# Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County

*How a lean IT team behind a vital community mission found the speed, security, and simplicity to support a workforce on the move — with Versa SASE*

## AT A GLANCE

**INDUSTRY**
Government / Public Sector

**Challenges**

- Legacy VPN and web-proxy tools from separate vendors were costly, overlapping, and hard to manage
- Frequent disconnects and slow access to on-prem apps disrupted a hybrid work schedule
- Limited visibility into web activity, phishing and malware exposure, and employee use of generative AI tools

**Results**

- Full client environment configured and deployed in about eight hours, the same day work began
- Reliable, office-like remote access that delivers consistent connectivity, clear video, and voice communication, and uninterrupted access to the information employees need to do their jobs
- Stronger visibility and control over internet activity and GenAI use, in a single pane of glass

## Serving the community through good work

Children's Services Council of Palm Beach County (CSC) occupies a distinctive role in its community. It is a special taxing district created by Palm Beach County voters in 1986 and reauthorized in 2014. Funded directly by local property taxpayers, CSC utilizes those public dollars to fund dozens of agencies offering services and programming across the county — all working toward a single mission: helping children grow up healthy, safe, strong, and ready for school and for life.

That mission takes shape in programs that touch families at every stage, from prenatal care and home visiting services for new mothers to early childhood education, quality childcare scholarships, before- and after-school programs, and initiatives that support teachers and caregivers throughout the county. Many of CSC's funded agencies enter data into a shared database that is under CSC's management and control. Because CSC's own staff largely works behind the scenes, funding and coordinating the organizations that deliver these services directly, its ability to manage information, protect data and keep its systems running smoothly has a direct impact on the well-being of the children and families it ultimately serves.

## A steady hand behind the scenes

That work falls to Chris Jacob, Director of Information Systems and Technology at CSC. Chris has supported CSC for over 15 years. Before that, his career was spent in large Fortune 500 companies. That contrast is one he appreciates: At CSC, a compact team with about 100 employees, he and his colleagues serve as a true one-stop shop, with hands in everything from desktop support, switching and routing to firewalls, cybersecurity, networking and virtualization. Chris reports directly to Robert Kurimski, the Chief Information and Technology Officer. Together the two have earned a reputation within the organization for staying ahead of the curve by carefully vetting new tools before adopting them.

## Balancing stewardship, security and trust

Running IT for an organization like CSC comes with a unique set of responsibilities. Every dollar CSC spends is ultimately taxpayer money, so its technology decisions must meet the same bar of stewardship as its funding decisions. CSC also manages sensitive information across the many programs it supports. While not legally obligated to, CSC voluntarily complies with the HIPAA Privacy and Security Rules. Chris said the organization does this to ensure the highest level of data protection. For a two-person IT function supporting a fast-paced, dynamic workforce, balancing affordability, security, and stewardship is an ongoing challenge and responsibility.



## Facing challenges to keep the community strong

Even from behind a desk, Chris sees the impact of CSC's mission play out in ways that stick with him. At a recent all-staff meeting, colleagues shared stories from the community: CSC purchased, and over half of CSC staff worked to fill, more than 1,000 backpacks with pencils, pens, crayons, watercolors, and other supplies that were distributed to kids before the new school year. "Some of those backpacks," Chris recalls with a laugh, "were nearly as big as the kids carrying them. A few of the little ones were beaming as they wore them! One nearly toppled over like a turtle under its shell. All the kids who received backpacks could barely contain their excitement."

Another story that stayed with Chris: CSC's own scholarship program, built to help local teachers pursue continuing education and certifications, which was itself a direct result of listening to the community it serves. The idea had first come up years earlier in a focus group, and CSC turned it into a real, funded program. One teacher told CSC staff, "Now I'm a part of it and able to take advantage of it." For a department that mostly works behind the scenes, moments like these are a reminder of exactly what the organization's technology and systems are ultimately in service of.

## A small team with a big mandate

Chris and Robert bring a consistent philosophy to every technology decision they make. As Chris put it, "We like to stay on the cutting edge, but it has to be technology that's tried and true." This discipline extends to every corner of the organization. Whether it's IT, accounting, business analysts, program staff or a funded agency, the expectation is the same. Everyone needs and depends on real-time access to the data, reporting and financial systems to stay efficient and productive.

## Outgrowing a patchwork of point products

For years, CSC used a vendor's VPN to connect employees to its firewall and another vendor to proxy internet traffic when employees were off-site. Both products met CSC's needs, but one vendor was becoming more expensive and felt overbuilt for an organization of only 100 employees. Running separate products also created extra administration, overlapping functions, and potential points of failure. CSC began looking for a more affordable way to consolidate secure internet access and VPN access back to headquarters.

