Improving Community Service through a Web-Based Child Care Waiting List Solution

By Sam Henderson & Chuck Shannon

In October of 2008 a Request for Proposal was issued by the District of Sault Ste. Marie Social Services Administration Board (DSSMSSAB) requesting costing on the development of a Centralized Child Care Waiting List Management System, which was awarded to the CGC in 2009. The project resulted in the creation of a centralized web-based child care application system, which is also used to manage wait lists for all licensed child care providers and generate reports for all the partners, including the DSSMSSAB. Parents use the system to find suitable child care and apply to care programs of their choice while child care providers use the solution to fill available spaces with interested families. Community Child Care Services, a division of DSSMSSAB, uses the system to monitor service utilization within the city and analyzes the community’s need and demand for child care.

Several technologies were harnessed to create the website. The overall look and feel of the site was achieved using cascading style sheets which enabled easy tweaking of design elements whenever necessary. The core functionality behind every page was implemented using Visual Basic.Net 2005 which connects to a Microsoft SQL Server Database. Finally, an ArcGIS Server Map Service was used to display interactive maps showing the child care provider locations across the city.

The website (www.saultdaycare.ca) was completed and was published to the public in October of 2009. The final version of the web site contains content for four user groups; the general public who can use the site to find contact and location information for community child care providers and DSSMSSAB, parents looking to apply for child care, care providers for monitoring and maintaining their wait lists and DSSMSSAB for reporting and analysis functions.

The general public utilizes the site as a resource for all the registered Child Care Providers in the Sault area. Detailed current information on provider’s location, who to contact, hours of operation, website, children’s age ranges served and types of programs offered (i.e. Full Day, Half Day AM, After School, etc.) are available. An additional page is also dedicated to Community Child Care Services division describing what services are offered in the community, who to contact for more information on child care and child care fee assistance. An interactive GIS enabled map illustrating the provider’s sites, as well as additional information such as schools and bus routes/stop, serves as an additional tool to help locate services close to where they live.

Parents use the web site to apply for child care through a secure login account, which also allows the parent to update any information related to themselves or their children at anytime. The parent is guided through the application process with a step...
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by step ‘wizard’. The collected information is validated at the end of each step ensuring that all the required pieces of information have been entered. The parent begins the application process by entering their address and contact info followed by their child’s information and day care requirements. Once all the data has been entered, a list of suggested care providers is listed for the parent based on their requirements. The list is sorted based on the closest distance between the parent’s home address and the provider using their geographic coordinates. The parent now decides what provider they wish to apply for care to by using the suggested providers or by manually choosing a provider from a drop down list. Parent’s can return to the site at anytime to revise their or their child’s information, add their child to another provider’s waitlist, remove their child from waitlists they are currently on once successfully placed with a provider, as well as to add additional children to the site. The complete child care application process for the parent is intuitive, easy to use and reduces their application time as parents previously would have to visit each care provider individually within the community.

Care provider staff utilized intuitive menus and controls to modify information pertaining to their facility themselves such as contact information, hours of operation and programs offered. The main focus for the providers is the management of their waitlists. Each waitlist displays as a list of applicants sorted by their application date with the earliest applicant appearing at the top of the list. Providers can focus their waitlist around specific criteria by applying filters to the waitlist, thus only illustrating a subset of applicants. The parent’s and child’s information are accessible for each application allowing the provider to easily follow-up with the parent. The placement process for an applicant occurs with a simple the click of a button.

DSSMSSAB staff have the same functionality abilities as the providers, as well as having access to each provider’s waitlist and are responsible for the follow-up contact with parents after the successful placement of a child. Several reports were created based on DSSMSSAB staff’s specifications which are used to assist with managing the daily administrative duties.

GIS is utilized throughout the website. A parent can view an interactive map illustrating the child care providers across the city, as well as the locations of schools, bus routes, bus stops and their own home. After completing the child’s information, the application

![Figure 2: Application Process using Child Information Wizard](image-url)
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stage uses geographic coordinates to calculate the distance between the parent’s address and each care provider. This distance is used to sort the list of suggested providers offering programs that match the child’s needs by the distance to care, with the closer providers appearing on the list first. Once the parent has successfully applied to the providers of their choice, the parents will be directed to a map displaying their selected care providers in relation to their home.

The site has been successfully active for eight months providing parents, care providers, and DSSMSSAB a centralized, easy to use and widely accessible solution to manage their child care requirements. The ability to combine ESRI’s web GIS functionality with standard web pages helped make the site a better resource for all the stakeholders.

About the Authors

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Spring/Summer 2010