



Powering up Children's  
Social Service:  
Supporting the Workforce  
with Digital and Data

## A frontline under pressure

Children's social service is fundamentally "people" work. Its workforce is the face of the family's experience. Within children's social service, the demands on frontline staff are evolving due to the increasing complexity of children's and families' needs and as expectations of governments to intervene and keep children safe intensifies, the demand for these services continue to grow.

Despite the growing demand for service within the sector, many countries continue to face significant challenges attracting their children's social service workforce. For example, studies have shown that children's social service systems in both the UK and Australia face persistent workforce shortages that threaten service delivery and reform. In the UK, there was 7,200 social worker vacancies reported as of September 2024 —23% higher than in 2017.<sup>1</sup> Another report found that 1 in 5 children's social service positions in the UK are vacant. The report described a converging set of challenges associated with social sector workforce attraction, including high caseloads, inflexible working practices, funding challenges and the perceived low status of the profession.<sup>1</sup> In Australia, shortages span all tiers of the children's social service system due to high turnover, limited graduate supply, and rising demand. The Australia health and social assistance sector has more than doubled in size over 20 years, with a projected shortfall of 286,000 care workers by 2050.<sup>2</sup> South Australia provides an example of the growing demand where child protection notifications have increased by 40% and the number of children in care by 39% since 2017, intensifying pressure on the workforce.<sup>3</sup>

To address these challenges, organizations are focusing on workforce strategies focusing on employee experience, organizational culture, establishment of clearer career paths, enhanced training and supervision, and collaboration with colleges and universities to invest in the workforce of the future. There is recognition that recruitment and retention of skilled and committed staff should be a priority.

Globally the sector is also turning to digital and data tools that "power up" their workforce – helping them to spend less time on administrative work, and more time on the relational work that aims to heal families and protect children.

**This article – the third in our series – explores the role of technology and data in powering up the children's social service workforce. It will describe how:**

- The children's workforce of the future will likely experience a reduction in time spent on administrative tasks, freeing up time for relational activities such as counselling and casework.
- GenAI can be utilized as an intelligent assistant to support caseworkers in providing personalized, data-driven support to children and families.
- Modern case management systems can use AI to streamline administrative tasks, unlock insights from case notes, and support evidence-based decision making.
- Information sharing and collaboration tools can support holistic, wraparound care, improve data accuracy and security, and provide families with better access to their own information.

## The children's workforce of the future

The children's workforce of the future spends more time with children and families and less time on administrative tasks. Deloitte US has examined the future of work for child support supervisors<sup>4</sup> and caseworkers<sup>5</sup> and foresees a significant reduction in time spent on administrative tasks, tracking, and reporting, allowing for a greater focus on casework and counselling.

## The future is here

Children's social service organizations have historically been late adopters of technology. Funding constraints - which have often led to cycles of underinvestment in the tools and systems that caseworkers use - are part of the challenge. Another contributing factor is the presence of real and perceived risks. Increased reliance on data and digital tools raises concerns about the security and privacy of sensitive information about children and families. Data-driven decision-making may inadvertently perpetuate biases, reinforcing existing inequalities and result in discriminatory outcomes for children and their families. On an ethical level, there is a valid concern that advanced digital tools might detract from - or even displace - the essential relationships that children should have with their support workers.

At the same time, the data and tools to support more effective practice, process and decision-making are becoming more cost effective and capable.

