

In Person Interview Summary

St. Anthony's Online Scheduler

On Monday, February 25, a representative of Cornershop spent approximately seven hours on-site at St. Anthony's, the bulk of the time being spent conducting interviews with various stakeholders in the Clothing Program. Those interviewed can be divided into four rough categories:

- Individual guests: These are single individuals who typically wait in line early in the morning to receive store appointments later that morning, although their appointments also can be made by case workers; approximately eight of these individuals were interviewed
- St. Anthony's staff: Employees or volunteers for St. Anthony's that do the work to administer the program. Four of these folks were interviewed, though others were also present at times and may have answered some questions.
- Family guests: These are individuals representing their families, who come in the afternoon and try to acquire an appointment via lottery (only 12 are served per day). Approximately eight people in this group were interviewed, though as they were sometimes brought together in groups not all may have spoken.
- Service Providers: These are typically case workers who are calling St. Anthony's to make appointments for their clients, though not everyone perform this duty is strictly speaking a case worker. Two of these were interviewed, one via phone.

This document summarizes findings from these interviews and attempts to identify themes and patterns in interviewees' responses, as well as highlight opportunities and challenges suggest by these themes. Due to the rough nature of the original interview notes, we provide this synthesis rather than the raw data gathered.

Individual Guests

Of the four audience groups, this one possesses the greatest heterogeneity and poses the biggest challenges to modernizing the scheduling system. Interviewees ranged widely in age, English skills, social/cognitive abilities and — perhaps most crucially — access to (and familiarity with) technology such as phones, computers, and tablets.

Some interviewees waited outside in the morning to get an appointment scheduled; others typically get their appointments scheduled by their case workers. Many are regular users of

the free clothing program and expressed appreciation for both the quality of the clothes and the lack of stringent eligibility rules overall.

Those who have appointments set up via case worker identified that going through their case workers can be a challenge because it can take some time and back-and-forth for an appointment to be setup given the need for the case worker to call and leave a message. Of those who stood in line, one complained that standing in line doesn't feel safe, lacks privacy, and can be constraining since it only happens at the same time every day which may not be a good time for everyone.

Of these guests, access to technology is often a major hurdle: many do not reliably possess cell phones — while they may be provided free “Smartlink” or “Obama” phones, such devices are challenging to keep and maintain — and comfort with touchscreens seems inconsistent, while others clearly have the savvy and access to maintain Facebook accounts, pay bills, and the like.

Those who did have consistent access to a mobile device, nearly universally agreed that being able to make an appointment (or at least try) via phone was preferable to standing in line, using a kiosk, or even going through a case worker. Two interviewees did say they would like to use a kiosk, though one thought it unrealistic to think that all that many individuals would.

Text message reminders were also generally regarded positively.

Many guests of this type also expressed concern over identity verification challenges: information beyond name and date of birth would be difficult to remember or provide, though options such as PIN numbers (like ATM cards have) and photo identification were raised as suggestions.

Family Guests

Those interviewed who participate in the afternoon family-focused program seemed somewhat more homogenous than the individual participants: All seemed to have mobile phones that they relied on regularly — having a consistent phone number and access to the Internet/text were clearly critical important to everyone in this audience. Several also indicated they had computers at home, or at least good access to one.

Members of this audience — all women, in the interviews conducted, and most of them Cantonese-speakers — generally expressed a strong desire to implement a new system that eliminated the need to be physically present for the lottery system (there was also

consistent consternation expressed at the reduction from 20 to 12 spots per day). Even if the lottery system itself were still present, the option to participate in it remotely (e.g. via text) was seen as dramatically easier and more convenient than having to come in — perhaps several times in a row — in order to try to get a spot.

Most members of this audience loved the idea of text message reminders, although one interviewee complained of getting too much text spam and would prefer email. Most thought being able to book (or attempt to book) up to one week in advance would be great, accompanied with a one-day reminder via text.

Service Providers

Though this audience generally consists of case workers, as one of the two individuals was not a *case worker* per se, we are using this more general moniker.

