



# **CS Connect Evaluation I**

## **Intervention I**

### **CS Live Soft Launch**

*Prepared for the Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE)*

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## Background

### Purpose

The Digital Marketing grant program, sponsored by the federal Office of Child Support Enforcement (OCSE) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families, is a 24-month demonstration project with the goal of researching how digital marketing may help the child support program more effectively reach and serve families. In September 2018, OCSE awarded funds to 14 child support agencies to test digital marketing approaches and partnerships to reach parents that could benefit from child support services, and create or improve two-way digital communication and engagement with parents. The Texas Child Support Division (CSD) was one of the 14 child support agencies selected to participate in the Digital Marketing demonstration grant program.

In this two-year demonstration project, the CSD will build on its recent efforts to engage with parents through its enhanced customer service, website redesign, and mobile-friendly web initiatives with the CS Connect project. With this grant, the CSD will study, design, implement, evaluate, and build upon a digital communication strategy that includes two-way, instant communication coupled with a series of targeted, digital outreach campaigns to increase both customer satisfaction and online applications for service. The CSD expects that this project will build internal capacity so that the program is well equipped to continue these efforts beyond the funding cycle.

### CS Connect Objective

The purpose of the CS Connect grant project is to increase the number of completed online applications for services. In FY 2018, there were 96,247 completed online applications and 38,337 completed paper applications statewide. Further analysis of CSD application data displayed a large disparity in online applications and paper applications between English and Spanish-language speakers across the state. According to CSD internal data, of all new statewide applications for services in FY 2018, only 13% of online applications were from Spanish-language speakers, whereas 87% of online applications were from English-language speakers. In addition, counties with a high percentage of new paper applications for service also have a higher percentage of English as a Second Language (ESL).

Due to the identified trend, the CSD chose to focus on three counties in Texas where a targeted digital outreach campaign could impact an increase in online applications where the completion rate is lower than average. County census data revealed that 89.8% of Cameron county's citizens are Hispanic or Latino, and 73.4% of the population speak a language other than English at home.<sup>1</sup> In Hidalgo county, census data shows that 92.4% of the population is Hispanic or Latino, and 84.3% speak a language other than English at home.<sup>2</sup> This data illustrates a great opportunity for the CSD to target outreach efforts in Cameron and Hidalgo Counties where the ESL population is high, and the rate online applications is low – 26% and 40% respectively.

On the other hand, application data from Lubbock County for FY 2018 presented an anomaly. Lubbock County is similar in population size to Cameron County, but the population was recorded as only 23% ESL on the 2010 census. This would lead one to assume that Lubbock County would have a far higher percentage of completed online applications than paper applications due to high percentage of native English-language speakers. Data from FY 2018 reflects almost identical percentages of completed online applications and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/cameroncountytexas/PST045218>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/hidalgocountytx>

paper applications<sup>3</sup>. This variance led the CSD to choose Lubbock County as the third county to target for a digital awareness campaign in an attempt to increase the number of completed online applications where the rate is lower than expected.

Although the original county selection depended heavily on application trends by the primary native language spoken in the area, the main objective of CS Connect is to increase completed online applications for services among all populations. Based on that overall objective, the digital outreach campaigns in future Interventions will be in both Spanish and English in all three counties to reach as many in the targeted demographic as possible. The targeted demographic in the three counties are Texas parents between 18 and 45 years of age who have at least one child under 18 years of age living with them. These parents must have one of the following marital statuses:

- Married, spouse absent
- Separated
- Divorced
- Never married/Single

Before launching a full digital outreach campaign, the CSD conducted a soft launch of a live chat feature, called CS Live (chat). Intervention I was designed to evaluate the chat tool and receive feedback from those who organically used the chat feature or completed an online application before driving traffic to the chat tool with a digital media campaign in Intervention II.

## **Intervention I**

Intervention I enabled the CSD to “road test” CS Live’s functionality to ensure that it was appropriately staffed, that the staff were appropriately trained, and that the child support knowledge base that the staff relied upon was adequate. The three Chat Officers will be managed by the CSD’s Written Inquiry section for the duration of the two-year demonstration project. This Intervention began on April 1, 2019 and was live for four months.

Data collected from Intervention I provided a baseline for the entire CS Connect project. The CSD collected and analyzed CS Live usage rates, the nature of chat inquiries, wait times, and customer feedback, and made mid-intervention adjustments as necessary to improve the CS Live experience and the online application. This effort allowed the CSD to proactively identify parts of the process that could be potentially problematic and make improvements prior to the anticipated increase in traffic to the website during Intervention II.

## **Goal**

The purpose of CS Connect is to increase new online applications for service. The CS Live chat icon appears on the five pages of the CSD’s website that most clearly aligned to search terms used by customers seeking application information:

- Get Started with Child Support
- How Child Support Works
- How to Apply for Child Support
- Out of State Parents
- Child Support and Family Violence

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<sup>3</sup> 3,574 completed online applications, 3,297 completed paper applications

Customers who visited the CSD’s website to look for application information could chat with a Chat Officer about pre-case information or get application assistance on weekdays from 7:00am to 5:00pm. In order to get customer service feedback, we asked chat users to comment about their experience and rate their satisfaction at a level of one to five stars at the completion of the chat. A survey was also administered after the completion of an online application to ask applicants about their chat experience and the online application process.

The CS Live chat tool has the ability to identify which site the customer is on (English or Spanish version), as well as detect the language that the customer is typing and auto-translates in real time for the Chat Officer and the customer.

**Outcome Measures**

Outcome	Method	Data Points
Increased completed online applications for service across Texas	Compare the number of online applications completed in the three months prior to Intervention I to the number of online applications completed during Intervention I  Compare monthly application trends from January through July 2018 to monthly trends from January through July 2019  Evaluate online application survey responses	Internal application data from CSD’s Business Management Information (BMI) section  Customer feedback
Increased satisfaction in customer service	Review the star ratings from the chat analytics report  Evaluate online application survey responses  Examine chat analytics	1-5 Likert Scale  Customer Feedback
Increased customer satisfaction by how they communicate with the CSD	Evaluate online application survey responses  Examine chat analytics	Customer feedback
Decreased online application abandonment rate	Compare the rate of abandoned online applications for the three months prior to Intervention I to the rate of abandoned online applications during Intervention I	Internal application data from CSD’s Business Management Information (BMI) section

**Research Questions:**

1. Was the availability of the chat feature associated with an increase in the number of completed online applications for services across the state?
2. Was the availability of the chat feature associated with a decrease in the percentage of abandoned online applications?
3. Was the availability of the chat feature associated in an increase the CSD’s ability to provide a higher level of customer service?
4. Was the availability of the chat feature associated in an increase customer satisfaction in how they communicate with the CSD?

# Results

## Data Collected from the COMM100 Chat Tool

### 1. Chat Volume

As shown in Figure 1, 10,505 chats were either initiated by the customer or manually by the Chat Officer in Intervention I, but the number of chats that actually occurred in Intervention I totaled 10,495, leaving an acceptance rate of 99.9%.

- 6 chats were refused by individuals when the Chat Officer manually initiated a chat
- 4 chats were missed due to high capacity and/or occurred during a building evacuation

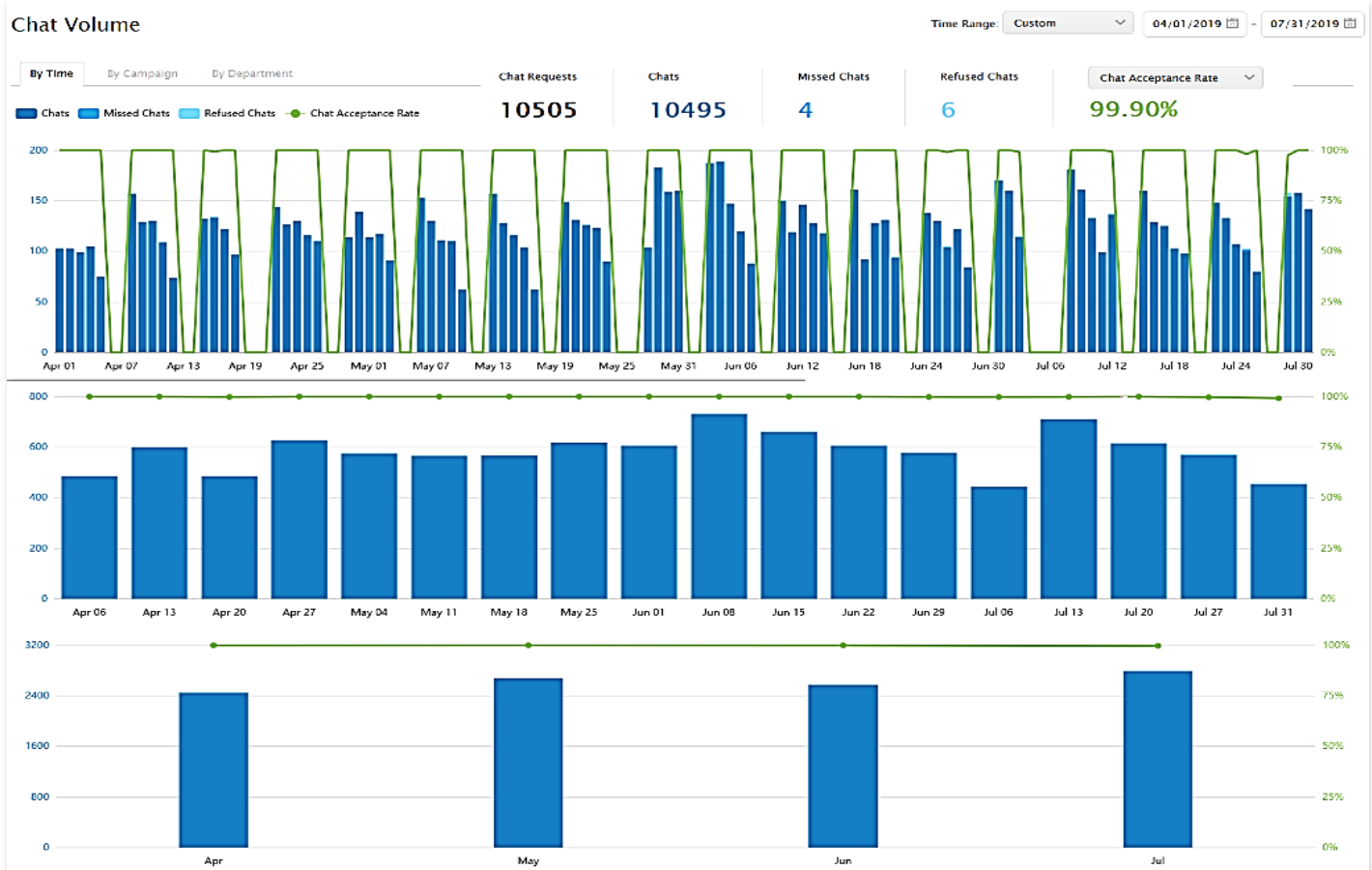


Figure 1

Overall chat volume increased over the four months, with a slight dip in June. Analysis of weekly data identified variables that caused visible dips:

