Chapter 3. Technology Innovations in Foster Care

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Abstract

The foster care system requires a substantial amount of documentation. Technology can be an important tool in helping caseworkers maintain records; however, technological advances in the child welfare system have been slow. Many caseworkers have been left to conduct their work in outdated and poorly designed systems. Agencies are looking for more modern solutions to address some of the most common shortcomings of their current systems. This chapter highlights common areas in need of improvement and provides examples of potential solutions. Specifically, Binti is referenced throughout the chapter as an example of a software program that meets the needs of caseworkers in foster care. The chapter discusses gaps in previously available technology options and recommendations for agencies looking to replace, upgrade, or rebuild their existing systems.

Meticulous documentation—including notes from client encounters, treatment reports, and communication with other providers—is a core element of social work practice. Documentation of this nature serves many purposes including assessment of the client's current needs, coordination of services, monitoring of client progress, and risk management (Reamer, 2005). Although documentation has been valued by the field of social work since the early 20th century, it was not explicitly obligatory in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics until 1996 (Reamer, 2005). The current NASW Code of Ethics mandates that practitioners maintain accurate and timely documentation and protect the confidentiality of client records (NASW, 2017). In addition to the ethical grounds for thorough documentation, governing bodies often use documentation as a way to monitor adequate provision of services. Funding from the federal and state governments and insurance companies often requires documentation to verify provision of services. Therefore, there is a financial incentive to increase the efficiency of documentation and services.

Given the demanding nature of documentation requirements, many agencies and non-profits have turned to various computer-based technologies to sustain documentation. However, caseworkers often feel burdened by these technology systems and report that the technology systems take away from their time with clients (Gillingham, 2011). Critiques raised by caseworkers have illuminated the shortcomings of many of the currently available systems. For example, the information housed in these systems often do not match up with the information practitioners need on a daily basis such as what paperwork has been completed or what documentation has already been provided to the agency. As a result, many practitioners choose to keep their own documents and spreadsheets of the information they need in addition to maintaining records in the electronic system, because the tools do not provide a robust solution that allows for the tracking of all required information. Therefore, these electronic systems that are designed to streamline the administrative tasks are experienced as time-intensive, duplicative, and burdensome.

Foster care caseworkers are responsible for making placement decisions for youth, monitoring youth progress, supporting families during the reunification, guardianship, or adoption process, and communicating with and supporting both biological and foster parents (Fulcher & McGladdery, 2011). Additionally, one study found that 80% of caseworkers felt they were responsible for managing the behavioral health of the youth on their caseloads including proper documentation of medications and coordinating appointments for mental health evaluations and treatment (Jolles, Givens, Lombardi, & Cuddeback, 2019). Thus, as is true in other areas of social work, practitioners involved with foster care often report feeling burdened by administrative tasks (Lindahl & Bruhn, 2018).

The Families First Prevention Services Act (hereafter, Families First Act) was signed into law in 2018 and reallocates child welfare funding to encourage the prevention of foster care. Additionally, the Families First Act aims to decrease the use of congregate and group home settings by reducing the reimbursement for these services. Instead, the Families First Act encourages the placement of children in family settings. This will require a greater quantity of foster families to provide care for children. Despite the increased need, there continues to be a nationwide struggle to recruit, certify, and retain foster caregivers (Bass, Shields, & Behrman, 2004; Geiger, Piel, & Julien-Chinn, 2017). Poor data management tools for caseworkers makes

the process of approving and monitoring foster families slow and time intensive, and may detract attention and resources from critical recruitment and retention efforts.

Shortcomings in Available Tools

Many of the currently available software systems within the child welfare system have overlapping shortcomings. This chapter focuses primarily on systems for tracking prospective and current foster families, but many of the key points apply to other facets of data management within the child welfare system. Common data management system issues include: difficulty collating interagency data, redundancies in data input requirements, lack of integration between systems, outdated interfaces, and no mobile/web-based access options.

