

Service Tracker Improves Client Services

“Without continual growth and progress, such words as improvement, achievement, and success have no meaning” –Benjamin Franklin

At Loaves & Fishes, we are always making improvements to better serve our clients. That also means advancing our technological means. February 2019 marks the beginning of a new database, specifically designed for our purposes, to more effectively serve our clients.

This new software is called Service Tracker and will be used to record all the activity of Loaves & Fishes' clients in one place. Currently there are two databases (one for food shopping and one for programs) that are not compatible with each other.

A team of staff and volunteers have been developing the new software since December 2017. The team consists of staff members Janet Derrick, Lori Nalefski, Maria McTarnaghan, Jane McDonald, and CARES Volunteer Leader Palma Aikins. The Loaves & Fishes team is also joined by Matthew Price, Vice President of Development for Webit Services, a local IT support company that has been a partner of Loaves & Fishes since 2010. The team has been meeting every Tuesday afternoon for a year, developing and testing the software.

Palma, who has a professional background in software development and created the original Naperville CARES software in 2002, describes the need for creating a new database from scratch to suit the needs of the organization. “We have half of our programs on one system and the other half on different one. We wanted all services for one client to be available in one place.” These two systems have been separate, even since the merger of Naperville CARES and Loaves & Fishes in 2016. For Palma and the team, it is all about synergy. “We need to act as one agency.”

This new database will help volunteers from different areas efficiently communicate with each other. “On the CARES side, we often refer clients to other programs such as VITA, Public Benefits or food shopping,” Palma explains. “Before we could not set them up with these other programs, we had to transfer them to the front desk and have another volunteer assist them, and they would have to repeat all their information and tell their story again. Now, we can all help them, no matter what the program.”

Program Manager Lori Nalefski describes how the new database benefits not only the volunteers, but the clients as well. “Combining all services a household participates in helps us understand the needs of our clients and plan for unmet needs.”

Volunteers from our welcome area team and our program team have spent the month of January training on this new database. Lori commends the volunteers for all their hard work and dedication to learn to use Service Tracker. “They accepted the challenge! They showed up for training and asked good questions. With a little bit of practice they got it. It was fun to gather groups from the registration team together for a new purpose.”

The software goes live for food shopping on Saturday, February 2nd, and live for programming on Monday, February 5th. The team would like to thank the volunteers for participating in training and providing feedback, and Webit Services for their hard work developing Service Tracker over the last year. This new, tailor-made technology will be an efficient way to productively serve our client across all programs.