REFORM IS THE DESTINATION. TECH IS THE ROAD.

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

Hello and welcome I'm very excited that you all have joined us today as we charge towards the holiday season and a new year to think about technology and child welfare and I'm and I'm happy that we have two really quick guests that I'm going to introduce in a second but I just kind of wanted to get us grounded in where we're going with this discussion today so I'm Daniel Heimpel I'm the Publisher of The Imprint and the President of Fostering Media Connections and today we're going to talk about tech and child welfare and as many of you know if I look at the attendee list I've got we've got people from the tech sector but we have people from academia as well as within child welfare practice and policy and often the conversation around technology and child welfare is crowded with jargon acronyms and language that is really just used by no offense to you out there but to the by tech geeks so today we have two people who speak that language but whose careers are focused on improving child welfare we have Molly Tierney who you see there she is the Child Welfare Industry Lead in Accenture's North America Public Sector Practice and we have Scooter Ward he's a former Deputy Chief Information Officer at DC's Child and Family Services Agency I wanted to kind of ground this conversation in a column recently written by our guest Molly and she recalls popping into a co-worker's office from her leadership team when she was running Baltimore Child Welfare Services Agency and this leadership team member had printed out a 114 page excel spreadsheet and taped each page end to end like a scroll with her reading glasses perched on

the edge of her nose she was scanning each line in search of duplicates and this is for the kids in child welfare I understood in a flash that she had zero confidence that our SACWIS with or any other computer would do that for her I'm pretty sure I stopped breathing dumbfounded I softly closed the door and backed away she like many of her colleagues thought that data on paper thought about data on paper and in single data points 18 months later we had a reliable count and learned that we had three times as many kids in foster care as you might expect in a city the size of Baltimore that was the starting point for our slow careful journey to get children home a decade later we had reduced the number of children in foster care by 72 percent and while many efforts contributed to this outcome it was anchored in data we believed in so you know this is what this whole conversation's about it's about getting past inputting data and looking at spreadsheets to what can you get out of the data and how can humans go ahead and do the work that they need to do and how can data facilitate that so obviously better technology is not going to improve outcomes but technology that is ancillary to the humans doing the work is going to do that so that's what we're here to talk about today and you know to start that conversation and you know folks in the audience I just want to say please use the chat box to start popping in questions so we can work that into our Q&A we typically have very lively Q and A's I'm sure given all of your thoughts on this subject that we're going to have a lively one today but to start it out I just want to ground the conversation with Scooter and Molly on what is the state of

technology in child welfare today so Molly you want to take that first yeah let me take a crack at it and then you know jump in Scooter I think that it's sort of in a really interesting precipice right and like I remember as a oh god it was the 90s when we got SACWIS systems which were the case management systems that most child welfare agencies use today and they're sort of mainframes think like black screen green cursor right and that like a lot of labor to get information into them and that was and they were delivered to child welfare as a child welfare practitioners as a here you go congratulations here's your technology now be happy about it and don't forget to put stuff in the system right and we've as a field been doing great work under dated systems I guess that's the short answer the question is boy it's out of date and while the consciousness that it's out of date is now clear to all of us that's happening at a time when federal legislation not just for new case management systems that you know are being built all over the country as we speak but at the same time changes in practice are happening and so I think that's the really interesting thing that's happening is we're having a chance a moment where we can bring technology up to speed but also not just do technology over there but have technology be driven by and here's how we're changing practice and we need our technology to undergo what we're trying to do with practice and so the sort of it's a careful dance to get those two things going together I don't know what if that resonates with you Scooter is that how you're thinking yeah I think one of the things when I think of SACWIS systems when they first came out is they came out to be a repository for information right and as that a place to put information so that you could account for audits do you know federal regulations and all of those things so that information was housed in one place and it was almost like we're putting it in there we don't need to think about that until we need to use it now as practice has shifted what tools are really needed are those that help people in practice do their job without dictating what they need to do so it's we we've gone from sort of like a flip phone as if we were to call sack with a flip phone to needing an iPhone needing something that's more powerful and provides many more many more functions to get through the day so as practice has lifted there have been