Collating Interagency Data

The majority of currently available software solutions make it very difficult to collect accurate data across an agency or region. There is a lack of standardization across data and terminology, making it difficult to make comparisons when looking at data. For example, an agency might define the length of time it takes to license a foster family as beginning the moment they first meet that family and ending once the family receives their license. Other agencies will measure that same data point, the length of time to license a foster family, but their beginning point is when the applicant first signs their application. There may be days, weeks, or even months in between the first contact with a family and the date they sign their application, which would lead to huge variations in data values and the meaning of the data element between these two agencies. Alternatively, you might have two agencies that track this same data point beginning with the date the application is signed, but at one agency the application might be the first step in the licensing process and at another agency it may be the last. In addition, different regions and agencies are all utilizing different tools that track different metrics. Many agencies are still unable to answer basic process questions such as, “how long does it take to find a placement for each referral received?” Similarly, agencies often cannot easily access a list of all children currently in a foster care placement, or the name and location of the family with whom they are placed.

Redundant Data Entry

Workers are required to duplicate their work or log work they previously completed, thereby increasing time spent on administrative tasks and decreasing available time for direct contact with children and families. For example, a caseworker may go to a home to conduct a home study to assess the safety and resources in the house. The caseworker might complete a standard form while they are in the home to ensure they check all the required

aspects of the home. When the caseworker returns to the office, their electronic system may require them to re-answer the same questions. In addition, they may need to re-enter the family's name, address, phone number, etc. to create a complete log of their visit and the outcome of the assessment. This information, in turn, might appear on multiple other forms or documents, the family's home study might need the date of the building and grounds assessment, and the final approval documentation may also need the date of the assessment, all of which require the worker to return to their original form or notes to copy the information into the relevant places. Many states and counties contract with private agencies, however they typically use multiple different systems that do not integrate with each other resulting in additional duplicative data entry for workers. When case workers have to input data twice—once on a paper form and a second time in the electronic database—they are doubling their time on administrative tasks and taking time away from seeing youth and families. This duplication of information also increases opportunities for error and inconsistency across forms.

Poor System Integration

Without a single system that covers all aspects of an agency's needs, agencies are forced to use multiple systems to track various processes. If these systems are not able to integrate, workers are required to enter the same information into multiple systems to ensure the information is present everywhere it is required. This duplication of work not only adds to the amount of time each worker must invest in each family, but it also increases the chances of data entry errors. Every field that is manually entered more than once has an increased chance for a typo that might then be perpetuated into other systems and forms in the future. A common example of this is that many state systems do not have the ability to track the foster parent licensing process. Thus, workers and agencies create their own tools to track requirements. The worker might be logging information into a spreadsheet to keep track of things like family name, home address, phone numbers, background checks, etc., and then once that family is licensed, they will still need to add them back into the state system which will require all that information to be re-entered. Even agencies that have built systems to track these processes did not necessarily structure them to facilitate integration with other systems. The majority of state systems are older and do not allow for integration, so even if an agency is using a system capable of integrating, that agency may be required to also use other systems that do not support that functionality.

Outdated Interfaces

Many of the current systems are outdated, making them both frustrating to use and out of compliance with current child welfare practices. As many statewide child welfare information systems were developed 20+ years ago, the user interface often does not look like the software tools workers are used to encountering in their everyday lives (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2003). These older systems are not intuitive for the user and therefore make them less efficient and more challenging for new staff to learn how to use them. Moreover, many assessment tools (e.g., surveys, checklists) have been developed to help caseworkers complete their jobs, and many policies and mandates have made certain forms and paperwork mandatory. However, the electronic programs used by many agencies have not been updated to align with the new forms, surveys, and formats of gathering information. As forms and policies change over time, the older systems cannot be updated quickly enough, which pushes workers to look for alternative solutions to handle their needs. This was seen in California when the state implemented new requirements to approve foster parents. The state's Child Welfare Services / Case Management System (CWS/CMS) had no way of tracking these new forms and requirements, yet the counties were still required to complete them and track each family every step of the way. CMS/CWS is the current system California requires their counties to use; however, it is unable to accommodate the additional tasks this new state mandate requires, so counties are left to come up with their own systems to track things.

