

AWARE

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Catching up on the day's happenings, Head Start student Tasia and Mindy Davis, lead clinician and director of AWARE's early children's services in Billings, take a break for a brief chat. *Photo by Jim Tracy*

In Billings

Head Start, AWARE partnership expands

By Jim Tracy

The word is getting out about the unique partnership AWARE has forged with the largest program for pre-school children in Montana.

A bulletin board filled with staff photos at the Billings Head Start tells the story.

Alongside pictures of Head Start teachers and classroom aides are photos of AWARE staff. Though they work for two different agencies, they work seamlessly together to improve the lives of children who attend the bustling school in Billings' North Park neighborhood.

See Head Start on page 12

Miles City schools welcome AWARE

By Tim Pray

There is a chance that—on any given weekday morning—you can walk into the halls of Washington Middle School in Miles City and hear the sounds of a washing machine from the Home Economics Room. Further, the chances are good that it's Bill Hill, a TST for the Community Based Psychiatric

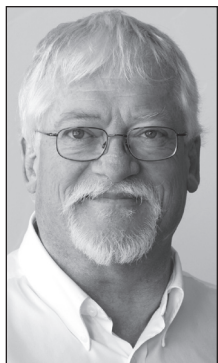
Rehabilitation & Support program who is washing a spare set of clothing for a youngster who just may need them later during the course of the day.

"He has a real concern for the AWARE kids that are enrolled..." says Jon Plowman, principal of the school, "...it's not just a job, and you can tell that."

See Miles City on page 5

Dear Staff and Friends,

Last month, Anaconda was subjected to a devastating windstorm that caused trees to uproot and roofs to blow completely apart all over town. At our new recycling center, the fence that had just been installed was blown over, and had to be considered a total loss. As I drove through town the following day, trying to grasp the extent of the damage—not just to our interests, but to the interests of the community as a whole—I couldn't help but think of how far we have come as an organization.



Larry Noonan

Thirty years ago, AWARE didn't have nearly the size or scope that it does now, and I can't help but think that, if we were struck by the same storm years ago, its impact would have had much more dire implications. We simply couldn't afford unexpected financial catastrophes.

We have always been an organization that finds a way to get back on our feet. There have been dark times, and times that we weren't sure how this was going to work. The recent storm, however, reaffirmed my belief that we are ready for adversity, ready for new challenges, and ready to charge ahead.

Part of charging ahead with our mission of unconditional care involves a willingness to be innovative, which, in a business sense, is a risk. But it is a risk that we need to take, and the moment we as an organization lose sight of that is the moment that we cease to be leaders in the services we provide.

I attended a national Head Start conference in Denver last month. Through an entire week full of seminars, workshops, group activities, meals, and networking, it struck me, and others for that matter, that the work we're doing is unique. The conversations were specifically in regards to our partnership with the Billings Head Start program, but the model that we use for that is the model that we use for all of our services.

As unexpected storms hit and unexpected partnerships succeed, it's important to know that we weather those storms and build those partnerships because we are a strong organization, have a stand-alone and professional staff, and are truly a part of all the communities we serve.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lawrence P. Noonan".

Behavioral Healthcare honors 2007 'Champions'

AWARE CEO Larry Noonan is one of four "champions" featured in the cover story of the November issue of *Behavioral Healthcare*.

"Being at the top of a behavioral healthcare organization certainly is a tough job, especially with omnipresent staffing and funding challenges," the introduction to the story says. "Yet some executives find ways to help their organizations not only survive, but thrive. They transform their operations to meet strategic goals; grow services to meet consumers' evolving needs; and share their experiences with colleagues to help improve service delivery across the country."

Besides Noonan, this year's honorees, nominated by readers and selected by the editors, are: Ann Borders, president and CEO of Cummins Behavioral Health Systems, Inc., in Indiana; Dale K. Klatzker, PhD, president and CEO of The Providence Center in Rhode Island and Massachusetts; Lawrence P. Noonan, CEO of AWARE, Inc., in Montana and New Mexico; and Tuerk Schlesinger, MBA, CEO of AltaPointe Health Systems, Inc., in Alabama, chosen in partnership with the sponsor of this year's awards, Netsmart Technologies. Read about the champions at www.behavioral.net.



Lawrence P. Noonan, CEO
Geri L. Wyant, CFO
Jeffrey Folsom, COO
Mike Schulte, CHO

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John O'Donnell, *President*
Allan Smith, *Vice President*
Teresa Marshall
Cheryl Zobenica
Keith Colbo
John Haffey

Written and Edited by Jim Tracy and Tim Pray

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John O'Donnell



Allan Smith



Teresa Marshall



John Haffey



Keith Colbo



Cheryl Zobenica

Board members bring enthusiasm, expertise to AWARE mission

John O'Donnell, President

Member since 1994

A retired Montana Power executive, John has been an active, positive participant in helping people in and around Montana. He devotes his time to many groups and activities in the Anaconda area, as demonstrated by his work at the Powell County Museum. John has been the President of the Board for the past six years, and has been instrumental in developing the Galen community and AWARE's Early Head Start program in Butte and Dillon. John's expertise with Montana Power/NorthWestern Energy helped to secure a \$1.2 million grant for sewer and water infrastructure on the Galen Campus.

Al Smith, Vice President

Member since 1987

Al has been an important influence in the development of AWARE's philosophy and purpose. He was an Advocate Attorney at the Montana State Hospital in Warm Springs. He is the attorney who won the "Eiler Decision," the landmark judgment for patients at the hospital whose treatment was inadequate. Al was the Executive Director of the Montana Advocacy Program when the "Travis D. vs. State of Montana" lawsuit was filed and which—even today—is helping to shape services for people affected by developmental disabilities. Al is Executive Director of the Montana Trial Lawyers Association and continues to donate his time to many groups and activities that better the lives of Montanans.