this stagnant technology that people have had to make all of these hoops to sort of jump through to get it just to work to the way they need it today we actually need technology that's not necessarily dictating what things need to be tomorrow but is open and accepting and can be leveraged for what comes tomorrow if there are drastic changes and practices in practice excuse me or if the way an agency wants to do something is creative and they need technology that they can lean on that has space for that and right now most secure systems don't have that and that was the reason you know you have things like family first you have CWIS and other things that are really trying to push where technology is going but not push it in a way that it is dictating what it needs to be but rather what it is housed on and how it organically moves up that I mean you mentioned family first kind of obliquely right so the family first prevention services act you know is as federal legislation can do sort of hap half-handedly trying to change practice to one that's more preventative right and simultaneously you've got the Child Welfare Information System the CWIS with coming through that is going to give you this opportunity to presumably extract more information that can change practice and change the way that we're doing things to try to prevent the separation of American families as family first is trying to do but I'm not again you know while you guys speak that language of tech person I don't and I and you know I think this gets to what are the opportunities you know with family first and beyond to really change practice and I think Molly you've got some ideas on that but you know what are those opportunities um what are the opportunities let's start with that that we have to as we really modernize the field through tech around family first we could start there right which is you know such a powerful opportunity right and really what the I think the federal government is getting trying to get practice to do is to follow the money right by being clear here's what we're going to pay for here's what we're not going to pay for and I think in following those goals like kids more likely to be in families kids more likely to be in their own families and avoiding stays in foster care I feel like technology has a it has a couple of things it can be doing and as Scooter so wisely said we should take great pains to be sure that we do not fall into the

trap of having anyone believe or interpret that technology's going to decide right because it can't and nor should it right it's a as you have heard me say we got to get the humans knowing what the humans can do and get the technology to do things like count and sort and analyze right because that's hard work for human brain you can get a bot to do that and but the bot can't observe a parent and their child together and notice how while there's challenges there's lots of stuff that's working and how can we leverage that that's a thing only humans can do but it's harder for the humans when information isn't sorted organized and categorized for them right and so I think about CWIS solutions as sort of having technology having two purposes like if you think about it this way those of us who have been inside child welfare systems know this everything is always burning everything is on fire constantly right and it is a those who get in and stay in it are wired like firefighters we're all ready to run into the burning building but I think what technology can do is two things first of all I ought to start dousing some of those flames right it ought to make some of the stuff that's so hard not so flipping hard right like it was a time when finding a placement for a kid was about what phone numbers I had written down on my coffee stained desk bladder and who I knew that I could call and based on my one-to-one relationships technology should help us know at all times here's an accurate list of foster homes in which there's actually space right now and something about those foster homes like they boys take girls they take teenagers they take babies they're ready to take a kid with a disability whatever like you need to know these things and you got to know a couple things about a million things you know a couple of things about the kids so you can figure out wow what if I could like this see which are the homes that I've that my agency has licensed to take a kid of this profile and are in the same zip code as with the place I'm going to have to remove this kid from because now the kid doesn't have to change schools and maybe this doesn't have to be quite as awful as it would be right that kind of work is done but with fingers and little pieces of paper by caseworkers now when that is a thing technology could do help the help the workers see here are the five foster homes a match that you could pick from you and you can only pick but here's five to start with I

think the purpose of that of dousing flames is of course important but also so that we can see beyond them and that's the next promise of the technology is we gotta make a bunch of stuff that's too hard we're going to make the wrong stuff is hard right we got to make the right stuff hard and then also be able to get at the helicopter view which is a thing you cannot do with seconds right you can't do it you can't see that right and if we could see the pattern then we might be able to say well now I can see from this zip code Baltimore city is a great example 21217 40% of all the calls for abuse and neglect come from 21217 that's the location of the proverbial burning CVS that many of you saw when Freddie Gray was murdered that zip code what if in addition to helping those kids one by one if we could also see hey look at all those kids let's see the pattern of what's happening in that neighborhood and what if we knew well the reason kids are coming to our attention in that neighborhood is because after school they're left home alone well maybe what we need to do is open up some after-school programs right in that zip code that kids are going to walk by on their way home from school they're going to be so tempting they're going to go inside but that's the promise I'm going to stop go Scooter yeah no I think Molly I want to I want to expand on your helicopter analogy a little bit and drill down because when you're in a helicopter you're looking at a drone shot in a movie you see everything right and so if everything is on fire you don't know where to land the helicopter to be safe and when you look at things like I'll use my 13 year old son who we adopted from foster care in DC he's now decided he was a vegan until I explained to him he couldn't eat chicken as a vegan now he no longer wants to be a vegan but that's just how Norman rolls one of the things that was really insightful for us was when we were able to pluck him up at two years old and say okay he needs to go to pre-k three in DC where there's universal pre-k three you you're able to look at we couldn't at that time depend on the agency to tell us the schools that were best suited for his needs because they didn't necessarily know that because everybody wasn't at the table and I really think technology can foster everybody being at the same table without even being in the same room you share the information that this school is great for kids with