- April 20 – the CSD was closed for Good Friday and chat was not staffed
- July 6 – the CSD was closed on July 4 and July 5 for Independence Day and chat was not staffed
- July 31 – data was collected every Monday, so this reflects chat volume for only the three remaining days in July

## 2. Chat Duration

Figure 2 shows that over the four months, the average wait time for chats initiated during Intervention I was 0, and the Chat Officers' response time trended downward. This data highlights that over time, there has been a continuous increase in the staff's response time to initiated chats. While direct correlations or conclusions cannot be drawn from this singular trend, an assumption can be established that this increase in response time may be associated with improved knowledge and experience through interaction with chat customers. (Figure 2)

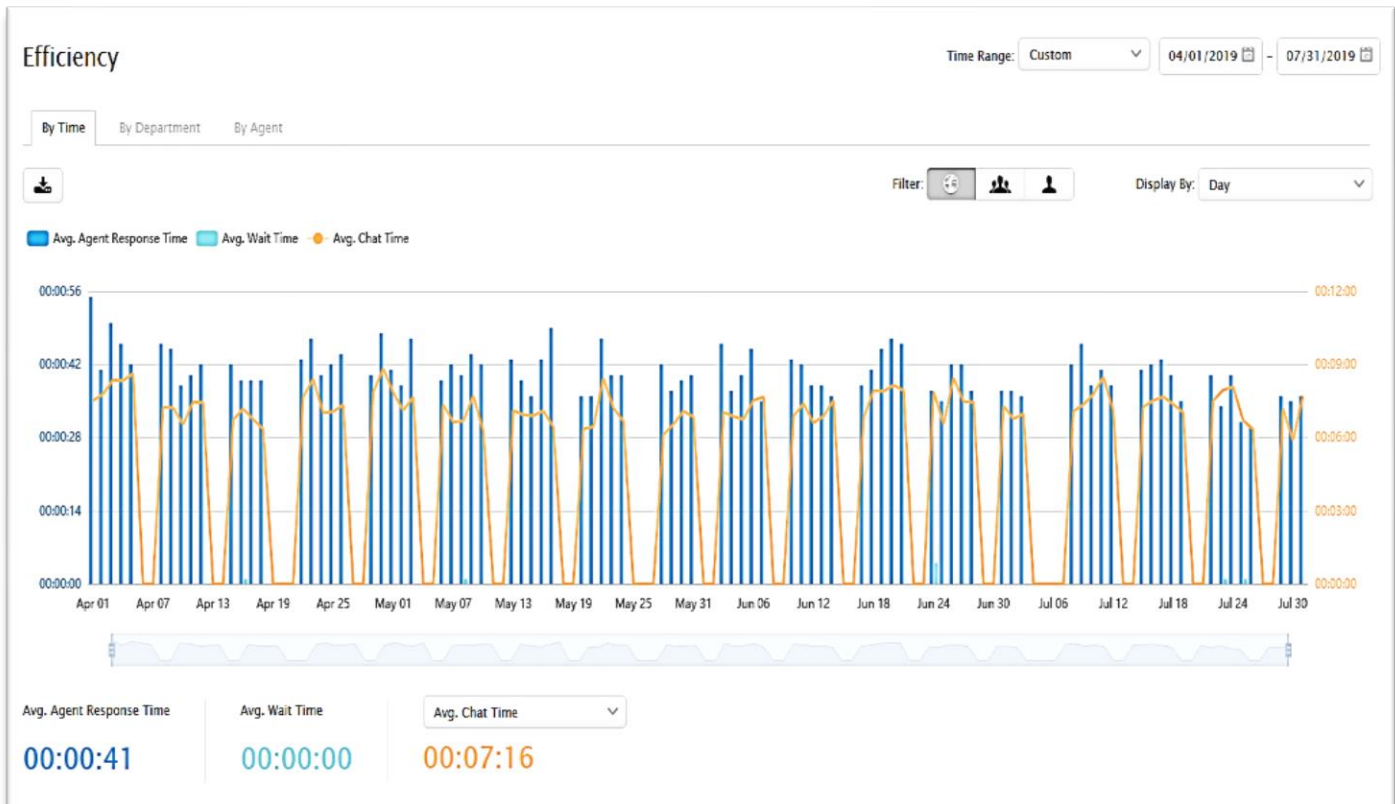


Figure 2

## 3. Chat Feedback

Overall, customer feedback was very positive based on a qualitative content analysis. Of the 672 comments the following common themes were identified:

### Helpful/Fast service

- "Very nice and professional to have an easy way to have questions answered live instead of on hold and or on the phone. Really helpful!"
- "Very helpful and polite, took time to answer all questions in depth and made sure I understood the information."
- "Extremely helpful. Also helped point me in the right directions for any questions that could not be answered."
- "Excellent service!! Information I needed was provided within seconds!"



### **Supported resolution**

- “Muy amable y aclaran mis dudas al 100%.” *Translation:* “Very friendly and clarified my doubts 100%”
- “Very helpful chat. Every concern that I had has been put to rest. I now know I am on the correct path. Thank you.”

### **Thankful for the method of communication**

- “I was so grateful for Alex's clear and simple responses to my questions and concerns. I appreciate the action items I could perform - i.e. actual web links to the forms and instructions needed. He also didn't rush me off the chat to move on to others. He patiently waited for my messages and quickly and concisely replied. He was very knowledgeable. And quite frankly, he brought me peace. I am immeasurably grateful for actual tools to make things right for my children. Thanks for this interface and well-trained and respectful specialists.”
- “Online chat is much less time consuming than calling. It gave me the chance to continue working on other things as I awaited my response. It was user friendly and the support specialist was very well informed. Thank you!”

### **Great customer service**

- “Diane was wonderful! We need more customer service agents like her in the world. Pleasant to engage with and very informative without a feeling being belittled! Good score all around!”
- “Diane is wonderful! I have asked her multiple questions regarding tough situations, and she has very kindly helped me navigate through the issues. So many questions, and concerns go with this process, it is so nice to know someone is on the other end willing to help. Thank you to Diane and you should definitely give her a raise! Thank you so much for having such an understanding and competent person on the other end!!”

### **Limitations**

Due to security and privacy concerns associated with the software still being within the FEDRamp Certification process, the CSD decided upfront that the agency would only utilize the chat tool with potential customers who were seeking information about the child support or application process. This limited scope excluded existing customers from getting specific case related information and created frustration as evident in some of the feedback received.

- “No help. He sent me to an 1800 number right away instead of asking for my case number and looking it up. What's the point of the chat if you're going to send people to an 1800 number -what if they can't call all the time but have internet service?”
- “Very convenient how you can ask questions and you get assistance right away. I just wish they have access to the system, so they could have further assisted me with my query.”

## **4. Star ratings**

Chat users were asked to rate their satisfaction of the chat experience using a one to five Likert scale, with five being the highest level of satisfaction and one being the lowest. Figure 3 shows that of the 2,156 ratings, the average rating was 4.71 stars. This rating could be associated with a very positive experience with chat.

