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**Customer Satisfaction of the Food Stamp Recertification Process in
Dillon County**

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Customer Satisfaction of the Food Stamp Recertification Process in Dillon County

Introduction

For years, the Food Stamp certification process for applicants and recipients required them to travel to the county office at least once a year for a face-to-face (office) interview in order for them to apply or continue to receive benefits. Being a rural county with limited resources, transportation is a barrier for most customers.

In an effort to meet the agency's goal to help people live better lives and serve our clients in a more efficient way, the county took advantage of a new recertification option introduced in October 2002 and started the recertification process by telephone. Since the start of the telephone recertification process, we have heard several responses from customers, positive and negative, regarding our new system. Therefore the question remains as to whether this new process has helped or hindered the recertification process.

The CPM project served as an opportunity to measure the level of customer satisfaction for Dillon County Food Stamp recipients who have used this process. It also serves as an opportunity to implement changes to improve service to our customers.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to develop and conduct a customer satisfaction survey of current Food Stamp recipients and the process that is used for recertification. The survey will serve as the county's assessment tool for measuring Food Stamp customer satisfaction of the telephone recertification process. The survey will also serve as a tool to continuously improve the overall process of serving the Food Stamp customers in Dillon county.

It has been a major concern of the wait period and the number of unnecessary trips that our customers make to the county office to handle business. In the past customers who came in for a face-to-face (office) interview usually had to wait in the lobby for a period of time before their interview appointment could be conducted (**Appendix A**). Being a county with limited resources, most of these clients depended upon someone else to bring them to their appointment. If they did not have someone to bring them, they would catch a ride with someone who may be going to town. In these situations, the customer often had to come to their appointment whenever transportation was available which caused them to arrive to their appointment early. With the implementation of the of the telephone recertification, it gave the county opportunity to minimize the number of trips to the office which would lessen the wait time and save the customer from making a trip to the office (**Appendix B**).

Information from the survey will provide the county with the customers' likes and dislikes.

The results of the survey will provide the county with information it needs in order to help better serve its customers. Information obtained from customers will help to target major concerns of the customers and implement these concerns into the improvement process.

What is Customer Satisfaction?

The interest of a customer lies in whether the quality of service provided will be improved or if it will solve their problems. Customer satisfaction is an issue that is dealt with in agencies and businesses of all kinds. Whether small or large, the success of an agency or business mainly depends on the satisfaction of its customers. Customers see a business as being there to provide for and service their needs (Waters, 1998). Therefore, customer satisfaction is essential because people tend to stick with who or what they are satisfied (Roth, 1998).

Customer satisfaction can be defined as a post consumption evaluative judgment concerning a product or a service (Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998). Past research indicates that many customers state that few things are as important to them as good service. Good customer service is as individual as the customer. There are many issues in providing quality service. Some customers require constant attention while others may want to just be served in a quiet manner. Although the food stamp customers major service is handled by the case manager, customer service begins with the receptionist when the customer walks through the door. The customer can be provided top service by the case manager, but if the receptionist is slow in serving the client, the whole experience is ruined.

Procedure

The study was described as being concerned with the degree of customer satisfaction with the telephone recertification process versus the face-to-face. With this, Food Stamp only customers, at random, were asked to complete a survey about the overall satisfaction of the telephone recertification process.

Respondents for the survey were chosen from the cases that were due for review in that particular month as well as participants who were seen in the office that previously had a face to face and telephone interview.

Each month the Food Stamp case managers are required to do a recertification interview on those clients in their caseload whose certification is ending. These clients are mailed an appointment date and a recertification interview packet. This packet consist of a checklist, application, consent form, Food Stamp referral form, benefit group form, wage statement and other forms to determine eligibility. These forms must be completed by the proper persons and returned to the county office prior to the day and / or time the client is to be interviewed. Eighty percent of the customers returned their packets timely.

When these packets are returned, they are routed to the case manager. The case manager contacts the client at the number provided in their file.

If necessary, at the end of the interview the casemananger gives the client a checklist of pending information that is needed in order for their case to be processed.

After the interview has been completed, the case manager conducts the survey by telephone. Clients are informed that the survey is for information only and that it will not affect their benefits. Those customers surveyed by telephone results were documented by the case manager who conducted the survey. Surveys indicated customer's education level, transportation availability, difficulty level of completing the recertification interview packets with additional comments and interview preference. Questions were asked on the difficulty level of the forms in the packet and also the preference of interview. The case manager forwards the survey sheet to the supervisor where responses will be tallied to obtain an overall percentage.