Lack of Mobile/Web-Based Access

Many of the existing software systems are not web-based, which means that work can only be completed in the office on designated computers that have the software installed. Because staff are primarily conducting their work in the field, having a system that is not designed for remote work means they are being forced to wait to complete their documentation once they return to the office. Alternatively, staff may be completing their notes in the field using informal methods (that may not be HIPAA approved) and transferring the information to the primary systems once back in the office. Either of these solutions can result in less accurate data and/or a duplication of work. It also makes it impossible for staff to easily move to remote work in the event of an emergency, such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Identifying a Solution

In order to develop an electronic system that is effective and useful, it is critical to listen to the needs of the people who will be using it—the social work practitioners themselves (Westwood, Dill, Campbell, & Shaw, 2017). Successful software development requires that the early stages of development include focus groups, meetings, and shadowing the target user group. For example, Binti, a software company that makes

tools specifically for the child welfare field, conducted thousands of hours of research with youth who have experienced foster care, parents involved in the system, foster families, caseworkers, supervisors, and administrators. All of them have had similar aspirations for their computer systems: a modern, adaptive system that promotes and supports quality social work practice, leading to positive outcomes for youth and families. This includes making it easy for staff to engage with families and collaborate with other agencies, while gathering the data from the field to measure progress without burdening staff with hours of data entry at their desks.

The majority of the currently available electronic systems do not meet these aspirations. States and agencies have invested huge sums of money and time to maintain systems that don't meet their needs, or to build new systems that either don't meet their basic needs or are never successfully launched. There are a number of factors that drive this failure to meet expectations. Invariably, state and county agency staff have been well-intentioned, smart, competent administrators working hard to get better systems. However, the lack of communication between the technology sector and the social work sector has caused a gap between what is needed and what is available. Through countless hours meeting with practitioners, agencies, and families, Binti has gleaned several lessons in the successful development of software systems for foster care caseworkers, which are detailed below.

Software as a Service (SaaS) Is the Future

In the past few decades, the business world has shifted dramatically toward SaaS for their enterprise software needs (Seethamraju, 2015). Instead of building and maintaining their own custom system to manage accounting, for example, businesses large and small pay a few thousand dollars per month for great software provided by SaaS companies that serve multiple businesses for their accounting needs. SaaS is therefore more cost-effective for an agency than building their own system (Seethamraju, 2015). As the software company can devote more resources and engineers to the development of the system, businesses can benefit from getting a product that is better than what they could build on their own. The purchasing company can focus on their core business functions, enabling them to build their expertise faster and serve their customers better. The SaaS model also lowers risk since the software has already been deployed in other places and the company can see its effectiveness in other businesses prior to purchase.

The SaaS model has grown in the fields of video games (Vaudour & Heinze, 2020), healthcare (Oh et al., 2015), and other small-to-medium sized businesses (Seethamraju, 2015). However, the adaptation of SaaS models in government agencies is much more recent. The benefits of SaaS that have been seen by commercial businesses are likely to be seen by the implementation of SaaS in government agencies—such as child welfare—as well. For example, SaaS will likely result in better software that can drive better outcomes, lower risk, and lower cost for child welfare agencies.

Binti has developed a SaaS model that offers several advantages over other, more customized models such as custom-built solutions or Platform as a Service (PaaS) solutions transferred from other jurisdictions. Binti's modules have been used widely and achieved measurable results on key metrics. Using Binti's Licensing Module, for example, agencies have been able to approve an average of 30% more families in 18% fewer days each year, saving an estimated 20-40% of social worker time. Binti's modular solution empowers agencies to do their work more effectively, with promising results across both private and public agencies, at both the regional and state level.

Another benefit of SaaS is the ability for agencies to quickly launch the software programs and customize them to their agency's needs. The development of a new program can take years; by adopting a SaaS solution, companies can quickly begin on a new system. In many cases, these launches can happen in 12 weeks or less, as is seen with Binti. In addition to a fast launch time, SaaS models are less risky to agencies than developing a new system as they have been previously tested and utilized by a number of other agencies. By examining how the SaaS performed in similar agencies, child welfare agencies are able to more confidently select a program to implement. On the other hand, the risks of more custom-built solutions have been well documented—numerous cost overruns and failed systems after investment of tens of millions of taxpayer dollars (Font, S. A., 2020).

