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# RJP Case Study: Michigan Department of Human Services

We chose to use the Michigan Department of Human Services (DHS) as a case study for producing a Realistic Job Preview (RJP). Michigan's video, entitled *Is this Job for Me?* was produced recently, and CPS acted as technical advisor during its production. The Annie E. Casey Foundation funded the development and production of the RJP under their Human Services Workforce Initiative.

## Background

DHS had long been aware of the retention problem of newly hired Children's Protective Services Workers and Foster Care Workers. It wasn't unusual for these newly hired staff to quit before they finished their eight-week, new-worker training program. Although the department did not have good turnover statistics available at the time, everyone knew that turnover among these new workers was a problem that needed to be fixed.

During the spring of 2000, the Department's HR Director became aware of Nebraska's RJP, obtained a copy and shared it with members of DHS' Executive Committee. The Department decided to move forward with producing its own version.

In 2003, the Annie E. Casey Foundation identified DHS as a best practice site under the Human Services Workforce Initiative. As part of the Foundation's grant to the department, support was provided for DHS to produce the RJP.

### RJP Snapshot: Michigan DHS

**Agency:** [Michigan Department of Human Services \(DHS\)](#)\*

**RJP Title:** Is This Job for Me?

**When Implemented:** 2005

**Position Covered:** Children's Protective Services and Foster Care Workers

**Media:** DVD

**Length:** 36 minutes

**Content Format:** Features Children's Protective Services Workers and Foster Care Workers in the routine performance of their jobs. Excerpts are taken from interviews with workers and frontline supervisors describing the nature of the work, its challenges and rewards. Although clients do not play a major role in the video, those shown in background interactions gave their consent to be included.

**Production:** The in-house producer spent three days in each of the offices he visited, shooting approximately 25 total hours of videotape. He conducted videotaped interviews with the workers featured in the RJP, and videotaped them in a variety of common work situations. Workers' interviews were used as "voiceovers" during footage showing the workers performing their jobs.

**Implementation:** DHS mails the RJP DVDs to all applicants who meet the minimum requirements for the job. To be considered, applicants must watch the DVD and return a statement certifying that they have done so and remain interested in the position.

\* DHS was re-named the Family Independence Agency (FIA) in 2004.

## Phase I – Preparedness

Once DHS decided to produce a RJP, the agency readied itself for production and implementation by:

- Researching RJPs that other human services agencies had produced.
- Assessing their ability to produce a RJP – DHS determined that they were able to handle planning and production.
- Designating Human Resources as the leader and champion of the project, from planning through implementation and evaluation.
- Conducting best practice research on how best to implement and use the RJP.

## Phase II – Planning

### *The Planning Group*

DHS invited several frontline supervisors to serve on a work group to help design the video. They joined staff from the human resources, operations, training, and policy offices to determine the content and design of the RJP.

Michigan simplified the process significantly by asking the supervisors on their Planning Group to identify individuals from their own offices who would be featured in the video. By having a first-hand understanding of the purpose and objectives for producing the RJP, those supervisors were able to identify four to six employees from their office to be featured in the video. They were also able to provide on-site assistance to the video producer.

Although an overview of the Children’s Protective Services and Foster Care jobs is described in the video, the workgroup decided that the primary focus of the video should be on the challenges and rewards of the job.

The video producer, a media production specialist from the agency’s professional development office, was a member of the Planning Group and was fully involved in all phases of the planning process.

Based on the discussions and decisions of the Planning Group, the video producer prepared a “[treatment](#)” – a written document broadly describing how the material would be covered in the video. The purpose of the treatment was to demonstrate to the Planning Group that the producer had accurately understood their overall direction, and to obtain the group’s approval before any filming began. The treatment also included a proposed timeline.

## The Budget

Michigan DHS budgeted and spent approximately \$27,000 on the production of its RJP video for their Services Specialists. The bulk of that cost, however, was the wages and benefits to employees in the video.

**Table A: Michigan DHS RJP Budget**

Budget Item	Cost
Ten-Member Planning Group (4 Meetings – 4 Hours each <sup>1</sup> , including travel time)	\$5,400
Travel expenses for committee meetings	\$1,000
Staff time for appearing in video (10 staff – 3 hours each <sup>2</sup> )	\$900
Video Producer and Assistant (450 hours – meetings, planning, travel, videotaping, editing)	\$16,000
Narrator	\$600
Closed Captioning	\$572
Travel Costs for Taping	\$130
Blank Tapes for Taping	\$378
DVD & VHS Production	\$2,145
DVD Sleeves	\$51
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$27,176</b>

\* The sample RJP is a 35-minute DVD; the video producer is a media production specialist from the agency's professional development office.