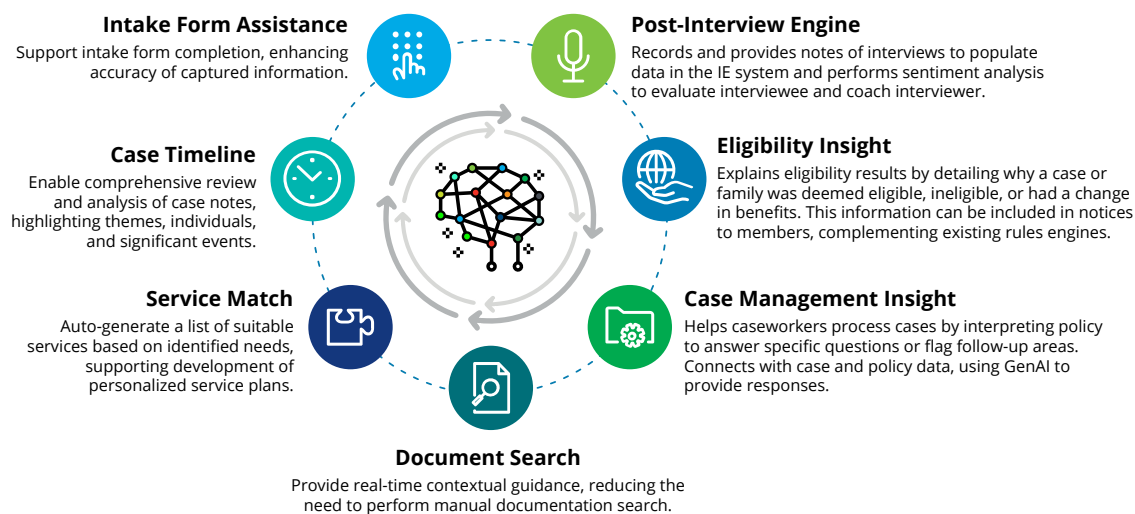
### GenAI

GenAI can create original content from existing information of many types - text, images, audio, voice, and video. As such, GenAI has the potential to intelligently assist caseworkers by answering case-specific questions in the context of jurisdiction-specific systems and policy.

There are early examples of tools being developed that enable caseworkers to interact with an AI assistant that provides clear, cited, policy-informed answers to their questions, improving efficiency and decision-making.

For example, a caseworker could inquire if a young person is eligible to transition from a Voluntary Agreement to an Independent Living agreement, based on the specific facts of the case and the applicable policy in the jurisdiction. The worker could type their inquiry in plain language and the GenAI solution could quickly answer that yes, this transition is permissible based on policy, as well as provide additional context as to why and what is required for this change of Agreement to take place. GenAI solutions have the potential to simplify policy guidance and rules, facilitate easy extraction of information from case notes, support training and onboarding, and help caseworkers make data-driven decisions. Importantly, these solutions can be designed within a robust security architecture, with data processed on private networks, to ensure that they comply with public sector security standards.

Core AI technologies can also be used in tandem with GenAI to help lessen caseworkers' workload by prepopulating data from paper applications, automating system actions, sending reminders and other communications, and recommending interventions.<sup>6</sup>



#### Key benefits include:

- Personalized interventions and services tailored to the needs and context of children and families
- Reduced administrative burden for caseworkers, such as mitigating the need to collate and draft information from multiple sources, including case notes and policy
- Faster onboarding for new caseworkers by simplifying retrieval of policy guidance and rules

## Modern children's case management systems

Modern case management systems are underpinned by data models that are centered on people – not on a case. As such they streamline the documentation, tracking, and monitoring of case information for children and families to support professionals to view and understand what is happening for a child, not just the latest case interaction. Enhanced with AI tools, case management has become increasingly powerful for children's social services.

Routine administrative tasks and task assignment can be automated using Robotic Process Automation reducing the time spent on data entry, search, and waiting for approvals. For example, modern case management systems enable intake to be completed from multiple devices, allowing caseworkers to collect information from virtually any location—not just in the office. This enables caseworkers to document information as they observe it, reducing the risk of gaps or errors that can occur when there is a delay between observation and data entry. Furthermore, advancements in speech-to-text algorithms, fueled by AI, have led to significant improvements in the accuracy and efficient of voice-to-text transcription capabilities.<sup>7</sup> Modern case management systems can support quick case note entries using voice-to-text transcription, reducing administrative burden on caseworkers. Once the intake is submitted, the system can support caseworkers in applying jurisdictional policies to make determinations for the child, based on pre-configured rules and straight-through processing capabilities.

