

## San Francisco's Department of Child Support Services Models Virtual Success in a Post-Pandemic World

Karen Roye has been watching over the *Department of Child Support Services (SF DCSS)* to ensure that its services have remained available to the people of City and County of San Francisco for the past 17 years.

When COVID-19 appeared, Roye and her team **Carol Beckett, Penni Eigster, Sheryl Myers, and Freda Randolph Glenn** were faced with a challenge—how to shelter-in-place while continuing to provide indispensable public services, such as establishing and enforcing child support, medical support, and establishing paternity for newborns and children.

Each year, SF DCSS provides services to over nine thousand families. SF DCSS advocates on behalf of parents caring for newborns, infants and children to secure reliable, consistent financial support.

Roye and her team had no ramp up time before Mayor London Breed's emergency declaration on March 16, 2020. Overnight, **Roye, Beckett, Eigster, Myers, and Randolph Glenn** had to expedite the *development* and *implementation* of a viable telecommuting solution for all staff in order to keep them safe from exposure to the infectious COVID-19 disease.

Because their clients' needs did not cease during the pandemic, Roye and her team had to identify work assignments that could be completed while telecommuting on a part-time basis. It immediately became clear that a long-term solution was needed to enhance the efficiencies of telecommuting employees and continue essential in-office functions, while maintaining employee and public health and safety alike.

SF DCSS reached out to strategic partners including California Child Support Services and the San Francisco Department of Technology (DT). DT created a viable multi-factor authentication (MFA) system connecting SF DCSS employees to the City's network and the state's own system and databases. DT also provided VDI and VPN solutions for SF DCSS to access their office desktop computers.

"Security and compliance were always at the forefront," explains Roye. "Because of the dedication and determination of the entire team at SF DCSS, our case workers were able to perform the full range of case management functions while teleworking safely from home.

"We immediately reduced our in-office work days to ensure the health and safety of our employees while supporting our clients with their urgent child support service needs."

The SF DCSS has become a model for how the new reality of telecommuting and remote case management can work productively and efficiently in the City.

The team came up with creative solutions to perform necessary legal functions, such as using *DocuSign* for stipulations and using *File & ServeXpress* for filing court documents and submitting service of process documentation electronically. SF DCSS maximized their success

by leveraging available technology and software solutions to transition from traditional onsite, manual processes to remote, paperless, or near-paperless processes, smoothly and cost-effectively.

During COVID-19, the team worked with local courts to develop a process and workflow for remote child support court hearings that ceased during the pandemic.

A model of collaboration, SF DCSS was one of the first California child support agencies to resume court hearings, allowing for modification of child support orders to reflect parents' actual ability to pay during a time of economic upheaval and financial uncertainty. For infants and children in need of financial and medical support, this was critical to their health and survival.

SF DCSS leveraged best practices to create a remote call-handling model consistent with other local child support agencies (LCSAs) to provide a seamless customer experience. The VPN connectivity that DT supplied also allowed caseworkers to provide remote call services for clients. An electronic call handling schedule was created and posted at the SF DCSS SharePoint site to enable remote access and schedule changes.

To ensure proper notice to the public, the team, led by Outreach Manager, Freda Randolph Glenn, published SF DCSS's temporary closure notifications and 24/7 self-service resources on its website and Facebook page. The team auto-dialed and mailed postcards communicating its availability to clients.

The team also provided regular updates at City partner meetings and information about suspended enforcement actions enacted by the California Department of Child Support Services (CA DCSS) in response to the pandemic.

The Team also participated in a virtual *Fatherhood Workshop* and *Megablack Dreamkeeper* meetings and provided input and served as the first pilot county program for CA DCSS' new *Debt Reduction Program* to provide debt relief to parents owning child support debt to the state.

The management team collaborated with staff to draft a *Racial Equity Action Plan (REAP)* focused on creating a *diverse, equitable, and inclusive* environment for its employees. *REAP* centers on creating fairness in the hiring process, providing promotional opportunities, supporting employee development, and providing a safe and inclusive work environment for all employees.

For internal administrative functions, Roye encouraged her team to reduce the need for on-site staff resulting in time sheets and attachments transitioning from hard copies to electronic documents and signatures. With the change came a reduction in timekeeping errors and need for corrections by SF DCSS payroll staff and the Controller Office's Payroll Division.

The team completed a renovation project consolidating three floors of office space into two floors. Following City, OSHA and CalOSHA COVID-19 health and safety standards, the team designed a new workspace to ensure the health and safety of all employees and visitors alike.

The team continues implementing new virtual solutions to improve child support services including the use of virtual interviews via Microsoft Teams, reintroducing a payment kiosk, creating a virtual reception and chat feature, and investing in computer kiosks in the lobby allowing visitors to access online virtual services.

Without question, SF DCSS' **Karen Roye, Carol Beckett, Penni Eigster, Sheryl Myers, and Freda Randolph Glenn** have served as a model for other City agencies serving the public on how to use innovative design and technology to deliver effective, quality services to the public in a post-pandemic world.

*Karen Roye was appointed to Director of the San Francisco Department of Child Support Services in 2004 by Mayor Gavin Newsom. Prior to her appointment, Roye served as a Budget Analyst in the Office of Budget and Legislative Affairs assisting with the development of the City's annual fiscal year for Mayor Willie Brown. She started her career with the City as a Budget Analyst with the Bureau of Finance for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission in 1998. During her City tenure, Roye has volunteered as a member of the San Francisco Reentry Council, the Family Violence Council, and the Sentencing Commission. Additionally, she has served on the California Board of Behavioral Sciences, and on the Board of the San Francisco Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).*