Improving Champaign County 211 Information for Crisis Response

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INTRODUCTION

Poverty is still a problem in the Champaign Urbana area. In 2019, the poverty rate was 19.2% of the population in the county (U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Champaign County, Illinois, 2019). Poverty is the main cause of many negative effects such as distribution, discrimination, disconnection and violence (Chynoweth, 2020). That is the reason why community services are designed for: to help balance social equality, against domestic violences and avoid the negative effects of poverty. Cunningham Township has been a successful example of local social services improving residents' lives: supported about 250 people last year including 100 homeless residents, got 586 people housed in two years including 292 children when the average time takes 3.5 years and etc (Chynoweth, 2020). Today, with the help of social media, it becomes more convenient for people to receive information through technology. The PATH 211 Crisis Illinois provides mainly hotlines, websites and other social media formats for users to access the information they need, and closes the gap between residents and local service providers. In this period of pandemic, communications and interactions are more dependent on technologies like phone lines and the internet. However, less human interactions convey the problems on insufficient technologies clearly.

AIM

The goal of the project is to create capacity and empower the community to help residents in Champaign County to take advantage of existing resources. The manifestation of the goal is to determine what functionalities and dynamic designs of the 211 PATH Crisis website can provide convenience and enhance user experience, what strategies can help the users to understand more about how to use the technology and resources.

FEATURES

Error Reporting System

Outdated information is a problem for many existing community service data systems. Many platform managers have a hard time encouraging service providers to update or correct their information. The PATH 211 Crisis Illinois also have the same problem since database existed since 1971 and there are thousands of services joined the project. It is nearly impossible for the PATH 211 Crisis Illinois to check regularly on each service providers and maintain an accurate list of information.

As a result, we designed an Error Reporting System to encourage both the clients to bravely report errors and being active, also motivates service providers to adjust the incorrect information in time. We would like to minimize human interactions with the system and keep the conversation between service providers and users to be active and responsive.

Here are the detailed steps for the system:
1. If a user finds an error on the website, they can use the Report Errors function to express their concerns
2. Service managers will receive a notification for the error report in the managing interface and also in their mailbox
3. Service managers are given 48 business hours to respond to the notification; if they do not respond in time, then there will be an error alert on their information page to warn users who are trying to use the same information
4. The user who reports the error will receive an update email once the report is taken care by the service manager
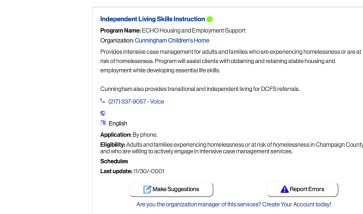

Correct information is the base line of a liable information system. Especially in the time of Covid, these community resources become even more meaningful to the ones who demand it. We intend to use this system to narrow down the time gap between service providers change their information and implement the update on our platform.
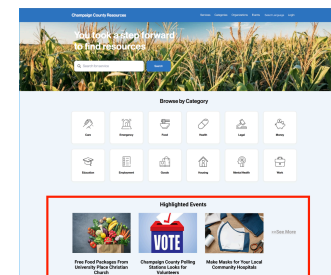
Event Calendar

Events are what help to build a community. Most of the service providers in the PATH 211 Crisis Illinois use their own social media accounts, such as Facebooks, Twitters, or Instagram to post information about the events they are holding. It requires users to browse through different pages across different platforms if they would like to find an event to attend at an ideal location and an appropriate time.

We researched different community service websites on their experiences of managing events. Only several of them own a distinct database that gathers different event information. From our meeting with the 211 LA, we acknowledged that their events section play a huge part of their services. Through their platform, users were actively participating in local events held by services.

Based on their success, we decide to design our own events section for the Champaign County.
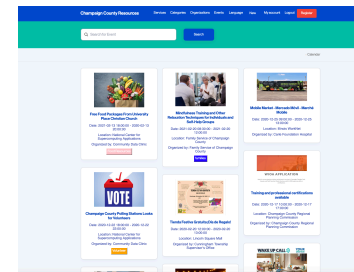

It is very similar to the service database that we had but this one holds all the events that can be created and updated by organization managers. Users can see a complete list of all events in our database provided by service providers.

On the front-page of our platform, there are three highlighted events that are about to happen or closest to the current time.

We have also designed an "event calendar", which is similar to our daily calendar app.
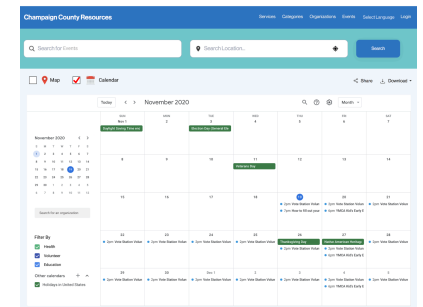
This feature caters to the need of a convenient view for all the events in the scale of time. Users can pick their favorite time spot that fits their schedule.

CONCLUSIONS

Through the two years of planning and work, our project has launched successfully. We are inviting service providers to settle in the new platform and actively doing research on improving existing functions and expanding new features.

As a testing environment for community research works, Champaign County Resources provides great opportunities with smaller serving population, closer geographical distribution and responsible communications.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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