



# Public Engagement Newsletter

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[COVERING APRIL/MAY/JUNE]

*Did you know it's been 15 years since all or parts of six state agencies were merged into one to form a totally new agency? Back in July of 1997 we began this new adventure called the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). As the years go by, each one brings achievements and milestones – for our customers, for us as an agency, and for our staff individually. We are grateful for the achievements we have made these past 15 years as we look forward to blazing new trails in the future.*

*A special 15-Year Anniversary Video Montage, scheduled for distribution this fall, will take the place of our regularly scheduled newsletter. It will give us an opportunity to share our most notable accomplishments with each other. You'll hear the stories from actual customers who tell us what a difference IDHS has made in their lives and vignettes from staff who share their own experiences working for the Agency. We hope some will take us down memory lane, recounting the integration from six agencies into IDHS and telling us what this adventure means to them.*

*In the meantime, please enjoy this issue of our Public Engagement Newsletter and find out why IDHS was honored by the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities; learn about the State's new Latino Community Outreach Initiative; and join us in celebrating the Agency's partnership with The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired in reaching a two million mark.*

*Also in this issue, a grant helps expand Illinois Link Card access at farmers markets; IDHS brings human services to Southwest Chicago residents; IDHS Family Community Resource Centers share their Local Office Pride; and car seat inspections prove to be successful at Norwegian American Hospital.*

*In other agency news, the Social Services Advisory Council keeps communication lines open and the Centralized Repository Vault is now live and operational.*



## **IDHS and staff honored by ICED**

The Illinois Department of Human Rights (IDHR) Director Rocco J. Claps and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Secretary Michelle R.B. Saddler were recently at the State Fairgrounds to present a series of awards and recognitions from the Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities (ICED).

Award recipients included Rep. La Shawn Ford (D-Chicago), Legislator of the Year; IDHS Mobility Instructor Judith A. West, Employee of the Year; the Lake County Center for Independent Living, Non-Profit award; and Benro Ogunyipe, a former ICED intern, now working in IDHS' Office of Accessibility and Customer Support, received an award in the employee category.



*DHS staff member Benro Ogunyipe receives an award from Elizabeth Gastellum, Office of the Lt. Gov., during the ICED awards ceremony, April 25, 2012, in Springfield, IL.*

“The Illinois Department of Human Services is strongly committed to serving persons with disabilities around the state and creating a workplace environment that empowers persons with disabilities to reach their full potential,” said Secretary Saddler. “Judith West and Benro Ogunyipe are wonderful examples of how IDHS is succeeding in achieving these twin goals.”



*IDHS staff member Anna D’Ascenzo, IDHS Secretary Michelle R.B. Saddler and IDHR Director Rocco J. Claps show the award given to state agencies during the ICED awards ceremony, April 25, 2012, in Springfield, IL.*

Additional awards were presented to agencies that have hired employees through the state’s Successful Disability Opportunities Program (SD).

Both IDHS and Anna D’Ascenzo, its chief of equal employment opportunity and affirmative action officer, received awards for promoting the employment of people with disabilities. Secretary Saddler recognized agency staff and Mrs. D’Ascenzo for their efforts in securing the employment for 34 out of the 43 individuals hired through the SD program, making it the program’s best year in history.

“The Committee was impressed with the work being done around the state to further the independence of people with disabilities,” said IDHR Director Claps. “We invite the community to join us in recognizing these outstanding individuals and organizations.”

The [Interagency Committee on Employees with Disabilities](#) represents the interests of more than 3,000 employees with disabilities

in state government. The Awards Program recognizes and promotes independence, access and opportunities for employees with disabilities.

## **State launches Latino Community Outreach Initiative**

Gov. Pat Quinn, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), Central Management Services (CMS), and the Illinois Hunger Coalition launched a new initiative designed to improve access to state-supported services in the Latino and underserved minority communities.

The Community Outreach Initiative (COI) will partner with community groups and business owners to realign access of state resources to meet the needs of the growing Latino and immigrant populations and provide a structured and consistent forum in which the issues facing these populations can be better identified and addressed.

