

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release

Stephanie Simon
(518) 442-3892

Serving the Needs of the Homeless with HIMS

Albany, NY - *And homeless near a thousand homes I stood.* - These words may have been written by William Wordsworth more than 200 years ago, but they could just as easily have been spoken by thousands of New Yorkers today.

Amidst a bustling economy and vibrant society, there are more than 30,000 men, women, and children in New York State who have no homes. These homeless people rely on a variety of government and non profit agencies to provide housing, education, child care, counseling, job training, health, and other services. It's a complicated task to determine the proper mix of programs that will best meet the specific needs of each homeless family and single adult. Determining whether the services are actually helping people break out of the cycle of poverty and homelessness is even tougher.

The Center for Technology in Government (CTG) is working with the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance, Bureau of Housing Services (BHS) to devise a system that will help government and non profit organizations manage homeless services and evaluate their effectiveness. The Homeless Information Management System, nicknamed HIMS by the project team, is a prototype information resource that draws upon data from existing case management systems and use technology to enable decision makers to manage and evaluate temporary housing and service programs for homeless families and single adults.

HIMS has been more than a year in the making. Representatives from BHS began working on the project as part of the first round of CTG's Using Information in Government Program. During that program, BHS conducted a full analysis of the business problem and created a comprehensive business case for the Web-based information resource.

The project then became part of Gateways to the Past, Present, and Future: Practical Guidelines to the Secondary Uses of Electronic Records. Funded by a research grant from the National Historical Publications and Records Commission, Gateways involves research on records management processes and models that ensure data will be maintained by government agencies and made available and useable for the widest variety of contemporary and future public needs.

A core team of 12 people from BHS and CTG spent about six months working on the discovery and design phase. The project team secured participation of homeless shelter organizations to provide data, which included addressing privacy and confidentiality concerns; identified what data from current legacy systems will be matched to the new data; chose Oracle Corporation as corporate partner; developed an implementation and testing plan; and designed the prototype system. The team also dealt with the data quality and data transformation issues that are involved in any effort to integrate disparate data sets. Lakshmi Mohan, associate professor of management science and information systems at the University at Albany, led the team through the user needs and data analysis, and developed the framework for the prototype design. Oracle then took the lead in completing the design, development, and population of the data repository, including the Web-based user interface.

HIMS is a decision support tool based on a data mart. The prototype is designed to use a small slice of information to demonstrate the form, function, and capability of the full system. For the prototype, three homeless shelter providers in **New York City (H.E.L.P. USA, Homes for the Homeless, and New York City Domestic Violence)** provided de-identified demographic data for people living in a total of nine family homeless shelters. Those facts were joined by welfare data provided by the state. All this information is matched in the prototype's staging area. Users query the system for answers about various homeless service programs. These answers allow government and non profit program managers to analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of these services.

"The prototype is a blueprint of what can be done with a full system," said CTG Project Support Manager Donna Canestraro. "We've broken a lot of ground. The capability of the prototype shows the value of the system."

The prototype was tested at nine sites in early fall. Officials from BHS, CTG, and shelters in New York City, Westchester and Suffolk counties tested the prototype HIMS following a structured evaluation plan. CTG is now

Serving the Needs of the Homeless with HIMS

evaluating the results of the test phase and producing a report of recommendations for BHS. Representatives from BHS will then take those recommendations and proceed with the project on their own. The agency is working on a budget proposal for the full development and implementation of HIMS.

More information about the HIMS project is available at <http://www.ctg.albany.edu/projects/hims>.