"Mobile First" Innovations for 20-Year-Old SACWIS Improve Productivity, Efficiency of Caseworkers

Case Study: Arizona Department of Child Safety

DIONA

Executive Summary

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) has been operating on a 20-year-old Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). As a result, valuable time that could be spent by caseworkers engaging families was instead spent navigating a cumbersome data system of yesteryear. DCS took an innovative approach to digital transformation by deploying a "mobile first" strategy, allowing more than 1,400 caseworkers to adopt current mobile technology into their practice today and access real-time data and information in the field, despite the limitations of its SACWIS. This has had a positive impact on thousands of families statewide, especially for 15,000+ youth in state care that must be seen at least monthly by their caseworker. By implementing Diona Visits and Diona Investigations, DCS achieved seven significant benefits:

- Increased Field Access to SACWIS to 100%
- Improved Caseworker Efficiency by 20%
- Increased Time Spent with Children and Families
- Enhanced Service Quality and Case Outcomes
- Improved Data Quality
- Saved $18.7 Million Annually in Departmental Costs (Projected)
- Implemented Complete Solution in Only 8 Months

In recognition for their achievements, the Arizona DCS has received the 2018 *CIO 100* Award.

The Challenge

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) is a state agency comprised of more than 2,700 employees and serving more than 15,000 youth. As highly motivated and caring public servants, DCS is committed to fulfilling its mission with excellence, providing safety and well-being for the most vulnerable population in Arizona—its children.

DCS is guided in its work by its Vision, Mission, and Core Principles:

Vision:
Children thrive in family environments free from abuse and neglect.
Mission:
Successfully engage children and families to ensure safety, strengthen families, and achieve permanency.

Core Principles:
- Safety: All Arizona's children are safe and protected from harm.
- Permanency: All Arizona's children live in safe, loving forever families.
- Well-Being: All Arizona's children are given the opportunity to thrive through the support of strong families and their communities.

According to Linda Jewell, Chief Information Officer (CIO) at DCS, agency staff conduct their work on a statewide basis, and 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. The entire scope of casework is complex and must be managed with rigor, as well as sensitivity. Caseworkers are required to assess living arrangements and children's welfare, and this varies from child wellness visits and home inspections to investigations of allegations and court appearances or testimonies. Child wellness visits must be conducted every 30 days—either in the home, group home, or other location—to evaluate the quality of care a child is receiving and if the child has additional needs such as clothing, therapy, or school supplies. Home inspections are also conducted regularly to ensure the child has proper living conditions, adequate food, and safe housing.

"The ability to perform field work and face-to-face interviews with parents and children is invaluable," says Jewell. "What was once a stable environment can change suddenly, and caseworkers must intervene quickly when faced with a crisis."

When a high priority allegation is logged, it is immediately assigned to an investigative caseworker. Responding investigators may

already be in the field and need to quickly access critical back-ground information to assess potential risks or threats they may encounter at the investigation site. Interviews with the child, witnesses, parents, and first responders help inform whether the allegation is founded—and requires increased monitoring—or unfounded—and the allegation can be closed. Court testimony is also a regular part of caseworkers' responsibilities, and they frequently spend hours each week in court.

Providing the highest quality care and support to Arizona's children requires extreme mobility so that caseworkers and investigators can conduct their work wherever they are needed. Modern case management should meet the needs of this ever-mobile population, but CHILDS, DCS' 20-year-old Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS), is a legacy system rife with constraints. As a result, caseworkers' ability to serve children and families to the best of their abilities while in the field was impaired by three critical problems:

1. Legacy case management system, applications, and information were inaccessible, resulting in lost productivity.
2. Vital case notes and client data could not be updated in real-time, reducing worker efficiency.
3. Paper-based information and files were vulnerable to loss or theft, potentially compromising client data security and privacy.

