



DHS-Matters

Bridges

on its way to your county.

A tip from those that have used it:

Be Prepared

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Bridges

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A tip from those that have used it:
Be Prepared

Be prepared” is the motto of the Boy Scouts, one that means to be ready for whatever situation comes next. That’s the advice Calhoun County staff have for DHS offices when it comes to the new online eligibility system known as Bridges.

Bridges is the largest information technology project the state has ever undertaken. Calhoun County has piloted the application since August 2008; Barry and Eaton counties joined the pilot in mid-January and Ingham County is coming in February. A tentative statewide rollout schedule follows for all counties from March-September 2009.

“I am a big proponent of Bridges,” said Terrie Brownell, AP program manager in Calhoun County. “One application cascading eligibility is fantastic.” **CONTINUE**



DHS Chief Deputy Director Stanley Stewart, Calhoun eligibility specialist Monica Ziemer and Calhoun director Gwain McCree take part in the Calhoun DHS celebration luncheon Dec. 17. The event rewarded county staff for their efforts piloting Bridges.

“It works fine on the simplest cases. It’s a new way of doing things, a lot like doing a brand new job, and it has bugs that need to be worked out.”

Calhoun County staff says the best way to confront the new application is to have cases up-to-date with no cases or reviews outstanding.

“I was caught up when we went from legacy to Bridges,” said Brenda Baldwin, an eligibility specialist in Calhoun County. “If you start behind, you’ll stay behind.”

“Running cases can take two minutes,” she said. “The more changes it has to make, the slower it can be.”

What’s good about it? “I like being able to run all programs at one time,” she said, “and I like having policy built in.” – even if it’s wrong sometimes.”

Among Bridges’ challenges is its habit of producing incorrect correspondence. Baldwin said the application sent a letter of congratulations on getting a new job to a client that lost his job.

Fortunately, that’s been fixed. However, typical problems staff in Battle Creek cited include:

- Interface with other agency and department systems.
- Citizenship on FIP and Medicaid applications.
- Pop-ups that come up anytime dates are more than 30 days old that make the worker enter all the information again.
- Child day care.

“The biggest challenge is day care,” said Mary Ellis, a family independence specialist with 31 years’ experience. “Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn’t. The dates are very sensitive.”

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Tarla Jones

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She gave an example where a client that applied at the beginning of the month with no day care provider didn't use day care until she went to Work First on the fifteenth of the month. This is problematic because the date of application and date of service weren't the same.

"Once you create the (verification checklist), even by error, you can't eliminate them (the dates)."

DHS Administrators know the problem areas and are working with the system developer to amend them.

"We began the Bridges pilot in Calhoun County with a lot of known issues, and we discovered many others as the pilot progressed," said Don Mussen, DHS automation champion.

Mussen said 102 changes have been made to the Bridges application since the pilot began and 52 more are expected to be completed before the pilot phase ends

in March.

"We owe Calhoun management and staff a debt of gratitude. They are the Bridges **CONTINUE**

pioneers. They helped us identify and resolve many problems and participated in focus groups to design application and process improvements."

Not everyone in Battle Creek commented on Bridges complications. Tarla Jones, a 29-year veteran of DHS and a registration support specialist, said the system works well for her. "I am happy as a lark when I get to register cases in Bridges as opposed to legacy," she said. "Change is always something to get used to. Stuff changes all the time."

Tarla said she learned the RSS piece very quickly, and thought the training was really helpful.

"Bridges has brought to light exactly how complicated our work is," Karen Doubleday, a family independence manager, said. "It does things on its own at times and seems unstable."

Doubleday said the issues associated with Bridges make it impossible to fall into a daily routine. She said reports are problematic in addition to client correspondence. Brownell agreed.

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“ I am happy as a lark when I get to register cases in Bridges ”

Bell ringers sing out to help community

From Susan McInally, Administrative Supervisor

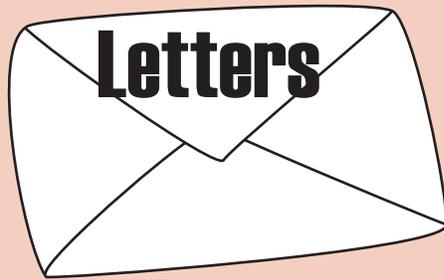
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From left: Amy Rigney, Kate Menkes, Cindy (Lucy) Harrington and Deb Goforth rang the bell for Salvation Army at Wal-mart in December.