<sup>1</sup> Includes the cost of wages and fringe benefits

<sup>2</sup> Does not include hours performing regularly assigned work as part of the videotaping process.

## Phase III – Production

### *Videotaping*

During the initial meeting with the employees in each office who were being videotaped, the video producer explained the reasons for producing the RJP and what their roles would be. (Their supervisors had also prepared them prior to his visit to the office.) He then conducted videotaped interviews with each of them. Rather than follow one worker for a full day, he asked them about their scheduled activities for the upcoming two days and decided whom he would accompany, depending on their schedules, while they conducted their job duties.

The child welfare workers featured in the RJP sought approval and a written release from their clients, employees of the courts, and any other members of the public before being videotaped. The workers then continued with their normal business. None of the interactions were “set up” or role-played.

The child welfare workers were also videotaped as they described the purpose of what they were doing while driving to the home call, approaching the front door of the client’s home, the child’s school or hospital. They were also videotaped in their offices interacting with their supervisor, other fellow workers, attending training and participating in meetings. During the editing process, responses to the questions were interwoven into the video as “voiceovers” while the camera captures the workers as they performed their work.

### *Narration and Editing*

The video producer spent three days in each of the offices he visited, shooting approximately 25 hours of videotape, then transcribing the interviews so that the producer could organize the first draft of the [script](#) from the transcribed text rather than the actual video.

The producer also prepared a first draft of the narrator’s comments that would be used to tie the various parts of the video together. He then shared this version of the draft, including the narrator’s comments, with the Planning Group prior to the meeting where the first draft of the script was discussed. In discussion the Planning Group deleted some material, moved other material, and asked the producer to look through the transcripts to see if he could find anything that better fit with the overall tone desired in the video.

Because the narrator’s comments would be critical, the Planning Group spent considerable time discussing them to ensure that they would communicate the appropriate message to the viewer. The Planning Committee believed that it was important for the narrator to explain at the beginning of the video why the video was produced. They also believed that near the end of the video, the narrator should remind the viewers to give serious thought to whether the child welfare job is a “good fit” for them or not. The narrated messages are:

Early in video:

*This program was produced to help you gain some understanding of just what's involved with being a member of the Children's Protective Services and Foster Care staff. Like many other children's services agencies across the country, DHS has found that turnover among new hires is much higher than it should be because many new hires find the job to be much different than they expected it to be. .... So as you learn more about these jobs, we'd like you to look into yourself and ask "Is this job for me?"*

Near the end of the video:

*".....Are these the kinds of jobs that can motivate you? That's for you to decide. Remember – high turnover among new hires is disruptive to the positive outcomes we all seek for these children and their families. I urge you to give careful thought to these positions before accepting one."*

Michigan's Planning Group considered asking the Department Director to serve as narrator, but feared that the video would become dated if the Director left the Department, so a professional actress was hired to serve as the narrator.

### *Approval and Screening*

Once the script had been approved and the narrator's remarks videotaped, the first draft of the video was shown to the Planning Group. The Planning Group was very pleased with the video, overall, but believed that it ended on too negative a note. The group decided to delete one scene completely and to move some of the comments about the "rewards of the job" closer to the end. Since the Michigan video uses background music, the Planning Group recommended that more "uplifting" music be used for the final few minutes of the video.

A few members of the Planning Group still worried that the video might overly discourage potentially good applicants. To resolve that concern, the Group decided that the video should be shown to potential applicants to test their reaction.

CPS developed a [questionnaire](#) to be administered to two classes of MSW students, one classroom of BSW students, and a group of college students interested in social work careers, but not necessarily majoring in social work. We designed the questionnaire to ask some of the same questions both before and after the students watched the video in order to determine the impact the video had on their perceptions of and interest in pursuing a child welfare position. The results satisfied the Planning Group that the video was appropriately balanced, yet still effective in discouraging uncertain candidates from following through with the application process.

## Phase IV – Implementation

Michigan DHS decided to duplicate their Realistic Job Preview on DVDs and mail them to all applicants who meet the minimum requirements for the job.

DHS informs applicants that to be considered further they must watch and return the DVD within 30 days. Applicants must also return a [statement certifying](#) that they have watched the DVD and remain interested in the position.

Although DHS asks the applicants to return the DVD even if they are not interested in the position, many do not. However, the DVDs are inexpensive enough (about \$1.00 each) that Michigan does not consider this a problem. Copies of the RJP are also available in VHS format. DHS also provides the RJP to the state's Schools of Social Work.

