

# ***Managing in a Paperless Environment:*** **STARS Automated System**

**ROSEMARIE DEFranco**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services (MCDSES) needs to automate its overall functions within the department. The primary focus should be on the imaging of case records and streamlining of internal paperwork due to the fast growing and ever-expanding demand for workspace. With the implementation of a case imaging system the demand for records storage space and workspace for the physical files is reduced drastically. Additionally, this maximizes the efficiency and productivity of caseworkers regarding how they manage their cases by creating a paperless case management process.

Currently MCDSES does not have an Information Technology (IT) infrastructure in place to set up an electronic/paperless environment. In order to ensure the success of this transition, a system such as CaseSTARS would need to be implemented. A description of the CaseSTARS system is described in the paper.

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## **Introduction**

Monterey County Department of Social and Employment Services (MCDSSES) would benefit from automating its case management system along with its overall automation of internal operations. This is due in part to the fast growing and ever-expanding demand for space to house employees, as well as advancing technology and the need to streamline workload for all employees. Due to the high number of physical case files per worker (this in itself takes up a lot of space as well as the demand for storage areas to house discontinued cases, forms, and new case folders, there is a continuous space problem. In examining Monterey County's workstation access to all cases, documents, forms, notices, handbooks, manuals, and worker information, Contra Costa County was an excellent place to conduct my 15-day internship. It allowed me to learn from what they have already implemented in regards to: Document Imaging, Storage and Retrieval System and a sophisticated Employee Database (Tel-STARS). Currently, MCDSSES does not have a robust information technology (IT) infrastructure that would support an easy transition into an automated environment; however, MCDSSES has been moving forward in the planning of an imaging solution. Contra Costa County's systems have allowed MCDSSES to move forward to become a paperless environment.

Contra Costa County Employment and Human Services Department (EHSD) implemented an electronic case records storage and retrieval system in May, 2005. This system is called CaseSTAR (Case Stored Text Automated Retrieval). The CaseStar

system houses EHSD records; this system was developed with EHSD and an outside vendor by the name of IKON. IKON is a "well-known" company in the document and imaging industry. They worked with EHSD to implement the CaseSTAR system for its benefit programs, caseworkers, and management.

## **The CaseSTAR System**

The CaseSTAR system allowed Contra Costa to consolidate case records for the following programs; CalWORKs, Food Stamps, Medi-Cal, General Assistance (GA), and Foster Care for each of its district offices. This allowed the physical case files to be centralized into an electronic-based environment for all staff to easily access from their workstations. One of the main reasons it is essential to have access to all cases at the "touch of a finger" is that Contra Costa County has a well functioning Call Center (client service center), in which clients call in and are provided service by any worker that takes the call. All client information can be accessed by any one of these workers at their workstation. EHSD expressed that one of the main reasons their Call Center has been successful is due to the CaseSTAR system.

## **Design of the System**

Contra Costa County went with a Vendor Hosted Service Solution developed by IKON, which was integrated with EHSD's internal network. All information is stored on a local server as well as a backup server in Sacramento. The system is known as CaseSTAR, and all of their sub-systems, such as Form-

STAR, TEL-STARS, and ASSIST which were developed to run in conjunction with CaseSTAR.

IKON worked closely with EHSD's IT staff to develop the system which would include the following: 1) A team of employees from IKON who would assist in the case preparation for case records to be sent to the IKON Scanning Center in Sacramento (lessons learned are; a) to ensure case preparation is done in advance by line workers, b) cases are split so only current information is in the cases, c) there aren't any loose papers, and d) documents should be imaged and filed by events), 2) the storage of the electronic case records and, 3) service and maintenance of the hardware and application.

In order to ensure a timely completion of the case scanning, thousands of case files were sent to the Sacramento IKON scanning facility, where over 100 onsite scanning machines were in place to ensure new applications would be scanned into the system as they were taken by EHSD. EHSD made a decision to send all denied applications to the Sacramento scanning facility to save time as well as wear and tear on their local scanners. The preparation of these case files is completed by the unit clerks.

*(See the Appendix for EHSD and IKON Indexed Documents 2005–2008.)*

### The Business Needs

Contra Costa EHSD had an immediate need to automate their old paper case record process into that of an imaging solution to better support their staff, reduce their need for a warehouse storage facility (which saved them \$510,000 the first year they were able to close this facility), and, as previously stated, to ensure the success of the Call Center. Additionally, they were able to reduce the amount of paper costs, by reducing the amount of paper that was distributed to staff and/or utilized for hard copies of documents. *(See Table 1.)*

### Benefits of Implementing an Imaging System

There are many benefits to implementing this Automated Case Records System. Below is a summary

**TABLE 1**  
**Implementation of STARS and FormSTAR Systems**  
**Impact on Paper Document Distribution Costs**  
**February 25, 2007**