you know mental deficits or reading delays or speech delays or you say if your child needs these sorts of things this is the kind of therapy or after school programs they could have and then you're sharing all that information in a way that then tells the school district oh my gosh in that zip code that Molly mentioned all of these kids need after school care there are four schools in that zip code we can put money in there and it's not a constant fight between two agencies or a constant discussion even between two agencies people are walking into the room with the same set of thoughts because that information has been shared from systems that are talking to one another about the principles who are involved so you're able to see from that helicopter analogy these are all the people on the outskirts that need to be coming in and this is how we can bring them in by sharing that information so then you also move towards you're able to as you said Molly the things that need to be hard need to be hard and the things that need to be easy need to be easy one thing that needs to be hard is data duplication it is not difficult right from a technology standpoint but every single time I talk to a jurisdiction about their psychosystem they talk about we have so many duplicates it should not be hard if even if you spell the name wrong but you get the address right or vice versa or you get the zip code wrong there should be something there that comes back and tells the person putting in that information are you sure could it have been this you wanted to see or could it have been this person this location these people is this person connected to this other person because this person is also in our system and lived at this address all of those are things that for the most part are done manually or somebody catches it or at some point your you know maybe two checks are sent out or something like that occurs and folks are made aware that oh there's a mistake in the system that is what should be hard what should be easy is for a worker to be able to go to a home to do a visit to go to a school to do a visit to record that visit to put in the information to do it from a Starbucks when we can go back to Starbucks and McDonald's when we can go back to McDonald's do all of those things in a way that meets them exactly where they are because so many young social workers talk about they go into the agency they feel like they're in a time

warp most of these folks nowadays probably were born in the 90s and never saw a flip phone right so these are the kind of things we're asking them to acclimate to when they can pick up their phone and go on yelp and find a vegan restaurant that's three blocks away but they can't do all of that for work and I think as we continue to progress with technology and child welfare will get them there but we have to keep it from being a point-in-time solution to a future proof solution to something that people can take a look at and see like okay this is where technology is right now but are we building this in a way that we do not have to completely re-architect it for this agency or for these people when technology changes four five six years from now okay Molly I know you got you I can tell you want to jump in I i know that that much from you but I just have a just want to pull one thing out that I think is an interesting concept which is that if you have a data system that really can take you up following this drone or helicopter metaphor I like the helicopter because somebody's at least got a job right I guess drone operators but anyway you're in the helicopter you're looking down but you talked about something which I thought was very interesting which was the concept and you said it to Molly is that there is sort of a possibility to read or distribute money based on what we can extract from these child welfare systems that could be cross-system which is which when we talk about again family first prevention through Title IV-E of the social security act I mean we need bigger than Title IV-E of the social security act if we are going to re-invigorate the lives of children that have been set back by virtue of 21217 or the zip code where you end up or otherwise so I just I thought it was an important concept to kind of take out and think about and the other one was you know you Scooter you mentioned walking in and being able to record and take that data down point in time when you're there you know and is this because it comes up to a question that came already from the from the part from the people listening from Stephanie Zulman and then kind of followed up by Lola Cornish you know looking forward to your discussion of how you are maintaining the security of personal data on these children because you know what this is all very sensitive integrating data systems with highly sensitive personal information in them is incredibly

challenging any suggestions so you know so I just wanna just we think about this incredible power how do you mitigate some of that and serve I think I want to Scooter I want to take this from a practical perspective and then ask you to take on the security question from a technical one because I surely don't know the answer to that I think this the two things first I heard you to say right we need a lot more resources to get right by kids in this country and I believe that is true and we at the same time we have got to stop spending dollars on things that don't work and right now because we're not getting this helicopter view we don't know what's working and what's not working so I imagine a future where it's not just I know from my data system which kids got sent to tutoring programs in my jurisdiction but because I'm talking to I know where I spent dollars on a tutoring program and I have a data relationship with the school system I also know which of those kids succeeded in getting to the next grade or improve their reading scores or whatever my measure wants to be so I can see now I can be saying and which of those tutoring programs actually works those are the ones I should be spending dollars on in social services we have spending dollars on things that people care a lot about and I think that's very sweet it's important that we all care and also and are we have to get on these children's schedule and that means we got to be doing things that work I think and it allows it allows the people involved to walk in to whatever conversations are had from a proactive standpoint rather than a reactive standpoint you're not hearing new information when you walk into the room if these if these platforms are exchanging information in the proper way so folks from the school district or mental health care professionals or whomever are coming to talk to the agency they're coming equipped with the same information that the agency has and the agency is equipped with the same information that the school district or others have and there's a collaborative conversation rather than I didn't know we had 103 kids who needed reading supplementation or you know I didn't know we had 500 kids who needed this or that everybody has the same level of information and it allows them to work in a collaborative fashion rather than these are my blocks that I'm bringing to the table you have your blocks we don't know if they sort of cross

