

Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services (DPSS)

DPSS' Experience with d.school Projects

October 2012

D.school is a problem-solving tool that has been used to design solutions for various Departmental challenges. This approach allows us to first gain empathy to understand the needs of a specific user group, and then create targeted improvements or solutions to meet those needs. Since its introduction in July 2011, DPSS has completed seven d.school projects, resulting in a combined total of 30 proposed solutions and compilation of insights. Out of the proposed solutions, ten have been implemented, 16 are being assessed, and four were determined to not be feasible.

DPSS Department Sections and Line Offices have sought guidance on how to apply components of this tool to improve areas of interest or address operational challenges. Additionally, Executive Management have identified the d.school approach as a tool for meeting organizational objectives for Strategic Plan Objectives. To date, five additional projects have been identified.

Our incorporation of d.school has found core areas where this method adds design value, and these include: Customer Service, Program Redesign, Line Operations, and Administrative Planning.



DPSS' Experience with d.school Projects

<p>Medi-Cal Applications d.school Project</p>	<p>DPSS Challenge DPSS took an interest in exploring what drives potential applicants to district offices to apply for Medi-Cal when regulations do not have a face-to-face requirement and there are alternatives such as mailing-in an application or applying through the DPSS website on Your Benefits Now (YBN). Through this project, DPSS took steps to enhance customer service for our community, while addressing the high lobby traffic in district offices.</p>	
<p>June 2012</p>	<p>d.school Team: DPSS formed a team of 8 represented employees at the level of Eligibility Workers.</p>	
<p>DPSS Lead: Medi-Cal Program</p>	<p>Project Duration and Engagement Site(s): The project took place across three days, from June 25 – June 27. The team completed two full cycles of the 5-phase d.school design process. Based on the empathetic interviews, 4 problem statements were identified by Medi-Cal customers. The team interviewed/tested prototypes with Medi-Cal applicants and participants in the Metro Special District 70. This office was selected based on the high number of applications received in person each month.</p>	
	Problem Statement	Prototype/Proposed Solution
	<p>Problem Statement 1: Medi-Cal applicants need assistance to complete applications because they are afraid of being denied.</p>	<p>The proposed solution is a DVD containing a series of short videos providing step-by-step instructions for completing the Medi-Cal application and other documents needed during intake. The instructional DVD could be provided to new applicants along with the Medi-Cal application package. The video could also be available on the YBN website and YouTube, and would play in District Office lobbies.</p>
	<p>Problem Statement 2: Medi-Cal customers need confirmation, from the eligibility worker, that their case will be reviewed and their concerns will be addressed.</p>	<p>The proposed solution includes two components to meet customers need for confirmation from DPSS: Option for applying for Medi-Cal over the phone with a DPSS worker and having the option to contact DPSS via text or e-mail with general questions about a pending Medi-Cal applications or case.</p>
	<p>Problem Statement 3: Medi-Cal applicants need to trust DPSS' mail-in application process because it is currently unreliable.</p>	<p>To reestablish trust in the Medi-Cal mail-in process, the proposed solution was the incorporation of a tracking system in the Medi-Cal application. Once the application is received and scanned by DPSS, a notice would be generated to inform the applicant that their application has been received.</p>

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	Problem Statement	Prototype/Proposed Solution
Medi-Cal Applications d.school Project (Continued)	<p>Problem Statement 4: Medi-Cal customers need exposure to alternative methods of contact with DPSS because the Department has conditioned them to contact DPSS in person.</p>	<p>The proposed solution is a multi-layered approach that includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancement to the YBN website to have "How to..." online tutorials, live webcast and online chat allowing for real-time questions and answers from participants. • Aggressive awareness campaign to promote alternative options to communicate and apply with DPSS, including billboard ads, buses, and other high visibility points. • "DPSS in your Community" efforts to strengthen collaboration with local community partners and teach both partners and their constituents how to connect with DPSS.
	<p>Reflections:</p> <p>"When the project ended, I felt a strong bond with every individual that was involved in this experiment because I knew each person involved cared about fixing this problem as much as I did." (Jose Franco, San Gabriel Valley District Office)</p> <p>"DPSS has some very intelligent and hardworking employees and the ideas that flowed in that room could rival an APPLE COMPUTERS think tank." (Angelica Morales, Metro Special District Office)</p>	

