DCSS

Title: Georgia Division of Child Support Services Mobile App

Category: Digital Government — Government to Citizen

State: Georgia

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Child Support Services (DCSS), launched a new child support mobile application, GA DCSS Mobile App, in September 2016 to assist customers with making child support payments on their mobile devices. In addition, the app offers a range of other self-service options. It allows customers to review their payment history; view scheduled appointments, case activities and details of child support orders; chat with a DCSS representative; and receive notifications and alerts about important information regarding their cases. The document and signature capture features allow customers to provide necessary signatures and documents without the inconvenience of visiting a child support office.

Georgia is the first state in the nation to make a full-service child support mobile app available to customers.

The app is providing significant relief to customers by offering secure access to their child support case on mobile devices, and it enables DCSS to enhance high-volume, mission-critical services. In addition, the new payment medium is resulting in the recovery of more support payments and increasing federal incentive dollars to the state.

Since the launch of the GA DCSS Mobile App, the DCSS Customer Contact Center continues to experience a reduction in call volumes, and local child support offices are seeing fewer customer visits. As a result, DCSS staff is able to focus more attention on case management functions and thereby strengthen services to Georgia's families.

The DHS Office of Information Technology (OIT) developed the app in-house and worked closely with other state agencies whose services and functions often overlap with DCSS. The technical team also collaborated with the GeorgiaGov Interactive team at the Georgia Technology Authority, which tested the app's functionality and recommended changes to make it easy to use and accessible for people with a range of disabilities.

The GA DCSS Mobile App is elevating DCSS' operational effectiveness by enhancing the availability of automated services and providing convenient options for customer interactions.

CONCEPT

The Georgia Department of Human Services (DHS), Division of Child Support Services (DCSS), needed an innovative approach to increase self-sufficiency for customers, as well as child support collections. The department also sought to reduce the level of walk-in traffic at local child support offices. As technology evolves, DCSS finds it prudent to capitalize on technological enhancements by leveraging mobile devices, especially smartphones.

DCSS currently manages about 400,000 child support cases and collects approximately $720 million in child support payments each year.

The child support web portal provides some online services, such as the ability to make payments. The website is among 78 websites hosted on Georgia's enterprise web-publishing platform, which is managed by GeorgiaGov Interactive, and it is accessed on mobile devices at a higher rate than any other website on the platform. However, the child support web portal is not mobile friendly. By developing the GA DCSS Mobile App, the new child support mobile app, DCSS sought to make it easier to access services and information on mobile devices and to expand the availability of mobile services to more customers.

The DCSS Customer Contact Center receives more than one million calls each year, which clearly documents the need to offer more convenient self-service options to custodial and noncustodial parents.

The DHS Office of Information Technology (OIT) developed the GA DCSS Mobile App as a hybrid using the IBM MobileFirst™ Platform Foundation (MobileFirst) as its base. Hybrid apps combine the power of native apps and web apps to realize the benefits of both, and are easier to scale to a variety of platforms and operating systems. The ability to build once and deploy to all platforms simplifies support and maintenance, and hybrid apps are the most cost-effective way to build optimal mobile apps.

MobileFirst enabled OIT to design, develop, test, deploy, distribute, analyze and manage a portfolio of cross-platform mobile apps on a range of iOS and Android devices.

The project was initially intended for an outside vendor, but after multiple demonstrations of vendor prototypes, division leaders were not satisfied. OIT was convinced it could provide a better solution internally. OIT developed a working prototype and presented it to Georgia DCSS leaders. OIT's solution better achieved DCSS' goals, and at significantly lower cost. It cost about $500,000 to develop the app in-house, compared to estimates of $1.5 million from some outside vendors.

With limited consulting assistance and guidance from the product vendor group, OIT rolled out a finished product in less than 12 months.

SIGNIFICANCE

The child support website is the most frequently visited of all of the websites hosted on Georgia's enterprise web-publishing platform. Despite DCSS' large and diverse customer base, only a small portion – about 3,000 – access the website each month using a desktop computer. Although the website is primarily accessed on mobile devices, its design is not optimized for mobile devices. Engaging with customers on the platform they primarily use and providing them with easy access to critical services and information increases not only customer service, but also compliance with child support orders.

