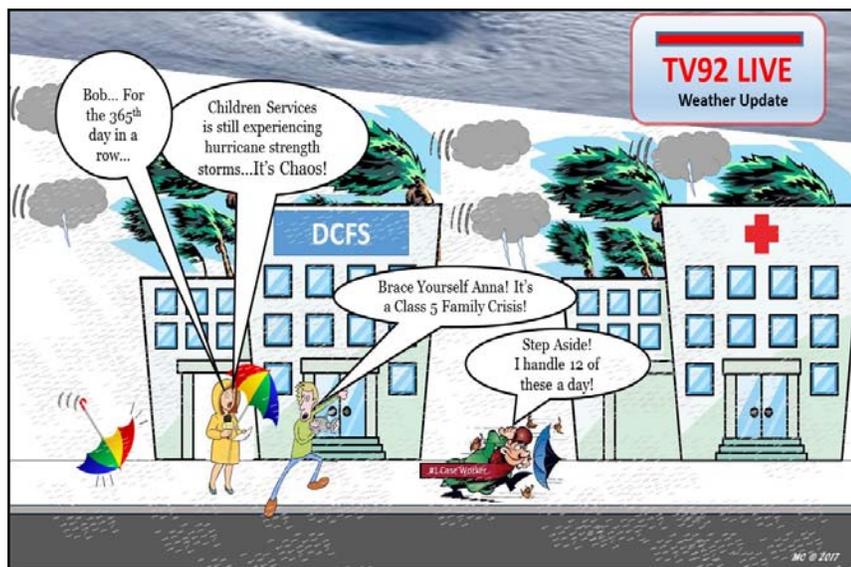**Child Welfare Special Edition**

Contemplating Accountability Conundrums

Are You Pursuing the Best Path to CCWIS & FFSPA?

Agencies are overwhelmed with daily dilemmas tied to small budgets, not enough resources, high turnover rates and emergencies such as the opioid crisis adding to heavy caseloads and overcapacity issues in the systems of care. With the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) and Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) accountability-driven requirements adding more chaos, the demand for change can seem daunting when facing so many hurdles. The good news is that quickly implemented and affordable Cloud-based, Commercial-off-the-Shelf (COTS), and Software as a Service (SaaS) products are available. The challenge is selecting the right solution to put you on the best path to simultaneously meet the demands of both laws', fix current obstacles and support you for years to come.

Our goal is to help you exceed accountability expectations by collecting higher quality data, knocking down the silos and empowering your entire workforce with a personally configured solution offering on demand Automated Information Driven (AID) recommendations. As an end-to-end solution, VitalChild's operational and predictive analytics supports systems of care from intake to post-discharge. With VitalChild's real-time reporting, evidence-driven placement decisions, treatment planning, outcomes monitoring and more, comprehensive preventative case management is at your fingertips. Instead of adopting a case manager product only supporting a small fraction of your workforce and leaving many other's needs unaddressed, why not take this opportunity to adopt a truly prevention-focused comprehensive information system supporting all across child welfare?

VitalChild provides a proactive approach to reducing public relations disasters fed by sad headlines of case workers being attacked, missing foster children and tragic deaths in the system. VitalChild can modernize SACWIS

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systems, simultaneously manage CCWIS and FFPSA demands, and increase the effectiveness and efficiency from the front lines to the highest administrative offices.

If you are concerned about your CCWIS decision passing the Notice of Intent and ongoing scrutiny of continuous federal monitoring, or still in the process of contemplating which technology can help meet CCWIS and FFPSA demands, the information to follow provides sound recommendations. By avoiding potential pitfalls, new technology can deliver the meaningful and the lasting change your agencies deserve.

The Secrets to CCWIS & FFPSA Success for Your New Technology

Although accountability movements often are viewed as not so wonderful by those held accountable, the three main CCWIS expectations actually hold great potential to improve child welfare and address FFPSA. One such expectation of the final CCWIS ruling is to improve the quality of case management data collected from intake to discharge or finding that forever home. Why? Because without high quality formative and summative data collected along each youth's path throughout the systems of care, operational and predictive analytics will not calculate consistent or accurate recommendations. And to capture this wider net of quality data across child welfare, CCWIS also seeks to increase workforce collaboration. Basically, the secrets to success for your new accountability technology, ironically rest within truly following the three main steps CCWIS is requesting.

Step 1: Collect Quality Data Essential to Monitoring Preventative Care, Accurate Analysis & Decision Making

The quality and quantity of data collected and fed into your new CCWIS, could mean the difference between life and death for your workers and youth. Making avoidable mistakes in child welfare is not an option. If the system is not fed an adequate amount of high quality data, the recommendations delivered (i.e. predictive analytics) will leave ample room for error putting the agency, staff and children at increased risk. A long list of required methodological and statistical assumptions must be met before any software can deliver sound predictive analytics that provide reliable and valid recommendations. Common challenges encountered in child welfare to meet these assumptions include sampling bias, quality and quantity of measurements used, statistically controlling for other variables impacting outcomes, missing data violations, and variability. To even consider using predictive analytics, higher quality data must be collected on far more than risk or safety assessments to meet these required assumptions. Because if you don't, and there is a 50/50 chance your data is not consistently measuring what you think you are measuring, or you are missing critical data, you might as well flip a coin.

For agencies with limited staff expertise and resources to build a larger database of essential psychometric tools, or ability to formally develop and test such assessments, adopting a new SaaS solution such as VitalChild can be to your advantage. VitalChild's multi-dimensional resource library, designed for use across the systems of care, provides the reliable and valid 360 degree assessments and management tools needed to meet the assumptions required to perform operational and predictive analytics, and reduce the margin of error. VitalChild supports higher quality data collection for automated reporting on placement decisions, treatment received and outcomes experienced. VitalChild empowers agencies to more precisely determine which variables truly feed the most accurate predictive analytic models needed to better guide preventative efforts. Capturing quality data is essential to being "evidence-driven," and most CCWIS technology doesn't offer what is needed to achieve this vital goal.

Step 2: Truly Share Data Collection Across Agencies

Case management systems designed to only support case managers with initial intake and placement decisions is not enough to shorten duration of services, reduce the number of children in the system or put a check mark next to the CCWIS box demonstrating that information is shared across your system. To improve high quality data collection comprehensively, we need to collect, connect and share information across the entire child welfare workforce. In order to produce Automated Information Driven (AID) recommendations, we need to know if previous attempts led to positive or negative short and long-term outcomes. And if we are not focused on collecting data beyond risk and safety, we are not going to have the formative and summative outcome scores to perform more precise predictive analytics.

With a more holistic and systemic approach, VitalChild helps agencies collectively gather information essential to creating integrated care passports detailing each youth's challenges and treatment history, no matter where they land in the systems of care. With operational analytics fed by system-wide data collection efforts, each person helping a youth along the way will benefit from knowing the youth's struggles; understanding the events leading to the child and family involvement, and knowing what strategies have worked or not. This enables predictive analytics to better determine the best path forward for preventative treatment, and help all better understand what each child and family needs next.

Why Case Management Systems for Only Case Managers is NOT Enough!

If youth in child welfare slowly navigate paths for months if not years across the systems of care, then how can a CCWIS product for only case managers to use for initial intakes & placements provide adequate support across agencies?

Can a product focused only on the first days or weeks of case management truly manage preventative FFPSA demands, or help shorten duration of stay for the thousands already in care? Of course not.

How does a product limiting usage to a small fraction of your workforce help foster care, residential treatment and service providers monitor safety and improve care? The bottom line, it doesn't.

You Deserve More... and The VitalChild Team Can Help!

The VitalChild team consists of talented technologists, cloud gurus, experienced child welfare leaders, and at-risk youth research experts who want to help you make a measurable difference.

The hard to find, fax, scan or mail CPS and clinical records scattered across different facilities and offices, need to become a thing of the past. Child welfare needs clinicians, service providers, magistrates, staff, administrators, case workers, social workers, IT and data analysts to be more connected in real time on one platform. By adopting technology that allows all to enter, share and access data, the amount of missing information can be greatly reduced. With higher quality data collection collaboration across agencies, the more empirical outcomes-based data needed to improve and justify performing predictive analysis can be increased. Knocking down the silos enables you to offer better preventative care for the existing and new youth within your systems of care, shortening duration of stay and costs.

Step 3: Personally Tailoring the System to Your State's Needs

As CCWIS also requests and FFPSA needs, new systems must allow for you to tailor data collection, analysis and reporting to your state's and county region's strengths and challenges. You cannot and should not assume that an intervention process or predictive equation that worked in one location can generalize to every location. Services and resources differ across communities, and response to treatment can differ among individuals. Your time, resources, and efforts are valuable and should be guided by realistic, personalized predictive analytic recommendations.

Also, if you are hoping to determine the best preventative approaches, new systems should avoid putting a heavy reliance on warning signs. The *New York Times* recently highlighted an effort in Pennsylvania that mainly focused on warning signs to guide the decisions of removing a child from the home. Of course, safety is essential. With FFPSA greatly reducing length of stays in group homes, however, more data is needed. Basing predictive analytics on warning signs will only lead to creating alert systems. But by building predictive recommendations on data documenting your agencies' quality of care, effectiveness of treatment and successful outcomes, you will be able to better determine more fruitful preventative approaches. Thus better informing decisions to select placements as well as treatments which lead to more successful outcomes and less services needed. This is the difference between being reactive versus being more proactive and preventative.

