

# Department of Social and Health Services

Washington State Agency

Forks, Washington

[www1.dshs.wa.gov](http://www1.dshs.wa.gov)



The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) is a 150-year old state agency that is dedicated to improving the quality of life for Washington individuals and families in need. Five years ago, DSHS took a fresh look at its customer service processes and decided that with the abundance of new communications technology options, it could do a better job of reaching out to its clients. It initiated a telephone-based customer service center, to allow clients with simple questions or changes to conduct their business over the phone.

This worked so well that gradually more and more services were included under the call center umbrella. Some changes were made along the way, to reduce the wait time for DSHS callers, and to create a stronger focus on the local connection between clients and representatives. The system has evolved into what is now a regional, distributed customer service network, with ten call center representatives working in three separate offices in Clallam and Jefferson counties. Clients can call a toll-free number and be quickly connected to the next available regional representative. Today, most DSHS clients in this region only need to come to the local facility for their initial interview and for a yearly review of their case.

Shannon Dahlgren, who has been with DSHS for 12 years, is one of two customer service representatives located in Forks, Washington. A long-time Forks resident, Shannon, along with her husband graduated from the local high school and then spent time in separate cities, working and going to school. They reunited in Forks, married, and decided to stay because they felt that Forks was a wonderful place to live and raise their family. Shannon likes being able to help the people in her own community with food, medical and financial assistance, and with child care needs. She says, "Our clients are always relieved to be talking with someone local. They relax a bit; they feel a local representative can better understand their problems."

DSHS makes full use of technology innovations to improve their client services. Since Forks has a large Spanish-speaking population, the Forks facility offers two ways to ease that potential language barrier. They provide not only part-time, onsite language interpreters, but also conference call access to Language Lines Services, a worldwide language interpretation company. Another way DSHS

has eased the process for clients is by increasing use of the Internet. There is now an online application option that allows busy, working parents and other clients to avoid the time and effort of traveling to their local office to apply for assistance. In addition to the application process, clients can go to the DSHS website and access the current status and history of their profile. If they need help with the website, a call center representative can access the website at the same time, and help them right over the phone. Shannon explains, "People love the convenience of the DSHS call center services. Clients can call anytime to stay current on what is going on with their case, or to report changes in their personal circumstances."

One other way technology has made it easier to provide quality service to rural customers is that regional DSHS staff meetings are conducted most often via phone conferencing, with an occasional face-to-face meeting in Port Angeles. Shannon likes the technology-based improvements as much as her clients do. She says, "Now, we can do almost everything for our clients by phone or the Internet; it works well for them and for us."

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- Shannon Dahlgren  
Customer Service Representative,

Washington State Department of Social and Health