All CSC operations are based at a single headquarters, but staff visit funded agencies and attend outside meetings on a regular basis, which requires access to all resources regardless of their location. Reliability had become urgent: with a competing solution, employees could be disconnected two to five times a day, and remote access to on-premises applications could feel as slow as dial-up. Video could buffer and VoIP audio could degrade. Chris and Robert wanted remote work to function as if employees were in the office, regardless of where they were connecting from. "People can work from home, a provider's office, a hotel, or a coffee shop, really from anywhere. We needed a way to keep them just as secure and just as visible to us in any of those places as if they were sitting at a desk here in the office," says Chris.

They wanted to consolidate multiple products into something simpler to manage. They wanted a solution that was proven, not experimental. When one of their existing products came up for renewal, it created a natural opening to ask a bigger question: could they find a single platform that did all of this at once?

Robert got his answer at an industry event in Miami, where he was introduced to Versa. What began as a brief encounter led both Robert and Chris to take a closer look and research the Versa Secure Access Service Edge (SASE) platform in earnest. The more they learned, the more it looked like the consolidation they'd been searching for.



## Making the right move to empower employees

Chris and Robert evaluated potential solutions against three practical criteria: a single product and pane of glass, affordability, and speed for both internet use and the connection back to headquarters. The team also wanted visibility and control over web activity, phishing and malware exposure, and organizational data entered into generative AI tools.

## One platform, built for how the team actually works

What sealed the decision with Versa was how the platform combined secure web access with connectivity back to CSC's headquarters in one manageable environment. That reduced the overhead of running overlapping products, giving the team the single pane of glass it wanted and fitting the needs of a small organization that had to watch its budget.

The key selling point was the performance of the link from Versa's cloud back to CSC's headquarters. Employees needed access to on-premises servers and thick-client applications without the slowdowns and disconnects they had experienced before. "We needed to make sure that our staff could VPN back to the office and work like they were 'in the office,'" Chris says. "And with Versa, we did."

CSC also wanted visibility and control over employees' use of generative AI tools, particularly to reduce the risk of organizational data being pasted into public services. Chris said the new environment gave the team much stronger control and visibility into internet activity, including what users could and could not access.

Simplicity also showed in how quickly CSC got up and running. Once the tenant was provisioned, Chris' client environment was configured in about eight hours, the same day the work began. He credits much of that speed to the Versa team walking through the platform with him step by step, translating what he'd built in his prior environment into a working configuration in near real time.

The support experience left as much of an impression on Chris as the platform itself. Questions sent by email were answered with a meeting invitation within minutes, not days, and the team brought in whoever was needed to resolve an issue on the spot rather than passing it along a queue. "The Versa support is the best in the industry," says Chris.

For Chris, what makes Versa the right fit for an organization like CSC comes down to how well the platform matches the size and shape of his team, without asking them to compromise on capability. "We're not a big enterprise with an army of engineers. We're a small team wearing a lot of hats," he says. "Versa is straightforward and simple to use. It's easy to bounce around and understand." The solution delivered the capability CSC needed without the operational burden of a platform that was too large for its environment.

Although CSC did not establish formal day-to-day KPIs for the rollout, the success criteria were practical: employees should connect as if they were in the office, avoid being kicked off two to five times a day, and hold Zoom or Teams calls without lost video, buffering or robotic audio. "We literally needed employees to be able to connect like they were in the office and do their job," Chris says. Those expectations have been met.

## Seeing the outcomes of their efforts

For Chris, meeting those criteria only tells part of the story. What matters just as much is how the improvement plays out in daily operations across the organization, and the confidence it's given him that CSC made the right call.

"Once we push it out and people get connected, it does what it needs to do. They don't have to call us to troubleshoot it," he says. The platform also integrated smoothly with CSC's SSO and MFA environment, making the experience seamless for users and easier for IT to support.

For a team like his, ease of use matters just as much as raw capability. Chris has found the platform easy to navigate on a daily basis, a meaningful advantage for an IT department where the same group of people is responsible for everything from the network to the help desk. And when things are working as they should, Chris notes, that's exactly the point: the fewer surprises his team hears about from the rest of the organization, the more confidence they have that the platform is doing its job quietly and well in the background.

CSC's relationship with Versa is already looking beyond the current deployment, and Chris is excited about where it might go from here. What started as a single product has grown into an ongoing collaboration he hopes to keep building on in the years ahead. "The Versa technology works. The people behind it are great to work with, and I'm excited to see where this partnership goes next for our organization," says Chris.

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About Versa

Versa, the global leader in unified networking and security, enables organizations to create self-protecting networks that radically simplify and automate their network and security infrastructure. Powered by AI, the VersaONE Universal SASE Platform delivers converged SSE, SD-WAN, and SD-LAN solutions that protect data and defend against cyberthreats while providing a superior digital experience. Thousands of customers globally, with hundreds of thousands of sites and millions of users, trust Versa with their mission-critical networks and security. Versa is privately held and funded by investors such as Sequoia Capital, Mayfield, and BlackRock. For more information, visit https://www.versa-networks.com and follow Versa on LinkedIn and X (Twitter) @versanetworks.

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