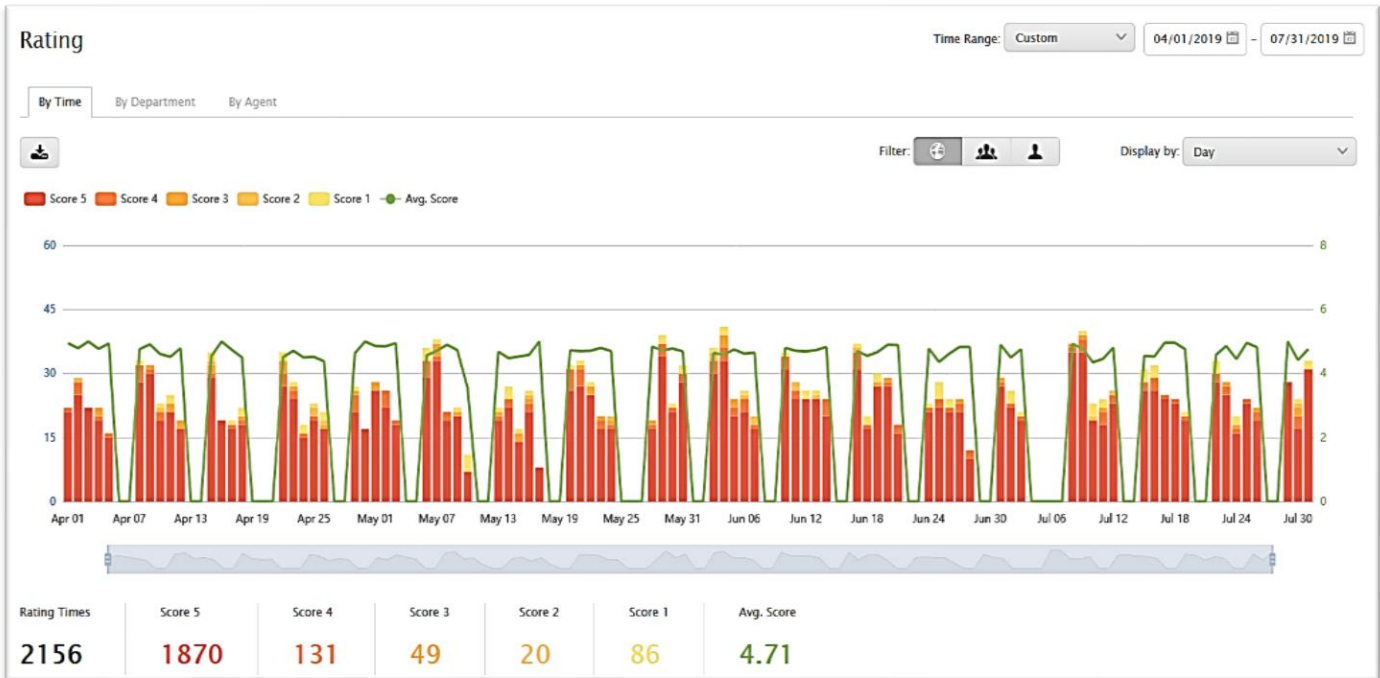


Figure 3

## 5. Chat Initiation

The Chat Officers were very proactive in initiating a chat when they saw an individual visit one of the five webpages where the chat icon appeared. The manual invitations gave visitors the ability to chat and ask questions before they knew that it was an option, supporting live communication and increasing customer service opportunities. (Figure 4)

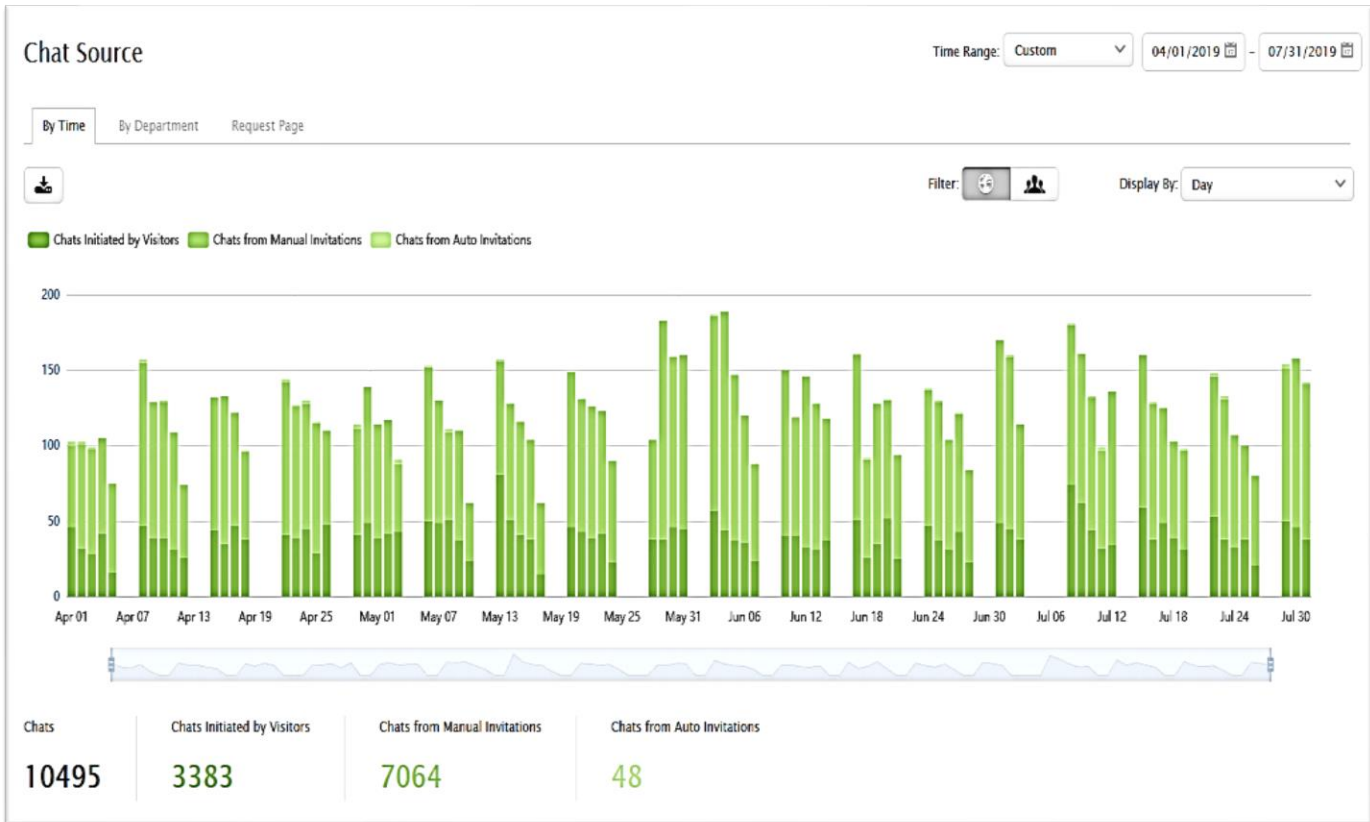


Figure 4

## 6. Chat Categories

Each of the 10,495 chats initiated in Intervention I were split into an English or Spanish language campaign and then broken down into categories. Although application inquiry was the top category in both campaigns (32.3%), case inquiry came in at a close second at 26.3%. (Figure 5)

Due to the high frequency of case-related questions, the CSD changed the Chat Officer’s opening statement from a general greeting to “how can we assist you with the application process?” to let customers know upfront that only pre-case inquiries about child support or the application process could be answered. Additionally, CSD created the following response to customers: “this is a new feature that is still in testing and development, so we cannot discuss specific case information yet. Hopefully we will be able to assist you with that matter in the future.”

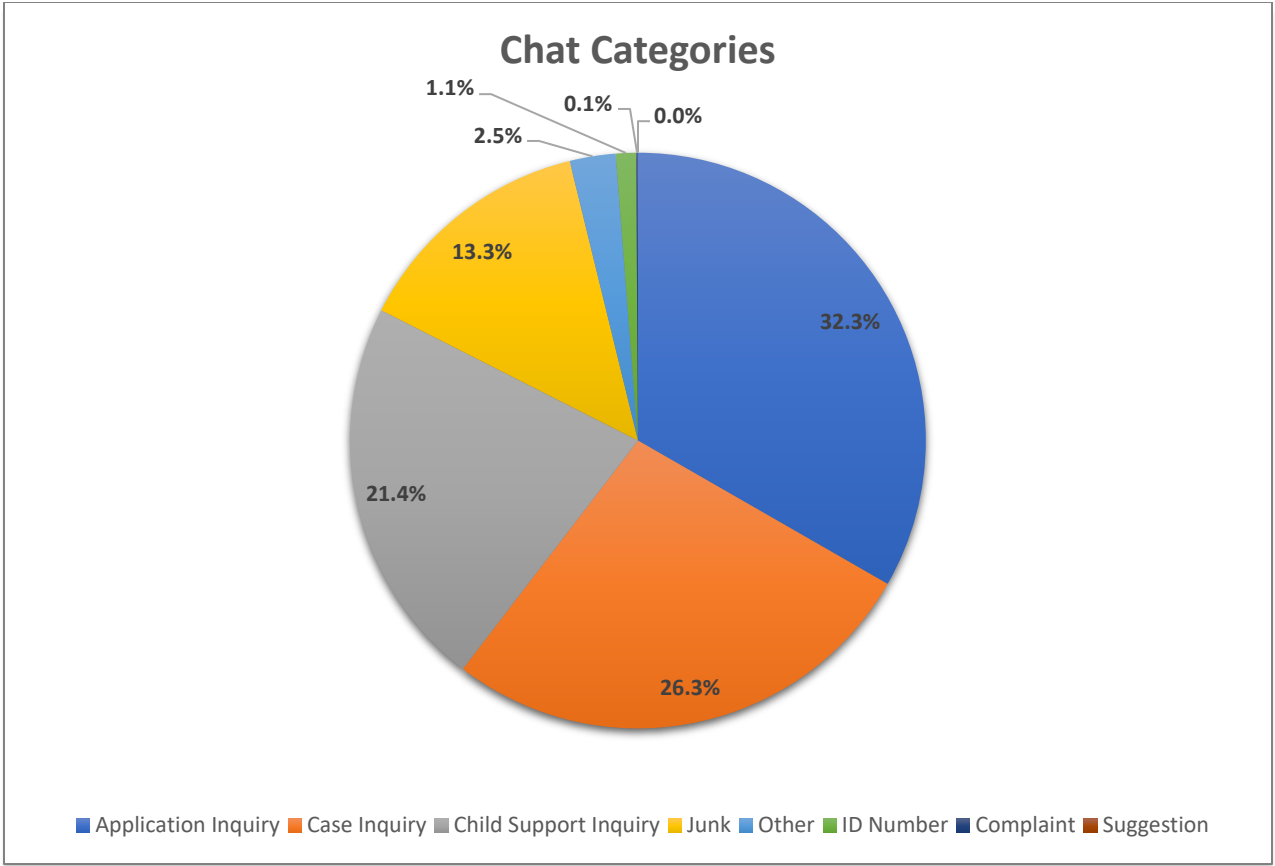


Figure 5

**Data Collection from the CSD’s Internal Database**

**1. Application Survey Data**

After completing the online application, customers were asked general questions about the application process as well as specific questions about the use of the chat feature to help complete the application. Of the 2,768 responses, only 425 applicants or 15.35% responded that they used the chat feature to help them complete an online application for services. (Figure 6)