What Surrounding Counties Are Doing

In order to get an idea of how many counties in the surrounding area are conducting telephone recertifications, an e mail was sent to the Food Stamp supervisors in 7 of the surrounding counties. The response that was received from most of the counties was that the majority of them are still doing the face-to-face (office) recertification with the exception of elderly and / or disabled households. Reasons for continuing with this process was concerns of the case manager and supervisors. A few of their concerns were that of positive identification of who they were conducting the interview and that of body language. Many case managers state that they can pick up on questionable information through body language of the client.

This can only be obtained through a face-to-face interview.

Even though they have concerns regarding the telephone recertification, one county in the surrounding area does use the telephone interview. Their way of dealing with the concerns that they have is to alternate the type interview that is conducted each year. By alternating the type interview, they will insure face-to-face contact every 2 years.

Survey Results

Survey participation was very high. Of the 300 customers that were scheduled to be recertified within the last 2 months, over 50 percent of them participated in the survey.

As stated, the survey (**Appendix C**) consisted of 5 questions, 2 of which were demographic, which focused on difficulty of forms, comprehension of forms, preference of interview, transportation availability and education level. The response to these questions are as follows:

Question 1 - Difficulty of Forms (Appendix D) : 84.4 percent responded as Not Difficult
13.5 percent responded as Somewhat
2.1 percent responded as Very Difficult

Question 3 - Interview Preference (Appendix E): 87.9 percent responded to Telephone
9.2 percent responded to Face to Face
2.8 percent responded to Either

Higher percentages of educational level of customers surveyed range between 10th through 12th grade (**Appendix G**).

As part of the procedure, the case managers were also surveyed (**Appendix H**). Their role in the process as well as their thoughts and ideas play a critical part in the recertification process.

They were questioned on the response and timeliness of customers returning packets, forms, processing time and overall process of the telephone recertification versus the face-to face (office). Their results are as follows:

- Question 1 (Appendix I):** 100% state that they get a quicker interview response. Most customers meet their first appointment by telephone versus face-to-face.
- Question 2 (Appendix J):** 80% state that they receive interview packets timely.
- Question 3 (Appendix K):** 80% state most additional pending forms come back correct.
- Question 4 (Appendix L):** 80% state that they are able to complete recertification faster with the face to face interview.
- Question 5 (Appendix M):** 20% state they had fewer claims doing face-to-face interviews.
- Question 6 (Appendix N):** 100% state overall the telephone interview was a more convenient and better process.

Recommendations

While some insight to customer satisfaction of the telephone recertification process may have been gained through this study, there are some weakness that exist. First, the sample used represents a small percentage of the Food Stamp customers in Dillon county.

By using a larger sample over a longer period of time, a better picture of customer satisfaction would be represented. Secondly, the study does not represent food stamp customers that receive monetary assistance through TANF.

These customers may be able to provide some input regarding the interview process in which it helps or hinders them with their requirements in order to receive benefits.

The county will continue to survey its customers, at random, regarding the telephone interview. These surveys will be evaluated and adjustments to the process will be implemented as needed in order to serve our customers in a more efficient manner.

