

# Assessment of Choices: Conducting Business In-Person versus other Means for CalWORKs and Medi-Cal Customers

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of the FY 2014-15 Research Agenda, the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) conducted an assessment of CalWORKs and Medi-Cal applicants' and participants' reasons for submitting paperwork in person at a DPSS office rather than using the internet, U.S. Mail or telephone. This effort aligns with the Department's strategic focus on increasing District Office efficiency and reducing customer wait times. The Management and Research Services Section (MRS) collected survey data from 602 DPSS customers at five district offices over four months in 2014 and commissioned a d.school project from the Intergovernmental Relations Section. Quantitative and qualitative results suggested no single reason or set of reasons that drove in-person visits. Respondents felt most comfortable applying in person apparently to avoid various perceived failures of DPSS processes, including documents getting lost in the mail, workers not returning telephone calls, and internet and mail inquiries going unanswered. In addition:

- Neither lack of access to nor inexperience using the internet were barriers to respondents' willingness to submit documents using methods other than office visits;
- Regardless of age, respondents overwhelmingly had access to and several years of experience using the internet;
- Respondents did not have security concerns submitting DPSS documents over the internet; and
- They indicated a willingness to submit documents over the internet if this were an option.

Yet, awareness of DPSS' online application program, Your Benefits Now! (YBN), was very low across respondent age groups, and DPSS line staff exhibited little confidence in their own knowledge of the system.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Provide YBN training to DPSS line staff and CalWORKs and Medi-Cal customers, building confidence in the system and removing barriers to its use;
- Raise awareness of YBN among CalWORKs and Medi-Cal customers through mailers and other available means.

Management and Research Services Section  
Research, Evaluation, and Quality Assurance Division  
Bureau of Special Operations  
Intergovernmental Relations & Community Services  
Block Grant Section  
Los Angeles County  
Department of Public Social Services



## INTRODUCTION

### Why do people go to a DPSS office when they have other options for conducting business?

DPSS is engaged in efforts to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the eligibility determination and redetermination processes for the CalWORKs and Medi-Cal programs. One approach is to encourage participants to apply for benefits and eligibility redetermination in ways that do not involve face-to-face access with DPSS staff. Reducing the number of in-person applicants is likely to reduce consumer wait times at DPSS offices and enable staff to devote more resources to case management and program integrity. Yet despite the availability of telephone, U.S. Mail and online application methods, most participants appear to prefer submitting documentation in person.

“Why do people go to a DPSS office when they have other options for conducting business?” was the central question this assessment was designed to answer. From May to July 2014, the Management and Research Services Section (MRS) collected survey data from 602 CalWORKs and Medi-Cal applicants and participants (see Table 1 for breakdown), visiting the El Monte, Glendale, Metro North, Norwalk and South Family offices (surveys are included in Attachment I). Offices were selected based on caseload count and diversity in languages spoken by participants. MRS also requested a qualitative investigation – a d.school

project - from the Intergovernmental Relations Section. d.school staff interviewed applicants and participants at the El Monte, Glendale, Metro North, Norwalk and South Family offices (selected findings from the d.school project are reported below; see Attachment II for the full report).

**Table 1. Number of subjects by program.**

	Applicants	Participants
CalWORKs	220	54
Medi-Cal	207	67

Note: 54 respondents did not indicate whether they were applicants or submitting a redetermination.

Application and redetermination options available to participants in the CalWORKs and Medi-Cal programs are as follows:

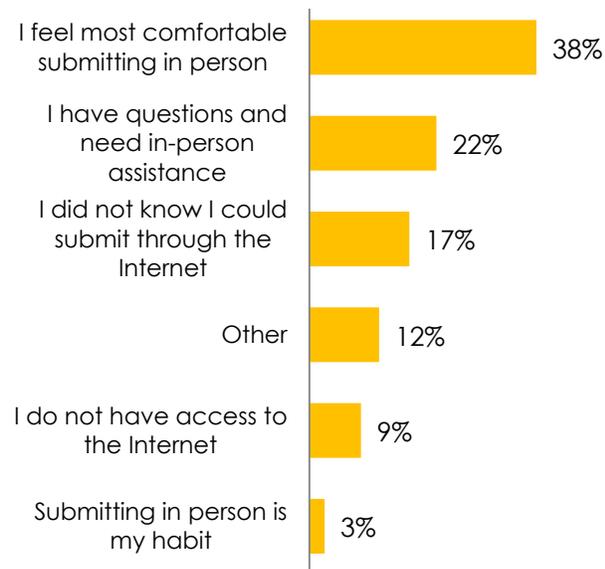
- CalWORKs applications may be submitted either in person at a DPSS office or online using the YBN platform.
- CalWORKs redeterminations are typically handled through a scheduled telephone call. If the call is not made or is missed, the participant is asked to come to the office to complete the process.
- Medi-Cal applications can be submitted online, in person at a DPSS office, or through the U.S. mail. Medi-Cal redeterminations must be submitted by mail or in person.

## RESULTS

### Reasons for In-Person CalWORKs Applications

Survey data suggested that applicants submit CalWORKs applications in-person at DPSS offices for a variety of reasons (see Figure 1). By far the most common reason, “I feel most comfortable doing so,” was selected by 38% of respondents. Individuals also had questions and needed in-person assistance (22%) or were not aware they could submit an application using the internet (17%). Over 10% of respondents selected “Other” and provided reasons such as being told by a DPSS worker to come in person, having problems or lack of response with the internet submission, and believing the application would be processed faster and more accurately (see Figure 2).

**Figure 1. “I am submitting my CalWORKs application at a DPSS office because...” (n=195).** Most applicants selected the option, “I feel most comfortable doing so in person.” Only 9% said they did not have access to the internet.



**Figure 2. “Word Cloud” generated from text provided by respondents choosing “Other” in response to the question, “I am submitting my CalWORKs application at a DPSS office because...” (n=29).** Word clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently.



CalWORKs applicants can apply online using YBN. Survey data showed that over 80% had access to the internet and almost half were experienced internet users (i.e., four or more years of use). However, only 34% had heard of YBN, only 10% had been shown how to use YBN at a DPSS office, and less than 21% had created a YBN account. Age was unrelated to frequency or duration of internet use, as well as with knowledge or use of YBN.

