



2016 Michigan NASCIO Award Nomination

Saving Time, Improving Outcomes: Michigan Child Support Program Transforms Its Customer Experience

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Michigan’s Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) Office of Child Support teamed with the Department of Technology, Management and Budget (DTMB) to transform the way the program serves families. Today, Michigan is using digital technologies to give citizens visibility into their own cases and empowering them to take action through around-the-clock self-service. The solution aligns with Michigan’s IT strategic plan and Mobile First IT strategy. A customer-focused interactive voice response (IVR) and call routing system complements the self-service options by making it much easier to get to a caseworker when needed. The transformation has yielded impressive results. More than 20,000 backlogged work items have been cleared, workers can now keep up with the workload, and customers who previously waited days or weeks for a return call now have calls answered in about five minutes. Caseworkers are 40 percent more productive and able to serve constituents through more flexible work arrangements.

[MDHHS Vision: “Focus on the person and solve their problems”](#)

Our Vision: The River of Opportunity

“

We can reorganize the way government does business from a people point of view – to focus on the person and solve their problems. If someone falls by the wayside – whether it’s from lack of education, an illness, or a difficult life event – we need to get them back into the River of Opportunity as fast as possible so they’re successful. This won’t be about creating new programs. It will be about effective, accountable government that collaborates to provide good service to our customers. ”

Michigan Governor Rick Snyder

Core Principles

People Not Programs
Root Causes Not Symptoms
Maximize Results
Engage the Community
Measure Outcomes

Putting people first, with the goal of helping all Michiganders lead healthier and more productive lives, no matter their stage in life.



PROJECT NARRATIVE

Concept

Description of the Business Problem

The efficiency of the child support intake process is fundamental to the Office of Child Support's ability to deliver on its mission of assisting parents with their financial obligations to their children and providing a range of services to families, employers, hospitals and schools. There were a number of issues and delays within the process. For example, of the 87,865 cases opened from June 2012 to June 2013, only 10 percent were referred in 30 days or less. Just 4 percent of cases were referred immediately. The state's Office of Child Support was only able to process about 55 percent of its incoming calls. What's more, at least 15 percent of cases opened during this time were opened unnecessarily.

With families unable to get access to their caseworker, the intake process was delaying their ability to get child support established for their children. Even worse, some families were having their public assistance benefits cut off because child support workers couldn't keep up with the work.

These challenges were heightened by a high volume of referrals from the public assistance program, which jumped exponentially during this period. "We had the disruption of a big change, which impacted the volume of work," says Erin Frisch, Director of the Office of Child Support. "As a result, folks felt like they were working very hard and not making any progress."

Solution

The big-picture view

Working in partnership with DTMB and Accenture, the Office of Child Support (OCS) took decisive action—implementing a series of initiatives that transformed how parents interact with the child support program while adhering to the Michigan project management methodology (www.michigan.gov/suite). To improve service and drive citizen and caseworker satisfaction, the team:

- Fundamentally changed caseworker and program business processes, including sending caseworkers home to work.
- Enhanced the core case management application, which automatically performs certain child support activities. Caseworkers also use the application daily to monitor those critical activities.
- Implemented a two-way self-service portal.
- Rolled out new customer service capabilities, including an intelligent call routing and IVR application.

Articulating the problems, identifying resolutions

Recognizing the urgent need for a fast, inclusive and outcomes-driven approach to process improvement, Michigan initiated a Kaizen event—a Lean method known for delivering quick results. The team's thorough analysis identified a number of issues, including:

- Inconsistent and often inaccurate incoming data

- Insufficient training and collaboration among agencies and partners
- Excessive rework and process delays
- Lack of standardization
- Delays associated with postal issues.

In just six weeks, they collaborated to identify 33 solutions that balanced process with system improvements. Eight of the solutions were “quick hits.” The process also tentatively identified support personnel to shepherd progress on the remaining 25 medium- to long-term solutions. A future-state value map incorporated all approved solutions, and a metrics plan proposed several new metrics to improve visibility into applicant needs on a daily basis. And the solution architecture met all Michigan and Federal IT standards including accessibility and security policy requirements.

A new customer experience platform

As part of the improvement initiatives, in January 2014 OCS removed its old, inefficient call routing and IVR system and replaced it with the Genesys Customer Experience Platform. “Where callers previously had to leave voicemail messages that might not get a response for weeks, now they always get a live person”, according to Monica Bowman, Director of Operations at OCS. In addition, most callers now wait less than five minutes in the call queue.

The Genesys Customer Experience Platform integrates self-service applications and caseworker-assisted transactions with a Nuance natural language interface, customer interaction management, analytics and reporting, workforce optimization, self-service capabilities, a routing engine, presence and visibility, and more.

With the new system, the customer experience begins with a self-service system that collects caller information and then routes calls to the appropriate caseworkers. Before caseworkers answer the calls, the Genesys solution provides detailed information about who is calling and why.

Self-service via MiChildSupport

OCS also added features to [MiChildSupport Portal](#) - a self-service portal for custodial and non-custodial parents.



This interactive website provides yet another channel for parents to interact with OCS. Available around the clock, the portal allows parents to see payment information on their case, contact their caseworker and have insight into what is happening on their case.

The website also delivers real-time, two-way communication between the parent and the program. As critical activities are completed, parents receive an immediate alert via email or text. So, when parents have an appointment or receive a payment, they get immediate notification via their preferred method of communication.

