PROCESS IMPROVEMENT
FOR LEGAL AID

TIG FINAL EVALUATION REPORT

Grantee Name: Florida Rural Legal Services **TIG Grant Number: 15033**
Submission Date: July 1, 2019

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I. Project Goals and Objectives

Project Goal: The overall goal of the project was to increase the number of low-income individuals who are provided assistance and information by upgrading our phone system to provide call center functionality necessary to implement a centralized phone intake system, advice line for family and housing law, and text message capability.

Objectives:

- Create and implement a program-wide telephone system that increases clients' access to the legal information and assistance and enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of FRLS's intake system.
- Increase clients' access to legal assistance on family and housing law matters by developing and implementing a family and housing law advice line.
- Create and implement a text messaging capability that increases clients' access to legal information and services and enables FRLS to better assess the effectiveness and results of services for clients.

II. Evaluation Data and Methodologies

The evaluation data and methodologies used to determine whether this project achieved its goals and objectives track those that were set out in the Evaluation Plan. The following contains a list of the key data sets or methodologies that were undertaken:

- Create and implement a program-wide telephone system that increases clients' access to the legal information and assistance and enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of FRLS's intake system.
  - Descriptions of the technical components of the phone system purchased (hardware and software)
  - Description of the functionality and capacity of the phone system including call center functionality to allow the intake system to work on a live queue and a caller friendly routing system.
  - Description of test protocols, major test results, and significant changes implemented based on test results.
  - Survey data from users including staff and applicants regarding system's usability, usefulness, and efficiency.
  - Review CMS data on number of intakes performed under new system versus the previous system

  - Description of the personnel who ultimately were hired or reassigned to the program wide phone intake system.
  - Description of training provided to personnel
  - Written observations of the system.

- Increase clients' access to legal assistance on family and housing law matters by developing and implementing a family and housing law advice line.

  - Description of the system's technical components including hardware and software
  - Description of the system's functions and capacity such as the number of clients who can be served
  - Description of testing protocols, major test results, and significant changes implemented based on test results.
  - Using CMS data, review number of clients helped with housing and family law issues compared to previous system
  - Review survey data from clients and personnel
  - Quantitative Data: impact on program efficiencies including level of service provided to housing and family law clients, numbers of applicants helped per advocate vs. old system, geographical differences in location of where clients were helped previously versus with new advice line.
  - Written observations of the advice line

- Create and implement a text messaging capability that increases clients' access to legal information and services and enables FRLS to better assess the effectiveness and results of services for clients.
  - Description of the system's technical components including hardware and software
  - Description of the system's functionalities and capacities including ability to allow individuals to request legal information and links sent via text message, texting surveys to follow up on service and outcomes, and to interact with current clients with important information about their cases.
  - Description of test protocols, major results, and significant changes made based on test results.
  - Data: number of users using the text messaging system and what they are using it for
  - Survey data from users regarding the system's usability and usefulness
  - Quantitative data: impact on the capture of outcomes in regards to cases

III. Summary of Major Accomplishments, Recommendations, and Future Steps

Summary of Major Accomplishments

- In July 2017, FRLS launched the centralized call center phone system which created the ability for applicants to be screened for services immediately.
    - FRLS increased the number of intakes by 22%.
- In May of 2016, FRLS implemented a legal advice line for private landlord tenant and mobile home park rental issues and expanded to family law issues in April of 2017.
    - FRLS increased the number of family law cases from 807 in the year prior to starting the project (August 1, 2015 to July, 31 2016) to 1,748 cases most recently (August 1, 2017 to July 31, 2018).
    - FRLS increased the number of Housing cases from 2,971 in the year prior to starting the project (August 1, 2015 to July, 31 2016) to 3,201 cases most recently (August 1, 2017 to July 31, 2018).
- In the Spring of 2019, FRLS implemented text messaging
    - We implemented text messaging through LegalServer and Twillio to text for outcomes, provide legal information, and communicate with clients.

Recommendations

- Do not terminate your technology consultant contract too early or you will pay the price.
    - You need that consultant to be your advocate through the entire process. If FRLS had kept ours on through project implementation, we would have saved ourselves time, money, and anxiety over the process.
- Do not let your contractors push you around
    - Most of our issues with this project are the result of bad communication from our service provider. What we were promised was not delivered. The reality was that the person we were dealing with was for all intents and purposes a salesman. He did not know the true capabilities of the system and what our budget was going to get us.
- Change is difficult
    - The change we made through this project went beyond technology. It went to the very culture of the program and how each office functioned. When making significate program changes, staff buy-in is a must. We found it helpful to have a TIG Staff Committee which the project manager ran potential changes to the system and to help spread the information to the offices.

Future Steps

- FRLS has put together a new intake task force to explore making improvements to the phone system and how we do intakes.
- As part of a statewide project, we will be implementing online intake in the future.
- Expanding texting for outcomes

IV. In-Depth Analysis of Accomplishments

Phone System

Prior to the TIG project, FRLS handled intake differently in each of the four main offices in the program. In every office, they had a receptionist who would pre-screen applicants and then schedule appointments with the client screeners who handled phone calls and walk in traffic for her own office. Each office was operating independently rather than as a unified law firm which led to a lack of uniformity in services provided to clients. There was a lot of waste and inefficiencies. This project set out to change that system.

When FRLS started the project, our intention was to augment our existing on premises phone system by adding a call center feature. As we started doing research, we discovered that changing the entire phone system would allow us to be on the cutting edge of technology and allow us to have the call center technology that we were searching for. We applied for a modification of the TIG which allowed us to purchase an entire phone system rather than just the call center.

After going through the procurement process, FRLS entered into a contract with our phone provider to purchase a cloud based phone system and call center in November 2016. We purchased 25 licenses for Agents and Supervisors for the phone system which more than covers those who sign into the call center and gives us room to grow as we rework the intake and queue phone system. It took months of working with the phone provider to develop the phone architecture for the call center. The centralized call center phone system was implemented in July 2017.