Teresa Marshall

Member since 1993

Teresa has probably helped everyone in Anaconda at one time or another. As a member of the Anaconda Food Bank, she helps feed the people in Anaconda whose resources are limited. Teresa was a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor who served some of the most challenging clients who were patients at Montana State Hospital. While Teresa's office was on the Montana State Hospital campus, she served a wide area around Deer Lodge County. Teresa is an important part of the Board and continues to help AWARE maintain its high standards.

John Haffey

Member since 2007

John "Jack" Haffey has spent most of his professional life working with large-scale business in the state of Montana as President of NorthWestern Energy and its predecessor, Montana Power Co. He served as a state senator in Montana from 1981-1988, and has spent time teaching math and French at Anaconda High School. With such a balanced professional and service history, he brings tangible, sound, and socially responsible business experience to the AWARE organization.

**Anaconda
Work
And
Residential
Enterprises**

Keith Colbo

Member since 2007

Keith has worked for AWARE in several capacities over the last few years and has enjoyed watching the organization grow. He states that he has the deepest respect for the work that is done for AWARE clients and the highest regard for the staff and leadership of the organization. He hopes that his background will bring a positive impact to the board and that he will be able to contribute to policy decisions. Keith adds that AWARE has always been a vibrant organization as is reflected in the growth and services it provides statewide. It is in this context that AWARE should continue to set the standard for services.

Cheryl Zobenica

Member since 2007

If one had to pick a word to describe Cheryl, it would easily be "involved." In addition to AWARE's Board of Directors, she serves on the boards of the Anaconda Local Development Corporation and the Anaconda Chamber of Commerce. In the past, she has served on the Big Brothers, Big Sisters-Butte Board, United Way Advisory Board, and the United Way Finance Committee. She also serves as Branch Manager/Vice President for Glacier Bank in Anaconda. With all of the work she does, she still finds time to spend with her family, including two grandchildren. Cheryl is honored to have been asked to become a member of the Board and is looking forward to contributing as a member and to the continued success of AWARE.

Glendive man achieves home ownership dream

Willis Bonner serves as a powerful role model for people with disabilities across the country and proves with a lot of persistence and creativity – not to mention, help from organizations like AWARE and the Montana Home Choice Coalition – the American dream of owning a home of your own can become a reality.

Willis Bonner is a pioneer. One of the first people in the state of Montana to use his HUD Section 8 Voucher for homeownership, Willis joined the elite 10 percent of people with developmental disabilities to own his own home.

Because of his love of sports and animals, Willis longed to live in a place that allowed him to be active in his community of Glendive. He was also tired of being a renter – he wanted the freedom to live the way he chose. Yet, due to the rapidly increasing cost of homeownership in Montana, Willis knew that he would need help.

Part of the community

Willis volunteers at a local kennel, bathing dogs and is an avid sports fan. Because he lives in a small community, the public transportation is limited and on nights and weekends, it's nonexistent. He was finding it increasingly difficult to make the three-mile bike ride to the kennel, be the high school Red Devil mascot, attend church and hang out at his favorite coffee shop. His goal was to own a house that was near the downtown area so he could really be part of the community he loved.

Willis attended one of the first community outreach meetings to help people with disabilities become homeowners. With the help of AWARE, he set up a savings account, and started looking for the perfect home. AWARE provides a variety of community-based services for families and children in 19 counties in Eastern

Montana that cover more than one-third of the state's land mass.

Gloria Garceau-Glaser at AWARE worked on the financing for Willis. People in the low-income housing and real estate fields called it "layered financing." In Willis's case, that was an understatement.

Section 8 voucher

The Fannie Mae Home Choice program for people with disabilities was a critical component. Since Willis was one of the first people in Montana to use his Section 8 Voucher towards his mortgage, the people at AWARE had to convince the banks that this was not really a risk.

AWARE provided \$12,210 in down-payment assistance, Montana Board of Housing provided \$500 in earnest money, and Montana Statewide Homeowners Assistance (HOME funds) provided \$7,500 just to open doors for Willis. This coupled with the low-interest mortgage through Fannie Mae and the Section 8 Voucher providing on-going mortgage payments further closed the affordability gap.

However, the only house that was in Willis's price range, in the area he wanted to live needed a lot of work.

The two bedroom 1,000-square-foot home with a fenced yard needed a new roof and bathroom. Willis received a 1 percent interest loan for home repairs from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Now, nearly four years after first moving into his dream home, Willis is positive he made the right decision and insists that it was worth all the work. He loves fixing up and taking care of his house. His new goals are to buy a computer, learn to drive and continue studying at the adult learning center.

Good credit important

Willis does have some advice for other prospective homeowners – learn how important having good credit is and always pay your bills on time! Willis serves as a powerful role model for people with disabilities across the country and proves with a lot of persistence and creativity – not to mention, help from organizations like AWARE and the Montana Home Choice Coalition – the American dream of owning a home of your own can become a reality.

This story reprinted with permission of the World Institute on Disability (www.wid.org).

Montana Home Choice Coalition

The mission of the Montana Home Choice Coalition is to create better community housing choices for all people with disabilities by working through a coalition of Montana citizens, advocates, providers, federal state, and local agencies, the housing finance community, real estate agents, and the home-building industry.

The Coalition believes that every person deserves quality, affordable, and safe housing of their own choosing. Housing choice for people and families with disabilities is the cornerstone of a stable life in the community offering greater independence and dignity.

Montana Home Choice Coalition

A.W.A.R.E., Inc.

616 Helena Avenue, Suite 305

Helena, MT 59601

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Members of AWARE's Miles City school program team left to right are: Caleb Samuelson, Jeff Regan, Bill Hill, Joe Jerrel, and Beth Tunnell. (not pictured Anna Rapson, TSC, on maternity leave).

Miles City...

For Hill, along with his Miles City colleagues at other area schools, TSTs Beth Tunnell, Joe Jerrell, Caleb Samuelson, and TSC Anna Rapson, the job of building trust with both the student bodies and the teachers of the schools is an absolutely crucial element in building a program that works.

AWARE's Miles City school presence is manifested in two programs: CBPR&S, a community-based program designed to provide youth with social skill building activities and mentoring throughout all venues of the community, including school. The other, the CSCT program, works with youth strictly within the setting of the school, and, within that setting, educators and AWARE staff focus on providing youth with all the tools necessary to be successful in their education, whether that means some form of mentoring, therapy, or any other sort of intervention.

Jeff Regan, AWARE's service administrator for both programs in Miles City, set out in the community

with the goal of getting a handle on the needs of the city and its youth, particularly in the schools. He met with AWARE CEO Larry Noonan, and the two decided to run a "needs assessment" throughout the community. It became clear that the schools were in need of qualified staff trained to connect with youth who—from time to time—struggle within the classroom.

'Win-win-win situation'

So, while Jeff, Larry, and the staff assembled in Miles City were confident of their ability to provide just the services that would create a win-win-win situation, the schools were cautiously optimistic. With the school environment nationwide walking on eggshells, it would stand to reason that anyone charged with assuring the quality of education, safety, and equal opportunities to staff, student bodies, and parents would walk into the proposition very carefully. Right off the bat, though, AWARE's presence in the school was welcomed.

"Last year was an experiment year," says Plowman. "We had some pretty tough kids." Hill, though, who has had extensive experience with children, jumped right in and immediately made himself and AWARE's services a resource that can't be argued with. "A big part of it is trust," Plowman continues. "He has filled the role of a mentor to these kids. While he's connecting with the youth, he's aware of his role within the school, keeping us all in the loop, and we continue to do the same for him."

For any organization in Eastern Montana, there's a certain level of autonomy that is required to succeed. Many people visiting Montana for the first time and traveling from the western to the eastern parts of the state are struck by the difference in topography, climate, culture, economy, and social norms.

Any AWARE program operating in such a different climate and so far away from the comforts of headquarters in Anaconda, would require an unquestionably great team

Continued on page 7

Shrink wRap

Just Say No To Texas!

By Dr. Ira Lourie

As AWARE moves toward a stronger commitment to providing unconditional care through our Unconditional Care Commission (UCC) values, we recognize that one of the measures of the need for further effort is the numbers of children in our care who are sent to residential facilities, many of them out of state, often to Texas.

Many Montanans seem to think that Texas as a state holds the promise of a cure for the worst emotional and neurological problems of our youth. However, the purpose of this column is not to challenge that premise, but to offer the idea that when we truly accept the concept of Unconditional Care, residential treatment center care in or out of Texas should not be necessary and that sending youth to such facilities is a sign of our failure to uphold our values.

Under our AWARE UCC values we state that we believe that children and youth should be treated in their communities and in their families. We further believe that families are children's most important resource. So why do we continue to take kids out of their families and communities and send them thousands of miles from home? The most cynical among us would say, "Out of sight, out of mind." The most practical of us might say, "There is no money for community-based treatment." The most burnt-out of us might say, "We just don't have anything else to offer." But, what children, youth and families really hear us say is, "I've given up on you!" which is quickly interpreted as meaning at best, "You've failed" and at worst, "Get lost!"

The concept of Unconditional Care came out of a youth service program in Chicago named Kaleidoscope; it was run by Karl Dennis who is known as the father of wraparound services. The idea was that as parents we don't have a choice as to who our kids will be and we love them unconditionally, no matter what they have done. Kaleidoscope therefore had a "No Reject, No Eject" policy



Dr. Ira Lourie

for their services. And by the way, sending a kid to Texas, no matter how one couches it, is an Eject. But we at AWARE are not alone; services systems nationally have been Ejecting kids for years and as the kids we serve bounce from program to program they see themselves through our eyes as multiple failures.

In order to break this negative cycle, Kaleidoscope committed themselves to not giving up on kids and treating them unconditionally. This means coming up with unique solutions for each case that will allow the child to stay under our care, in their family and community. As we have made this commitment in AWARE, we have proven that when we put our heads, hearts and resources together we too can make this happen for the children and youth with the most difficult problems who are entrusted to our care.

Recently, AWARE has developed within its youth services a mechanism for making our care more unconditional, which involves our youth case managers, family support staff and our clinicians. We call this new process Out Of state Placement Staffing (I'm not sure if the acronym for these staffings, OOPS, was done on purpose or by accident, but it sure does get the point across). OOPS encourages a multilevel staff teaming process to develop innovative solutions to tough clinical problems in an effort to avoid out of state placements and to better prepare for bringing kids back home from these placements.

Coordinated by Pandi Highland who is one of AWARE's lead clinicians, OOPS currently involves a team brainstorming session led by Pandi and includes one or more of AWARE's administrators: the Director of Family Support Service, Mike Kelly, the Director of Children's Case Management Services, Gale Evans, the Chief Operating Officer, Jeff Folsom, and/or myself, the Medical Director. The promise of the process is for the senior clinical and administrative staff to offer suggestions and to support case managers and family support specialists

Continued on next page

Miles City...

of staff and decision-makers. Jeff Regan keeps in touch with the appropriate service directors and, of course, Noonan in the interest of touching base.

“Carter Anderson, Mike Kelly, and Jaci Noonan have been extremely supportive,” Regan says. “Carter helps with any CSCT questions, Mike does the same with Support Services, and Jaci is an all-around help. She knows what works in Eastern Montana.”

Regan is quick to point out, though, that it is the team of TSTs and TSCs in Miles City that have built the environment of trust in the Miles City school system.

Washington Middle School, Highland Park Elementary, Custer County High School, and Garfield Elementary School are all working with the Miles City AWARE staff, and the relationship is working out beautifully in each of the schools.

“They definitely enhance things,” according to Lorie Huffman, principal at the Garfield School. “The AWARE staff have been willing to tweak some things to make it better for everyone, creating an environment in which everyone is asking ‘what can help the kids?’”

As the AWARE staff continues to make connections throughout the community in Miles City, those being served, school administrators, parents, and teachers will continue to speak highly of the relationships that have been built and continue to thrive.

“Nothing is better to show how well someone does than saying ‘hey...look at these results!’ says Huffman. “The teachers have learned by word of mouth to trust this situation.”