The nature of SaaS is to serve a number of different agencies. As more agencies adopt the same platform, the opportunity for collaboration and sharing becomes easier. For example, with Binti's SaaS solution, both public and private agencies serving youth and families use the system as part of the all-inclusive annual license fee. When working at the state level, through multiple carefully calibrated levels of access, state staff can access cases related to all youth and families, while private agencies access only the families and youth assigned to them for services. This enhances partnership and collaboration and integrates services. As the SaaS solution grows in size and accumulates more customers, they are able to provide a larger, more specialized engineering team that can iterate more quickly on launching new features than any agency would be able to afford on their own. Each agency benefits from other agencies using the system. Even though agencies share the broader platform, a SaaS solution such as Binti is configurable so that each agency has their own custom look and feel, forms, and data fields. This ability to customize to the specific needs of each agency creates a more efficient and streamlined experience for caseworkers and practitioners using the software.

Start With Some Quick Wins

Many agencies that Binti has worked with have had highly ambitious plans to develop systems with highly detailed functionality in all areas of child welfare practice. Others have sought the interoperability that is so critical to holistic practice by developing systems that could be deployed across multiple, broad swaths of government operations. These ambitions have the best of intentions, but have run into extreme challenges of timeliness, cost, and maintenance

when developing and deploying such a complex solution. Platform-based solutions such as Salesforce, Microsoft Dynamics, and IBM's Cúram also promise to perform across systems and deploy more quickly, but they have yet to deploy successfully and still require extensive—and expensive—customization by large consulting firms. This is because they were not designed for child welfare in the first place. Due to new regulations some states are looking to revamp their statewide Comprehensive Child Welfare Information Systems (CCWIS). These new regulations for CCWIS are extensive and include, for example, functionality to support outcomes for children and families, collect data, and allow for data exchanges between systems (Federal Register, 2016). Binti recommends that states and agencies begin their Comprehensive Child Welfare Information Systems (CCWIS) system revamps with quick success by deploying Binti's modules since they can launch quickly and add great value for staff while causing minimal disruption to operations. Staff can instantly see the value of the system to help them get their work done, and subsequent deployments can build on this success. Administrators can also understand what it's like to work with the software program prior to investing huge amounts of time and resources into a system, as the annual license fee for these modules would be the only investment prior to seeing results.

Since Binti has a bi-directional Application Programming Interface (API), allowing for integration into other systems, Binti's modules can be used in tandem with other systems to support different workflows across agencies.

Let Competition Flourish—Stay Platform Agnostic

Technology changes rapidly. It sometimes moves faster than procurement processes and nearly always moves faster than multi-year deployments of custom products. Therefore, it is important for agencies to stay platform agnostic, or open to various platforms and approaches without committing or limiting your projects scope to a specific vendor or platform, and launch modularly when adopting new technological tools for social services. This maximizes competition and allows SaaS vendors to compete. Specific platform solutions often limit choices to large consulting firms that build more custom solutions on top of specific platforms. While these platforms are powerful tools, they were not designed for child welfare and they still require extensive customization, usually by large consulting firms that are also not dedicated to child welfare, which adds additional time and cost to the project both upfront and on an ongoing basis as the systems must be maintained.

It is also recommended that agencies avoid putting limitations on size, company age, and revenue amounts of companies eligible to apply. By excluding vendors simply based on revenue (e.g., higher than $100M), this limits the number of options from vendors that each state or agency can choose from. It also excludes more innovative, mission-driven companies that may provide more specialized services.

Agencies should outline desired functionality with less focus on specific features. This allows vendors to be creative in suggesting a variety of features that could be relevant to the state while incorporating the necessary functionality. For example, Binti has a dedicated product development team that integrates research from the field to identify and creatively solve key barriers for child welfare teams. Requests For Proposals (RFPs) that require adherence to very specific feature lists are likely to miss some of the more creative solutions that might be discovered or are already available.