Year	Total Annual Cost	Year Over Year Difference	Accumulated Yearly Savings
2002	\$954,426.97		
2003	\$511,867.62	-\$442,559.35	\$ 442,559.35
2004	\$287,624.00	-\$224,243.62	\$ 666,802.97
2005	\$545,844.28	\$258,220.28	\$ 408,582.69
Total			\$1,517,945.01
Cost data was not tracked for 2006 and 2007			

of just a few reasons its beneficial for Contra Costa County:

- Implementation of CaseSTARS, FormSTAR, TEL-STAR, and ASSIST automated systems run together to ensure that all employees can access case information, forms, notices, manual sections, handbooks, and personnel information at the touch of a finger.
- It also assisted in the success of the Call Center. Client information is readily accessible and current. Further, there is a decrease in verifications being lost or misplaced. A sufficient amount of space to house staff to handle a higher number of clients was reduced due to no physical case files in multiple bookshelves, and additionally with all forms, manuals
- and notices of action on line; there is no need for line staff to store paper copies at their workstations.
- Finally, there were significant savings on the closure of storage facilities, reduction in the number of case folders, copies, mail distribution, floor space for staff, Call Center Facility, where more clients can be served by less staff and less space needed to meet these needs.

### EHSD's Proposed Budget

*See Table 2.*

**TABLE 2**  
**Automated Case Records System Cost Allocation Plan**

State	\$895,271	40%
Federal	\$895,271	40%
County	\$447,636	20%
Total	\$2,238,178	100%

## Procurement

A county competitive bid process was followed in order to meet state and federal procurement requirements.

EHSD was challenged with ensuring that it received the best value solution available for the monies they had allotted to this project. The competitive bid process needed to meet all state and federal procurement requirements. Selection was narrowed to companies that had a demonstrated experience level, in particular with a county that had over 50,000 case records to image.

## Project Duration

In a little over 3 months Contra Costa County was able to complete the huge task of converting over 51,000 case records into the case imaging system. This was a team adventure, from the IKON employees, to line workers, clerical staff, and management did their part to ensure the success of this conversion. The reason this was done so quickly was that over the next few months they were transitioning to the CalWIN system.

## Lessons Learned

In researching this project, there were many key lessons learned and shared by Contra Costa County. One of the key lessons learned is not to implement several major changes within months of each other. Due to EHSD's upcoming transition to CalWIN, and opening a Call Center, they had to expedite the implementation of the case imaging system. This amount of change to significant work practices highly impacted all levels of staff, as well as clients. A few other lessons learned are as follows: 1) require ad-

equate training from the vendor on imaging (EHSD only had 3 days of training to a select group of people who then trained all of their staff in one and a half to two hour training sessions), 2) do not change your case filing mechanism, 3) stay with the events you have in your current manual files (the change in this impacts staff and clients by the inability to locate documents), 4) split all of your manual case files in advance (only have the papers you need scanned in the case file at the time of conversion and do not have any loose papers in the case they all should be filed in the event you want them imaged), 5) use the bar coding imaging system (this is faster and less chance of misfiling papers), and 6) do not convert closed files (do not spend time or resources imaging closed files since when these individuals come in to reapply, their file will be imaged at that time).

## Recommendations for Monterey County DSES

A document imaging system such as CaseSTAR could be implemented in DSES to address the following business needs:

- **Implementation of Call Centers**—With the impending transition to a Call Center, implementation of a caseimaging program would provide workers with fast and easy access to all client stored documents. This would allow any worker that received the call to access all information at their desk.
- **Workstation Space**—Due to the high number of physical cases assigned to workers, space at their workstations is limited. The case imaging system would allow workstations to be redesigned to allow for less space needed per workstation and more workstations per location overall.
- **Building Space**—The case imaging system would allow for less space to be dedicated to the storage of closed cases on site, as well as the reduction and/or elimination of storage of forms/notices on site.
- **Off-site Storage Space**—The ability to image all cases would all but eliminate the need to have an off-site storage facility to house thousands of physical case files.

- **Customer Service**—Due to the ability to scan documents into the computer system at the time they are received from clients, the overall level of service would increase by less documents being misrouted to the incorrect worker or being lost enroute to the worker.
- **Case load Management**—The benefit of having access at your fingertips for case information, forms, notices, policies, and regulations is that it would reduce the amount of time staff would need to search for the manual versions of all of these.

## Conclusion

MCDSSES will continue to gather information and knowledge about the various imaging systems. In the near future, MCDSSES will be converting to the C-IV benefit issuing system and possibly a call service center. Technology will play a key role in the success of these conversions. The ability to have access at each workstation to all cases, forms, and personnel will ensure the success of these endeavors, while providing a greater quality service to the community.

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