Conclusions

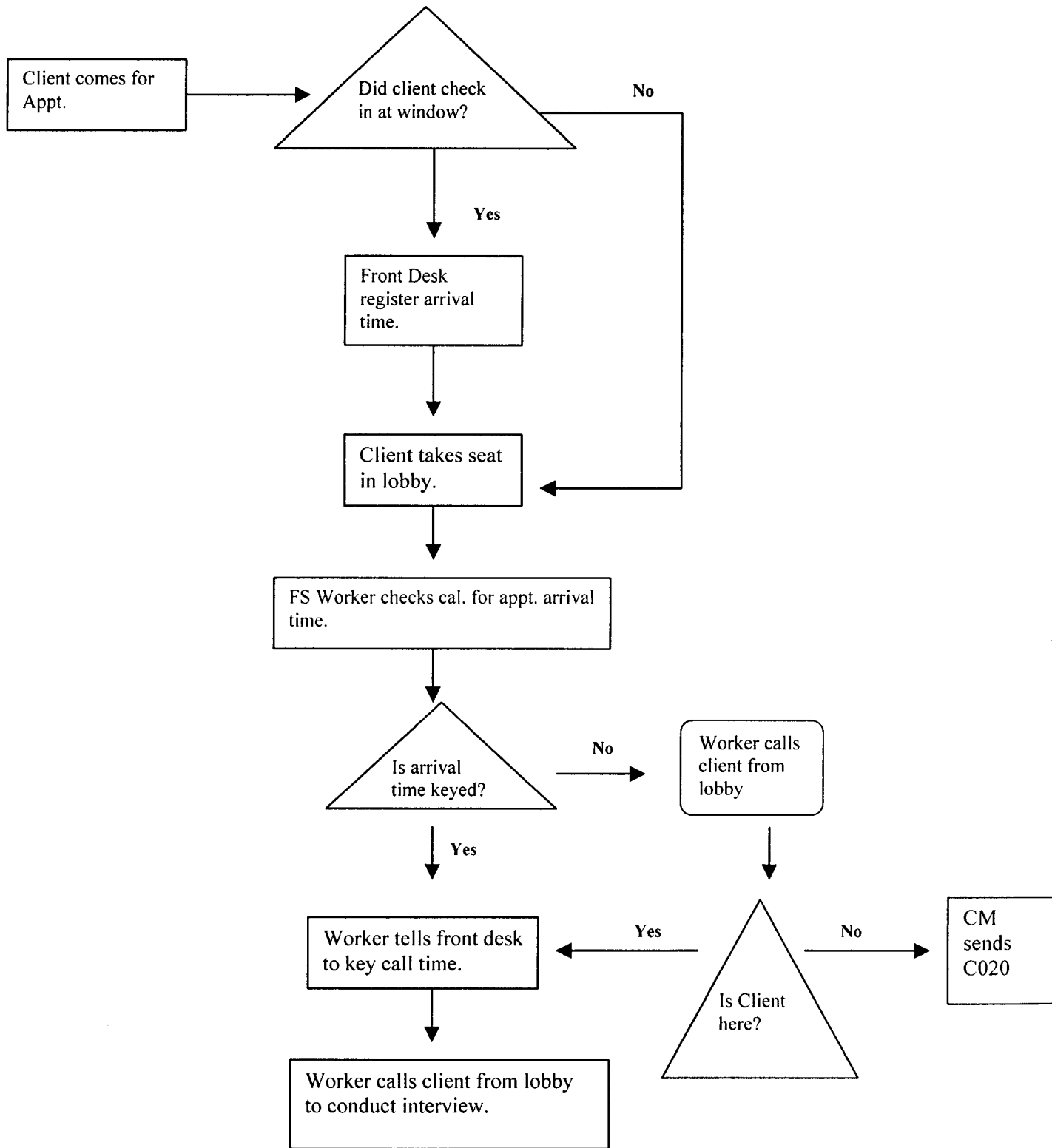
Initially, there was skepticism with the Food Stamp customers and case managers regarding the telephone recertification process. Both parties were uncomfortable with the process and very hesitant with adapting to the change.

As the process evolved, food stamp customers as well as case managers begin to benefit from the advantages of the telephone recertification process

The food stamp customers without transportation were able to meet appointments without having the burden of finding transportation or having to reschedule their appointment. Food stamp customers who were employed did not have to miss work but could meet their interview while at work during their break.

