

AUTOMATED REFERRAL ENTRY SYSTEM

Los Angeles, CA

1. Abstract of the Program

The County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has over 32,000 children in its care. To support an effective child welfare system of services, DCFS relies on using the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). CWS/CMS is a statewide tool that improves the lives of children and families by giving service workers information to improve case work services and frees them from repetitive tasks; however, on occasion, the CWS/CMS system experiences outages for various reasons, including system upgrades. Loss of access to CWS/CMS during these outages would potentially negatively impact DCFS' ability to provide children with the care they depend on.

The Automated Referral Entry System (ARES) application was implemented on February 18, 2015. It was developed to promote uninterrupted services to our County's children by allowing DCFS Child Protection Hotline (CPH) staff the ability to enter Hotline referral call information in an auxiliary system in the event that the main CWS/CMS application becomes inaccessible. ARES also provides a more effective alternative for tracking referrals, rather than relying on handwritten notes. The increased efficiency made possible by ARES reduces call volume and wait times, and accelerates the initial assessment of child safety, all of which collectively contribute towards enhancing the quality of service provided to our County's children.

2. Problem/Need for the Program

DCFS' CPH receives an average of 800-1,000 referral calls per day regarding child abuse and neglect. The Department relies on using CWS/CMS to access information related to their casework during the course of providing service to children and their families. However CPH staff, including Children's Social Workers (CSW) working during the graveyard shift, experience CWS/CMS application outages regularly during system upgrades or "Code Drops". Code Drops refer to changes made to the CWS/CMS application. Prior to ARES, there was no existing automated system that CPH staff could use when the CWS/CMS application was down that would allow them to document Consultation; Information to CSW; Referral calls; and calls for storage, review, and statistical purposes. "Consultation" call types are generally calls from the public seeking information or resources. "Information to CSW" call types are calls that generate additional information for existing referrals usually from parties like school personnel or law enforcement. "Referrals" are call types where a CSW needs to respond in person. Instead, all calls were tracked manually during CWS/CMS outages by writing on a piece of paper or a notebook. CPH staff responsible for the Hotline are heavily impacted with the workload associated with addressing incoming calls. Therefore, as the process for recording information was done manually, there was a heightened risk for loss of sensitive/crucial caller information due to human error and misplacement of documents.

Additionally, prior to ARES, the Department had the following needs:

- Staff were required to utilize multiple data-entry screens within CWS/CMS to enter a Referral, which was time-consuming. Hotline CSWs expressed the business need for a more user-friendly system that provided a single screen, which allows for quicker assessments of child safety and reduces the time needed to enter data for referrals. ARES provides a single screen that contains elements of Consultation, Information to CSW, and Referral call types. CSWs could select which type of call to work with for corresponding

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fields to show. This functionality cut data entry time in half compared to entering data in CWS/CMS application.

- There was no existing system that Regional CSWs could use to document and submit Companion/Related referrals. Companion/Related referrals are referrals that are possibly associated with the same family but for different children. A Companion/Related referral can also be for related families.
- There was no existing system to document an after-hours Absent Without Leave (AWOL) report or to document reports of children who run away from their placement.
- No existing system to capture data for non-jurisdictional calls which could be used to justify allocation of resources such as staffing, equipment and funding.
- Approximately 125 notebooks were used per month to document calls to the CPH when CWS/CMS system was down. The notebooks also required archiving for five years, and with an average of 60 boxes per year, the CPH office became disorderly.

3. Description of the Program

The ARES application can be used as an alternative to enter incoming referrals from the CPH when CWS/CMS is down. It allows the effective tracking of those referrals, which would otherwise be recorded via handwritten notes. Also, as an alternative to CWS/CMS' more complex interface, the ARES application was developed to provide a user-friendly system for CSWs who are not computer savvy and allows a single data entry screen that facilitates more expedient assessments of child safety.

As added utility, Regional CSWs can use ARES to complete and submit Companion/Related referrals. This reduces call volume, wait times, and accelerates the initial assessment of child safety. ARES application is also used to document after-hours AWOL reports, which reduces call volume and keeps a record of the number of reports. These reports can be referenced in historical data and to produce management reports to assist in future management strategies and/or goals.

