Illinois DCFS A.S.K. Mobile App

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) staff realized a real need for the Statewide Automated Child Welfare System (SACWIS) to be made available via a mobile solution. The end goal was to provide DCFS investigators and case workers with a mobile app solution that provides employees with the ability to retrieve case data and enter data remotely. This new application was designed to provide DCFS investigators and case workers with a solution to support the following benefit elements; child safety, worker safety, security, efficiency and data quality. The official mobile app named "Always Stay Konnected" (A.S.K.) and iPhone deployment rollout was August 2016 thru January 2017 to approximately 930 DCFS front line staff, including investigators and caseworkers. Since that time, approximately 1,000 DCFS investigators and case workers are utilizing A.S.K. to fulfill their roles and support the citizens of Illinois they serve daily.

Project Narrative: CONCEPT

Background

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) staff and contracted service agencies traditionally access the Statewide Automated Child Welfare System (SACWIS) case management system via laptop devices. While these devices have the capability to connect remotely via Citrix and Virtual Private Network (VPN), they were not as convenient as today's directly connected mobile devices, such as smart phones and tablets. This direct connectivity was identified as a need for a multitude of reasons, some of which are enumerated in the "Benefits/Value" below.

Approach

In January 2016, DCFS chose to pilot a thin, connected-only mobile app for three months prior to a full statewide rollout. The intent of the pilot was to deploy a few key features to a small number of investigators and caseworkers across DCFS and Purchase of Service (POS) agencies in order to provide adequate feedback on the viability of this type of app. For purposes of timeliness and manageability, the minimum feature set focused on note creation and photo upload. The pilot team was limited to 40 participants. Version 1.0 app was limited to iOS devices.*
Version 2.0 was released in April 2017, one year after pilot completion, and featured improved UX/UI and Android compatibility.

Target Users

The target users for this application are DCFS investigators and case workers, as well as external, private agency caseworkers.

Initial Scope

1. **Real-time integration with SACWIS**
2. **GPS capture on all photo upload and data entry**
3. **Talk-to-text**
4. **Photo upload**
   The user has the ability to capture and upload photos directly to SACWIS via the mobile device.
5. **Case note entry and retrieval**
   The user has the ability to enter case notes directly to the SACWIS system and view and edit the last three months of notes.

At the pilot's conclusion on April 26, 2016, a decision was made to deploy the version 1.0 pilot case access app to 1000 DCFS investigative and casework staff on DCFS-issued iPhone 6S+'s. Mobile app and iPhone deployment started in August 2016 and completed in January 2017.   While staff began using the mobile app, ongoing customer development and analytics revealed that the app was being used 70 percent of the time to retrieve case data and 30 percent to enter mobile data.

The mobile team pivoted to building data retrieval features that provided the most value to investigative and casework staff while working mobile. In tandem, the app was refactored to support necessary feature improvements for photo upload, as well as Android compatibility for future external private agency staff.

The mobile team continues to deliver value in regular two-week sprints using agile scrum methodology. In-house, iterative development paired with customer development remains a successful approach and is still the preferred process.

Benefits/Value

Child Safety
It is a constant struggle to retain updated photos of our children. In the case of an emergency or missing child, an updated photo is critical to ensure a safe and timely resolution. A mobile app increases the efficiency and convenience of taking and uploading a new photo when the child is regularly visited by the case worker.

Worker Safety
The native iOS 11 emergency SOS feature coupled with workers having convenient access to tools like FaceTime provide added layers of communication and alerts if a worker finds him/herself in an unsafe situation.

Security
Before the app, investigators and case workers used digital cameras to take investigation and youth in care photos to upload to the SACWIS system. Those pictures were not secured on camera SIM cards and were sometimes deleted before being uploaded. That technology didn't allow for photo encryption. In the event of a lost or stolen camera, there was no photo data security. The mobile app allows the investigator or caseworker to take a picture and immediately upload it to SACWIS in a secure manner. In addition, there is a photo gallery feature that allows investigators to store encrypted photos within the app until it's convenient to upload the photos. These conveniences have greatly reduced the use of personal devices for this function and allowed our agency to stay in compliance with security policies.

Efficiency
The features on the mobile app ensure that critical case information is entered into the system faster and more conveniently than logging into a laptop with an air card. Many of the entities providing these services do not have laptops equipped with air cards, so they have to wait until they get back to the office to enter the data. The app saves time and travel by allowing mobile entry of these key data elements. Investigators have convenient access to new assignment intake summaries, client demographic and contact information and prior history without having to come back to the office to pick up initiation reports or call office support staff.

Data Quality
Timely data entry is vital to *quality* data. This mobile app allows the investigator or caseworker to enter data at the time they acquire the information, rather than waiting until they are in a location where a laptop can be used, or even worse, when they return to the office.

1. **Multi-photo upload for investigators**
   Investigators can take multiple photos in quick succession to expedite their forensic data collection
2. **Person Search and Person Details**
   Client information retrieval feature including demographics and contact information, prior history, legal and placement details
3. **App Photo Gallery**
   The investigator can store photos in a secure, encrypted manner until a convenient time to upload
4. **Note Recovery**
   The user has the ability to recover the last note if the save process is interrupted.
5. **Supporting designee functionality**
   Staff can act as other staff when designated to access additional information to support after hours work and job sharing duties
6. **Supporting management and legal roles**
   Area Administrators, Regional Administrators, Immersion Site Directors and Department Attorneys will have the ability to log into the app and retrieve important person and case data.

SIGNIFICANCE & IMPACT

The Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Always Stay Konnected (A.S.K.) mobile app project has several layers of significance.

1. **Customer-centric development**
   - Identify "customer" pain points and build mobile solutions to resolve them
   - Focus on the user experience (UX) to create positive technology experience. Social work is a high stress, high burnout occupation. They are low tech consumers that need simple yet impactful solutions.
   - Recognize state government employees as **customers** (usage target market vs. purchase target market).
   - Understand the value of lean development practices and integrate key practices with agile development to conserve resources while delivering customer value.
   - Continue paired product and customer development to "build a successful customer" rather than solely focusing on the product.
2. **Agile and Lean**
   - Agile is an effective methodology to maintain customer engagement and increase product adoption over time
     - Two week sprint deliverables
     - Customer release demos
     - Usability testing

- Customers are pleased when requested features are available in the app within weeks or a few months vs. waiting months and years for previous project deliverables.
- Lean concepts encourage a minimum viable product (MVP) mindset in order to Build > Measure > Learn and pivot when necessary. Because we implemented actionable metrics and data analytics at the onset of product development, we were able to quickly identify customer behavior and make data informed decisions.

3. **Mobile-First Mentality**
   - DCFS is the first state government agency in Illinois to create and deploy a large-scale enterprise mobile app for internal and external staff.
   - By scaling the mobile app to 1K+ external staff using external devices (BYOD), we are trailblazers in the Illinois state government Mobile Application Management (MAM) arena.
   - Our project is driving improved mobility governance and state policies to better support external mobile partners.

Measurable change that makes state government better:

- A.S.K. is an optional tool, given to users to augment the primary system of record, and consistently sees 250 to 300 unique daily visitors with approximately 70 percent of the total user population utilizing the application at least once each month
- Customers report a marked increase in productivity with instant access to case, investigation, historical and person demographics giving them the ability to make faster and more informed decisions by having access to this critical information
- Across the 160,000+ contact notes entered in a single month, users are entering their notes on average 10 percent faster than before the introduction of the mobile app leading to critical information getting into the hands of decision makers much sooner
- The number of notes entered in the system on the same day of contact increased from 55 percent to 88 percent of the total number of notes entered each month