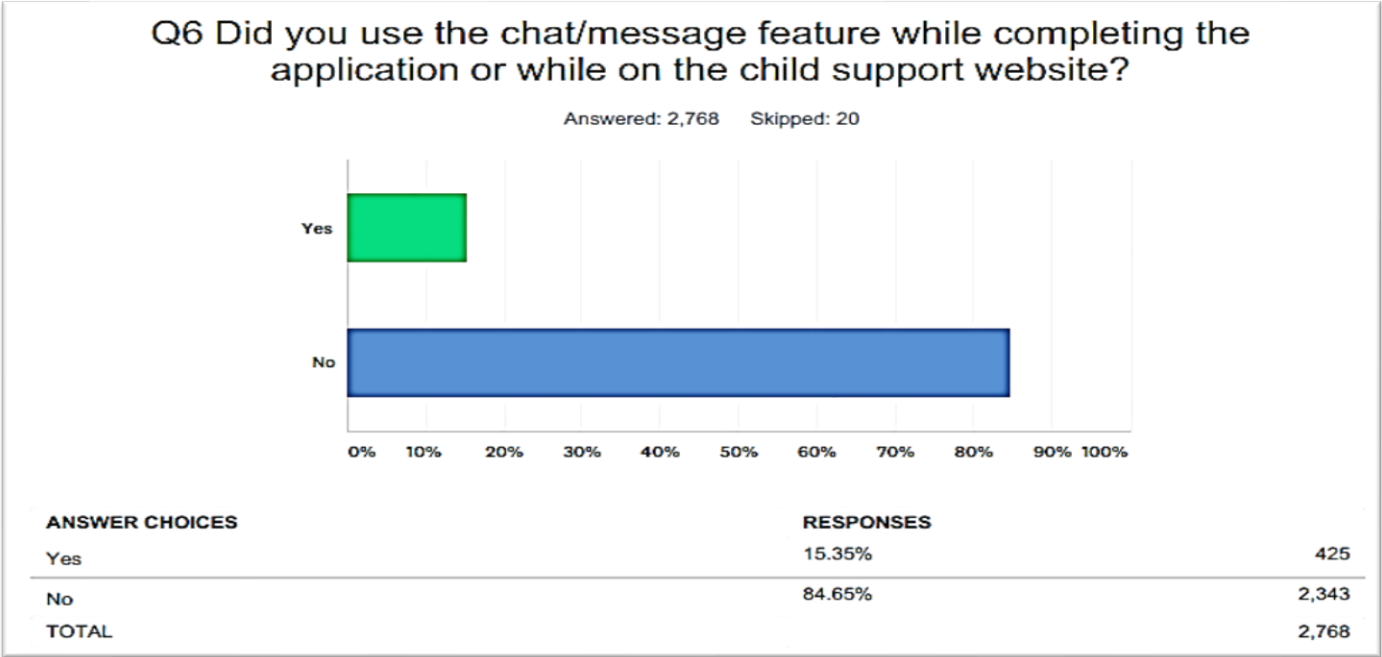


Figure 6

When asked about the quality of the chat services, 404 of 420 respondents ranked the chat services as “very high quality” or “high quality.” (Figure 7)

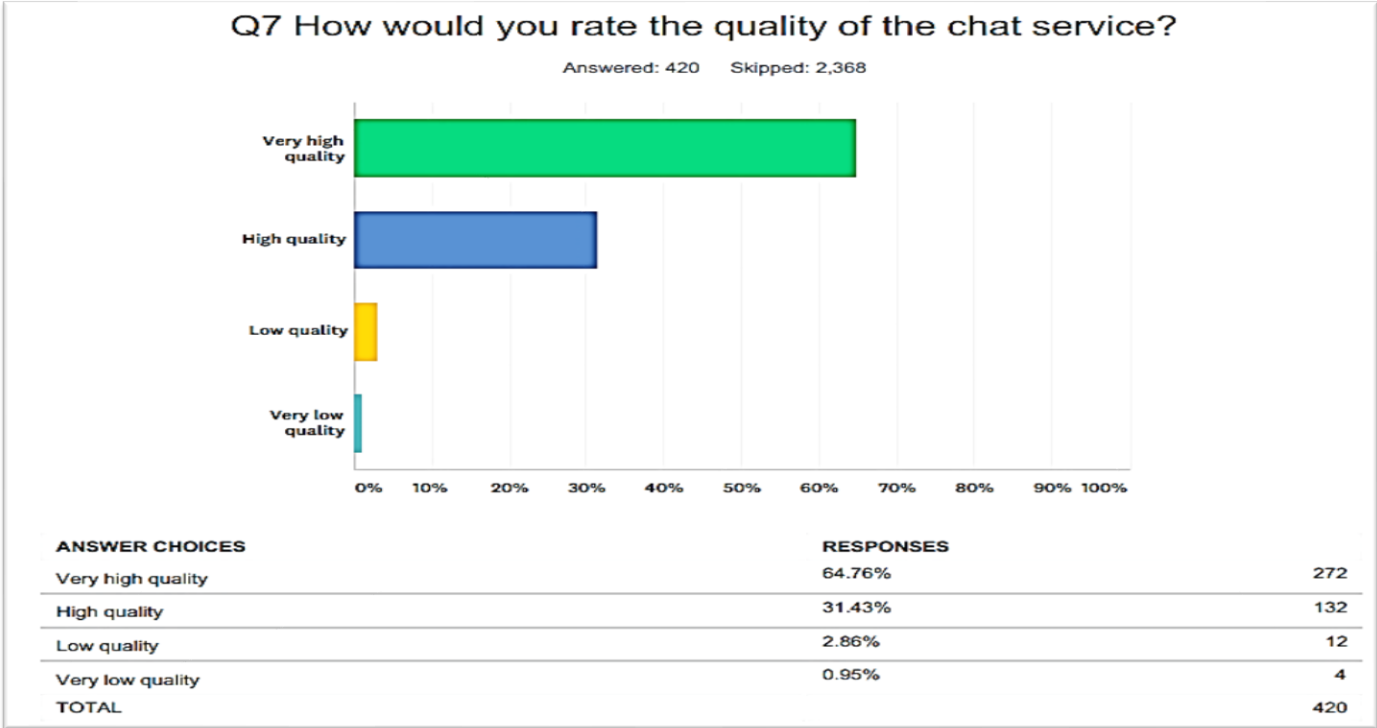


Figure 7

When asked if the applicant found the chat services helpful, 386 of the 415 responses replied “yes.” (Figure 8)

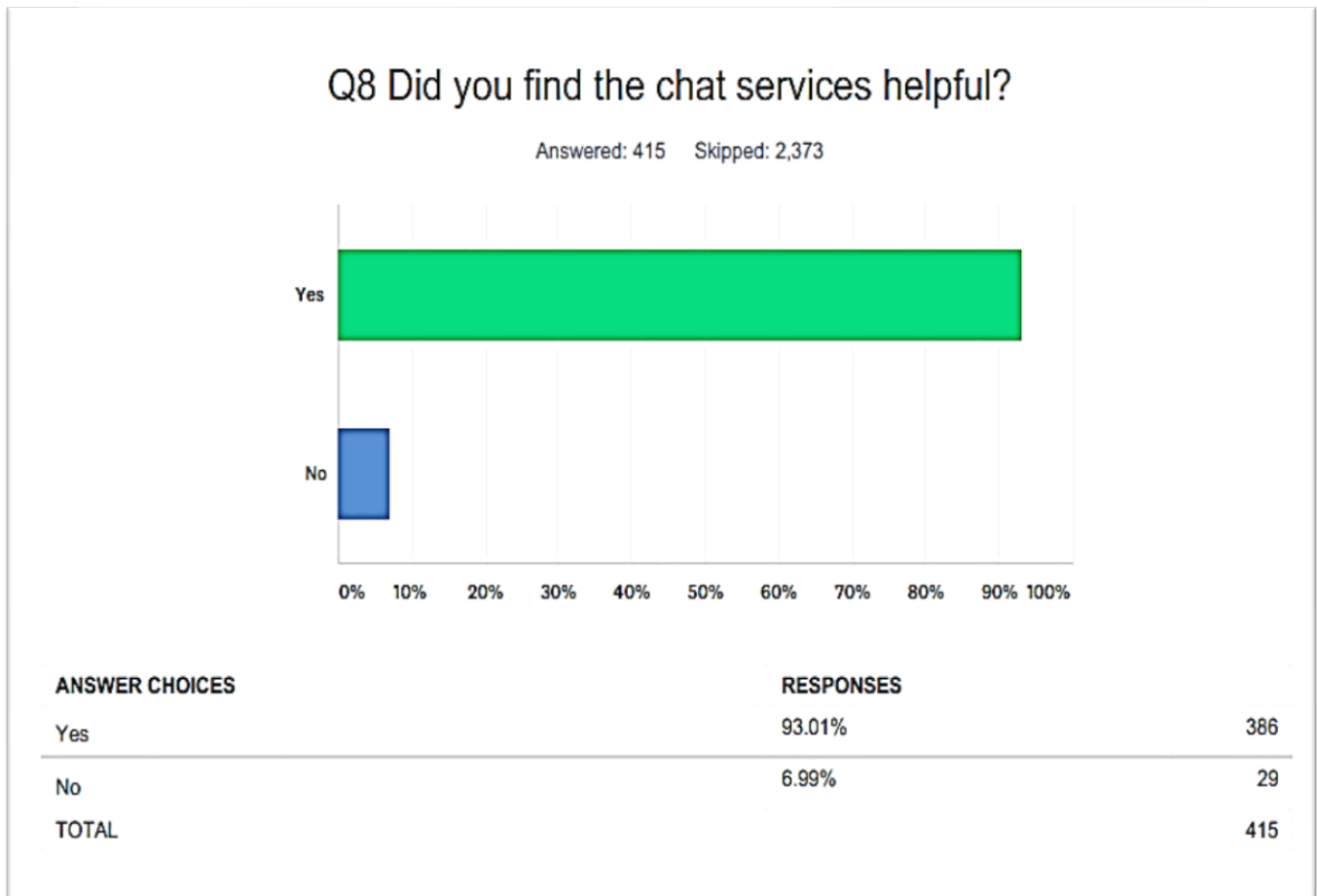


Figure 8

Applicants were asked to provide feedback on how the online application process or chat services could be improved. Some of the common themes are listed below:

**Helpful**

- “I especially liked the chat option – the people were so helpful.”
- “Andres was my chat contact, incredibly helpful attaching the links to work on the guide to complete the form quickly and efficiently, making a stressful experience much more bearable. Thank you for training your team and hiring individuals who clearly take pride in their work.”