Jon Plowman adds, “AWARE provides a great service, and if anyone wanted to call me, I’d tell them that immediately.”

Find peace of mind during the holidays

Kathy Shea, lead clinician in Helena, passed on this holiday season stress-reliever to staff in a recent e-mail:

“Yup – it is official. You can’t run. You can’t hide.

Holiday season is upon us. If you are like me you love every second of the season, stress and all. But, the fact of the matter is that for the kids and families we work for, this time of year is especially tough. Which means, by default, that your job this next month or so may be especially tough. Therefore...here are some additional thoughts on maintaining your own sanity:

- ▶ Sit in silence for at least 10 minutes a day. Buy a lock for the door if you have to.

- ▶ When you wake up in the morning complete the following statement, “My purpose is to _____ today.”

- ▶ Eat more foods that grow on trees and plants and eat less foods that are manufactured in plants.

- ▶ Drink green tea and plenty of water. Eat blueberries, salmon, broccoli, almonds and walnuts.

- ▶ Don’t waste your precious energy on gossip, energy vampires, issues of the past, negative thoughts, or things that are beyond your control.

- ▶ Burn candles. Use the nice sheets. Wear the fancy underwear every day. Don’t save it all for a special occasion. You deserve to be pampered TODAY.

- ▶ Frame every disaster with these words: “In five years, will this matter?”

- ▶ However good or bad a situation is, it will change.

- ▶ Take a 10-minute walk every day. And while you walk, smile. It is the best anti-depressant.

- ▶ Live with the 3 E’s: Energy. Enthusiasm. And Empathy.

- ▶ Make a gratitude list and read it when you are struggling. It reminds you what blessings you carry with you every day.

- ▶ Go to bed early. Snuggle with your pets, your partner, your teddy bear.

- ▶ So, we can make it through this season in the spirit that it was intended: Joy. Laughter. Peace...peace of mind.”

Shrink wRap...

in coming up with innovative solutions which will allow us to keep kids in state and in their communities and families. We have already had some successes with OOPS and at least two youth will not be returned to Montana from out of state without sufficient discharge planning.

When asked about sending kids to Texas, I have been known to ask in reply, “What do you expect will happen there for that child?” The answer often comes back, “They have a unique program there especially for this kind of child.” My answer to this is, “When is the last time you saw a program truly do something unique for anyone? Most often programs offer a generic program than fits a class of children and don’t have the capacity to be truly individualized.” The result of these placements is that often the children come back without unique solutions to their problems, under the influence of powerful

medications, and basically unprepared for their family or community.

When I get a specific answer to my question about what do we want to happen in Texas, our brainstorming can usually come up with a number of possible community and family-based solutions. The advantage of doing our OOPS brainstorming with both clinical experts and high-level AWARE administrators is that once a solution is decided upon, we administrators are available to help facilitate the development and funding of these often extremely unique answers.

Now at AWARE, when we say OOPS, we are really are saying, “Just say no to Texas!”

Dr. Ira Lourie serves as Medical Director to AWARE, Inc. He is the author of Everything is Normal Until Proven Otherwise. He resides in Hagerstown, Maryland.

For the record

AWARE sets up document center at Galen

By Jim Tracy

Medical records clerk Donna Kostecky has her work laid out before her in cardboard boxes lined up on the floor at AWARE's new Records Center at Galen.

The boxes contain the files of consumers – single folders for some, boxes of bulging folders for others.

Kostecky's job is to organize the folders, catalog them and file them in steel cabinets two deep that roll on tracks and line the walls of what once was a two-story warehouse on the Galen campus northeast of Anaconda.

It's all part of a plan to establish a secure archive for thousands of files AWARE must keep to comply with state and federal regulations. Like other providers of human services, AWARE is required to follow strict standards for protecting the privacy of consumer's health information under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, better known as HIPAA.

From the outside, the two-story concrete block building where the records are kept looks like Scrooge McDuck's money bin.

"When I walked in there were boxes stacked up seven high," Kostecky said in a recent interview, recalling her first day on the new job.

Boxes are still stacked in her office, but the stacks are gradually shrinking.

So far she has completed filing a backlog of records from A through H. At the same time, new files arrive each week.

"Every time I get just a little ahead, more come in," Kostecky said.

A log she keeps shows 2,013 files arrived at the Record Center during July, August, September and October, while 194 files went out over the same period. The reorganization of AWARE's Great Falls office alone produced 711 files that had to be organized, put in correct file folders, labeled and prepared for the file system. In October, 213 files arrived from AWARE's Dillon office alone.

The system Kostecky uses to track files is partly inherited and partly her own invention.

"The volume we get is enormous, but the filing system is working well," she said.

She knows that because Youth Case Manager Supervisor Gale Evans recently asked her to pull a stack of files for a number of consumers.

"I was able to pull all the files in 10 minutes."

To help track records, Kostecky, who has worked for



AWARE consumer files, many of them still in the boxes they were transported in, soon will be placed in order in secure metal cabinets at the Record Center at Galen. Photo by Jim Tracy



Donna Kostecky reaches for a file at AWARE's new Record Center on the Galen campus northeast of Anaconda. Kostecky is working her way through a backlog of consumer folders and storing them in steel cabinets. *Photo by Jim Tracy*

AWARE for eight years, continues to work on an existing database. So far, she has more than 6,000 entries on her spreadsheet, an indicator of how much AWARE has grown in 30-plus years. When it started in 1976, the corporation had files for only 16 people.

A former payroll clerk at the main office in Anaconda, Kostecky started spending part of her work week at Galen in March 2007. She's been there full time since July.

Before the Record Center was established all files were kept in individual AWARE offices.

"That created its own problems," Kostecky said.

"Files were misplaced in some cases or were out of order."

Still, most of the files come to her in good shape, "especially if there is an administrative assistant in the AWARE facility to prepare the files," she said.

Once she gets a firm grip on files already at the center, Kostecky plans to visit AWARE offices across the state.