and we can use you know cross efforts to solve these problems we just know I have what I have and you know you have what you have and that's the stance unfortunately in a lot of jurisdictions nowadays and I think that this question about prevention is an equally important one related to this data sharing thing and I want to give a two ways of thinking about it imagine a scenario where a worker is going into a home because there's been an allegation and they have to go to an investigation and part of the allegation might be the cops are always over at that house because there's always some something going they're always stopping by and it's dangerous and the kid never goes to school and as a little kid right and the difference for that worker walking in the home going all I know is somebody said somebody said somebody said something and on their smartphone inside their secure system a data exchange with the school that says this child actually has a 98 attendance rate and the cops haven't been to that house in four years is really different than that person knowing cops actually are there three times a week and this kid has a 40 attendance rate those data points wouldn't make the decision for the worker but they sure would inform what they did next right isn't it it's of course we worry in child welfare about both positive and negative errors right am I bringing a kid into care when I could have kept them safe at home or did I need to bring a kid into care and instead they got left to their peril and I think a worker not knowing I know somebody said that the kids are the kids are always home and not going to school and the cops are always there but in fact that's not the truth might help us know well what do I need to understand to keep these kids safe at home so and so the risk of us not sharing the data falls to children so when we start thinking about oh there's a lot of noise it's worrisome sharing data and data governance is a battle that needs to get fought the consequences of not sharing it falls to children I have a vivid memory of my time in Baltimore where like most jurisdictions we review child fatalities the deaths of children because we want to sort of come to understand what can we do to prevent them and one thing that we noticed over a span of years was that there was a pattern of babies that were dying all of whom's moms had the baby before the mom was 15. now what I as soon as I saw it I thought like oh

this is great this is leaping off the page with statistical clarity all I got to do because I'm sitting in a room imagine me sitting in a room with all the folks who work at the hospitals and saying this is great all you got to do is tell me when you have a live birth of a child from a mom who's under the age of 15 and I'll bring help we'll bring supportive services because surely it's hard enough to raise a kid when you're a kid it's a really hard and let's just be helpful and I'm gonna tell you to a person they flipped out no we can't share that hip of this and you can't share that right what is wrong with you what I'm I am as you can see to this day incredulous that we retreated to nope can't share and I think right and the consequences of not sharing we're serious really serious well I mean I think you bring up so many good points and Scooter I know I don't want to keep on jumping in but I i feel like I kind of have to I mean it's like these conversations the two of you guys moderate each other but um this question of d so what you're saying Molly is clearly we know from the data certain things that are quote unquote predictive right of child protection involvement whether or not that equates to maltreatment or not we you know that's a different conversation but we know what can be what is sneaking okay um there is a question that we have to figure out how to get past which is this one of surveillance bias just by virtue of throwing eyes on a family you know whether or not well-intentioned and the way and again this is where technology data can essentially change the way a system functions what we're trying to do in terms of practice with family first and where we are going as a field in recognition of the often times brutality of the child welfare system of the child protection system is how do you use that data in a way that doesn't um wrongly point the eye at people but on this point of data sharing I mean I remember my first interaction with Molly ever was where she had worked out with the superintendent of Baltimore schools how to share that data so that you knew how your kids were doing and you knew you knew again how to place kids and that was a big quote-unquote innovation that was done as you always said on the back of a napkin that was your innovation right um and I also remember being in Florida on a listening tour with Karen Bass where she was sitting next to Alexey Hastings and a woman at the legal center in

Florida said you know this FERPA law we need to all you got to do is change this little bit of FERPA and you could social workers could get access to records and guess what Karen ran that up that was like we heard that in March by May that law was passed the uninterrupted scholars act and now you presumably have access to that information so there was a question about firewalls how do we get past firewalls and collect data that is uniformly defined in my history it has been you know I've seen Molly do it the back of the napkin way and I've seen it done through legislation but you know I think we're begging the bigger question about what do we need to do to break down those firewalls and create the integration and we're getting a lot of questions on that so I mean this this this webinar is getting very quickly out of control so I said that you guys can keep on going and I'm gonna try to try to wade through all these wonderful questions that are you know so important I do want to talk about the sort of data ontology and data security topic that came up earlier because you know I I'm a firm believer that in any agency or any organization folks only get what they want and Daniel you spoke earlier to sort of like the tech nerds in a room talking about tech stuff tech people want to build really cool stuff we want to make it really snazzy so that folks can use it but oftentimes at agencies workers aren't the people talking to the tech people it's someone in procurement who wrote up an RFP that may not know all the nuances of how an agency works or it's someone in leadership at an agency who's like I just need something that does this and it's so targeted that oftentimes folks just go and build that particularly tech people right and on the tech side like I've seen incredible agencies who've really stepped in and brought in sort of private sector practices of having product managers and all these other things who are asking those questions to workers okay how does this need to be secured should we be blurring out this information should we include this is the social security number sufficient for an id for the child or are we using their case id do you call it case head or do you call it this and there are all these sort of different things that exist there that I really think the answer is a collaborative approach at what I like to call the customers customer level which is the agency a collaborative approach of where they come together and talk through all of

