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PARIS is Providing Results

Following a successful six month pilot in four Income Support Division (ISD) field offices, the Public Assistance Reporting Information System (PARIS) data match is proving that it will create a collaborative relationship with ISD and HSD's Office of Inspector General (OIG) to reduce caseloads and improve program integrity. "Now plans are for the PARIS project to be implemented statewide next month," said Randy Scott, HSD Inspector General.

PARIS is a computer program that matches New Mexico (NM) ISD2 client data with data from 49 other states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. The data is actually processed for matches at the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) in California.

When it is determined that a New Mexico client is receiving public assistance in another state, the OIG is notified. The verification process is then initiated by the OIG to determine which state the client truly resides.

As part of the verification process, the OIG sends a notice to the client. The notice asks the client to verify residency by calling their local ISD office. If the client does not respond to the notice within 14 days, their case can be closed. If a client contacts ISD and indicates he/she is a NM resident and in receipt of a Notice of Closure, the case will be reinstated and the matching state is contacted to close their case with the client.

Irene Romero, an OIG PARIS analyst, indicated that often-times, after a client receives our letter, we get a call from him or her saying, "Oh, I forgot to close my case in Albuquerque, I'll take care of it."

"The majority of New Mexicans enrolled in income support programs who decide to move to another state and enroll in the same programs are not intentionally trying to receive benefits from multiple states," said Berna Quintana, OIG's Restitutions Bureau Chief. There are exceptions,

recent PARIS data match recent SNAP benefits in a time, including New Mexico.

dit because he seemed to be California stopping in each emergency food benefits to help pay for his travels. The person was later convicted of welfare fraud and is now ineligible for benefits for ten years.

There have been several other possible public assistance fraud cases uncovered using PARIS data matches, some as far away as New York, that are being investigated by the OIG. Overall, the four pilot ISD offices (NE Bernalillo, Farmington, Silver City, and West Doña Ana) have helped to close hundreds of Medicaid, SNAP and TANF cases. The total cost avoidance in these offices is \$537,725.

Johanna Bair, now a Line Manager at the NW Bernalillo ISD office, was responsible for the PARIS pilot at the at the Northeast



HSD Office of Inspector General staff Stephanie Valdez (left) and Irene Romero place finishing touches on the plan to roll out the PARIS Project to all ISD offices next month.

"The four pilot county offices have been very cooperative, as well as all the other ISD field offices that have been contacted by OIG to resolve matches," said Irene Romero, PARIS analyst.

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Nutrition Assistance Programs in Great Need in New Mexico

Never in the history of the department has the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) caseload increased by such a large amount of people in one year as it did in 2009. Last year, the number of SNAP cases increased by an astronomical 32 percent, from 106,231 to 140,116 families. The next closest annual increase was back in 2004 when the SNAP caseload increased by 17 percent

ISD Economist Rachel Moskowitz says last year's unprecedented increase in SNAP cases was caused mainly by the recession and high unemployment. Other factors that contributed to the increase include outreach efforts to get more people who were eligible signed up, public service announcements to reduce the stigma of being on the program and continued cutting of red tape to make it easier to enroll.

"In New Mexico about one in six people are on SNAP" said Moskowitz. "Nationwide, about one in eight people are on the program."

In addition to the large number of families using the SNAP, food banks across the state are helping more and more people. A hunger study released last month by the New Mexico Association of Food Banks shows that about 40,000 people per week are getting food assistance from their 600-plus outlets located in all 33 counties of the state.

Kathy Komoll, director of the NM Association of Food Banks, has noticed an increase in the number of children and elderly seeking assistance, saying, "With nearly 40,000 people seeking food assistance each week, this is the equivalent of having a city the size of Farmington getting emergency food every seven days."

As part of the study, food banks conducted face-to-face interviews with 459 people seeking emergency food assistance. "This is the first large scale research study to capture the significant connection between the recent economic downturn and an increased need for emergency food assistance," said Komoll. The study found that 40 percent of those served are children under the age of 18, while 13 percent are elderly.

When you compare this study with current SNAP recipients you find that half of those receiving SNAP are under 18 years old (164,345), yet only six percent (20,300) are aged 60 or older.

The department continues to work closely with the New Mexico Food Bank Association, which administers the USDA Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP) through a contract with the state through the ISD Food and Nutrition Services (FANS) Bureau. TEFAP foods help the food banks to offer more variety and enhance the food boxes that food bank clients receive. TEFAP foods have included milk, soups, canned fruit and vegetables, rice, beans and other staples. USDA allots each state their entitlement of commodity food each year, based on poverty and unemployment statistics. In recent years however, USDA has offered an increasing amount of "bonus" commodities, which also helps those in need who seek services through the food bank network.

One exciting initiative of the food bank network is the mobile food pantry. Individuals or organizations can adopt a site, paying a minimal fee and have a truckload of food delivered to their site on a regular basis to feed those in need. The mobile pantry sites are springing up all over the state, helping our rural and urban poor. As part of continuing outreach efforts, ISD staff have gone to some of the mobile sites to encourage clients to apply for SNAP, if they are not receiving it.



Clients wait to be interviewed by FAAs at the SW Albuquerque ISD office where over 12,000 families receive SNAP benefits monthly.