"Part of my job will be to meet with staff and collect records," she said.

One box that recently arrived at the center contains 15 bulging folders – the paperwork for just one person.

"The folders pretty much tell consumers' life stories," Kostecky said. "Seeing these files certainly opened my eyes. It brings home the way AWARE touches people."

Besides a few computer glitches, Kostecky has had to face real bugs at the Record Center – the six-legged, eight-legged and hundred-legged variety – "little crawly things," she calls them.

"We have spiders, hornets and other insects," she said. "This is definitely not the place for someone who has a fear of bugs. It seems like every box I open or move has a friend for me."

If she had one request of people keeping records it's this: "People filling out forms and other paperwork for consumers should use the person's given name – the name that's on their Social Security card. That's huge. The name needs to be correct."

HIPAA protections explained

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996, or HIPAA, includes provisions designed to encourage electronic transactions and also requires safeguards to protect the security and confidentiality of health information.

HIPAA covers health plans, health care clearinghouses, and health care providers like AWARE who conduct certain financial and administrative transactions (e.g., enrollment, billing and eligibility verification) electronically. Most health insurers, pharmacies, doctors and other health care providers were required to comply with these federal standards beginning in April 2003.

Developed by the Department of Health and Human Services, HIPAA standards provide patients with access to their medical records and more control over how their personal health information is used and disclosed. They represent a uniform, federal floor of privacy protections for consumers across the country.

Patient protections

The privacy regulations ensure a national floor of privacy protections for patients by limiting the ways that health plans, pharmacies, hospitals and other covered entities can use patients' personal medical information. The regulations protect medical records and other individually identifiable health information, whether it is on paper, in computers or communicated orally.

Access to medical records

Patients generally should be able to see and obtain copies of their medical records and request corrections if they identify errors and mistakes. Health plans, doctors, hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and other covered entities generally should provide access these records within 30 days and may charge patients for the cost of copying and sending the records.

Training brings field staff, administration face to face for one-day sessions in Anaconda

By Jim Tracy

AWARE'S recent revival of corporate-wide administrative training serves two purposes, according to Chief Financial Officer Geri Wyant.

The one-day sessions at the main office in Anaconda help staff become more efficient at completing the blizzards of paperwork that sometimes accompany jobs in human services.

But more important, Wyant says, "I don't think anybody can underestimate the power of people meeting people and people establishing relationships.

"It's easy in the age of computers to send correspondence electronically without interacting with people. It makes a big difference when people can sit down together and have lunch."

About 40 AWARE employees so far have spent a day at the Anaconda office meeting face to face with administrative staff and learning the basics of keeping records – everything from filling out time-sheets, to tracking petty cash, to buying groceries, to completing vehicle maintenance forms.

The first training session took place in October and November.

After a brief introduction from Wyant, the administration staff took over.

"Each one of the experts in the department presents the training," Wyant said. "They bring to the table what they feel are the most urgent and frequent questions that need to be addressed."

Trainees also get a manual with general information – phone directories and a list of paid holidays, for example – and specifics about items such as Novatime, purchase orders, petty cash, rental agreements and lists of accounts.

The manual is broken down by department: human resources, payroll,

Once they understand the 'whys,' they have a tendency to get it done right the first time and get back to what they really want to do, and that is help consumers. — Geri Wyant, Chief Financial Officer

accounts payable and accounts receivable. It includes a section on transportation and a list of contacts with photos.

"We provide the most important information they need to know about each department," Wyant said.

She described the training sessions as an opportunity for "cross pollination."

"It lets people in the field discuss how they do things in different ways. It also helps having the field staff come in and talk about their trials and tribulations with my staff."

And after they return to their own hometowns, she said, they should feel more comfortable calling and asking questions.

"It goes back to putting the face to the name," Wyant said. "People are able to communicate better with one another after they've had a chance to talk face to face."

Wyant said AWARE has always emphasized the need for efficiency in completing administrative chores.

"We started this a long time ago to help people in the field do the administrative portion of their job a lot better," she said. "We want not only to let them know the importance of the paperwork and the time requirements to complete it but also to put in place processes so they can do tasks as completely and efficiently as possible.

"Once they understand the 'whys,' they have a tendency to get it done right the first time and get back to what they really want to do, and that is help consumers."

Though it may not always seem so, she said, all of the paperwork staff are required to complete can be traced to government regulations, contractual obligations with the state and federal governments or licensing requirements.

Who receives training?

"It's everybody," Wyant said. "Everybody does payroll, purchasing, hires. It starts with supervisors whether they do it themselves or delegate it to someone else. Anybody can benefit from it."

Training next year will include people recently hired by AWARE and anyone directors or supervisors believe should attend. Classes will be restricted to 25 to 30 people.

Here's the 2008 training schedule:

- Thursday, Jan. 24
- Thursday, March 20
- Thursday, May 22
- Thursday, July 24

Wyant stressed that the training sessions don't cover everything a person needs to know to satisfy administrative requirements.

For that reason, she said, anyone who has questions or needs help should feel free to contact administrative staff by phone or e-mail.

The ultimate goal is improve efficiency.

"The hope is that this will allow them to do things right the first time in accordance with policies and procedures," Wyant said. "If they do it right the first time, it saves everybody time and effort."

Book Marks

Each issue of *AWARE Ink* includes a collection of books recommended by staff, covering a range of topics related to the work we do. This issue features titles suggested by Dr. Alan Reyes, a psychiatrist who has worked for *AWARE* in the Missoula office since June 2006.

Dr. Reyes has recommended the first three titles “because fiction can help us to have understanding and empathy for the people we work with.”

“I recommend the book on short psychotherapy as a reminder that all our therapeutic encounters can be seen as brief psychotherapy sessions,” he says. “The last I recommend because it is the definitions of the illnesses and is the best reference for the bare bones of the disorders that cause our clients disabilities.”

Here is a brief summary of his recommendations:

Flowers for Algernon

By Daniel Keyes

Published originally as a short story in 1958, *Flowers for Algernon* appeared as a full-length novel in 1966. Still popular, the novel unfolds in a series of “Progress Reports” written by 32-year-old Charlie Gordon, whose IQ of 68 is tripled by an experimental surgical procedure.