those things so that you know every time Molly says child name parent name school name all of those are sort of secure pieces of information that need to be treated differently along with social security number birth date and all of those sort of identifying pieces that need to be treated differently than school or what the kid's allergic to you know all these kinds of things from a technology standpoint particularly for people who haven't worked in child welfare just sort of are dumped on a desk and you just start you know you start coding and building accordingly and then you inevitably turn it back over to the agency and they're like this is not what I need why can I just see the child's name why is the parent showing up we this was an anonymous call for service why do I see this person's name you should be able to say anonymous and then we don't see those things but we're getting better at those conversations but I think a lot of these questions asking about data integrity and some other things really hinge on tech coming together with practice in a way that talks through what those are now CWIS is great start I think it did a huge leap on those things but at the ground level when you're talking about the things that are really agency specific the larger conversations need to be had that aren't just a byproduct of what the federal legislation was I want to ask you a question about that Scooter because I really feel like what you're talking about is the frontier that you know we came into this knowing our you know sort of across the country this round knowing well we have to have practitioners in the mix to tell the technologists what we want and that's good and we did a whole bunch of human centered design and how can we really learn from what the practice needs and in when one gets to implementation it's a pressure cooker right because the practice is desperate for help it's gotta you gotta give me something better and technology's on the clock we gotta hurry and implement something the stuff's gotta get delivered on a schedule and how I wonder what your thoughts are about how to keep those very different disciplines in the same conversation because what I worry about is when we don't have a common language how will the technologists help the practitioners do something other than create a prettier sacwis system right because that's what I work because what the practitioners want is relief from oh the thing my

psychos wasn't doing make that thing go away but they're not really thinking give me an iPhone right they're thinking is that question coming through no it absolutely is and I think it's a continuation of things like human-centered design and those sorts of conversation where you have people not necessarily in a room they can be on a webinar they can be wherever but I often start conversations with imagine you've never seen a sackless system which is immediately they go right to thinking about their security system right but it and I do that on purpose so that I can say okay now if you had the sears wish book which I grew up in an era you got that at Christmas you dog eared all the pages and if you grew up anything like me you didn't get anything you dog here but nonetheless you get your sears wish book what would you want intake to look like what would you want how you handle court cases in your sackless to look how do you want education to look then how does that look max match the function how do you translate that into a mobile instance what are the things you have to have mobily that you may not need to have desktop or vice versa and having those conversations that really drive people into architecting a solution wherein you know the 12 things the solution has to do excuse me but there's still maybe 30 wants and those wants really are what I think lead us to future proof solutions because you may say okay I see that you want 30 things we can put in 15 but practice may change in the next few years so those other 15 we can still build them but it may look very different if we do it now and then have to do it again because when you're getting something it's sort of like going to buy a new car you want leather seats you want a sunroof you want a convertible maybe well I guess you can't have a sunroof and a converter but you want a list of things and then you go and you see okay maybe I can't get this and that can't get a convertible and heated seats or I can't get this and that but it informs what you want to do if you go to buy your next car when you go look at the next place so I think having those kinds of conversations where people are designing their wishful system still having in the back of their mind their current system because every sentence when you say okay how do you want to do intake it starts with well in our current system we do it like this and we have to worry about this

and if you do this there's a duplicate I try to wipe that slick clean and just say no how do you want it to work and then have particularly large technology companies not even large ones most technology companies now have people who translate that into what requirements need to look like at various different levels and deliver much better solutions for customers whether they be child welfare or anywhere anyone else is very interested question about but just about that dream system you know there's some big matzo balls out there in terms of problems within the child welfare system and um I think I just indicated that I'm Jewish and we were just finishing Hanukkah so that they're there for the matzah ball reference but you think about for example you know I was talking to child welfare leader not long ago just about meetings right so visit and visitation so with the coronavirus you know visitation obviously got cut down they're doing a lot more by zoom and by telephone and stuff like that and sometimes that works fine I mean sometimes you don't you know families need a lighter touch and you can figure out how that works better and but it gets to this question of you know there's a big issues with the workforce this compliance driven workforce that needs to fill out paperwork and all these types of things and they have these stack with systems where they're just you know taking from an excel spreadsheet and then just cutting and pasting putting stuff in sdm they got all this stuff they got all this data entry and all the stuff they got to do so you got these workforce questions and this what you know how does the dream see with system get us to a place where we're dealing with that better how does it get us all to a place where I want to go and we had a question from Samuel Martin talking about you know he was asking about surveillance bias and length through the lens of race specifically but also you know we're talking we're in a moment we're talking about racial disproportionality and the incursion of the child welfare system on black and brown families so when you think about that dream system how does it how does it start getting to some of these big these big as I like to call them mata balls I think one way is to do what you just did Daniel sort of like just talk about them yeah right and I think a lot of times in agencies they don't talk about the big problems because they still don't think technology can