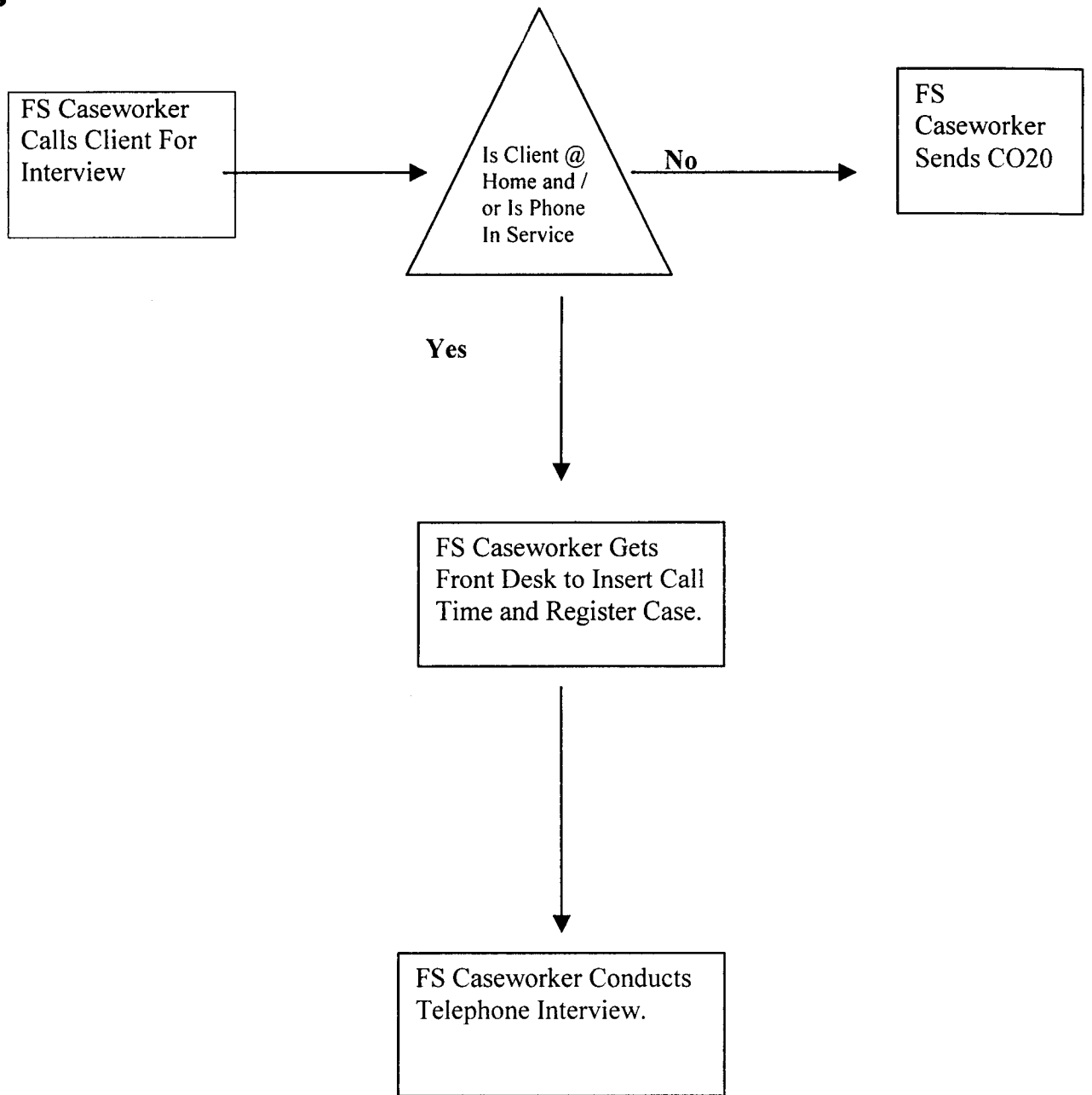
Case managers spent less time interviewing because food stamp customers were having to reschedule appointments less. Telephone interviews were not as long which allowed more time to process cases and work on other pending information in their caseloads.

Overall, the telephone recertification process has been an advantage to the food stamp customer and case manager. Both are able to save on time and produce more.