**Was not able to find/use chat feature**

- “The first time I tried to do it I clicked on the link for FAQs and lost all my info and had to start over - I didn't see a chat feature or I would have used that.”

- “I’m unclear if I even filled out the correct application. Instructions and ease of finding the right application could be made clearer. I was also unaware that there was a chat feature on the website until I read that question in this survey.”

During this two-year demonstration project, one of the main limitations for the chat feature is that it is staffed only Monday through Friday from 7:00am to 5:00pm due to budgetary constraints. This limits a potential customer’s access to the tool and prevents them from getting application assistance outside of normal business hours.

## 2. Completed Applications

Figure 9 shows the trend of total completed applications for service for January through July for 2018 and 2019.

2019	Jan 19	Feb 19	Mar 19	Apr 19	May 19	Jun 19	Jul 19
<b>Total Applications Completed</b>	11,744	10,021	10,315	11,301	11,581	11,338	12,642

2018	Jan 18	Feb 18	Mar 18	Apr 18	May 18	Jun 18	Jul 18
<b>Total Applications Completed</b>	12,070	9,720	10,348	11,081	11,093	11,262	11,806

Figure 9

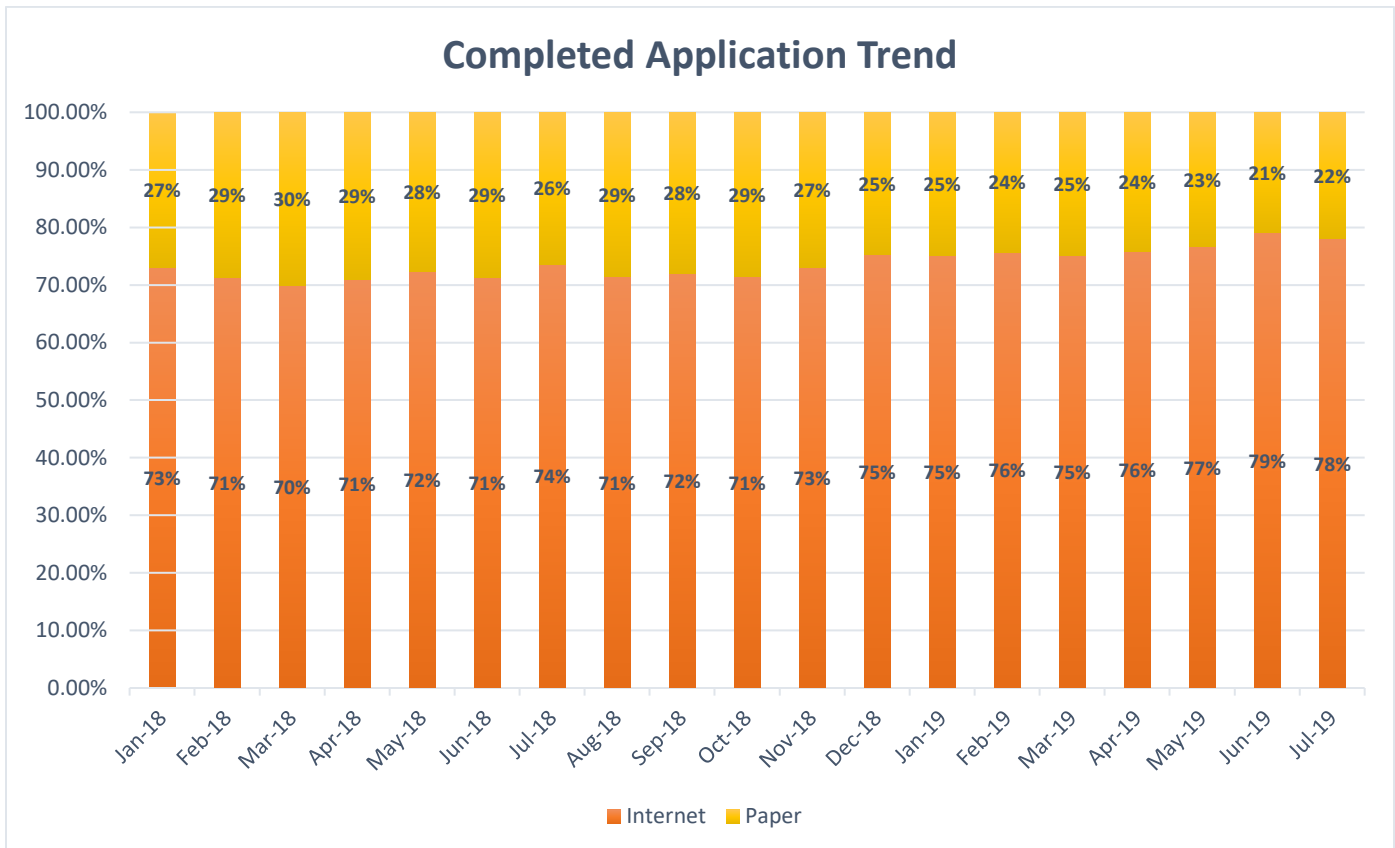


Figure 10

Monthly application trends demonstrate that the percentage of completed online applications compared to paper applications has steadily risen since January 2018. March 2018 had the lowest online application utilization at just 69%. June and July 2019 data reflects that the use of the online application is at an all-time high at 79% and 78%, respectively. This baseline will provide insight into how the launch of a digital media outreach campaign in Intervention II may be associated with an impact to the monthly trends for completed online applications compared to paper applications for services.

Intervention I did not involve digital media outreach. Based on the current data from this time period, there appears to be causation between chat and number of applications, but this relationship cannot be substantiated.

SPANISH / ENGLISH BREAKDOWN	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19
<b>SPANISH</b>							
Applications Started	483	484	451	510	641	561	734
Applications Completed	210	211	200	229	298	282	349
% Completed (Spanish)	43%	44%	44%	45%	46%	50%	48%
<b>ENGLISH</b>							
Applications Started	15,893	13,950	14,102	15,969	16,420	16,102	17,713
Applications Completed	8,603	7,375	7,542	8,333	8,583	8,682	9,494
% Completed (English)	54%	53%	53%	52%	52%	54%	54%

Figure 11

As highlighted in Figure 11, the percentage of completed English online applications has remained fairly static, although the actual number of completed applications across the state has trended upward since March 2019. Intervention II and III will target Lubbock County primarily with an English-language digital outreach campaign in an attempt to increase completed online applications in county that has a high percentage of native English speakers, but a lower percentage of completed online applications compared paper applications for services.

Figure 11 also shows that since January 2019, the percentage of completed Spanish online applications has steadily increased. Interventions II and III will target Hidalgo and Cameron Counties primarily in a Spanish-language digital outreach campaign due to the high percentage of native Spanish speakers in both counties. The CSD anticipates that the amount of Spanish-language online applications will increase if this particular population is engaged.

APPLICATION TOTALS	Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19
Online Applications Started	16,376	14,266	14,050	16,900	17,061	16,404	18,447
Online Applications Completed	8,761	7,530	7,424	8,562	8,898	8,863	9,843
Online Applications Abandoned - Calculated *	3,409	3,002	3,018	3,200	3,539	3,300	3,701
% Abandoned	28%	29%	29%	27%	28%	27%	27%
% Completed	72%	71%	71%	73%	72%	73%	73%
* = Unique Abandons w/out Completion							

Figure 12



A desired outcome for this two-year demonstration project is a decreased rate of abandoned online applications. Internal data shows that many customers do not complete applications in a first attempt; rather, they complete applications within four to six months. The percentage of abandoned online applications in Figure 12 reflects all unique applications that customers started but never completed during that month. As the number of customers that use the chat feature for online application assistance increases, the CSD expects that there may be an associated decline in online application abandonment rates.