Currently, the centralized phone system routes all calls into FRLS through to the queue for the intake. There are four full time intake specialists and four receptionists who work on the call center queues part time. The idea was to create a call center that would allow any caller to be able to get through and free up support staff time to work on other projects. Currently, screenings take place from 8:30 AM until 4:15 PM. The phones continue to be picked up after 4:15 PM, but callers looking for services are directed to call back the next business day.

The current call flow is attached as Exhibit 1. Currently, when someone calls into the phones, they will be able to get out of the queue immediately if they know the parties extension. Then they are offered language options. Once a choice is made, the caller can go to the staff phone directory again to avoid the queue. If they do not opt out, then they go into the queue. Wait times on the queue normally run an average two minutes on all language queues. The feature that makes our phone system unique is the automated callback, which provides the ability for callers to hold their place in line without having to use precious phone minutes waiting to speak with an intake specialist. They can input their number and the system will call them back when it is their turn. The longest waits on the phone system tend to be at the lunch hours between 12:00 PM and 2:00 PM because many of our staff are at lunch and applicants are calling during their own lunch hours.

FRLS used current personnel who were part of the prior intake system and reallocated them to the intake phone system. FRLS reallocated the four existing client screeners and converted them to the role of Intake Specialist. They pre-screen and screen the applicants calling for services. Receptionists have been allocated to the intake department part time to fill in when the intake specialists are not on the phone due to lunch or annual leave and to go onto the queue during times of high call volumes. A Managing Attorney of the Intake and Advice Line was hired from inside the program.

Prior to the phone system being implemented, we provided an in-person training of all staff at our main office in Lakeland, Florida. The training consisted of teaching everyone how to screen an applicant for services and making sure that everyone was working off of the same expectations since prior to the project everyone was screening differently in each office. We also made sure that the receptionists knew how to screen for services because they had only been prescreening prior to the change.

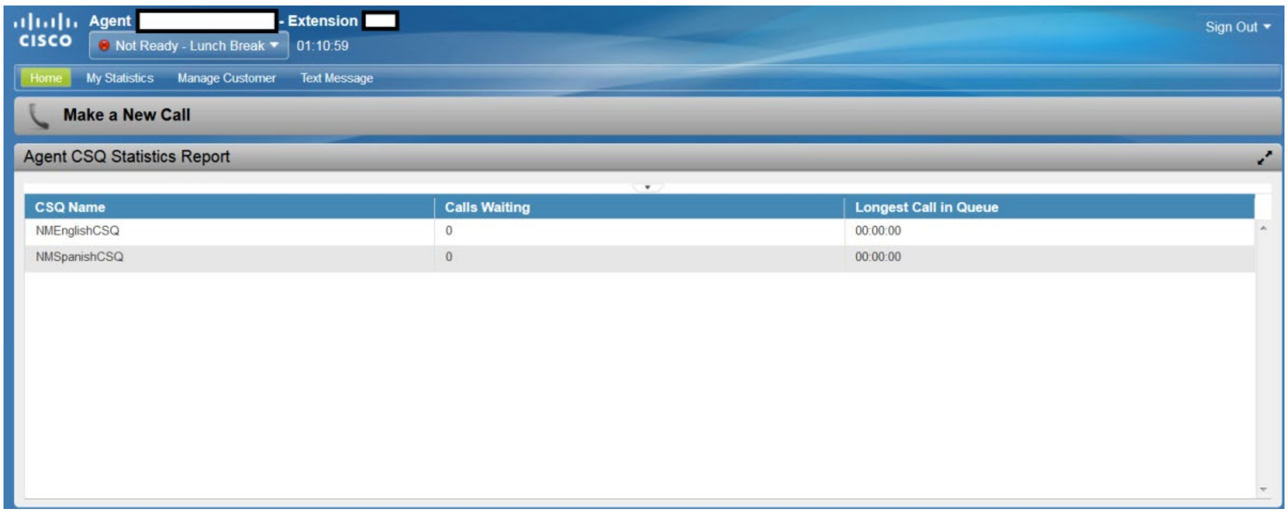
As the new program-wide phone system was implemented, trainings were provided to all personnel on how to use their phones by the phone provider. Once we were ready to implement the call center, a specialized training was provided to all of the intake specialists, receptionists and supervisors who would be interacting with the call center technology. To follow up on that training, the project manager traveled to all four offices to sit with each of the users to make sure they understood how to use the phones. We continue to provide training to all staff who interact with the call center technology in person and as well as through webinars.

Prior to the implementation of the phone system, limited testing was done by the project manager, the IT manager, and other members of the staff. We would call into the test queue to test the phone system functionality and ease of use. It took months to design the phone architecture and to install the needed equipment. By the time the phone system was installed, the phone provider was anxious to get us to sign off so they could get paid. Because we were being pushed by the phone system provider, we did not do as thorough of testing that we would have liked and did not have members of the public, community partners, etc. review the phone system prior to implementation. Due to the lack of testing, the call center had a few false starts where we had to go back to the old system due to issues with the phone architecture.

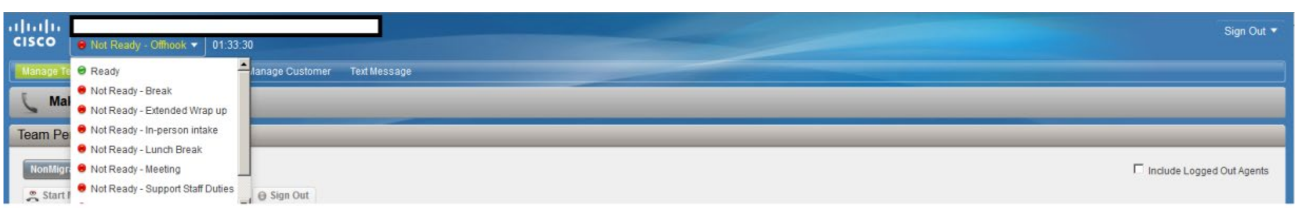
Because of the lack of testing, the phone system, when it finally went live, went through a series of minor changes due to feedback we received. First, we gave people more options at the beginning to opt out of the queue by entering an extension number or going to a staff directory. Second, we added more instructive information. After having the phone system up and running for almost two years, we are looking at re-scripting the phone queue to make it more user friendly.

