

Foster Care Search System (FCSS) Executive Summary

Overview

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) created a web-based Foster Care Search System (FCSS) to process child placement searches, placements, and service requests.

Challenge

DCFS has over 20,000 children in its care, and locating an appropriate placement, although crucial, was time consuming and expensive. Prior to FCSS, thousands of telephone calls were needed to locate placements for children. Also, DCFS recognized that the old foster care web-based system had significant challenges as a result of design deficiencies, inadequate system interfaces, outdated software and an inaccurate placement vacancy database. Moreover, the old system lacked a standardized workflow or procedure to process action requests for Technical Assistants (TA) in the regional offices. Additional issues included the following: (1) absence of a workflow to provide staff with the status of requests; (2) no fields existed to document placement search efforts; (3) manual logs had to be kept to track requests in each of the various DCFS offices; (4) and the manual approval process was inconvenient and time-consuming for supervisors and managers.

Innovative Solution

To address the business need to create a new, efficient web-based application, the Department's Business Information Systems (BIS) Division developed the FCSS, with an accompanying mobile interface, and implemented it on August 14, 2014. This new system automated the process of creating and submitting pertinent forms by pre-populating them with available data to eliminate manual data entry, and provided electronic signatures for approvals via a desktop computer, tablets, or a mobile phone. Assigning requests to TAs could now be standardized and performed online. FCSS generated e-mail notifications of request statuses and required actions as well as logging and tracking of requests. It also automated the placement search process and enhanced accountability by allowing for documentation of search efforts. As soon as a child is placed at or removed from a home, the Children's Social Workers (CSW) is able to confirm a placement or submit a stop placement immediately via a mobile phone to add or deduct a bed from a specific home. Additionally, with the FCSS, licensed caregivers are able to review and maintain information regarding foster children in their homes.

Originality

For the first time, CSWs and TAs are able to conduct placement search requests with a highly advanced, easy-to-use web-based system. The FCSS is able to locate vacant beds in Licensed Foster Family Homes, Group Homes, Small Family Homes, and Foster Family Agency Certified Homes by utilizing a search feature with criteria options that are aligned with populations the Department serves. The FCSS also has a Geographic Information System mapping feature that shows map views of placement homes with vacant beds within proximity to schools and community boundaries. Generated results and placement profiles are made available to CSWs to

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identify the most suitable homes for foster children. Furthermore, the mobile application allows Regional Administrators, Assistant Regional Administrators, and Supervising Children's Social Workers to perform workflow approvals on placement and service requests. Accessibility from mobile devices offers freedom from being restricted to an office or business hours. The aim of the mobile application is to expedite the workflow approval process in order to prevent both a delay in child placements and the backlog of requests.

Cost Effectiveness

The cost for developing the FCSS was \$1.1 million dollars and included 12 Information Technology (IT) staff; however, between its implementation in August 14, 2014 and June 1, 2016, FCSS has yielded a savings of 130,000 hours in productivity, which translates into an estimated soft savings of \$7,339,000. Soft cost savings calculations are based on multiplying the staff hours saved by their respective payroll title's hourly rate. There has also been an annual cost savings of approximately \$5,000 in paper supplies.

Results

The FCSS was an instant success with staff; they were able to adapt to the system quickly due to well-planned functionalities, features, and it being user-friendly. Furthermore, the FCSS has been an innovative improvement to Department operations. The CSWs were granted the flexibility to submit requests and upload supporting documentation at the desktop or remotely, gaining freedom from the old approval process that kept them in their offices. Instant e-mail alerts and the versatility of the mobile application permitted timely approvals for processing, leading to a system that processes requests three times faster than the manual process. The new system affords the CSWs and TAs more accurate and reliable placement home and vacancy information. The system is in use at all 19 area offices with over 5,400 active users. CSWs are able to view and monitor their requests, resulting in an 80% improvement in time from manually tracking requests by phone, e-mail, or in the office. The Workload Management Report generated by FCSS saves the Eligibility Supervisors 20% of their time spent on daily tasks associated with reviewing and approving placement-related requests. Daily, there are approximately 1,900 user logins. Since implementation, the FCSS has successfully processed over 30,000 placements and over 91,000 requests that include placement search requests, placement packet requests, stop placement requests, and miscellaneous requests. Through FCSS, placements and services are delivered in a more efficient and accelerated manner that contribute to children's safety and well-being. The Department offers these services to the children of Los Angeles County in an effort to achieve its vision of "children thriving in safe families and supportive communities." With the implementation of FCSS CSWs are able to better serve children, their families, and the communities in which those families live.

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