

Delaware Division of Family Services **boosts caseworker productivity with Dragon®**

Challenge

Delaware DFS needed a way to help caseworkers speed documentation turnaround so they could spend more time in the field helping children and families and less time at their desktops – without putting the agency at risk of non-compliance.

Solution

Delaware DFS caseworkers jumpstart paperwork by dictating case notes into a digital voice recorder in the field. Dragon automatically transcribes their notes when they connect to their PC. Caseworkers also save time in the office by dictating directly into PC applications instead of typing. Features like custom voice commands further speed and simplify paperwork.

Results

Dragon has cut the time it takes caseworkers to input case notes by up to 75%. In addition, using the digital voice recorder for dictating notes in the field allows caseworkers to boost productivity – even when they're simply traveling to appointments or waiting in court.

The Division of Family Services (DFS), part of Delaware's Department of Services for Children, Youth, and Their Families (DSCYF), is dedicated to promoting the protection, safety, and permanency of the state's youth. The agency is mandated by law to investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect, and where appropriate, oversee foster care placements and/or provide supportive services that empower families to better protect and nurture their children.



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Family Service Specialist, Delaware DFS Investigation Unit

Successful execution of the Delaware DFS mission depends on efficient collaboration and communication among a network of state agencies, private providers, families, and communities.

Whether Delaware DFS caseworkers are investigating child abuse or neglect, coordinating treatment services, placing children in foster homes, or preparing foster teens for independent adult living, their jobs all share one thing in common: paperwork – and lots of it.

“We have a lot of paperwork to complete because documentation is critical in this field,” says Christy Diffendall, a Family Crisis Therapist in the Delaware DFS Treatment Unit. “As far as the courts are concerned, if it isn’t documented in our case notes, it didn’t happen. So creating a detailed paper trail is important not only for compliance purposes, but for facilitating caseworker research and enabling smooth case transfers between DFS units and our providers.”

It was this pile-up of paperwork that led Rodney Brittingham, Delaware’s Deputy Director of the Division of Family Services, to consider speech recognition as a productivity tool that would enable DFS caseworkers to spend more time helping families and children and less time tied to their desktops. Delaware DFS conducted a one-month pilot during which 10 caseworkers used Dragon from Nuance for dictating case notes and preparing reports. Based on the pilot’s success, Brittingham decided to purchase 200 Dragon licenses for all front-line workers—Family Crisis Therapists, Master Family Service Specialists, Family Services Specialists, Regional Administrators, and Family Services Assistants—in the Delaware DFS Investigation, Treatment, and Permanency Units.

Training ... the path to success

Before embarking on a full-scale solution rollout, Bob Challenger and Donna Blakey, Delaware DSCYF Education/ Training Administrators, participated in a Dragon web training session and used the software themselves for about a month. Nuance followed up by phone during that time to provide support and answer questions. Once

the DFS trainers were comfortable using Dragon, they scheduled two on-site training sessions at the DFS office in Wilmington. Nuance taught the first session while Bob and Donna observed, and Bob taught the second session while Nuance observed. After this first day of training, Nuance provided Bob with feedback and tips for fine-tuning his training methods. From that point forward, Bob and Donna were conducting in-house Dragon training on their own – supplemented by regularly scheduled calls with Nuance to review best practices and address specific user issues.

The Delaware DFS Treatment Unit caseworkers were trained first, followed by those in the Investigation and Permanency Units. All workshops were held on two subsequent days in Delaware DFS’s Wilmington office; caseworkers from Kent and Sussex counties traveled there to attend the classes. The first four hours of training covered the basics, such as connecting and positioning the microphone; building a user profile; reading the acoustic training text; and using Dragon with a digital voice recorder. The second four hours were optional, but provided an opportunity for users to ask more detailed questions or receive additional help in getting up to speed with Dragon.

“I found the training very helpful,” said Pete Derepentigny, a Family Crisis Therapist in the Delaware DFS Investigation Unit. “I left the training and began using Dragon productively that same day. I let Dragon read through all my saved emails and letters, and it started to understand the way that I write and the things that I say, including names and terminology specific to DFS, other agencies, and the courts.”

Capturing the facts in FACTS

All Delaware DSCYF divisions use the Family and Children Tracking System (FACTS), which tracks and stores information about all cases handled by the department. Within FACTS, caseworkers and administrators can search by name and find information on all cases relating to a given family. Depending on their role within DFS, caseworkers must complete specific FACTS events, such as Initial Interviews, Risk Assessments, and Treatment Plans, for each of their cases. Using Dragon to create text for FACTS has yielded dramatic productivity gains over typing.

"When I get back from visiting with a family, I'll have several pages of handwritten notes that I need to get into FACTS," said Derepentigny. "Dragon just makes the whole process go a lot faster."

Dragon also enables caseworkers to easily create time-saving custom voice commands for automating multi-step processes or inserting frequently used text or graphics. "At an initial home visit we're required to give the parents a handbook and forms, and we have to document that in our notes," said Derepentigny. "I used to have to type in, 'I gave Mrs. Smith a copy of the DFS handbook and the HIPPA pamphlet. She signed the HIPPA form and released the information for herself and her children.' Now, with the simple voice command, 'Mrs. Smith required notification,' Dragon inserts all that text automatically."

Driving mobile productivity

All Delaware DFS front-line caseworkers were given an Olympus® digital voice recorder to use in conjunction with Dragon. Using the handheld recorder, caseworkers can dictate notes in the field and Dragon automatically transcribes the resulting audio files when they connect the recorder to their PC. Wireless microphone support delivers added convenience.

"The recorder has been such a timesaver," states Diffendall. "When I leave a meeting, I dictate my notes while I'm driving to my next appointment. It just becomes second nature to say 'next line' or 'capitalize that' as I dictate; I don't even have to think about it anymore. I even dictate to-do lists into the recorder when I'm on the road."

"I love the recorder," adds Derepentigny. "In our county it takes a long time to get from one family visit to the next, so when I'm driving I can just speak my notes instead of having to pull over and write the conversation down on paper. All I have to do is connect the recorder to my PC back at the office and the transcription works really well."

The digital voice recorder also lets caseworkers capture notes while they are still fresh in their minds. "If anything, my notes are longer and more detailed since I've been using

Dragon," says Diffendall. "As I'm talking, I add more detail than I would if I were just typing. Other caseworkers have noticed the same thing."

Providing additional productivity perks

Besides entering case notes into FACTS, Delaware DFS caseworkers use Dragon for completing routine office tasks more efficiently – whether they're dictating emails or preparing court updates.

"We make a lot of use of email in our jobs and it can get out of control pretty quickly," says John Meade, a Family Services Specialist in the Delaware DFS Investigation Unit. "I use Dragon to dictate my emails, which helps me keep up with the volume."

Dragon works seamlessly with Microsoft® Office applications, like Word, making it easy to dictate all kinds of documents with unprecedented speed and ease. "When we have a child in protective custody, we have to attend quarterly court hearings," explains Diffendall. "With Dragon, I'm able to dictate lengthy court updates for the attorneys in record time."

Dragon also incorporates Nuance text-to-speech technology that reads on-screen text in human-sounding synthesized speech. "I have to read a lot of reports," states Derepentigny. "So I cut and paste them into Word and have Dragon read them back to me while I'm doing other things. That ability to multi-task has been really helpful."

Results that speak for themselves

As caseworkers expand their use of Dragon, the productivity gains it offers continue to increase. "With Dragon it takes me fifteen minutes to enter information from five home visits into the FACTS system," concludes Derepentigny. "Entering information on those five visits by typing probably would have taken me more than an hour. Dragon just saves me a whole lot of time."

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