How the Customer Contact Center Works:

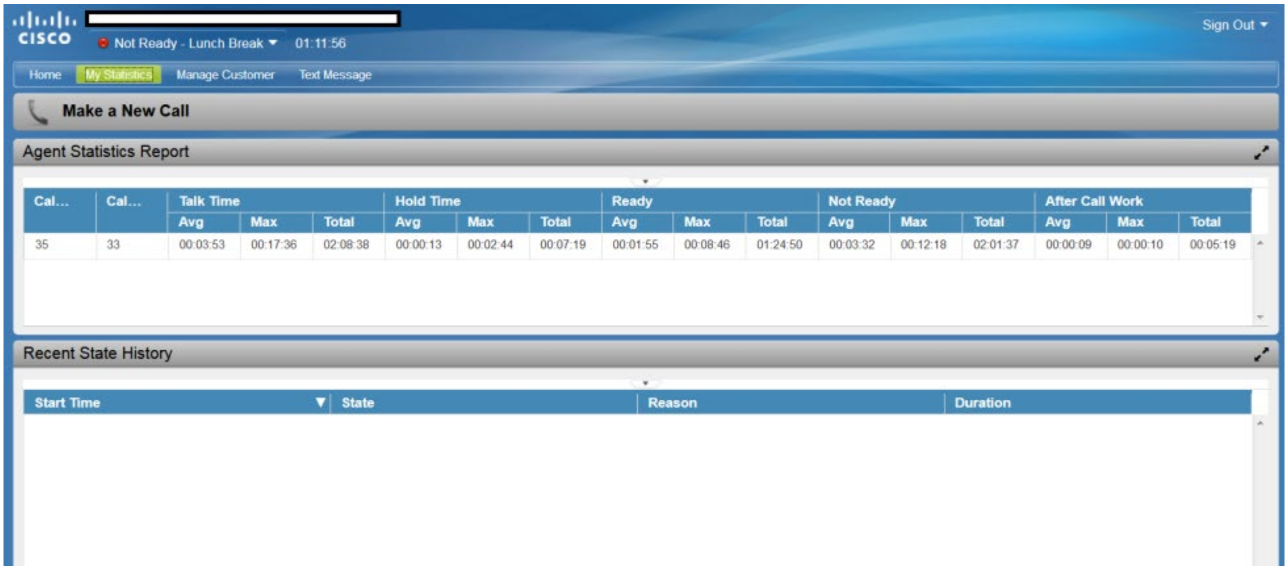
Each of the Intake Specialists and Receptionists use the customer contact phone center through an online portal. They are able to see the queues they are assigned and how many calls are waiting.



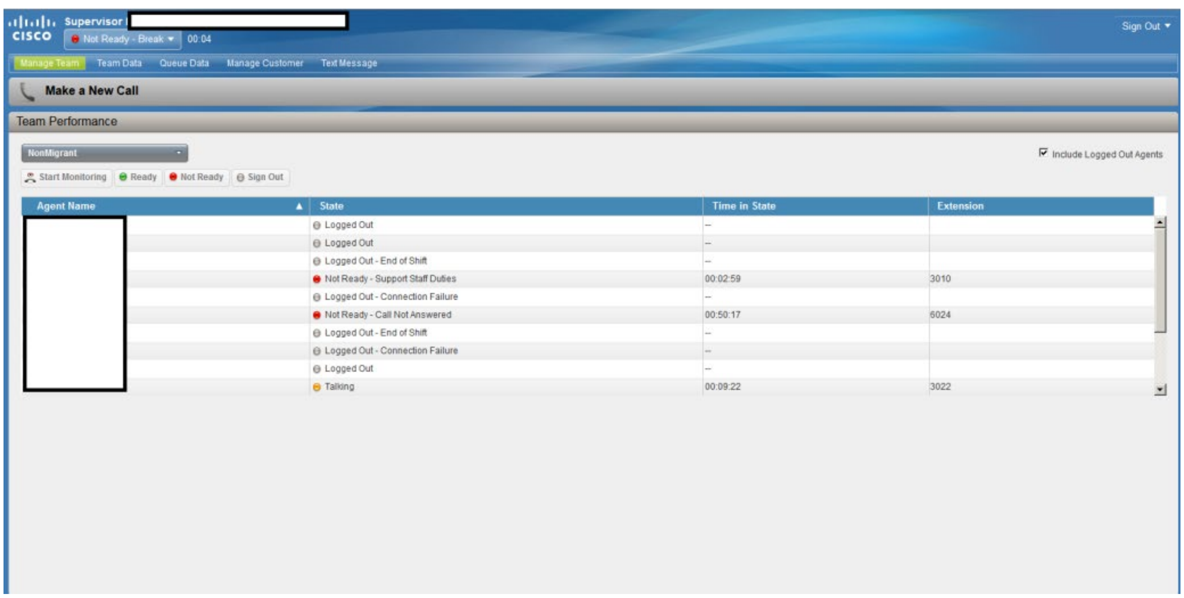
They have to put themselves in "Ready" status to accept phone calls. When they want to not answer the phone, they have to put themselves in "Not Ready Status" by choosing one of the drop down menu options.