Build an Integrated, Configurable System

When working at the state level, Binti proposes a roll-out of modules for all counties and private agencies across the state. This removes unnecessary duplication of systems in counties and private agencies, and minimizes overall costs. It also ensures that the state maximizes CCWIS funding, if that funding is being utilized, since Child Welfare Contributing Agencies (CWCAs) will be included in the system. If CWCAs get their own system and there is duplicate functionality, the state could lose CCWIS funding. However, with Binti, CWCAs use Binti, ensuring there is not a chance of duplication or loss in funding. Additionally, many CWCAs will request funding from the state to fund their one-off systems, adding more cost to the state budget. Existing state systems don't work for CWCAs because they have not built their systems in a manner that is configurable enough to accommodate differences between counties and private agencies. Binti is the only state system that works across counties and CWCAs and includes the cost of CWCAs in their pricing.

It is critical that software companies take the time to understand the requirements, forms, and workflows that are statewide, and those that are county- and agency-specific. Then, developers can configure each module based on these forms and workflows as applicable. If working at the state level, it can be helpful to allow the state to access all data and functionality across all agencies. At Binti, reporting functionality is configured for statewide, county and private agency views, allowing states to evaluate outcomes and effectiveness. Counties and private agencies are also more invested in the system, since it reflects both the statewide requirements and their own unique processes.

Be Open to Module-Based Annual License Fees

There is an unfortunate history of multimillion dollar systems failing to launch or being scrapped after only being utilized for a short period of time and the immense cost of these systems creates an additional barrier for smaller agencies/states (Font, S. A., 2020). Binti uses a pricing model based on a per-module, all-inclusive annual license fee. As outlined above, this model reduces cost and risk for agencies and aligns incentives between

the software company and the child welfare agency for excellent products and service over time. All updates and ongoing configurations are included in the annual fee—and updates are quick and frequent (over 20 per week). Hourly pricing structures for implementation based on consultants' or staff time provide some initial estimates of costs, but absent the aligned incentives, they frequently lead to cost overruns and systems that don't meet expectations but require large sums to fix and make operational. They also require intensive state staff resources for tracking and billing, all of which is avoided when using the annual licensing fee model.

Driving Improved Outcomes with Technology

It is important when evaluating and implementing new technology solutions to make sure the systems are designed to improve outcomes. The innovation comes not just through updated systems, but through systems that specifically evaluate and improve outcomes. For example, the design process should begin by identifying and focusing on the success metrics that drive high-quality outcomes for youth and families. Then, the software developers should use the metrics to guide intensive research and discovery processes, identifying the barriers to achieving those metrics and formulating the software to address these barriers.

For example, integral components of Binti's design are the staff portal and dashboards. The dashboards provide essential information on each applicant, allowing staff to see in real time where each applicant is in the process and what is outstanding for each of the major steps (forms, supporting documents, references, medical clearance, trainings, background checks, caseworker forms, etc). Staff, supervisors, and administrators can select from extensive filter options to help them prioritize their time on applications that need the most immediate attention, and easily sort applicants by multiple characteristics. Configurable reminders provide for flexibility for staff and applicants to set email alerts that match their work style and help them to keep moving applications forward.

Systems ought to allow families and caseworkers to easily see what requirements are completed or outstanding in order to direct work efforts towards the families that are most in need of assistance. Binti addresses this by having the applicant-facing portal and the agency portal allow users to click into each requirement section, view documents, and complete/electronically sign forms as needed. Multiple access levels allow for administrators to access all families, supervisors to see their supervisees' families, and workers to see their own assigned cases. Additional access levels are available for private agency staff or county staff that complete different parts of the application, such as training attendance.

All aspects of the licensing process are tracked and monitored seamlessly online through the Binti program. Training and background check requirements are integrated and tracked as they are completed. Attendance at training is tracked online in real time, and contracted training staff can be granted access levels to take attendance and monitor progress. Complaints are recorded, screened, assessed, and documented, including the response, investigative steps, and disposition. Staff can complete all steps of the licensing process online, including

all forms, data tracking, and approvals.