Also, ARES captures all Consultations; Information to CSW; Referral calls; and calls for storage, review, and statistical purposes. As an added benefit, ARES could be used to capture data for non-jurisdictional calls, which could be used to justify allocation of resources such as staffing and funding. Furthermore, the application aids in expediting the review of Consultations and Information to CSWs by Supervising CSWs (SCSW) in case they need to be upgraded to an in-person response. In addition to improving services for the Department's constituents, ARES has further benefited DCFS by reducing the amount of paper used during the course of its regular operations by eliminating the need for handwritten paper referrals when CWS/CMS is down.

4. Cost of the Program

The ARES application was developed by DCFS Business Information Systems Division's staff. Their classifications, as well as the cost based on hours worked, are as follows:

| TITLE | TASK PERFORMED | COST |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| Senior Information Systems Analyst | Develop application | \$79,344.00 |
| | Maintain application | \$19,836.00 |

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|---|----------------------|---------------------|
| Principal Information Systems Analyst | Develop application | \$88,740.00 |
| | Maintain application | \$11,050.00 |
| TOTAL LABOR COST AS OF DECEMBER, 2014: | | \$198,970.00 |

The following is a breakdown of monthly expenses generated for maintenance since the system's implementation in February of 2015:

| EXPENDITURE | eCloud | Windows | Storage | Midrange Application Server | Overhead | TOTAL |
|-------------|----------|----------|----------|--------------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| COST | \$422.00 | \$400.00 | \$155.00 | \$1,378.00 | \$44.29 | \$2,399.29 |

5. Results/Success of the Program

The development of the ARES application has greatly enhanced the ability of Hotline CSWs to enter data and track referrals electronically rather than risk loss of sensitive/crucial caller information. The CPH receives 800-1,000 calls per day. Since implementation of the ARES system, an average of 19,600 overflow calls have been recorded and processed per year, whereas prior to ARES, the Department's ability to effectively record and process calls was significantly less. The SCSWs and CSWs are able to provide better customer service, as they are able to document information more quickly and with greater accuracy. Also, the improved functionality offered by ARES has facilitated a decrease in the amount of time that the callers and CSWs are on the phone. When calling back, caller history and child abuse information is now instantly accessible via ARES, leading to accurate identification of callers and immediate processing of allegations. Prior to ARES implementation, all calls handled by the CPH were processed manually and required CSWs to utilize multiple ancillary systems to access information that is now readily provided by ARES' single screen functionality.

In addition, shifting from the use of paper to ARES dramatically reduced the need for both supplies and space for the storage of records. Prior to ARES, approximately 125 notebooks were used each month, and a carton containing 25 books cost \$271.75; this has equated to an annual savings of \$16,305.00.

ARES application was implemented on February 18, 2015. To date, there are approximately over 16,000 call records saved in ARES' database. The benefits are many including access to CWS/CMS prior abuse history information, automated process of calls, reduced call times, reduced time spent on each call by Hotline CSWs and ability to process more calls overall when compared to manual process prior to ARES implementation. The breakdown is as follows:

- 25,397 – Consultation calls
- 2,306 – Information to CSW calls
- 1,386 – Referral calls

6. Worthiness of the Award

ARES has improved the overall efficiency of the DCFS Child Protection Hotline (CPH) Division. It has provided an efficient way to enter Hotline referrals when CWS/CMS is down and provides better tracking of those referrals versus handwritten referrals. ARES reduces call volume, wait

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times and accelerates the initial assessment of child safety. Most importantly, ARES has improved the Department's ability to provide needed services to Los Angeles County's children and families.

In addition to increased productivity and a measure of cost savings, ARES has achieved and promoted the County of Los Angeles' Mission and the following Strategic Plan goals:

- ***County Mission: To enrich lives through effective and caring service.***
The Child Protection Hotline is a critical operation of DCFS. Often, it is the first contact the public and other government agencies make to report suspected child abuse incidents. It is critical that the Department provides the speediest and most efficient response. ARES has allowed CPH staff to fulfill the responsibility of providing effective and caring service.
- ***Operation Effectiveness/Fiscal Sustainability:***
ARES eliminated the time consuming and inefficient manual processes, in turn removing the need for manual completion of forms, for stationary, and for storage.
- ***Community Support and Responsiveness:***
The needs of children and families are expeditiously and appropriately addressed due to the timely processing and investigation of calls.

ARES has efficiently helped CPH staff perform their work by providing a fast and user-friendly system. Overall CPH staff productivity has increased due to ARES application simplifying the process by which CPH staff document and conduct their daily work activities.

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