“Building partnerships within the Latino and underserved minority communities is a crucial step in ensuring that IDHS services are effectively reaching our clients,” said IDHS Secretary Michelle R.B. Saddler. “The Community Outreach Initiative will unite the state with grassroots and community organizations in the shared goal of making services available and easily accessible to these underserved populations.”

A recent survey by the Pew Hispanic Center found that the economic downturn hit the Hispanic community particularly hard, with 59 percent of Hispanics reporting that their finances are in fair to poor shape. And according to an Illinois Hunger Coalition report, although many Hispanic families struggle to pay their bills and put food on the table, just 42 percent of eligible Latino families report using the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as Food Stamps, designed to provide much needed food and nutritional assistance.

A specific goal of the COI will be the strategic placement of IDHS Family Community Resource Centers (FCRCs) in convenient areas to help Latino and immigrant families locate and apply for resources. This initiative will also focus attention on the delivery of human services within the City of Chicago and western Cook County suburbs. The western Cook County suburbs have seen an increased demand for resources due to the tremendous growth and expansion of the Latino and underserved minority communities.

State legislators in support of this initiative so far include: State Sen. William Delgado, Sen. Iris Martinez, Sen. Antonio Munoz, State Rep. Ed Acevedo, Rep. Luis Arroyo, Rep. Toni Berrios, Rep. Dena Carli, and Rep. Cynthia Soto.



## [The Chicago Lighthouse's collaborative with IDHS hits 2 million mark](#)

Members of the Recipient Identification Number (RIN) program, a collaborative effort between The Chicago Lighthouse for People Who Are Blind or Visually Impaired and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), were saluted recently for achieving a major milestone: the production of two million electronic RINs!

Receiving special certificates of appreciation for their hard work were Kevin Burton, manager of the program; Sara Chung; Connie Davis; Jefferdia Draper; Jarvis Johnson; Mindy Mayer; and Meghan McGovern.



On hand to honor the RIN team were IDHS Secretary Michelle R.B. Saddler, along with other state officials and Lighthouse President and Executive Director Dr. Janet Szlyk, who praised the employees for their productivity and commitment to excellence. She also thanked IDHS for its partnership and support of the program.

Secretary Saddler also paid tribute to RIN staff and commended the Lighthouse as a valued partner in this "dynamic initiative to assist people with disabilities in securing employment."

First inaugurated at the Lighthouse in 2008, the RIN program enables employees, all of whom have a disability, to use an internet-based system to retrieve and assign recipient identification numbers to clients receiving services from social services agencies and enables them to invoice for payment. Using RIN numbers instead of social security numbers helps lessen the threat of identity fraud.

The RIN employees process on average more than 1,300 requests a day and an average of 6,000 to 7,000 per week. For further information on RINs, call (312) 666-1331 or visit [The Chicago Lighthouse](#) online.

## [Grant expands Illinois Link card access at farmers markets](#)

Up to 150 Illinois farmers markets could receive free wireless machines that accept debit, credit and Illinois Link cards thanks to a grant partnership announced recently by Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon, a local food advocate who chairs the Governor's Rural Affairs Council.

The Illinois Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Wireless Project aims to expand access to fresh produce for low-income residents and boost the sale of locally grown food statewide. For the first time, farmers markets will be able to accept Illinois Link cards wirelessly for a minimal cost. The Illinois Link program allows access to federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits.

"Improving access to local food can improve the health of our citizens, our underserved neighborhoods and the state economy," said Simon. "As a state we spend more than 95 percent of our food dollars on products grown outside of Illinois. This project will ensure we keep more of those dollars in our local communities at no new cost to state taxpayers."

The wireless EBT project, funded by a grant of \$182,000 from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, will be administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and the Illinois Department of Agriculture with support from the Lt. Gov.'s office. The program will reimburse farmers markets up to \$1,200 for the purchase of a wireless EBT machine and the fees for activation and wireless service. Interested markets had to apply prior to July 9, 2012.

"This partnership is exciting because it is using technology to enable growers to expand their markets and it helps families get access to affordable, healthy, locally-grown produce," said IDHS Secretary Michelle R.B. Saddler.