In addition to making child support payments, the GA DCSS Mobile App allows customers to review their payment history; view scheduled appointments, case activities and details of child support orders; chat with a DCSS representative; and receive notifications and alerts about important information regarding their cases. The document and signature capture features allow customers to provide necessary signatures and documents without the inconvenience of visiting a child support office.

Developing the GA DCSS Mobile App called for collaboration with 40 other state agencies whose services and functions often overlap with DCSS. One example involved the Georgia Department of Driver Services (DDS). Falling behind in child support payments could result in the suspension of a noncustodial parent's driver's license. DCSS' mobile app provides information about child support issues affecting driver's licenses, and it links to DDS webpages with instructions for addressing such issues. The linkage is another means of providing customers with vital information and of collecting support payments for Georgia's children.
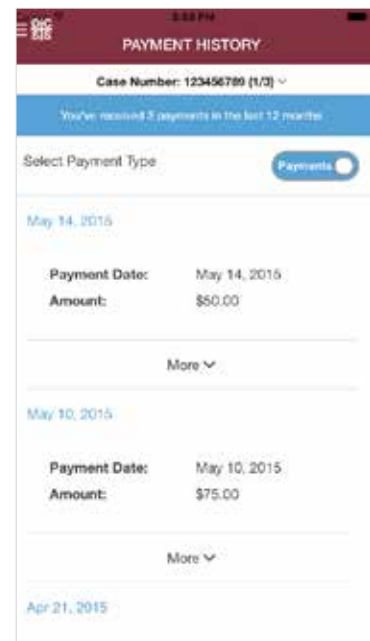
The DHS technical team also collaborated with the GeorgiaGov Interactive team at the Georgia Technology Authority, which helped ensure the GA DCSS Mobile App's compliance with best practices in mobile design. GeorgiaGov Interactive conducted heuristic tests and advised DCSS about changes to make the app easier to use and more accessible for people with a range of disabilities. The team also made sure the app's branding complied with the state's enterprise standards.

The technical team engaged with numerous internal DHS offices and work groups, including:

- Commissioner's Office and steering and governance committees to ensure state regulations were properly followed.

- Office of Legislative Affairs and Communications to ensure compliance with state laws and to coordinate public awareness and distribution of the app.

- Office of Procurement and Contracts to ensure compliance with standardized processes in obtaining the tools necessary to develop the app.

IMPACT

The GA DCSS Mobile App is providing significant relief to both customers and state workers by serving as an economic and timesaving alternative for accessing information about child support cases.

Through January 2017, more than 34,000 customers were actively using the app. Many of the services and information provided through the app were previously available only by visiting a local child support office or contacting the DCSS Customer Contact Center. The center receives one million calls each year, but from the time the app became available in September 2016 through December 2016, call volumes declined by 13 percent. Reduced call volumes are allowing state workers to focus more attention on case management.

Meanwhile, more than 130,000 notifications have been sent through the app's push notification feature, including payment reminders, court date reminders and enforcement actions.
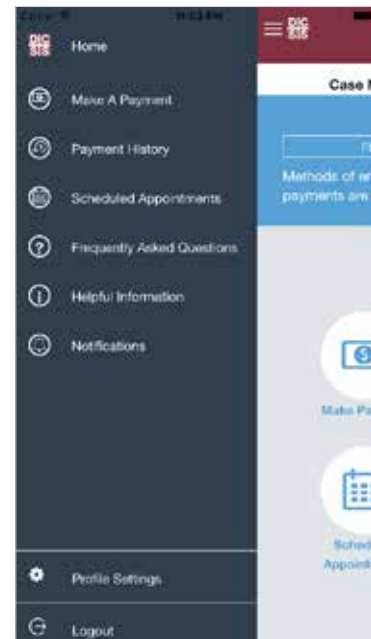
The push notification feature for payment reminders is boosting child support payments. From September 2016 through November 2016, credit card payments increased more than seven percent. Increased payments are a high priority for DCSS since they provide necessary financial support for Georgia's children. DCSS currently receives 60 percent of its child support payments through income withholdings in which payments are deducted from the noncustodial parent's paycheck. The GA DCSS Mobile App's payment feature provides an easier payment method for noncustodial parents who do not participate in income withholding.

With the GA DCSS Mobile App launch, DCSS embraced an innovative approach to increasing customers' self-sufficiency.

Given the challenges some customers experience in conducting child support business during standard office hours, the benefits of extending the availability of high-volume, mission-critical services and information through technology during nontraditional hours are readily apparent.