solve them because what they're sitting with right now isn't meeting that need it's you know sometimes I'm talking to an agency and I say okay imagine a universe where you only need to put in demographic data once and I cannot tell you how many size eye rolls and laughs I get I'm like it's just not like filling out a bank application online you don't have to put in your name and address and race and date of birth and all that multiple times so we should be creating systems that meet people again exactly where they are and talk through these things so then that starts to take care of the um data entry issue without them without that being front of mind when you're able to say you put this information is it conveys throughout the life of this case unless you need to change it obviously that is not necessarily something that's in the front of a worker's mind because they have been doing that since time in memoriam right they've just been putting that data in so the concept that I don't have to do that anymore every time I go to this case is sometimes foreign so we just have to have what some people particularly technologists are like this is the most basic discussion I've ever had and I was like you're dealing with some of the most basic technological thinking because you're moving from an information repository to what I call like an action incubator right like the next generation like cwis system should be like action incubators you put in the information you've put in the needs of the child you've put in what the agency believes needs to happen with this child the system is constantly taking that information and comparing and contrasting it to all that it has in it and comes back and gives Molly 20 suggestions Molly may still I mean and should use you know worker intuition you use her noggin as she knocks on her head to say okay these 20 look great but I still have these three that I know of because maybe they're new and you know all these other sorts of things I'm still going to go talk to them but I know I have these 20. and right now lacking anything like that on a very large scale is what draws us to people still going to their notepad and saying I'm going to call you know foster parent smith and foster parent jones and we're going to figure this out versus not realizing that historically that there may be some indicators that this this particular child needs to stay with someone who understands trauma therapy and this kid's had a

lot of trauma even though they're quiet and nice and everything else they still need that kind of thing that may have been put in six months ago into the case the system would have that but in a system that's just a repository and not an action incubator the person it's not front of mind for them so when you have the action incubator it's lifted up and it's right there and you realize that maybe those first five are folks who have experience with children who have this kind of trauma and you're doing it and it happens in a way that the worker isn't running around all five floors of the agency or whatever and talking to 200 people to figure that out it's right there in front of them and they can act on that information to get the best outcome for the child I think this is a great example Daniel of how technology can help us spin out of just comply because child welfare will beat its staff down and to just comply just comply just comply and it's a real it's a real deadener and so I think that's a great example and I'm also moved by your the courage of taking up the matter of race and equity which I think may be the most important conversation our country is having right now and I think in the context of child welfare so here's the thing about there's a way in which it's a demographic fact that child welfare is doling out its services in a way that's falling along color line right we know this from past conversations black and brown children far more likely to be subject of investigation and removed from their families than white children there's a way in which this conversation about race feels to me as one that's about power and about the redistribution of it and this is going to be a bumpy ride for our country because implicit in white privilege is the message power is a thing that you should get and keep for your very own self and don't share it right and get more of it and keep it just for your own and of course once one spins out of then one realizes the only way that power expands is when you redistribute it when you give it away right that's what makes it grow I think as related to how technology can help with this there's something really important about biological parents who are largely powerless in child welfare proceedings right think about it caseworker comes in your home they got all the power and the biological has none of it the a way in which the very technology that you're talking about has the potential to help to redistribute some of that I've

talked to a handful of jurisdictions where once we went to COVID the courts that stayed up and running started doing their hearings on zoom and it turns out when you do a hearing on when you do a meeting on zoom everybody's picture is the same size right and everybody gets a chance to raise their hand and speak and parents are saying for the first time ever they got to speak to the judge they felt represented in a hearing and I think that is a that is a real that's a real game changer for how we're all experiencing parents and I also know part of building these sewage systems everybody's hot on these external portals like how we can be better at sharing information and when they start thinking about external portals they think about like I have a reporter for foster parents and I gotta have a product for service providers and I need a portal for a school teacher and way down to the list is why did a biological parent have access to that portal where they can see what's the state of my case what's the case plan I can submit documents I can chat with my caseworker like I can have this sort of participation I can I can have a share of the power in decision making that's going on with my very own family and I speak I think that's that will help child welfare move into a different way of being and practicing around the color line that it struggles with so mightily I don't know if that resonates with you Daniel is I stumbled through describing it well I mean you talk you talk to I mean I you talk on the ground level so you know you're talking about you know you like to say the transactional levels you're talking about you know what is the interaction between the biological parent and the system technologically speaking so you know I think it's a it's a point well taking if you can if you can you know it's for parents I mean for workers it's about compliance but for parents it's all about compliance so if as opposed to having to come down to the court with some paper signed by somebody in your aaa group or wherever you can you can submit it electronically that gives some power back so I think I think you're right I think also you know my question is you know is also as we change the you know the what did you call them Scooter action incubators and I love that phrase action incubators action incubator so these action incubators I mean I just you know I always think about things through a transparency lens and a and there's a question

