

Newsletter
Winter 2020



An alliance dedicated to enhancing the health and lives of those we serve

A VNA Nurse in Every Homeless Shelter

VNA | Visiting Nurse Association
Easterseals Nebraska



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Shaping tomorrow's care.
Today.

From VNA President and CEO, James Summerfelt



James C. Summerfelt, M.Ed., MSPT, President and CEO

The World Health Organization has proclaimed 2020 the Year of the Nurse. At VNA, we believe every day, every week, every month is a celebration of nurses – and we appreciate any opportunity to recognize the men and women, present and past, who serve as part of our mission to deliver community-based care that provides peace of mind, quality of life, and independence.

Throughout VNA headquarters, there are historical photos donated by the Durham Museum. Dating back to 1896, each photo tells the story of individuals and families in need, and the nurses who helped them. For 124 years, VNA has devoted time, money, and expertise in service of the deprived, the forgotten, the neglected, and the poor. We fund this work by providing the highest quality home

healthcare and hospice to those utilizing health insurance and private pay. We also depend on the generous donations of local foundations and individuals like you.

Since 1987, VNA nurses have worked in homeless and domestic violence shelters in Omaha and Council Bluffs at no cost to the shelters. It's difficult work with a tough population, and I could not be more proud of the exceptional care and devotion our shelter nurses show to those who are vulnerable, confused, and often misunderstood. Over 60% of local shelter residents have mental health diagnoses in addition to physical health issues. And while our state and our nation struggle with a growing behavioral health crisis, VNA has been quietly addressing it through the expertise and stabilizing presence of our shelter nurses and the community partners with whom we collaborate.

Would you celebrate the Year of the Nurse by helping me recognize the extraordinary work that is accomplished with our homeless clients? Read the words of our shelter nurses in this newsletter, and consider sending them a note of thanks. And if you'd like to support their work financially, there's no better opportunity than participating in, or donating toward, our 23rd annual Art & Soup Fundraiser, with profits exclusively devoted to keeping VNA nurses in the shelters with homeless men, women, teens, and children.

Thank you for allowing VNA to serve you and this community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James C. Summerfelt". The script is fluid and cursive.





Year of the Nurse

In the 1890s, a young Anna Millard Rogers traveled Europe and witnessed the compassionate response of nurses to human suffering in the slums of London. This experience inspired her to return to the U.S., attend Johns Hopkins School of Nursing, and found VNA in 1896. It was on those same London streets that another historically important nurse, Florence Nightingale, founded the profession of nursing almost 40 years earlier.

In honor of Florence Nightingale, and the many nurses like Anna who have followed in her footsteps to serve their communities, The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared 2020 the *International Year of the Nurse*. VNA is excited to share in this year-long celebration because it's a time to highlight the challenging conditions nurses often face, and the many successes they help people in our community achieve. As an employer, it is a time to reflect on the importance of investing in the nursing workforce and to celebrate nursing's many contributions to the Omaha/Council Bluffs metro area.

Nurses play a vital role in providing services that support the health and wellbeing of people in our community, especially those with complicated health needs who are facing multiple risk factors, including poverty, hunger and homelessness. We know that among VNA's ranks are nurses who have devoted their lives to caring for the sick and aging; those who help young moms give their vulnerable infants the best start in life; those who help the unseen - individuals and families living in homelessness; those who give lifesaving immunizations; and those who ensure quality of life and comfort through the end of life.

WHO Director-general Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, in declaring the Year of the Nurse, called nurses the "bridge" of healthcare, creating a crucial link between people in the community and the complex healthcare system. As we prepare this month for Art & Soup, VNA's annual fundraiser supporting a nurse in every local domestic violence and homeless shelter, join us in celebrating VNA's homeless shelter nurses who are this bridge for the most in-need in our community.



A VNA Nurse in Every Homeless Shelter

In every Omaha/Council Bluffs domestic violence and homeless shelter, you will find a VNA nurse devoted to serving men, women, teens, and children who call the shelters or the streets “home.” VNA nurses are on the frontline, providing direct care and helping clients navigate the healthcare system and community partner services.

In recognition of 2020: Year of the Nurse, it seems appropriate to hear directly from VNA’s shelter nurses.

VNA has provided nurses to local homeless shelters since 1987. We are honored to serve alongside the amazing staff and volunteers at:

- Micah House
- Mohm’s Place/New Visions
- Open Door Mission/Lydia House
- Siena Francis House
- Stephen Center/John L. Hoich Center for Recovery (HERO)
- Youth Emergency Services

Annually, VNA shelter nurses make nearly **9,000** face-to-face visits with over **2,300** men, women, and children. VNA shelter nurses also make **2,500** referrals annually to supportive services with community partners.



When I was in college, I volunteered at a soup kitchen. What I valued most was just sitting at the tables and talking to people who were coming in for a hot bowl of soup in the middle of winter. Taking time to listen had a big impact on me because it helped me see that if you don’t know a person’s story, then you don’t have the right to form an opinion of their situation. Everyone has a story.

