

This report presents results from an assessment of laptop computer deployment to Child Protective Services (CPS) caseworkers in three New York State Local Departments of Social Services (LDSS): New York City Administration for Children Services (ACS), Onondaga County Department of Social Services, and Wayne County Department of Social Services. The assessment reported here is part of a much larger effort by the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) and the state legislature to deploy and assess mobile technologies in CPS. The larger project known as **The New York State Mobile Technology Project** has two major parallel components – deployment and evaluation. The deployment of mobile technologies was a collaborative effort between OCFS and the LDSS. The Center for Technology in Government (CTG) at the University at Albany/SUNY, an independent research center, was contracted to conduct the evaluation.

To date, three phases of mobile technology deployment across the state and three corresponding evaluations to assess the impact of mobile technologies in CPS work have been completed. The fourth evaluation effort, entitled the **2008-2009 Demonstration Project**, is the subject of this report. The most recent evaluation strategy is an extended assessment of three LDSS who previously deployed laptops in order to learn more about the impact of mobile technology over longer periods of use.

This report examines the use of mobile technology in these three LDSS for a period of eight to ten months. This longer time period for the initial assessment differs from that in previous deployment and assessment phases, which covered less than three months of use. The longer time period provides an opportunity to explore how caseworkers are using mobile technologies and the resulting new ways of working. This assessment also examines productivity results through analysis of data from the state central database as well as satisfaction of caseworkers through group interviews with a sample of users from each district.

Productivity increases were evident in all three LDSS, but each followed different patterns. The NYC ACS results showed the largest productivity increases in terms of timely case closings. In NYC, laptop users handled approximately 28% more cases during the ten month test period compared to the preceding ten months. The rate of case closings within the required 60-day period increased from 52% to 75%. Both Onondaga and Wayne handled slightly more cases during the eight month test period compared to the preceding eight months. Both experienced increases in the rate of case closings within the first 60 days. All three districts experienced an increase in the volume of progress note entries as well as an increase in the volume of safety assessments completed within seven days. For safety assessments, the volume closed with the seven-day requirement increased, but not the proportion. For example, Onondaga and Wayne showed an increase in volume entered, but showed either no change or small decreases in the percent of notes entered within each day. Lastly, Onondaga and Wayne showed an increase in the number of cases closed after 60 days. This last trend may be a result of clearing of older case backlogs.

Caseworkers in the second data collection period reported a two-phase learning process – focused first on the technology itself, then on how to best integrate it into work practices. Over time, it seems caseworkers are able to integrate the laptop use into CPS work. In the interviews, CPS caseworkers reported a wide variety of ways in which they integrated the devices into daily routines, ranging from carrying them along in the field on a regular basis to keeping the laptops at home for after-hours catch-up work (i.e., generally documentation). There remained some important barriers to this deeper integration. On the technical side, caseworkers reported continuing to experience poor connectivity and cumbersome log-on and data entry procedures. Lack of incentives and supportive policies for field, home or overtime compensation for the use of the laptops emerged as barriers to more extensive and integrated use. In spite of the lack of compensation, however, many users reported substantial use at home to help stay current with their work load. This was described as an important, though intangible benefit. Overall, in both data collection periods, satisfaction with laptop use was high.

The policy and technical barriers illustrated by caseworkers reveal the difficulty of mobile technology deployment in a complex environment such as that of the social services field in New York State. Implementing a statewide initiative such as this one, and within a limited period of time, is complicated by the local administration of CPS work. The prospects for rapid change in such a two-layered system are unlikely. OCFS' strategy of incremental change, where feedback informs subsequent deployment phases, is more likely to succeed. A deployment and assessment schedule that aligns well with a more natural progression of organizational, policy, and technical change may allow for the realization of the full impact of the mobile technology. Even in this current and deliberate process, however, LDSS are already starting to share information with other LDSS about supportive policies and practices. With a strong and steady pace, OCFS can continue to make modifications along the way so that cultural changes are effected and barriers minimized.