The robust tracking functionality allows for agencies to view and access data about their processes and outcomes that previously would have been inaccessible to them. Binti's insights from all of the agencies and users have helped develop a unique set of built-in reports that help to identify barriers, track trends, and manage staff performance and workload. These reports help workers gain insights and make informed decisions based on the current and accurate data that might otherwise be unavailable.

In an effort to collect data organically, Binti has created unique interfaces that facilitate the collection of data naturally through the course of the existing workflows without requiring the additional data entry or tracking that most other systems require. Binti has multiple portals to collect data from primary sources (such as the youth or family), which allows for a more natural collection of information and reduces the possibility of error as information does not need to be passed through multiple sources before it is recorded. The modern mobile interface makes it simple for users to access the fields they need and prompts them to continue through the appropriate workflow without missing steps or requirements. In addition, the system has built-in prompts to avoid duplication and facilitate the capture of quality data—users cannot continue if required fields have not been complete, they will be prompted if there are similar entries within the system to reduce or eliminate duplication within the data, and at every step users can easily see what most urgently needs to be completed to ensure deadlines are met.

Having access to improved data across agencies allows us to answer questions that we previously could not, such as what types of recruitment activities are most productive for bringing in potential foster families and which of those families will complete the licensing process. It is possible that some recruitment methods might bring in more families, but if those families aren't as likely to complete the entire process, there might be other recruitment methods that would have better outcomes overall that can be focused on instead. By surfacing this information in Binti, agencies will be able to make more informed decisions regarding their recruitment efforts.

Observed Outcomes Across Binti's Partner Agencies

As mentioned previously, Binti has been able to observe measurable outcomes across the agencies using Binti and has seen agencies achieve remarkable results through their use of updated technology. By looking at de-identified and anonymized data across the agencies using Binti, we have been able to determine that, on average, agencies are approving 30% more families in the year after they start using Binti compared to the year prior. Agencies are able to better track every family that begins the application process and what their outcomes are, and they can see where families are dropping out of the process and what barriers are causing them to withdraw or close out. In addition, agencies are approving these families in 18% fewer days, meaning they are approving far more families more efficiently. The streamlined process for both applicants and agency workers ensures that families are able to move at a steady pace

through the process, and the assigned worker will easily be able to step in to help if the families get held up.

Illustration of a Workflow in Binti

By incorporating innovative new features into their software, Binti has been able to streamline processes and workflows that previously added hours, if not days, of additional work for caseworkers and families. Binti's product team spends hundreds of hours shadowing and researching the existing workflows in order to identify different areas that can be streamlined or automated. Below is an example of one workflow—approving new foster families—using the Binti software system.

1. Prospective foster and adoptive parents can sign up directly online to begin the application process in Binti. Agencies can embed a link to sign up directly within their existing website, or Binti can create a public recruiting website as needed. Once an applicant clicks the link, enters their email address, and creates a password, Binti automatically sends them an email with a message from the agency, welcoming them to the process and allowing them to continue at any time with one click. Agency staff automatically have access to contact information once an applicant begins the process and can begin to follow up. Agency workers are also able to start an application on behalf of an applicant, in the case that a prospective family becomes interested after engaging with an agency worker (e.g., at a recruitment event or information session). In both cases, applicants receive a welcome email with a message created by the agency that includes one-click access to log in and start or continue the application.
2. Applicants fill out necessary information within the application, which is clearly outlined in a sidebar within each section of the application. Applicants can complete all of their necessary paperwork at their own pace from any computer or mobile device. An intuitive user interface (UI) guides applicants to complete all steps of the process. All processes, forms, and data fields in the application are configured to exactly match the agency's forms and workflows. Forms are exactly replicated in PDF format once complete with information entered digitally and e-signed as needed. All forms can also be submitted in paper format and uploaded easily into Binti, if applicants wish to complete the application process that way.
3. Applicants add contact information of other adults in the home and references, which are also completed online. Once entered, Binti sends these individuals an automated email with a link for them to also complete the necessary forms and information through their own unique login into Binti. Reminders are automatically sent up to three times, and staff or applicants can also send reminders. All information is available in real time for the assigned agency worker to review, sign, and access as needed. Applicants can add/edit entered information in the case of changes and are notified when a reference is completed.