The Otsego County DHS clerical staff — Deb Goforth, Amy Rigney, Kate Menkes and Cindy (Lucy) Harrington — volunteered their personal time to do the official "bell ringing" for Wal-mart in Gaylord during December. The group danced and sang, bringing much holiday cheer while collecting donations even though weather conditions were less than ideal. Donations overflowed their collection bucket on two separate occasions. Donations were distributed through Salvation Army of Gaylord to those in need during the holidays. The group is an example of the many caring staff from our DHS offices. Thanks again to Deb, Amy, Kate and Lucy for representing our agency and helping those in need! □



Date: Dec. 8
 To: Kerrie VanBelzen
 Eligibility Specialist
 Newaygo DHS, White Cloud
 Subj: Thank you

I was hoping that you could forward this letter to your boss. I don't have his e-mail address. I just want to thank you for everything you did for me. I have been so worried about heat that I couldn't think of anything else. You really worked fast and hard to help me out. I have been in DHS before and heard the people there for help say what awful people work there. I think they get so used to the help that they believe that it is owed to them.

I am very humbled to have to ask for help. I have worked since I was 12 years old. I worked for my dad from age 12 until he retired and closed the business in 1992. I worked for the same place after that until 2007 at which time I was fired because I would not sign a contract. I have been on unemployment since and it is hard for me to adjust.

You made me feel like a person and not just a number. You were very professional and at the same time sympathetic. You were very patient after I called you and you called me three times and didn't give up. I hope I don't need much more help but I am glad to know that you are on my side if I do.

Again, I just want to say a very big thank you and hope you have a great holiday season.

Peggy Perkins
 Newaygo

- Newaygo DHS Director Jim McCormick submitted this letter for publication. "Kerrie VanBelzen is an ES worker in Newaygo County," he said. "She's only been with us for a little over four months but does a great job." □

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"Since September, I don't know how we're serving clients," Brownell said. "I can't tell because I don't have an accurate report.

"Our SOP (standard of promptness) this month (January) dropped to 30-40 percent. We desire 98 percent and had that in August 2008.

"A lot of clients say it's great," she said. "We have workers going through a learning curve; their clients are not so satisfied."

She said newer workers tend to pick up the application more quickly and defined the attributes of a good Bridges case worker as intelligent, educated

(some college or graduated), client- or people-savvy, and able to have the multi-tasking ability to text, carry on a conversation and enter case information online simultaneously.

Another 25-year employee at Calhoun County said institutional memory, or unlearning everything you know about eligibility processes, can be helpful.

"It's very difficult to see what Bridges is doing," said Bill Worth, a family independence specialist. "You plug in the info, Bridges does it all behind the scenes...and it produces results, some you don't expect or want."

Worth, who was with the department when it installed its last online eligibility program, ASSIST, recommends new users be patient, attend to details, have your caseload as up-to-date as possible, and expect everything to take two to three times as long as before. He said to expect

"hell" for a month and to expect a six-month transition.

"When it works the way it's supposed to, it's really neat," he said. "That happens about 70 percent of the time now. It happened about 20 percent of the time when we started (five months ago)."

Calhoun County Director Gwain McCree agrees with his staff. "Clean up your caseload," he said, "especially overdue cases, registration and reviews. You need to have zero overdues."

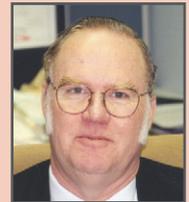
He said workers that struggle with legacy applications are going to struggle more with Bridges. "Try to get some assistance to employees you know have issues."

He said directors might expect an increase in complaint calls and possible legislative inquiries because of the Bridges' learning curve and intricacies.

McCree thinks the application will eventually fulfill its promise. "Eventually, you'll apply and get your benefits in an hour and not have to see us again for a while. But it's not that way now." □



Terrie Brownell



Don Mussen



Mary Ellis

Holiday tidings around DHS

The DHS director's annual holiday open house was celebrated in Lansing Dec. 18 with food, friendship and music. Director Ismael Ahmed established the tradition in 2007 by inviting Grand Tower and other DHS and contract employees in Lansing to the director's office during the two-hour celebration.

Grand Tower DHS staff prepared a feast and special music was provided by Jere Stormer, who manages Ahmed's Detroit office. The annual event attracts scores of Lansing employees who went with Ahmed and Chief Deputy Director Stanley Stewart.

