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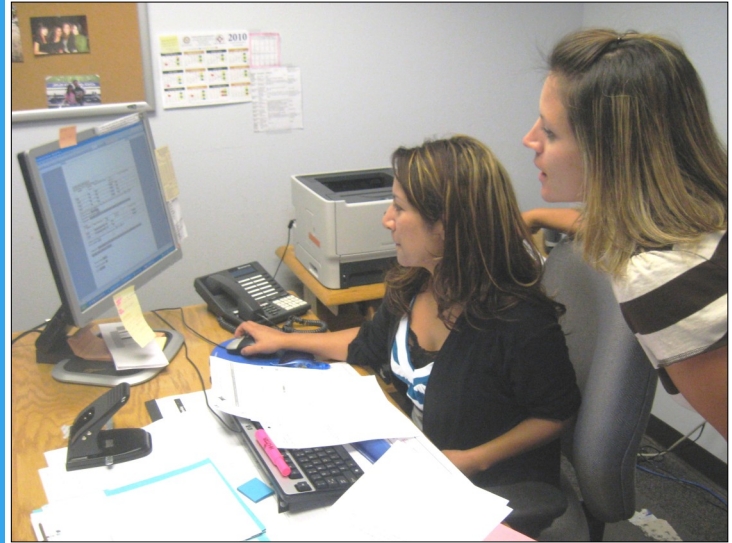
ISD Offices Facing Greatest Challenges

Since what some now call the “Great Recession” first began nearly three years ago, every Income Support Division (ISD) office, from tiny Tierra Amarilla to the four large Albuquerque offices, has seen a swelling of their caseloads. One can get an idea of what has been happening by comparing the rate of growth of the statewide ISD caseload from December 2007 (when the recession officially began) to June 2010: the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) grew by 65,138 families (71 percent) to 157,218; the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program grew by 6,126 families (45 percent) to 19,855 and the Medicaid Program grew by 71,191 families (32 percent) to 294,528.

These numbers also mirror what’s happening in other states, but here, as in other states, you can’t just blame the recession: new policies and programs have also affected caseload growth. For example, Medicaid’s new State Coverage Insurance (SCI) Program that offers health insurance primarily to low-income working families earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level has grown by 203 percent (34,300 cases) to 51,203 cases. Had this program not been started, the Medicaid roles would have increased by a little more than half of what they did: a more modest 18 percent increase over three years.

It is more difficult to pinpoint causes besides the recession for the caseload growth in the SNAP Program. Two likely contributors are that eligibility for SNAP was recently expanded to 165 percent of poverty, from 130 percent; and state supplemental assistance for seniors has increased the percent of adults on the SNAP by 4 percent over three years (52.2 percent today versus just 48.2 percent three years ago, when the program was fairly new.) Additionally, outreach initiatives at both the state and federal levels may also have had an effect in the growing number of SNAP cases.

During the month of July alone, over 80,000 people physically came into our offices statewide,” said Ted Roth, ISD Deputy Director. “This is an incredible number because the majority of our interviews are completed by telephone now and do not require a visit to an ISD office.” Unfortunately, these people are not spread out evenly across ISD offices, so occasionally one county office or region is asked to assist another county office by processing some of the work. “With the high demand for ISD services, offices have been helping each other out in an effort to equalize workloads and ensure ISD’s clients’ needs and performance goals are met,” said Roth. “It has been a wonderful



NE Albuquerque Line Manager, Shanita Harrison (right) works with FAA Sophia De Conti to get information for a SNAP client about a benefits inquiry. De Conti has been with the ISD only since May, while Harrison is a seven year veteran in the division.

experience observing how offices and caseworkers have willingly pitched in or otherwise offered help to each other.” :

Interestingly, over this same period of time, child support enforcement cases have grown at a more modest 7.0 percent, from 58,673 in December 2007 to 62,754 cases in July 2010. The reason for the decreased rate of growth of the child support caseload is because not every new ISD application results in the creation of a child support case. For example, if an ISD applicant applies for and receives only SNAP benefits, no referral is made to CSED. In addition, deprivation must be involved in order for a TANF application to result in a referral to child support.

Some ISD Offices are Outliers

Even though every ISD office in the state has recorded overall caseload growth, there are a couple of offices that actually saw a decline in their TANF cases: The Clayton and Tucumcari ISD offices’ TANF caseloads have decreased from 20 to 13 and from 142 to 115 families, respectively. Likewise, the East Doña Ana and Moriarty ISD offices stayed about even in the number of Medicaid cases, rising one and two percent respectively, while at the state level cases increased by 32 percent.

Belinda Garland, County Director at the Moriarty ISD office said, “We have a lot of clients who have moved to Bernalillo County. They may have done this because there are little to no job opportunities here in Torrance County.”

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Staff are Working Harder Than Ever

ISD offices are dealing with an unprecedented number of clients and, on top of that, they have had to do this with the reality that the state's budget deficit means there's little chance for staff increases. According to the ISD Monthly Statistical Report, the average caseload per worker in ten ISD offices is now above 1,000. And in all but two counties (Los Alamos and Harding, which don't have ISD offices) the SNAP caseload has grown to more than ten percent of each county's population.