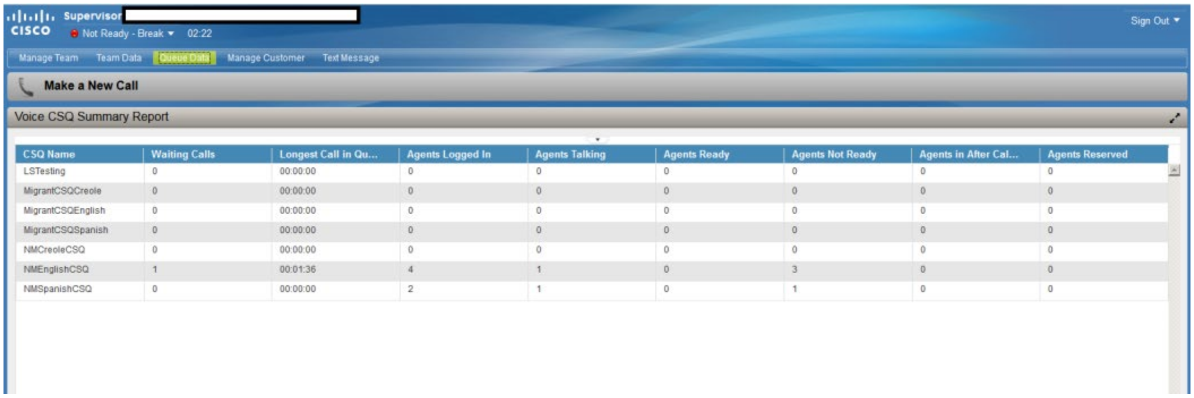
They can view their statistics:



A supervisor has the ability to see the status of everyone signed into the phone system.



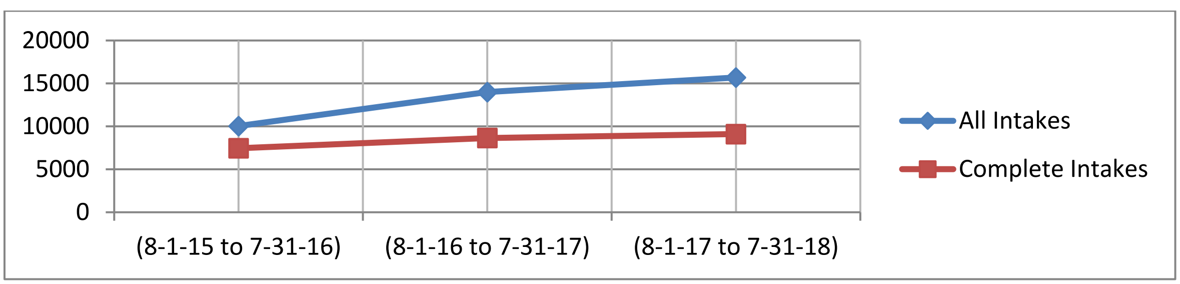
They can also monitor the queues of Spanish, English and Creole in both the migrant and non-migrant phone systems:



CSQ Name	Waiting Calls	Longest Call in Qu...	Agents Logged In	Agents Talking	Agents Ready	Agents Not Ready	Agents in After Cal...	Agents Reserved
LSTesting	0	00:00:00	0	0	0	0	0	0
MigrantCSQCreole	0	00:00:00	0	0	0	0	0	0
MigrantCSQEnglish	0	00:00:00	0	0	0	0	0	0
MigrantCSQSpanish	0	00:00:00	0	0	0	0	0	0
NMCreoleCSQ	0	00:00:00	0	0	0	0	0	0
NMEnglishCSQ	1	00:01:36	4	1	0	3	0	0
NMSpanishCSQ	0	00:00:00	2	1	0	1	0	0

Before FRLS started this project, the number of non-rejected intakes completed was 7,451 (August 1, 2015 to July 31, 2016). The next year (August 1, 2016 to July 31, 2017) the number of non-rejected intakes increased to 8,647. Most recently (August 1, 2017 to July 31, 2018), the number of non-rejected intakes completed was 9,107. That is a 22% increase in complete intakes being processed.

Prior to this project (August 1, 2015 to July 31, 2016), all intakes including applicants rejected prior to assignment, were 10,041. The next year (August 1, 2016 to July 31, 2017) the number intakes increased to 13,994. Most recently (August 1, 2017 to July 31, 2018), the number of intakes completed was 15,692. That is a 56% increase in the number of applications captured by FRLS meaning that we are making better contact with the public and collecting better data about applicants whom we reject. That information can help with our future strategic planning.



Surveys were created for Intake Staff, General Staff and for applicants regarding the system. Survey results for the Intake Staff and General Staff are included in this report as Exhibit #2. Overall, the system is considered easy to use. We added a brief survey to the end of the intake, and the data is included in the report as Exhibit #3.

The new system is a major improvement for our program. First, there has been a significant reduction in the amount of time from initial phone call to assignment to the office. We went from taking three to four days for an applicant to be screened for services to an average wait time of approximately two minutes. Second, prior to the project, each office handled phone calls, intakes, and cases differently. In observing the intake specialists and receptionists in the four main offices, we have found that they are asking similar questions and interpreting the answers from applicants similarly. Because of the TIG project and our partnership with Toyota Production System (see V. Factors affecting project accomplishments), FRLS improved and continues to improve its efficiency and uniformity across the program.

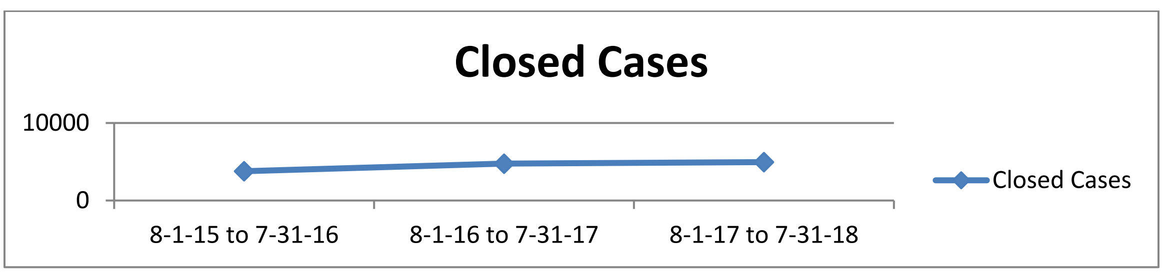
Advice Line

In May of 2016, we implemented our Advice Line for family and housing law. We are currently using an appointment system to handle phone calls on the Advice Line, using LegalServer calendars to set the appointments. Once the appointment is set, intake staff send an email to the advocate who is assigned the case letting them know the date and time and if any documents will be forthcoming. The advice line attorney is then required to look at their calendar for their appointments for that day. They call the applicant at the phone number given and speak with them about their legal issue. At that point, they close the file or send it to the managing attorney of the advice line to review for further services. All cases are reviewed by the managing attorney of the advice line to verify that proper advice was given.

