



Contract Services group helps ASWB members focus on regulation

What do you get when you combine 2,000 social work licensing applications, 500 exam pre-approval applications, and 1,900 continuing education audits? A very busy bunch of ASWB staffers in the Social Work Registry and Contract Services group.

A division of Member Services, this group began with the creation of the Social Work Registry in 2003. Two years later, ASWB was awarded a contract for license application processing for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Board of Registration of Social Workers. While the rest isn't exactly history, it is a story that illustrates ASWB's support of the social work regulatory community.

From that first contract, ASWB expanded its contract service offerings to include continuing education audits and, as of March, pre-approval of examination candidates for the Utah Social Work Licensing Board.

Nine years later, ASWB was again selected by the Massachusetts Board of Registration of Social Workers to provide application processing services and was awarded a 3-year contract with two 3-year renewal options.

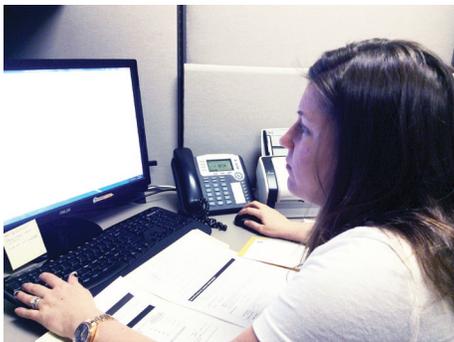
"We are delighted to continue working with Massachusetts," says Jennifer Henkel, LCSW,

Member Services senior manager. "We have grown together and we have continued to evolve. We are looking forward to taking their applications online, especially since the Commonwealth of Massachusetts is moving to an e-licensing system for all their professions."

Based in part on the Contract Services experience with online pre-approval applications for Utah, the new contract with Massachusetts includes plans for an online application, streamlining the process for the applicants and for the board. "It's time to get paperless, in terms of efficiency," says Henkel. "People want and expect to be able to apply for things online. It's good timing for us to create those solutions" for ASWB members.

Henkel points out that ASWB is uniquely equipped to provide these services for social work regulators. "We know what's important in social work regulation, so we can make sure that our systems flag what needs to be flagged."

"For Utah, we're projected to get 500 pre-approval applications per year," says Registry and Contract Services Supervisor Dave Ryczko. "To date, we have received 195 applications" in less than three months, he says. "The bulk of the



Registry and Contract Services Representative Brandy Gurgevich processes a licensing application for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

applications are going to be at graduation time,” he points out. Ryczko—and Utah board staff members—can check that number any time via the Web-based database that ASWB developed. Applicants complete a simple online form detailing their education and experience and attest to a series of statements about their fitness to practice. If their credentials don’t match Utah’s requirements, they are not approved for testing. Any required paper documents are scanned and uploaded to a secure server where they can be reviewed by Utah board staff members. Ryczko says this feature “confirms that boards are able to accept proof of education electronically. Paper is not a necessity.”

Additionally, ASWB staff can flag certain applications that are questionable. But for straightforward applicants, the process is fast, and the exam approval is sent directly to the candidate and ASWB’s Candidate Services Center (CSC).

Applicants in Massachusetts are impressed with ASWB’s timely service, Ryczko reports. “The turnaround time is favorable,” he says. Ryczko estimates that 70% of Massachusetts applications arrive complete and are processed in one pass, meaning that Ryczko’s staff can often generate an approval to the candidate the same day that the application is received. Once the approval is sent to the candidate and the CSC, the candidate can register for the exam right away. Applicants with problems—missing data, unclear responses—are contacted as soon as possible, and ASWB follows up with the applicant persistently until the application is complete.

Meanwhile, North Carolina, Louisiana, Maryland, and Massachusetts also use Contract Services to conduct continuing education audits. Audit services, like application and pre-approval processing, have been customized to reflect the needs of the regulatory agencies. ASWB staff contact social workers whose continuing education is being audited and follow up throughout the process, managing the paperwork and administrative details and reporting their findings to the board.

Ryczko also points out the expertise of his team. “Everyone has a strong customer service

background,” he says. Chanda Andes, Donna Edwards, and Brandy Gurgevich all moved from the Candidate Services Center to Contract Services, and Virginia Smoot, the most senior member of the team, transferred to Contract Services when the Registry was launched in 2003.

Henkel sees growth ahead for Ryczko’s team. “I want Member Services to embody the mutual respect between what ASWB does and can do, and what the boards do and need to do. ... [Services] are going to develop because of our partnership with the boards. We really want to support their needs. We want to create services that help them focus on regulation.”

Public protection from another angle

ASWB’s Social Work Registry makes applying for licensure in multiple states a much simpler process for social workers. With the expansion of technology in general and telehealth in particular, practitioners and their employers are finding that holding multiple licenses makes sense.

Online Care Network-American Well Systems, based in Boston, Mass., sees the value of the Social Work Registry. American Well employs five social workers to serve clients all over the country. The employer chose the Social Work Registry to collect the social workers’ credentials—from educational transcripts to supervision documentation—and assist in preparation of licensing applications for all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia.

By relying on the Registry, American Well also knows that the application packets will be complete before they get to the regulatory boards, and that each packet will be customized to meet the board’s criteria.

This process makes a lot of sense for American Well, because it simplifies the paperwork required for so many license applications. The process makes a lot of sense for regulatory boards, because the application packets prepared by the Social Work Registry will be customized to reflect the requirements in each jurisdiction. The process makes even more sense for ASWB, because it aligns with the association’s priorities for technology and practice.

For many years, ASWB has emphasized the need to make sure clients receiving services remotely are protected. In fact, the Model Social Work Practice Act specifies that social workers practicing remotely should be licensed in their own jurisdiction and in the jurisdiction of any of their remote clients. Thanks to the Social Work Registry, the social workers employed by American Well will be meeting that standard.