While it was once believed that laptops, or "portability," would bridge the gap between office systems and remote access, that belief was never fully realized. DCS found that portability is not "mobility. Workers had laptops, yet subtle—and significant—barriers persisted due to gaps in functionality, usability, accessibility, connectivity, and security. Over time, another unexpected insight revealed itself—due to the presence of a laptop screen between caseworkers and clients, laptops actually created a "physical barrier" to client engagement.

When it came right down to it, DCS needed a solution that not only solved their three core challenges, but also enabled five critical benefits:

1. Leveraged the investment in their existing case management system.
2. Accelerated the timeline to deliver directly into the field the necessary benefits and functionality of their case management system.
3. Increased the efficiency and productivity of their workforce in the field.
4. Boosted system accessibility to 100% by delivering offline capabilities.
5. Enhanced client engagement by removing the physical barrier of a laptop screen between caseworkers and their clients.

Jewell had the vision to recognize that a "mobile first" strategy and a thoughtfully designed mobile solution could solve DCS' challenges and deliver the benefits they sought, resulting in a healthier organization that better provided the vital services children and families needed.

The Innovative Solution

What's innovative for some may seem rudimentary for others. Not so with DCS. With a legacy SACWIS, mobile technology and solutions seemed like a pipedream. Yet under the leadership of Jewell, working in partnership with Shalom Jacobs, Deputy Director of Field Operations, the department was able to bring technical innovation into the field through a quick, "mobile first" approach.
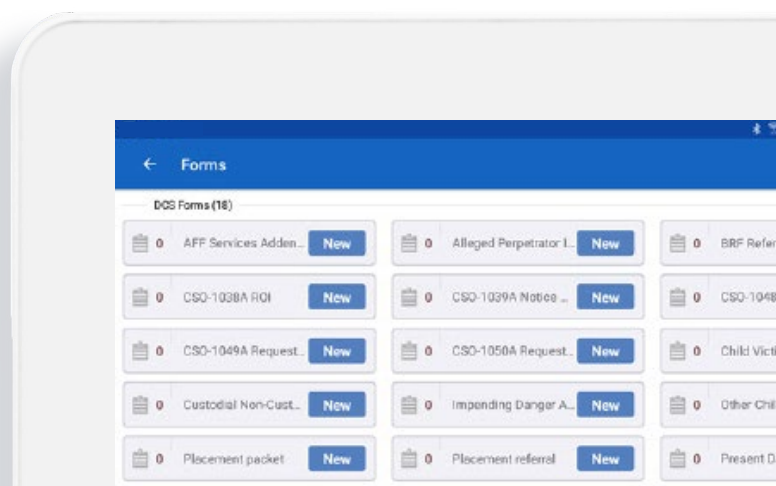
The two envisioned a modular approach to implementing the new Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) requirements for upgrading their SACWIS. According to CCWIS, "The final rule supports the use of cost-effective, innovative technologies to automate the collection of high-quality case management data and to promote its analysis, distribution, and use by workers, supervisors, administrators, researchers, and policy makers."

When developing their RFP, user-centered feedback was an important component of requirements definition. DCS conducted hours of interviews with caseworkers to deeply understand the needed functionality for the solution that would not only address the agency's business challenges and deliver the benefits it required, but would also provide a user experience that met the needs of caseworkers.

Core to DCS's goal to deliver innovative technologies was the selection of Diona through the rigorous RFP process. "I believe in a mobile first strategy," says Jewell. "We wanted mobility, and Diona delivered." Diona's family of social program engagement solutions turn mobile devices—such as smartphones and tablets—into tools to achieve better business and social outcomes. Diona solutions improve how employees work and collaborate by extending organizational systems and delivering real-time data directly into the field through a cloud-based platform that is secure, robust, scalable, and reliable.