As a VNA shelter nurse, I am able to continue to take time to listen to individuals’ stories and try to put the pieces of a very complex puzzle together. Putting the pieces together involves referring someone to the appropriate medical, mental health, dental, or other necessary resource for services.

As a VNA shelter nurse, we are consistently in the shelters week after week. This enables us to meet with clients for continued follow up and motivate them to follow through with resources that will improve their health.

When someone is there to encourage you, I think it helps an individual believe they are valuable. When you feel valued, you take steps towards a better future.

- Amber VanKirk



The shelter nursing program is needed to provide hope and healing to a vulnerable population. We listen to needs and then provide care and referrals. We actively seek out individuals and offer assistance for a healthier lifestyle.

One of the aspects of shelter nursing that is important to me is listening for and responding to the heartfelt needs of our homeless clients. Many of these clients are wounded from abuse, mental illness, addictions, disabilities, disfigurements, bad decisions, and chronic illnesses - and they are going at it alone. We provide nursing care and teaching - and many times, step by step, even though progress may be slow, goals are met.

- Ann Hatting



I do the work I do to help people. The clients we serve are vulnerable and need help with their medical and mental health issues. We help teach and guide them to be able to take care of themselves - to be independent. To realize they are worthy, and they have value and a purpose. Many of our clients have no one to help them, support them, or advocate for them. I do this by helping them with medical appointments, teaching about medications, and connecting them to resources they need to be healthy and stable. It's great to see clients learn how to care for themselves and navigate their medical needs.

When our community supports VNA nurses in the shelters, they are doing so much to help our homeless who are so vulnerable. We need to continue to help those who are not able to help themselves.

- Tracy Yandell



It's so important to have VNA nurses in the homeless shelters. We work with a very vulnerable population with mental health needs, addictions or major medical diagnoses. The majority of clients in homelessness don't make healthcare a priority. We are there to help them navigate the healthcare system to get whatever needs they have met. Many times they don't feel there are options out there for them, and it can be very daunting to know where to begin to even make a phone call.

That is one of the reasons I choose to work in a homeless shelter setting. Although it is hard to see anyone - man, woman or child - in a homeless situation, I feel fortunate and humbled that I can be in a position to help one person at a time. It's so important to offer support and compassion to those in need, to let them know they matter, and that I care.

- Lesa Edmundson



Expanding Camp

Easterseals Nebraska (ESN) is changing the way the world views and defines disability. One significant way we take on disability is through our camp and respite program. What makes ESN camp unique is that we serve campers of all disabilities and ages. With a 1-to-1 or 1-to-3 counselor to camper ratio (depending on camper needs) and a registered nurse on-site, anyone with special needs can attend camp. Each camper is given an opportunity to get out in their community, meet new people and gain independence.

To help change how people think and talk about disability, ESN started Nebraska Empowered Youth Camp (NEYC). NEYC is a leadership camp for individuals ages 14 – 25. The goal of NEYC is to provide youth with disabilities a unique, recreational experience that prepares them for school, work and life inclusion. Campers not only experience the fun activities of camp, they also learn how to self-advocate, talk about their disability, request accommodations at school and work, and gain valuable leadership skills. Campers take on life's challenges and the reality of living, learning, and working with a disability.

ESN offers a variety of camp opportunities. New this year, ESN is expanding camp to Western Nebraska with a session located at Camp Comeca near Cozad. Campers will experience all the fun activities that we are known for such as canoeing, fishing, archery, climbing wall, swimming, and of course making new friends. We are thrilled about this new expansion and look forward to growing more opportunities for campers in Western Nebraska.

ESN camp couldn't thrive without community support. Each year, nearly 80% of campers rely on some type of financial assistance to attend camp. The gap between actual cost and what (is billed to families), as well as the ability to offer partial to full camp scholarships, is covered by donors like you. Thank you for ensuring everyone has access to the same opportunities in their community.

There are many ways to help camp thrive. ESN Camp is always looking for volunteers to share their time and talents with our campers.

- Purchase items off our wish list.
- Give the gift of camp by providing a partial or full scholarship.
- Sponsor a vital part of camp like medical supplies, meals, transportation fees, campground rental, and internet.
- You can give the gift of camp by donating via the attached envelope or online at vnatoday.org/ESNcamps.

ESN Summer Camp registration is now open.

For information and to register for Summer Camp go to vnatoday.org/ESNcamps.

Hurry, sessions are filling up fast. Reserve your camper's spot today!



Events



Pints for Pink

Thunderhead Brewing Taproom
Thursday, April 23, 4:30 – 8:00 pm
13304 W Center Road, Omaha



Omaha Gives

May 20, 2020

omahagives.org/VNAtoday
omahagives.org/easterseals

2020 VNA Senior Speaker Series

Join VNA for a free lunch and conversation with experts in a variety of fields that support successful aging in place.

Learn more and register for these free events. Call 402-930-4021 or go online at vnatoday.org/speaker-series.