Substance Abuse Services Available at Los Lunas ISD Office

Back in November, ground was broken for a much-needed substance abuse treatment and training center in Los Lunas. When completed, the center is projected to annually serve up to 840 men, women and children needing intensive outpatient substance abuse treatment services. However, until that happens, the Los Lunas income support office is serving as a temporary center.

Partners in Wellness was selected by a multi-stakeholder group to provide from nine to 12 hours of treatment per week for these individuals once the new facility is completed. Original plans, pending funding, calls for two phases of implementation: Phase one included a training center within the Intensive Outpatient Program facility that will be used to conduct trainings for law enforcement, the judicial system and behavioral health providers. The projected opening for the first phase is in January 2011. The second phase includes a women's residential treatment service component that will have 16 beds for women, with up to 24 children, in treatment.

The department and stakeholders in Valencia County, however, felt that they could not wait until 2011 because the need for substance abuse treatment there was so great.

"We worked with Paula Maglione, HSD General Services Bureau Chief, to acquire space at the Los Lunas Income Support Division (ISD) office, held a series of public meetings about the early initiative and asked Partners in Wellness if they could begin offering services out of the ISD office," said HSD Behavioral Health Services Division (BHSD) Olin Dodson. (Dodson has been working on the proposal to get a permanent location in Valencia County for the substance abuse center since 2006.)

"Right away, one of our caseworkers said, 'Hey, we can walk over possible referrals to you ourselves'? New Mexico State University's NMWorks staff asked the same questions," said former Los Lunas ISD Director Robert Chavez.

"We have intensive in and outpatient substance abuse services in Rio Arriba County to combat the generational plight of heroin addiction there," said Dodson. "In recent years, we have seen a fast-growing problem with Methamphetamine use, as well as other drug and alcohol abuse, from southern-Albuquerque to Socorro. One of the biggest problems for intensive substance abuse treatment services was having to send people to Albuquerque for treatment – requiring people to drive up and back to Al-



Partners in Wellness staffer, Deidre Johnson enjoys working at the Los Lunas ISD office.

What is Intensive Outpatient Substance Abuse Treatment?

Treatment for those with substance abuse problems has come a long way. "In the old days, counselors used a one-strike-and-you're-out-approach to treatment," said BHSD's Olin Dodson. "Counselors would take the tough approach, in effect blaming and shaming addicts. Now treatment programs operate under a philosophy of recovery and resiliency."

Today there is an understanding among psychologists and treatment experts that people come in for substance abuse treatment in various stages of motivation: people do relapse, just like someone trying to quit smoking or lose weight.

Intensive outpatient substance abuse treatment includes a full assessment of the individual, including a mental health assessment. "Today we understand that most people needing intensive substance abuse services also have a co-occurring mental health problem," said Dodson.

Intensive outpatient substance abuse treatment typically consists of a minimum of three, three-hour group treatment sessions, with up to ten others needing the same services, a week. People typically stay in the program for four months. Most are referred to treatment from the courts.

According to Dodson, people come into treatment sessions in one of three states of mind: they don't want to be here, they are ambivalent or they are highly motivated to succeed and serious about recovery. Good substance abuse programs can work effectively with individuals in all stages.

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buquerque three times a week has its obvious shortcomings.”

Robert Chavez was the Director at the Los Lunas ISD office when he was approached with the BHSD’s proposal to serve people requiring intensive outpatient substance abuse services out of his ISD office. “It amounted to we had vacant space in our ISD office, BHSD didn’t want to wait to begin treatment services; and it was the right thing to pursue for the residents of Valencia County,” said Chavez. (He now works in the BHSD in Santa Fe as a financial manager.)

Chavez said at first staff were worried about our own clients’ confidentiality and other things like will they use our kitchen and take our coffee when off-hour services were being conducted? “After Partners in Wellness gave staff a briefing on what they would be doing in our office everyone understood that this was a good thing. Right away, one of our caseworkers said, ‘Hey, we can walk over possible referrals to you ourselves’? New Mexico State University’s NMWorks staff asked the same question.”

“It became a good fit after some of the logistics were worked out,” said Chavez.

Now in the Los Lunas office, ISD and NMWorks staff have the advantage of being able to immediately refer their clients to behavioral health services by simply walking them down the hallway.

Louis Thorp, Partners in Wellness Director said, “At this time we are treating approximately 50 consumers a week. Growth has been steady, and we anticipate serving over 400 intensive outpatient consumers by the end of fiscal year 2011, as well as a similar number for behavioral health.” Partners in Wellness currently has two masters level therapists, a licensed alcohol and drug counselor and a part-time psychiatrist/addictionologist working in the Los Lunas ISD office.

(PARIS, Continued from page 1)

office. “Our office ultimately closed out more than 100 individuals over the course of four months based on the information provided in the PARIS report,” she said.

“The four pilot county offices have been very cooperative, as well as all the other ISD field offices that have been contacted by OIG to resolve matches,” said Romero.

Once the project goes statewide the OIG is confident that the savings could be as high as one million dollars per quarter.



New Mexico Human Services Department
Office of the Secretary
37 Plaza La Prensa
Santa Fe, NM 87507
Phone: 505 476-6207/Fax: 505 476-6215
Email: Marty.Eckert@state.nm.us
We're on the web: <http://www.hsd.state.nm.us>