4. Applicants upload necessary documents and forms directly into the application portal. Key documents identified by the agency, such as DMV records and CPR certification cards, can be easily uploaded by applicants or staff using a mobile device or computer, avoiding potential delays in the process. Binti also has a quick and easy "drag and drop" feature allowing applicants to quickly upload documents. All uploaded documents are instantly available to staff.
5. Applicants have access to all of their completed paperwork and uploaded documents in their "My Documents" section. All uploaded documents and signed forms can be easily surfaced and viewed in the "My Documents" section, a comprehensive dashboard in which applicants can edit/delete/re-upload documents as needed or generate a PDF of all documents.
6. Applicants can continually go back to the main dashboard to see progress of their application, with the ability to click into each section and continue making progress or editing previously entered information. The dashboard highlights all the major components required for completion, such as the main application, supporting documents, background checks, training registration/completion, caseworker approval checklist, and more.
7. Once all required information and steps are completed, applicants receive a confirmation of completion. The assigned agency worker (and administrators/supervisors, as relevant) will have access to all the information in real time and can easily follow-up with the applicant to approve the application and/or gather additional information as needed.
8. After application approval and licensing, applicants use the Family Portal to continue to access their application and update information, certifications, and trainings that are required for license renewals. Binti fully automates renewals as well as the initial applications. On the agency dashboard, workers are also notified of upcoming renewals and necessary steps needed to complete those renewals.

Creating a Culture of Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

All of Binti's modules are designed to support the federal outcome indicators related to safety, permanence, and well-being. Binti's Licensing Module has also been a national leader in supporting quality practice in recruiting, approving, and retaining high-quality caregivers. Binti's existing functionality collects data never assembled before about prospective caregivers and foster families, greatly enhancing the ability of agencies to monitor and improve their practice. Data on a wide range of demographics, location, preferences, and characteristics of prospective foster parents is collected and can be analyzed over time to inform recruitment and retention.

Built-in reporting allows agencies to examine cohorts of applicants, youth, or families over time to examine outcomes and inform Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) efforts. Extensive mapping capability allows agency staff to easily analyze geographic patterns of youth

in care and available and prospective placements. Data in all of Binti's dashboards is also sortable and filterable by multiple factors, enhancing the ability of the agency to conduct checks of data quality. Filtered data from the dashboards can also be instantly downloaded in .csv format, supporting custom reports for monitoring data quality.

Binti is dedicated to CQI for all of their modules and understands the data that must be surfaced in order for administrators and staff at all levels to examine data critically and link their practice to outcomes. By implementing a data system that is built with an understanding of CQI, agencies are able to collect, manage, and interpret data far more efficiently than ever before.

Conclusion

Given the administrative demands on caseworkers—particularly on those that work in foster care and child welfare—it makes sense to integrate technology to make documentation and clinical decision making more efficient. However, much of the currently available software does not adequately meet the needs of the caseworkers it aims to serve. These programs often require redundant manual inputting of information which creates a greater administrative burden on staff. Many existing programs are not web-based and therefore staff cannot access them in the field—only from desktop computers in their offices. Additionally, many of the programs are not standardized, therefore making collating information across counties/agencies challenging. Finally, many of the systems are outdated both in design and content. It is important that software companies work together with social service agencies to ensure their program meets the needs of the caseworkers who will be using it. Binti is one company that has worked closely with child welfare workers to create a program that addresses many of the shortcomings of previous programs. As an example for future companies, Binti has shown that for technology to effectively assist child welfare workers, it should use a SaaS model, start with quick wins, stay platform agnostic, build an integrated system that allows for differences across counties/areas, and be open to module-based annual license fee pricing. Using the model set forth by Binti may allow for technology to truly be more integrated into social work practice to improve child and youth outcomes and improve job satisfaction among caseworkers.

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