

## **Program Title: Children Family Services Dependency Investigation App**

**Start/Launch Date of the Program:** March 1, 2022

**Department:** Information Technology Department and Social Services Agency

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### **Abstract of the Program**

Alameda County Information Technology Department (ITD) collaborated with Alameda County Social Services Agency (ACSSA) to successfully launch a mobile friendly web application that allows for the improved efficiency and tracking of Dependency Investigations (DI) that are critical for petitioning for the safety and protection of a child in danger.

The Dependency Investigations Database is accessible to staff from anywhere using any device and the information is stored in a secure data center with controls and security elements in place to protect unauthorized access to information. As a result, streamlines the process for ACSSA to keep track and distribute investigations safely and securely.

### **The Problem or Need Addressed by the Program**

Before March 2021, ACSSA Children Family Services managed and assigned Dependency Investigations with an Excel file located on a shared drive. Supervisors across multiple office locations needed to manually transfer information to keep track of case assignment, however, only one person can make updates to the Excel file at a time. Additionally, line staff accessing the file would on occasion prevent supervisors to quickly assign referrals. With multiple users having full permission of the Excel file, there was a high risk of generating errors causing more delays in the process.

ACSSA Children Family Services needed to streamline the process to respond to referrals, increase data integrity and increase staff efficiency.

### **Description of the Program**

The DI Assignment App was designed to replace the spreadsheet used for assigning referrals and cases in the DI Program. The new assignment database needed to mimic the functionality of the spreadsheet, while enabling the ability for supervisors spread across multiple office locations to update simultaneously, granting line staff permission to view only the necessary information, and without compromising data integrity. Ultimately, enhancing features to improve the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the assignment process. It is critical that assignments are made quickly and accurately so that a worker can begin working on a case, and that the work is distributed equitably among available staff.

For decades, the Dependency Investigations (DI) program in the Department of Children and Family Services in ACSSA had to manage the unpredictable intake and equitable assignment of referrals to 20-25 staff, by 4 supervisors, spread across 2 offices, in different parts of the county, using only pencil, paper and post-it notes. A DI Child Welfare Worker (CWW) files a petition in the Juvenile Court for the safety and protection of a child in danger. The filing of these petitions, and the subsequent court hearings, are extremely time-sensitive, with staff having only 48 hours to file their petition in most cases, and another 24 hours after that to write and present a court report documenting the Agency's concerns and the evidence to support allegations for the Court. Prompt assignment is critical, and ensuring that the cases are assigned in a fair rotation is also essential. Tracking these assignments using

pencil and paper, meant that supervisors in the other office could not monitor the case assignment levels, which lead to some staff consistently receiving more assignments than others. Additionally, the order of staff assignment was determined by who was available in the office and when they were last assigned a case. This tracked on a post-it note that was re-written each day. Additionally, monthly statistics were captured through manual count, and there was no archive of the previous statistics. It should also be noted that there were two Family Finding and Engagement (FFE) staff whose case assignments also needed to be tracked, and whose cases were weighted differently than that of the DI staff. Additionally, they worked in a supportive role on cases and were not the primary case carrying worker.

When the Excel spreadsheet was introduced, the assignment process instantly became more efficient. There was a North County and South County spreadsheet, reflecting the two different offices where staff was assigned. The supervisors in each office could read (and edit) each of the spreadsheets, however, only one person could edit it at a time. Staff also had unauthorized visibility of the caseloads of their peers, when they only should be able to access their own caseloads. However, staff wanted to know when they would be “up” for assignment so that they could plan their day effectively. Unfortunately, staff began inadvertently tampering with the database and erasing formulas that were needed. Also, they would unknowingly lock the supervisors out of the spreadsheet while they were viewing! Additionally, because this was not a web-based application, it was not well equipped to be accessed remotely which may be necessary in the event of an emergency or disaster. Coupled with the growing erosion of the integrity of maintaining a spreadsheet, the program needed a better system.

The objectives of a new system were to enhance and upgrade the Excel database by:

- Replicating the functionality of the spreadsheet while improving its reliability and data integrity
- Provide a web-based application so that supervisors can make real-time updates to assignments from anywhere, using any device
- Automate the assignment rotations of staff and make that accessible to the staff so they do not have to:
  - Find a supervisor to ask where they are in the rotation
  - Be in the office to know where they are in the rotation
  - Minimize or avoid human error in calculating who is up next for assignment
  - Access information to which they are entitled.
- Provide a user-friendly way to track the assignment of cases that are assigned.
- Provide a courtesy notification to the CWW and their supervisor that they have received a new assignment
- In the event of an emergency or disaster, be able to make assignments from an alternative/remote location.
- Assist with monthly reporting of statics to the Program Manager, and the tracking of patterns and trends of intake and case assignment over time
- Track schedules of the staff so that supervisors know which staff are available to receive an assignment.

- Differentiate between types of assignments and weight the cases accordingly.

