

Information Builders enables agile information solutions with business intelligence (BI) and integration technologies. WebFOCUS – the most widely utilized business intelligence platform – connects to any enterprise system or application and enables simple and intuitive interaction with information.

City of Philadelphia

Snapshot

Organization

City of Philadelphia Office of Mental Health/Mental Retardation.

The Challenge

Replace cumbersome green-screen reports with modern Web-based systems for updating, analyzing, and delivering information to more than 100 provider agencies and program managers.

The Strategy

Deploy a Web-based business intelligence environment that streamlines access to current information; systematically replace RAMIS reporting systems.

The Results

More effective service to citizens; advanced tracking of social services; simplified business processes for state reporting requirements; less rigorous data entry requirements; and reallocation of agency resources to more productive tasks.

Information Builders Solution

WebFOCUS, Consulting, Training, and Education.



Lawrence “Dutch” Klugman praised Information Builders’ reporting software for being easy to learn and use.

Web-Based Reporting Enhances Philadelphia’s Social Services

Innovative Applications Help Citizens Obtain Needed Services

While there is no substitute for the ardent desire to help people in need, the efforts of social services workers can be made more efficient with information technology. This simple acknowledgement has motivated the City of Philadelphia to create several award-winning software applications to streamline the efforts of a diverse group of social services teams. Whether they’re assisting homeless people in search of shelter, developmentally delayed children seeking special care, or mental health patients dealing with psychiatric crises, social services agencies need quick access to current information to coordinate their activities.

“By applying the business intelligence and analysis capabilities of WebFOCUS to track progress, ensure compliance, and measure results, we are able to provide more effective services for our citizens,” says Dutch Klugman, director of Research and Information Management at the Philadelphia Office of Mental Health/Mental Retardation.

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Leveraging a technology base that is affordable enough for government agencies and social services organizations with tight budgets, the City of Philadelphia’s Homeless Outreach, Early Intervention, and Crisis Response Center applications provide agency personnel with an easy to use Web-based environment that can both access and update data in the agency’s databases. “Our developers are not programmers or IT staff; they are social scientists, while our end users are social service workers,” says Klugman. “WebFOCUS gives us a flexible, user-friendly means for monitoring social services and reporting results to the state.”

Bringing WebFOCUS Home

Until recently, Philadelphia’s mental health/ mental retardation agency used the RAMIS programming language to create reporting applications. However, an ever-increasing task load coupled with a desire to adopt user-friendly, Web-based systems compelled Klugman and his staff to look for a new business intelligence solution. “We have heavy reporting requirements,” he says. “Our funding comes from the state level and they insist on careful accounting as we monitor more than 100 provider agencies and report their results back to the state. We needed a modern IT solution to meet our growing needs.”

The agency used funds from a state technology grant to purchase an IBM RS/6000 server as well as licenses for Information Builders’ FOCUS and WebFOCUS software. “FOCUS was the logical language for our needs because it is similar to RAMIS. However, where RAMIS only runs on the city’s mainframe, FOCUS is more flexible and has versions that run on multiple platforms,” Klugman explains. “Our experience with RAMIS made the transition easy, and the software was affordable.”

Information Builders’ Training, Education, and Consulting departments assisted with the transition. All WebFOCUS developers were sent to training courses at the local Information Builders office. Additionally, a WebFOCUS trainer conducted a Maintain Boot Camp on-site and worked with individual staff members.

“Information Builders consultants were very helpful,” Klugman says. “They got us started with the software, and then my people did the fine tuning. So far they have helped us with four projects.” The consulting organization helped the city by mentoring the City’s personnel in WebFOCUS techniques, and by developing launch pages for each of the applications. Once the WebFOCUS applications were developed, the consultants applied their experience to testing and optimizing each application.

Creating Award-Winning Applications – With Street-Level Benefits

To create a series of applications for reporting, analyzing, and updating data, the city used the WebFOCUS Managed Reporting Environment (MRE) in conjunction with WebFOCUS Maintain and the FOCUS database. WebFOCUS MRE provides an application development environment for building business intelligence, reporting, and analysis applications. Maintain adds additional development capabilities so users can update data in the underlying databases.