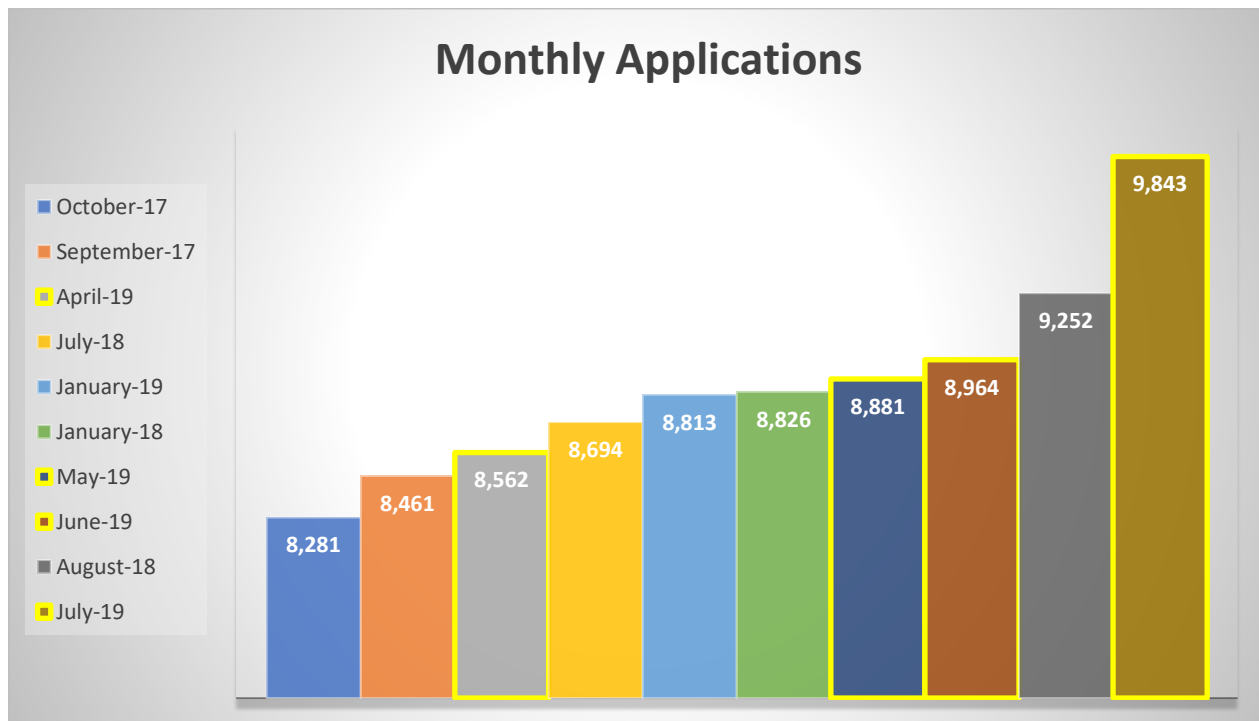


Figure 13

Four of the top ten months<sup>4</sup> with the most completed online applications for service occurred in Intervention I. (Figure 13)

## Analysis

Intervention I allowed CSD time to test the new chat feature, build the Chat Officers' knowledge base on the child support application process and the tool functionality, and gain feedback on both the online application and the chat services that customers used.

In late 2018, the CSD began tracking online application start and completion dates to identify customers who eventually complete the application and those that do not. The soft launch of the chat feature enabled the CSD to identify where applicants may be struggling in the process by providing digital real time chat assistance to help them complete an application that they otherwise might have abandoned. When Intervention I launched, the CSD also launched a new survey to gather customer feedback after their online application was completed. This customer feedback provided valuable information during Intervention I that allowed the CSD to identify and remedy glitches with the online application. During this time, the CSD was

<sup>4</sup> September 2012 – July 2019

also able to train staff and thereby ensure the Chat Officer's had the ability to successfully answer questions in real-time during the application process.

When it comes to customer service delivery methods, research across industries indicates a growing preference for digital communication over in-person or telephone interaction<sup>5</sup>. Evaluation data from Intervention I provides evidence that this trend holds true for child support customers. Feedback like "The chat feature was a lifesaver!!" and "Very nice and professional to have an easy way to have questions answered live instead of on hold and or on the phone. Really helpful!" from the application survey shows that customers were thankful to have a two-way, real-time, digital conversation with Chat Officers. Data and feedback from the chat tool also reflected that the chat feature was appropriately staffed for Intervention I.

The purpose of the CS Connect grant project is to increase completed online applications for service. A component of increasing completed online application is to ensure that the application was user friendly and that the questions are easily digestible for the customer. The feedback from the new customer survey during Intervention I allowed the CSD to identify problems and take suggestions on how to improve the online application experience.

Out of 144 customer suggestions, the following ideas reoccurred:

- Include the ability to upload attachments (11.8%)
- Allow applicants to create an account or save an application in progress so they do not need to start over; allow applicants to navigate back to edit or add more information (8.3%)
- Explain next steps after an application is completed; create a notification process/timeline of the case (18.8%)
- Allow more space in the comment boxes for further elaboration; fix the limitation on special characters (34.7%)
- Simplify application instructions/language (21.5%)
- Provide more upfront information on how to fill out the application (4.9 %)

Based on customer feedback, the CSD made the following changes to the online application prior to the launch of Intervention II:

- Expanded the additional comment fields from 250 to 2,000 characters
- Clarified and simplified language on the application that was identified as confusing
- Added a feature that sends a confirmation email to customers once they complete an online application
- Implemented a new "Pre-App Checklist" providing the applicant a list of all the information they will need to gather to complete the online application
- Allowed applicants to go back and edit pages of their application before clicking "submit"

The current online application system does not allow applicants to navigate back to edit their information, nor save an application before it is completed. The CSD is pursuing a system change that will allow applicants to create an account number so the applicant could return to an application in-progress. The CSD suspects that this system change could be associated with a decrease in future online application abandonment rates.

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<sup>5</sup> 2016 Aspect Consumer Experience Index [https://www.aspect.com/globalassets/2016-aspect-consumer-experience-index-survey\\_index-results-final.pdf](https://www.aspect.com/globalassets/2016-aspect-consumer-experience-index-survey_index-results-final.pdf)

Despite the many suggestions for changes to the online application, 98.5% of the 2,774 customers surveyed answered that they had a “very positive” or “positive” experience completing the online application. (Figure 14)

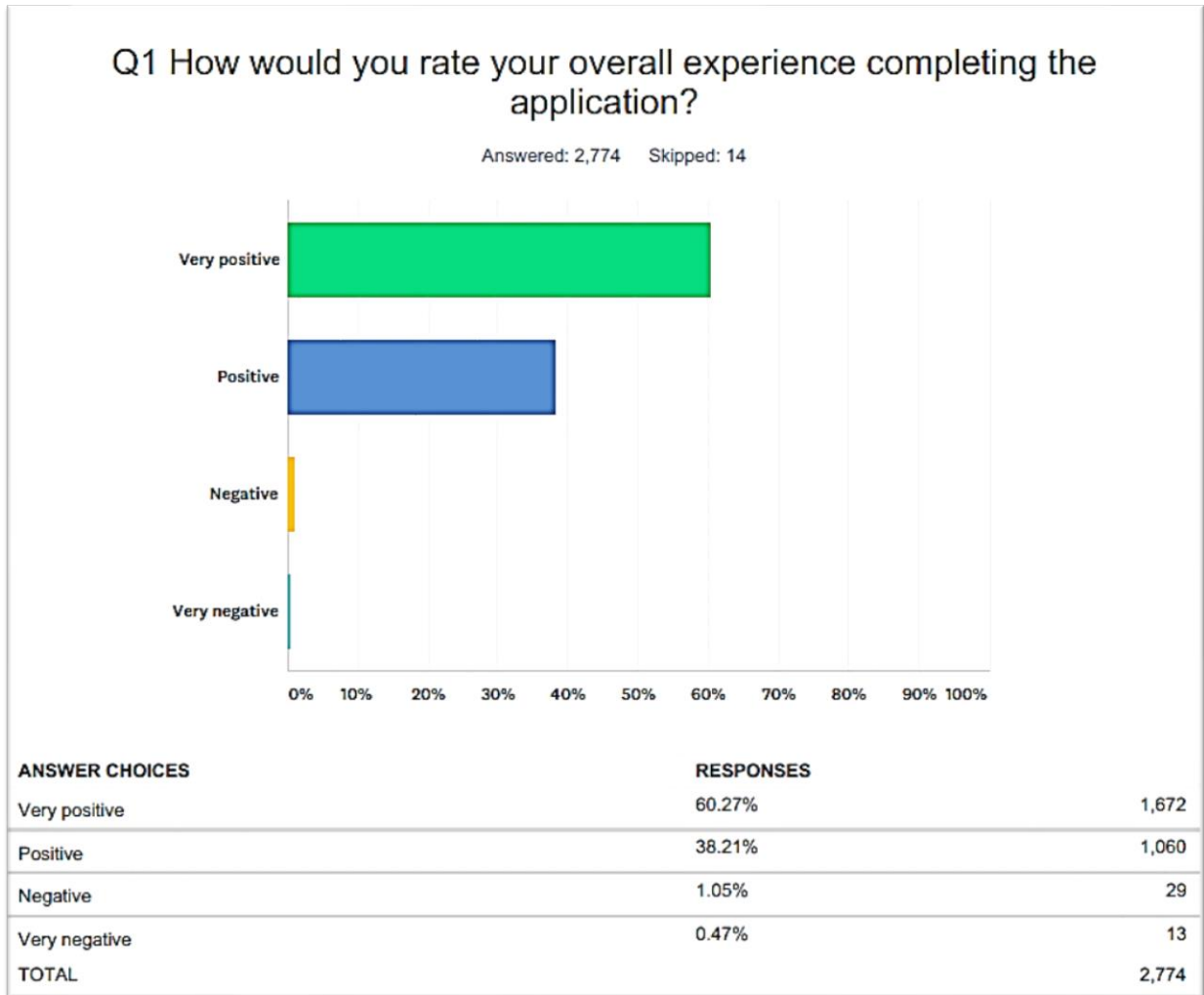


Figure 14

Feedback from customers who used the chat feature shows that there is an overall satisfaction with the digital two-way medium of communication, and that they find it helpful when completing an online application. Of 10,495 chats, the CSD received 672 individual comments from the feedback box. Of the 672 comments:

- 58 were from the Spanish-language version of the CSD website
  - 51 positive comments
  - 7 negative/case related comments
- 614 were from the English version of the CSD website
  - 538 positive comments
  - 76 negative/case related comments