**FS Application and Recertification
Face-to-Face Interview Process**

Appendix B



**FS Application and Recertification
Telephone Interview Process**

Appendix C

FS Client Survey Telephone Interview vs. Face to Face Interview

1. How difficult was it to complete the forms in the packet that were mailed to you without a case manager's assistance?

Not Difficult

Somewhat Difficult

Very Difficult

2. What was the hardest part / form(s) to understand?

3. What type interview do you prefer?

Telephone

Face to Face

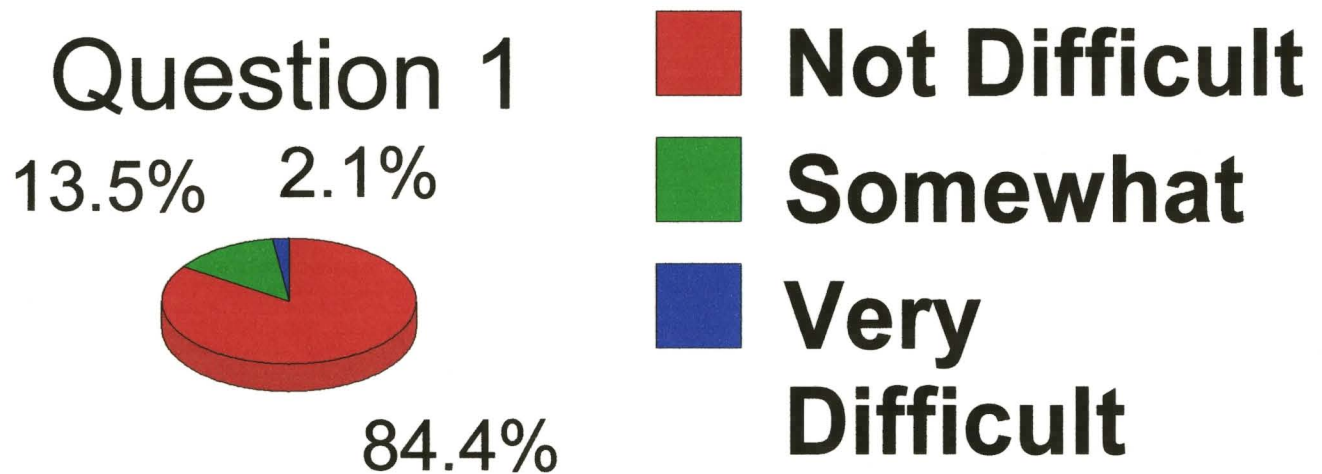
Why _____

4. Do you have transportation? Yes No

5. What is your level of education? _____

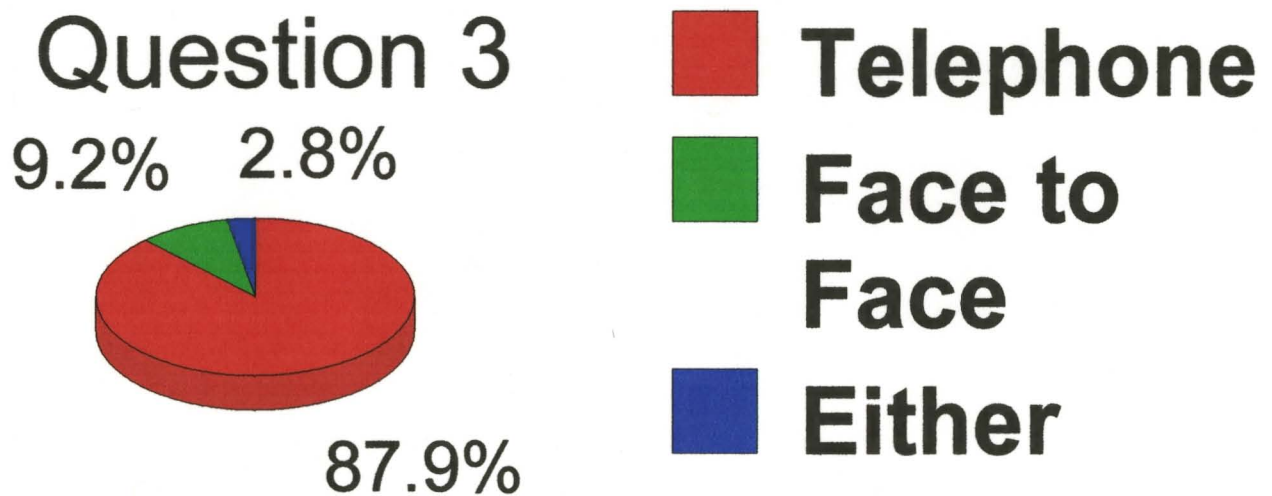
Appendix D

FS Survey



Appendix E

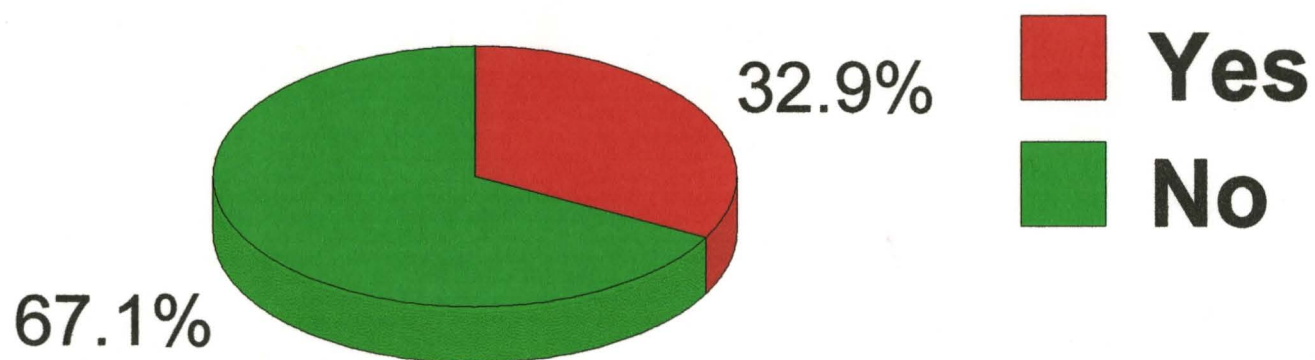
FS Survey



Appendix F

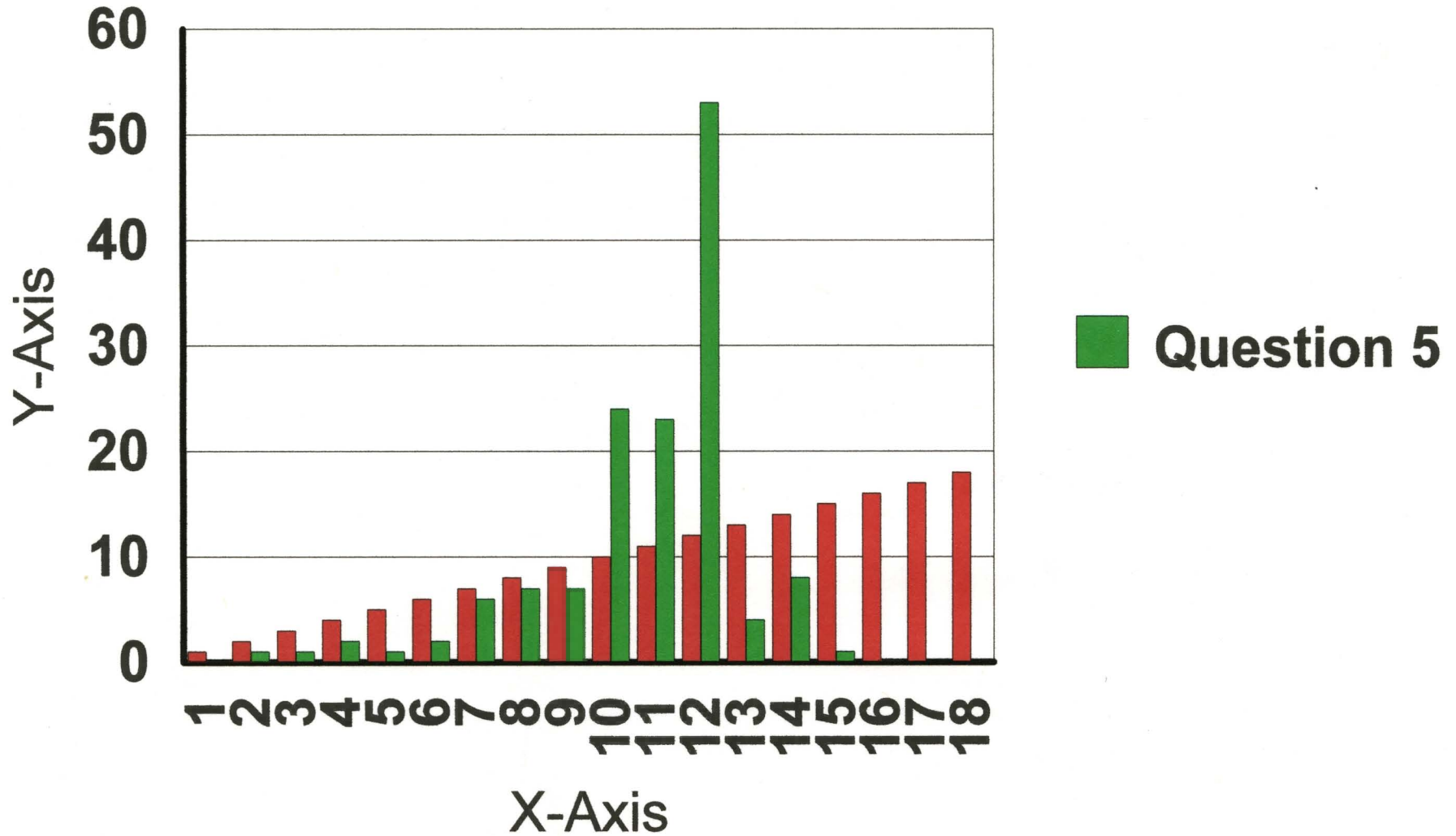
FS Survey

Question 4



Appendix G

FS Survey



Appendix H

Customer Satisfaction of the FS Application / Recertification Process in Dillon County Survey (Case manager)

