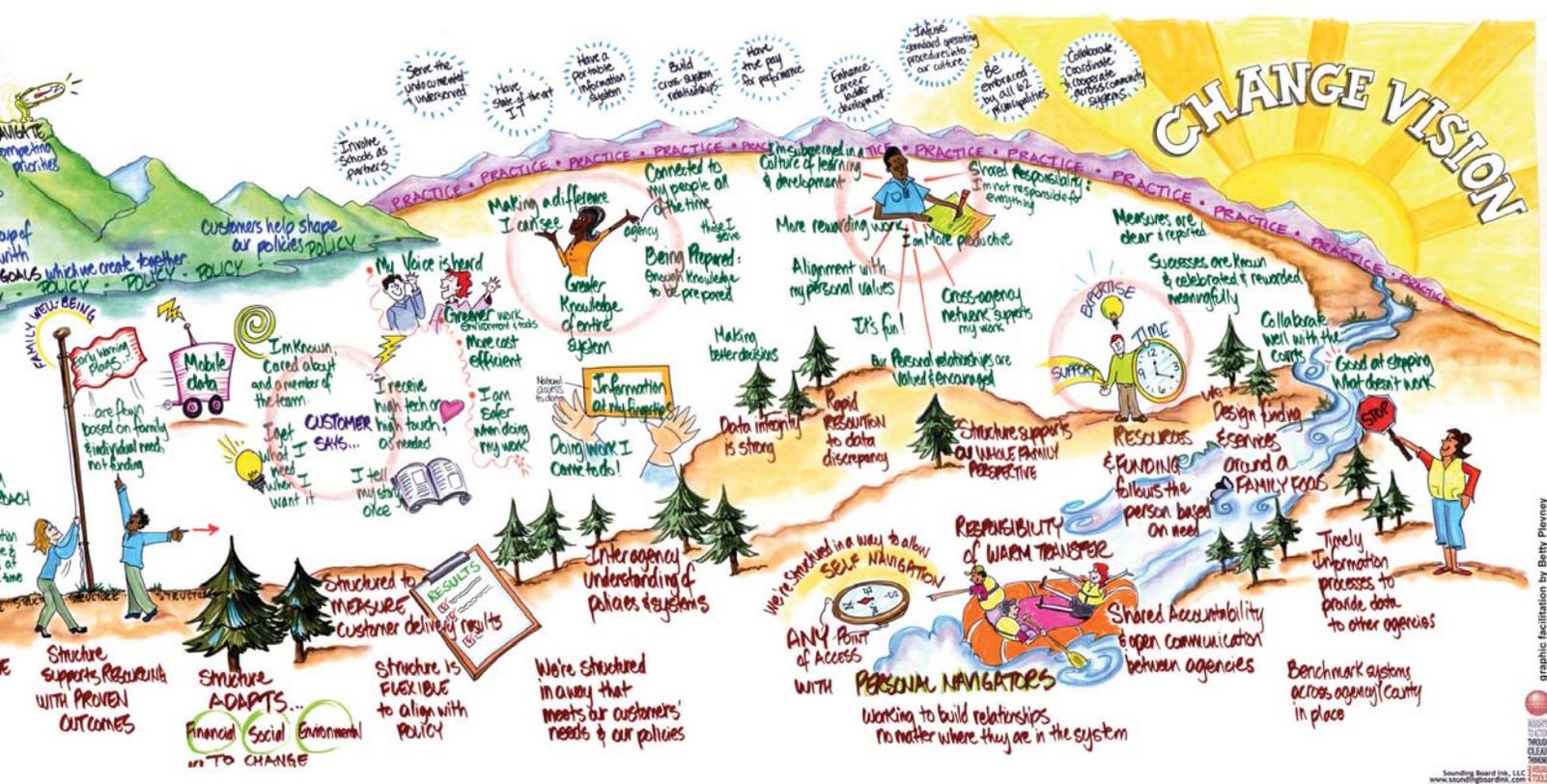


# Focused On Counties



# The urgency for real-time, mobile, interoperable information systems, in child welfare and beyond

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*Vision as determined by the same diverse group of stakeholders. The actual map is 20-feet long! At the end of the two-day convening, there was complete consensus upon the vision and the imperative need to move this process forward.*