## Phase V - Evaluation

CPS is partnering with Michigan DHS to evaluate the impact of their RJP on employee turnover. We began working with DHS on how to evaluate the RJP very early in their planning process – well before the RJP was produced. CPS worked with DHS to develop a [short survey](#) to assess the reactions of applicants who viewed the RJP but did not return the DVD and certification.

Michigan DHS introduced the RJP into their hiring process in July 2005. Beginning in September 2005, DHS began hiring individuals who had viewed the *Is this Job for Me?* RJP during the application process.

We have also identified a “control group” – those workers hired after September 2004 but who haven't viewed the RJP. We can use Michigan's automated Human Resources Management System (HMRS) to identify and track data over time on both the “control group” and those newly hired workers who viewed the RJP. As more workers are hired, each of these groups will grow in size, resulting in more robust data. CPS and DHS will assess the impact of the RJP on turnover by comparing the data on these two groups.

## *Cost Effectiveness*

Michigan DHS estimated the cost of the turnover of one children's services worker to be over \$50,000, including both the direct and indirect costs of turnover. The direct costs alone (the costs associated with processing the separation, hiring the replacement, and training the new employee) were estimated in 2004 to be over \$20,000. The types of indirect costs DHS examined included:

- The productivity differential between the departing employee and the replacement.
- Errors due to inexperience.
- Lowered morale and productivity of other employees.

Michigan budgeted and spent approximately \$27,000 on the production of its RJP video for child welfare workers. The bulk of that cost, however, was the wage and benefit costs to employees who were on the payroll already and would have been engaged in other activities.

Given these figures, avoiding one “wrong hire” would more than cover Michigan’s production costs of the video, with the savings in direct costs alone nearly covering the full cost of producing their RJP video.

The ongoing costs associated with using the RJP are negligible. The cost of each DVD is about \$1.00 and applicants return approximately 80 percent of them, which are used again. The postage costs (applicants are provided with a postage-paid return envelope) and administrative costs represent a negligible increase.

### *Impact on Applicant Decisions to Continue with the Selection Process*

In July 2005, DHS began [mailing a RJP DVD](#) to all qualified applicants and asking them to indicate whether they wanted to continue with the application process. When the applicant returns the required materials, the Department records the information in their applicant tracking system. DHS also tracks those who do not respond within the required time (30 days).

Between July 1<sup>st</sup> and November 15, 2005, DHS mailed DVDs that were received by 443 applicants. Seventy-seven (17.4 percent) of the applicants did not return the DVD and certification. We were able to follow up with nearly 70 percent of these non-responders. Of these, about nine didn’t follow through with the application process because of the RJP.

Michigan’s data reveals that about 31 applicants (6.9 percent) concluded that a child welfare job wasn’t right for them, based on reviewing the RJP. As one of these applicants said, “I had a general idea about the job, but the DVD portrayed the pros and cons so clearly that it just really made it clear that I wouldn’t have stayed in the job.”

### *Turnover Rates*

We are in the process of tracking both the DHS “control group” of employees who did not view the RJP and their newly hired workers who did. By tracking the departures of employees in these groups over time, CPS and DHS will be able to assess the effect the RJP has had on turnover rates. We will begin analyzing the data in the last quarter of 2006.

### *Job Satisfaction*

In order to evaluate the RJP’s impact on job satisfaction we designed several questions that are being administered to all employees hired after September 2004 (See below for the questions designed to measure job satisfaction). Employees who have not seen the RJP serve as the control group. The survey questions are administered six months after the employees have completed new-worker training.

Because employees who have seen the RJP have only been hired recently, the survey has only been administered to employees who have not seen the RJP. Based on the results from the 56 employees who have participated in the survey at “six-months-after-training,” 27 percent of them “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” with the statement, “Based on what I’ve learned so far, this job is pretty much as I expected it to be.” Twenty-one percent of the respondents Agree or Strongly Agree with the statement, “I never would have taken this job if I’d had a better understanding of what it was going to be like.”

For both studies, we will be able to conduct an analysis of the data by the end of 2006. If Michigan’s RJP has the desired effect, we expect these percentages to be significantly lower among the survey respondents who will have seen the RJP.

### *Job-satisfaction Survey Statements*

- Based on what I've learned so far, this job is pretty much as I expected it to be.
- I never would have taken this job if I'd had a better understanding of what it was going to be like.
- Learning what I did about this job during the application and selection process has helped me cope with some of the job pressures I'm experiencing.
- Now that I have a better understanding of what this job is all about, I believe it's going to be harder than I thought.
- DHS' honesty during the recruitment process makes me feel more loyal to the department.
- I believe I am going to be able to cope with the stress and pressure of this job.

DHS child welfare workers taking the survey rank each statement using the following scale:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree