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Final Copy of Case Study

LOCATION:
Broomfield, CO, US

ORGANIZATION:
State of Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)

YEAR:
2011

ORGANIZATION URL:
<http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/>

STATUS:
Laureate

PROJECT NAME:
Maine Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS)

CATEGORY:
Human Services

PROJECT OVERVIEW

In response to federal laws requiring improved tracking of children in state foster care, the State of Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) embarked on a project to create a State Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS). Prior to the launching of this project, most information on children in care was paper-based and fragmented, which caused issues with overall business process effectiveness and efficiency. A base system was brought in from the State of Indiana, and the design effort included all levels of program and technical staff. The process culminated with the Maine Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS), developed in accordance with federal and state mandated laws. Today, MACWIS is one of only nine federally-compliant state child welfare information systems in the country. MACWIS serves as the single repository for all Maine child welfare information to assist case workers in the recording, tracking, and processing of child welfare functions. As an object-oriented, windows-based application, MACWIS was developed using Sybase PowerBuilder as the application development tool. Oracle 10G is the database that stores data, and the system runs in a client/server environment. The Oracle database resides on a central server with program executables residing in each client PC. More than 1,000 users have access to MACWIS, and at any time during the day, 400 users are actively using the system. The system is the single repository for all electronic child welfare information and actively manages 850,000 identified persons as well as 30,000 resources. MACWIS also manages the licensing functions of those resources through the Office of Child and Family Services as well as the Division of Licensing and Regulatory Services. The system interfaces with many other statewide agency systems. Users can enter and retrieve information from any state office and have access to information quickly to help accomplish their work. MACWIS also allows users to access ticklers as reminders of upcoming tasks and lists of service/placement providers. The system also enables electronic case-transfer and provides required forms for documenting work. Due to the extremely sensitive information in the system, MACWIS follows strict confidentiality rules that include security profiles, restricted access to high-

profile cases, and user tracking. Users of MACWIS provide a variety of tasks for many areas across DHHS. For example, case workers can review client child welfare participation, create legal documents for court activity, and pay service/placement providers. MACWIS has never experienced a significant service outage and continues to provide a multitude of different services to different customers to the benefit of the families and children that DHHS serves.

SOCIETAL BENEFITS

MACWIS presents real time data to allow supervisors and caseworkers to provide timely and effective interventions and permanency plans. This allows more children to be successfully placed in a permanent family setting, avoiding the poor outcomes associated with long term foster care including homelessness, criminal activity, and substance abuse.

PREVIOUS PROJECT UPDATED/EXPANDED?

(this project has not previously nominated for the award) The most recent major update to MACWIS occurred in 2009 which resulted in DHHS achieving compliance with federal regulations from the Administration of Children Youth and Family. MACWIS also requires on-going updates to meet various new government requirements.

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION COMPLETE?

Yes

PROJECT BENEFIT EXAMPLE

The MACWIS project provides a case management tool that captures all of the information required to meet the needs of the field staff. Its wealth of data has resulted in the ability to create informative and dynamic reports for the use in policy management and field staff supervision. Due to MACWIS, management was able to make a conscious decision to move from a system managed by anecdote to one driven by data. Today at all levels of the system, child welfare professionals are not only familiar with but on a regular basis actively using data. Quote from a regional Manager "It was not until data reports were able to be generated that the system moved from supervising by anecdote to being able to manage with data and allowed managers to measure performance in ways that directly affected the outcomes for the families they serve." MACWIS data allows staff to work more effectively by concentrating on those case elements that most directly resulted in positive outcomes for children. One detailed example of the benefits of the MACWIS system is Maine's ability to reduce its reliance on institutional care placements for foster children and increase of foster care placements with relatives. Research proves that children have better long term outcomes through adulthood when raised in a family setting. Since 2003, MACWIS data has been used by management to make informed policy decisions that have decrease by 88% the number of children placed in an institutional setting and today only 6% of Maine foster children are placed in an institutional setting, one of the lowest percentages in the country. In 2003, 12% of the children in foster care where placed with a relative, today 50% of the children that enter foster care are placed with a relatives. Since the implementation of the MACWIS system, Maine has developed into a leading child welfare system. Specific data elements from the MACWIS system are able to be used to create a data view of the child welfare process from start to finish. Managers are able to create real and sustainable improvements to the system, which has increased the wellbeing and the safety for the children in Maine. "Daily we work in an environment where we deal with each case individually, but it is the use of the data available in the system that allows us to step back and say if decisions being made are really beneficial to long



term outcomes for the families we serve.”

IS THIS PROJECT AN INNOVATION, BEST PRACTICE? Yes

ADDITIONAL PROJECT INFORMATION

All of the state and federal regulations that MACWIS must comply with, and which change over time, present a constant challenge. The federal requirements alone are several hundred pages long and include strict security and privacy regulations since the information to be tracked is extremely private. Maine receives 17,000 child abuse reports annually, 10,000 of which turn out to be appropriate and require investigation. DHHS has achieved current compliance, but new requirements will continue to emerge, so success is a moving target. The organization has succeeded because it has deployed the necessary hardware and software with a technical staff savvy enough to adapt to changes and the ability to program the software to handle the intricacies of compliance. Because of the compliance challenge, many states in the U.S. have attempted to build such a system but only nine have completed the process. The MACWIS solution has been successful as it is flexible enough to adapt to changes. Because the system was created modularly and is maintained at that level, the organization can more easily consider new features, and it allows the base system to be helpful to other areas of the state, which helps make the state government more efficient.

