A CASE STUDY BY SOCIAL SOLUTIONS
The leading cloud software provider for the social good sector

How a Digital Approach to Data and Reporting is Empowering Communities in Schools – Greater Tarrant County to Increase Staff Productivity and Drive Barrier-Breaking Outcomes

With Social Solutions' Apricot 360 software, CIS – Greater Tarrant County has increased its efficiency in case management data collection and reporting so much that staff members are meeting their goals ahead of schedule and removing more barriers that stand in the way of students' success.

When Lauren Sly, Vice President of Programs at Communities in Schools (CIS) – Greater Tarrant County, speaks about her organization, you can't help but feel energized by her exuberance to find meaningful life-changing solutions to the challenges students are facing in her community.

"Everything we do focuses on two things: building relationships and removing students' barriers to success," Lauren explains. "We get to know our students on an individual level so that we can identify their unique barriers, and then we come up with ways to solve them."

The CIS approach is to partner with schools and augment what overloaded school counselors are doing to support students already. As Lauren puts it, CIS will say, "bring us your most at-risk students, your students who need the most attention." By building trust and forming relationships with these students and their families, CIS can apply tailored solutions – often through partnerships that can provide specific resources – that address areas ranging from mental health, food insecurity, housing insecurity, job opportunities and more.

Communities In Schools
Greater Tarrant County

CLIENT
Communities in Schools (CIS) – Greater Tarrant County

SECTOR
Youth Development

PRODUCT
Apricot 360

THE CASE(LOAD) FOR BETTER CASE MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY

Even within the category of "most at-risk," CIS – Greater Tarrant County is responsible for a large student caseload: more than 4,200 cases per year with more than 7,000 services logged each month. And with this much activity, there is, of course, a lot of data that needs to be routinely collected, stored and reported throughout the year – and wrangling this process was a journey for Lauren and her team. When Lauren looks back several years to how CIS – Greater Tarrant County used to manage its data, she says, "We used to manage with carbon copy yellow and white paper forms. And then, we moved to a small database that was painstakingly slow and didn't allow us to analyze our data beyond exporting a spreadsheet. We knew we needed a better solution."

> "Here's what I believe: do the work, and the outcomes will show. But in order for outcomes to show, I need the data. So, that means I need the right database and technology to prove the work and results."
>
> LAUREN SLY
> Vice President of Programs

Since choosing Apricot 360 from Social Solutions in 2019, the organization's approach to data management and reporting has been night-and-day.

"Social Solutions has ways to meet our needs that we haven't even thought of yet," says Lauren. "I'm still amazed at how our Apricot 360 database was built, trained on—and launched all within eight weeks—our former database took a year. Nothing is slowing my team down!"

Lauren shared that in the past, CIS – Greater Tarrant County had a team of eight people who would take paper-based data and enter it into database systems for reporting requirements. Today, Social Solutions' technology has helped the organization boost productivity by moving data collection and reporting into a digital environment. "Because of Apricot 360, two people can now do what used to take eight people," Lauren explains. "Plus, our data team is consistently on, or even ahead of schedule with reporting. In the past, we were always a couple of months behind. Now, we are up-to-date with real numbers to report when I have school districts and stakeholders asking for preliminary estimates. The efficiency and time savings are huge for us."

PRODUCING OUTCOMES THROUGHOUT A PANDEMIC

For organizations across the spectrum of human services, the COVID-19 pandemic has rocked the foundation of how programs and services are delivered, and even which programs and services can be delivered. When schools shut their doors in early March 2020 and families began social distancing efforts to prevent the spread of the virus, CIS – Greater Tarrant County faced a challenge to go virtual—virtually overnight.

"Relationships are best built in person, so when COVID-19 hit our community and schools were shut down, we had to go virtual the best we could," explains Lauren. "And because of our Apricot 360 database from Social Solutions, our work supporting students and families didn't have to stop."

One reason Lauren's team was able to quickly pivot to virtual or remote service delivery was through using the Intake feature within Social Solutions' Apricot 360 to handle electronic parental consent forms. "Being able to send and receive consent forms electronically has been mind-blowing," Lauren said. "Plus, we have been able

> "Relationships are best built in person, so when COVID-19 hit our community and schools were shut down, we had to go virtual the best we could. And because of our Apricot 360 database from Social Solutions, our work supporting students and families didn't have to stop"

LAUREN SLY
Vice President of Programs

to collect and report on critical data at the individual level because we had electronic channels. Even when we can't be in person with our students, we're still getting to our outcomes, and we didn't have to scramble to get this up and running."

Lauren's team has gone above and beyond to keep a strong focus on building relationships through the pandemic outside of the computer- and phone-based service delivery. Even when it wasn't required, staff members did "porch visits" with families, delivered meals and dropped off school supplies.

Part of the reason staff was able to invest that additional time with students is because Social Solutions' technology had made the entire team more productive. Surprisingly, staff have even worried that they might be forgetting something or not getting as much done, but, as Lauren says, "I had to tell them to look at the numbers – they were where they needed to be or beyond for the whole year. I had to say, 'you aren't forgetting anything; case management is just easier now, so you can focus more on your kids and doing the real work.'"

In the midst of a pandemic, with schools closed and a data system that was less than a year old in the organization, CIS – Greater Tarrant County reported that staff was already 300 cases over their 4,200-caseload requirement. For Lauren, being able to report to funders and stakeholders that the organization was ahead of schedule on enrollment and producing outcomes even during a pandemic was key. "If COVID-19 had happened while we were on our old database, I don't know how we could have kept track of services or reported adequately to our state office."

BREAKING BARRIERS WITH DATA TO BREAK BARRIERS FOR STUDENTS

With easy-to-use yet powerful case management and reporting technology, CIS – Greater Tarrant County has been able to take its drive to break barriers for students and apply that approach internally. Work that used to take multiple people and many hours has been streamlined to where the team is consistently on or ahead of schedule and confident that they can share up-to-date data with funders and stakeholders without delay.

Additionally, the organization is saving costs by managing data digitally instead of on paper. "Carbon copies were $10,000 per year," Lauren explains. "Plus, we had to pay to store all that paper – so we are seeing significant cost savings on paper, printing, boxing, and storage facilities."
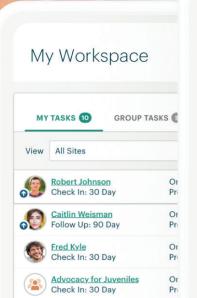
Simultaneously, streamlining the case management process has allowed staff to be more productive and complete their reporting on schedule, allowing them to take a much-needed summer break. Frontline workers often deal with hard situations that can be draining, even in a "normal" school year. As Lauren explains, her staff need and deserve time to recharge so that they can be their best for the students they support each year. By enabling faster, simpler case management and reporting through Apricot 360, her staff didn't have to miss any of their time off.

For Lauren and her team at CIS – Greater Tarrant County, breaking down barriers to achieving efficient data management has led to their ability to spend more time and use more resources to break down barriers that stand in the way of student success. Social Solutions is proud to support CIS – Greater Tarrant County to advance the organization's approach to case management and reporting, enhance productivity, and support outcomes for students and families across the community.

Ready to create lasting social change? See Apricot in action.

REQUEST A DEMO TODAY