“We are under pressure from our user base to develop more and more applications with WebFOCUS. They love the ease of access and Web browser connectivity of the WebFOCUS interface.”

Klugman praised the Information Builders reporting software for being easy to learn and use. “Maintain was more difficult to master as our developers were not accustomed to GUI programming,” he says. “With support from Information Builders consultants and trainers, we’ve learned to use this tool as well. We’ve been writing these applications while our normal daily work continues, so we don’t always have large blocks of time to dedicate to new development,” he says. “However, we were able to get our first application, Homeless Outreach, up and running in just two months. That’s very fast, although some of the more complex applications have taken longer to develop.”

Homeless Outreach (developed by Klugman) is one of two applications created by the City of Philadelphia to win the Innovation Award at the Information Builders Summit 2003 User Conference in Chicago. “The goal of our Homeless Outreach program is to get people off the streets and into shelters, so we can get them the services they need,” Klugman explains. “The office funds teams that make contact with homeless people. Homeless Outreach creates reports that track the homeless population and makes it easier for the mental health staff to manage the activities of the various outreach teams.”

The self-service application allows authorized agency members to view reports from any Web browser. They can organize reports by date, type of problem, contact classification, and other variables, making their job of helping citizens easier and more efficient. Security features within WebFOCUS restrict each team to viewing reports only about the people under their charge, while program managers have access to the entire database.

“WebFOCUS provides secure access to information while shielding users from data complexities and cryptic field names,” says Klugman. “They can run reports on demand and take advantage of advanced analytical functionality. It makes it easy for us to access and update data from any location.”

Early Intervention – the second application to win the Innovation Award (developed by Ana Shane) – is used to monitor developmentally delayed children to ensure that they are getting the care and services they need. “WebFOCUS provides a tracking system so our mental retardation staff is aware of when there is an interruption in service for these children and can make sure it gets resolved,” says Klugman. “With our old system, provider agencies sent us Microsoft Word documents, which we keyed in manually. Now, with Maintain, providers can key the data in directly. This is more accurate and saves our agency enormous resources.”

The City of Philadelphia uses WebFOCUS ReportCaster to notify provider agencies about the status of the children they serve, as well as to send status reports to internal managers and notify them about potential data-entry errors.

Keeping Up With Special Needs

The City of Philadelphia Office of Mental Health/Mental Retardation has other WebFOCUS applications as well. Its new Crisis Response Center application (developed by Coleman Poses) uses Information Builders’ technology to assist staff at psychiatric emergency rooms by providing

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easy, Web-based access to their patients' history and other information. "It replaces an old COBOL application and is much easier to use," says Klugman. "It allows us to keep track of activities in crisis response centers and makes the job easier for personnel in those centers."

Another WebFOCUS application (developed by Robert Spencer) tracks the utilization of the city's 2,000 residential beds for persons with mental illness. Staff can monitor admissions, discharges, absences, persons in need of residential services, periodic reviews of residents' progress, and facility information. The WebFOCUS software combines occupancy and facility data with diagnostic and service history data to determine the best possible placement for each individual.

Klugman believes the ease of use that WebFOCUS brings to monitoring and reporting tasks is what has made these new applications so popular. "We are under pressure from our user base to develop more and more applications with WebFOCUS," he says. "They love the ease of access and Web browser connectivity of the WebFOCUS interface. Once they get their hands on WebFOCUS applications, they don't want to go back to the old mainframe green screens. This motivates us to move additional business processes over to WebFOCUS as quickly as possible."

Other projects in development include replacing the RAMIS MH geriatric services and MH court commitment databases, as well as the entire mental retardation database system with FOCUS databases. "There is a lot of exciting development going on at our agency with WebFOCUS," Klugman concludes. "It is flexible enough to serve a wide variety of requirements, and we find Information Builders to be very responsive to our needs."