



The VNA Voice

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From Our House to Yours

By the time you read this newsletter, we will be nearly a year into the disarray and life changes created by the COVID-19 pandemic. In some ways, it feels like yesterday; in others it feels this past year lasted a decade... or more. One of the things that did not change throughout the past year is Visiting Nurses' availability to our community. As with many organizations and businesses, we too had administrative staff pivot to remote work. However, a small group staffed the office and our clinical field staff never wavered from their responsibility to patient care.

Douglas County was fortunate in that COVID case numbers remained low for many months. However, starting last July, we started receiving referrals for COVID-positive and COVID-recovering patients. As expected by the healthcare community, that number has significantly increased from November and continues to this writing. Again, our clinical staff

never wavered from caring for those individuals. I look forward to a reduction in spread and illness severity as our vaccinations are administered.

Speaking of vaccinations, Douglas County is also fortunate to have a healthcare continuum that works together for the benefit of the community. Whether you've been able to receive your vaccination yet, please know that as doses are delivered, all are working together to meet the enormous challenge of vaccinating our friends and neighbors. Visiting Nurses has played a role in making this happen by partnering with the Lawrence-Douglas County Public Health (LDCPH) to identify individuals who are unable to leave their home for a vaccination clinic. Based on their list of interested individuals, LDCPH provides us a small group once or twice each week to visit and vaccinate members of our community. The process is not without challenge as doses

must be properly managed and administered within a specific time period (hours). My gratitude to our vaccinating heroes, Debbie Ahlert-Caffey (Director of Clinical Services) and Pat Deaver (Help at Home Manager and VNA's Safety Officer). In addition to in-home vaccinations, we've also been able to volunteer some staff time to the mass vaccination clinics each week since they began and our Community Outreach Specialist, Jill Craft, has been assisting the Senior Resource Center with their "call center" for vaccination questions.

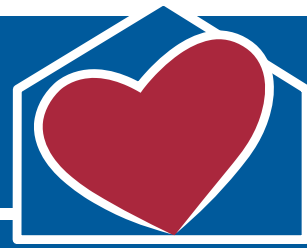
It's been a bumpy 12 months, but I see some light at the end of this very long tunnel. Thank you for safely riding the train with us, and I look forward to celebrating the other side!



Cynthia Lewis
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

OUR MISSION

Improving quality of life through
compassionate patient care
wherever you call home.



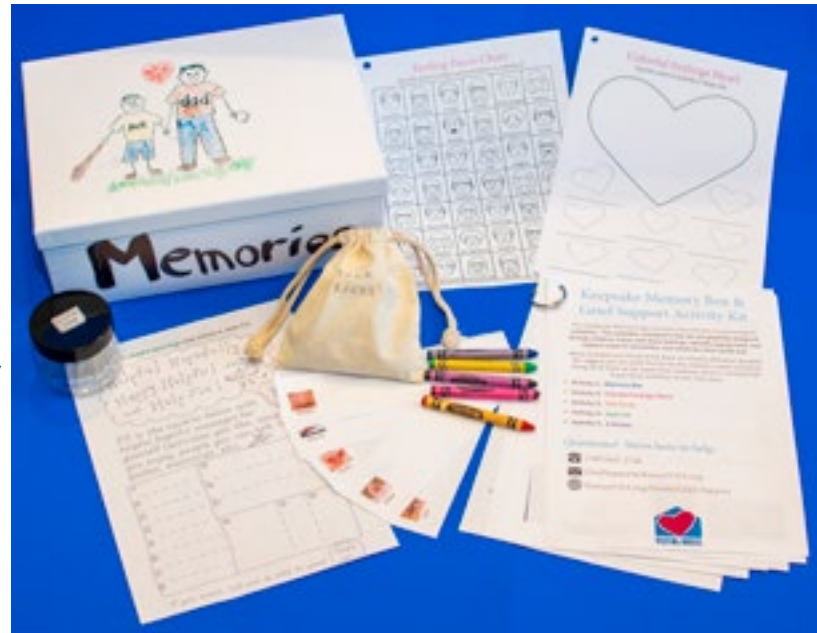
Children's Grief Support: Keepsake Boxes

Grief and loss can be a complicated experience for anyone, but for a child, it can be an especially challenging and confusing time. VNA has long recognized the unique challenges that children face when coping with grief and has offered grief support programs specifically for children.

Keepsake is a grief support program offered by VNA to help children, teenagers, and their parents/caregivers who are grieving the death of a close family member or friend.

Traditionally, Keepsake was an afternoon gathering hosted at VNA's office, but with COVID-19 making in-person sessions impossible for now, VNA developed a way for grieving children to get the help they need in their own home.

The Keepsake Memory Box and Grief Support Activity Kit



Pictured above: VNA's Keepsake Memory Box and Grief Support Activity Kit features five activities to help children and teenagers work through their grief with their parents/caregivers.

were created to make sure that COVID-19 precautions weren't stopping children from getting the grief support they need. This kit features five activities to help children name and share feelings, identify coping tools and explore

ways to remember and celebrate their loved one. The activities are meant to be done as a family, whenever possible, to help foster communication between children

and their parents/caregivers. Once children have identified how they are feeling and have a constructive way to express those feelings, it is easier for parents/caregivers to acknowledge those feelings and help their children develop coping tools.