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<p>Lancaster Customer Service Project</p> <p>April 2012</p> <p>DPSS Lead: Lancaster General Relief District Office</p>	<p>DPSS Challenge In early 2012, community advocates expressed concerns with the level of customer service provided at the Lancaster General Relief District Office. Through this all, employees strive to keep up with increased caseloads and help their participants. This project was two-fold, first engaging staff to seek input on improving customer relations by making recommendations about office processes, which to the extent possible, could foster a better work environment. Secondly, the project engaged customers (participants/applicants) to seek input on what aspects of service delivery could be improved. The participation in this project was a step towards rebuilding trust within the District Office and with the community to create a positive change.</p> <p>d.school Team: DPSS formed a team of 8 represented employees, comprised of 5 Eligibility Workers, 1 Eligibility Supervisor, 1 GAIN Services Supervisor, and 1 Intermediate Typist Clerk.</p> <p>Project Duration and Engagement Site(s): The project took place across four days, from April 9 – 12. The team completed two full cycles of the 5-phase d.school design process, received training on each phase, and interviewed/tested prototypes with DPSS staff and customers in the Lancaster General Relief District Office.</p>		
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<p>Staff's Problem Statement 1: Overwhelmed EWs need their caseload reduced to provide better customer service and improve teamwork.</p>	<p>Prototyped Solution: The proposed solution aimed at placing greater emphasis to helping customers when they first arrive in the office requesting services. The following are elements of the solution to change the lobby dynamic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eligibility Rover: Place an Eligibility Worker in the lobby whose primary function is to greet, direct, inform, and provide customers with needed packets/forms and verify their correct completion. The Eligibility Rover would be the liaison between customers and office staff, helping the customer navigate through office processes. • TV Monitors: Make better use of lobby TV monitors to display informational messages for customers, including brief "Did you know..." segments and reminders. Keeping customers informed through these alerts would over time reduce lobby traffic by preventing unnecessary, repeat visits. • Vending Machine: Staff point out that customers often complain about the unavailability of snacks while waiting in the District Office. Some participants have special medical needs, necessitating food, resulting in missed or delayed interviews when the participant must leave the lobby to get food. The proposed solution incorporated a vending machine in the District Office lobby that would offer healthy snack options and drinks, and may support use of EBT cards. 		

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Lancaster Customer Service Project (Continued)	Problem Statement	Prototype/Proposed Solution
	<p>Staff's Problem Statement 2: GR District employees need a morale boost and a more enjoyable work environment to provide better customer service.</p>	<p>Proposed Solution: The proposed solution was to establish an office environment that fosters unity and brings employees together outside of work. The objective was to have employees participate in activities to emphasize that all employees share many of the same values and priorities. Proposed actions/activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DPSS Employee Volunteer Day • Family Day at the Park (at least twice a year), with employee sport teams • Public acknowledgements over the District's Public Announcement (PA) System • Enhancing the employee Lounge/Break room • Employee of the Month Parking Spot
	<p>Customer's Problem Statement 1: GR/GROW customers need satisfying information to receive faster, friendlier and caring service.</p>	<p>Proposed Solution: To address the problem of customers not having enough knowledge/information on office processes, the proposed solution was to have a "quick guide" specifically for General Relief applicants to provide them with the 5 key steps involved in the intake process. The guide would inform applicants of their responsibilities within each step to ensure a quicker and seamless process.</p>
	<p>Customer's Problem Statement 2: GR/GROW customers need an improved office environment to create a more satisfying experience.</p>	<p>Proposed Solution: Several proposed solutions were developed to improve the lobby organization, which included renumbering interview booths and windows and adding colored lines to distinguish between different service areas and functions. Additionally, lobby television monitors and electronic bulletin boards would be used to display useful and relevant information for customers.</p>
<p>Reflection "Who knew that you could work so hard and have so much fun at the same time? The team building skills; a think outside of the box approach; the desire to provide better customer service; compassion towards both customers and my co-workers; the desire to improve the situations surrounding me and the ability to know that I can make a difference are some of the many things learned last week that all come together to create a feeling of Empowerment!" (Sarina Arredondo, Lancaster District Office)</p>		

