PUTTING THE CHILD AT THE CENTER OF CHILD WELFARE

The time is now for a fresh look at the system’s processes, data and technology

With 4 million child abuse/neglect reports annually¹, approximately 430,000 children in foster care² and an average of five children dying each day in the United States from abuse or neglect³, it is time to approach child welfare in a new way. Child welfare services are intended to protect the most vulnerable among us. Too often, systems intended to protect children fail them. Children are frequently not reunited with their families and many never find adoptive homes. Often, they will age out of the system while in foster care and face an uncertain future. These youths are seven times more likely to experience drug addiction and five times more likely to experience post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) from their experiences. By age 21 only 32% reported being enrolled in or participating in an educational program. 23% of former foster care children reported being neither enrolled in or attending an educational program, nor employed full- or part-time at the age of 21⁴. These outcomes can’t be viewed as acceptable.

Furthermore, caseworkers are overworked, understaffed, and the tools available to them are outdated by decades. Traditional approaches are clearly not working. We can and must do better. It is time for a fresh look—to rethink and redesign the processes and supporting technology that shape the child welfare system. Let’s ask ourselves what kind of system might prevent children from entering, much less age out while still in foster care? How might we better interact with children to secure their futures? What kind of tools and technology would enable caseworkers to support this approach? It is time to build solutions centered on empowering children and families; re-engage caseworkers, providers and clients; and enable them to improve outcomes—outcomes that change life trajectories.

REFOCUS TO REFINE

A look through the child and family lens to accelerate outcomes

Accenture has been working with child welfare experts and foster care alumni from across the country through a series of workshops, agile sprints and human-centered design thinking sessions to develop child-centric models for protecting children and families, ensuring their welfare and providing the services they need. We recognize that current technology does not adequately support the child welfare system. But it is not enough to merely replace old technology with new technology. We must also design, adopt and deploy fundamentally new ways of delivering child welfare services that improve decision-making, give better access to data and provide a holistic view of a family’s situation. This type of data insight can drive better decision making, such as taking real-time predictive or corrective action instead of tracking what simply went wrong.
With new approaches combined with new technology, we aim to dramatically change how child welfare agencies engage and serve children and families while at the same time empower and support their focus on achieving well-being. We see an opportunity to ignite a three-tiered transformation in how child welfare systems and practices operate:

- **EXPERIENTIAL**—change the user experience for delivering relevant and child-centric content with more intuitive interfaces and reimagined workflows to increase efficiency and effectiveness.

- **TECHNICAL**—harness the power of data, analysis and adaptability to support identification of services, avoid failures and help inform the support network.

- **CULTURAL**—provide better support for families and caseworkers, and change the ways in which related agencies and the public views and engages with child protective services.

This transformation drives nontraditional solutions and positions us to deliver outcomes for children and families that we can all be proud of. For example, external portals for providers, clients, youth in care and caretakers enable cross-community ownership of a child’s well-being. Analytics inform decisions at all levels from the caseworker, to the agency director, and the community. And we must recognize that cross-agency integration does not begin and end with human services. We need to cast a wider net to engage all players—the courts, education, health care providers, juvenile justice, and other influences on family success—on a cloud-based platform. These types of solutions allow us to redesign and rethink how child safety and well-being outcomes are transformed.

At Accenture, our goal is to think about child welfare a whole new way—to apply a human-centered approach to better serve children and families. By enabling child welfare agencies to focus on their core mission of serving their communities—not barriers—we empower them to better serve their clients and deliver life-changing results.

**OUR JOURNEY TOWARD OUTCOMES ACCELERATED FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BEGINS NOW.**

**IGNITE A 3-TIERED TRANSFORMATION**

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