



2018 Arizona NASCIO Award Nomination

Arizona Department of Child Safety Mobile Solution

Category: Digital Government: Government to Citizen

Nomination Submitted by:

Linda Jewell, Chief Information Officer (CIO)
Arizona Department of Child Safety
Linda.Jewell@azdcs.gov
602-427-7265

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Contact Information:

Cynthia Weiss, Director of Communications
Arizona Department of Child Safety
cynthia.weiss@azdcs.gov
602-255-2530

Nomination Contributor:

Leah Walling, Executive Vice President of Global Marketing
Diona
(408) 761-3862
leah.walling@diona.com



Executive Summary

Arizona Department of Child Safety (AZDCS) is currently operating on a 20-year-old child welfare information system (CHILDS). As a result, valuable time that could be spent by caseworkers engaging families is instead spent navigating a cumbersome data system of yesteryear. AZDCS took an innovative approach to digital transformation by deploying a “mobile first” strategy, allowing over 1,000 caseworkers to adopt current mobile technology into their practice today and access real-time data and information in the field, despite the limitations of CHILDS. This has a big impact on thousands of families statewide, especially for 15,000+ youth in state care that must be seen at least monthly by their caseworker.

Concept

AZDCS implemented a mobile solution that extends their child welfare information system (CHILDS) and delivers real-time data directly into the field to worker's tablet devices. The mobile solution gives caseworkers access to powerful agency systems—anytime, anywhere and is enabled by a cloud-based platform that is secure, robust, scalable, and reliable. The solution provides mobile applications for both case management and investigations and is accessible even when no internet connection is available.

AZDCS found that “portability” via laptops is not “mobility.” Though workers had laptops, there were still barriers to worker productivity due to gaps in functionality, usability, accessibility, connectivity, and security.

With the mobile solution, workers have necessary functionality, applications, and connectivity on an intuitive, easy-to-use tablet device so they can effectively and productively engage with children and families in the field. Workers can download case files, information, appointments, maps, GPS, communications, notes, historical data, and audio and video recordings, and gather client input such as interviews, electronic signatures, documents, photos.

Security features like data encryption, Mobile Device Management, and the ability to instantly “brick” or erase a lost or stolen device ensure children and family data is secure and protected. The project began in May 2017, with the pilot going live July 1, 2017, the first phase release September 2, 2017, and the second phase release December 15, 2017.

AZDCS staff conduct their work on a statewide basis so the ability to perform field work and face-to-face interviews with parents and children is invaluable. Modern case management should meet the needs of an ever-mobile population by providing the means for DCS staff to conduct their work wherever they are. The mobile solution provides AZDCS staff with access to information contained in the case management system while they are away from the office serving children and families. The mobile solution includes the ability to download case information to a mobile device, synchronize calendar information, leverage mobile tools and applications such as mapping software, send communications, and perform business functions without returning to the office. Child safety specialists are able to enter information at the point of collection, improving its reliability and validity.

Case management staff often have 40 children on their caseload. With user-centered design and functions such as “Calendar,” they know instantly where they need be; “Tasks” help them quickly create lists of follow-up actions; and “Case Notes” has driven nearly full staff usage for inputting home visit case notes. Actions can be taken immediately, and all notes and activities are synced back to CHILDS.

Government agencies must be willing to take risks and find opportunities to create capacity for their workers. This is why AZDCS implemented a “mobile first” strategy. AZDCS is working to make obsolete all paper processes, give investigators access to all forms electronically, and enable clients with electronic signatures. AZDCS’ goals are to better serve their workers and ensure more clients get the help they need. With their new mobile solution, they are well on their way to realizing this goal.

What’s innovative for some may seem rudimentary for others. Not so with AZDCS. With a 20-year-old child welfare information system, mobile technology and applications seemed like a pipedream. Yet under the leadership of Jewell, the department was able to bring technical innovation into the field through a quick, “mobile first” approach. AZDCS implemented a mobile solution that extended data and core functionality from the CHILDS system into the hands of caseworkers through mobile devices. What “mobility first” translates to is that AZDCS approached the problem from an “agile” philosophy. Rather than developing a massive “waterfall” development project that might take years to implement—at significantly greater cost—AZDCS used the innovations of Agile Development to implement its solution quickly.

Solution requirements were based on user-centered feedback and design. The cross-functional team conducted hours of interviews with caseworkers to deeply understand the core requirements for the solution. Experts in mobile business process, design, development, change management, and implementation were engaged to build a mobile solution that delivered functionality that was intuitive, easy-to-use, and solved the problems vital to caseworkers, children, and families. With the right mobile solution on tablet devices, caseworkers can now meet with more clients, interact with children and families at a deeper and more informed level unimpeded by technical barriers, spend less time copying and inputting notes and documents into CHILDS, and respond immediately to the concerns of foster children and parents with accurate information and data at their fingertips. One foster parent in particular described how much faster and intimate the experience was with the caseworker who was using their new tablet with the mobile solution.