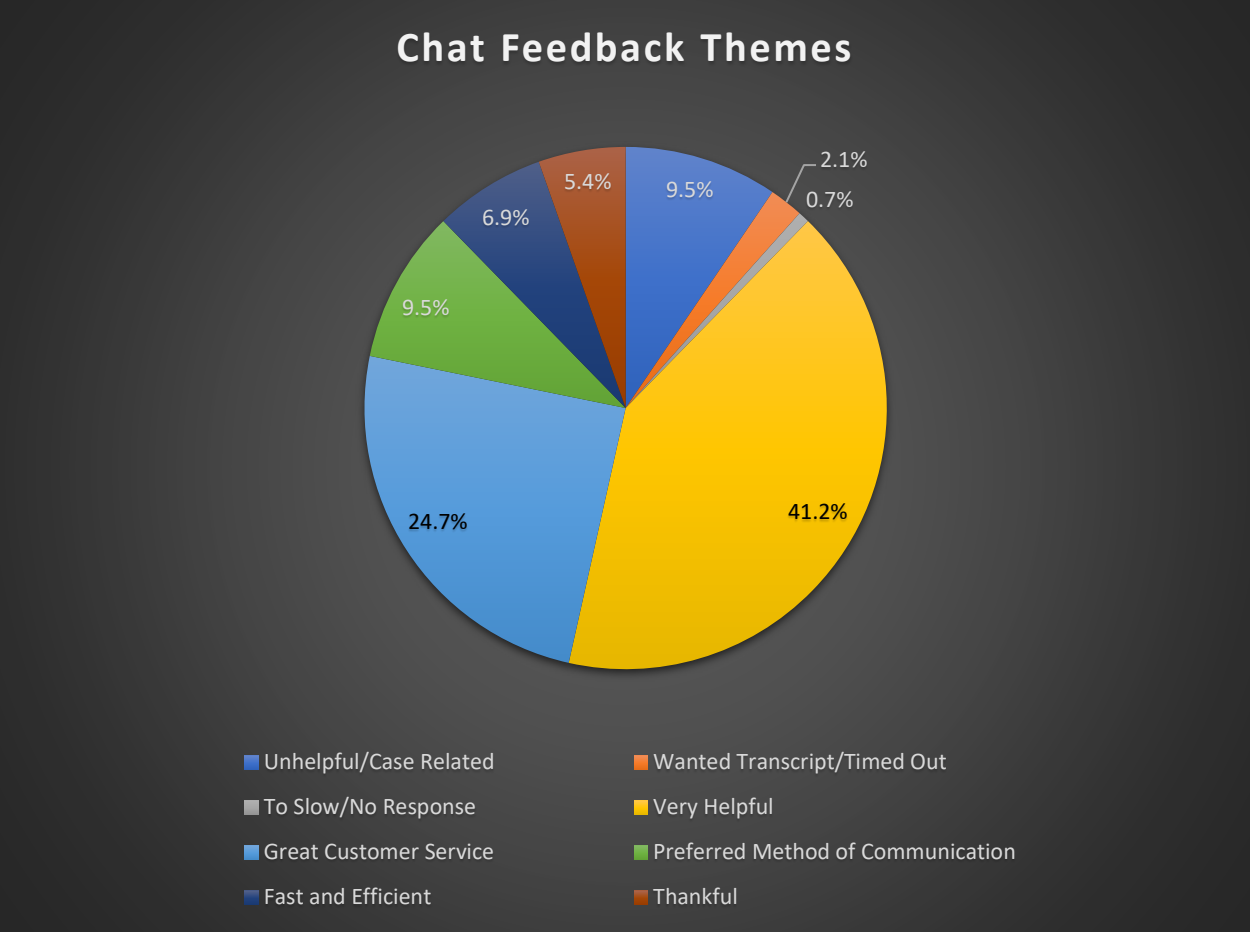


Figure 15

- Very Helpful – 277
- Great Customer Service – 166
- Preferred communication – 64
- Fast and Efficient – 46
- Thankful – 36
- Unhelpful/couldn't address customer case information – 64
- Timed out and/or wanted emailed transcript – 14
- No response or too slow – 5

**Mobile versus Non-Mobile Chat Traffic**

A total of 519 chats were initiated on the Spanish-language version of the CSD website.

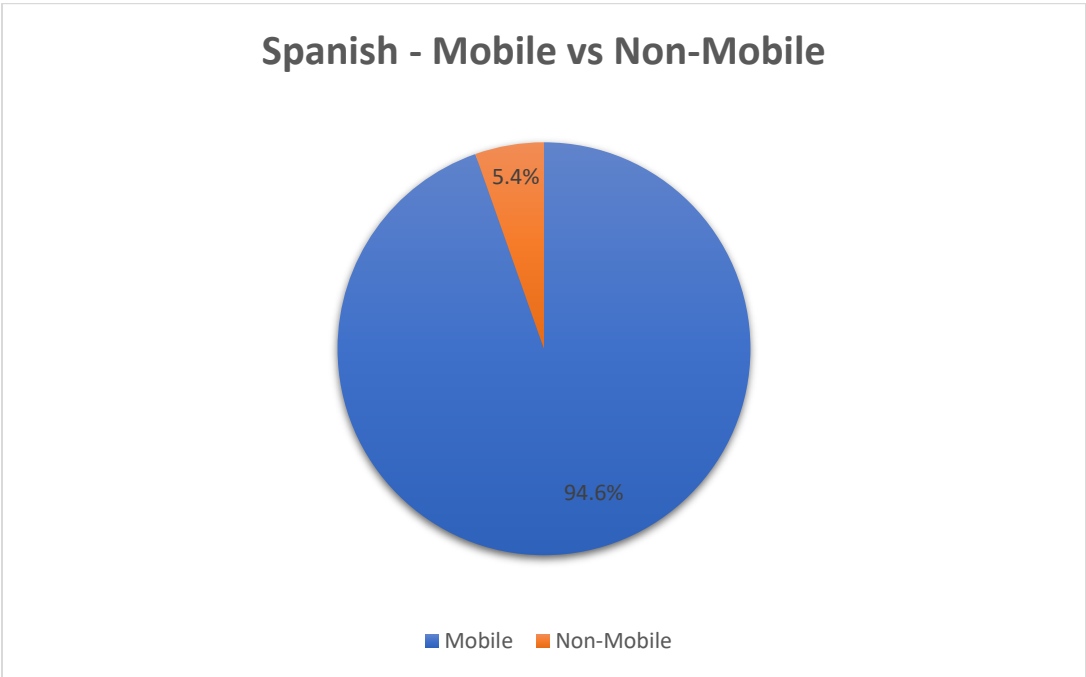


Figure 16

A total of 9,976 chats were initiated on the English-language version of the CSD website.

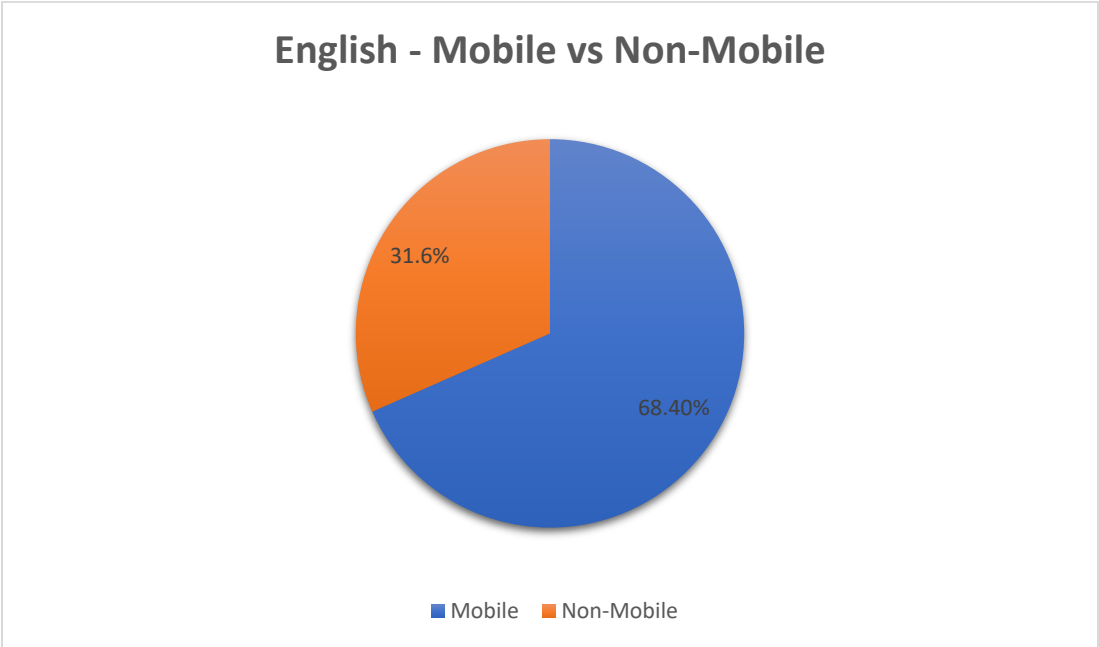


Figure 17

The data in Figure 16 and Figure 17 data provides a baseline for comparison in future evaluations to see if there is any noticeable change. The platforms used for digital outreach in future Interventions could be associated with an uptick in mobile chat traffic if mobile-centric social media sites are chosen.