*DANIELLE KELLY, A 14-YEAR OLD CHILD WITH CEREBRAL PALSY, died in her mother's home from profound neglect, wasting away to only 42 pounds. Nine different people were criminally charged with contributing to her death, including staff of the Philadelphia Department of Human Services and the private agency that was supposed to be providing in-home services and monitoring Danielle's safety. Required visits to see Danielle were not carried out by either DHS or the private agency. No one above the level of caseworker knew that Danielle had not been seen until it was too late.*

*FOUR BROTHERS ADOPTED BY NEW JERSEY'S JACKSON FAMILY subsisted on a diet of pancake batter and whatever scraps they could find. Their plight was discovered when neighbors called the police reporting that an 8-year old boy was eating out of the trash. In actuality, he was 19, with growth profoundly stunted due to neglect. If someone had visited them and uploaded monthly photos, perhaps the brothers' suffering would have been reduced if not prevented.*

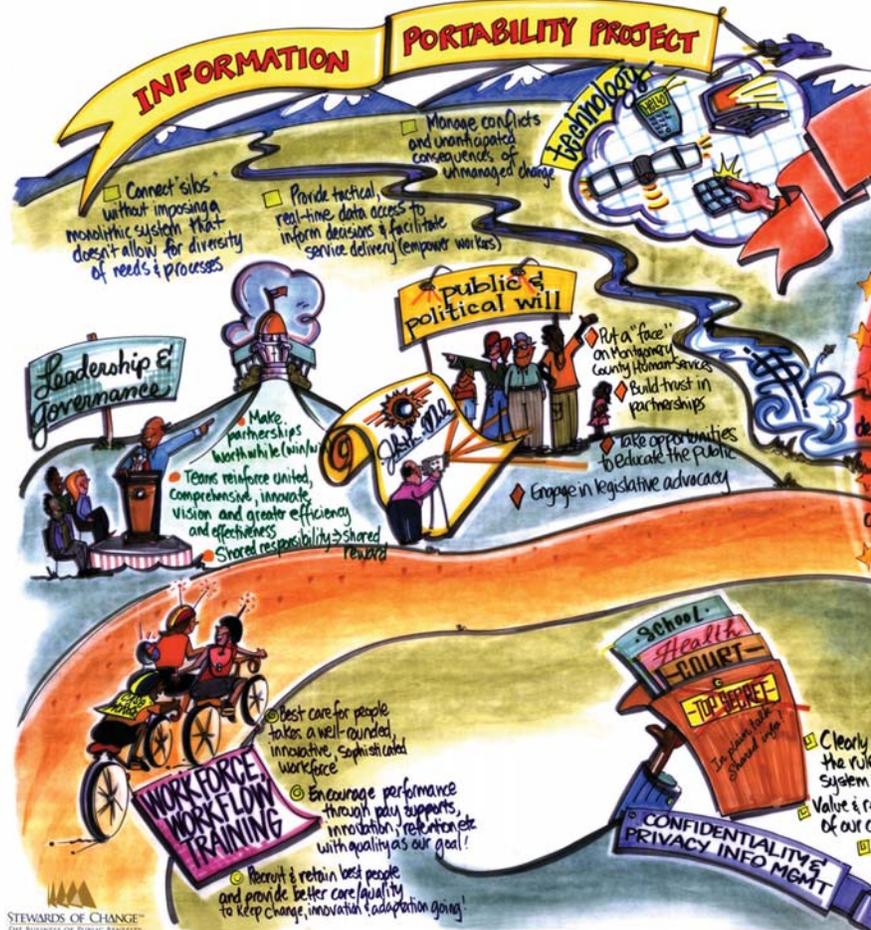
*WHEN CASEWORKER BRENDA LEE YEAGER MADE A HOME VISIT to a family in West Virginia, she was hit on the head with a frying pan, held at knifepoint, sexually assaulted, and then suffocated. Safety of caseworkers can be greatly increased if they have access to better information about the families and homes that they go into, and if their supervisors can track where caseworkers are and how long they are there.*

*"JESSIE" WAS PLACED WITH A HALF-SIBLING AND THE SIBLING'S FATHER (unrelated to Jessie). The father, an agency-approved caretaker despite a history of violence and HIV positive status, subsequently sexually abused Jessie, resulting in the child contracting HIV herself. In addition to neglecting to perform background checks, the caseworker had not visited Jessie in placement for three months. The county settled a civil suit for \$3.5 million.*

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“Road Map” - this graphic depiction of the work represents 100 days of diverse stakeholder input.