Deep Breaths & Baby Steps

Understandably, many agencies are feeling overwhelmed by the cost and work needed to pursue CCWIS and FFPSA. Many also are tired of the endless sad headlines and the revolving door of high-turnover. Evidence suggest that nationwide staff, children and families need more than a minimal solution. For those who see these new laws as an opportunity to not only upgrade technology but also improve data collection and evidence-driven decision-making, VitalChild has a tech solution and team ready to help you. The VitalChild team seeks clients who want to take the high road to meaningful change. By empowering your team with a tailored COTS solution essential to improving outcomes for all, streamlining and exceeding accountability can be quick, affordable and effective. And as a result of truly embracing these three steps to CCWIS compliance, receiving the 50% development costs match from the federal government and more proactively being reimbursed for Title IV-E, becomes a more likely reality.

Debating the Use of Algorithms in Child Welfare

As one last barrier to bypass when it comes to CCWIS, let's take a moment to consider the role of algorithms and artificial intelligence (AI) in child welfare. As the summer of 2018 CCWIS adoption deadlines approach, tech companies are busy sharing news of how their new case manager products can help you "meet" accountability requirements. Some even claim their AI product's can deliver the historically elusive child welfare algorithm. But before you place too much reliance - and possible liability- on the promises of a new AI algorithm, one should pause to understand the scope of this aspiration. Indeed, if it sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

In academic texts, an algorithm is basically defined as a specific sequence of steps that guarantees a correct solution. Note the use of the word *guarantees*. As history has demonstrated, there are no "guarantees" when it comes to decisions in child welfare.

Seeking 100% consistency and accuracy with an algorithm to solve every unique family's or child's circumstances might be a worthy goal. But we are not predicting the weather, a stock's value, or a friend's next online dating match. It is not simply assessing the loss of your investment or hoping a second date goes better. Child welfare decisions can literally have life or death consequences.

Moreover, how can anyone perfectly predict the behavior of a rogue live-in boyfriend or drug addicted family member, when agencies often currently have no way of evaluating or monitoring them? How can we assure a child's safety in another home if that other home's safety is not monitored? At this point in time, child welfare does not have the needed level of psychometric science and quality data collection processes in place. Before child welfare can have a chance of finding an algorithm, efforts first need to identify the most predictive variables that create the most predictive models.

For now, let's just remove algorithm from the child welfare vocabulary.

Think about your favorite local weather forecaster or smartphone's go to weather app. Although tomorrow's predictions might be fairly accurate and yet not perfect, when predicting the next five day's their predictive models' accuracy drop dramatically. When trying to go beyond 10 days, the accuracy of such forecasting basically can once again be replaced with a flip of the coin. And yet when it comes to weather forecasting, there are more than 11,000 observation stations worldwide collecting and connecting hourly measurements of temperature, air pressure, humidity, wind speed and direction, rainfall and other numerous conditions and variables.

With so many collecting so much weather information, and their predictive outcome models still can't make accurate predictions past five days, why would we think it is even possible to *perfectly* forecast the future outcomes of traumatized kids and families in crisis? While weather forecasters have 11,000 teams measuring many variables, currently in child welfare we typically find one person (i.e. case worker) solely responsible for measuring just risk and safety and making the final decision. You don't need to replace human instincts with artificial intelligence. Your workforce just needs better real intelligence to help them accomplish the often impossible task of curtailing crisis. What child welfare deserves is a more comprehensive information system that can improve the management of cases from intake to discharge in real-time.

5 More Reasons to Avoid the Artificial Intelligence Hype

There is considerable risk to increased safety concerns and liability associated with adopting artificial intelligence (AI) driven CCWIS products. Beyond possibly giving you the wrong answer, consider how the following might also challenge your staff's abilities to receive the highly consistent and accurate decision guidance they need.

1. **You Have to Feed The AI Machine** — For AI to perform, somebody has to feed it data. Given most tech companies don't offer the assistance of a research team, this means your agencies will be responsible for babysitting and constantly making sure the AI machine has the information needed to manufacture artificially intelligent recommendations. Diet is everything.

2. **But It Eats Everything** — Note, most AI machines don't necessarily have "your" algorithm. In order to find this mystical anomaly, it wants you to feed it every piece of data you can... pictures, recordings, reports and forms. With no regard for data quality, they basically throw everything into a statistical blender. And what pours out could be different from day to day based upon the catch of the day. A never-ending data-mining fishing trip, void of quality data control, falls far short of strategically using predictive analysis wisely.

3. **AI Doesn't Know What it is Missing** — If more quality data is needed and most AI products focus mainly on an initial risk, safety and placement assessment, there is a high probability essential information needed to inform more accurate decisions is missing (e.g., trauma— ACE's).

4. **Garbage In, Garbage Out** — If the AI is using inaccurate and incomplete data, most will likely experience inaccurate and incomplete recommendations.

5. **Proprietary is a Problem** — And if they are not letting you see the recipe for what they are concocting, all you can do is hope their secret sauce is healthy.

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