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<p>YBN Marketing Campaign</p> <p>November 2011</p> <p>DPSS Lead: Intergovernmental Relations and Multimedia Services Section</p>	<p>DPSS Challenge Create an effective marketing campaign for the Your Benefits Now online system, to raise awareness and promote the online tool as a convenient alternative for low-income L.A. County families to get access to benefits.</p> <p>d.school Team: DPSS formed a team of 8 employees, comprised of 5 Eligibility Workers, 2 Program Assistants, and 1 Program Manager.</p> <p>Project Duration and Engagement Site(s): The project took place across two days, from October 31 – November 1. The team completed one cycle of the 5-phase d.school design process, identified two Problem Statements, and interviewed/tested prototypes at 2 District Offices and 2 partnering community agencies.</p>	
	Problem Statement	Prototype/Proposed Solution
	<p>Problem Statement 1: DPSS needs to create more awareness on the YBN website, because applying online provides convenience, security, ease, and it saves time.</p>	<p>Prototyped Solution: The prototyped solution was the development of a TV monitor advertisement, which would include messaging on YBN services and features. This advertisement would be played on existing monitor screens at local venues that reach people during the course of their daily lives, such as supermarket checkout lines, gas station pumps, and on or around buses. The advertisement could be incorporated within DPSS offices and community agencies to reinforce the message. This prototype focused on reaching the broader community to inform and promote the use of the YBN website.</p>
	<p>Problem Statement 2: Potential applicants and participants need to feel that YBN is secure, efficient, and accurate because there is a fear that the system is unforgiving of mistakes, which could lead to delays, denials, or terminations of their application or case.</p>	<p>Prototype Solution: The prototyped solution was a large colorful banner for posting outside of DPSS District Offices, which highlighted key features and conveniences of using the YBN website. The banner incorporated visual icons that reaffirmed potential YBN users that the website is accurate, secure, and easy to use. Additionally, the banner provided further assurance that YBN users could get support on-line through the YBN website or through the phone to call for any questions.</p>
	<p>Reflection: "It was wonderful to see that ideas flowed so freely from all participating group members and that without thinking about budgets or limitations, ideas are allowed to blossom into solutions." (Maria Aquino, Wilshire Special District Office)</p>	

