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UPenn pilot program to design 'PDAs on steroids' for Montgomery County child welfare caseworkers

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Currently in Montgomery County, caseworkers for the [Office of Children and Youth](#) have no way to remote access current case files and no way to upload photos and videos when they conduct home visits.

"Caseworkers, for the most part, are not provided with any technology," says Debra Schilling Wolfe, the executive director of UPenn's [Field Center for Children's Policy, Practice & Research](#), which is spearheading a pilot program to design digital devices for child welfare workers in Montgomery County.

"Workers aren't necessarily even provided with cell phones," she says. "There isn't a technological linkage between what happens in the home and what happens in the office and in the case file. That just doesn't exist."

But the Information Portability Project, a partnership between Montgomery County, [Stewards of Change](#), Microsoft Corp., Motorola and the Field Center, aims to change that by designing innovative digital devices that will enable caseworkers to view and update files remotely, take and upload photos and video, and provide a GPS tracking system for increased safety during home visits.

The devices, to be designed by Motorola, will work with a web-based data management system that Microsoft will design to integrate seamlessly with Montgomery County's current system.

Wolfe describes the devices as "PDAs on steroids," and says the project is a crucial component in improving the safety and welfare of abused and neglected children, especially in cases where detailed, real-time information is needed.

The \$950,000 design phase of the project, which is being funded through a combination of state, federal and private sources, is the result of three years of research by the Field Center on how to bring cutting-edge technology and best practices to bear on child welfare.

"In some cases, it really is a life or death situation," Wolfe says, "and we are very excited that all of these national experts are coming together to work and save children's lives."

Source: Debra Schilling Wolfe, Field Center for Children's Policy

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