

Project helps states mine data to improve services for kids

26 August 2014, by Mike Krings

When children are placed in foster care, the ultimate goal is to give them the best possible services to achieve permanency, either by returning them home or finding a stable, supportive home environment. A project directed by the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare has developed a Web-based reporting system that helps child welfare agencies know how well they are achieving timely permanency as well as many other performance metrics. The project is currently working with 12 states across the country.

For years, [child welfare](#) agencies have kept volumes of data on the youth they served and their outcomes. However, reams of paper reports made it difficult to organize the data into usable formats. About eight years ago KU launched the Results Oriented Management (ROM) Project to help agencies use already existing data in a flexible reporting tool that allowed agencies to see and use their data in new ways.

"We saw one of the major roadblocks to using data was simply getting access to it," said Terry Moore, [project](#) director in the Center for Children and Families in the [social welfare](#) school. "In today's world we're used to being able to quickly access information we need, but it hasn't always been that way in social services. What we do in this project is help agencies organize their data longitudinally, develop meaningful metrics and provide Web-based reports that enable further analysis."

The simple goal is to help child welfare service providers improve their operations. The goal is not new, but through use of the ROM Reports system, it can be done in a much more efficient and intuitive manner. Moore shared the example of a state wanting to find out how children were doing 12 months after entering the foster care system. The ROM Project allows users to find out how many have been reunited with families and how many are still in foster care. The user can also check by various time periods—such as quarters or

fiscal years—by staff unit from region to individual workers, and drill down to child records behind the aggregate numbers.

"Everyone in an agency has access to the same data. Based on that information, it can help you diagnose what's going on," Moore said. "This gives them the tools to understand what might be driving a particular outcome for a particular group of kids, and whether they are meeting service standards. We see it as a tool to for continuous quality improvements for better serving kids and families."

That improvement can range from one worker to state legislators and policy makers. Case workers can find data on their clients. Organizations can use the data to improve their operations and make reports to policy makers who make decisions regarding funding and laws pertaining to child services. Colorado has taken the project a step further, becoming the first state to enact a version of the ROM Reports that is available to the public. Individuals can visit <http://www.cdhsdatamatters.org/> to find data on children being served, child safety, permanency outcomes and more.

States using the system are already able to quickly access data on roughly 70 different measures and use filters to pull together specific types of information from the data to create customizable reports. ROM Project staff help states generate new reports or add features to the system when they find they are looking for certain data or reports that are not currently available. There has been growing concern in child welfare that minorities are being disproportionately placed in [foster care](#). New reports in the system allow states to analyze their own data to determine whether there is overrepresentation of specific race groups at various decision points.

"We also help them understand what the data means and how they can use it to improve their

services," Moore said.

The Center for Children and Families has also made the system available for use in analyzing data for child and adult mental health services as well as psychiatric residential treatment facilities in Kansas. Similar to the child welfare version, states and [service providers](#) can view data and produce reports, including data on measures such as school outcomes, clinical [data](#), services provided in homes versus facilities and many others. Likewise, the reporting system is now being developed for juvenile justice programs.

The states either using the ROM Project or in initial preparations to use it: Colorado, Connecticut, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, New Mexico, Ohio, Oregon and Vermont.

Provided by University of Kansas

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