San Mateo County

Child Support Performance Management Case Study



**Intent of Project/Program/Service**

How do you sort and organize more than 1,300,000 cases to initiate appropriate action to collect child support for families? If the new computer system doesn’t include a feature to effectively sort, organize and prioritize, you develop a software application to handle this monumental task. By October 2008, the California Department of Child Support Services had transitioned all county child support agencies onto California’s statewide child support automation system (CSE). CSE automatically performs many routine child support enforcement activities, such as employment searches and database matches. Even so, many critical steps to establish paternity and enforce support rely on employee directed action. In CSE, caseworkers must manually review individual cases to determine what action is needed. To address this problem, David Kilgore with Los Angeles County’s Child Support Services Division (CSSD), developed a complex software application named the Case Management Tool (CMT).

From an organizational perspective, the Case Management Tool provides management with the means to analyze the characteristics of the entire County’s caseload. It provides a means to develop, implement, and assess targeted and strategic work approaches that best serve the needs of the child support customers. For managers and supervisors, the Case Management Tool permits them to evaluate the caseload of their office as well as the employee teams within their office. It supports them in evaluating staff performance and helps them hold staff accountable for achieving measurable outcomes. Caseworkers benefit, too, because the Tool provides them with unprecedented oversight and control of their case assignments, allowing them to sort and prioritize their cases and to track the results of their efforts.

**Innovation Characteristics**

The Case Management Tool improves efficiency and responsiveness on two levels. First, from a management standpoint, the Case Management Tool supports setting and monitoring priorities for the entire Department, as well as for each office location and team. It enables managers to identify when, where and how caseworkers should direct their efforts, in alignment with goals set by the Department, to meet federal and state performance measures. It enables the local county agencies to meet county strategic goals. The capability provided by the Case Management Tool to target cases for action and avoid time consuming, hit-or-miss case reviews is both highly efficient and especially valuable in a time of reduced staffing and hiring freezes. The Tool also provides workers with their “scores” on the federal performance measure alongside those for their team and for their division office.

Second, from a customer standpoint, the Case Management Tool helps staff to identify and react more quickly to critical changes in day-to-day circumstances. Parents who become unemployed or disabled may no longer be able to meet their financial obligations. Using the Case Management Tool, caseworkers can target those cases to modify court orders in keeping with changed reality, avoiding the accumulation of uncollectable debt.

Along with the CMT a Goal Calculator was developed. The Goal Calculator allows managers to set performance goals for units and individuals provide caseworkers a monthly update of where they could focus their case management efforts to improve performance. With the ability to see each workers performance we are now able to readily identify best practices used by higher performing workers and share these with others. In addition, when a worker is falling behind we instantly see this and can take proactive steps, such as additional training, to correct and improve performance.

**Applicable Results and Real World Practicality**

It was not long before word got out throughout the child support community in California that LA County had a prototype case stratification tool to help manage performance. A statewide team was convened with various counties participating. The final product is nothing short of remarkable. The CMT organized cases in CSE by office locations, team, and worker. As a direct result of implementing the CMT, for the first time in the state’s history, California’s annual performance has moved from 51 out of 52 to 25th in the nation. Families benefit from this tool by receiving more support than they have in the past.

This improved performance technology is particularly noteworthy given the economic recession in effect since 2008. The families relying upon the services of the Local Child Support Agencies for regular and consistent child support payments were disproportionately affected by the economic recession and suffered a greater unemployment rate than the overall population. County agencies ability to improve performance during the worst recession since the great depression can be linked directly to the enhanced ability of staff to appropriately work their caseload by utilizing the CMT.