ◀

## February is National Children's Dental Health Month

► At a recent meeting, the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors declared February as National Children's Dental Health Month. The proclamation highlights the importance of oral health practices, noting that one in four children in Humboldt County will start kindergarten with untreated dental decay. DHHS Oral Program Coordinator Sarah Vogel was present to accept the proclamation and speak to its importance, “This proclamation highlights the importance of twice daily brushing, daily flossing and twice annual dental visits for maintaining a healthy mouth. Poor oral health early in life can impact a child's overall health for a lifetime. Although the proclamation highlights Children's Dental Health Month, maintaining good oral health is important in all stages of life, she said.

Dental resources and tips for caregivers can be found by visiting the Humboldt County Dental Advisory Group's website at [smilehumboldt.com](http://smilehumboldt.com). ◀



Pictured from left, Fourth District Supervisor Natalie Arroyo and Vogel.

## CWS Director's Report

by Camellia Wire, Social Worker Supervisor

► Every year, Child Welfare Services has the honor of celebrating our foster parents, and the children in their care, with a holiday party that is completely powered by volunteers and community generosity. This year, more than 130 foster parents and children came together for an afternoon filled with warmth, connection and holiday joy. Rotary volunteers, alongside CWS staff, Children's Behavioral Health and Juvenile Probation, brought together more than 50 volunteers to help welcome families, serve meals, support activities and create a space where caregivers felt truly appreciated and kids could just be kids. We were also grateful for the involvement Arcata High Schools Interact Club and Transition-Age Youth (TAY) volunteers, who provided thoughtful table service.

One of the most unforgettable moments of the day was Santa's grand arrival, escorted in by the Arcata Fire Department in a firetruck, alongside the Kinetic Grand Championship racing machines, with fire cannons blazing. The excitement on the children's faces captured the magic of the day and the heart of this community. Families enjoyed a vibrant performance by the Ballet Folklorico de Cal Poly Humboldt dancers, a cozy library reading corner where children snuggled under blankets donated by the Foster Parent Association and hands-on activities like lantern-making and face painting.

Miller Farms generously donated forest-themed décor, transforming



Dancers from Ballet Folklorico de Cal Poly Humboldt perform for the annual party for foster families and the children in their care.

the Arcata Veterans Hall, which was also donated as the venue. College of the Redwoods provided hot chocolate and cider, adding even more warmth and comfort to the afternoon.

A special highlight was the presentation of the inaugural Mirian Ziemer Guiding Light Award, made possible through the generosity of the Bridging the Gap Foundation and Advanced Tech Solutions. These awards honored caregivers whose steady, compassionate presence truly serves as a guiding light for children and youth in our community. What made these awards so special was that the recipients were nominated by Child Welfare staff who work directly with them and see firsthand the steady love, commitment and safety they provide.

What makes the holiday celebration so remarkable is that each year it is entirely donated. Every detail, from the venue, to the food, décor, activities and volunteer hours, is con-

tributed through partnership and goodwill. Bringing something of this size together is not easy, but it is inspiring to see Humboldt show up year after year. This was our largest turnout in more than five years, a reflection of both the need for these moments and the strength of the community behind them.

It is a profound honor for CWS to host this event each year alongside Rotary and Bridging the Gap, continuing a tradition of care that has now lasted for more than 30 years.

The holiday celebration is a powerful reminder of what is possible when public service and community partnership come together. CWS is deeply grateful to Rotary of Arcata Sunrise and all participating organizations for creating a day filled with joy, connection and light. We are already looking forward to what next year will bring.

If you are interested in helping next year, please email [cwsplacement@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:cwsplacement@co.humboldt.ca.us). ◀

## Safety Snippets

► Do you have an ever-growing stack of boxes of surplus office supplies or piles of outdated Policy & Procedure binders cluttering your cubicle or in your office areas collecting dust? To maintain a safe work environment, DHHS Facilities would like to keep those walkways clear. If you have surplus or unneeded office items and equipment, simply [download the "Surplus" tag from the forms page on the DHHS BulletinBoard](#) and let your supervisor or Facilities' building contact know so that a work order can be created for a pick up. When communicating with Facilities, please remember to include your entire building, room and cubicle address—located on your workstation label attached to your cubicle—and a detailed list of items and box count.





From left, Youth Advisory Board (YAB) member Jess Luné Weaver and Humboldt County Transition-Age Youth Collaboration (HCTAYC) founder and coaching consultant Jamie Lee Evans reflect on their thoughts after the Visioning events concluded.

# Youth Advisory Board envisions future



"Today's Goals" signage was posted throughout the Transition-Age Youth Center during the Visioning event as encouragement to help foster a collaborative environment.

Staff from DHHS Administration, Public Health, Behavioral Health, Child Welfare Services, CalPoly Humboldt's Social Work and Excelling & Living Independently Through Education (ELITE) Scholars programs, Humboldt County Office of Education and a YAB member discuss ideas, hopes and future goals.



Humboldt County Department of Health & Human Services

## Now Hiring

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