*Lt. Gov. Sheila Simon, Co-Chair of the Governors Rural Affairs Council, chats with customers at a local farmers market in Illinois.*

To be eligible for the wireless EBT grant, farmers markets must obtain certification to accept SNAP benefits through the USDA Food and Nutrition Service before seeking reimbursement. Markets that are already certified and own an EBT machine can seek reimbursement as long as their certification and EBT machine purchase happened after November 18, 2011. The USDA defines a farmers market as a multi-stall market where farmers sell agricultural products directly to consumers from a central or fixed location.

“I thank the USDA for recognizing the importance of expanding access to nutritious, locally-grown foods and providing this funding,” said Acting Agriculture Director Bob Flider. “Lt. Gov. Simon recognizes that this important USDA program will help consumers make food choices that improve not only their health, but also the health of the local farm economy. The program is a win-win all the way around.”

Illinois’ wireless EBT project is part of a \$4 million nationwide effort by the USDA to increase SNAP use at farmers markets. SNAP sales at Illinois farmers markets totaled nearly \$70,000 in 2011, an increase of over 522 percent since 2009. The number of farmers markets and direct-marketing farmers certified to accept SNAP benefits has increased from 35 in 2009 to 49 in 2011.

“This funding will help Illinois SNAP customers increase their opportunities to access healthy, local foods,” said USDA Food and Nutrition Service Midwest Regional Administrator Ollice Holden. “And evidence suggests they will take advantage of that access. When we couple this approach with strategies like the education, cooking demonstrations, and community support often found at farmers markets, consumption of healthy foods should rise even more.”

### **IDHS partnership brings human services to Southwest Chicago residents**

In an effort to provide greater access and bring human services directly to individuals and families in the communities in which they live, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) has partnered with several community organizations and state agencies to host a series of Illinois Welcoming Days throughout the state.



As recent as last month, the Illinois Welcoming Center hosted a community resource fair in Southwest Chicago. Close to nearly 200 participants gathered at the West Lawn Branch Public Library to take advantage of free health screenings, apply for human services through IDHS and learn about employment and training opportunities through the Illinois Department of Employment Security.

“The vision of the Illinois Welcoming Days is to bring together state agencies, local community organizations and educational institutions that support self-sufficiency,” said Silvia Villa, director of the Illinois Welcoming Center. “Through this partnership, we are able to provide access to a variety of social services in a one-day format to our immigrant and refugee residents.”

The resource fair also served as an opportunity for participants to obtain information on foreclosure prevention, citizenship, housing, education and a variety of other supportive services provided by local entities. Southwest Chicago residents also enjoyed live music and traditional dance performances.

### **Family Community Resource Centers share their Local Office Pride**

During a Local Office Pride (LOP) kickoff event in June 2012, at the DuPage Family Community Resource Center (FCRC) in Villa Park, IL, Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) Secretary Michelle R.B. Saddler spoke of the following PRIDE goals to forward the agency’s Culture of Caring:

***P for Partnership*** – “IDHS is one of the state's largest agencies, and yet even IDHS cannot accomplish its mission of service by itself. We need and value the assistance of all of our employees, community partners, and advocacy groups to help us serve the people of Illinois and to help vulnerable populations achieve self sufficiency.”



*DuPage Local Office Administrator, Phyllis Baxter, explains new office procedures to IDHS Secretary Michelle R.B. Saddler and other staff members during the Local Office Pride kickoff June 2012, in Chicago, IL.*



*IDHS staff members Jennifer Wagner, LK McIntosh, Linda Saterfield, Linda Shumate, and Donna Clay visit the Southeast Family Community Resource Center to launch the Local Office Pride initiative June 2012, in Chicago, IL.*

**R for Rebalancing** – “I believe that the state of Illinois needs a diverse range of facilities to serve citizens who require specialized and/or residential care. We need both large facilities as well as more community-based providers so that we can serve people in the setting most appropriate to their needs and preferences.”

**I for Integrated Delivery of Human Services** – “A person in need should be able to walk into any IDHS office and learn about all state services that might help him or her. We at IDHS will strive to become more *person centric* rather than *program focused*.”

**D is for Data Driven Program Evaluation** – “We need to ask the question, ‘Do all of our programs make a difference?’ Despite the newly approved tax increase, the state of Illinois continues to operate with limited resources - and we must ensure that our resources are devoted to programs that are proven to be effective.”

**E is for Effective Core Human Services** – “As spending limits continue to impose downward pressure on human services, we must determine the most essential services needed by our citizens and fight to preserve those core services.”