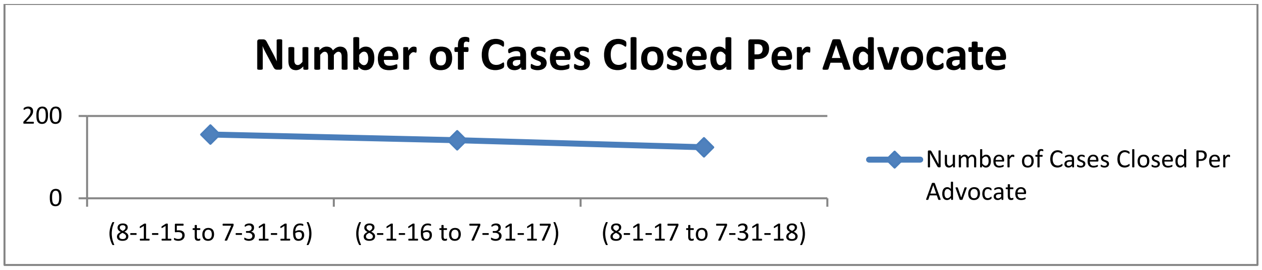
When fully staffed, the advice line has two part time attorneys and the managing attorney who each can handle up to eight appointments a day. One hundred twenty clients a week can ultimately be served by the advice line using the current appointment system.

The technical components vary depending on whether the advice line advocate works remotely or at one of the offices. A remote advocate uses a "soft phone" on the computer using to make phone calls. An advocate in the office uses a physical phone at their desktops to make calls.

Since the implementation of the system, the number of family law and housing clients assisted has increased. Before the project (August 1, 2015 to July 31, 2016), we helped 3,778 clients with these issues. In the middle of the project (August 1, 2016 to July 31, 2017), we helped 4,760 clients. In the most recent year (August 1, 2017 to July 31, 2018), FRLS helped 4,952 clients. Of those 4,952 clients 2,104 were serviced by the advice line only.



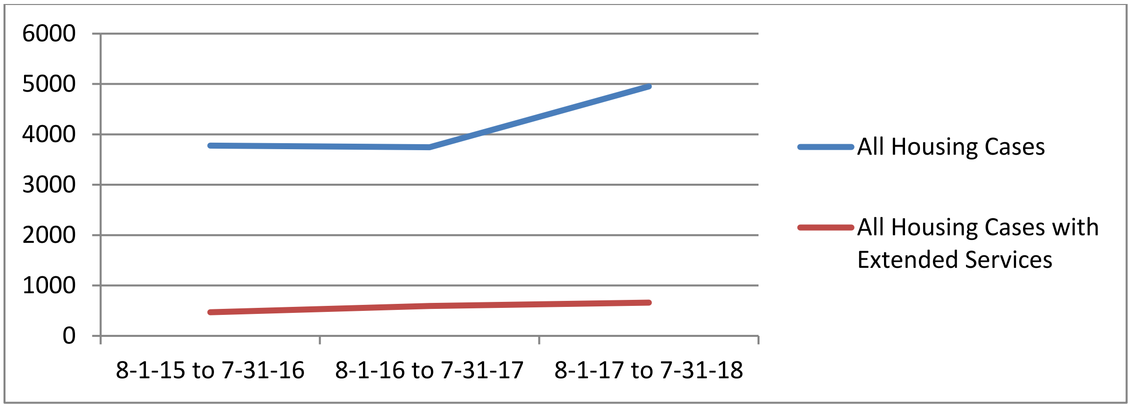
By instituting the advice line, we were able to reduce the number of cases handled by the main office advocates and attorneys by approximately 30 cases per year on average. That number includes advocates and attorneys who are not full time case handlers.

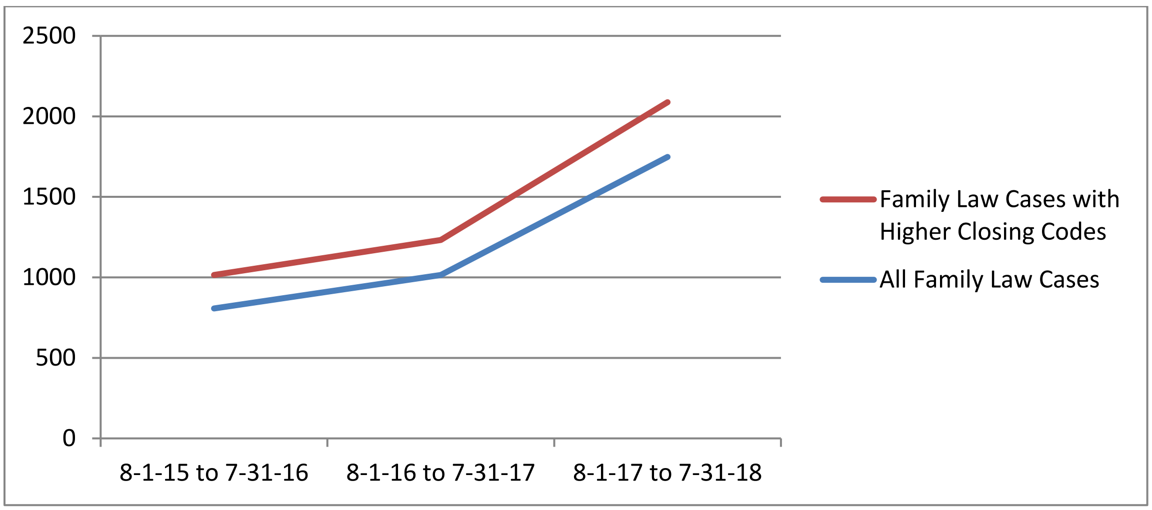


In some of the counties that are more remote, we have seen an increase in the number of individuals served in those counties. We also saw small increases in the number of intakes in Hendry, Highlands, Indian River, and Okeechobee counties. The biggest increases are in Polk and Saint Lucie Counties where we have offices.

