



The Computerworld Honors Program

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Final Copy of Case Study

YEAR:

2012

STATUS:

Laureate

Organization:

Westchester County

Organization URL:

www.westchestergov.com

Project Name:

TeleCorrections Inmate Kiosk and Video Visitation System

What social/humanitarian issue was the project designed to address? What specific metrics did you use to measure the project's success?

The TeleCorrections Inmate Kiosk and Video Visitation System is a first-of-its-kind solution in New York State and possibly the United States that allows an inmate from the Westchester County Jail to securely communicate face-to-face with an outside party without having to leave his or her secure housing area. The new system addresses social and humanitarian issues among Westchester County's prison population by increasing the ease and amount of communication with family and other important members of the inmate's support network. The solution also provides a positive alternative to the inconvenient and potentially traumatic experience of an on-site prison visit, especially for young children. The metrics that were used to measure the project's success include the total number of visits via the new system for 2011 (2,500), as well as the number of home visits/registered home users from Nov. 16 (when functionality was launched) through Dec. 30, 2011: 154/65. Cost savings totaling \$400,000 for 2011 have also been used to measure project success. In this case, savings go hand in hand with social and humanitarian benefits, as the system has proven to reduce the time in which it takes for bail expeditors to meet with inmates, thereby reducing the duration of incarceration by approximately 2,500 days in 2011 alone. The Department of Correction has estimated the total savings resulting from the 1,000 visits by bail expeditors in 2011 at approximately \$320,000 (\$30,000 as a result of reduced travel and staff time and \$290,000 from the reduced number of jail days). In addition, it is estimated that the more than 1,300 visits made by probation officers in 2011 has resulted in a savings of more than \$80,000 (reduced travel and staff time).

Please describe the technologies used and how those technologies were deployed in an innovative way. Also, please include any technical or other challenges that were overcome for the successful implementation of the project.

TeleCorrections is a custom-built system that utilizes both a hardened client-server video visitation and information kiosk system specifically designed for correctional facilities as well as a web-based user management and scheduling application. The most significant obstacle when building the TeleCorrections solution was the absence of replicable best practices on the market. Westchester County proactively developed this solution in partnership with Primonics to meet requirements that were being developed for the first time specifically for correctional facilities. This aspect of the deployment is especially innovative because for the first time, video conferencing units have been securely installed directly at an inmate's housing unit. Outside visitors utilize any computer with a web browser and either a built-in or exterior web camera to communicate with inmates. When the system was first launched, visits were limited to bail-bond professionals and probation officers that would use County computers from their offices. The challenge of making the system accessible to family members from the comfort of their own homes or local community facility was overcome in Nov. 2011. An Apache application server manages all aspects of the TeleCorrections system as well as the interactions between the TeleCorrections terminals and clients. An interface provides inmate data from the Jail Management System to better coordinate and inform visits. Use of a centralized infrastructure ensures that all aspects of the solution are hosted and managed in an efficient and secure manner. Finally, the open architecture allows the terminals to not only provide video visitation but also act as an electronic billboard that provides inmates controlled access to information such as commissary balances, court dates, bail amounts and upcoming visits.

Please list the specific humanitarian benefits the project has yielded so far.

Specific humanitarian benefits yielded by TeleCorrections so far include: - The facilitation of communication between an inmate and family members that would otherwise be impossible or impractical: Several inmates have been able to visit with family members that live a long distance away, and are therefore unable to make the physical trips to the County Jail. Others have made the virtual visits because of financial reasons or poor health. By providing an effective and non-discriminatory method of communication for distressed family members and loved ones of inmates, this solution is delivering a significant benefit to society and the overall well-being of individuals who are more likely to be psychologically, socially or economically distressed. - An improved environment for children: Children with incarcerated parents will benefit both in the short and long terms as a result of this solution. By allowing children who are still in their early stages of development to avoid the harsh realities of an on-site visit (security, waiting lines, etc.), TeleCorrections is providing a more wholesome and comfortable environment to communicate in. In so doing, the system will allow for improved communication and hopefully better relationships between inmates and their children.

Please provide the best example of how the project has benefited a specific individual, enterprise or organization. Feel free to include personal quotes from individuals who have directly benefited from the work.

While we cannot provide specific quotes and examples due to privacy concerns, the benefits of the system for the families of inmates, especially children, is clearly described in previous responses and perhaps the most important benefit, from a societal and humanitarian perspective. From an organizational standpoint, however, it is worth reiterating the significant cost savings that this project has generated for Westchester County, which, like most counties across the United

States, has been faced with shrinking revenues and increasing budget deficits since 2008. The cost savings for 2011 alone are estimated conservatively at \$400,000. Further, those savings reflect an improvement in the way the County Jail and inmates are managed. The bulk of savings has resulted from inmates receiving the pre-trial services they require sooner, thereby reducing the number of days they spend incarcerated. This has a significant impact on the quality of life for inmates and their families, while generating substantial savings for Westchester County. Ultimately, this project demonstrates the impact that the smart application of technology can have on both individuals and a large governmental organization such as Westchester County.