Purpose

The project to upgrade the Housing Services Registry software system was initiated in 2019. The initial system was built using Lotus Notes, an obsolete technology which had limited server support. The transfer of data from Lotus Notes to YARDI Rent Café allows applicant households to apply online for rent-geared-to-income (RGI) subsidy and update their own information as needed. The YARDI Rent Café software will provide online features and functionalities to service applicant households, improve citizen experience, provide for staff efficiencies, automate manual tasks and enable better access to data.

Background

The process of replacing the Housing Registry software system began in 2019 to ensure that the integrity of the data was maintained in a secure platform. The data had been stored in a system that was antiquated with limited features and would eventually not be supported. YARDI was selected as the service provider to maintain Housing Services data in their Rent Café software system. Nearly 80% of Service Managers across the province of Ontario currently use the Rent Café system for their centralized wait list.

There are two phases to the project. Phase I involved the transfer of data from Lotus Notes to Rent Café. Staff from Housing Services and Information Technology worked with the service provider to ensure that all data was accurately and securely transferred. In-depth training on the system was provided this past spring. Registry staff in Housing Services and Community Housing Providers have been working with Rent Café since the launch of the system on June 10, 2020.

Phase II of the project will involve the roll out of the online portal. This will provide applicant households the ability to make application for RGI subsidy and update their own information anytime, anywhere through the use of a computer or hand held device that is connected to the internet. Housing Services is working with Corporate Communications to develop a strategy that will inform the public of this new service. In light of COVID-19, this provides applicant households an opportunity to access their data from home. The launch of the online application is anticipated in the fourth quarter of this year.

To provide the highest level of customer service to people, Housing Services will continue to accept paper-based applications. In addition, two computer terminals will be available in the lobby of the Housing Services office in order for applicant households to view and update their file. Staff are available to assist applicants navigate the system as they learn the new tool.

Next Steps

Housing Services will launch the online portal in the fourth quarter of this year, and continue the modernization of managing the centralized wait list. Staff will communicate the enhanced services to the public. As well, they will support applicants and community housing providers become familiar with the new software

tool and continue to look for ways to modernize the management of the centralized wait list.

Resources Cited

YARDI
yardi.com