

Children’s Bureau Child Welfare Evaluation Virtual Summit Series 2013-2014:

Who Cares About Data Sharing? Making the Case to Courts

Transcript

[Introduction Graphic – Child Welfare Evaluation Virtual Summit Series]

[Introduction Graphic – Children’s Bureau Logo]

[01:00:22 – Music – Downtempo groove plays.]

[Graphic Text – Who cares about data sharing? Making the Case to Courts. Presented by: (Graphic illustration of “Dr. Gene Flango.”)]

[Graphic – Hand draws an image of a representative from the courts and the agencies communicating via computer.]

Narrator / Judge: [01:00:33] Who cares about data sharing between courts and child welfare agencies? Why should we be concerned when there are children in foster care who need permanent homes? [Graphic – Image switches to show two parents accepting a foster child.] Both courts and child welfare agencies have a moral and professional responsibility to keep children safe, physically and emotionally healthy in permanent homes. So how successful are we at this, how do we know we’re successful?

[Graphic – Evidence folder, with tabs A,B,C,D,E.]

[01:00:58] Evidence is a familiar topic to everyone in courts, but are we using evidence to make child welfare decisions? [Graphic – Evidence file opens, “Trauma Assessment” on left, “Trauma Screening” on right.] If not, what are we basing our decisions on? I recall an instance where one informed and prominent judge assumed that runaways we’re older children near the age of majority, would probably age out of the system soon anyway.

[Graphic – Judge imagines the scenario of a young adolescent walking the streets at night.]

[01:01:20] As a result, he decided not to devote more than a routine effort to track them down. When he gathered data and discovered that the average age of runaways was much less, between 12 and 14 years old, [Graphic – judge see young boy instead. The judge looks concerned.] he became very concerned and focused more attention on the issue.

[Graphic – Judge is shown with a red blindfold.]

[01:01:39] Without data, we accept a greater risk that our assumptions and anecdotes might be inaccurate or paint an incomplete picture and acting on these can result in unintended consequences. [Graphic – Judge, with blindfold, throws darts at a dartboard and is way off the target, because he is blindfolded.] Data are needed to help

judges make decisions in individual cases, such as when time deadlines for hearings are approaching.

[Graphic – Judge reviews data. Then he considers scenarios as the narrator continues.]

[01:02:01] Most judges are also curious about what happens after placements, but are not often given that sort of feedback, which placements were the most successful, which achieved better results for which types of children? This sort of feedback would certainly improve decision making in the future.

[Graphic – Individual judge is balanced by multiple team members on a see-saw style balance beam. The image is seen on a corkboard as an item of data in analysis. The data is explored as the narrator continues.]

[01:02:19] Equally as important as data needed by individual judges are data needed by presiding judges, court administrators and child welfare managers charged with improving system performance. It is important to know if the system as a whole is having a positive effect. We need information about the whole system performance to make practical policy decisions and to determine what works and what doesn't.

[Graphic – Man at a desk with piles of paperwork. He brings some to other team members and they consolidate it into their system.]

[01:02:46] There is a crying need for data, but not just mounds of data. Data must be processed as information and provided to the people who make decisions in a form that they can use. It is information that is actionable. [Graphic – Judge reviews a simple report form the data and two puzzle pieces appear on his computer screen.

Performance Measures connected with Outcomes.] The solution is performance measures based upon outcomes. That type of goal setting is really the first step in the continuous quality improvement process.

[Graphic – Official Publication. AKA toolkit.]

[01:03:11] The National Resource Center on Legal and Judicial Issues recently produced a publication entitled Court Performance Measures in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases. We commonly refer to this as the toolkit. And the toolkit was recently supplemented by newly created draft measures of child well-being to assist in the evaluation of system performance.

[Graphic – Image shows judge and caseworker holding an image with three outcome measures. Safety, permanency, and well-being.]

[01:03:34] Outcome measures are the ultimate indicator of success because they force us to make an objective appraisal, did we make a difference. [Graphic – Hand smudges performance measures, and image is replaced by a sad boy.] Indifference to outcome measures means children could be physically and emotionally harmed because we don't know, not because we don't care.

