

## **Management Assistance for Work First via a Dynamic Website**

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The purpose of the Work First project is to assist the state Dept. of Health and Human Services (DHHS) staff and each county Dept. of Social Services (DSS) across the state in the management of welfare reform initiatives. Work First is the cash assistance program in NC. One important objective is to encourage and support program managers to use data on outcomes to assess their performance. This is accomplished by providing them with easy to use and easy to understand comprehensive information on the experiences of families and individuals that have received assistance through their agency over time.

In a state supervised, county administered environment, communicating such information is a challenge because the program managers are dispersed throughout the state. Prior to the website, most of this assistance was provided in person using a one time analysis. As a more efficient method, a dynamic website driven by aggregate information from extracts of multiple administrative databases was built to track the Work First program by county. It assists the 100 county DSS program managers in evaluating their local programs. We used SAS/Intrnet as the platform because it allowed us to develop a simple site that could emulate the personal presentations. By using SAS/Intrnet we are able to build a site that can run sophisticated statistical procedures and present the results graphically with a mouse click. The website can deliver information to counties efficiently and in an easy to use, easy to understand manner with low maintenance – the backend dataset is updated monthly through a batch process. Shortly after the first of the month, state and county staff are able to access information on the caseload as of the end of the prior month. Keeping applications light (i.e. inexpensive to maintain as well as easy to support) is one of the most important aspects of successfully transferring IT to government agencies.

On the homepage, users are presented with a state map outlining the counties. The clickable counties are used to provide intuitive drill down capability. Once a county has been selected, the user can pick and choose from a wide range of analysis organized by category in the side menu bar. Information is provided on the caseload as a whole (caseload characteristics) as well as how it has changed over time (caseload dynamics). Information is available on caseload attributes, such as the size of families and the racial composition. Under caseload dynamics, an array of graphs depicts how the median length of stay on welfare has changed over time. Users are also able to compare the dynamics of caseload sub-populations. For example, the analysis done by age of youngest child shows that the families with children under 1 take longer to exit the program compared to other families. Users are also able to observe and analyze changes in different types of Work First cases such as those comprised only of children or those containing two parents. The latest version of the website contains information on the earnings of all individuals who have left Work First as well as information on whether they return to the program. The site also contains information on individuals subject to time limits on the receipt of benefits. Another addition to this version shows the number of individuals receiving diversion benefits—these individuals receive a higher one-time payment for an emergency situation. Finally, we are adding the rate of return to the caseload. The website itself was designed to be self-explanatory. Most of the information on the website is presented in tables, graphs and charts which can be downloaded for incorporation into reports. The data tables were designed so that the managers could save information on their county and use other tools to conduct additional analyses.

The information technology provides a means for efficient dissemination of information and a way to describe the complex caseload characteristics. The information delivery system is designed to be intuitive and easy to use. The information provided through the website has resulted in many counties using outcome measures to evaluate their performance. The site also provides a common set of measures that can be compared over time and across counties.