Linda Saterfield, Director of the Division of Family and Community Services, also joined staff at the Southeast FCRC during a recent LOP kickoff to celebrate their hard work and success over the past year. A part of the Work Support Strategies Project, the Southeast FCRC was one of three model offices in the state that worked to test and implement changes to their office processes. Some of the changes include placing a greeter in the waiting room, shifting from caseloads to a task-based system, and placing caseworkers on duty in interview booths in the waiting room in order to serve customers more quickly.

“With these changes, Southeast staff have been able to ensure customers receive their benefits in a timely manner,” said Director Saterfield. “Many staff members have also commented on the improved work environment and increased employee morale.”

### **Car seat inspections prove successful at Norwegian American Hospital**

Over the past few years, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) has partnered with Norwegian American Hospital and Illinois State Police to conduct car-seat inspections, provide training on the proper use of car seats and distribute free car seats to community residents.

“We are thrilled to have partnered with the Illinois Department of Human Services and Illinois State Police to provide free car seat checks and car seats to those in need,” said Norwegian American Hospital President and CEO José R. Sánchez. “This state program has a tremendous impact on the families we serve by informing the parents on child safety and helping their children stay healthy and safe.”

In June 2012, this partnership proved to be successful for surrounding children and parents who participated in the event. Out of 64 car seat inspections that were conducted, 62 free car seats were given to children whose lives were endangered each time they rode in a vehicle with an unsafe child seat.

“Each year this partnership continues to thrive by helping save the lives of children who ride in improper or unsafe car seats,” said Carmen Flores-Rance, manager of the program for IDHS. “The lives of children in the surrounding communities that Norwegian American Hospital serves are much safer.”



*More than 60 car seats were distributed to parents during a car-seat inspection at Norwegian American Hospital June 2012, in Chicago, IL.*

With manufacturers marketing new and more innovative child seats every day, the improper use of child seats is on the rise. By checking for correct installation and making sure the children's seats are properly installed in the vehicles they regularly use, the likelihood of children surviving car crashes improves drastically.

"Car crashes are the number one killer of children 1 to 12 years old in the United States," according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. "The best way to protect them in the car is to put them in the right seat, at the right time, and use it the right way."

## **OTHER HAPPENINGS AT THE ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES:**

### **Social Services Advisory Council keeps lines of communication open**

Last fall the Illinois Department of Human Services Secretary Michelle R.B. Saddler appointed a new Social Services Advisory Council (SSAC) to enhance communication between the department and providers and advocates. The SSAC allows for an exchange of ideas on current topics of particular concern to various groups.

The new SSAC had its initial meeting in October 2011 and has met monthly in 2012 to discuss important issues such as the budget, legislation, contracts, Medicaid and the restructuring plan for mental health and developmental disabilities services. The SSAC has also provided input through several committees and played a vital role in passage of the supplemental appropriation for child care. The next SSAC meeting is scheduled for the end of July 2012 in Chicago and Springfield.

### **The Centralized Repository Vault now live and operational**

Effective July 2012, the state's Centralized Repository Vault (CRV), a partnership with the state's five human service agencies, is now live and operational.

As reported in our previous Public Engagement Newsletter, the CRV is a web-based software application that facilitates uploading documents (in PDF format only) and stores information into a secure database. This powerful and user-friendly tool works as simple as attaching a document to an email and provides a secure method for providers to submit documentation or data once and have multiple authorized state agencies access those documents. The review process at each agency has not changed; the CRV reduces the burden on our providers by eliminating redundant requests for the same documents or data allowing providers to focus more on human services delivery.

The CRV is a key project in the overall Management Improvement Initiative, which was signed into law by Gov. Pat Quinn on August 25, 2011, as Public Act 97-0558. The Management Improvement Initiative aims to create greater efficiencies in business-related practices and ultimately foster a network in Illinois that will enable a greater level of direct service to our more vulnerable citizens.

The CRV is a partnership between the Illinois Department of Human Services, the Illinois Department on Aging, the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services, and the Illinois Department of Public Health.

To sign up and learn more about CRV, service providers must register to receive authorization to use the system by visiting the [Centralized Repository Vault](#) website.

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