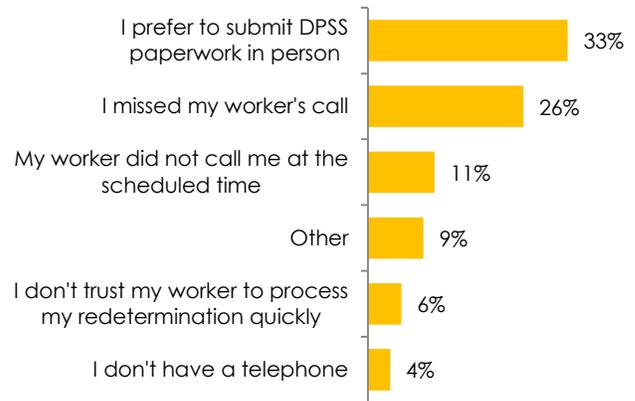
Given a choice of using the internet, telephone or U.S. Mail, 41% of in-person CalWORKs visitors had no preference in terms of perceived security. Only 9% felt the internet was the most secure, and 23% and 28% preferred to use the U.S. mail or telephone, respectively. Younger individuals were more likely to have a smartphone ( $r = 0.15, p < 0.05$ ) and less likely to submit reports and other mandatory information by mail ( $r = -0.20, p < 0.01$ ).

### Reasons for In-Person CalWORKs Redeterminations

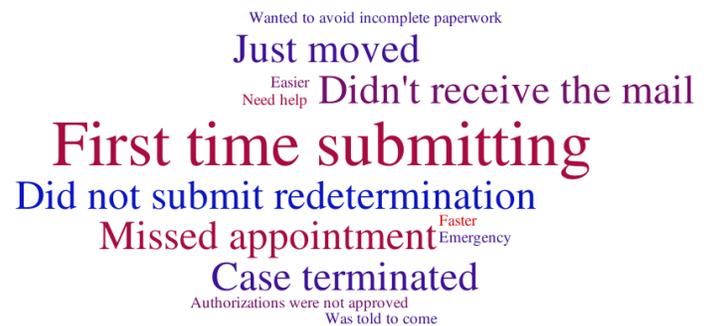
Almost half of existing CalWORKs participants submitting a redetermination (47%) felt equally secure using the internet, telephone, or U.S. mail to provide personal information to DPSS. Another 26% believed the telephone was the most secure method, 19% the U.S. Mail, and only 9% the internet. As above, older aged participants were more willing to submit redeterminations by mail. Age, however, was not associated with experience using the internet – older participants were just as experienced as younger participants.

Rather than selecting a specific reason for not submitting redeterminations over the telephone, one-third of participants said they simply preferred to do so in person (see Figure 3). Another 26% were in an office because they had missed a scheduled telephone appointment, with only 11% indicating their worker did not call at the scheduled time. Fewer did not trust their worker to process a redetermination submitted over the telephone in a timely manner (6%), and 4% did not have a telephone. Respondents choosing “Other” wrote a variety of reasons, including most commonly, mailing error (e.g., not receiving the notice of the appointment) and missed appointment (see Figure 4).

**Figure 3. “I am submitting my CalWORKs redetermination forms at a DPSS office because...” (n=54). Most participants submitted paperwork in person because they preferred to. Fewer than 26% missed their worker’s telephone call.**



**Figure 4. “Word Cloud” generated from text provided by respondents choosing “Other” in response to the question, “I am submitting my CalWORKs redetermination at a DPSS office because...” (n=29).**



Although redeterminations currently cannot be submitted using the internet, more participants submitting a redetermination than applicants were assumed to know about YBN. Yet as presented in Table 2, more than two-thirds of redetermination submitters had never been alerted to YBN at a district office, 86% of redetermination submitters had never been shown at an office how to use YBN, and only 25% of redetermination submitters had a YBN account.

**Table 2. The majority of in-person visitors had not opened a YBN account, had not been shown how to use YBN at a DPSS office, and had not heard of or read about YBN at a DPSS office.**

	Heard/read about YBN at a DPSS office?		Shown at an office how to use YBN?		Set up a YBN account?	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
CalWORKs Application	34%	63%	10%	90%	21%	80%
CalWORKs Redetermination	24%	67%	14%	86%	25%	75%
Medi-Cal Application and Redetermination	20%	80%	5%	95%	14%	86%

## YBN

Utilization and awareness of YBN was very low among all age groups, despite experience using the internet, no security preference for other methods, and an overall willingness to use the internet for DPSS business if it were available. In d.school interviews, most applicants said they didn't know how to use YBN or the mail drop-off system, leaving as the only option a visit to a DPSS office. Visiting an office was seen as easier than applying online. Some who had attempted online applications were overwhelmed by the bulk and variety of information required and worried that errors would halt the application process.

DPSS workers who were interviewed by d.school staff cited their own lack of knowledge about YBN. Many said they had been given information about how to access YBN training on the intranet but viewed the information as outdated or constantly changing. Several workers said they did not need to know how to use YBN because they believed special

YBN units existed that handled those cases.

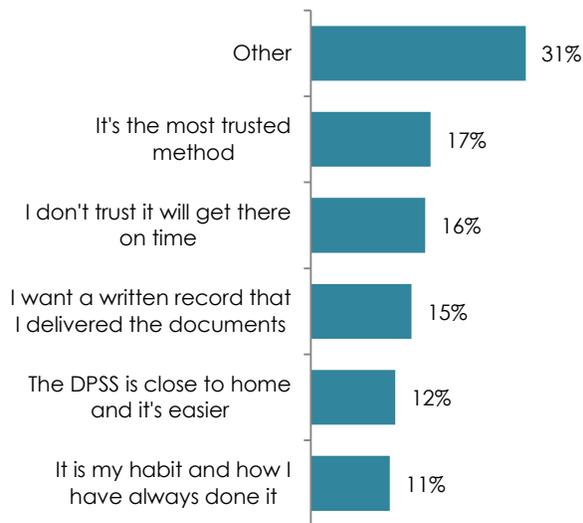
## Reasons for Not Using the Mail to Submit Medi-Cal Applications and Redeterminations

Medi-Cal applicants and submitters of redetermination documents avoided using the mail for a range of reasons. One third chose the "Other" option from the list of possible responses, preferring instead to write in an explanation (n=78; see Figure 5). Over 40% of these write-in responses concerned reported failures among workers to receive documents in the mail, workers not returning telephone calls, internet and mail inquiries going unanswered, or feelings of urgency due to missed deadlines or medical emergencies (i.e., a need for quick coverage). The remaining reasons were less likely and almost equally likely to be selected (see Figure 6).

**Figure 5. "Word Cloud" generated from text provided by respondents choosing "Other" in response to the question, "What is the main reason you do not use the mail to send us your Medi-Cal application or redetermination?" n=78.**



**Figure 6. “What is the main reason why you do not use the mail to send us your Medi-Cal application or redetermination? (n=255).** Over 30% of respondents wrote an answer rather than select an option from the list.