The writer (Joseph Roynan, jroynan@montcopa.org) provided the images noting that they are powerful and attract attention whenever displayed. They enable the visualization of abstract concepts. They are available in different sizes and resolutions.



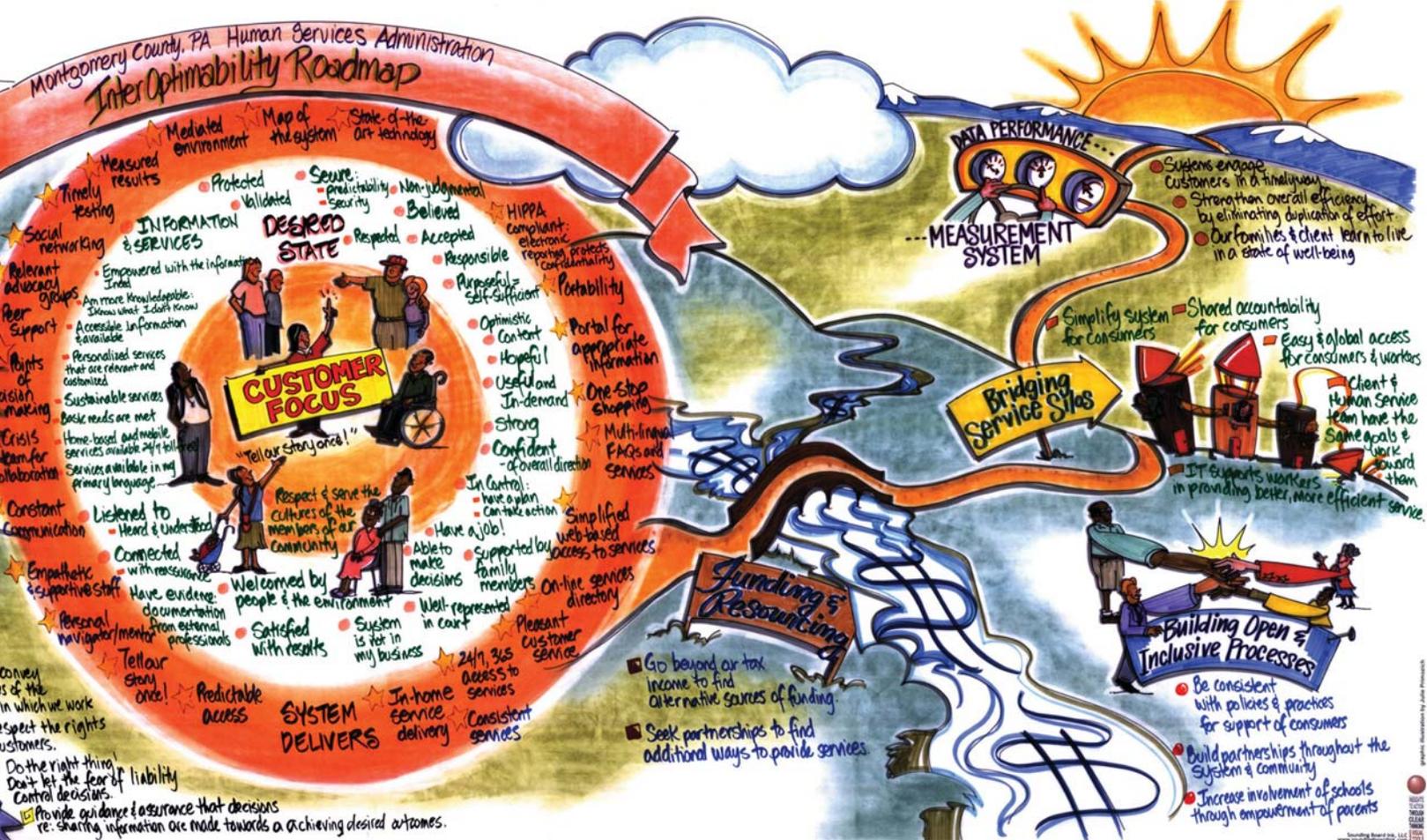
Each one of these tragedies might have had a different outcome, for the child, for the caseworker, for the agency, for the taxpayers, had systems and technology been in place that are already in use in the business world. Companies such as UPS and eBay are able to track information in real-time, but applications in child welfare and other human services lag far behind. Even Domino’s has a real-time system to send messages to customers about the stages of making, cooking, and delivery of a pizza.