Unfortunately, the effects of the operation wear off after several months, and at the end of the novel Charlie is once more of subnormal intelligence.

Much of the novel’s power comes from the use of first-person point of view, as Charlie’s entries move from semi-literacy to complex sophistication and back to semi-literacy. The character of Charlie Gordon is a memorable portrait of alienation, of an individual who is at odds with his society and who struggles to have satisfactory relationships with others.

The novel gained additional fame when its 1968 film version, *Charly*, earned Cliff Robertson an Academy Award as best actor for his portrayal of Charlie Gordon.

K-Pax

By Gene Brewer

K-PAX is the story of a psychiatric patient who claims to be from another planet (K-PAX). The novel explores the relationship of the main character, Prot (short for protagonist?), his doctor (Gene Brewer), and other patients at the hospital where Prot has been committed. Some of the patients show remarkable improvement after speaking with him. The novel was first published in March 1995 and subsequently reprinted in 20 countries. K-PAX was nominated for the Arthur C. Clarke award in 1996. In 2001, the novel was made into a movie starring Kevin Spacey as Prot.

Of Mice and Men

By John Steinbeck

Critics have described *Of Mice and Men* as John Steinbeck’s parable about what it means to be human. Set on a ranch in the Salinas Valley in California during the Great Depression of the 1930s, it tells the story of two migrant farm workers, George Milton and Lennie Small, and their dream of some day owning their own ranch and the obstacles that stand in their way. Ultimately, Lennie, the mentally handicapped giant who makes George’s dream of owning his own ranch worthwhile, ironically becomes the biggest obstacle in the way of achieving that dream. The action of the story occurs over three days. The novel’s two main characters portray victims of forces beyond their control. Their extraordinary friendship distinguishes them from other hopeless and lonely migrant farm workers.

Time Limited Psychotherapy

By James Mann

Waiting lists at psychiatric clinics and growing numbers of patients in long-term psychotherapy highlight the need for shorter treatment methods. Existing short-term psychotherapy sessions tend to be vague and uncertain. They lack a clearly formulated rationale and methodology. Dr. Mann, professor of psychiatry at Boston University School of Medicine and former dean of the Boston Psychoanalytic Institute, hopes his technique for brief psychotherapy designed around time itself will revolutionize current practice. He examines the significance of time in human life in terms of the development of a time sense as well as its unconscious meaning. Mann shows how the interplay between regressive pressures of a child’s sense of infinite time and the adult reality of categorical time determine a patient’s unconscious expectations of psychotherapy.

Diagnostic Criteria From DSM4

American Psychiatric Association

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is an American handbook for mental health professionals that lists different categories of mental disorders and the criteria for diagnosing them, according to the publishing organization the American Psychiatric Association. Clinicians and researchers as well as insurance companies, pharmaceutical companies and policy makers worldwide use it.

There have been five revisions of the DSM since it was first published in 1952. The last major revision was the DSM-IV published in 1994, although a “text revision” was produced in 2000.



Billings Head Start occupies three floors at the former North Park School. The federally funded program for pre-school children serves 360 kids in Billings and surrounding areas. About 15 percent of those also receive AWARE services. *Photo by Jim Tracy*

Head Start...

"AWARE staff have integrated so naturally to our program they are just seen as other teachers or staff persons," says Colleen Bosch, family services supervisor at Head Start.

"I don't think the general community would ever pick up that we are actually two agencies in one building."

Bosch has worked at Billings Head Start for 18 years, the last year supervising a staff of nine family services specialists.

She and Mindy Davis, lead clinician and director of AWARE's early childhood service in Billings, have formed a strong professional relationship since the non-profit began working directly with Head Start in August 2006.

Bosch and Davis talk with each other throughout the day, catching up in the hallway or in each other's offices. They also attend weekly team meetings with teachers and participate in treatment plan meetings every three months.

Bosch says AWARE's presence is a blessing to children with special needs who otherwise might not be able to take advantage of the boost Head Start provides to needy kids.

"Children with mental health or behavior concerns are identified so much more quickly because of AWARE," she says. "It's the early intervention piece that we all need so desperately."

"Early intervention makes all the difference," adds Davis. "If we wait until second or third grade, problems are amplified

and take more time to solve. Because we intervene early, we need to keep very few children – only extreme cases – longer than a year."

Services AWARE provides at the school include outpatient therapy, evaluation and assessment, therapeutic family care, and community-based rehabilitation and support.

Altogether, AWARE's staff works with 46 children ages 3 to 6 at Head Start, or just over 15 percent of the kids enrolled.

AWARE also serves two pre-school classes at Rimrock School.

In addition, AWARE provides services to families in their own homes, building on the work Head Start is doing, according to Bosch.

"It's become a joint effort between Head Start and AWARE to enhance that relationship with parents," she says. "As a result, it strengthens their parenting and their families."

What the kindergarten teachers are telling us is that AWARE's involvement speeds the identification process for children needing increasing services. We're actually getting phone calls from principals who are hearing from parents that they want AWARE's help. — Sally Leep, Billings Head Start Director

Easily the most important work AWARE does at Head Start, though, is in the classroom.

A Head Start class can have as many as 18 children, each taught by a degreed teacher. AWARE staff, indistinguishable from Head Start staff in the classroom, provide one-on-one support for kids who are struggling, freeing teachers to devote their time and attention to other kids without distraction.

A measurable benefit of

AWARE's involvement can be seen in the children who take part in the summer program, Bosch says.

While most Head Start kids take the summer off, many children AWARE serves continue pre-school through June, July and August, learning new skills and reinforcing others.

At the end of Head Start's school year in the spring, AWARE invites parents who already receive its services to enroll their children in a summer program, also based at the Head Start building.

By all accounts, the summer program, which includes transportation, has been a boon to kids, their peers at Head Start and their families.

