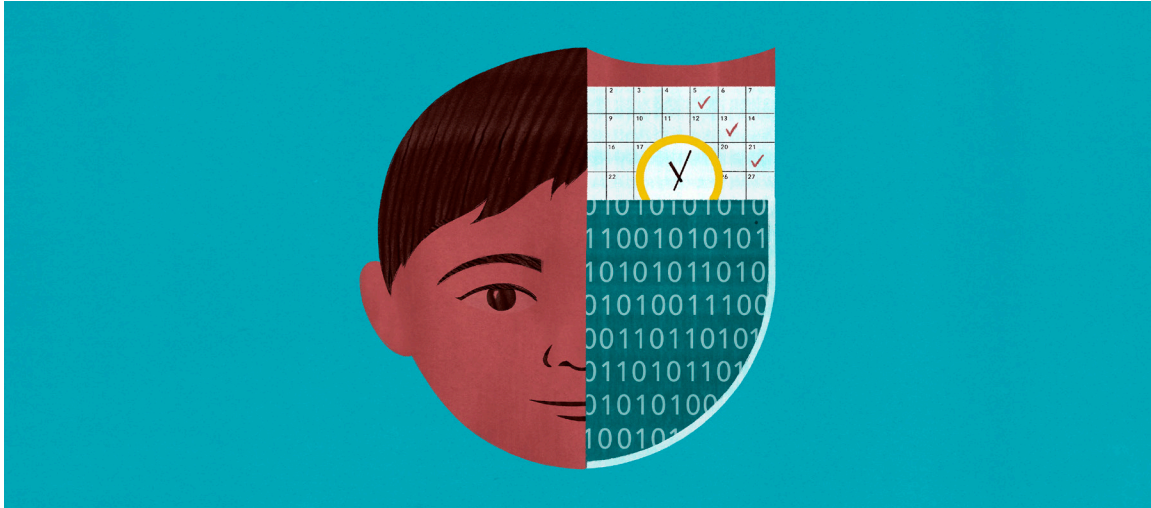


Beyond case management

Better child welfare outcomes through relationship management



CHILD WELFARE CASEWORKERS serve on the frontlines of protecting America’s most vulnerable children. Poverty, neglect, violence, parental substance use, and physical abuse are common among children that come into contact with the child welfare system. Ensuring their safety often involves working with fractured families and making difficult decisions—when to remove a child from a home, place a child in foster care, or reunify a child with his or her family—all while minimizing the trauma children experience. It’s a tremendous responsibility carried out under some of the most challenging circumstances.

While a caseworker’s job is complex by nature, workplace realities make it even harder. High caseloads constrain the amount of time a caseworker can spend with any given family.

According to the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, the caseload of the typical child welfare caseworker is often twice the accepted national standard.¹ Moreover, turnover rates for child welfare agencies hover around 30 percent nationally.² The result is that cases frequently change hands and are touched by multiple caseworkers over time.

In addition, many caseworkers rely on decades-old legacy case management systems (CMS) to support their day-to-day work. Time spent struggling with the shortcomings of these systems is time *not* spent with the children and families under their care.

One problem with many CMS is that they lack an integrated view of a child’s or family’s engagement with various health and human services programs.

That leaves caseworkers to manually piece together data from different sources to develop a holistic view of the children and families they serve.

Nor do CMS adequately support decision-making. These systems were designed as data collection machines that agencies then use to comply with state and federal reporting requirements. The case file a CMS produces is hard to navigate and doesn't put the relationship between agency and client at the center of the system's design.

Moreover, when an agency wants to add new capabilities to a legacy CMS, such as predictive analytics or artificial intelligence (AI), that initiative takes a great deal of work.

Any technology solution used to support the critical business processes of child welfare should address these challenges. It should allow agencies to build more effective relationships with the children they serve, while being:

- Modifiable, to keep pace with changes in policy and business processes
- Less costly to own and maintain
- Easy to learn and use

For agencies seeking to develop better support for child welfare caseworkers, customer relationship management (CRM) platforms can play a critical role.

Enter CRM: Child protection through relationship management

CRM platforms are designed to help organizations manage their relationships with new or existing customers. As integrated, data-driven software solutions, CRM platforms can improve the way

agencies interact with and manage long-term relationships with the children they serve, from childhood, through adolescence, and into adulthood.

CRM platforms can help tackle some of the long-standing challenges caseworkers and child welfare agencies face.