The Process Management Model Rescues Many ISD Offices

Statistics show that the ISD office with the greatest caseload growth since the recession officially began in December 2007 is the NE Albuquerque ISD office. Its SNAP cases have increased by 141 percent, its TANF cases have increased by 103 percent, and its Medicaid cases have increased by 40 percent.

County Director Dennis Davis was asked how he and his staff are coping with such an unprecedented number of clients. "Actually, all of our Albuquerque offices have really been slammed," he said. "We're all in this together, and we have a great group of high-energy, high-performing workers."

Then he said, "The real headline should be that someone in Santa Fe, a few years ago, had the foresight to anticipate increased numbers of clients together with budget constraints and began planning for what is now known as the Process Management Model." The model has resulted in clients no longer being dependent on a single caseworker, but rather a team of workers. This system basically moves people through the intake process much more quickly and efficiently.

NE Albuquerque ISD office Line Manager Shanita Harrison agrees, stating "Things are streamlined under the Process Management Model. There is no way on earth that we could manage caseloads of this magnitude under the old system. Under the old system, we thought we were busy with caseloads of 500-800. If we were to do it the same way today, with more than 1,000 cases per worker, it would truly be unmanageable."

"The concept behind the Process Management Model is determining what clients want as soon as they walk in the door," said Davis. "To do this efficiently and accurately, Family Assistance Analysts now occupy the intake windows. This results in faster eligibility decisions. Meanwhile, our valued clerks support back office activities – and quite expertly, too. We now have six intake windows for faster service but this requires tremendous support from our clerical staff."

Davis said the competition among seasoned workers at the front windows is healthy, "No one wants to be outdone by the other. When one worker sees that another is ahead in clients served, their colleagues pick up speed as well. The workers take great pride in the numbers of clients served each day, but greater pride in good customer service."

The clerks, too, seem to find their work more fulfilling as they provide invaluable support behind the scenes, managing critical tasks and gaining valuable experience in places like the mailroom and file room. "Our clerks spend most of their day organizing and locating files, matching documents to files and getting them quickly to caseworkers," said Davis. "They have become masters at finding lost or misplaced files."

Another important concept inherent to the model is identifying clients who drop by to request simple changes in their case, to drop off documentation (proof), or to ask questions. "This is our version of 'red or green'," said Davis. "About 70 percent of the people who drop by are here for a 'green' reason (one that is easily resolved). We work to get them in and out as quickly as possible." The results, so far, look very promising because the numbers of complaints at his office have dropped noticeably.

Change is Hard

Anytime large, established organizations like the ISD make major changes in the way they conduct their affairs – 75 percent of the ISD offices are using the Process Management Model – there's bound to be challenges and the Process Management Model brought on its share of them. One criticism of the new intake approach was that error rates and complaints would increase because no client is assigned a specific caseworker. "This hasn't been the case here," said Davis, "Because there is a team of people working on a case and, even if no team member can assist there is always the line manager or myself to help. Additionally, 'timeliness' and 'accuracy' rates are better under this new system."

Others say the new policy detracted from the one-on-one relationship a caseworker builds with his or her client over time. "This may be the case in some instances," said Davis. "However, I've come to learn that clients are mostly more concerned about timely issuances to their EBT cards than relationships with caseworkers."



ISD work experience clerks Michelle Tafoya (left), Lisa Marie Martinez and William Crockett get files for other staff at the NE Albuquerque Office.

MAD DIRECTOR CAROLYN INGRAM TAKES A POSITION WITH CENTER FOR HEALTH CARE STRATEGIES (CHCS)

Carolyn Ingram for the second time is leaving the Human Services Department. This time it's after an unprecedented seven-plus years as the state's Medicaid Director. The last time she left the department was back in 2000. Then she was a MAD bureau chief who left for a position with the Lewin Group in Washington D.C.

Carolyn began her career in the department back in 1993 when she was a student intern for the ISD. In 1994 she began working full time at ISD's Central Office in the old Project Forward works program, prior to moving to the MAD in 1995.

On Aug. 24 her co-workers gave Carolyn a send off and everyone had the opportunity to say good bye to her. "We're all just *mad* about here leaving," said Carla Roybal, a MAD administrator. "She worked very hard for Medicaid, and I'm sad to see her go." Then she added with a smile, "Halloween this year won't be the same without her." (Apparently, Carolyn supported some great staff Halloween parties.)

Alongside MAD staff bidding Carolyn farewell was HSD Secretary Katie Falls and some faces from the past, including two-time former HSD Secretary Alex Valdez, Deputy Secretary Larry Martinez and ISD Director Bill Dunbar.

"Oh, I laughed, and I cried at the farewell," said Ingram. "It was so nice to see people who I used to see on a daily basis, but haven't seen for some time."

She has accepted a position with the CHCS where she will work with states to implement health care reform. When asked about her thoughts on her new work, Ingram said, "I'm excited about the new challenges, and the people I'll be working with at CHCS, but I'll always be interested in New Mexico and state government because my roots are here."