The extra support has allowed the kids to return to Head Start in the fall with greater success to the same classrooms they were in with the same teachers and classmates, Davis says.

"When they return to school, many no longer need constant attention to get through the school day. They can make it through the day and follow normal teacher redirection without any one-on-one support."

Three kids recently discharged from the program had participated in AWARE's summer session.

Davis says the summer program has been especially good for children graduating from Head Start to kindergarten. Besides honing academic and social skills, the kids got to visit their new schools, including playground tours.

AWARE also followed up as school was starting in the fall with a call to principals at the kids' schools.

"Anything to help ease them in," says Davis.

The schools, the kindergartens and the principals, she says, "have been very receptive to us."

"What the kindergarten teachers are telling us is that AWARE's involvement speeds the identification process for children needing increasing services," says Billings Head Start Director Sally Leep. "We're actually getting phone calls from principals who are hearing from parents that they want AWARE's help."

In all, Billings Head Start, headquartered in a former neighborhood school in the well-kept North Park area,

Continued on page 15

'Joyful noise' fills classrooms, hallways at Billings Head Start

"The first thing you notice is the sound ... the voices of children mixing and mingling into a joyful noise." — Head Start brochure

Billings Head Start Director Sally Leep loves to talk about the benefits the federally funded program provides to preschool children.

Most of all it's a place where kids can flourish, she says.

Head Start devotes individual attention to every enrolled child, including classroom instruction from certified childhood teachers and home visits if required. The program emphasizes development of social skills, early literacy, language and other kindergarten readiness skills.

In addition, Head Start provides nutritious meals and snacks for kids and information for parents on healthful eating and meal planning on a budget; help in getting medical and dental exams and hearing and vision screening; and transportation if needed to and from the classroom to home or child care.

For children with special needs, Head Start provides speech and language therapy and individual help with delayed development in any area, including social, motor and thinking skills

Leep says the program helps kids and their parents, but it also provides benefits to the wider culture.

Society receives nearly \$9 in benefits for every \$1 invested in Head Start children, she says. Those benefits include increased earnings, employment, and family

stability, and decreased welfare dependency, crime costs, grade repetition, and special education.

A recent study funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, showed that Head Start children performed better on cognitive, language, and health measures than their counterparts in a comparison group.

"Other studies have found that Head Start children have increased achievement test scores and that they experience favorable long-term effects on grade repetition, special education, and graduation rates," Leep says. "When children enter Head Start, they are far below their non-poor peers in school readiness skills. When they exit Head Start, they are at or above what their non-poor peers are."

According to Leep, Head Start children at age 5 had larger vocabularies than a study control group children had. They also demonstrated a higher level of social-emotional development than did the control group.

Head Start has served low-income children and their families since 1965. It actually consists of two programs: Head Start and Early Head Start.

Funding goes directly from the federal government to local grantees. The federal government provides 80 percent of the yearly cost to operate a Head Start program. The remaining 20 percent must come from a local match or in-kind contributions, which may be in the form of money, donations of goods or services, or volunteer hours.

Head Start and Early Head Start programs serve children in families earning income at or below the federal poverty level, which for a family of four in the 48 contiguous states and the District of Columbia was \$20,000 in 2006.

Panel studying criminal background checks

Volunteer group looking for definitions, answers to fulfill legislative request

By Jim Tracy

AWARE Human Resources Director George Groesbeck deals every day with issues surrounding new employees, including questions about criminal background checks.



George Groesbeck

Now Groesbeck is learning about criminal background checks from a different angle. He's one of 15 members of a volunteer workgroup charged with addressing background checks for "direct care workers" as defined in a resolution from the 2007 Montana Legislature's regular session.

The joint House-Senate resolution asked the Department of Public Health and Human Services and the Department of Justice to look at the possibility of requiring such checks for workers and to submit a proposal to the 2009 Legislature.

"I'm excited to be a member of the work group," said Groesbeck. "The policy implications and potential impacts mean it's going to be an interesting process. We're still just trying to define who is a direct care worker."

Here's the working definition the group is using: "an unlicensed person who works in private or licensed residential settings, licensed health care facilities, or day service programs that involve direct contact with a client, patient or resident."

DPHHS staff have been charged with comparing other states' definitions and reporting back in December.

The workgroup is also struggling with other definitions. For example, criminal background checks would become a condition of employment in programs and services that serve "the most vulnerable people in society."

"Who are the most vulnerable people in society?" Groesbeck asks. "We'll have to determine that as well."

Like other corporations that provide human services, AWARE already runs criminal background checks on new employees as well as yearly background checks on people already on the job at a cost of thousands of dollars a year. These checks, required by DPHHS, include the Montana Department of Justice criminal background check, Motor Vehicle Record check and Adult/Child Protective Services background check.

Tammy DeRieux, hiring and recruitment specialist, performs all background checks for new applicants that are considered for hire.

"Background checks are one of many factors considered in hire approvals," DeRieux said.

"In the past, the Department of Justice criminal background checks were submitted via fax and the results could take two to four days, delaying the hiring process. In July, the Department of Justice instituted an online service that allows registered users to perform the criminal background checks, which has helped expedite hiring."

Human Resources Technician Barb Wilson performs the yearly employee background check, which includes searches on the Montana Department of Justice web site. The web site allows registered users to search the state's public criminal history record database.

An online background check costs \$11.50 and includes searches on up to four aliases, Wilson explained.

The criminal history information available to the public includes: notations of arrests and detentions; complaints, indictments or information filed and any related dispositions; sentences; and correctional status.

The Department of Justice background checks don't include driving records, except felony DUI, nor do they include personal descriptions and photos, dismissals after a deferred sentence, protection orders, warrants, federal offenses (including tribal), and out-of-state records.

AWARE also runs motor vehicle records checks, adding to the cost.

A controversial provision suggested in the joint Senate-House resolution would require an applicant seeking employment as a direct-care staff person in a program or service that is provided, funded, or regulated by the Department of Public Health and Human Services to undergo a check using fingerprints through the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The workgroup is also working on a specific list of crimes that would exclude a convicted applicant from employment as a direct care staff person.