we had about this that I think is salient to this point that I'm kind of trying to make and this comes from Nancy Blackwell the ed of the congressional coalition on adoption institute she said when we think about the arc of data integration into child welfare there is some resistance to information gathering integration because it may shine a light on leadership and staff deficiencies how can we reconcile this and so you know I think that gets the part of this question I I'm thinking about it like a journalist always well what is the accountability piece what is the transparency piece and then I think if you've got these action incubators that are gathering and spitting out data in a new way and giving opportunities for new ways of going to what degree does that become public to what degrees does that shame child welfare leaders into better practice or law leaders who have you know done a great a good job on that I mean what is that the macro level a way that technology can be in service of trying to beat back these kind of such glaring disparities that we're talking about here well I think naturally like you can't possibly get better at anything unless you have all of the information needed to act upon so you know I saw the question in the chat and I immediately thought about what if you're [Music] you're sick you want to know if or you need surgery you want to know if your surgeon's a bad surgeon right like that information should be out there but you don't want your hospital hiding that from you necessarily so I look at that much the same way like we have to use the information at hand in order to get better it doesn't help anyone to sort of you know tamp it down and hide it under the rug it eventually comes out because somebody picks up that rug to sweep under it right so we have to put the information out there in a way that is actionable not in a way that is accusatory and I think for so long that because the data in a data repository is so stale and it's not cross-matched with something so it looks like you have three times more kids in care than you should but if you knew that you know drug rehabilitation programs the enrollment in those had gone up four-fold right and you're able to cross-match are some of these children's parents in these programs is this happening and you're able to again just work across systems both physical and computer systems to get the real information because no

one silo of information tells all the story so one silo of how many children women care and another silo of how many you know high trauma needs kids you have in care and another silo of you have this many kids who are in foster care who are absconding from school the three of those separately don't tell you anything but if you had connected data that workers intuitively know that if a child is absconding from school I need to talk to that child about what else is going on and be able to put that into a system that then informs what actions we can take to curb that but again if you only see that one silo then it looks bad on the agency that they've got all these kids who are absconding from school not understanding that they may be absconding from school because they're sneaking back to their you know birth family home to parentify younger siblings so that may need that may need me that family needs more support and lacking all of that sort of cross information in a place that's front that's right there in front of a worker on a screen really holds us back and you made a great point that I just want to touch on before Molly comes on is that I really think COVID has propelled us to a space that we see how care can be provided without needing to be in an office it has forced in many ways visits via zoom hearings via zoom meetings even via zoom in ways that weren't even thought of before that and I think it shows us that a lot of the things we thought were very difficult the collectively not necessarily me but the collective we thought would be difficult in sort of a remote world are actually pretty easy it's probably much easier to schedule a meeting with a parent foster parent youth or you know birth parent via zoom if they have that capability than it is to schedule a time for them to get off work to make it to a visit or for you to come to their home make it to a visit you're able to do those things probably you know much more effectively and just sit and talk where it's not a computer in between the two and someone's typing or there aren't a ton of other things going through someone's mind because they're doing it on their lunch break and all those types of things I think those things have really propelled us forward and forced agencies to see that technology can really be your friend when you use it in a way that really promotes the practice and the needs of folks you're involved with that's so to this question of just a leadership shining light on