From start to finish, the program took about 5 months to launch. The blueprint, proof of concept phase discussion began in late 9/2021. We had a “sketch” to review at the end of 10/2021. On 2/1/2022 we had an app to beta test. The pilot lasted 4 weeks with regular consultation with the developer. The app launched 3/1/2022 and has been in consistent use ever since.

The new DI App met or exceeded all of the requirements. The DI App is designed to expand to other programs outside of DI to keep track of their cases and assignment distribution.

## The Cost of the Program

The team comprised of internal resources from ACSSA and ITD, resulting in no additional cost to the County with the following roles:

- Business Analyst
- Branding Designer
- Project Manager
- Program Manager
- Program Supervisor

The application was created using a combination of different technologies that are part of the Microsoft Office 365 US Government (GCC) services:

- Power Apps to create internal web application
- Power BI for reporting
- O365 Outlook for emailing staff

## The Results/Success of the Program

The new DI App were released in March 2021. Since then, SSA observed the following:

- 656 cases created and distributed among 4 supervisors
- 75% decrease in time to administrate distribution of DI case assignment
- 97% availability for supervisors to make updates in real-time, using any device, from anywhere, anytime

In addition, the new Power BI reports provide a better visualization of the case assignment trends to ensure equity across office locations.

## Worthiness of Award

For SSA’s Children Family Services, responding promptly is vital for the protection of a child in danger. The DI App streamlines the process to reduce operational risk, increase staff efficiency, and reduce processing times for workers to make a referral. Staff are now able to quickly see availability and make assignments using any device, from any location, anytime.

# Supplemental Materials – SSA Dependency Investigations (DI)

Power Apps | DI App

## Dependency Investigations

Cases Schedules Users Holidays

From: 12/31/2001 To: 12/31/2001 Role: Case Type: Office: Worker: Children: Clear Add Case

Worker	Office	Role	Assigned	DI Case Type	Child(ren)	# Children	Entered Care	Court Filing	LEP	Primary CWW	Pr. CWW Sup	Notes
[Worker]	[Office]	[Role]	[Assigned]	[DI Case Type]	[Child(ren)]	[# Children]	[Entered Care]	[Court Filing]	[LEP]	[Primary CWW]	[Pr. CWW Sup]	[Notes]
[Worker]	[Office]	[Role]	[Assigned]	[DI Case Type]	[Child(ren)]	[# Children]	[Entered Care]	[Court Filing]	[LEP]	[Primary CWW]	[Pr. CWW Sup]	[Notes]
[Worker]	[Office]	[Role]	[Assigned]	[DI Case Type]	[Child(ren)]	[# Children]	[Entered Care]	[Court Filing]	[LEP]	[Primary CWW]	[Pr. CWW Sup]	[Notes]
[Worker]	[Office]	[Role]	[Assigned]	[DI Case Type]	[Child(ren)]	[# Children]	[Entered Care]	[Court Filing]	[LEP]	[Primary CWW]	[Pr. CWW Sup]	[Notes]
[Worker]	[Office]	[Role]	[Assigned]	[DI Case Type]	[Child(ren)]	[# Children]	[Entered Care]	[Court Filing]	[LEP]	[Primary CWW]	[Pr. CWW Sup]	[Notes]

Power BI SSA Dependency Inve... Dependency Investigat... | Data updated 2/15/23

### Next Assignment

Alameda County Social Services Agency

Office	Last Assigned Date	Worker - Full Name	02/15/2023	02/16/2023	02/17/2023	02/20/2023	02/21/2023	02/22/2023	02/23/2023	02/24/2023	02/27/2023	02/28/2023
North County	01/31/2023	C349 - Peter Iid	Available	Available	Available	Unavailable	Available	Available	Unavailable	Available	Unavailable	Available
	02/06/2023	C352 - Myra Wright	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Available	Unavailable	Available	Available
	02/07/2023	C341 - Emily Carmona	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available						
		C354 - Sofia Marabito	Available	Available	Unavailable	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available	Unavailable	Available	Available
	02/09/2023	C356 - Scott Sizer	Available	Available	Available	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available
South County	02/10/2023	C342 - Marissa Morgan	Available	Available	Available	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available
	02/14/2023	C345 - Cassandra Nguyen	Available	Available	Available	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available	Unavailable	Unavailable	Available
	01/24/2023	C355 - Yulija Karyandri	Available	Unavailable	Unavailable	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available
	02/02/2023	C337 - Rhiana Scot	Unavailable	Unavailable	Available	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available
	02/02/2023	C337 - Shaina Cooper	Unavailable	Available	Available							
02/02/2023	C324 - Mark Hood	Unavailable	Available	Available	Unavailable	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available
	02/14/2023	C332 - Ryan Coffey	Available	Available	Available	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available
		C332 - Anna Becker	Available	Available	Available	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available
	C338 - Jordan Lupo	Available	Available	Available	Unavailable	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available	Available	