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<p>GROW Job Club Redesign</p> <p>September 2011</p> <p>DPSS Lead: GROW Program</p>	<p>DPSS Challenge Redesign the Job Skills Preparation Classes (JSPC), also known as Job Club, offered to General Relief (GR) participants through the welfare-to-work program. The three-week Job Club curriculum has been in place since 1999, providing employable participants with standard job skills and job search activities, regardless of their work experience, education/training, skill-set, job-readiness and age.</p> <p>d.school Team: DPSS formed a team of 10 employees. Nine were represented employees in the capacity of Eligibility/GAIN Service workers and Program Assistants, and one was a non-represented Program Manager. Six of the ten team members had varying degrees of fluency in the GROW Program, while the other 4 had only basic knowledge of GROW/JSPC.</p> <p>Project Duration and Engagement Site(s): The project took place across three days, from September 26 – September 28. The team completed two cycles of the 5-phase d.school design process. Based on the empathetic interviews, 3 problem statements were identified for adult and youth JSPC participants. The team interviewed/tested prototypes at 8 GROW sites with distinct demographics and office settings (some were co-located within a DPSS office, while others were off-site), and tested a combined total of 5 prototypes with GROW participants.</p>		
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<p>Adult JSPC Participants Problem Statement 1: Participants need customized job club services, on-site resources, and access to advanced technology to meet their specific needs and remove employment barriers.</p>	<p>Prototyped Solutions: The first prototyped solution was the incorporation of a “How Can We Help You” questionnaire for participant’s use during visits with their GROW case manager. The questionnaire would list select services offered through GROW, JSPC, or other GR components (e.g., employment services, computer skills, housing assistance). The second prototype combined all aspects of the problem statement into one concept: “The Employment Zone.” This “zone” would increase the physical space of GROW resource centers to allow more computers and equipment, thereby extending the time participants could use these tools. Additionally, this would allow a space to offer more on-site resources, such as monthly visits from recruiting employers and service providers.</p>		
<p>Adult JSPC Participants Problem Statement 2: GROW participants need to be better connected to more efficient and readily available on-site and community-based resources to develop and maintain employability and self-sufficiency.</p>	<p>Prototyped Solutions: The prototyped solution was a website for GROW participants, to keep them connected to services that would help them find and maintain employment. The GROW website would include the JSPC curriculum online, employment leads, a calendar section (to provide up-to-date information on job/resource fairs, recruitment events, trainings and workshops, and other key reminders/alerts), links to external community resources, and a “Contact Us” page with most frequently used numbers.</p>		

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	Problem Statement	Prototype/Proposed Solution
GROW Job Club Redesign (Continued)	Youth JSPC Participants Problem Statement 1: <i>Youth participants identified similar needs to those of adults, and therefore had a shared problem statement - Participants need customized job club services, on-site resources, and access to advanced technology to meet their specific needs and remove employment barriers.</i>	Prototyped solution: The prototype was a “tool belt” that symbolized various proposed changes to Job Club to make the classroom environment more inviting: the hour of power, where youth would share with each other significant quotes, poems, stories, or songs; skill-sharing, where youth would teach a unique skill to their peer; the use of YouTube videos for short how-to lessons; and using music to make the classroom environment more inviting. Additionally, to address youth's concerns that the JSPC name was unappealing and therefore not motivating, part of the proposed solution was to change the name to M.O.V.E., which stands for More Opportunities for Viable Employment.
	Youth JSPC Participants Problem Statement 2: Participants need enthusiastic and motivating facilitators in order to receive effective employment services.	Prototyped Solutions: The solution emphasized the importance of motivating the motivator, which would in turn lead to more effective services for the participant. The solution was prototyped as a poster representing the following equation: 1 + 1 = YOU. This symbolized that through enhanced partnerships by DPSS and the JSPC contractor, participants would have better support and more tools that would contribute to their success.
	Reflection "It was refreshing to abandon the scientific method to embark in a humanistic and innovative approach to problem-solving." (Maria Hunt, GROW Program)	

DPSS' Experience with d.school Projects

**Transitional
Subsidized
Employment
(TSE) Redesign**

**September
2011**

**DPSS Lead:
GAIN Program**

DPSS Challenge

With the passage of Senate Bill 72 in 2011, and the absence of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds, DPSS pursued the redesign of the CalWORKs subsidized employment program. DPSS needed to understand the concerns of employers that could prevent their participation in the subsidized employment program and design a program that would mutually benefit employers and the County. The goal was to create an employment program that would foster successful long-term job placement opportunities for participants, enabling them to become self-sufficient.

d.school Team: DPSS formed a team of 4 employees. Two were Program managers in the GAIN Program Division familiar with the previous subsidized employment program. The other two were represented employees in the capacity of Program Assistants, who facilitated the d.school process during this project.

Project Duration and Engagement Site(s): The project took place across two days, from September 14 – September 15. The team completed one cycle of the 5-phase d.school design process. Based on the empathetic interviews with employers, 2 problem statements were identified. The team interviewed and tested the prototype with 12 employers throughout L.A. County.

Problem Statement	Prototype/Proposed Solution
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Problem Statement 1: Employers need work-ready and qualified individuals to feel confident in retaining employees.