The protection of personal data and information has reached an unprecedented level today. Consider for a moment a caseworker driving to an appointment with a foster child and her parents. On the passenger seat of the caseworker’s car is a box filled with paper files containing historical information about all the children and parents she will meet with that day – personal information, social security numbers, addresses, phone numbers, email addresses, pending investigations, potential abuse allegations, juvenile infractions. Any of these could be contained within a child’s or parent’s file. If this box full of paper files is stolen, there is no way to protect

the people it impacts. Now, consider a tablet device with the day's case files—what happens if the tablet is stolen or lost? First, the device is password protected, so no one can access the information without the password or fingerprint touch ID. Second, within minutes the case worker can call the AZDCS main office, notify them of the theft or loss, and the device is instantly erased of all traces of data – or “bricked.” That is the level of security now implemented at AZDCS. Add to this the fact that the transmission of all data is encrypted through a secure, private cloud server, and the level of security over private information is increase exponentially over a box of paper files.

Impact

- Departmental Cost Savings: ~\$18.7 million annually
- Increased Field Access to Child Welfare System by 100,000%. Went from 0% using the CHILDS system in the field on laptops to more than 1000 caseworkers using the mobile solution on tablets in the field with children and families.
- Improved Efficiency of caseworkers by 20% as measured by time savings, and Increased Timeliness of child placements to “Immediate”

The time caseworkers spend transcribing notes from field visits once they are back in the office has a significant impact on costs. The new mobile solution now provides caseworkers with the ability to immediately input case notes, upload documents and electronic signatures, download critical information and data to respond more effectively, and transmit vital information for case management and investigations instantaneously into the CHILDS system. No longer faced with writing handwritten notes and transcribing them—doing double the work—as well as the immediate integration of data and information, administrative costs are reduced, translating to an estimated \$18.7 million in annual savings.

Caseworkers do most of their work in the field, visiting children and foster parents in their homes or care facilities to understand their life circumstances and needs. What was once a stable environment can change suddenly, and caseworkers must intervene quickly when faced with a crisis. Due to the ineffectiveness of laptops and the lack of mobile solutions, significant barriers previously existed for caseworkers to access the CHILDS system while doing their work in the field. Without access to critical information, the caseworkers' ability to best serve the needs of children and families is impaired. Before the mobile solution was implemented, 0% of caseworkers were accessing the CHILDS systems in the field. Now, access has increased 100,000%, with more than 1000 caseworkers able to access the case management and investigations applications upon which they depend to do their job effectively.

Caseworkers spend a significant amount of time reconciling field experiences with the CHILDS systems once they return to the office. With field access to AZDCS case management and

investigations applications no longer a barrier, experiences and information are directly input into the mobile applications through their tablets during visits. This results in an estimated increase in caseworker efficiency of 20%. Furthermore, caseworkers now have the information, data, and resources necessary to make child placement decisions “on the spot,” going from delayed timeliness to “Immediate.” Further qualitative benefits are also enabled with the new mobile solution:

Increased time for child and parent visitations improves service quality and case outcomes. Previously, child safety specialists were hindered in completing visits as frequently as needed or required due to high caseloads. Mobile access improves child safety specialists’ ability to complete visits, capture notes, and issue forms in a timely manner.

The mobile solution improves the quality of data entered into the case management system. Congregate care placements—highly-structured settings that consist of 24-hour supervision for children—are more expensive, but before the mobile solution, due to system constraints, they were a quicker solution for time-sensitive placements. Now with the mobile solution, more children needing out-of-home care can be placed in family settings that are generally less expensive and more cost-effective. Live access to accurate, up-to-date provider information gives child safety specialists the ability to match children requiring removal to a family setting, when appropriate, rather than placing them in congregate care.

A broad, cross-functional team of approximate 300 people was engaged to define the solution and ensure the implementation was successful, including a core group of 25-30 people with day-to-day involvement. Representative groups included:

- Policy Group: Ensured the solution complied with all governmental policies.
- Organizational Change Management: Understood the impacts of technology innovation.
- Business and Investigations Team: Defined the core needs of the business including caseworkers, social workers, children, foster parents, and families.
- Training: Understood training needs and defined and implemented training curriculum.
- DCS Technology: Organized and managed Asset Management and Mobile Device Management.
- CHILDS Development: Defined and developed the integration layer between the mobile solution and the child welfare information system/case management/investigations.
- Diona: Provided the commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) product, implemented user-interface configurations for the mobile applications and developed integration points with CHILDS.
- Public Consulting Group (PCG): Defined mobile business processes.