

HIGH TECH HELPS THE HOMELESS

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Ray Allen, Executive Director, Community Technology Alliance



Industry

Nonprofit

Business Process

Operations

Challenge
Community Technology Alliance uses technology to improve service to the homeless. The 25 agencies in Santa Clara County lacked an effective way to cross-reference and leverage their different service offerings.

Why Business Objects?
BusinessObjects Data Integrator makes it possible to combine the two primary data sources, greatly enhancing the efficiency of referral operations at homeless shelters.

Business Objects Products and Services
BusinessObjects Enterprise XI

Crystal Reports

BusinessObjects Data Integrator

CHALLENGE

A light rain fell on Santa Clara County (SCC) in the predawn hours of January 29, 2007. It fell on unsheltered homeless people – sleeping in creek beds, under freeways and bridges, in vehicles and abandoned buildings – and on a small army of census takers who were trying to count them. The “point-in-time” tally found 5,101 men, women, and children on the street, with an additional 2,101 in emergency shelters, transitional housing, and domestic violence shelters. In fact, the numbers are even higher – it’s estimated that 18,056 persons, or around 1% of the total SCC population, were homeless at some time during 2006.

This is the face of homelessness in California’s famed Silicon Valley. It’s a daunting problem that myriad agencies and other organizations are working hard to solve. Unique among them is the nonprofit Community Technology Alliance (CTA), whose stated mission is “to end and prevent homelessness by linking and networking communities through technology.” To help achieve its goals, CTA depends on software from Business Objects, an SAP company – in particular, BusinessObjects™ Data Integrator–.

Ray Allen, executive director at CTA, says that BusinessObjects Data Integrator has transformed case management for the homeless. “The case manager at a shelter can readily identify who offers the necessary services, and then refer clients to the service providers that can assist them,” Allen says. “Previously, helping a client find a job or an apartment meant looking through 10 or 12 different paper directories. Using BusinessObjects Data Integrator, we’ve been able to combine all of those directories into a single directory and load it into the case management software. As a result, appropriate referrals can now be made quickly and easily.”

APPROACH

The primary tools underpinning this system of communication and collaboration – both of them Web-based, and each with its own database – are the Homeless Management Information System for Santa Clara County (HMIS SCC) and HelpSCC. HelpSCC is a searchable public Web site of more than 1,200 health and human services provided throughout the county. HMIS SCC is a password-protected client intake and service tracking system, used by staff in more than 100 assistance programs to track eviction prevention, mental health support, job readiness, life skills, and other services required to maintain housing. CTA views the successful integration of these systems as essential in connecting the homeless with available services, understanding demographics and patterns related to the homeless population, and tracking the success rate of individual service offerings.

CTA approached Business Objects in 2005 to explore the possibility of using business intelligence (BI) software to achieve its vision. The consensus was that BusinessObjects Enterprise XI and BusinessObjects Data Integrator would best serve the agency’s need for query, analysis, reporting, and data integration. Business Objects donated the enterprise software licenses and provided training.

The initial task was to integrate all the HelpSCC records into ResourcePoint, a proprietary HMIS SCC target application that helps match clients and programs. The CTA team and on-site Business Objects consultants cleansed the source data, synchronized it with the target

data structure, and successfully loaded it into the production system. With BusinessObjects Data Integrator, CTA was able to identify and overcome the differences in data models between HelpSCC and HIMS SCC. "It works like a charm," says Allen. "The two databases now automatically update each other, which has really helped transform the way in which service providers case-manage their clients. We couldn't have done it without BusinessObjects Data Integrator."

Data Integrator XI - Results

Before Data Integrator XI, a case manager searching for resources would have found only 1 program that met the clients needs. Because of Data Integrator the case manager has 5 programs to refer the client. Data Integrator XI has greatly expanded our access to resources.

Name	Type	Phone	Location	Last Update
Center for Employment Training (CET)	Level 2	408-287-7924	San Jose 95110	Jan 12 2004 03:52PM
Center for Employment Training (CET) - South County Cost Site	Level 2	408-842-6484	Gilroy 95020	Mar 29 2007 09:10AM
Central County Vocational Center Program (CCVCP)	Level 2	408-723-6407	San Jose 95136	Mar 29 2007 09:10AM
Goodwill of Silicon Valley	Level 2	408-998-5787 x 223	San Jose 95112	Mar 29 2007 09:10AM
Santa Clara Adult Education (SCAE)	Level 1	408-423-3511	Santa Clara, California 95050	Jan 30 2007 01:48PM

RESULTS

"Integrating the HelpSCC and HIMS SCC databases using BusinessObjects Data Integrator has encouraged the development of holistic solutions to homelessness," says Allen. "It's helped improve collaboration among all the different agencies, enhancing service levels for the homeless and at-risk population of our county." Staff and volunteers at

partnering programs also benefit, because the system makes their jobs easier and their efforts more successful. And policy makers receive better data, leading to more informed decisions on how to shorten – and ultimately end – episodes of homelessness.

CTA's success with BusinessObjects Data Integrator hasn't gone unnoticed. The agency is providing a best practice case study on its data warehousing work to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and it was also called in to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Currently underway is an ambitious program that will extend the infrastructure to include 11 counties in the San Francisco and Monterey Bay Areas. Says Allen, "We're trying to pull together the data from all these counties into a single data warehouse, using BusinessObjects Data Integrator to transform and load the data."

The consolidated database will make it possible to look at the homeless situation at a regional rather than a local level – with the expected result that causes of homelessness will be better understood and more effective solutions will be developed. However, it's a project replete with challenges, not least of which is questionable data quality. "In Santa Clara County alone, we have 25 different participating agencies collecting data," says Allen. "A case manager asks 60 questions of every homeless person who walks in the door. In a fast flow-through shelter that serves 200 people a night, trying to collect 60 different data sets on each person is almost impossible – so some data is not collected, and often the data that *is* collected is not very good." CTA is interested in exploring BusinessObjects Data Quality XI to help with automatic criteria matching and data deduplication.

"BusinessObjects Data Integrator is one of the most important tools we are using to foster interagency collaboration," concludes Allen. "Effective data sharing is essential if we're going to solve the homeless problem. Without the technology and software that help us provide holistic case management, it would be impossible to know what combination of services best helps a client out of homelessness. BusinessObjects Data Integrator is a pivotal component of this system. Without the really generous donation of the software from Business Objects, we certainly would not have been able to achieve all the things we've achieved."

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