Qualitative data from the d.school interviews suggested several factors contributed to applicant discomfort using submission methods other than office visits. Many expressed concern that DPSS workers would lose their paperwork or delay in processing it if applicants did not submit it in person. Reports of being asked by workers to visit the office (without an appointment) to drop off documentation or verification were common. A number of respondents said that even when in possession of a receipt for documents they had submitted in person, a worker asked them to return to the office to provide additional copies.

The qualitative data also suggested that participants' perceived inability to contact their DPSS workers by telephone resulted in unnecessary office visits. More than half of interviewees came to an office merely to verify that DPSS was in receipt of documentation submitted

at an earlier time. These visits were usually subsequent to individuals attempting to obtain verification over the telephone but failing to reach the necessary person and not receiving a return telephone call.

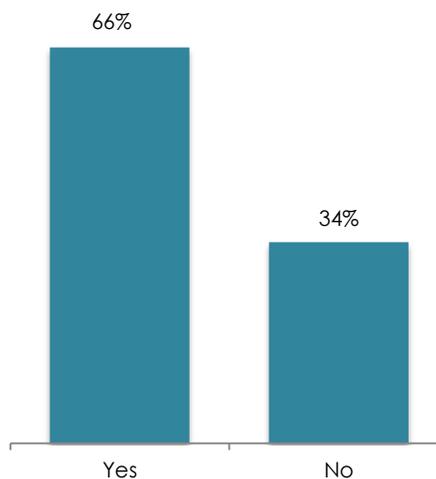
***If You Could Use the Internet to Submit Medi-Cal Documentation, Would You?***

A clear majority of Medi-Cal visitors indicated a willingness to submit applications over the internet if that option was available (see Figure 7). This response was not related to age or experience with the internet. In fact, many respondents had been using the internet for more than five years (44%), and over 40% felt equally secure conducting DPSS business using the internet, the U.S. Mail or the telephone.

Regarding telephone use, half of respondents did not own a “landline,” while over 85% had a cell phone. This is consistent with national studies on telephone ownership.

**Figure 7. Medi-Cal applicants' and participants' willingness to apply over the internet (n=288).**

Two-thirds would be willing to submit a DPSS application over the internet.



## Next Steps

CalWORKs and Medi-Cal applicants and submitters of redeterminations who completed a survey for this study were in general well-educated and computer literate, with access to and familiarity with the internet. Most respondents reported a willingness to submit DPSS documents electronically, given the opportunity. Yet, awareness of YBN among respondents was low, and few reported having received instruction from DPSS line staff on how to use it. Given that DPSS line staff, in qualitative interviews, expressed little confidence in their own knowledge of the system, additional training on how to demonstrate the benefits of YBN to participants may be warranted. The goal is to ensure that DPSS is not depriving people of a submission option that might save them time and, in the process, improve efficiency among office staff and reduce wait times.

## About the Study's Subjects

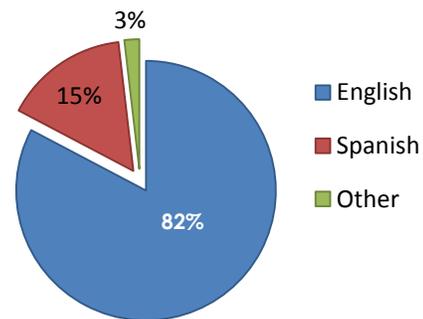
Over 600 DPSS customers completed surveys for this study (n=602). Respondents were evenly distributed across the Medi-Cal and CalWORKs programs; with 305 completing Medi-Cal paperwork (51%) and 297 CalWORKs (49%). About 70% submitted applications (n=207 for Medi-Cal and n=220 for CalWORKs, respectively), and 20% sought redetermination (n=67 for Medi-Cal and n=54 for CalWORKs, respectively).

Descriptive analyses suggested no significant differences in key variables between applicants and participants within either CalWORKs or Medi-Cal, nor between CalWORKs and Medi-Cal respondents overall. To maximize

sample size, a single combined data set containing both Medi-Cal and CalWORKs new applicants and participants pursuing redetermination was used where possible.

**Language** As shown in the Figure 8 below, 82% of CalWORKs and Medi-Cal respondents completed the survey in English, 15% in Spanish, and 3% in Armenian, Cambodian, Chinese or Russian (labeled "Other" below).

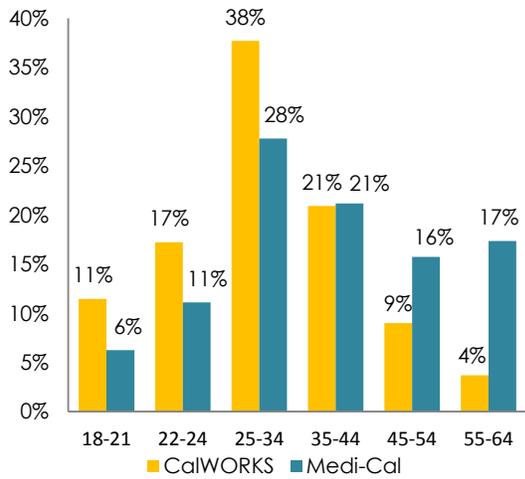
**Figure 8. Survey Language (n=586).** Less than 20% of participants completed the survey in a language other than English.



**Age** Almost 50% of Medi-Cal respondents were between the ages of 25 and 44 years (48.96%). Seventeen percent were 55 years or older and another 17% were less than 24 years old. Almost 60% of CalWORKs respondents were between the ages of 25-44 years (58.09%), whereas only 4% were aged 55 or older. Twenty-eight percent of CalWORKs respondents were 24 or younger (see Figure 9).<sup>1</sup>

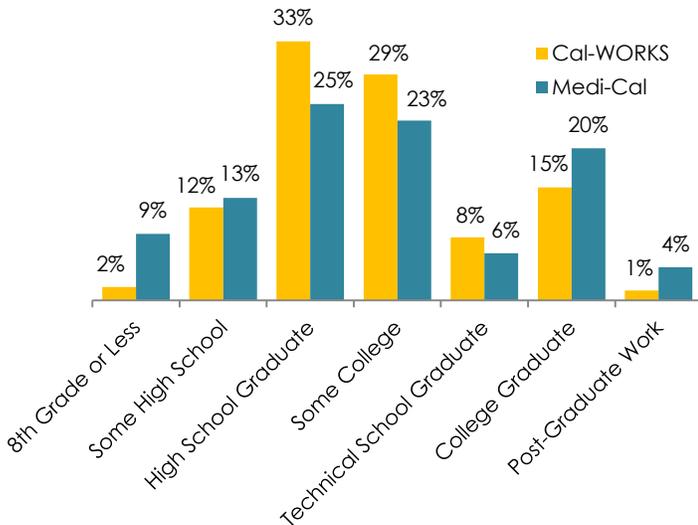
<sup>1</sup> CalWORKs age data may not be representative of the sample since 18% of respondents left the item blank.