Just like all of our grief programs, the Keepsake Memory Box and Grief Support Activity Kit are available to anyone in our community needing support in their grief journey. The kit includes most of the materials needed for the activities except for art supplies such as markers, crayons, colored pencils, sharpies and acrylic paint. Anyone who needs a Keepsake Memory Box and Grief Support Activity Kit can call (785) 843-3738 or email griefsupport@kansasvna.org to request one. VNA hopes to resume in-person grief support programs when it is safe to do so.

The Heart of VNA: An Award-Winning Board Member

VNA's Board of Directors is and has historically been made up of intelligent, altruistic, involved members of the community who excel in their fields. One of VNA's board members who exemplifies these characteristics was recently recognized for excelling in her field. In October of 2020, Janelle

Williamson was announced as a recipient of the Kansas Hospital Association's (KHA) Health Care Worker of the Year Award. This award recognizes hospital employees who have improved their hospital by consistently going above and beyond the call of duty. Janelle is certified in hospice and palliative care and has

been a dedicated advocate for both types of care. She has made numerous educational presentations in Douglas County and surrounding areas about palliative care and how it benefits patients. Her expertise, advocacy, and educational efforts have undoubtedly benefited many patients throughout the

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The Heart of VNA: An Award-Winning Board Member (cont.)

community. Janelle's commitment to healthcare, especially to patients with chronic conditions and those who are at the end of life, has made her a great fit on VNA's board. She also shares the patient-first mentality that is at the heart of VNA.

"I feel that it is every person's right to have access to high-quality, high-value, patient-centered care," Janelle says. "The specialty of palliative care aims to understand what is most important to patients and their families as they live with serious chronic illness. I love the process of establishing a relationship with patients and families in an effort to understand what is most important to them, and ensuring the medical plan of care aligns. Often the medicine

that people need is the provision of the basics such as food, water, and shelter. And this should be done with compassion, empathy, understanding and love. The interdisciplinary palliative care team does just that." The KHA award is not the only recent honor Janelle has received. She also received the 2020



Pictured above: VNA board member, Janelle Williamson, accepting her KHA Health Care Worker of the Year Award.

American Association of Nurse Practitioners Kansas State Award for Nurse Practitioner Excellence. "I am truly honored and humbled to have received both of these awards," Janelle says. "For both awards, I was nominated by colleagues who I respect and hold in the highest regard. That they saw that I was deserving of these awards makes my heart smile! When both of these awards were announced last year, I was flooded with congratulatory words of kindness from so many admired colleagues, patients, friends and family. I was so touched by their words! It was truly the highlight of 2020 for me!"

Congratulations to Janelle on receiving this well-deserved award!

Employee Spotlight: Staying Active with Stephanie

Most people are aware physical activity is very important for one's health and well-being, perhaps now more than ever, but COVID-19, social distancing, and now winter weather have made it more difficult than ever for many people to stay active. Stephanie Unekis, one of VNA's Home Health Managers, knows all about the importance of staying active. As a Physical Therapist, she knows the importance of physical activity for maintaining mobility and strength, but she also understands the value of staying active on a personal level. "I have a mild case of seasonal depression," Stephanie says.

"The cold, gloomy winter months are hard because it gets dark early, and all you want to do is curl up in your PJs. Running, for me, is my natural happy pill."



Pictured above: VNA Home Health Manager, Stephanie Unekis, enjoying a run in the snow.

One of the things Stephanie appreciates about running is that it doesn't require other people, expensive equipment, or a specific location. "The wonderful thing about the sport of running is that you don't have to depend on someone else to play, just yourself, running shoes, and weather-appropriate clothing," she says. While running doesn't have to be a group activity, Stephanie has been able to use it as a way to stay in touch with some friends throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. "During COVID, everyone's social life drastically changed. Through running, I was able to stay connected with 2-3 running friends. We were able

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Employee Spotlight: Staying Active with Stephanie (cont.)

to meet outdoors and monitor our distances from each other. Without these early morning friend running meet ups, I would have never been with friends," she says. Stephanie is clearly committed to running. She has completed 26 marathons and countless half-marathons in 24 different states, but that is not all she does to stay active. She parks far from entrances of buildings, takes stairs instead of the elevator, walks her dog every day, and keeps hand weights in her office to do some quick exercises throughout the day. Stephanie also has suggestions for those who can't get out to exercise. "Get your family involved and

have them participate with you," she says. "I recommend listening to music and dancing, even light swaying with your loved one gets your body moving and brightens the spirit. If you do anything, just get up and find a walking track



Pictured above: VNA Home Health Manager, Stephanie Unekis, demonstrating a shoulder exercise using resistance bands.

in your home, even if it is just a hallway, and walk for 15 minutes." Stephanie and VNA have also created a fun chair exercise video for those who want to stay active and healthy at home. Stephanie walks viewers through a variety of exercises that can be done with resistance bands or household items (canned goods, bottled water). ***If you'd like some free VNA resistance bands of your own, give us a call at (785) 843-3738 or send us an email at marketing@kansasvna.org. Visit the VNA Facebook page or YouTube channel to check out the video and workout with Stephanie!***

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