



## Moving Up the Value Curve by Meeting Users Where They Are

**T**hree simple words separate human services technology providers from true partners: starting with why.

In the book “Start with Why,” Simon Sinek explains, “Very few people or companies can clearly articulate why they do what they do. When I say why, I don’t mean make money—that’s a result. By why I mean what is your purpose, cause, or belief? Why does your company exist? And why should anyone care?”

At Northwoods, starting with why provides a constant reminder of our collective goal: improve outcomes for children and families by empowering the practice. Turning this belief into something tangible starts with meeting users where they are.

To do this, we’ve observed case-workers for hundreds of hours—going on ride-alongs, sitting in on home visits, shadowing them in the agency, and more. As a 2019 Emerging Leader at APHSA’s ISM Annual Conference this year, I shared how the insights we’ve gathered directly influenced the development of Traverse, our solution for child welfare.

Here’s what we’ve learned about six settings that provide a sample of how child welfare caseworkers could spend their days, and how technology can meet them where they are in each place—both physically, and in terms of practice.

■ **At the desk:** Workers try to learn everything about a family before going on a visit. With limited time and complex cases, it’s challenging to digest and make use of all this information. Technology that analyzes the entire case and

highlights the most critical details can answer key questions, such as: What happened? Why are we involved? Has the court been involved? Who are the important people? Workers get quickly acclimated to the case before they leave the office, which enhances engagement once they’re with a family.

■ **In the car:** When workers’ days are filled driving to and from the

office, home visits, schools, or court hearings, they attempt to plan for any scenario they may encounter, which often means carting around multiple case files and forms. By mobilizing content and case files, a worker is more prepared for any situation—even in the car. They have immediate access to all case

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information, including both history and anything new they collect that day. They never have to worry about forgetting a form again.

■ **At the home:** Families build stronger relationships with workers when they can collaborate on forms, plans, or assessments and be assured that entire processes are being completed. Workers build trust by collaborating with families to fill out forms. Further, getting forms signed by clients and supervisors or sharing them with outside providers before leaving clients' homes helps families quickly get access to services.

■ **In a family team meeting:** Consistent with the Value Curve's Integrative Stage, families are more invested in case plans they've helped create. If the process has been transparent until and through the meeting, there should be greater likelihood that parents will be more forthcoming and cooperative, reducing the likelihood of recidivism and future risk. Technology facilitates collaboration and adds transparency to the planning process. Everyone in the room can work together to make a holistic plan addressing the root

cause of the family's problems instead of focusing on surface-level needs.

■ **At court:** Consider a worker in court with a two-hour window when the judge will call the case. With existing tools that aren't designed to meet a mobile worker's needs, they're often forced to just sit there and wait. What if workers could repurpose this previously spent downtime getting caught up on case notes? This would improve productivity while also potentially cutting down on overtime. In this example, meeting workers where they are also means understanding how connected they'll be in any situation. Wi-Fi and cell service are lacking in many courthouses, so tools shouldn't require an Internet connection for workers to use them.


■ **In supervision:** Better collaboration drives better outcomes. Yet, critical time workers have with their supervisors is too often spent catching them up on the past instead of discussing how to move forward. Technology can solve this problem by providing supervisors with a summary of the whole case, plus access to specific content for more detailed context. They have more time to focus on

coaching workers and validating decisions. This way, supervisors and workers would both be confident that every decision meets current policy, best practices, and most important, the best interests of those they serve.

## **Designing Technology for the Point of Engagement**

The Human Services Value Curve suggests looking at everything we do from the consumers' point of view and evolving business models to continuously drive better outcomes for them.

The best way technology providers can help agencies successfully move through the four levels of the Value Curve is by providing tools that work for the people delivering services, whether they're in a home, in the car, at the agency, or anywhere else.

We can empower the practice by starting with why and making sure everything we do syncs with it. 

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