[01:03:52] But is information on outcome measures enough? Perhaps, but we might also want to know how those results were achieved. This requires measures that look at court processes, [Graphic – Sad boy thinks visually about different things as narrator continues.] were hearings conducted in a timely manner, were all of the participants and attorneys for litigants present, was there sufficient time for a quality hearing?

[Graphic – Caseworker looks at wrist watch while judge looks at pocket watch.]

[01:04:14] Timeliness must be measured to include both time in the child welfare system and time in the courts if we want to learn the time from removal to placement.

[Graphic – Caseworker and Judge review the case data.] It is absolutely critical that we take the time to examine the measures and discuss what they mean in order to make the right decisions.

[Graphic – Court Order document.]

[01:04:34] Court clerks and child welfare staff who must go through the tedious process of gathering data should know how important that data are to decision making and therefore how critical it is that data be complete, comprehensive and accurate.

[Graphic – Image shows flow of data as different caseworkers and team members use the data.] Collection is not a routine chore conducted solely to meet local, state or federal requirements.

[01:04:54] Also to be truly useful the right information needs to get to the people who need it when they need it. [Graphic – Dashboard shows criteria for measurement in three main dials and an overall evaluation based on all three factors.] I like the dashboard idea now becoming popular because it focuses attention on critical, actionable information that is presented in a summary fashion. Data from both courts and child welfare agencies are necessary to get a complete picture of how states are progressing in terms of achieving timely permanency for children.

[Graphic – Drawing shows the flow and connections of data from state / local government to national, medical, and educational networks.]

[01:05:24] Data from medical and educational institutions are required to determine the well-being of children in care. We need the data collected by all of these agencies to construct performance measures. Past practice was for each court and each agency to collect and record the data they needed to process their own cases.

[Graphic – Dashboard is disconnected from integrated system, the dashboard becomes unstable and the dials go up and down.]

[01:05:45] This results in an incomplete picture of the needs of children and families, much duplication of effort and a waste of scarce resources. [Graphic – Demonstrates technology being used to organize and collect data from different sources.] Through technology, it is now possible to collect and share the data much more efficiently. Data sharing promotes efficiency and reduces duplication of effort.

[Graphic – Demonstrates the benefits of electronic data exchange as the narrator continues.]

[01:06:06] Electronic data exchange benefits courts and child welfare agencies by (1) allowing each to obtain data elements for which they are responsible and use them to construct performance measures and management reports.

[01:06:20] (2), reducing the burden of data entry for each and more importantly, reducing the errors that are inevitable in redundant data entry and (3) providing each with timely, complete and accurate information upon which to make the decisions that promote child safety, permanency and well-being.

[Graphic – Demonstrates barriers to effective data exchange.]

[01:06:39] If data exchange is such a no-brainer, why isn't everybody doing it? Sometimes privacy concerns get in the way. Both courts and child welfare agencies are rightly concerned about the privacy of their records. And as we extend performance measures to include well-being, healthcare and educational professionals also become concerned about HPPA and FERPA laws.

[01:07:05] Is privacy a barrier to data sharing? No, it is not. The privacy of families and children can be protected even while data are being exchanged. The National

Resource Center on Data and Technology even has guides to help select which data exchanges HPPA and FERPA permit and which they do not.

[Graphic – Judge and caseworker wondering how to best use their performance measures effectively.]

[01:07:25] In sum, how do we know how well we are doing in getting foster children into permanent homes by setting goals and then using performance measures to measure progress toward achieving them. Performance measures help us [music – slow] make better practice decisions and thus improve outcomes for children.

[Graphic – Shows effective data sharing between courts and caseworkers.]

[01:07:46] Data sharing makes performance measurement practicable and doable. Data sharing allows courts and agencies both to get the full picture which will support the best decisions. We all love the idea of others sharing their data with us, but parting with our own data is uncomfortable. [Graphic – Shows professional team smiling and ready to share data between parties.] We need to get over that discomfort in order to benefit children and families; the stakes are just too high to do any less.

[Graphic Text – Special Thanks: Gene Flango – National Center for State Courts, David Kelly, Brian Deakins – Children’s Bureau.]

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