

## REACH OUT AND TOUCH SOMEONE

Reach Out and Touch Someone was a workshop that focused on outreach programs and ways to simplify access to various public assistance programs. Representing the State of Texas was Tom Wilkinson, Jr., Executive Director of the Brazos Valley Council of Governments, Sue Ann Palmore, Program Manager for the Texas Department of Human Services, and Boyd Graves, manager for the TEXASWORKS program for the Texas Department of Human Services. Representing the state of California was Sheryl Spiller, Division Chief for the Health and Nutrition Program for the county of Los Angeles.

Sheryl Spiller began the presentation by giving examples of Los Angeles County's extensive outreach efforts. Like many public assistance agencies, there are many obstacles in attempting to ensure that qualified individuals receive the assistance that they may need. Los Angeles County has undertaken extensive efforts to reach this population. In fact, Los Angeles County's goal is to increase participation in public assistance programs by 35%, or roughly 17,000 individuals. One of their outreach methods puts eligibility workers out in the communities to speak with local community groups. This includes malls, churches, PTA meetings, and other local venues. By simply bringing the worker to the applicant, many barriers can be broken. One very interesting and noteworthy point about Los Angeles County's aggressive outreach campaign is the increased morale among the eligibility workers, and a better understanding of the clients they serve.

Tom Wilkinson and Sue Ann Palmore shared a key component of their state's efforts to both reach more applicants and to simplify the entire application process. Under a grant by the former governor of the state of Texas, the seven county Brazos Valley area has instituted an on-line, "community-driven system created by local agencies and organizations in order to minimize service delivery gaps in the local information and client referral systems". This system, entitled TexasOne, allows numerous public assistance agencies to share information on applicants to ensure that each applicant is receiving the assistance that they may be qualified for. Additionally, by sharing this information on one system, the Brazos Valley area hopes to maintain a "no wrong door" policy for the clients they serve.

For additional information on the TexasOne system, you are encouraged to visit the website at [www.TexasOne.com](http://www.TexasOne.com).