

## Data warehouse simplifies access to critical information for Foster Parents Plan

Commentary by Kelvin Cantafio,  
Chief Information Officer, Foster Parents Plan of Canada

---

### INDUSTRY

NON-PROFIT

---

### BUSINESS APPLICATION

DATA WAREHOUSING



Foster Parents Plan of Canada is a leading international child-focused development organization. A member of PLAN International, Foster Parents Plan gives Canadians the opportunity to sponsor a child and fund a variety of community-based programs in more than 40 developing countries. Over 90,000 Canadians currently sponsor more than 105,000 of the 1.2 million children worldwide who are supported by the international organization. Foster Parents Plan's efforts benefit children, their families and their communities in the neediest parts of the world. For more information about Foster Parents Plan, visit [www.fosterparentsplan.ca](http://www.fosterparentsplan.ca).

and manage activities with other PLAN offices worldwide. In 1996, Foster Parents Plan found itself at a turning point in its use of technology. Its donor data residing on an AS/400 Model F20 was difficult to access. With large volumes of data amassing within the Organization, it was critical to find an effective way for managers to access information.

"We were relying on programmers to write custom reports for all data analysis and reporting, which was a labor-intensive process," says Kelvin Cantafio, Chief Information Officer for Foster Parents Plan of Canada. "As a result, we had to deal with a large backlog of requests for information."

---

**"Because Transformation Server works reliably and is virtually transparent to end users, we have been able to maintain low operating and administration costs."**

---

### The Solution

In order to avoid overloading its programmers, the IT team selected DataMirror Transformation Server in 1996 to cleanse its donor data and create synchronization points to optimize analysis of the data for business managers using Microsoft Access and other front end tools.

### The Problem

Foster Parents Plan depends on reliable access to up-to-date information to measure the effectiveness of programs, keep track of donations and payment methods

"DataMirror Transformation Server certainly stood out as the best-of-breed," says Cantafio. "We first considered creating custom code, but then came across Transformation Server and realized there was no need to re-invent the wheel. Using the

DataMirror solution out-of-the-box simplified the process in that we did not have to make time-consuming programming changes to existing systems. It was also far more cost-effective than custom coding in terms of the initial application and ongoing maintenance."

As time evolved, however, there were limitations to using Microsoft Access. It was clear that Foster Parents Plan needed a more efficient computing environment. The IT team wanted to find a way that the existing AS/400 system would work together with a new NT system, providing managers and staff with easy access to critical business information. As a result, the Organization developed a SQL Server data warehouse on Microsoft Windows NT 4.0 with a core focus on data marts and business intelligence to provide a new level of knowledge management at Foster Parents Plan.

Today, Transformation Server is a key component of Foster Parents Plan's refinery layer. In 1999, the Organization upgraded to iSeries RISC. Foster Parents Plan now uses Transformation Server for intra-system iSeries replication on a nightly basis as well as to replicate data in real-time between its iSeries system and refinery input staging files. Once customized, iSeries refinery programs update the dimension and fact files and Transformation Server replicates the changes to corresponding target tables on Foster Parents Plan's SQL Server data warehouse.

After the refinery process has been completed, queries and reporting as well as OLAP analysis can be conducted on a number of data marts, enabled through Cognos Impromptu and PowerPlay.

## The Benefits

Over the last four years, Transformation Server has evolved to meet the current needs of Foster Parents Plan.

"We've watched Transformation Server grow from replicating only 20 percent of our key data to replicating more than 80 percent of it to our data warehouse environment," says Cantafio. "While replication used to be done on a monthly basis, Transformation Server now conducts replication nightly to provide a much more current view of the data. DataMirror has ensured that Transformation Server is continuously being improved to support the needs of its customers."

Foster Parents Plan's adoption of Transformation Server's real-time mirroring capabilities has allowed the Organization to generate up-to-date donor information for producing letters and other correspondence materials using Microsoft Word's Mail Merge capability.

"Before adopting Transformation Server's real-time capabilities, it would have taken one to two days for our IT staff to set up a new letter template to welcome new Foster Parents or to thank supporters," says Cantafio. "Today, users have the ability to set up their own Word template and use electronic signatures. This new

process is much more efficient as we have been able to streamline the process and reduce costs. With the DataMirror solution's real-time data capture, transform and flow (CTF) technology, we can efficiently do personalized printing in large batches as opposed to printing each letter individually."

## Conclusions

As a result of its innovative combination of best-of-breed and in-house solutions, Foster Parents Plan's data warehousing environment has received international acclaim from the world's most respected technology awards programs. A case study highlighting Foster Parents Plan's data warehousing solution is part of the Smithsonian Institute's permanent archives.

"Recognition of our knowledge management initiatives means a lot to us because, as a non-profit organization, we are constantly challenged to make maximum impact on minimum budget," says Cantafio. "Because Transformation Server works reliably and is virtually transparent to end users, we have been able to maintain low operating and administration costs. This means we can maximize our funds for projects in developing countries that make a lasting difference in the lives of children, their families and communities."



DataMirror software is available on-line at [datamirror.com](http://datamirror.com) or call 1-800-362-5955

**DataMirror**<sup>®</sup>  
Integrate your data. Anywhere. Anytime.