Working in partnership with Diona, DCS implemented the Diona Visits and Diona Investigations solutions onto 1,400 tablets for DCS caseworkers. Configured to meet their business requirements and integrated with their SACWIS, the solution extended data and core functionality into the hands of caseworkers through mobile devices. Diona's COTS software could be easily configured for DCS, including interface "language" needs, system uptime requirements, agency forms display and pdf delivery, UI adjustments, and system properties. For DCS, what "mobility first" translated to is that they approached the problem from an "agile" philosophy. Rather than developing a monolithic "waterfall" development project to replace their SACWIS that might take years to implement—at significantly greater cost—DCS used the innovations of Agile to implement its mobile solution quickly—and in only eight months.

Diona's solution ultimately addressed DCS' challenges with a solution that was intuitive and easy-to-use, and delivered the benefits vital to caseworkers, children, and families:

Solution Highlights:

- DCS implemented two mobile solutions that extend their child welfare information system and deliver real-time data directly into the field to worker's tablet devices.
- 1,400 caseworkers are no longer "physically disconnected" from their case files when working in the field. Through their mobile devices, caseworkers access powerful agency systems—anytime, anywhere—through a government 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.
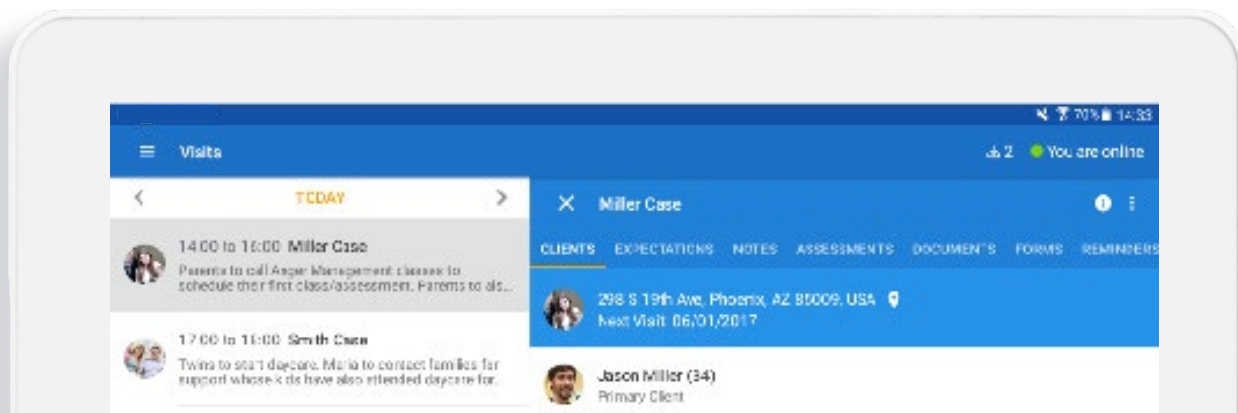
- Workers have necessary functionality, forms, and connectivity on an intuitive, easy-to-use tablet device so they can engage effectively and productively with children and families in the field.
- Workers can download case files, information, appointments, maps, GPS, communications, notes, historical data, and audio/video recordings, as well as input real-time data from the field such as interviews, electronic signatures, documents, and photos.
- Universal access to all forms is provided electronically and service delivery is accelerated with electronic signatures, so that paper-based processes are obsolete.
- Client data is stored securely and privately in the cloud, alleviating the need to bring paper files into the field.
- 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 Results

With Diona Visits and Diona Investigations, 100% of caseworkers and investigators (1,400) are now able to access the case management and investigations systems upon which they depend to do their job effectively. DCS workers can meet with more clients, interact with children and families at a deeper and more informed level unimpeded by technical and physical 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 even described how much faster and intimate the experience was with the caseworker who was using their new tablet with the mobile solution.

Overall, the benefits DCS has realized from the Diona solutions are significant:

- Increased field access to SACWIS to 100%.
- Improved caseworker efficiency by 20%.
- Increased time spent with children and families.

