

Michigan's Juvenile Justice Online Technology:

A System of Care for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice

Michigan, like most states, faces a changing political and economic landscape. Its fiscal year 2003–2004 budget deficits continue to grow. Term limits of legislators and the early retirement of employees is costing the state experience, institutional memory, and policy expertise.

But, Michigan's need to cut costs and increase service effectiveness is revolutionizing the state's child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Michigan's System Reform for Children and Families initiative and federal funding opportunities have provided the means to implement a system of care for abused, neglected, and delinquent children and youth, supported by a foundation of case management information system (MIS) technologies.

Michigan's Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice System

Michigan's family courts have jurisdiction over abused and neglected children and delinquent youth, with the authority to commit children and youth to the Department of Human Services (DHS), private agencies, or court probation departments for care and supervision. DHS is responsible for child welfare and juvenile justice services, and contracts with private agencies to provide protection, treatment, and rehabilitation services to vulnerable children, youth, and families. DHS includes a system of privately and publicly operated family, group, and residential services for children in out-of-home care, as well as an array of community-based prevention and intervention services for children and youth remaining in their home. Since 1990, the number of abused and neglected children in out-of-home care in Michigan has increased 17%, and the state's overall delinquency rate has risen 5%. The *Kids Count in Michigan 2002 Data-book* reports that 20,900 children were in out-of-home care in Michigan in 2001. Of these, 84% were victims of abuse and neglect, and 16% were delinquent. Some 174,000 cases were investigated for child abuse and neglect by DHS Children's Protective Services—67 out of every 1,000 children.

DHS's Bureau of Juvenile Justice (BJJ) is responsible for about 5,000 delinquent state wards, ages 12 to 21, in a variety of living arrangements. These facilities offer specialized treatment and incorporate a "balanced and restorative justice" philosophy in policy and programming. BJJ also operates six community justice centers offering structured reintegration to assist youth transitioning to community living.



System Reform

In 1994, the directors of Michigan's Departments of Community Health, DHS, and Education created the Systems Reform Task Force to develop systems reform for children and families, with a primary goal to "achieve better results for multigenerational families who receive services across multiple human service and educational systems."

Among the task force's recommendations was developing technology to simplify administrative processes, improve communication across systems, and reduce barriers to services for families. The task force's report spurred the creation of the PIT Crew, short for Putting It Together With Michigan Families.

This collaborative body works to develop systems of care for children and families. Children under DHS supervision frequently need services across multiple systems. BJJ family/offender profiles for youth committed to state training schools show 66% of those youth have substance abuse problems, and 70% have serious mental health problems. Of juveniles committed to state facilities, 85% no longer attend school, 50% were adjudicated before age 15, and 28% were placed out-of-home more than once.

These multiservice youth are a focus of Michigan's interagency efforts. Although the agencies have agreed to deliver services through a system of care approach, the systems lack the technology to share necessary information for integrated case management. "Juvenile integrated information sharing is the sharing of essential information between multiple agencies and across systems through structured procedures to improve outcomes for youth and families," according to the Center for Network Development.

Systems of care require an MIS built upon the principles of fiscal and program accountability, flexible structure for coordination of services and enhanced workflow, and the tools to enhance collaboration and communication among service providers.

Fiscal Opportunities

In 2002, President Bush signed the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJJPA), which, among other important measures, authorizes the Juvenile Accountability Block Grant (JABG). A critical new component of JJJPA requires linkages between the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. Specifically, states are required to establish policies and systems to incorporate relevant child protective service records into juvenile justice records for the purposes of establishing and implementing treatment plans for juvenile offenders.

Juvenile offenders whose placements are Title IV-E eligible must receive the same case-management oversight as child welfare wards, and all juveniles must be interviewed and assessed by public child welfare staff.

Finally, JJJPA calls for a federal study of juveniles under the care or custody of the child welfare or juvenile justice systems to examine the extent that the two systems are coordinating services and treatment, identifying federal and local funds used for placement and services, and providing services. These existing and new JJJPA provisions offered the impetus to implement a virtual system of care for Michigan's child welfare and juvenile justice systems through a web-based MIS.



Kent County Family Court Judge Patricia Gardner chaired the Michigan JABG Advisory Committee. "The grant [funds] will allow Michigan to improve statewide technology and statistical analysis of youthful crime" Gardner says. "We believe this system will be a critical piece of technology to enable Michigan to continue to reduce juvenile crime." To meet the new requirements for reporting child welfare data under the reauthorized JJDP, BJJ sought an MIS, known as Juvenile Justice Online Technology (JJOLT), to support a system of care framework that:

- is a web-based demographic server, capable of acting as a central repository of information;
- captures fiscal and business information, such as billing and payments;
- contains a flexible, open architecture allowing for continual modifications and expansion;
- includes passwords and data encryption;
- meets the privacy and security requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act;
- is user friendly and reduces repetitive data entry;
- has an automatic e-mail notification function for court hearings, doctor's appointments, and escape notifications, and between social workers and their managers;
- is easily audited, and meets the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis Reporting System (AFCARS) reporting requirements; and
- can generate customized reports.

DHS is also using the Title XX Social Services Block Grant, state general fund dollars, and some Title IV-E funds to supplement the JABG grant for JJOLT.

