

**News from the North Dakota Department of Human Services
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Grand Forks area residents honored at child welfare conference

BISMARCK, N.D. – The North Dakota Department of Human Services has recognized three Grand Forks area residents for their leadership, personal accomplishments, and efforts on behalf of foster children and families.

Lloyd Rath, a community volunteer and court appointed guardian for foster children, received the 2007 Outstanding Legal Advocate Award. Mark and Kathy Lommen were named the 2007 Outstanding Foster Parents, and Ashley Hiller received the 2007 Outstanding Former Foster Youth Award. They joined nine other individuals who were honored at the 2007 Children and Family Services Conference in Bismarck last week.

“The award recipients exemplify the best of the best,” said Dawn Pearson of the department’s Children and Family Services Division. “

Rath, whose background includes military service, law enforcement, and probation work, is retired, but shares his expertise with foster children and the Community Violence Intervention Center. As a guardian, he works with the child welfare and juvenile court systems to advocate for the best interests of children. He also mentors new guardians and is also a member of the Northland Rescue Mission.

Licensed foster parents since 1993, the Lommens have cared for over 30 children ranging in age from infancy to adulthood. In addition to their three biological children, they have adopted two children and serve as guardians to two others. The Lommens are dedicated to children and work to strengthen families, serving as resources for the parents of the children in their care. They are active in a foster parent support group, actively recruit and mentor other foster parents, and help train new foster parents.

Hiller attends the University of North Dakota as a business major and helps manage a restaurant, while also volunteering time to advocate on behalf of foster children. She is the president of the Regional Youth Advocacy Group and an officer on the newly formed NDYouth, a state advocacy organization established by foster youth with the support of the human services department to help shape services for children. She supports foster parent recruitment efforts, mentors other foster youth entering college, and participates in the Region IV Children and Family Services Review.

Grand Forks County Social Services staff nominated Lommen, Rath, and Hiller.

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