Natural Language Processing (NLP) unlocks details and insights from case notes. Using NLP, a caseworker can search for specific references, identify relationships, and even detect and analyze sentiment. Coupled with machine learning models that can identify trends and outliers, caseworkers can see patterns of risks, strengths, and protective factors over time. For example, Augintel is a software designed specifically for government children's social service agencies that uses NLP to reveal risks, strengths, relationships, and social determinants of health across client case notes. This information can enable caseworkers to save time on administrative work, proactively respond to the early warning signs of abuse or mental health challenges and obtain necessary insights to inform interventions.<sup>8</sup>

Modern case management systems are also equipped with robust security and privacy controls to protect sensitive client data and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements. These systems typically feature role-based access controls, ensuring that users can only view or edit information relevant to their responsibilities. Data encryption safeguards personal and confidential information from unauthorized access. Secure login protocols, such as multi-factor authentication, further reduce the risk of data breaches. Together, these controls help build trust with clients and stakeholders while maintaining the integrity and confidentiality of case data.



#### **Key benefits include:**

- Early risk detection with short term and long-term mitigation
- Improved data security and privacy to protect sensitive client data
- Enhanced visibility for case workers through improved access to, and clarity of, case information
- Streamlining of routine tasks frees up caseworker time to spend on meaningful client interactions and complex casework
- Faster onboarding for new caseworkers based on their skillset, expertise and location
- Daily, weekly, and monthly task views help caseworkers plan and prioritize their workload effectively
- Timely alerts provide reminders to caseworkers to conduct follow-ups when necessary

### **Tools for information sharing and collaboration**

Timely and accurate information – shared appropriately – is tremendously valuable to the workforce that serves children and families. Historically, information sharing has been hindered by incompatible systems and different ways of recording and storing child and family data. By using cloud-based document management and Application Programming Interface-first (API) architectures, we can securely exchange information and overcome these challenges without expensive structural change to existing systems.

Integrated case management consolidates information from multiple case management systems, to enable joined-up case management centered on the needs of the child or family. This may include collaborative triage, comprehensive needs assessments, planning and decision making, and monitoring and reporting on programs.



With the support of real-time messaging, effective communications channels and collaborative spaces for case discussions and planning, caseworkers can effectively coordinate with colleagues across the Human Services including health, education, housing and contracted third party providers to provide holistic, wraparound care.

Moreover, modern case management systems often support public-facing portals which help enable families to view their own data and communicate with their caseworkers. These portals can provide families with increased transparency, access and control over their own information, and the ability to easily request supports and services.



**Key benefits include:**

- Better access to personal information for children and families
- A holistic view of children and families, relieving the pressure for children and families to tell their stories multiple times
- Less time spent on data collation, re-keying and manual information sharing
- Improved data accuracy and security
- Improved decisions that take account of children's and families' context and needs
- Reduced cost of services through earlier intervention, and reduced "overserving" by multiple agencies

### Better service, workforce, and workflow management

Just as modern case management systems support individual caseworkers in making timely, well-informed decisions for their clients, these technologies also help enable policymakers and agency leaders to analyze trends across their entire caseload. Data and analytics tools can empower leaders to engage in evidence-based decision-making, performance monitoring, and trend analysis to inform service planning and interventions. The right technology investments can help to deploy human resources for the greatest benefit to families and unleash the workforce.



**Key benefits include:**

- Better informed service delivery and decision making for children and families
- Improved service targeting and resource allocation
- Optimized workforce planning, recruitment, and rostering by identifying emerging needs and trends

### Case study: US legislative reform

The U.S. Administration for Children and Families has enacted the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) regulations which aims to improve data collection, sharing and analysis nationally.<sup>9</sup> These regulations replace the Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information Systems (SACWIS), which came out in 1993. SACWIS included 51 mandatory federal requirements while the new CCWIS regulation include 14.

These modern-day regulations put the focus on data quality, data integration and effective use of automated case management functions while supporting states to create more flexible and modular systems, ones that align their IT needs more closely with their unique program requirements, and that can work well with other human services systems (such as health care or education databases). Agencies can take advantage of modern technology to share data between multiple systems. The result is a more holistic understanding of the child, so that child welfare professionals can better address their needs.<sup>10</sup>

Overall, CCWIS will help agencies to leverage advanced analytics and reporting capabilities, to gain insights into their operations and case management processes, identify trends, and get a perspective on service delivery outcomes. This allows agencies to find areas for improvement, allocate resources more effectively, and be agile, continually refining their practices to better serve children and families' needs.