CASEWORKER CHALLENGES

Managing multiple communication channels: A client's case involves far more communications than simple case notes can capture. A system that creates one big set of notes can cause problems when a case changes hands and a new caseworker must get up to speed quickly. A CRM platform provides a configurable foundation with an intelligent, structured way to ask questions and capture notes, using CRM techniques fine-tuned over years of experience. Lacking this kind of intelligence, traditional CMS rely on caseworkers using their own experience to figure out how best to gather data from clients.

Supporting work that takes place outside the office: Most caseworkers split their time between the office and other locations. Agencies that want to let caseworkers access a traditional CMS from mobile devices must have that capability built for them. CRM platforms come with built-in mobile capabilities.

Developing data-driven action plans: CRM platforms let caseworkers analyze data and trends within their caseloads, helping them develop strategies to promote better outcomes for the client. While this is a fundamental function of CRM platforms, it has typically been added to CMS solutions only as an afterthought.

Reacting to changes in family structure: As household structures can change over the course of a case, it's often hard for caseworkers to keep track of the people in a child's life. CRM platforms

automatically monitor changing relationships, helping caseworkers better understand how the network surrounding a child evolves over time.

DEPARTMENTAL CHALLENGES

Growing caseloads, reduced budgets: The population of youth and families involved with child welfare agencies continues to grow, requiring agencies to do more with less. Cloud-based CRM platforms are cost-efficient. They can also synthesize operational data, which the agency can use to gauge its performance and facilitate ongoing improvements.

Constant training needs: With high staff turnover, an agency must quickly onboard a steady stream of new, inexperienced staff and deploy them to the field.³ Moreover, as policies change, the agency must update its technology and related training for new and existing staff. CRM platforms provide the ability to “configure” rather than “develop” solutions, enabling swift changes that can keep pace with new requirements. These platforms let agencies develop different interfaces for different users, making it easier to train disparate populations.

Facilitating collaboration: CRM platforms promote collaboration internally, between social workers, and externally, between social workers and clients. They offer built-in mechanisms to capture conversations, ask questions, chat, and otherwise communicate in a natural social context, as opposed to a form-based, system-heavy experience.

States on the forefront of change

Given these benefits, a number of states have adopted cloud-based CRM platforms for managing their child welfare programs.

In 2018, Delaware’s Department of Services for Children, Youth, and their Families (DSCYF) went live with the nation’s first cloud-based CRM system for child welfare caseworkers, FOCUS (For Our Children’s Ultimate Success). FOCUS integrates the department’s four previously siloed divisions within one enterprisewide solution.

To ensure that FOCUS would spur innovations to address the core needs of DSCYF staff, the department conducted human-centered design research with key business stakeholders. The goal of the new solution was less time spent in the system, improved operational efficiency, ease of use, visibility of information across service providers, and user ability to locate information at every level of the organization.

DSCYF staff and providers can now spend more time focused on advancing their core mission, to promote the safety and well-being of the 49,000+ children and families whom they support on a daily basis.⁴

Other states are also migrating to CRM platforms to manage their child welfare programs.

Louisiana implemented its child protective services intake and investigation modules on a cloud-based CRM platform and saved 60 percent of its annual technology costs compared with its legacy technology solution. The solution was implemented with an external portal that designated reporters can use to provide nonemergent information on alleged child abuse or neglect. Diverting those reports to the Web has reduced call wait times on the Department of Children and Family Services’ hotline.

Idaho’s Department of Health and Welfare (DHW) is currently implementing Ensuring Safety and Permanency in Idaho (ESPI), a cloud-based CRM solution for child welfare. Through ESPI, the department seeks to improve child outcomes and

family engagement, meet comprehensive child welfare information system (CCWIS) compliance, and improve organizational effectiveness through data-driven decision-making. The implementation is being guided by human-centered design principles and uses an agile-based, phased implementation approach to roll out DHW child welfare functions. To date, both the cloud-based technology architecture for the entire solution, which is integrated with DHW's infrastructure, as well as the first ESPI module for intake have been rolled out in just six months.

Looking ahead

Child welfare caseworkers deserve technology that supports, rather than impedes, the life-changing work they do on behalf of vulnerable children and their families. Cloud-based CRM solutions can bring child welfare caseworkers into the 21st century, helping them perform the right work for the right people at the right time. With this support from modern technology, caseworkers can better promote the safety and well-being of the children they serve.

Endnotes

1. National Child Welfare Workforce Institute, *Child welfare workforce demographics (2000-2010): Snapshot of the frontline child welfare caseworker*, April 2011.
2. Casey Family Programs, "How does turnover affect outcomes and what can be done to address retention?," December 29, 2017.
3. Ibid.
4. Department of Technology and Information, State of Delaware, *NASCIO 2018 Recognition Awards nomination: FOCUS (For Our Children's Ultimate Success)*, 2018.

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