	Intakes by County		
	8-1-15 to 7-31-16	8-1-16 to 7-31-17	8-1-17 to 7-31-18
County of Dispute	Totals		
00 OUT-OF-STATE OR UNKNOWN	56	25	75
ALACHUA	0	0	1
BREVARD	1	2	0
BROWARD	1	7	1
CHARLOTTE	515	506	347
COLLIER	228	143	198
COLUMBIA	0	0	1
DE SOTO	58	45	82
DUVAL	1	2	0
GLADES	15	17	17
HAMILTON	1	0	1
HARDEE	36	20	24
HENDRY	120	145	137
HERNANDO	0	0	1
HIGHLANDS	138	158	173
HILLSBOROUGH	4	16	23
INDIAN RIVER	345	431	445
LAKE	9	0	0
LEE	1681	1846	1626
MANATEE	0	0	2
MARION	0	0	1
MARTIN	324	413	441
MIAMI-DADE	8	4	3
OKEECHOBEE	74	136	172
ORANGE	5	3	0
OSCEOLA	0	2	0
PALM BEACH	1307	1674	1447
PINELLAS	2	0	0
POLK	1645	2014	2428
SAINT LUCIE	923	1147	1545
SANTA ROSA	0	0	1
SARASOTA	3	6	4
Total Intakes	7502	8764	9198

FRLS saw an increase in the number of closed family and housing law cases and the number of clients who received extended services. FRLS went from providing 469 clients extended services in housing cases to 606 clients. For Family Law cases, we went from providing 208 clients extended services to 340 clients for the most recent year.





The Advice Line has given FRLS another tool to assist more clients and bridge the gap for those who need legal services but cannot afford it. In observing the system, the pros are that individuals are given a date and time for a phone call. Normally, the advice line attorneys call at the date and time of the appointment unless it has to be rescheduled. However, applicants sometimes do not pick up. Also, there is sometimes a waste in the amount of time scheduled. We have half hour appointments. Sometimes, the phone call does not last more than ten minutes. Overall, however, the advice line has improved our services to our clients and community.

We set up a limited survey of Advice Line clients. To be surveyed by text message, the applicant had to agree to receive text messages and agree to take a survey. We started sending the surveys to clients who were served as of May 1, 2019 and closed the survey on June 7, 2019. During that period of time, the advice line closed 189 cases. Of those individual clients 57 agreed to take a survey and receive a text message. Of those 57 clients, we received 23 responses to the survey question.

In setting up the survey, we debated what kind of survey we should send. We thought about creating a more elaborate survey on a survey platform to send to applicants. After doing research, we found that the response rate tended to be lower. We do not have a way of sending multimedia text messages at this time through LegalServer and Twillio so that also limited our options. In an attempt to get the best response rate, we came up with a simple question to send to clients. The text message reads as follows: "Thank you for agreeing to take a survey from Florida Rural Legal Services. Did the advice we provide to you help you understand your legal rights?"

With the response rate we have received, we are looking at expanding the survey to other projects in the program. The primary roadblock to expanding the project is finding available staff time to send out surveys and record responses using the current system. We are looking at possibly getting volunteers from law schools etc. to work on sending the surveys and gathering the data in the future. FRLS is also looking into the bulk text messaging module as it becomes more readily available to the LegalServer community.

Text Messaging

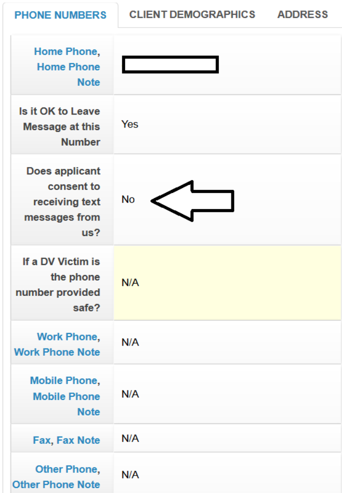
The text messaging part of this project had many road blocks along the way. When we started our bidding process we explained to all of the phone providers the needs for the project regarding text messaging. The provider chosen led us to believe that it could provide that text messaging feature through their software system. When it was implemented in the Fall of 2017, we discovered that it did not meet our program's needs. Specifically, the only staff who had access were users of the call center system. Because the company was not charging us for the features, it did not do anything to fix the issues. Eventually, the text messaging stopped working all together after one of the companies involved went out of business.

In the meantime, because we knew we had issues with the text messaging, we were in contact with LegalServer and Twillio to purchase the text messaging feature. Twillio is a company that handles text messaging for companies and non-profits and is set up to work with LegalServer. Our first step was to set up an account with them. The company has a very generous non-profit agreement that allowed FRLS to set up text messaging for very little expense. Once we had the account with Twillio, we purchase the basic text messaging module for LegalServer.