In Idaho, the Department of Health and Welfare (DHW) collaborated with Deloitte US to implement Ensuring Safety and Permanency in Idaho (ESPI) a CCWIS-compliant child welfare technology solution built on Microsoft Dynamics 365 and Microsoft Power Platform. The goals of the solution were to manage cases and deliver services more efficiently, streamline administrative processes, and promote data-driven decision-making.

Human-centered design guided the configuration of the solution. It allows Idaho DHW to provide a modern user experience, such as a mobility and a caseworker portal, and a stable and scalable cloud platform. With that, caseworkers have an increased ability to focus on child well-being and family engagement.<sup>11</sup>

### Case study: Victoria, Australia

In Victoria, Australia, system leaders are supporting more effective programs through data collection and analysis. The state government has been working to study the characteristics of families involved with child protection, and to collaborate with child protection workers to operationalize this knowledge. They've focused on identifying which families would benefit most from certain programs, and determining what programs work for whom.<sup>12</sup>

The Victorian government has also placed a strong emphasis on enabling the workforce with technology, including an Integrated Reports and Information System. This software tool for funded agencies serves to collect and report data to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. Using these tools supports better information-sharing and case management tracking for the Department, which is responsible for child protection and the prevention of family violence (among others).<sup>13</sup>

## Priority Implementation Considerations: Trustworthy AI

Could systemic bias be built into AI? Might social workers become too reliant on AI-generated information at the expense of their own skills? These are legitimate concerns. However, a Deloitte Insights paper concluded that, under the right conditions, teaming AI with human decision making can help to de-bias decision making in government.<sup>14</sup>

The potential benefits of AI are game changing for children's social service. But it should be implemented with ethical safeguards, and trust and fairness at its heart. [Deloitte's Trustworthy AI™](#) is a multi-dimensional framework to support decision-makers to deploy AI safely and effectively.<sup>15</sup>

### Where to start: What can children's social service providers do today?

Technology advances and proven use cases have put accessible, digital and data tools within the reach of children's social service organizations. Stepping through this still requires leaders to make strategic decision about how, and where to invest. There are five critical success factors for leaders and decision-makers.

- 1. Understand where the greatest opportunities are.** The entities that have succeeded in using digital and data well have made the business case along the way – seizing the opportunity to liberate staff from mountains of paperwork and free them up to spend time with children and on more critical and person-centred work.
- 2. Establish the governance mechanisms to understand risk** (particularly with AI and predictive analytics). Governments around the world are catching up fast and putting in place the frameworks – and compliance – to understand, manage and govern AI risk. Building up your existing practices – using a framework like Deloitte's Trustworthy AI™ framework – can help ensure that your risk management reflects advances in data and technology. Help ensure your governance is tasked with a full view of risk – including the risk of doing nothing. Assessing the impact of current practices and workloads can unearth known organizational risks.
- 3. Redesign work.** Don't simply digitize existing processes that should be transformed or removed altogether—instead, design with the needs of children, families, and the workforce at the center. A common mistake when implementing new tools is to slightly improve current practices rather than rethink them entirely. For example, automating a process to eliminate a form may be far more effective than just making the form more user-friendly
- 4. Invest in the digital skills of the workforce.** Adoption and effective use of digital and decision-making tools will likely flounder if the workforce doesn't have the skills and confidence to use them. Training and support to use and interpret data in decision-making, maintain privacy and security, and use new tools to capture and communicate information can increase adoption.
- 5. Capture the value.** Have a plan to track the impact and be purposeful in how that time is used. It is tempting to jump on an AI use case or buy a tool that solves a pain point but without the baseline analysis to compare to, quantifying the value is hard. Without clear direction to staff about how that free time gets used, it will be difficult to translate that through to the real impact for children and families. By setting out the benefits you expect to see, it can be easier to evaluate how successful the investment has been – and where to focus next.



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