Montgomery County was one of several child welfare jurisdictions invited to participate in a national Child Welfare Summit on Information Technology hosted by the University of Pennsylvania’s Field Center for Children’s Policy, Practice & Research in 2007. The summit brought together experts from multiple arenas, including technology, business, philanthropy, state and federal government, and academia, to explore the need for a transparent and effective means of managing information and improving accountability in the child welfare system. What resulted was a com-

mitment to explore the development of a system that could track cases in real time and alert supervisors and administrators of gaps or inadequacies in caseworking services, while providing caseworkers in the field with critical case information to improve decision-making.

The field center joined with business experts and summit participants Stewards of Change to select Montgomery County to develop the Information Portability Project, an interoperable technology system that allows real-time information sharing across different human service agencies. With a goal of replication throughout Pennsylvania and across the country, Montgomery County was chosen as the ideal site for a pilot, based on its merits and its diversity. The partnership was supplemented by the technical expertise of Microsoft and Motorola. The Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare and the Montgomery County Human Services Administration, including the Montgomery County Office of Children and Youth and the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, rounded out the team.

Utilizing the Stewards of Change well-researched “InterOptimability” model which includes business process mapping, organizational assessments and technology analyses, the partners produced a future vision and operational roadmap to support building a fully interoperable health and human services framework. The project ultimately creates interoperable, real-time technology systems that will link together all services within the County’s Human Services Administration as well as State systems as appropriate. Additionally, it offers mobile solutions to enable caseworkers and supervisors immediate access to critical information in and from the field. The mobility component outfits caseworkers with “super PDA’s” with the capability to access critical cross-system information in real time, document and track visitation and worker location via GPS, take and immediately upload photos and videos, immediate 911 access, and complete required forms at the client’s location. This work also provides the state with models and learning that can be transferred to other counties across the commonwealth.



Children and families do not live in the silos created by systems and funding streams. By providing information sharing across systems, in the field and in real time, the Information Portability Project revolutionizes service delivery to children and families and makes a difference in significant ways, including:

- Increasing client safety and well-being
- Improving outcomes
- Coordinating service delivery
- Increasing efficiency
- Promoting data-informed decision making
- Fostering safety of the worker in the field
- Providing new tools for supervision and caseload management
- Documenting provision of service
- Supporting workforce recruitment and retention
- Reducing duplication of services
- Meeting increased needs in a time of diminished funding
- Protecting the county and its residents through reducing liability and financial risk

The Information Portability Project is not about technology, it is about information and decision making. The project is generations ahead of other efforts around the country by integrating all three distinct, yet critical, aspects of technology: interoperability, mobility, and real-time access. This approach differs from other attempts that have failed by recognizing that culture change must be initiated prior to implementation of new technology. By engaging the prospective users of technology in its development, buy-in is achieved at multiple levels.

The Information Portability Project's approach is consistent with current federal and state initiatives. The goals of the Office of the National Coordinator for Health Information Technology, the principal federal entity charged with coordination of nationwide efforts to implement and use the most advanced health information technology and the electronic exchange of health information, mirror those of this project. Similarly, the Department of Health and Human Services' Center for Medicaid and Medicare Services (CMS) is focused on information sharing to improve outcomes.

With Montgomery County as the starting point, the Information Portability Project promises change in the way that human services are delivered. Traditional silos will give way to cross-system collaboration and service delivery. The Information Portability Project applies business-proven and industry-specific technology to child and family-serving systems of care to meet emerging human, data, and management needs. Casework will focus on coordinated, technology-supported decision-making, reducing the antiquated paper-driven, burdensome processes that exist today. Supervisors will have state-of-the-art tools and systems to monitor, train, and improve the skills of their staff. Management can support a safer and more productive workforce, and be better stewards of the public trust.

The Information Portability Project demonstrates that it is critical for technology to be an integral part of all levels of human service delivery, with tremendous return on investment.