MINNESOTA DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

Saint Paul, Minnesota, USA
Electronic Document Management System

Please provide a paragraph or two about the history of your organization.

The Minnesota Department of Human Services (DHS), in cooperation with its county partners, helps people meet their basic needs so they can live in dignity and achieve their highest potential. Known as the "welfare agency" since its beginning in the mid-1800s when the first state hospital opened in St. Peter, Minnesota, the department's
focus always has been on helping people make transitions and overcome obstacles in their lives. In 1868, the department began working with Minnesota's county employees to create what is now the state's county-based social services system. Today, employees in the department's central office in St. Paul work closely with employees from Minnesota's 87 counties who provide most of the direct services to Minnesotans. Since the late 1800s, DHS has always served Minnesotans in need. From its beginning as the state Board of Correction and Charities in 1883, which evolved into the state Board of Control in 1901, the Minnesota Department of Social Security in 1939, the Department of Public Welfare in 1953, and finally to the Department of Human Services in 1983, it is here to help people make transitions in their lives and live as independently as possible.

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An opportunity to get some much deserved recognition for an outstanding project team. The project required that members juggle multiple efforts and expand their skill set. It is a tribute to the project team that every one of them stayed through project completion and signed up for the follow-on project, EDMS Clean Sweep.
Attachments: Minneapolis Star-Tribune article on the Backfile Conversion Area Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities Brochure Last update: October 5, 2005 at 10:54 PM H.J. Cummins: Workers with disabilities get a boost from digital conversions H.J. Cummins, Star Tribune October 6, 2005 WORKANDLIFE1006 With 20 percent of its floor space consumed by file cabinets, the crowded Minnesota Department of Human Services realized it had a problem with paper. The agency's solution might be a sign of things to come. It hired 16 of its own clients with disabilities, trained them to convert paper documents to digital images, and 18 months later this corner of state government has 3.5 million fewer pages of documents in storage boxes. "It was either this or look into 'bunk cubicles,' " said Monica Crocker, coordinator of the electronic document management system at

the department. Advocates for the disabled see digital conversions as a potential mother lode for their clients: Governments, banks, law firms and health care companies are all looking to the promise of computer disk storage to liberate them from their paper burdens. And conversions -- especially the repetitive process of removing staples, taping rips and opening folded papers so they can be electronically scanned -- is ideal work for many with physical, cognitive or emotional disabilities. On top of that, this option can make the labor-intensive process affordable to more employers. The Human Services Department pays $7 an hour to this crew, compared with the $28 an hour Crocker said she got in an open bidding process. Everyone on the work team gets $6.15 of that $7 -- the state's minimum wage. "Good money," said an appreciative crew member, Trina Lewis. The department was motivated to shrink its records to prepare to move some of its divisions into the new Elmer L. Andersen Human Services Building, which opened last weekend. The nature of its work requires lots of records and often long storage. For example, the files on people under public guardianship must remain intact through their lifetimes plus 20 years, Crocker said. To get the job done, the department turned to the piece of its Minnesota State Operated Community Services that finds and supports employment for people with disabilities. It provides 16 to 19 clients at a time, and some coaches to train and supervise them, placement coordinator Heidi Forbes said. The clients work four-hour shifts, and have organized themselves in four teams -- the Early Birds, Vikings, Stars and Wild. Most of their work is "document preparation" -- taking out staples and anything else needed to make a sheet of paper ready to be scanned. "Once they learn it, it's the same thing every day," Forbes said. "It's important to these people to be consistent. Change can be hard; repetitive is good. "In fact, some of these folks have been successful here, after they hadn't been elsewhere," she said. The department got the idea from the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. That advocacy agency converted all its paperwork, including decades of mental health research, to a website, council director Colleen Wieck said.
Wieck had read about an autistic man in Lodi, Calif., who was doing well converting city documents into electronic files. "I thought, 'You gotta get this work done. You gotta hire people with disabilities.' A lot of forces came together," Wieck said. She hired 18 people, who scanned documents for her for 16 months. She and Forbes hope more employers will take time to learn about this as a possibility. Besides the department, Olmsted County's corrections department also has hired people with disabilities to help handle its documents. She has had interest from a banker. "And somebody in New Jersey found us by Googling 'disabilities' and 'digital imaging' and said, 'How do we set up a business to do this?' " Wieck said. In the 1980s, the only placements for people with disabilities were in such jobs as fast food, laundry and janitorial. Now those agencies ask their and putting stickers on pipes at a state-run workshop. Working for the department is a

big-deal job, Shaffer said. "We're working for the state, and that means it's important," he said. "I never had a government job before." What are your workplace issues? You can reach H.J. Cummins atworkandlife@ startribune.com. Please sign your emails; no names will appear in print without prior approval.

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The project team included carefully selected individuals with specific business and technical skills. Being part of the Computerworld Honors Program recognizes their hard work, ingenuity, and focus. Documenting their story in the ComputerWorld archive can achieve broader benefits as it models and communicates a creatively successful synthesis of readily available technologies that adds significant value for the enterprise and the people of Minnesota.