Carolyn was born in Tucumcari, where her family operated a dairy farm and owned Crescent Creamery selling ice cream, butter and milk. Later they moved to Santa Fe where her father, Lawrence Ingram, served as HSD Cabinet Secretary from January 1979 through December 1982, under the King administration.

Serving as a state Medicaid Director, especially for such a long time, can be a frustrating job because of the dollars involved, now \$3.5 billion a year in state and federal moneys, and the seemingly haphazard policy changes that come down from Congress to the states that affect millions of people. "Most state Medicaid Directors last a very short time," said Ingram. "I'm very proud of the fact that during my time as

director the division insured more people than ever before and brought up new programs like the State Coverage Insurance, Coordinated Long-term Care Services and doubled the number of school-based health centers."

"I learned so much, not only from MAD staff but from working with Secretary Hyde," she said. "Pam was a very caring person, and she expected people to do a good job." (Secretary Hyde has the distinction of being the longest serving HSD Secretary: her tenure here was from 2003 to 2009.)

When asked what challenges the division will face in the future, Ingram said, "The budget; the worst part will be trying to run the program under the sure-to-come dollar constraints now being considered. The exciting thing coming, however, will be the new opportunities health care reform brings."

Her advice to the next MAD director is to listen to staff because there are so many smart people in the division who are doing a great job. Julie Weinberg is the new acting MAD director for the department.

Since Carolyn has left HSD before and returned, one naturally wanted to know if she plans on returning here someday – perhaps even in the position her father once held. Her answer: "I'll consider any opportunity here. Who knows what lies ahead? Heck, I'm not that old, and I have a lot left to do!"



Carolyn Ingram hugs a co-worker during her farewell brunch.

FANS' Poverty Simulation Spreads to a Private Group

The popular poverty simulation exercise that has allowed HSD employees to replicate the day-to-day challenges of many of their clients has recently expanded to include those working in the private sector as well. The six previous poverty simulation exercises, conducted over the past three years by ISD's Food and Nutrition Services (FANS) Bureau, have been for ISD staff, NMSU educators, *NMWorks* staff and the upper management of the HSD. On Aug. 26th, HSD facilitated the poverty simulation for the Real Solutions National Credit Union Foundation Program; they were holding their annual conference in Albuquerque. So how did this come about?

"We definitely haven't been busy marketing our poverty simulation to the general public," said Mary Oleske, FANS Bureau Chief. "What happened was the credit union foundation contacted the Missouri Association for Community Action, who developed the poverty simulation kit that we purchased, and asked them if they knew of anyone in New Mexico who would be willing to conduct the simulation for them in Albuquerque.

One reason that we agreed was that the credit union foundation was able to give the volunteer role players a gift card as a token of their appreciation. We invited clients who are receiving services through St. Martin's Hospitality Center.

When asked how the credit union group of about 60 participants differed in the way they played their parts in the poverty simulation compared to ISD staff, Oleske said, "Interestingly, they were all from the banking industry and wanted to know why they couldn't get direct deposit or debit cards instead of paper checks; and most of them rushed first to the bank when the whistle blew beginning a new simulation week."

The *Take a Walk in My Shoes* poverty simulation is one hectic hour spread into four fifteen minute weeks, equaling one month. Each group of one to six individuals is a family unit consisting of infants, children, teens, single parents and seniors, some of whom are disabled, living in low-income apartments with little or no money.

Each week the family unit may receive a "luck of the draw" card that can bring them good or bad news. It usually brings bad news, like a purse with money in it is stolen, one family member gets in trouble, a car needs mechanical service or daycare services abruptly end. Good news cards are winning a \$25 lottery or the weather is unseasonably warm, so the heating bill is \$30 less that month.

Participant Kerrie Davis manages a credit union in Carlsbad. She said, "Living this way is very stressful: once all the bills are paid at the end of one week, all you have to look forward to is it all starting all over again the next week. I think it's critical that people learn money management skills." She also noted something she now sees in her office: "Low-income has really moved up the scale," she said. "I know this because one of my full time workers recently had to take the afternoon off to go certify for subsidized daycare for her children."

Anita Paul was a child during the simulation. "It was stressful for me, and I was a just a kid. This kind of stress-filled life, however, is also lived by middle income families because they want to have everything now and end up getting behind."

At the end of the simulation each group reported on what they learned. The volunteer staff from Saint Martin's also shared their personal insights with the conference participants during the debriefing session.

One group recommended putting a list of social service agencies in their credit unions for their customers to use as a resource. Another group said the most frustrating thing for them was all the running around they had to do each week. They recommended that people fill out just one form for all the different services offered. All of the groups felt that transportation was a huge barrier for

them during the simulation; they said they are going to see what they can do about this barrier where they live when they return to their respective states.

Oleske said she doesn't have any plans to conduct another poverty simulation at this time, but said she's always willing to do so.



Participants from the credit union foundation actively debate courses of action during the poverty simulation.



FANS Bureau, Nick Candelaria (left) was the illegal activities person in the simulation. Here he is selling something to a neighborhood kid.



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