**Chat availability**

Originally identified as a limitation, internal analytics show that the normal ebb and flow of traffic to the child support website peaks on Monday and gradually trends downward throughout the work week, bottoming out over the weekends or on holidays. The fact that the Chat Officers are not available outside of the work week or after 5:00pm remains a limitation, but the Chat Officers are available during the highest website traffic times and days. (Figure 18)

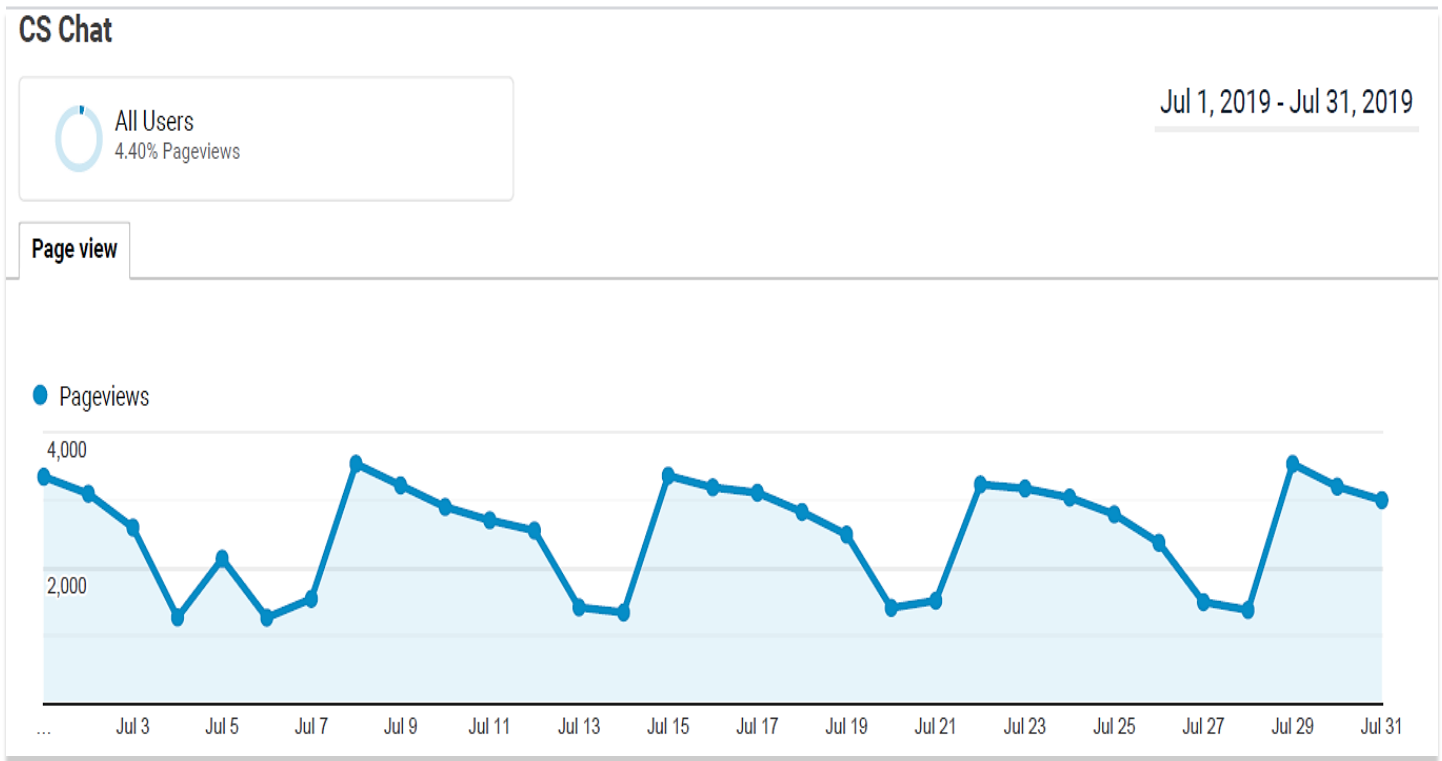


Figure 18 - Ex: July 2019

**Website Traffic**

The CS Live chat prompt was available on the five pages of the CSD’s website that most clearly aligned to search terms used by customers seeking application information. The CSD anticipated that Google analytics would provide accurate traffic numbers to the five web pages. Unfortunately, the CSD did not have the proper metrics in place to obtain the appropriate data for each web page, therefore the statistics are not immediately available to establish a baseline in Evaluation I. CSD IT is working to redefine the metrics from Intervention I to ensure accurate traffic numbers for Intervention II.

In Evaluation II, the CSD will compare both sets of data to assess if the digital outreach campaign in Intervention II is associated with increased visitor traffic to the website.

## Lessons Learned

There were many lessons learned during Intervention I that caused the CSD to innovate and improve user experience with chat feature and improve the online application itself.

### Chat Responses

- Due to the high frequency of case-related questions, the CSD adjusted the Chat Officer's opening statement from a general greeting to "how can we assist you with the application process" in an attempt to let customers know upfront that only pre-case inquiries about child support or the application process could be answered.
- The CSD created a canned response to use in the event of an unexpected building evacuation.

Due to customer feedback, the CSD changed a feature of the chat tool to allow emails of chat transcripts be sent to a customer before the conversation is closed. Originally, users were able to download the transcript before signing out of a chat, but the option was not obvious, as shown in Figure 19:

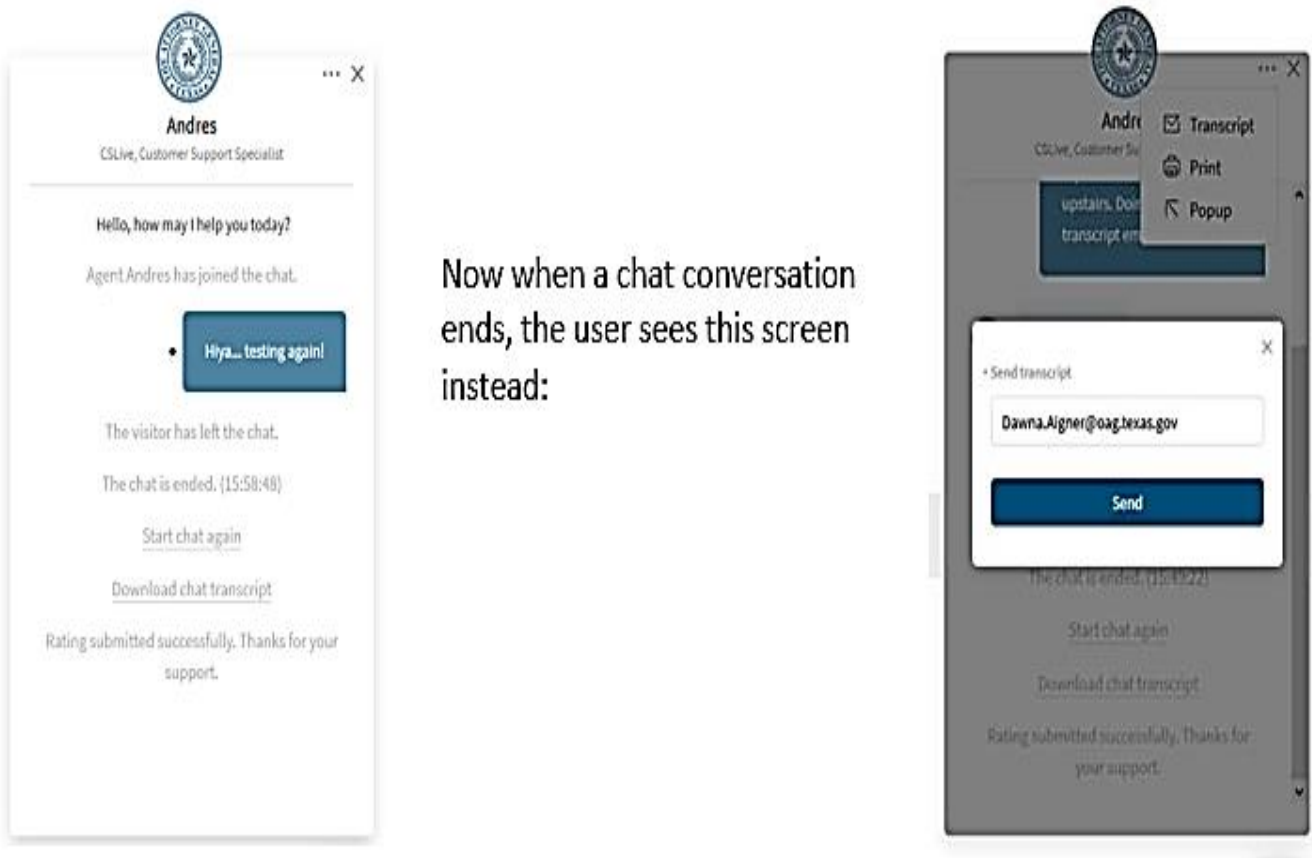


Figure 19

Key takeaways from Intervention I and the soft launch of CS Live can best be summed up by customer feedback:

- "She was very informative, even though this was through chat, I truly felt that she cared about my case. She was a small blessing for me today."

- “That was FAST! I was on hold on the phone with y'all, but after the chat, I didn't need to talk to anyone. I got the answers I needed.”
- “This is the best service ever, thanks for making it available. It makes is so much easier and efficient to get questions answered without having to call a hotline and be on hold or navigate through an automated system.”
- “Very prompt and kindly helpful service!! The live customer support chat makes the process so much less stressful than waiting for a person via phone line. Thank you!!”

Overall, the soft launch of CS Live could be perceived as associated with enhanced customer service, increased customer satisfaction, and supporting customers in completing an online application.

### **Next Steps**

The CSD will prepare to launch a digital outreach campaign on October 1, 2019 to promote Apply Online to the target demographic in Hidalgo, Cameron and Lubbock Counties. The CSD will begin to collect application data monthly and track digital media “clicks” daily to ensure that digital media costs remain within the budget for Intervention II. No foreseen system changes are needed for the chat tool, but the CSD will add a question to the online application survey to ask customers if they saw and/or clicked the digital media graphic which led them to the CSD website to complete an online application for services.