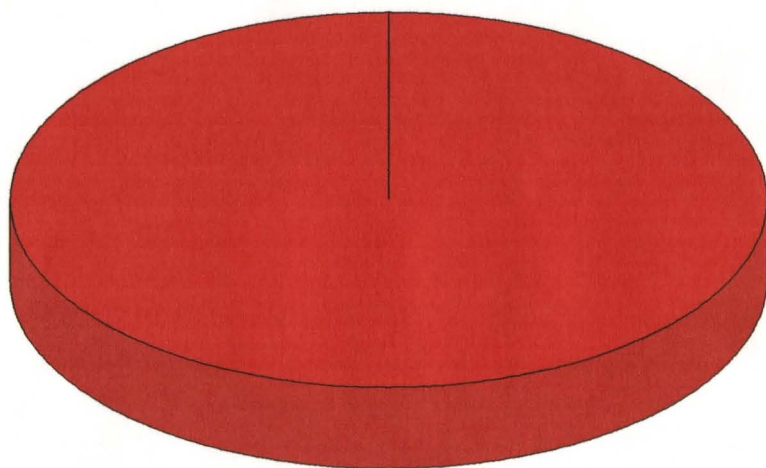
Please circle "Yes" or "No" for each question.

- | | | |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. Most customers meet their first appointment with the telephone interview vs. face-to-face interview. | Yes | No |
| 2. My customers return their telephone interview packet in a timely manner. | Yes | No |
| 3. Most additional pending forms that are sent to telephone interview customers come back completed correctly. | Yes | No |
| 4. I am able to complete my recerts / applications in a more expedient manner since the telephone interview process began. | Yes | No |
| 5. I had fewer claims doing face to face interviews. | Yes | No |
| 6. Overall the telephone interview process has been a better / more convenient process than the face-to-face. | Yes | No |