JJOLT Development and Operation

Michigan created the Service Worker Support System (SWSS) to input DHS caseworker data, serving as the designated SACWIS system to collect data required by AFCARS. An Extensive Mark-up Language portal has been created between the SWSS and JJOLT systems to share data. JJOLT contains an automated case management module including assessment, screening, case planning, monitoring, and billing components for juvenile justice.

The system was later expanded to include electronic case management for DHS child welfare staff, family courts, prosecutors, and private contracted service providers. The need for an integrated MIS that can communicate across systems and generate real-time data is necessary for effective case management and quality assurance. "Quality assurance goes beyond the technical data to service quality of treatment plans," says Merry Perkins, DHS's Manager of Information and Resource Management.

The JJOLT team includes social workers, detention intake staff, treatment providers, teachers, and administrative assistants. A steering committee of private agency information technology administrators has been meeting since 2002 to provide feedback on the design and functionality of an interface between the state and private systems. Input from the field on the MIS's functionality has been instrumental in the design of JJOLT. According to Perkins, "The most consistent barrier we have to overcome is the perception that government cannot create and sustain something that is both cost-efficient and effective."

DHS contracted with Global Vision Technologies to use FAMCare, a web-based application that provides flexible, open architecture and integrates the functions of case management, business processes, automated inquiries, and production reports. JJOLT is accessed through the Internet, requiring little installation at state or contracted facilities, saving the state significant time and money for implementation, operation, and future modifications.



DHS uses JJOLT as an electronic case management structure with juvenile justice line staff, intake workers and treatment staff, health care providers, and teachers in DHS facilities. JJOLT allows DHS to track placements to, data reporting by, and auditing of contracted private agencies. DHS administrators use JJOLT for program planning and fiscal and program accountability.

JJOLT includes all state-operated juvenile facilities and many private residential facilities. DHS provides 24/7 technical assistance through a help desk and a pager number. JJOLT training for new employees is offered regularly through the BJJ Training Center and DHS Child Welfare Institute.

When a child or youth comes into contact with DHS or the family court, a Juvenile Justice Services (JJS) caseworker completes a risk assessment and strength/needs assessment in JJOLT. The case is then referred electronically to the Juvenile Justice Assignment Unit (JJAU). The JJAU assignment specialist then compares the strength/need and risk assessment scores to the information on the private agencies' provider grids. The provider grids describe the agency programs and the types of youth an agency will accept.

JJOLT automatically seeks provider matches, searching for specialized care codes and including private foster homes. The assignment specialist reviews the matches for each youth and checks for current vacancies in the matched programs. "If a match is confirmed and the facility has a vacancy, the referral can be sent the same day," says JJAU Manager Carol Slottke.

Each youth's electronic case file includes personal, school, and health information; psychosocial assessment; and treatment plans and outcomes. Case managers maintain and update information in each youth's electronic case file throughout the time the youth is under family court jurisdiction.

JJOLT also has the capacity to send automatic electronic notifications. For example, when a youth absconds from a facility, staff send an e-mail alert to notify key administrators and law enforcement immediately. The e-mail notification includes a hyperlink to case records, protecting necessary confidential child information.

Future Directions

Effective case management is able to cross multiple agency and system boundaries, resulting in better service coordination and accountability, according to the Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Real-time data collection and communication support effective case management, and a statewide MIS that links family courts, county services, private agencies, and other service providers allows this communication and effective decision making to occur. "JJOLT will have a lasting contribution in our communities to reduce juvenile crime," Gardner says. "As we have more information about children who are at risk, we can do our jobs better to help them get back on their feet and become productive citizens."

John Evans, DHS Director of the Community Support Division of Child and Family Services, believes JJOLT "will allow DHS to determine if families are already receiving services, and will give caseworkers and judges more information in order to make a determination about what is in the best interests of children."



JJOLT and Systems Reform

JJOLT interfaces with other human service databases and assessment tools to offer the most accurate, up-to-date case assessment information. The system electronically links to:

- Michigan Department of Education—Individualized Education Plans, listings of school districts, and educational testing records;
- Michigan Department of Consumer and Industry Services—licensed provider codes;
- Medical records—prescribed medications, health assessments, and physician reports;
- Michigan Department of Community Health—required psychosocial assessments;
- Mental Health Services—emotional mental intelligence testing and case management; and Council of Juvenile Correctional Associations/
- OJJDP—incident reporting and quality assurance.

Future integration with the Michigan Department of Community Health will facilitate Medicaid billing for Medicaid-eligible children and youth, and update immunization records for children under state JJOLT is a functional, flexible platform for integrating technology into a system of care framework.

Through JJOLT, many benefit from the enhanced case management, reduced duplication of services, improved quality of interventions and service delivery, and increased accountability.

“Our bottom line is to determine the needs of children and youth as soon as they come in contact with the system, and create a service plan that meets their needs,” says BJJ Director Kenneth Hales. “If we are following these children, and implement their personalized system of care, fewer children will fall through the cracks. Fewer children will be institutionalized. We will make a well-documented case for investing in prevention services as the most effective way of meeting the needs of kids, reducing recidivism and residential placements, and therefore reducing costs to the state and county.”

For more information on JJOLT, visit <http://jjolthelp.famcare.net>.