OCS also enhanced this self-service portal to include an intuitive online application to allow clients to apply for child support services themselves. In building the new application, the State of Michigan engaged user experience experts. The team created an online form with a progressive interview. It begins with easy questions and offers simple screens, intuitive dynamic help and a progress bar. And it's not "all or nothing"; applicants can save their application and finish it later. In addition, users can copy common information—such as insurance coverage—to multiple children identified on the application. With these capabilities, most applications are now completed in 30 minutes or less.

Dynamic case management

Processes have improved for caseworkers, as well. Previously, cases were assigned a specific caseworker. This resulted in unbalanced caseloads, and if a particular worker was home sick or on vacation, the customer had no alternative but to wait to get service. The Office removed caseloads from workers by adopting a function-based model. With this model, anyone who needs to speak to a child support specialist gets the service they need, ensuring that cases are established and questions are answered more quickly. Case activities and customer interactions are recorded in the Michigan Child Support Enforcement System (MiCSES) so any worker can pick up the case and take the next appropriate action.

Today, the self-service website, core child support enforcement system and IVR solution all work in harmony to support dramatically improved customer service and caseworker productivity.

Significance

These improvements are significant because they affect millions of citizens and support several key [Strategy Objectives](#) from MDHHS, DTMB and the Governor's office:

Touches millions of lives. Michigan has the fifth-highest child support caseload in the United States. With more than 840,000 active cases and 95,000 new cases each year, the child support program serves millions of Michigan citizens and processes \$1.3 billion in child support payments a year.

Supports OCS objectives. The child support program’s vision is to engage parents to improve children’s lives. OCS has committed to doing this by delivering innovative and holistic services and empowering child support professionals. This effort moved OCS closer to its vision.

Supports MDHHS objectives. The child support improvements supported three of MDHHS’s department-wide strategic objectives, including Case Worker Relief, Universal Case Load and Call Center. The exemplary child support project is providing a model for how other programs in public assistance, child welfare and Medicaid can retool.

Supports DTMB objectives. Mobile First is a primary objective for DTMB. The MiChildSupport interactive citizen portal was built with responsive design, and more than two-thirds of the 400,000 monthly logins are done from a mobile device.

Supports objectives from Governor’s office. Providing citizens with anytime, anywhere access to the child support program supports an often-repeated mandate from the Governor’s office to simplify government. The child support initiatives align with the Governor’s vision to make government more accessible to citizens, to eliminate “program-speak” and to treat citizens and hardworking people with respect and as whole persons.

Impact

In addition to supporting so many of Michigan’s public policy goals, the child support initiatives have delivered impressive—and quantifiable—benefits to both parents/citizens and caseworkers.

Benefits to parents/citizens

Parents/citizens who are engaged with the program now enjoy a dramatically improved customer experience, including:

- More productive caseworker interactions, with the elimination of the voicemail system and the implementation of virtual queues and skills-based routing. Customers have their calls answered by a live agent with an average speed of five minutes instead of waiting for days or weeks for a callback.
- 44-percent increase in cases processed from initiation to the next step in the child support lifecycle.
- Reduction in the number of client touch points, with intake workers now able to address client needs without requiring multiple follow-up steps.
- 53-percent decrease in cases sent into “non-cooperation.” In the past, intake workers could not finish their initiation with the client, requiring clients to follow up. But it was a vicious cycle: Clients couldn’t get through and the follow-up process was so cumbersome that no follow-up would occur. The client was then deemed to be not cooperating, so services on the case were

suspended until the follow-up could occur. The result: even more headaches for citizens who had to work with two government support centers (child support AND eligibility) to clear up the faulty non-cooperation designation so that both assistance and child support activities could be restarted. By avoiding the “non-cooperation” detour, eligible families get the financial support they need.

- Reduction in the compliance cycle. Non-compliant customers could continue to receive benefits for which they were not eligible for months or even over a year. Now they receive no more than one month of benefits before their benefits are sanctioned for non-compliance.

Benefits to caseworkers

The employee experience is also better, delivering the following benefits to and for caseworkers:

- 40-percent increase in caseworker productivity, with case backlogs and escalations practically eliminated.
- 74-percent drop in call center volume (from 60,000 to 16,000 calls per month) because clients are getting their questions answered the first time. They no longer need to repeatedly call in and leave voicemails that go unanswered.
- 76-percent reduction in the volume of administrative hearings, which consume valuable intake worker time and rarely deliver customer satisfaction.
- 30-percent increase in the resolution of exceptions coming from the eligibility agency, enabling intake workers to focus on their core job.
- Reports from support specialists that the number of calls that start with an angry tone have all but disappeared. “The tone of the conversations is much different now when a client reaches a caseworker,” says Monica Bowman, Deputy Director of Operations. “That has led to an increase in employee morale and efficiency.”
- 90 percent of caseworkers now work from home thanks to the digital technologies deployed in a virtual environment.

With these initiatives, Michigan’s Office of Child Support has demonstrated the power of collaboration and innovation. Together, MDHHS and DTMB took ownership of the challenges and identified ways to solve them. By improving processes and deploying digital technologies, they’ve reshaped the customer and employee experience—driving efficiency, enhancing satisfaction and, ultimately, improving outcomes for children and families in Michigan.