The DHS celebrated the season elsewhere in other ways in 2008. An article in the Ironwood Daily Globe highlighted the collaboration between a local area charity and the Gogebic-Ontonagon DHS office, where "Christmas Belles" and DHS partnered during the holiday season to bring gifts and holiday items to foster children in the area.

"The outpouring of generosity and effort by our community and staff is moving," said Scott Parrott, director of Gogebic-Ontonagon DHS. "The synergy of this event is overwhelming. Staff go out of their way to ensure gifts are provided to children in care during the holiday season. It truly represents the spirit of the holidays." **CONTINUE**

"I am very proud of my staff and the community which makes this miracle a reality."

To show miracles like this happen all over Michigan, Dawn Bushouse of Lake-Newaygo DHS published a story in the Lake County Star on Christmas day about Lake County's commitment to children.

"Despite some wintry weather," Dawn wrote, "parents of 600 children were able to make it to the Luther Lion's Club the second week of December to choose

gifts for their children.

"Parents went home with warm clothing, a primary toy, hats, mittens, stocking stuffers, stuffed animals, books, socks and underwear. The Lake County community made it happen."

Bushouse's story credited the program's success to community entities including local churches, DHS, Family Health Care of Lake and Newaygo counties, Road Runners Variety Store in Idlewild, Rotary, Yates Township Fire Department in Idlewild and more. "Some groups adopted families and shopped for items on their wish list," she said. "All helped to make Christmas merrier for low-income families in our area.

"All these givers can imagine the smiles on children's faces this Christmas morning." □

"I am very proud of my staff and the community."

A Christmas story

From Ismael Ahmed, Director Michigan Department of Human Services, Lansing

The good we do often has little ways of showing up on our doorstep. On Christmas day, my daughter, Nichole, gave a beautiful crocheted baby blanket to my grandson Zack who is 6 months old.

Nichole had flown in from Austin, Texas, a few days earlier trying to think of an appropriate present for baby Zack. On the flight she found herself sitting with a young girl of 19 years who was also coming home to spend Christmas with loved ones.

The young girl, Ariole, was finishing a blanket that she had been working on for months. Nichole

was struck by the beauty of the blanket and asked where she had learned to crochet so well. Ariole confided that she had learned to crochet while



Ismael Ahmed

spending time in the Michigan juvenile justice system. Nicole asked her if she could buy the blanket; Ariole said she would be glad to give it her, but Nicole paid her just the same.

Zack today has a warm blanket thanks to Ariole, Nicole, and the unknown heroes of our juvenile justice that taught Ariole this simple skill. □

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Washtenaw County DHS' Giving Tree

From James Johnson and Deborah Swasey
Washtenaw DHS, Ypsilanti
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The Washtenaw DHS Holiday Committee set-up and decorated its "giving tree" for the 2008 holidays in the lobby of our Ypsilanti office.

Employees and friends of the department donated stuffed animals, children's books, hats, gloves, mittens, play dough, art and craft supplies as well as the old standby, candy canes. In addition Aéropostale department store donated more than 200 teddy bears. More than 100 children and adults received gifts.

Special recognition goes to Connie Witt of St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Ypsilanti, who donated many items including six hooded towels, eight baby blankets, two standing vanity mirrors, women's winter gloves, 17 girl's and toddler's hat and mitten sets, and throws.

Clients who came into the office to see their specialist during the holidays were allowed to select a gift for themselves or for their child(ren). Parents expressed gratitude to their specialists for the gifts their children were able to **CONTINUE**



Washtenaw DHS Giving Tree

select. The Holiday Committee and staff were pleased with the response from co-workers and the community regarding donations. □

About

DHS-Matters is a product of the Michigan Department of Human Services

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Letter Guidelines

Customer letters praising employees are very popular with other employees. To submit a customer letter for publication:

1. Ensure your supervisor knows about this and approves.
2. If a client sent the letter, have them sign a Consent for Publication form, which is downloadable from the MS Word template as form 0199
3. Obtain verbal permission of everyone named in the letter before sending it for publication; obtain the verbal permission of letter writers that are not clients.
4. Send the letter and a copy of the signed consent form to the editor by e-mail or by fax (517-373-4871).
5. Include the letter writer's hometown and the job classification(s) of the employee(s) cited in the letter.

We will contact you If there are any questions about the letter. Thanks! □