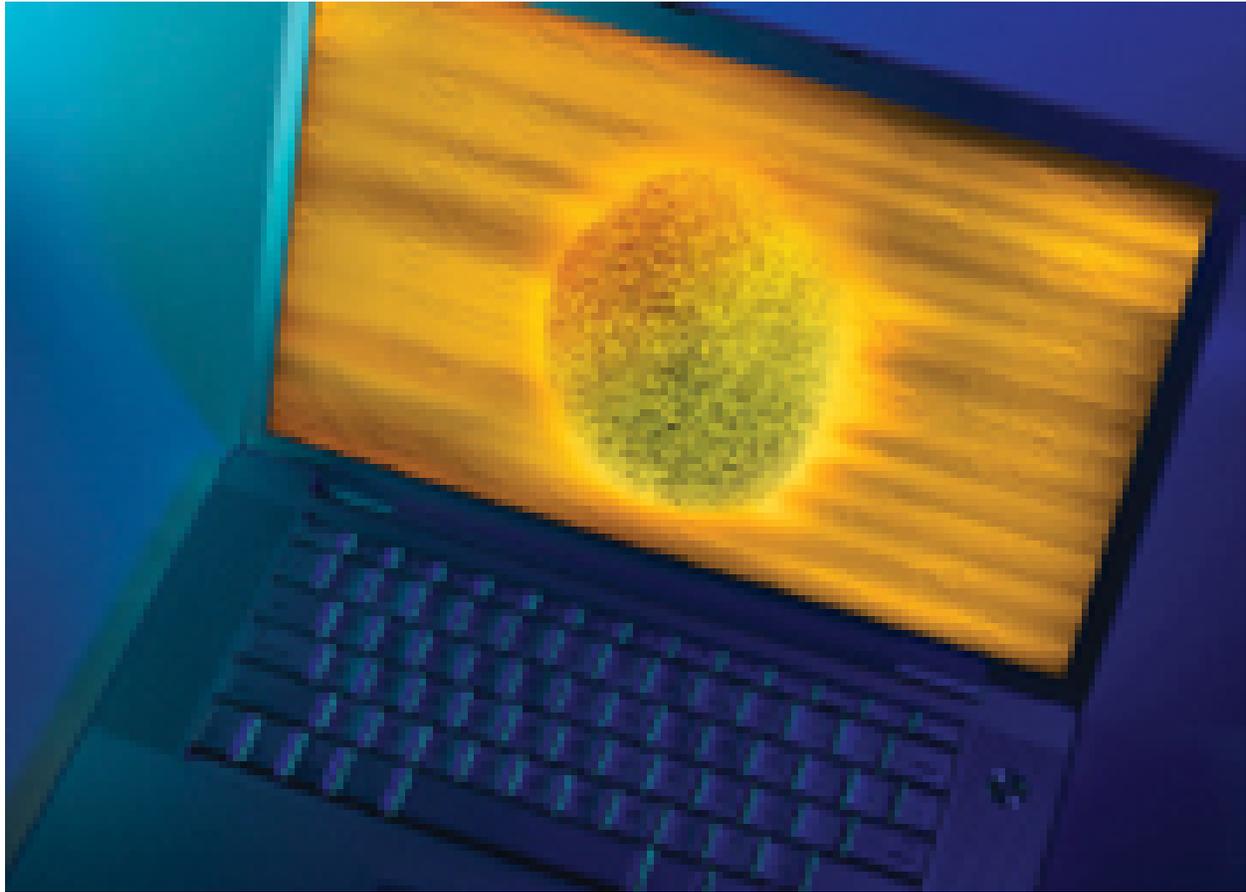


## Biometric Devices Help New Jersey County Track Delivery of Homeless Services

Russell Nichols | October 27, 2010



Bergen County, N.J., has dealt with one particular dilemma for years: The Department of Human Services (DHS) needs to estimate how many homeless individuals receive services, such as food, medicine and shelter. But many people served by the department don't have accurate forms of identification, and without a precise tracking system, the DHS might have erroneously counted one person who visits the shelter 10 times, for example, as 10 different people visiting once.

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Now with biometrics technology, Bergen County has implemented a solution that helps the DHS keep an accurate count of the homeless people who receive social services. In September, the DHS unveiled a fingerprint identification system developed by Fulcrum Biometrics, a San Antonio-based company.

Working with New Jersey Business Systems, the company used its Fulcrum Biometric Framework to develop a Web-based application that links finger image scanners at DHS service sites and a fingerprint-matching algorithm to the existing New Jersey Homeless Management Information System. While Fulcrum's Web services interface provides automated information exchange between the two systems, both systems operate independently.

"They realized that it was really difficult to get accurate metrics — who they're serving, how many times — without really having to harass homeless people," said Ken Nosker, president of Fulcrum Biometrics. "We gave them a custom solution that is actually not integrated with the large state database, but communicates with the database."

The data-sharing method reduces "check-in" time to seconds: no sign-in sheets or extensive interviews. DHS workers simply open a Web page and select the service and location. A homeless person comes in, places a finger on the scanner, and the computer captures the data and communicates with the state database to verify the person's identity.

The county paid \$90,000 for the solution, Nottingham said, and so far the system has collected data from about 450 homeless people.

However, she added, the biometric device doesn't store pictures of fingerprints, but gathers numerical values that correspond to the unique points on a person's finger. This method protects the data and gives the DHS accurate numbers to work with.

The system helped the county recognize that food programs attract the largest crowds in the third week of the month — not the last week like officials originally thought. Such findings will allow the DHS to adjust its strategies to improve service delivery.

And the county can now tell funders exactly how many homeless people have been served by DHS workers in a given time and, in turn, how much their contributions have helped support homeless management efforts.

"It's opening all kinds of interesting opportunities for us," Nottingham said. "There's a very clear picture, and it makes us astoundingly accountable."

<http://www.govtech.com/health/Biometric-Devices-Delivery-Homeless-Services.html>