FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Dale Ownby Receives Jerry W. Friedman Excellence in Leadership Award
at APHSA’s 2022 ISM Conference & Expo
Recognized for Innovative Leadership Promoting Sound IT Solutions, Policies, and Practices

ARLINGTON, VA—The American Public Human Services Association’s (APHSA) Information Technology Solutions Management for Human Services (ISM) Conference & Expo promotes Information Technology (IT) solutions and celebrates IT achievements in human services. This year, ISM recognizes Dale Ownby, Eligibility Services Division (ESD) Director for Utah’s Department of Workforce Services, with the Jerry W. Friedman Excellence in Leadership Award.

Jerry W. Friedman, in whose honor the award was created, served as APHSA’s Executive Director for eight years and was, for many years, an active member of the ISM Planning Committee. The award recognizes an individual who has demonstrated a clear understanding of the fundamental role that information technology can play in efficient and effective operation in the field of health and human services and honors innovative leadership that has promoted sound information technology solutions, policies, and practices.

Ownby played a pivotal role in creating ESD, a new division, in 2009, reducing the ratio of leadership to front-line staff by eliminating duplication of effort across five regions and streamlining the responsibilities of supervisors and managers. He led the development of the division’s first Program Review Team to promote consistent adherence to policies and procedures and support ongoing learning rather than punitive corrections.

Ownby also supported the creation of a new rules-based eligibility system, eREP, an in-house Eligibility and Enrollment system. Using only state employees, contractors, and with limited resources, ESD successfully rebuilt the entire eligibility system with no downtime for staff or customers. He also helped establish specialized hierarchies to serve customer groups who may have encountered barriers—most notably customers who speak Spanish, Refugees, American Indians, and Aged, Blind, or Disabled. Another innovation, launched 12 years ago, was a user-friendly access point for customers called myCase, the first-of-its-kind customer portal for an Eligibility and Enrollment system. Ownby’s method of decision making, critical in deciding if technological augmentations are appropriate for ESD and ensuring decisions are always consistent with considerations for compliance, simplicity, budget, and usefulness, is commonly known in ESD as “passing the Dale Ownby smell test.”
Ownby’s ability to think on his feet and his decisiveness in stressful circumstances was put on full
display in spring 2020. Just after pandemic-related shutdowns began and the need for public assistance
started to climb, a 5.7 magnitude earthquake shook the Salt Lake area. At a time when it was
potentially dangerous to be in an office, but essential to maintain operations, he communicated the
decision to send all ESD employees statewide home to telework if they desired. Teleworking has
become a valuable strategy as ESD strives to maintain appropriate staffing levels throughout the
pandemic. His focus was not only on staff work performance, but on their personal well-being and
safety.

Although eligible to retire in July 2022 after 30 exceptional years of service, but with lingering doubts
about the pandemic and how ESD would recover, Ownby postponed his retirement for another 18
months. While others in his position would take an opportunity to leave as scheduled, Dale’s decision
to continue working, leading and supporting ESD through tough times ahead reaffirms his great love
for, and dedication to, his division, his employees, and the citizens of Utah.

As Utah Department of Workforce Services’ Executive Director Casey Cameron said, “Dale is well
deserving of this award. For over 30 years, he’s demonstrated compassionate leadership and achieved
many successful outcomes. His legacy is forever cemented within the hearts of eligibility services staff,
department colleagues, partners, and friends.”

APHSA and its affinity group, ISM, are honored to recognize and celebrate Dale Ownby and continue to
be eternally grateful for dedicated leaders helping to build thriving communities across the country
while leaving a lasting impact on both the human services field and those it serves.

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& Convention Center in National Harbor, MD. Award recipients were recognized on Monday, October
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Ohio Department of Administrative Services for Health and Family Services Awarded Best Use of Technology (Internal Focus) at APHSA’s 2022 ISM Conference & Expo
Recognized for Innovative Use of AI Technologies to Better Serve Ohioans

ARLINGTON, VA—The American Public Human Services Association’s (APHSA) Information Technology Solutions Management for Human Services (ISM) Conference & Expo promotes Information Technology (IT) solutions and celebrates IT achievements in human services. This year, ISM recognizes the Ohio Department of Administrative Services (DAS) for Health and Family Services for Best Use of Technology for Customers (Internal Focus) because of their innovative use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies, or “bots,” to vastly improve productivity and efficiencies as they better serve children and families in their communities.

Under the program name Ohio Benefits Program Intelligent Process Automation, the team, as described by Duane Fontenot, consultant at APHSA and former IT director for Louisiana’s Department of Children and Family Services, “Identified labor-intensive caseload responsibilities and used AI to replicate the human actions needed to free up their workforce and increase focus on more value-added activities.” Duane further details the program by adding, “a family of ‘bots’ was created, such as the ‘Baby Bot,’ to address newborns’ access to Medicaid within just one day of receiving the child’s information.”

In 2021, the DAS identified the counties’ labor-intensive responsibilities as an opportunity to expand the use of AI and process automation software to replicate human actions and complete rules-based tasks, which would free up the workforce to complete other value-added activities. DAS also recognized that as a county-administered state, any successful technological innovations required a harmony of policy needs and operational realities. While DAS advocated for AI adoption, the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM) and the Department of Job and Family Services (JFS) led the prioritization of use cases with the state’s 88 counties, identifying areas where intelligent automation could be brought to life.

Throughout the bot lifecycle, the DAS coordinates closely with ODM and JFS to evaluate and assess the automation potential for each identified use case. In addition, every automation is developed and implemented with the county user in mind. County users are often leveraged as subject matter experts to evaluate the effectiveness of a proposed automation during the design phase. This allows for a
constant feedback mechanism and provides an opportunity to address any concerns prior to deployment.

