



## **NASCIO 2009 Recognition and Award Nominations**

**Title:** Public Provider Website Enhancements

**Category:** Digital Government: Government to Business (G to B)

**Agency:** Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)

**State:** Texas

## **B. Executive Summary**

This nomination describes the Public and Provider Website Enhancements Project completed by the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (TXDFPS) in 2008. This website provides information and the capability to make requests related to the Child-Care Licensing (CCL) Program. The CCL Program is responsible for protecting the health, safety, and well-being of children who attend or reside in regulated child-care operations and homes. One of the primary purposes of the website is to help educate the public in the selection and improvement of child-care services. This project was initiated to make the site more efficient and user-friendly for both child care providers and public users.

During the initial phase of this project, workshops were held with members of the public and child care providers to determine what was working well and what needed improvement. Based on information obtained during the workgroup sessions, it was concluded that the *Search Texas Child Care* site yielded good information, however, the search function could be improved and the search results could be displayed to provide more useful information for consumers. In addition, child care providers wanted enhancements made to the secure provider site that provided the ability to update their data via the web site as needed.

Enhancements to the *Search Texas Child Care* site ([www.txchildcaresearch.org](http://www.txchildcaresearch.org)) were made to improve the usability of the site for consumers of daycare, residential care and foster care. As a result of the project, the website now provides enhanced facility search features and functions and displays compliance history in an easier to read format. In addition, the data can easily be sorted or filtered. For example, a consumer may only wish to see deficiencies with a high weight (or level of risk) that pose a greater danger to children. These important enhancements help consumers carefully choose child-care and adoption services by providing comprehensive search capabilities.

The new site allows child care providers to use the secure portion of the web site to update specific pieces of information about their operation and to submit their staff member's demographic information so that the necessary background checks can be performed. Previously, child care providers could review information on the website, but couldn't make changes electronically; they were required to contact a Child Care Licensing staff member. The Child Care Licensing representatives manually entered the updated information into the licensing database. The recent enhancements for child care providers allow quicker online updates, increased data accuracy, less load on front line licensing representatives, and ultimately faster turn around for the public.

## **C. Project Description:**

### ***Process***

The Public and Provider Website Enhancement project was developed and tested from September 2007 through October 2008. It was deployed statewide on November 1, 2008.

The requirement gathering stage for this project involved conducting work group sessions including members of the general public, child care providers and the agency staff. The project has relationship to three other projects related to Mobile Field Application, and Child Care Licensing Support and Maintenance Systems. Designated staff of these projects provided information to the workgroup members for their decision making.

This project was an enhancement to an existing system. The old system used ASP technology. In the enhanced system ASP.NET (Microsoft standards) were adopted for improved user experience, event-driven programming and easier configuration and deployment.

The project was a multi vendor project which cost the state approximately \$590,000 to complete. The project management approach utilized standard project management processes including initiating, planning, executing, monitoring and controlling and closing.

During the project the team managed two critical risks:

- There was a potential for low Provider acceptance due to changes to reported information and its new layout/design. Constant communication from State Office to the Provider population through newsletters, user involvement from project inception, and feedback loop between Program and Providers during testing fostered a sense of ownership to the system's design. Some cultural change was needed from the Providers as a result of making compliance history with weights available on the web site. To encourage the cultural change, the Providers were included in design of the display, and selection of appropriate terminology and wording.
- Low availability of testing resources was identified as a risk. Risk mitigation included leveraging Program and field users to test throughout the development and testing, conducting regular meetings between testers and developers, and working longer hours.

All project issues were tracked using a collaboration website.

### **Benefits to Public Users**

The enhancements made to the child care search function of the Child Care Licensing website provide user-friendly consumer support to parents and others searching for child care. Specific changes include:

- The enhanced Search Texas Child Care page clearly defines the types of child-care with the ability to search within each distinct option: Search for Child-Care Center or Home; Search for Residential (24-hour) Operation; Search for Child Placing Agencies for Adoption; and Search for Child Placing Agencies for Foster Care.
- The Inspection Summary provides the ability to easily view how many reports and/or inspections were conducted at a facility in the last two years.
- The Compliance Summary now provides the ability to easily view how many standards were evaluated for compliance; how many of those resulted in cited deficiencies; and the weight assigned to each individual standard.

### **Benefits to Child Care Providers**

The following enhancements allow child-care providers to interact and communicate more easily with Child Care Licensing via the Internet: Once registered and logged-in, providers are now able to:

- Request a waiver/variance electronically;
- Manage accounts to the site including the ability to assign multiple users or log-ins to the CCL Provider web site;
- Submit changes in their Director, email address, website, and other certain information; and
- Providers can now enter reports of abuse neglect or standards violations electronically via the site.

### **Training**

To provide end user support, a Public user training guide and a Provider user training guide were developed in PDF format and were posted to the Public Provider Website. No classroom training was required for this project. As the project was deployed, all users were directed to call the Customer Service Center to get assistance

## **D. Significance**

This project is an excellent example of collaboration between business, government and public citizens. TXDPFS was able to gather feedback from many different groups and create a solution that benefits many types of users. Each group saw their needs met including:

- **Citizens:** Who are able to easily search for child care and logically locate detailed information about each and every licensed child care option available in Texas.

- **Child care providers:** Who now save time on administrative changes by simply logging in and making updates themselves.
- **Child care licensing workers:** who are spending more time in the field and less time updating administrative data for providers.

Since the implementation of the changes, DFPS has received many comments from both Providers and parents about the improvement in navigation and the ability to easily manage tasks from one place.

### **E. Benefit of the Project**

TXDFPS is responsible for protecting children who attend or reside in over 36,000 facilities across the state. The enhancements made to the child care search function of the Child Care Licensing website provide user-friendly consumer support to parents and others searching for child care. This means that consumers will spend less time searching for the information and that the results of the search provide the information in an easier to use format, thus making it easier for them to make informed child care decisions.

There are 15,702 individuals (Administrators and other provider staff) that have accounts created in the website. The changes to the provider site give the providers tools that automate tasks that previously required duplicative manual input from their licensing representative. This enhancement gives providers the ability to manage the staff that can input information on the site that pertains to their operation. As an example, there have been 677 Governing Body Reports made by the providers saving time of licensing staff. It also gives providers the flexibility to enter and track the status of the information submitted at their convenience. This improves the accuracy of the data as well as the ability for providers to review their status request at anytime. While providing better service to the providers this increases the amount of time Licensing Representatives are available to be in the field conducting inspections and speaking with other providers in person to improve overall communications between the child care licensing program and the child care providers.