**Figure 9. Respondents per age range by program (n=532).** A higher percentage of CalWORKs than Medi-Cal respondents were age 34 or under, whereas most Medi-Cal respondents were over 35.



**Education** Respondents were an educated group. Half of Medi-Cal and 62% of CalWORKs respondents reported finishing high school or completing college units. More Medi-Cal than CalWORKs customers were college graduates (20% and 15%, respectively); conversely, more Medi-Cal recipients had not attended high school (9% and 2%, respectively (see Figure 10).<sup>2</sup>

**Figure 10. Last grade completed by program (n=515).** Most CalWORKs and Medi-Cal customers were high school graduates or had also completed college units.



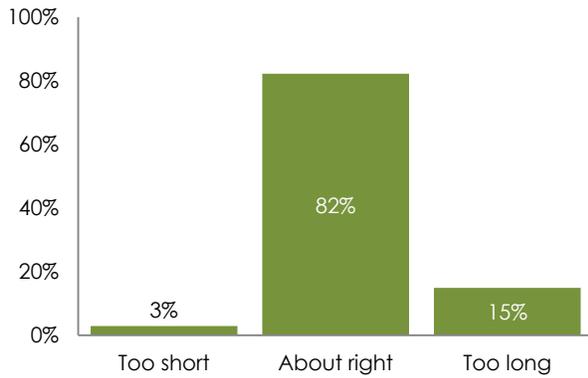
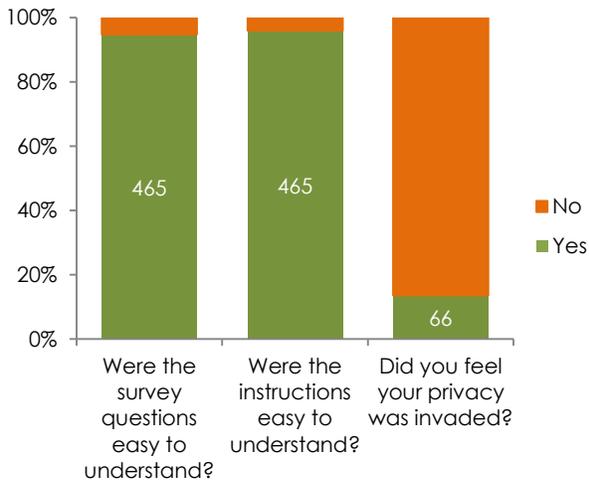
## About the Survey Instruments

The primary sources of data for this study were anonymous, paper-and-pencil surveys developed by MRS using Scantron eListen software to format and print and later scan the surveys into a database (see Attachment I). Participants who agreed to complete a survey when approached by MRS staff during a DPSS visit formed the convenience sample. MRS consulted Bureau of Work Services Line Operations staff on lobby-appropriate administration methods, and MRS staff were trained to administer the surveys. The instruments were translated from English into nine additional languages, including Armenian, Cambodian, Chinese, Farsi, Korean, Russian, Spanish, Tagalog, and Vietnamese. Data elements were initially evaluated in eListen, then downloaded into SAS and Excel for further analysis.

Applicants and participants responded well to being asked to complete a survey and to the survey itself. As shown in Figures 11 and 12, at least 95% felt the instructions and questions were easy to understand, and only 13% felt that being approached in the lobby was an invasion of privacy.

<sup>2</sup> CalWORKs education data may not be representative of the sample since 21% of respondents left the item blank.

**Figures 11 and 12. Participant attitudes toward taking the survey (n=489).** Overwhelming majorities responded positively on multiple measures. Less than 20% felt the instrument was too long or too short.



# CalWORKs Application and Redetermination Survey

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Social Services is conducting a study to better understand how program participants like you conduct their business when applying for public assistance or renewing their eligibility. We plan to use this information to develop an awareness campaign to promote various options that reduce a person's time in our offices. The survey will take a few minutes to complete.

NO. 2 PENCIL	
<b>RIGHT</b>	<b>WRONG</b>
<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Please Use No. 2 Pencil</li> <li>- Fill in Bubble Completely</li> <li>- Erase Completely to Change</li> </ul>	

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please bubble your answers below. Press firmly when filling in bubbles and erase completely when changing your answers.

**1. What language do you speak at home most of the time?**

<input type="checkbox"/> English <input type="checkbox"/> Spanish <input type="checkbox"/> Armenian <input type="checkbox"/> Cambodian	<input type="checkbox"/> Chinese <input type="checkbox"/> Korean <input type="checkbox"/> Russian <input type="checkbox"/> Tagalog	<input type="checkbox"/> Vietnamese <input type="checkbox"/> Farsi <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____
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**2. What is the purpose of your visit to a DPSS office today?**

To submit my CalWORKs application (Go to Question 3)  
 To submit my CalWORKs redetermination (Go to Question 4)

**3. Which statement best describes your situation today? I am submitting my CalWORKs application at a DPSS office because ...**

I do not have access to the internet.  
 I did not know I could submit my application through the internet.  
 I feel most comfortable doing so in person.  
 It is my habit and it is how I have always done it.  
 I have questions and need in person assistance.  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Which statement best describes your situation today? I am submitting my CalWORKs redetermination forms at a DPSS office because ...**

My eligibility worker did not call me at the scheduled time.  
 I missed my eligibility worker's call at the scheduled time.  
 I do not have a telephone.  
 I do not trust that my eligibility worker will complete my redetermination timely.  
 I prefer to submit all of my paperwork in person at a DPSS office.  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you have a telephone in your home (land line/wired phone)?	6. Do you have a cell phone?	7. Do you connect to the internet from home?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

8. Do you access the internet from any other location, such as work or the library?

- Yes
- No

9. Do you use any of the following devices to connect to the internet at Wi-Fi hot spots? (Check all that apply.)

- Laptop or notebook
- Cellular phone with internet access
- Handheld device such as iPhone or blackberry or smart phone
- None
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

10. How long have you been using the internet for non-work-related purposes at any location?

- Less than 1 year
- 1 - 3 years
- 4 - 5 years
- More than 5 years
- Do not use internet for non-business purposes

11. During the last month, how often did adults in your household use the internet for non-work-related purposes at any location?

- Several times a day
- Almost every day
- Several times a week
- Once a week
- Once a month
- Less than once a month
- No one in my household used the internet.