“This award recognizes the great value of teamwork,” said Kristina Hagberg, Deputy State Chief Information Officer for the State of Ohio. “While AI technology is impressive, the true success story for the Ohio Benefits Program lies in the team’s collaboration to address a major systemic challenge to improve Ohioans’ ability to receive assistance in a time of great need. I am so proud of what we achieved together.”

APHSA and their affinity group, ISM, are honored to recognize and celebrate the Ohio Department of Administrative Services for Health and Family Services success and continue to be eternally grateful for those helping to build thriving communities across the country while leaving a lasting impact on both the human services field and those it serves.

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Commonwealth of Kentucky’s Office of Application Technology Services Awarded
Best Use of Technology for Customers at APHSA’s 2022 ISM Conference & Expo
Recognized for Innovative Technology Usage that Enhances and Expands Service Delivery

ARLINGTON, VA—The American Public Human Services Association’s (APHSA) Information Technology Solutions Management for Human Services (ISM) Conference & Expo promotes Information Technology (IT) solutions and celebrates IT achievements in human services. This year, ISM recognizes the Commonwealth of Kentucky’s Cabinet for Health and Family Services’ Office of Application Technology Services for Best Use of Technology for Customers (External Focus).

Jennifer Harp, Executive Director for the Office of Application Technology Services, shared, “Our team is dedicated to connecting Kentuckians with essential information, including health coverage, food assistance, and other important benefits. The Salesforce Marketing Cloud platform and a consultative approach to consumer use have allowed us to make a quantum leap in our communications approach by connecting with Kentuckians in the ways they have come to prefer—text messaging.”

Two years ago, the Commonwealth of Kentucky transformed the online experience for the members they serve by launching a new cloud-based self-service platform called “kynect,” which provides Kentucky families with access to a multitude of public assistance benefits. The kynect platform, with three separate resident-facing portals, was designed to be a “one-stop shop” for Kentuckians to learn about, apply for, and manage their benefits.

The Commonwealth also transitioned from the federal marketplace to a State-Based Marketplace so Kentuckians could shop for health coverage on kynect, requiring Kentuckians to learn and adopt several new policies and systems over the past two years, all while navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. The Commonwealth acknowledged the challenges this created for their residents and made it their mission to ensure Kentuckians understood how to use the digital tools available to them. The result of this expanded use of technology has been measurable results from automating customer engagement and providing personalized content at scale across email, web, and mobile.

The Best Use of Technology for Customers (External Focus) awards innovative technology usage that enhances and expands external service delivery. Robert Hobbelman, 1st Vice Chair of the ISM Executive Advisory Council shared, “Health and human services are being delivered in nontraditional places and...
by nontraditional methods, and these new approaches would not be possible without the thoughtful and strategic use of IT innovations.” Platforms that interact with users where they are, and when they are ready and available to respond, allow for increased response rates and improved service delivery—the Office of Application Technology Services’ use of the Salesforce Marketing Cloud is a perfect example.

APHSA and their affinity group, ISM, are honored to recognize and celebrate Kentucky’s Office of Application Technology Services and continue to be eternally grateful for those helping to build thriving communities across the country, while leaving a lasting impact on both the human services field and those it serves.

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The California Statewide Automated Welfare System Receives
Collaboration Across Boundaries Award at 2022 ISM Conference & Expo

The California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) Recognized for Shark Tank–inspired Idea Creation Program

ARLINGTON, VA—The American Public Human Services Association’s (APHSA) Information Technology Solutions Management for Human Services (ISM) Conference & Expo promotes Information Technology (IT) solutions and celebrates IT achievements in human services. This year, ISM recognizes the California Statewide Automated Welfare System (CalSAWS) with its Collaboration Across Boundaries award for developing the CalSAWS Innovation Program. Using a Shark Tank model of ideation, the massive undertaking works to provide California’s 58 counties with a range of ideas on how best to use technology to serve Californians.

This dynamic, complex, and mission-driven ecosystem was challenged to harness the creativity and innovative ideas of all individuals within their ecosystem. Today, the CalSAWS Innovation Program functions as an innovation idea-generating machine by leveraging the best thinking across the CalSAWS ecosystem to create impactful solutions for the people who need them most.

The theme of the first Innovation Event, held in August 2021, was “how to optimize a remote workforce.” Duane Fontenot, consultant at APHSA and former IT director for Louisiana’s Department of Children and Family Services, explains, “The CalSAWS Innovation Program brought a collection of consortium members, counties, vendors, and other stakeholders to generate ideas using technology to best address customer service. For example, from over 80 ideas, one was selected and implemented in just six weeks to address the automation of replacement EBT cards.”

Robert Hobbelman, 1st Vice Chair of the ISM Executive Advisory Council, says, “The Collaboration Across Boundaries award recognizes the use of technology to support collaboration and/or integration that crosses traditional program or organizational boundaries.” Detailing CalSAWS’s approach, he shares, “The focus was on overall collaboration and customer focus using the television show Shark Tank model. Quarterly innovation events are being held, and business challenges are provided. Five teams develop a design and present them. It’s unique and effective.”
This Innovation Engine—CalSAWS’s innovation event built around the Shark Tank theme—has transformed the culture of CalSAWS and created a sustainable way to address urgent business challenges while changing the culture to one of engagement and delivering unprecedented value to their county stakeholders and residents.

APHSA and their affinity group, ISM, are honored to recognize and celebrate CalSAWS’s success and continue to be eternally grateful for those helping to build thriving communities across the country while leaving a lasting impact on both the human services field and those it serves.

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