Costs likely would go up depending on what the working group proposes to the Legislature.

"We still haven't got to the big issue of who's going to pay for them," said Groesbeck, who is uniquely qualified to serve on the working group since he also serves in the Legislature as House District 74 representative.

Joan Miles, director of Montana Department of Public

We still haven't got to the big issue of who's going to pay for these background checks. —

George Groesbeck, Human Resources Director

Health and Human Services, appointed Groesbeck to the group.

Other workgroup members include Betty Beverly, Montana Senior Citizen's Association; Webb Brown, Montana Chamber of Commerce; Gayla Brown, MSN, RN, Elkhorn Health and Rehab; Jerry Daugett, Living Life; Tom Gregg, St Peters Hospital; Mike Hanshew, Montana Health Solutions; Rose Hughes, MHCA; Stu Lekander, Easter Seals; Karolyne Redding, Waterford; Bob Ross, South Central Mental Health Center; Claudia Clifford, AARP; and Jeff Buska, Jill Caldwell and Becky Fleming-Siebenaler, all of the Quality Assurance Division of DPHHS.

Also invited to participate were representatives from the Department of Justice, Department of Labor and Industry, and the Department of Corrections to participate in the discussions.

The workgroup is supported by DPHHS agency staff from various divisions with programs or services provided, funded or regulated by DPHHS.

The workgroup will meet again December 4-5 in Helena.

In the meantime, the group is looking to other states for answers to questions about background checks.

For example, they want to know how often background checks are done elsewhere? Do other states have an exception for consumer directed care? Who gets the results and who pays for the background checks?

They also want answers to other questions:

- Are businesses going to be told whom they cannot hire?
- Who has the liability for not hiring (or hiring) somebody?
- Are background checks transferable for a period of time?
- Can employees work pending a background check?
- Can employers grandfather in existing employees?
- If employers need to perform background checks on existing employees, will the results be treated the same?
- Are there concerns about identity theft?

More meetings are set for January and February. The timeline calls for presenting a proposal to the Governor's Office and the Children and Families Interim Committee and delivering draft legislation next December.

"A lot of discussion needs to take place before then," says Groesbeck, who has a long list of questions and concerns about the requirements.

The group's goal, he said, is to work on legislation that will get passed at the legislature, and not be too broad to cause it to fail.

Head Start...

serves 360 children – 299 in Billings and another 60 or so in Carbon County (Red Lodge and Joliet) and Big Horn County (Hardin).

Even though they meet federal poverty guidelines, another 100 children are on a waiting list because there isn't enough money available to enroll them.

According to Leep, historically about 15 percent of children in the program require mental health services either on site or in the community.

At Billings Head Start they're receiving those services more effectively because of AWARE's involvement, says Leep.

"I think the children at Head Start are receiving the highest quality services because our partnership with AWARE is so strong," she says. "It is blended. It is seamless because AWARE staff and our staff work so well together in the classroom."

Mike Kelly, who directs AWARE's family support services and set up the joint program in Billings, agrees.

"Communication between the staffs is incredible," Kelly says. "This promotes quality service from both. Families are truly happy and grateful for the combination of services they receive. And early identification of support needs will translate to increased success for these kids in their academic and social careers as they continue on to elementary school."

"I don't believe there is another relationship like this one in the state," he says. "Head Start is our priority in the Billings community."

AWARE's Head Start staff besides Davis are Danielle Eldridge, fulltime clinician; treatment service technicians Tenille Grossman, Mandi Contreras, Melissa Eldridge, Lita Brown and Becca Eidem; case manager Karla Wickens; and treatment service specialists Lori Kelly and Heather Waite.

Dr. Alan Reyes, an AWARE psychiatrist based in Missoula, visits every six to eight weeks to do assessments with kids.

Coming in January

The January/February 2008 issue of *AWARE Ink* will feature stories and photos from Corporate Congress 2007, Dec. 5-7, at Fairmont Hot Springs.

Please send ideas and tips for other stories about AWARE staff and programs or questions about the organization to ask@aware-inc.org.



AWARE in the News

AWARE has been in the news lately in Butte, Anaconda and Great Falls.

A pair of stories in *The Montana Standard* in Butte highlighted two aspects of the work AWARE employees and consumers are doing.

Reporter Erin Nicholes featured AWARE's new equipment and facilities at Anaconda Recycling in a full-page story in the *Standard's* Sunday business section on Nov. 18.

The story included photos of habilitation technician Mike Kopp; behavioral services coordinator Knute Oaas; and consumer John Micheletti, who works at the recycling center and adjacent Hope Thrift Store.

Nicholes noted that AWARE accepts newspaper, magazines, plastics, cardboard and cans. Residents can drop off recyclables at the center, and the program provides pickup services to 70 Anaconda businesses, from offices to restaurants.

Center workers pick up recyclables in Deer Lodge and Philipsburg, and process material collected by Butte Recycling, which AWARE also owns.

THE TWICE-WEEKLY *Anaconda Leader*, wrote on Oct. 5 about construction of the new 12,000-square foot recycling building on the east edge of Anaconda. Kathie Miller, editor of the *Leader*, reported that in terms of tonnage of material, AWARE is the largest recycler in Southwest Montana.

IN A STORY published on Page 1 of the *Standard* on Nov. 12, reporter Holly Michels recounted the life and times of C.R. "Mac" McDougall.

At 81, McDougall is still on the payroll at AWARE.

"That's after half a century in the Navy and jobs with the Milwaukee Road and Butte, Anaconda & Pacific Railway, Orofino Ice Co., and Butte Machine Co.," Michels wrote.

The story pointed out that AWARE dedicated its new bus storage and maintenance house in Butte as the C.R. McDougall Transit Center.

IN ITS BUSINESS BRIEF section on Oct. 12, *The Great Falls Tribune* published a six-paragraph story about AWARE's expanded Intensive Family Education and Support Services and the hiring of IFES coordinator Teresa Rivenes.

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