12. Which of the following internet activities do members of your household use? (Check all that apply.)

- E-mailing
- Social networking sites such as Facebook and Myspace
- Online banking
- Search for information
- Online shopping
- Look up information about my DPSS case using YOUR BENEFITS NOW!
- No one in my household uses the internet
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

13. When you make purchases, which one makes you feel more secure providing personal information?

- Internet
- U.S. mail
- About the same

14. When you apply for benefits at DPSS, which one makes you feel most secure providing personal information?

- Internet
- Telephone
- U.S. mail
- About the same

15. Given all of these options for conducting business outside a DPSS office, which one makes you feel the most secure about providing personal information?

- Internet
- Telephone
- U.S. mail
- About the same

16. Have you ever heard about or read about YOUR BENEFITS NOW! at a DPSS office?

- Yes
- No

17. Has anyone at a DPSS office ever shown you how to use YOUR BENEFITS NOW! on the DPSS website?

- Yes
- No

18. Do you have an account set up on YOUR BENEFITS NOW!?

- Yes
- No

**19. Which of the following features have you used on the YOUR BENEFITS NOW! website? (Check all that apply.)**

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> View existing case information        | <input type="checkbox"/> View existing notices                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> View or submit reports                | <input type="checkbox"/> Apply for benefits                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> View my existing benefits             | <input type="checkbox"/> None of the above - I don't have an account. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> View information about my case worker | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                                  |

**20. Do you typically submit reports and other mandatory information to DPSS by mail?**

- Yes (Go to Question 21)       No (Go to Question 22)

**21. What is the main reason that you send these documents to DPSS by mail?**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Easy to use                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Most trusted method            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Saves time                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Want a written record to track |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Habit - like traditional way               | <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Do not want to wait in line at DPSS office |   |

**22. What is the main reason why you do not use the mail and instead go to a DPSS office to submit reports and other important information to DPSS?**

- Do not trust that it will get there on time
- DPSS office is close to where I live and it is easier
- It is my habit and it is how I have always done it.
- Most trusted method
- Want a written record that I delivered the documents
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**23. What was the last grade you completed in school?**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 8th grade or less    | <input type="checkbox"/> Technical school graduate |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some high school     | <input type="checkbox"/> College graduate          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High school graduate | <input type="checkbox"/> Post graduate work        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Some college         |  |

**24. What is your age?**

- |                                  |                                  |
|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 18 - 21 | <input type="checkbox"/> 35 - 44 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 22 - 24 | <input type="checkbox"/> 45 - 54 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 25 - 34 | <input type="checkbox"/> 55 - 64 |

**We would like to ask you how you think about this survey. Your input is very important.**

**25. Were the survey questions easy to understand?**

- Yes     No

**26. Were the instructions easy to understand?**

- Yes     No

**27. What do you think about the length of the survey?**

- Too short     Too long
- About right

**28. Did you feel your privacy was invaded by the survey?**

- Yes
- No

**29. Please provide your comments if you have any.**

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!**

# Medi-Cal Application and Redetermination Survey

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2. What is the purpose of your visit to a DPSS office today?	
<input type="checkbox"/> To submit my Medi-Cal application	<input type="checkbox"/> To submit my Medi-Cal redetermination

3. What is the main reason why you do not use the mail to send us your Medi-Cal application or redetermination?
<input type="checkbox"/> Do not trust that it will get there on time <input type="checkbox"/> DPSS office is close to where I live and it is easier <input type="checkbox"/> It is my habit and it is how I have always done it. <input type="checkbox"/> Most trusted method <input type="checkbox"/> Want a written record that I delivered the documents <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

4. If you could use the internet to submit your Medi-Cal application or redetermination, would you do so?	5. Do you have a telephone in your home (land line/wired phone)?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

6. Do you have a cell phone?	7. Is your cell phone a Smart phone?	8. Do you connect to the internet from home?	9. Do you access the internet from any other location, such as work or the library?
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes (Go to Question 7) <input type="checkbox"/> No (Go to Question 8)	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

10. Do you use any of the following devices to connect to the internet at Wi-Fi hot spots? (Check all that apply.)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Laptop or notebook <input type="checkbox"/> Cellular phone with internet access <input type="checkbox"/> Handheld device such as iPhone or blackberry or smart phone	<input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

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- U.S. mail
- About the same

**16. Given all of these options for conducting business outside a DPSS office, which one makes you feel the most secure about providing personal information?**

- Internet
- Telephone
- U.S. mail
- About the same

**17. Have you ever heard about or read about YOUR BENEFITS NOW! at a DPSS office?**

- Yes
- No

**18. Has anyone at a DPSS office ever shown you how to use YOUR BENEFITS NOW! on the DPSS website?**

- Yes
- No

**19. Do you have an account set up on YOUR BENEFITS NOW!?**

- Yes
- No

**20. Which of the following features have you used on the YOUR BENEFITS NOW! website? (Check all that apply.)**

- View existing case information
- View existing notices
- View or submit reports
- Apply for benefits
- View my existing benefits
- None of the above - I don't have an account.
- View information about my case worker
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**21. Do you typically submit reports and other mandatory information to DPSS by mail?**

- Yes (Go to Question 22)
- No (Go to Question 23)

**22. What is the main reason that you send these documents to DPSS by mail?**

- Easy to use
- Saves time
- Habit - like traditional way
- Do not want to wait in line at DPSS office
- Most trusted method
- Want a written record to track
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**23. What is the main reason why you do not use the mail and instead go to a DPSS office to submit reports and other important information to DPSS?**

- Do not trust that it will get there on time
- DPSS office is close to where I live and it is easier
- It is my habit and it is how I have always done it.
- Most trusted method
- Want a written record that I delivered the documents
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**24. What was the last grade you completed in school?**

- 8th grade or less
- Some high school
- High school graduate
- Some college
- Technical school graduate
- College graduate
- Post graduate work

**25. What is your age?**

- 18 - 21
- 22 - 24
- 25 - 34
- 35 - 44
- 45 - 54
- 55 - 64

**We would like to ask you how you think about this survey. Your input is very important.**

**26. Were the survey questions easy to understand?**

- Yes
- No

**27. Were the instructions easy to understand?**

- Yes
- No

**28. What do you think about the length of the survey?**

- Too short
- Too long
- About right

**29. Did you feel your privacy was invaded by the survey?**

- Yes
- No

**30. Please provide your comments if you have any.**

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**THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!**

*Management and Research Services d.school Project*

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Design Thinking

MRS d.school project

July 2014

Completed by: Intergovernmental Relations & Community Services  
Block Grant Section

Project Coordinator: Michael Bono, REQAD/MRS

Project Facilitators: Christine Borbon & Arpi Zadoorian

d.school Project Lead: Rosalia Montero

### **Purpose**

Since July 2013, the Research, Evaluation & Quality Assurance Division, Management and Research Services (MRS) Section, has been conducting an assessment about the ways in which CalWORKs and Medi-Cal applicants/participants conduct County business. Through this research, MRS intends to identify why applicants/participants visit district offices in lieu of utilizing alternative avenues, such as on-line, mail-in, or telephone services, when conducting County business transactions. MRS has been gathering quantitative data through a 30 question scantron survey.