Appendix I

CM Survey

Question 1



100.0%

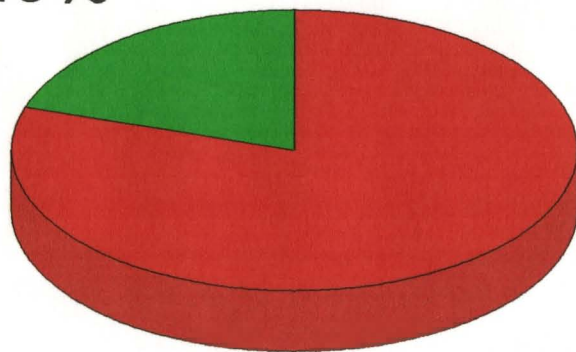


Appendix J

CM Survey

Question 2

20.0%



Yes

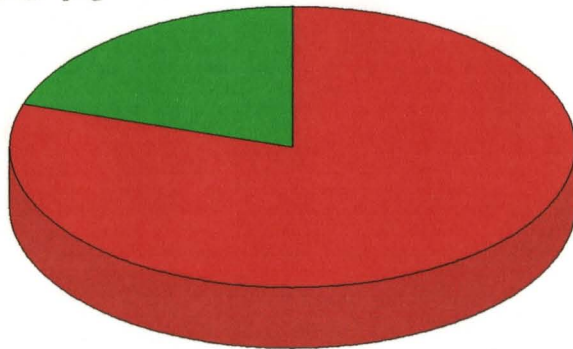
No

Appendix K

CM Survey

Question 3

20.0%



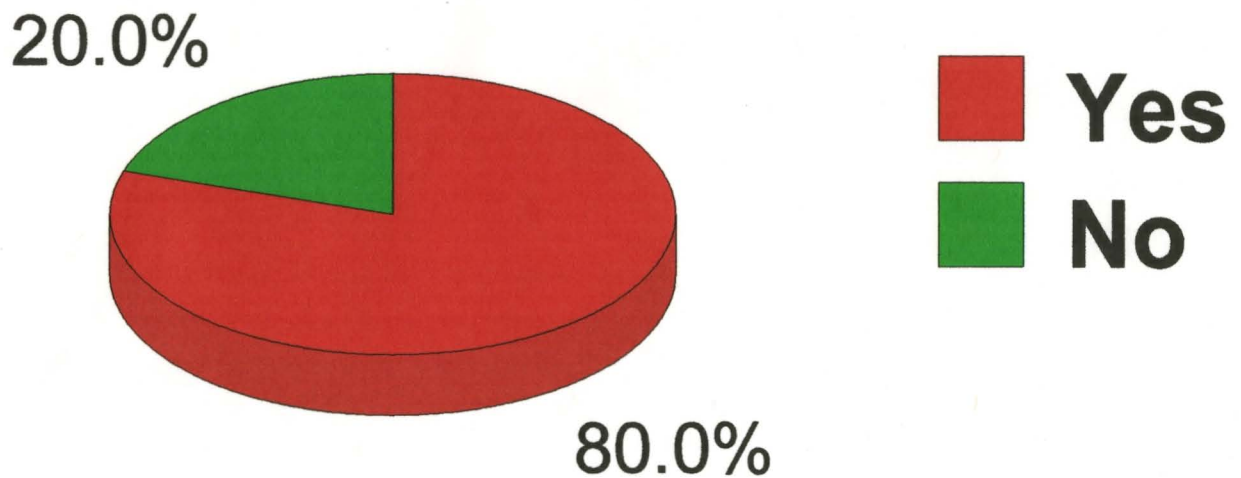
80.0%



Appendix L

CM Survey

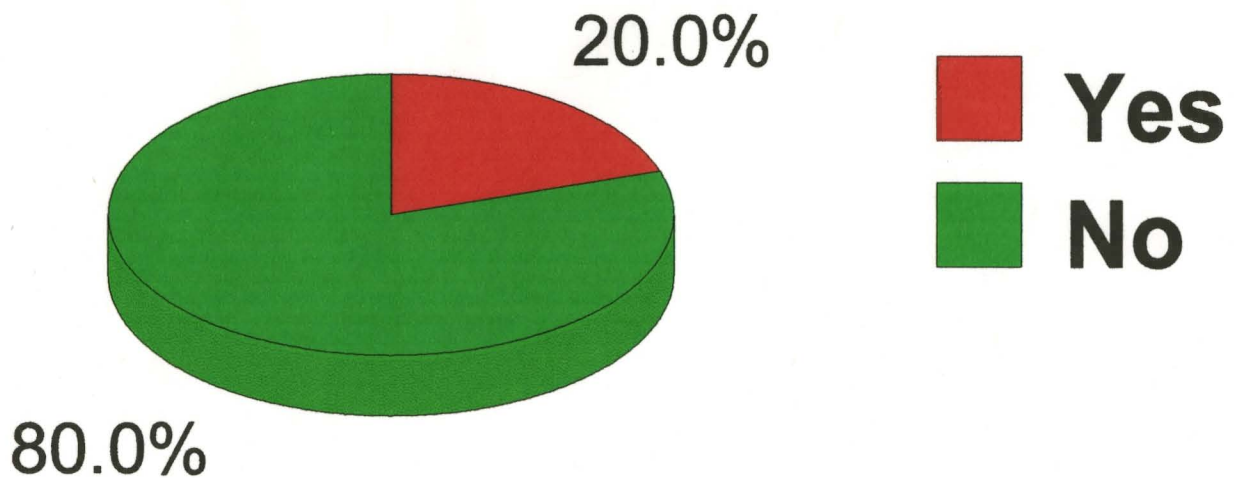
Question 4



Appendix M

CM Survey

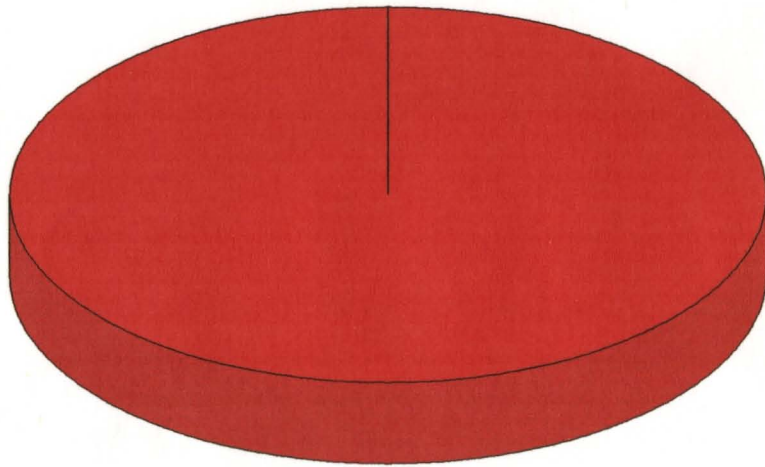
Question 5



Appendix N

CM Survey

Question 6



100.0%



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