

The Connection

January 13, 2014 Weekly newsletter for employees of HHSC, DADS, DARS, DFPS and DSHS

Tuna's 'Aunt Pearl' Promotes Wellness for DADS

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DADS has a new way to encourage Texans to help others and themselves stay healthier as they age. In a first-of-its-kind public service video, the outspoken but lovable "Aunt Pearl" of Greater Tuna fame urges Texans to volunteer, reminding us that we can all use a little help once in a while.

"Some of your neighbors... really could use a hand with ... getting healthier or just having a friendly ear to talk to," she explains. Alternating between sincere appeals and her brand of folksy humor, Aunt Pearl elaborates emphatically: "You all volunteer now, you hear? I mean it!"

The spot is part of a broader DADS initiative, Age Well Live Well, which promotes wellness among older Texans or those with disabilities. A second spot on the importance of exercise is in the works.

Aunt Pearl has been part of the Texas landscape for more than 30 years and is the creation of the talented and funny Joe Sears. He, along with Jaston Williams, brought the mythical town of Tuna, Texas, to life in a series of plays that chronicle the adventures of its many eccentric characters.

Joe Sears, as "Aunt Pearl," reminds viewers about the importance of getting fit and helping others, especially the elderly.

After working at an event last year put on by a group that advocates for Texas seniors, Sears wanted to do more and volunteered his services, said Betsey Bishop, manager for the agency's Volunteer and Community Engagement group.

DADS jumped at the opportunity.

Sears was a perfect fit. Although doing celebrity video spots is new, the agency saw little risk in enlisting Sears, said Allison Lowery, director of the Center for Consumer and External Affairs for DADS.

"There was general consensus from the start that he had the kind of engaging, funny personality that would resonate with the people DADS serves," she said. He was wonderful to work with, she added, striking a tough balance during the video shoot between being light-hearted and serious.

It's obvious that the process was fun. Outtakes provide a hilarious peek at the creative process and the man behind "Aunt Pearl."

DADS staff have high hopes that the spots on the volunteer site and on Facebook will bring new attention to the needs of aging Texans.

"We're still learning, I think, what will get traction and what will be popular," said Jeff Peck, DADS communications director, who oversaw production of the spots, which were created by the agency's Media Services team led by Kelvin Anderson.

DADS may try to get the spots televised, or find other ways to promote them, Peck added. And stay tuned, rumor has it

that Aunt Pearl may be back.