MRS requested the assistance of the d.school team to collect important qualitative data to further enhance the MRS research.

### **Objectives**

- To obtain qualitative data by means of empathetic and compassionate interviews so as to complement the MRS survey data regarding CalWORKs and Medi-Cal applicants/participants.
- To learn and better understand the reasons behind customer district office visits.
- To capture the preference by which customers conduct County business.

### **Timeline**

The Project was conducted from June 30, 2014 through July 3, 2014.

The Design Thinking team interviewed applicants and participants from CalWORKs and Medi-Cal programs at the following districts:

- Glendale
- Metro North
- South Family
- Norwalk
- El Monte

Interviewed applicants/participants were asked if they would like to participate in a short interview and were ensured that participation would not affect their case status. There was no particular methodology for selecting applicants or participants. Customers are simply asked if they are interested in participating in the interview as they appear to be entering, exiting or waiting in the lobby in one of the above mentioned district offices. In order to stay consistent with the MRS assessment, d.school volunteers only interviewed those that self-identified as CalWORKs and/or Medi-Cal applicants/participants.

**Purpose of Interviews**



In-depth empathetic interviews provide an opportunity to better understand the unique perspectives of the customers the Department of Public Social Services (DPSS) serves. In-depth empathetic interviews yield personal insights that are otherwise difficult to capture via scantron surveying. Qualitative data helps portray a face behind the numbers. Empathetic interviews help to provide a complete picture of the applicant/participant that mere statistics may not illustrate. For this particular project, the idea was to gather information regarding customer's preferences of conducting County business. Via the interviews, topics regarding on-line access and knowledge about the convenience of utilizing on-line, mail-in, and telephone services are introduced.

Empathetic interviews help collect information that better represent the experience of the DPSS customer, thus providing the Department with important information that can help improve services based on the voiced needs of the customer.

In order to gain the type of insight mentioned above, the d.school team developed a set of empathetic interview questions to help guide the interviews. Those questions are presented below:

1. *What service(s) are you here for today?*
2. *Why do you prefer to come into the district office?*
3. *Do you have any suggestions of what would make submitting applications and documents simpler for you?*
4. *What are your feelings about conducting DPSS services outside of an office? Over the phone? On-line? By mail?*
5. *What would make you feel secure with providing personal/private information on-line?*
6. *How can we improve our services?*

**Problem Statements**

Two problem statements were developed based on the empathetic interviews conducted by the d.school team. These problem statements capture the feelings of the applicants and participants encountered.

**Participant:**

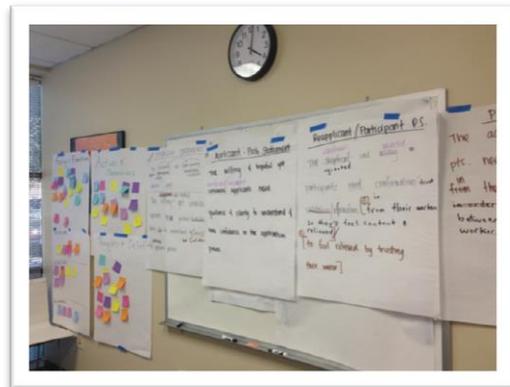
“The jaded and skeptical participants need an affirmative response from their worker that their issues and concerns will be taken care of immediately, in order to feel assured and confident that they will receive a decision, confirmation, and/or resolution pertaining to their case.”

**Applicant:**

“The optimistic and necessitous applicants, due to unforeseen circumstances, need guidance tools, transparency, and confidence in the application process for benefits because it will allow the applicants to feel prepared, informed, and assured when applying.”



Picture 1: Design Thinking phases



Picture 2: Design Thinking process

**Challenges Encountered/Findings**

- Workers in some offices do not have intranet access and therefore cannot view the Your Benefits Now (YBN) demo nor can they access the YBN website to view the updates to YBN. This in turn does not allow workers to provided proper assistance to applicants/participants if they inquire about YBN or require guidance to navigate the system;

## Management and Research Services d.school Project

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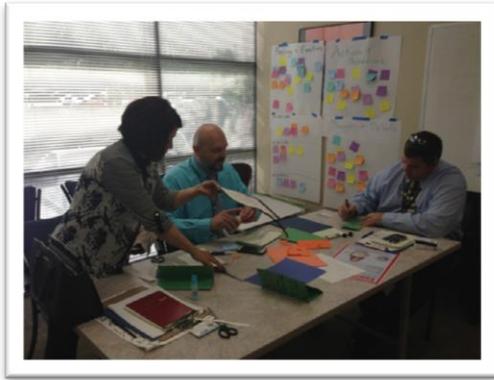
- Although smartphone applications are useful and convenient for some applicants/participants, a few challenges arise.
  - Small screens are not easy to read for some participants.
  - Limited data service plans/data usage does not allow all users to access the DPSS applications on their cell phones.
- Applicants/participants proposed access to website tutorials and videos. They stated this would make them feel comfortable about accessing on-line services. Many expressed not trusting submitting data via the Internet, but expressed that if they understood how their information was being processed, they would be slightly more at ease about the on-line process and it would make them feel more confident about using the on-line service.
- Applicants/participants expressed a lack of confidence in submitting documentation to the CalWORKs/Medi-Cal office by any other means than in person due to having the documentation lost or misplaced by workers. Customers also stated having experienced on-line identity theft, therefore not feeling confident about submitting information on-line. They believe that coming into the district for a traditional face-to-face meeting is the most reliable way to ensure documents are submitted, received and processed timely by workers.
- Some workers are confused about who is responsible for introducing and discussing YBN to customers. They believe that specific employees, i.e., intake workers and customer service workers, are in charge of disseminating YBN information.



Picture 3: Design Thinkers in action



Picture 4: Developing prototypes



Picture 5: Prototyping



Picture 6: More Prototype Work

### **Proposed Solutions**

- Place signs/banners that are readable and noticeable to County customers who promote the use of alternative methods of applying for benefits and submitting County paperwork.
- Train staff to educate and assist applicants with applying for services on YBN and submitting documents via the use of computers found in the district office for the purpose in-office education to participants with applying on-line and submitting documents. Train staff to triage participants to speak, similar to the Apple store style in order to expedite customers by need.
- Establish YBN awareness month to both promote and educate customers and staff about the benefits of utilizing and accessing YBN. Create a Public Service Announcement (PSA) that promotes YBN, similar to the CalFresh PSA.
- In an effort to decrease overall traffic flow in district offices, train staff to help applicants/participants apply for benefits outside of district offices i.e. community-based organizations and faith-based organizations that the Department currently has contracts with.
- Develop a scanning system which can provide customers with live information about their case status and receipt of the documents that have been processed by workers. If and when customers submit documents on-line or by mail, they want to know that the documents have been received and are being processed.