Problem Statement 2: Employers need more flexibility in contract requirements to continue partnering with DPSS.

Prototyped Solution for both Problem Statements: Employer's primary concerns (captured through the Problem Statements) contributed to the proposed structure of the redesigned TSE Program. The proposed structure was prototyped in a flyer, which suggested the following:

- The first three months, the employer of record would be the DPSS contractor, and the employer would share the cost of the employee at 50% of their \$8 per hour wage.
- The following three months would require the employer to hire the employee, with a 50% wage subsidy.

After evaluating the proposed solution, GAIN Program concluded that the participant would be employed by the contractor for 2 months at no cost to the employer, and the following four months, the employer would hire the employee with a 50% wage subsidy.

Reflection

"The solutions were based solely on the TSE employer's thoughts, feelings, concerns and suggestions. I believe the best part of this project is knowing the employers are sincerely grateful that we took the time to come to them to hear their thoughts and consider them in the redesign of TSE." (Diana Giannone, GAIN Program)

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<p>QR-7 Project</p> <p>August 2011</p> <p>DPSS Lead: CalWORKs Program</p>	<p>DPSS Challenge Many DPSS participants fail to submit the QR-7 report complete and on-time, resulting in a suspension or termination of their benefits.</p>	
	<p>d.school Team: DPSS formed a team of 8 represented employees, comprised of Eligibility Workers, GAIN Services Workers, and Program Assistants, who had all completed the DPSS-sponsored Masters in Public Administration program.</p>	
	<p>Project Duration and Engagement Site(s): The project took place across four days, from August 1- August 4. The team completed two cycles of the 5-phase d.school design process. Based on the empathetic interviews with participants, four problem statements were identified. The team interviewed and tested the prototypes with DPSS participants in 9 district offices.</p>	
	<p>Problem Statement Prototype/Proposed Solution</p>	
	<p>Problem Statement 1: Participants need a more effective way to complete the QR-7 in a timely and precise manner. Surprisingly, many clients are willing to share information, but have expressed the need for help.</p>	<p>Prototyped Solution: The prototyped solution was a QR-7 hotline through which participants would be able to ask questions about QR-7 completion and/or complete their QR-7 electronically (with no DPSS staff involvement) by using a cell phone or touch-tone phone, if they do not need to submit any supporting documents.</p>
	<p>Problem Statement 2: DPSS needs to develop a uniform method for processing mailed QR-7's because participants do not trust the DPSS mail system.</p>	<p>Prototyped Solution: The prototyped solution was a centralized QR-7 mail processing center, where QR-7s and supporting documents would be scanned into the DPSS QR-7 automated system and confirmation of receipt would be automatically sent to the participant via e-mail, text message, phone message, or U.S. mail (as selected by the participant).</p>
<p><i>Pending work on these two proposed solutions, the DPSS Director asked that work not proceed on the other two prototypes developed by the team:</i></p>		
<p>Problem Statement 3: Participants need instructions at intake or by submission of the 1st QR-7 on completing the QR-7 form because they are confused about the QR-7 requirements.</p>	<p>Prototyped Solution: The prototyped solution was a QR-7 Orientation Training, consisting of a standardized 15-minute QR-7 training session in DPSS offices as part of the intake process.</p>	

DPSS' Experience with d.school Projects

QR7 Project	Problem Statement	Prototype/Proposed Solution
(Continued)	<p>Problem Statement 4: Participants need to have alternative methods of QR-7 submission because there is distrust in the internal mail system, walk-ins are time consuming, and most do not have access to computers.</p>	<p>Prototyped Solution: The prototyped solution was a QR-7 Scanner that would use ATM-like technology through which participants could submit their QR-7 and/or supporting documents directly into the DPSS automated system and receive an immediate receipt.</p>
	<p>Reflections "I believe that being able to brainstorm like that is the catalyst for coming up with great ideas that can be refined." (Nina Brown, Contract Management Division)</p>	