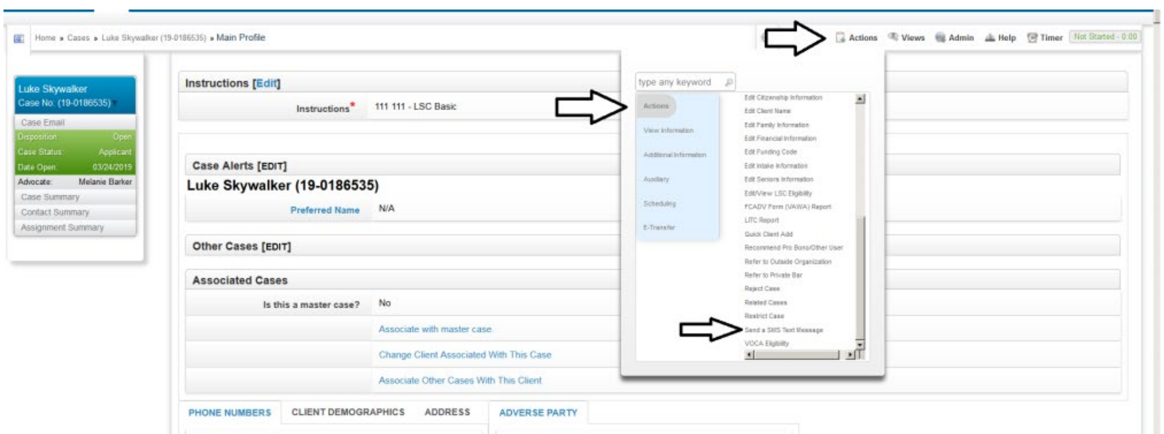
We implemented text messaging through LegalServer in the Spring of 2019. The system is available to everyone in the program and each person has the ability to text clients and applicants as needed. The intake and advice line use the text message feature to send texts to applicants who do not answer the phone for their appointments, to send links to legal information websites, and notifications of where to fax or email documents.

Text Messaging In LegalServer:

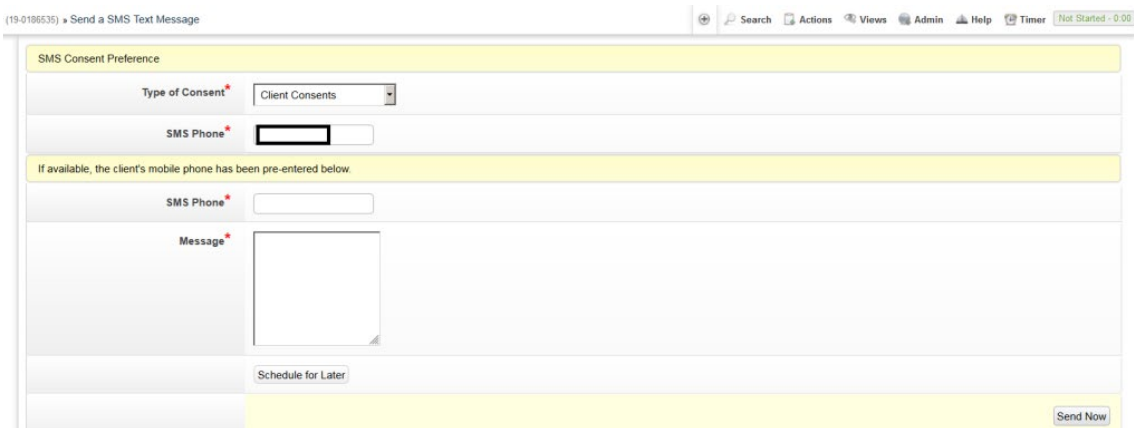
To text a client, we first verify that they agreed to receive a text message. We placed that data point under the "Phone Number" tab on the client's main profile page.



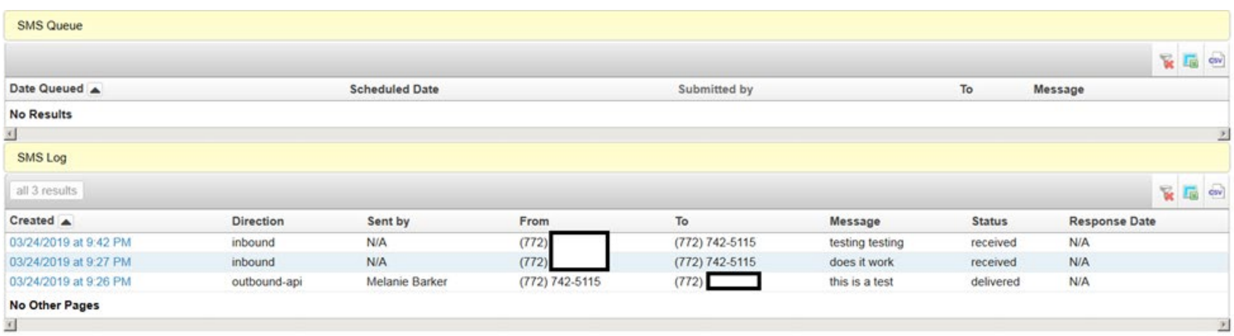
If client has consented, then you go to the "Actions" menu on the Client Profile page and choose "Send a SMS Text Message"



It will send the user to the SMS Text Message Page where they have to verify the client's consent preference by completing the SMS Consent Preference and entering the phone number that the client agreed to use for texting. Once the consent is completed, then the user has to re-input the number without any dashes or numerical symbols and the message. They can choose to schedule it now or in the future.



The user can see all scheduled text message in the file in the "Queue" and see all of the text message that have been sent or received in the "Log" which is also located on the SMS Text Message Page.



SMS Queue

Date Queued	Scheduled Date	Submitted by	To	Message
No Results				

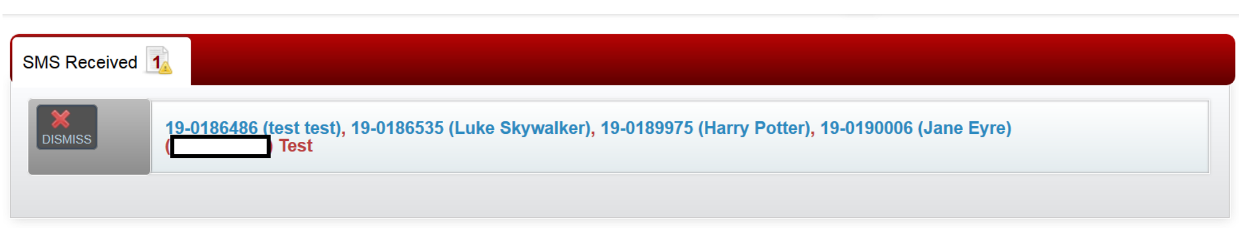
SMS Log

all 3 results

Created	Direction	Sent by	From	To	Message	Status	Response Date
03/24/2019 at 9:42 PM	inbound	N/A	(772) [redacted]	(772) 742-5115	testing testing	received	N/A
03/24/2019 at 9:27 PM	inbound	N/A	(772) [redacted]	(772) 742-5115	does it work	received	N/A
03/24/2019 at 9:26 PM	outbound-api	Melanie Barker	(772) 742-5115	(772) [redacted]	this is a test	delivered	N/A

No Other Pages

Users see an alert when you receive a Text from a phone number associated with a case assigned to you.



