Nearly Twenty Years Later
It's Clear We Don't Need a
Nicer Shinier Car!!!

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Since CCWIS final rule was released in June 2016 we've heard a lot about what CCWIS can do, the "must dos" to be federally compliant and the foreseeable advantages over its SACWIS predecessor. There has been quite a buzz about the accessibility and quality of data, interoperability, mobility and the promise that CCWIS offers more for the child welfare workforce. High stakes have been placed on the "new system" as a solution to an organization's business needs and the "pain points" of child welfare practice.

For many, the SACWIS story is well known. Reflecting on the last twenty-five years since SACWIS requirements were initially released in 1993, SACWIS promised automation not yet realized in child welfare at the time. The goal to modernize practice was well intended, however not the primary focus in functional designs. The nearly two-decades old system was designed from a blueprint that included far too many federal requirements and little room for flexibility in individual business supported design. Data quality, accessibility, interoperability and mobility were not a primary part of the equation. The latest technologies and tools of our time (Mobility, GPS, Cloud etc.) were not yet realized in some cases and never utilized in building SACWIS. I know firsthand because I was in the thick of state child welfare for nearly 21 years and much of that time was served in a state IT shop. We marketed SACWIS to our workforce as a tool that enhanced practice and in some ways SACWIS did meet needs.

Considering I began my career in the late nineties by recording worker contacts and case documentation pen to paper and eventually Microsoft Word templates, as an automated case management system SACWIS did have its advantages. However, if I may put it bluntly, SACWIS didn't cut the mustard. The monolithic "big box" system ultimately became a hindrance rather than a helpful solution. The workforce began to view their SACWIS solution as more of a ball and chain than automation that afforded flexibility to perform their jobs efficiently.

No one set out to create a cumbersome system. The objectives behind SACWIS were well intended but fell short of making things significantly better for workers. I personally spent countless sessions working directly with system users hearing their issues, documenting needs, translating needs into business requirements and figuring out how to approach development teams faced with real limitations because of how SACWIS was constructed in the first place. Development cycles often lasted six months or more, frustration came from all angles...users felt unsupported and overlooked and IT teams felt like the scapegoats. All while trying to move the needle on safety, permanency and wellbeing.

We understood that users needed stuff and once we figured out the stuff they needed, IT had the job of making it happen. From a transactional perspective a service was being performed but the idea of customer centric design had not surfaced in a tangible way. The design perspective fell mainly on institutional requirements rather than the needs of the people using the system. We believed we'd gathered valuable input from system users and we'd spend months developing what we "assumed" was the right solution, often leaving users more frustrated and disengaged. **In other words, we got results but not always the results the workforce needed.**

SACWIS

So...How Will We Get It Right This Time?

We Have to go Beyond the Requirements:

IIf you're reading this and spent any amount of time in child welfare waiting for an automated solution for a system release to "make your work life easier" you may have a slightly raised pulse about now. If you are wondering how CCWIS development might differ from SACWIS your thoughts are on par with those of many others also wondering "How CCWIS will be any different if we are not approaching it differently?" I mentioned the buzz since CCWIS Rule was introduced and the high stakes placed on a CCWIS solution. Yet without well-defined business needs and a clear understanding of the problems to solve, states run the risk of developing a CCWIS that will end up looking a lot like their current system. Caseworkers need a system that is responsive to their daily workflow and sensitive to their workload. **In other words, the idea is not to build a nicer, shinier car if you really need a jet!**

Finger pointing often ensued and "us versus them" positions took hold as our users tried to remain focused on the primary task of keeping kids safe and affording them the permanency and wellbeing they deserved. In reality, no one was to blame yet we were all part of the missed opportunities.

This paper is the first in a series aimed at getting real and shedding light on the journey from SACWIS to CCWIS. Follow our series #therealdeal as your organization prepares for CCWIS.

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