SDM (Structured Decision-Making) Program

▶ The Client

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services is the public agency charged with the duty of establishing, managing and advocating a system of services in partnership with parents, relatives, foster parents and community organizations to ensure children's safety, optimum growth and healthy development. The largest County DCFS organization in the nation, LAC DCFS currently manages over 40,000 open child welfare cases and deals with close to 155,000 emergency response referrals yearly. The department employs over 6,600 staff including intake workers, investigators, caseworkers, business managers and others across the County over 16 offices, and manages over 30 specialized programs serving the specific needs of children and families.

▶ The Challenge

The County of Los Angeles, as one of seven counties in California participating with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in a three-year pilot program, needed to develop assessment tools that would serve as an integral part of a Structured Decision-Making (SDM) process. The risk assessment would identify families as having high, moderate or low probabilities of continued child abuse or neglect. With the risk factors clearly defined and objectively quantified, it would then be possible to allocate agency resources to different families according to risk level.

The new assessment tools would be made available to all social workers across 16 office locations throughout the County of Los Angeles. Performance would be crucial, as the Department has over 6,000 employees who are all potential users of the application. Security was another

key design concern, as some data would need to be visible only to LADCFS employees due to HIPAA regulations.

The Department wanted to develop the program within 2 months, and it had to be easy to maintain and completely scalable.

▶ The Solution

The Saga project team envisioned a web-based intranet system to address the issues of availability, performance and security. To facilitate performance and scalability, the new system would be designed with multiple application tiers: a User Layer, Business Layer and Data Layer.

Divided based on data analysis and functional requirements, 5 modules comprised the finished application: Safety Assessment, Risk Assessment, FSNA Assessment, Risk Reassessment and Reunification. Associated business processes were also captured with the data flow in the application: from location to unit, and from unit to CSW.

To address the client's concern regarding maintenance and time-to-market, the project team adopted cutting-edge .NET Framework technology for the SDM Utility Application. The Data Layer was created using ADO.NET and ODBC for Oracle, as well as Oracle packages; the Business Layer was developed with C# and XML Web Service; and the User Layer was implemented with ASP.NET. Data passes across the application layers in XML format.

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⮚ The Benefits

The County of Los Angeles Department of Children and Family Services realized a significant improvement in productivity and a tremendous savings in development cost by working with Saga Technologies to develop the SDM Utility Program.

- •   The .NET development improved the client's time-to-market by as much as 25%.
- •   The client saved over 40% in application development and staff training costs.
- •   The .NET Framework knowledge transfer occurred smoothly with the Department's IT staff.

⮚ Technologies Utilized

ASP.NET, Oracle 9i Database Server, C#, COM/COM+, HTML, JAVASCRIPT, XML, Adobe PhotoShop