

Successfully Adopting IT for Social Welfare Program Management

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In North Carolina, welfare programs are state supervised and county administered. To properly manage welfare programs in such an environment, efficient timely communication of a comprehensive set of data analysis customized to each county is required between the state and the 100 counties in North Carolina. Consequently a dynamic website that tracks the experiences of families and individuals on Work First¹ by county was built to assist county DSS (Departments of Social Services) program managers in evaluating their local program. The information technology not only provides a means for efficient dissemination of information, but also shows social workers a new way of thinking by presenting complex information in a user friendly manner. The information provided through the website allows many counties to evaluate their performance in terms of outcomes. It has provided a common set of measures that can be compared over time and across counties.

The Work First website has been successful in assisting state and county staff in managing Work First. The website was part of a collaboration between the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) and the Jordan Institute for Families at the School of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH). The collaboration was first introduced in DGO 2003 [1]. In DGO 2004, we reflect on our experience to learn what makes for a successful IT project in government agencies and demo the new development in our collaboration. In particular, we found that the collaboration between academia and government agency proved beneficial to both. See our research paper submitted to DGO 2004 for details. We would like a demo of our website to accompany the research paper.

In addition to the Work First website, first show-cased in the DGO 2003 demo program [2], we will also be demonstrating the beta version of our new Food Stamp website. Based on the previous success in our Work First project, the NC DHHS and UNC-CH have extended the collaboration to work on a similar website to disseminate information on the Food Stamp program in NC. Specifically, the Jordan Institute will be providing assistance in the evaluation of changes to the Food Stamp employment and training (E&T) program. Similar to the Work First project, the collaboration will involve designing a longitudinal data warehouse, an efficient summary database, and the Food Stamp website. The beta version of the website will be completed by the end of May.

Reference

- [1] Hye-Chung (Monica) Kum, Dean Duncan, Kimberly Flair, and Wei Wang. (2003). Social Welfare Program Administration and Evaluation and Policy Analysis Using Knowledge Discovery and Data Mining (KDD) on Administrative Data. *Proc. of the 3rd National Conference on Digital Government Research*. Boston, MA, May 2003.
- [2] Hye-Chung (Monica) Kum, Dean Duncan, and Kimberly Flair. (2003). Management Assistance for Work First via a Dynamic Website. *Proc. of the 3rd National Conference on Digital Government Research*. Boston, MA, May 2003.

¹ Work First is the cash assistance welfare program, also called TANF, in North Carolina.