

County Orange
Department of Social Services

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Project Title GIS Mapping of Foster Homes for Community and School Identification

Category Cost Savings Measures and/or Improvements in Efficiency
(Please select one)

Project Description and Summary

What did you do?

Describe your program or project. What did you do? What is the history behind the program/project? What did you hope to accomplish? What was your timeline? Your budget? How did you identify your objectives? How well did you use available resources?

Children take comfort in the familiar; their home, family, friends, neighbors, parks, and schools make up most of their world. When children need to come into foster care, they lose that sense of familiarity as they are placed in a different home with a different family. One of our goals in child welfare is to keep children who come into foster care in familiar surroundings. This means keeping them in their community whenever possible and for school-age children specifically, we make every attempt

to keep them in their current school.

Our project utilizes ArcGIS mapping technology to keep foster children in their home communities and schools. Social workers needed to be able to quickly identify which school zone a child came from and which school a foster home would be assigned to. Currently, the state provides only address information about each county's registered foster homes; however the state requires that staff try to keep each child in their same school during the transition to foster care. Manually determining which school zone each foster home would belong to took valuable time away from direct social work. Therefore we looked for a solution to map foster homes and automatically add school zone information to the state's list of foster homes.

Over the span of three months, we met with various members of our county planning and GIS departments. We found that a solution would be possible with currently available county resources. The county already kept geographical records of county addresses and school zones. Also, the county had already bought the license for an ArcGIS Online group that had several open accounts. Therefore, we were able to create an ArcGIS Online map, which could be displayed by workers on their browser or a smart phone. This map would provide workers school zone information of each foster home. Because the resources were already provided by other departments in the agency, the program has no additional budget cost.

Project Success and Impact

What was the outcome?

Was your program/project a success? What was the impact? How did you measure the impact? How widespread is the impact of your program/project? How were you able to overcome obstacles and challenges? Did your program/project meet your established objectives?

Even though the program is still in its early stages, we have already achieved the immediate goals of providing school zone information to our social workers quickly and efficiently. Using the mapping programs, we are able to provide workers with information about school districts of each foster home both as an excel file sent monthly to replace the state sent foster home report and on the map itself. As the program becomes

fully implemented we expect to see higher rates of successful placement of foster children in their same school, better identification of school zones for foster home recruitment, and less time spent on assigning foster homes by workers.

In creating this program, we have found two significant obstacles to making this project successful. First, during the planning stage, it was very important to find a program that was private but easy for social workers to access. While working with our GIS department, we determined that the ArcGIS website can create private groups. This allowed any worker with an account access to the webpage from their computer or smartphones, but did not allow anyone else to get access to confidential CPS information. The second obstacle to implementation involved training and gaining acceptance from workers on using the ArcGIS online website. We are currently building confidence in the program by using it to assist in the foster home registering process.

Staff are excited about continued improvements in efficiency utilizing this program. One additional use has already been discovered. When registering prospective foster homes, the social workers had to measure how close the home was to any body of water near the property. Previously, such measures had to be done manually, with workers walking a measuring tape from the back door to the creek or lake. Now, the online map can accomplish this from a browser, using a combination of satellite imagery and county stored geographic information about lakes, streams and ponds.

Future applications for this project may include using historical CPS removal locations to stage community based interventions and using locations of community gathering points, such as churches and community centers, to recruit foster parents in specific areas of need.