Picture 7: Presentation Day



Picture 8: Stakeholders in attendance

### **Presentation to Stakeholders**

In order to share the findings and recommendations of the project, a presentation was held on July 9, 2014 at the Annex in El Monte. The Design Thinking team chose to present the findings in a skit format to convey their d.school experiences in an enjoyable and casual fashion.

The presentation focused on the feelings that applicants/participants reported experiencing when coming into the district offices. The presentation was followed by a question and answer period.

### **Next Steps/Suggestions**

- Provide additional YBN system training for staff, which allows for hands on demo of what the applicants/participants experience when entering data in YBN. This training educates staff so that they may properly answer questions about the YBN system when inquiries are raised by applicants/participants;
- Create a tracking system which will let applicants and participants know when the district office has received documents and forms that have been submitted on-line or via the drop box; and
- Updating YBN: troubleshooting links, Q&A areas, denoting mandatory fields and providing instructions for the people completing the applications on-line.
- Train staff to properly use and explain the existing lobby monitors system to track customer waiting times and status while customers wait in the district office lobbies.

## **Final Thoughts**

The d.school team observed that there appears to be a lack of information exchange between DPSS workers and applicants/participants regarding the various outlets available for conducting County business transactions, such as on-line, mail-in, and telephone services. It is possible to substantially decrease unnecessary district office visits. One way of accomplishing this would be to motivate workers on the importance of encouraging the uses of on-line, mail-in, and telephone services. In addition, explaining the convenience of using alternative means of handling County business is important to advertise because it was found that applicants/participants are willing to utilize them. Participants are unaware that there are other avenues of delivering information to the workers. During this project it was found that participants are asked by their workers to come in to the office without an appointment to drop-off documentation/verification. Several interviewed participants voiced that even if the document/verification is dropped off, they cannot communicate with their workers via telephone to confirm the receipt of the documents. Lack of communication makes applicants/participants uneasy with the current process. Improper worker training and misinformation may be one of the leading causes in needless office visits. Ultimately, applicants/participants feel compelled to return to district offices to resubmit documents in order to have their cases processed and approved. More than half of the applicants/participants interviewed stated that they simply needed confirmation.

It was the d.school team's experience that participants demonstrated feelings of defeat. Most of them were in the office because something had happened to their cases. For example, either their cases were terminated or no action/progress had occurred, even though they had provided all the necessary verifications. In fact, several participants voiced that they had submitted all the required documents, yet they were compelled to come into the office to check the status of their case. In some instances, participants were informed that documents were not received and that they needed to provide additional copies even when they had receipts of submitting them. Participants are uneducated on how the on-line and mail drop-off systems work; therefore, they are left with the option to come into the office to get their questions answered. Furthermore, some individuals feel that it is easier to come in instead of applying on-line. For example, an applicant stated that she attempted to apply on-line but was overwhelmed with what information she had to provide. She stated that she was afraid of making errors on her application which would halt the entire application process. She felt that on-line errors would come in the way of her application being received by the office and that coming in would eliminate this risk.

As for employees, some commented on their unawareness of the YBN system. Although they had been given the information on how to access YBN training via Intranet, they felt that the information was outdated and that YBN is continually changing. One approved worker commented that it was not his problem and that he did not need to know that information. Other intake workers stated that it was not necessary to know the information since there are special YBN units that handle those cases. It was observed that workers are task orientated and do not hold themselves accountable for learning or knowing anything that they have not specifically been

“tasked” or assigned with. This in turn makes it difficult for customers to gain assistance from one worker or in one office visit because customers are asked to wait to see another worker to get a response for a particular action. This fragmented way of providing services, adds to the already existing problems with district office lobby traffic and extended appointment wait times, hence producing customer dissatisfaction and frustration.

### **Recommendations:**

These recommendations are based on remarks collected during the d.school project from applicants, participants, and staff:

- Update the YBN demo's for workers to have hands-on experience and to be trained to understand what customers see on-line;
- Create an interactive training (similar to LEADER training at Academy) showing workers how to navigate YBN and how to respond to customers who have questions about the YBN process;
- Create tutorials or pop-up instructions on the YBN page for customers to better navigate the system and understand which sections are mandatory to complete in order to have the application processed;
- Have 24-hour on-line support or enhancements on the troubleshooting process so customers can receive real time answers when completing applications on-line;
- Create barcodes on forms/documents that can be scanned into the computer once documents and forms are received either via the Customer Service desk, mail drop-off boxes, in order to reflect the progression of a case in real time on-line;
- Have a reliable case tracking system. Participants need more detail on their case status and yearn for confirmation of case progress and status; and
- Train workers to be more accountable for communicating via telephone, e-mail, etc., with participants.
- Customers come into the office to gain a case status update or to find out why a case has been denied or terminated. A simple confirmation from a worker stating that documents have been received, or at what point of the application process their case is in, may eliminate the need for customers to want to visit the district office.

**REFLECTIONS**



Picture 9: Design Thinkers



Picture 10: Presentation Planning

**Allan Albuero:**

My d.school experience turned out to be surprisingly interesting. I thought to myself "What is d. school?" An art project? Making something out of one's imagination? Staring at the bins of colored paper, glue, and other art/school supplies, it reminded me of my early years in grade school. Nevertheless, as elementary as the activity was, it was a powerful and clever way to ignite one's interest and curiosity because of the challenges that came with it. Trying to finish the task with time restrictions was the biggest test. Upon completion of the tasks at hand, we all came out of it feeling relieved and accomplished. But yet, at that moment, I don't think any of us had any idea of how important the exercise was for the rest of the d.school project.

**Richard Amiel:**

As I look back on my d.school experience, I think about how the d.school team in one way or another will be contributing to the process of submitting verifications for cases and applying for aid on-line. By being part of this d.school project, I feel I contributed to future procedures that may better service applicants/participants. Presenting participants with options on how to apply for aid on-line is valuable information that I will share with other workers in my district.

I want to thank Christine, Arpi and Rosalia for doing such a wonderful job. D.school made me feel like I was truly contributing on the ongoing success that DPSS is showing. From getting the information out to the public through the Internet, via public services announcements, and through the instructional multimedia CD's that are in the works. By interviewing the participants and applicants I got a sense that we were truly hearing what the public had to say and the department is allowing their voices to be heard. D.school made me feel that the department can address the issues that we heard during our empathetic interviews. This type of compassion will make me a better worker and also a better human being. Thank you d.school for the opportunity that so few get to experience.