Both individuals interviewed described the same experiences trying to book appointments, something they had both done many times over the last several years: a call would be made, a message would inevitably have to be left, and the call would be returned by St. Anthony's staff within 24 hours. Both individuals expressed frustration with this process; though St. Anthony's can be reliably counted upon to return the call, trying to schedule appointments when the would-be guest is no longer at the provider's side presents many challenges regarding communications and availability.

Both thought the idea of being able to book appointments online for their clients would represent a hugely beneficial change, and both expressed a need for some sort of "dashboard" to view (as well as change or cancel) appointments they'd made for their clients — though it wasn't clear if it would be best to have accounts at the agency or the individual case worker level.

Being able to book one week to ten days in advance was seen as sufficient; any further out than that offers no real benefit due to unpredictability. Opinions on the value of the referral letter were split.

St. Anthony's Staff

Several staff members were interviewed to get their perspectives on the problems, challenges and opportunities a modernized scheduling system would provide. Of the four staff talked to at length, perspectives varied significantly on the potential improvements a new system could provide. While there was recognition across the board that the current system is antiquated and problematic (particularly for case workers inundating the system with calls), strong concerns about the idea of shifting to something digital were also expressed. These concerns generally took two forms: First, skepticism that clients would be able to successfully use a such a system and find it as rewarding as receiving the individual human interaction and attention they do now; and second, that the new system may exacerbate already-extant problems with equity of access. Both concerns were voiced within the framework of wishing to adhere to St. Anthony's mission and reputation as a center where guests are treated well. Word-of-mouth around unwanted or negative changes was identified as a significant concern as well, given how guests (particularly morning ones) share information with one another.

Summary & Thoughts

It's clear from talking to guests, service providers and staff that the current scheduling system has many flaws and frustrations; what's less clear is the ideal way forward.

In general, it seems as though case workers (and St. Anthony's staff) would clearly see efficiencies and benefits from offering an online system case workers could use to book appointments for their clients.

It would also seem as though most participants in the afternoon "family" program have the requisite skills and access to be able to benefit from using an online/mobile-friendly system to book appointments (or even participate in the afternoon lottery), and would love to be able to leverage their phones to improve the process.

Individual guests are more of a mixed bag; some could make use of a mobile phone; others a kiosk; and yet others would not be well served by either.

The equity question is also a central one with which St. Anthony's must grapple. While there are clearly equity issues now (e.g. a mother with a job that ends before 2pm and a teenager is much more capable of returning several times in a row to get an appointment than a mother with two small children and/or an afternoon job; someone with a case worker can get something scheduled in a way someone without one can't), the "digital divide" is a very real, very visible complication. Depending on the depth of these concerns it may be desirable to: retain the system as-is; move completely to an online/kiosk system and train

guest; or move to some hybrid system where some spots are reserved for online users and others for more “traditional” participants. Each of these approaches comes with its own benefits and drawbacks.

One key concern before interviews began was fraud and authentication: How can we build a system that can verify people’s identities without requiring significant amounts of Personally Identifiable Information (PII), or usernames/passwords, that many guests may not be able to reliably provide? This problem area seemed less insurmountable as interviews were conducted, however, as it became increasingly clear that nearly all guests can provide their full name and DoB, which given the current low levels of fraud seems sufficient for identification, though optionally allowing a PIN or password to guests wanting “extra security” may be worthwhile.

One other area of concern is the effect a new system might have on “no show” rates, which according to interviewees hover around 30-50%. This is of course a high number, made more so when considering that most appointments are “same day” (or booked just a few days out by a case worker). Offering the ability to schedule appointments remotely, even with text message reminders, will clearly reduce the effort required to make appointments and therefore could lead to higher no-show rates as guests lack the investment in the process. No penalties are currently in place for repeat no-shows, and future penalties seem highly unlikely, although a digital system could provide St. Anthony’s staff with significantly more data on which types of guests and appointments are most likely to show.