

**County** Durham  
**Department of Social Services**

**Submitted By** Catherine Williamson-Hardy

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**Project Title** Hunger Awareness

**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?**

Our agency has been growing and to help meet office space needs we began a project to leverage technology in a way that would enable four of our eight Call Center employees to work from home. This allows for four cubicle workspaces to be used in other ways at the agency. The initial timeline began in June 2016 with a six month phase of planning, testing, and preparation. The go-live date was in January 2017. We established

and maintained a small budget by repurposing existing equipment for this project. The only expenses were economical headsets at \$5 and the monthly internet stipend of \$50 per worker. The objectives were identified in collaboration with the Director, the Assistant Director over this area, and the supervision of this specific unit, along with our partners in the County Information Services & Technology department. Through the re-use and repurposing of existing equipment we were very efficient with existing resources. The Cisco soft phone and Call Agent Software runs on Microsoft Surface Pro 2 tablets. The workers login to these devices as well as use a laptop to perform their other non-phone functions (looking up client information, email, etc.).

### **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?**

Overall, this project has been a successful collaboration internally as well as with our partners in other county departments. The workspaces have been able to be used for other purposes and the employees are positive about this change and celebrate their flexibility. The impact can also be measured by looking at data related to call taking including the percentage of calls being handled as opposed to being dropped. We are maintaining high levels of call handling even with these remote workers. We have an average of 99% calls being answered since this project rolled out in January 2017. Even though it appears that this project impacts four employees, it has impacts for all of our clients. The call center employees answered 100,129 calls from January 2, 2017 to July 31, 2017 and 45,037 (45%) of those calls and client interactions were handled by the remote workers. (FYI: One telecommuter was on FMLA for approx. 3 months)

Some of the main challenges and obstacles were first that this technology was new to these employees working from home and now the usability of their personal internet and home network was vital to their job. We ended up using a monthly stipend to pay for high-speed cable internet for these four employees to ensure they all had the same access and the same speed of service. Also, from a technical standpoint, the supervisor of the

unit was invaluable because in the early phases they provided first-line technical support to the remote workers. To prevent too many issues in the beginning, we did a phased roll-out of one employee per month. This allowed the worker to become comfortable in their new environment while giving technical staff the time to work out any issues and provide additional training if necessary.

Our goal to find an economical way to efficiently free up space, while maintaining the same level of customer service. That has been accomplished. In addition, an added benefit has been improved morale from the flexibility that comes with working from home, to saving money on gas, car maintenance, to work clothes. We hope this will assist us in improving staff retention, and reduce the cost of constantly recruiting/onboarding staff in this entry level position. We have already noted, a reduction in the number of absences.

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