



University of Pennsylvania, Montgomery County Partner on Integrated, Interoperable...

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University of Pennsylvania, Montgomery County Partner on Integrated, Interoperable System Design for Child Welfare

Microsoft, Motorola Join effort to Link Services, Caseworkers

PHILADELPHIA, May 21 /PRNewswire/ -- The Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice and Research at the University of Pennsylvania has announced a partnership with Montgomery County, Pa., Stewards of Change, Microsoft Corp. and Motorola to pilot the Information Portability Project.

A collaborative effort between public and private entities, this groundbreaking interoperable, real-time technology system will link together all services within the County's Department of Human Services, allowing caseworkers and their supervisors immediate access to critical information to improve the safety of abused and neglected children. This design phase is made possible through a \$950,000 consulting contract between the Field Center and Montgomery County, Pa.

Designed by Stewards of Change with technical support from the Microsoft Corp. and Motorola, this first-of-its-kind Web-based system will be piloted in Montgomery County, Pa. Project collaborators hope to eventually replicate it elsewhere in other Pennsylvania counties, including Philadelphia.

Once ready, the technology will enable caseworkers to carry specially designed, rugged, hand-held devices that provide immediate, remote access to files and instant documentation, including the ability to take and upload photos and video from a caseworker's home visit. It will increase productivity and allow for better service coordination, along with seamless systems for prevention, treatment and recovery. In addition, it provides a GPS system for tracking of home visits and for increase safety for caseworkers.

"This new technology will revolutionize child welfare. If real-time, interoperable technology were available, tragedies could have been prevented," Debra Schilling Wolfe, the executive director for the Field Center, said. "This new, cutting-edge approach will promote better decision making, encourage efficiency and offer support to caseworkers. It could save children's lives."

The Field Center will provide oversight and subject-matter expertise and has subcontracted the organizational and technical assessments to Stewards of Change. Other pilot participants include personnel from Montgomery County Human Services and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Public Welfare.

"With immediate access to the most up-to-date, accurate information, children and families are more likely to receive all of the services they need, when they need them," said Laurie O'Connor, director of the Montgomery County Office of Children and Youth.

Penn's Field Center, a collaboration among the Penn schools of Social Policy & Practice, Law and Medicine and the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, spent three years researching the project.

The Hite Foundation, in memory of Sybil E. Hite, provided the funding for the initial research on the project to identify the need for this kind of technological improvement, as well as for hosting a national summit on information technology usage in child welfare. Many ideas emerged from the 2007 Child Welfare Summit on Information Technology, including this pilot program.

Named in honor of Joseph and Marie Field, its founding benefactors, the Field Center is the only university-based center for child welfare in the nation which integrates the fields of social work, law and medicine to promote the well-being of abused and neglected children and those at risk of maltreatment.

SOURCE University of Pennsylvania

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