- Enhanced service quality and case outcomes—previously, child safety specialists were hindered in completing visits as frequently as needed or required. Mobile access improves child safety specialists' ability to complete visits, capture notes, and issue forms in a timely manner.
- Improved data quality entered into the case management system.
- Saved $18.7 million annually in departmental costs (projected).
- Implemented complete solution in only 8 months.

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The time caseworkers spent transcribing and reconciling notes from field visits once they were back in the office had a significant impact on costs. The Diona solutions provide 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. This also resulted in an estimated increase in caseworker efficiency.

"I believe in a mobile first strategy. We wanted mobility, and Diona delivered."

Linda Jewell
CIO, AZ DCS

The Diona solutions provide DCS staff with access to information contained in the case management system while they are away from the office serving children and families. The mobile solutions include the ability to download case information for offline access, receive calendar notifications, leverage mobile device features such as GPS mapping, 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 timeliness, reliability, and validity.

But the Diona solutions also provide the ability to seamlessly continue working even while offline—or if the mainframe system is down for maintenance. Caseworkers are able to access critical functionality without an internet connection, and once back online, data is immediately synched and updated. "That's been huge for us," says Jacobs. "Workers can continue to document in the app when the mainframe goes down."

Privacy and Security
The protection of personal data and information has reached an unprecedented level today. Consider for a moment a caseworker driving to an appointment. On the passenger seat of the caseworker's car is a box filled with paper files containing historical information about all the children and families 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 case 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 caseworker can call the DCS 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 DCS. 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 increased exponentially over a box of paper files.

As Jacobs describes, "You have multiple kids on your case load and you're trying to figure out where you need to be. We're hearing a lot of good things about the calendaring aspects of the app and tasks."

"You have to be willing to take risks. You have to be willing to find opportunities to create capacity for your workers, and this was why we moved on mobile before we moved on anything else."

Shalom Jacobs
Deputy Director of Field Operations, AZ DCS

DCS is leading the charge to transform service delivery using a "mobile first" strategy, what Jewell says is a "game-changer for child welfare and social work." As Jacobs explained at the 2017 Information Technology Solutions Management for Human Services (ISM) Conference, "You have to be willing to take risks. You have to find opportunities to create capacity for your workers, and this was why we moved on mobile before we moved on anything else."

DCS strategy has also taught its caseworkers how to be "truly mobile," an important project consideration but one that is sometimes overlooked in child welfare and social work. Too often departments don't consider the transformation impact a big system replacement will have on their workforce. By approaching mobile first, DCS can make a positive usability impact on its caseworkers by providing usable applications first, then solving the big, back-end issues second.

The goal of DCS is to empower their workforce to ensure children and families get the help they need immediately. With their new Diona solutions, they are now better equipped to realize this goal and deliver more effectively on their mission to "successfully engage children and families to ensure safety, strengthen families, and achieve permanency."

About Arizona Department of Child Safety

The Arizona Department of Child Safety is dedicated to the vision that "Children thrive in family environments free from abuse and neglect." As highly motivated and caring public servants, the DCS team is committed to fulfilling this mission with excellence, providing safety and well-being for the most vulnerable population in Arizona—our children. DCS caseworkers have the strength, sensitivity, passion, and empathy to restore hope to children and families. Learn more about DCS' Compassioneers at dcs.az.gov. If you suspect child abuse, call 888-SOS-CHILD.

About Diona

Diona provides innovative systems of engagement solutions to government Health and Human Services, Social Care, and Social Security agencies and NGOs around the world. Diona's family of social program engagement solutions, turn mobile devices—such as smartphones and tablets—into tools to achieve better business and social outcomes by helping agencies serve people more effectively, while improving how their employees work and collaborate. Diona solutions extend organizational systems of record and deliver real-time data directly into the field for clients and workers. Diona solutions are secure, robust, scalable, and reliable and feature flexible cloud-based or on-premise deployment options. With deep domain expertise and a user-centered design philosophy, Diona delivers digital solutions that help government agencies and NGOs solve real-world problems for their clients and employees.

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