**Brian Lozada:**

Upon reflecting on my d.school experience, I have learned to open my eyes to the environment around me. I looked around the room and saw the ten people that I would be working with throughout the project. I read the first question "What brought you into the district office today?" My only thought was that it would be challenging to attempt to gather so much data through interviews and in such a short amount of time. As an Eligibility Worker, I had my initial bias. In my experience the majority of clients come to the district office due to missing benefits or because they want to submit documents to the worker. After four days of interviews, I started to learn that clients were coming to the office due to confusion, anger, and an overall feeling of mistrust in the system. A client told me that it was difficult to get a hold of her worker. She informed me that she was part of the Healthy Families and has not liked the transition over to Medi-Cal because she had to consistently submit the same documents over and over again.

After interviewing that client, I conducted another interview and also saw anger in that client. The gentleman said that he submitted documents and actually spoke to his case carrying worker over a month ago. He stated that his Medi-Cal had not been activated and it didn't work when he attempted to visit the doctor. He also stated that this particular district office was having a difficult time checking people in at the front counter. Due to this incident, he claims it took excessive time to have him checked-in for his appointment, and he was now considered a non-appointment to his worker. I personally felt bad because he was penalized for being a non-appointment due to our system failing to check people in promptly.

The overall feeling I got from conducting the empathetic interviews was doubt in the way DPSS does business. People consistently have issues whether they are submitting documents on-line through YBN, through regular mail or even via the drop box. Clients consistently informed me of multiple drop offs of documents with no expectation of actually having the paperwork processed. Customers believe that the only true way to have their issues resolved for them is by actually coming to the district office and handing it to their worker.

**Jeanette Martinez:**

I've really enjoyed my time with d.school, and I would love to be considered for future d.school projects. Although at times the process felt confusing due to the fast pace, it allowed me to go outside of my comfort zone and think out of the box. I appreciate the team I was assigned to from the lead, facilitators and thinkers. I believe we all got along well and we were all hands on during the interviews and debriefing process. Everyone was willing to give ideas and willing to participate. The ideas for the skit were great and clever. I believe the way we chose to present the results intrigued our audience and it engaged them as well.

## **Management and Research Services d.school Project**

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The information I gathered made me discover that many have no idea about the on-line, mail or phone services DPSS offers. Most of the offices we interviewed applicants/participants in did not really have promotion material regarding YBN. My personal experience also informed me that workers do not know how to navigate the YBN system; therefore, they cannot explain it to the clients either. The team had a couple of applicants that when informed about YBN chose to go home and apply on-line because they had been in the office waiting for a long period of time. Other applicants, even though they were informed of the option to conduct business on-line, preferred to stay because they either didn't know how to navigate through the on-line services or didn't trust that information will get to their worker.

On the other hand, participants and re-applicants preferred to come into the office to obtain reassurance that their worker will be taking action on their case or would at least respond to their concerns on the spot, since they were already in the office. Through most of these interviews, I noticed that the relationship between workers and clients are damaged due to mistrust. For example: 39 year old white female reapplying for aid: "I came into the office because that is the only way things get done on my case."

### **Zhaneta Torosyan:**

First when I heard about d.school project I felt confused. I didn't know anything about d.school. Then when we got together and the project was explained I felt nervous. When we went to the offices to interview the participants and applicants, I felt so bad for some of the participants for what they are going through. The d.school team gathered so much information during the empathetic interviews. I hope that the suggestions we have provided can be helpful and improve services. I am glad I did this project. Thank you.

### **Rene Recio:**

I first want to thank you for opportunity, experience and help that you provided during our short time. I had a great time and would love to be part of future d.school projects. I know that the experience will help me in the future. The new insights that I receive are invaluable. My general feelings are that one-third of my interviews were new applicants and two-thirds were existing participants who needed service/action to be taken by their worker. Most participants do not trust their worker or the call center. One particular participant stated that she provided requested documents/verifications to her worker on a previous visit. She watched her worker update the information on LEADER, put it in the supervisors basket and still no action was taken, therefore she is back in the office.

### **Relles Aquino:**

My thoughts: First off, I would like to thank the d.school for the opportunity. Having special assignments like this make my job experience better. As much as I learned from going through this process and the clients we serve, I also learned something about myself and my abilities.

This project has tapped into my creativity in a way that I would not imagine doing on my own. The empathizing project allowed me to think beyond the gift-giving concept. I was able to place myself outside the box and really felt what gift giving is all about. It was a good icebreaker and to get to know the members of the group. I am a person that responds well to structure and guidance. Therefore doing things on the fly was something I thought I couldn't do and the first project did allow me to open up and think on my toes or in other words think and act faster. What was really challenging for me was creating the prototype in a short amount of time given. Thinking back, if we would have received more time that would have not had the same effect. Ideating prototypes was most difficult but more fun as well.

I have no issues talking to people when I know what I need to cook them to spark up a conversation. When we went to our first office, the difficulty and experience was that since I didn't come up with the questions to ask I couldn't get any insight from the participant. It was into my third day that I was able to understand the questions a bit more and get more insight from the people I was interviewing.

The facilitators were good at getting us to think outside the box. Our facilitators have had more experience with this project and will be a phenomenal asset to d.school. I commend them for volunteering and running the project because it was not easy. They managed to keep the groove in control and focused on the task at hand. Thank you for your leadership. The member selection is also very important. The individuals need to work well and keep on the same page. The group selected was a fantastic group because it had many dynamic personalities. Everyone was open for anything and compliant. Great group selection.

### **Christine "CeeJay" Borbon:**

It was an honor and privilege to be asked to return to another design thinking project. My first experience left me wanting to come back to continue research for DPSS and ways to make our services efficient and better for our applicants and participants. I approached this project different than before, as a facilitator, being able to lead a group and knowing when to let the group take responsibility was familiar given my past experience as a facilitator. This process was different as a facilitator because structurally, I had to know the process inside and out. As a facilitator, we had to take a lot of concepts from Design Thinking and schedule each day for the team in order to yield qualitative results. Not only did I interview applicants and participants, I also focused on observing the team, the interviewees, office workers, as well as the overall environment. Obtaining our data through our interviews was important, but also was the time and environment those interviews were conducted in. It was quite exciting to be asked to do another project that will improve our services within DPSS.

**Arpi Zadoorian:**

For the second time around, d.school has provided me with this special opportunity. I feel honored, humbled, and grateful to have experienced this amazing journey once again. I have met some incredible people who have reminded me of the importance of what I do at DPSS. We impact lives; we help people, we make a difference. I have learned so much from everyone involved in the project, and for this I am truly obliged.