We currently do not have any templates for the text messaging feature set up so that we can standardize what is being sent. However, it is something that we are looking to do in the future.

Part of this TIG project was to try to use text messaging to help gather outcomes from clients served by FRLS. When we purchased the text messaging feature, we did not purchase the bulk text messaging module which would have allowed us to send mass text message surveys to multiple clients at one time. We are looking into possibly purchasing that feature in the future from LegalServer, but wanted to test the response rate for text message surveys before making any decision.

IV. Information for Multiyear Projects

Not Applicable.

V. Factors affecting project accomplishments

While we tried to take advantage of the knowledge and expertise of other LSC funded programs in working on this TIG, the lack of experience in working on a large transformative technology project created a lot of issues. We hired a technology expert who had worked with other LSC funded organizations on similar projects. However, he is dependent on us to communicate with him exactly what our needs were. Since this was FRLS's first transformative technology project, we did not understand what we really needed and had difficulty communicating those needs effectively.

Our lack of experience then led us to not renew our contract with our outside technology expert. It was assumed that our IT director could handle the implementation and communication with the phone provider. However, we quickly realized that even though our IT director was computer and phone savvy, he was not salesman savvy. Much of what was promised to us by our phone provider did not come to fruition. We were promised integration with LegalServer to give us caller ID. However, that never happened. We were promised text messaging that would meet our needs for the project. However, that did not happen.

One of the largest stumbling blocks was building the architecture for the phone system. We assumed they knew what they were doing and would guide us in the best way to set up the phones. However, we learned rather quickly that they were used to working with larger organizations with a phone expert designing the phone system and were not prepared for the handholding we needed.

Additionally, when it came time to implement and test the system, they were very impatient and wanted the phone system online so they could get paid. They kept pushing us for the okay, even as we were doing limited testing of the phone system and finding issues. Because we did not have experience on this kind of project and because we did not have our expert to act as a go between, we were pushed into implementing a phone system that was not fully tested. If we had our technology expert through the design and implementation phase of the project things would have probably gone more smoothly and we would have better understood what to expect.

Additionally, we fundamentally changed the way our organization handled intake and cases in general. Change can be very difficult for people to handle. We worked hard to try to include input from everyone regarding changes we were making. However, we still had pushback from people in the organization who did not like to see things going in a different direction. Change is difficult for every organization.

In making our changes, FRLS was given the opportunity to work with the Toyota Production System on a project to improve our intake. The Toyota representative we worked with helped us reduce the amount of time we were taking from time of initial phone call to assignment to the office. Through his help, we were able to go from days to minutes in the amount of time an applicant initially calls to assignment. He also taught us Toyota's version of Business Process Analysis which we have used throughout this project. He made us take a look at the way we were doing things and open ourselves up to change. He made us realize that problems are not bad. They are good. You need to see the problems so that you can make the needed changes.

VI. Strategies to address Major Challenges

Business Process Analysis is probably the most fundamental strategy we used to deal with many of the challenges we faced during the project. Part of Business Process Analysis is looking at the big problem and trying to break it down into smaller more succinct problems so you get to the root cause of whatever issue you are dealing with. Fundamentally, you have to figure out what the real problem is and then you can figure out solutions.

The biggest challenge we faced is trying to get the text messaging features that we promised as part of the project. As we stated, we were promised all sorts of things by the phone provider which turned out to be false. In fact, we have no working text messaging feature through our current phone system. Once we realized that it was not going to work, we started working the problem trying to find a technology solution that we could afford and that would solve the problems. Once we started doing research, we realized that LegalServer and Twillio (thanks to another TIG project) had already developed what we needed as a reasonable price that would work for our budget.

VI. Major lessons and Recommendations

Do not terminate your technology consultant contractor too early or you will pay the price. FRLS hired an excellent technology consultant after sending out the required proposals to help FRLS find a phone company and phone system for the new call center. In the search, we decided to move to a cloud based phone system which caused us to incur more costs due to the new research required. Those cost overruns were not anticipated and the executive team decided that in order to minimize costs we would not renew the consultant's contract. A phone development project that should have taken a few months kept going on. It took almost eight months for the phone system to be fully functional and we did not get everything promised (i.e. the text messaging features). You need that consultant to be your advocate. If FRLS had kept ours on through project implementation, we would have saved ourselves time, money, and anxiety over the process.

Do not let your contractors push you around. Most of our issues with this project are the result of bad communication from our service provider. What we were promised was not delivered. The reality was that the person we were dealing with was for all intents and purposes a salesman. He did not know the true capabilities of the system and what our budget was going to get us. Additionally, we kept getting pushed to implement the phone system when we knew it was not ready. They wanted to get paid and for us to sign off. However, it was not complete. This goes back to the first recommendation, keep your technology consultant on through implementation. The interests of technology companies are not always aligned with yours.

Change is difficult. The change we made through this project went beyond technology. It went to the very culture of the program and how each office functioned. When you are making major changes in your program, you need staff buy in. We found it helpful to have a TIG Staff Committee that the project manager ran by potential changes to the system to and to help spread the information to the offices.

Finally, take advantage of the advanced phone call center technology to do some of the triage for you. We are currently looking at changing the phone architecture to allow for more triage and to take individuals out of the intake queue now that we fully understand its functionality. It is something that all programs should look at when working on this type of project.