

2020 CSAC Challenge Award Entry
Using CLOUDS Technology to Enhance Communications with Families During COVID-19
Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD)

Overview – During COVID-19, Community Services Bureau (CSB), a Head Start agency and the largest childcare provider in Contra Costa County, leveraged technology to enhance communication with families.

Challenge – CSB staff needed to establish different ways to connect with families during the COVID-19 health crisis by enhancing CLOUDS, its existing all-in-one data management system that it developed for automating daily work activities. CSB identified various needs in order to boost communication: 1) families' ability to contact CSB at any time for assistance needs, with CSB tracking requests and providing timely responses; 2) CSB's capability to send urgent messages via text, email and/or voice message to staff and families, delivering important information in a timely manner and per communication preferences; 3) support for telecommuting staff who faced difficulty in calling client families, due to limited availability of agency mobile phones; and 4) support distance learning for children enrolled in CSB programs with ability to send daily updates to family and staff.

Solution – CSB's CLOUDS Children and Family Data System maintains records of all employee and family information (i.e., cell numbers and emails). To devise a way to send and receive communications to our families and staff efficiently during COVID-19, CSB developed an automated Interactive Voice Messaging system within CLOUDS, allowing clients to call a dedicated line and request essential items (diapers, masks, cleaning supplies, books, etc.). The system records all incoming phone calls, and identifies phone numbers of currently enrolled families or those on our waitlist, automating simple steps to speed the process. The system offers interface in English or Spanish. Messages with a specific request are recorded, converted from voice to text, then logged into a family's profile. Staff can respond to messages in real time, contact clients to provide necessary support, enter notes, and/or forward the message to other units, as appropriate. CSB also created a way to disseminate important information to enrolled families through a Group Messaging system that allows staff to send daily updates, emergency notices, distance-learning activities, and letters to families and staff quickly via SMS (text message), recorded voice messages, and email. The feature allows staff to select all or specific centers, classrooms or individuals with a simple click of the mouse. CSB developed one other CLOUDS feature specifically to assist staff working from home so

2020 CSAC Challenge Award Entry
Using CLOUDS Technology to Enhance Communications with Families During COVID-19
Contra Costa County Employment & Human Services Department (EHSD)

they could contact our clients without the use of their personal cell phone. It enabled staff to call families and new clients through the internet using the CLOUDS web-calling application. During the shelter-in-place, there was limited cell phone availability, and this feature eliminated the cost of purchasing additional cell phones and data plans. The system can handle unlimited calls simultaneously throughout the day with no other service fee.

Innovation – Currently, there is no other child care management system in California with an interactive communication system that can handle all state and federal childcare programs/funding, staff management and daily attendance and enrollment processes in real time, while providing the communication features CSB developed. Although there are systems with similar features available, they focus only on specific programs. Combining an all-in-one system, using common data between our operated programs, as well as having quick access to all communications and case notes, greatly enhances productivity and efficiency. Most agencies have to deal with multiple standalone applications, creating double data entry with unreliable/nonmatching data records, making communications much more difficult to manage.

Results – This system ensures that there are no missed calls out of the 1000+ per week that CSB receives, and that all calls are recorded, tracked and receive a reply. Clouds Group Emailing/Messaging feature helps teaching staff send distance learning activities to enrolled families on a daily basis, and quickly notify families of emergencies. CSB sends more than 1,000 individual group messages per week. Staff can call families and new clients through the CLOUDS web-calling application, eliminating the need to purchase additional cell phones and data plans. The system can handle unlimited calls simultaneously with minimum service fee. All these enhancements saved the agency time, money, and work hours.

Replicability – The technologies CSB uses and are leveraging are simple for other counties to implement in order to enable staff who are telecommuting to assist and provide services to clients and families.

Program Contact – Sung Kim, Business Systems Manager, 1470 Civic Court, Concord, CA, (925) 681-6303 or skim@ehsd.cccounty.us