leadership I mean what you're basically saying is that through integrated data you know leadership should want that period and should want that out there as well because it can you know help give the context to get the services that are needed for yeah the services and the funds and whatever else is needed it's I'm sure it's super hard to go to the mayor or deputy mayor or whomever and say hey we need more funds for therapy needs for our children when you can't when you can't make that cross-connection it's instead just what you know in your gut because you know it's there but if you're able to show it in black and white and say this is the reason we have this many kids falling into this tranche is we need more supportive services surrounding this particular issue and I think most agencies aren't equipped to do that not because they don't want to so they have to sort of finagle things to get to a space where they're just comfortable giving the numbers I think that's really true and also it just strikes me something about what you said Daniel or this wasn't it was in Nancy's question leadership and staff deficiencies how it might shine a light on that and I've just been long curious about why we don't apply that kind of thinking to child welfare so for instance if anybody participating in this webinar went to a drive through to a fast food restaurant and opened up a burger to find a bug in the bag you all know we would be right back up in that restaurant saying oh what yeah you wouldn't get your money back you'd get another burger you might whatever like you would address it right and we don't have that sensibility on behalf of the customers of child welfare right so like I wonder back to the notion of this portal a portal might be used for older youth in foster care and older youth may be the single greatest source of source of understanding the quality of our foster homes because they understand it from an angle we do not understand it and why do we want to hear from them I was in this foster home for six months and I can take the little survey and rate that foster parent on and how did that foster parent do right I could the parent could do it with a caseworker we don't want to rely on that body of people for information and I think that's the we're afraid of it we're afraid of shining a light on it and I think I think the families being served deserve the opportunity to inform us about how our behavior is affecting them how it's working

for them what are the kinds of things that make a difference and we do that if you do you do on a very small scale because somebody marches in your office to say I like this or I didn't like that but we're not doing it to Scooter's point on any kind of scale where we could make use of that organization to reward the behavior we seek and curb the behaviors we want to change absolutely I i we're running low on time unfortunately but wait I got some questions um that I i just would like to get to here we have one from Katie Adams she says are there any groups gathering information about tech development I think it's important you know for child welfare professionals with a thought of helping agencies stay abreast of what is available so is there you know is there some kind of repository again back to the repository but is there a repository out there where you know the very best in technological developments that are being implemented are seen and available to child welfare child welfare professionals that you know of I don't know of a single place that one would go to say and here's a technical welfare but I would draw your attention to the app store on your smartphone so whatever you're going to your app store to solve for every problem to solve imagine that you're going to pick the best app to do whatever it is you need to do you should approach techno approach child welfare with the same kind of tenacity is I should get the best of something to fix my problem they're translating what we can all find in the app store to the things that need to get solved in child welfare I feel like is a one great place to start and I and I think also the hard part with that question having a direct answer to that question is we talk about child welfare still in a box and that box is either the cyquest or the cwis system there there's an economy sort of lower case e non-monetary to child welfare that we oftentimes don't talk about and that's you know providers we need to make sure our providers have best of breed solutions from provider management to you know whatever else it is and all of these other places that are sort of ancillary to the agency itself but also have support services so if you have outsourced mental health practitioners nurses teachers tutors all of those they also need systems that lift them up because they're dealing with the antiquated systems that agencies have and they haven't had to rise up to really work

with those in a way that has been effective so I i think the next sort of page that needs to be turned is how do we address the economy again lowercase e of child welfare and lift everyone up so that it's almost a straight line you're looking out towards the horizon in a way that like you know progress is on the horizon but right now we're like progress is on the horizon but the rocky mountains are literally right in front of us so we can't even see past them and I think the mountains get lower as we get cwis systems in place and data ontology and data sharing in place and security in place and then we start lifting up those supportive sort of you know economies around our central child welfare agencies well I want to end on this this this um question and thought so it's a it's kind of two together so gabe kraut who says as a former foster youth I would also be very curious to interview the individuals who are participants in a case that's what you were talking about Molly I expect they would have an idea what information may be relevant for their caseworker manager to know contextually what to know contextually that is lost to the shuffle and then we have can we create yelp for foster homes so there is kind of this confluence of you know being able to extract information from the people who are experiencing these systems and then creating something that we could see in our everyday technological world that would that would help I mean I just would just you know reflect on as we close out here and I've got one more a little comment that I want to share because it's a good one but just as we close out you know I mean yelp for foster homes I mean just such a obvious kind of idea you know what are you excited to see in 2021 that's going to you know be just some common sense technological solution coming to child welfare I think less about individual solutions I am looking forward in 2021 child welfare demanding great tech because if you're out there in the field right now you should expect that of yourself you should demand it of the things that are brought to you and be the drabout it like it's time it's time and then from my standpoint I second what Molly says but also sort of the launching of the first generation of cwis systems that will probably go live next year at some point in time I think we will learn a lot from those not only how they were implemented but what information looks like and what action sort

of looks like based on the information that's coming out of them and actually take a strong approach to getting that feedback from the workers the actual workers like the folks out there doing the visits and everything else like how does this really feel and that that's not to say that supervisors and everybody else aren't workers but I think really having that conversation with the folks who are using this day in and day out beyond just the approval processes and some of the back end pieces but how is this working for you doing your actual job because it should not be an encumbrance that should make it easier I'll close this out with this I just want to thank you Molly and Scooter for being a part of this conversation it's always great to see both of your faces people that I've known for some time now and that are doing really good things to try to make sure that on many fronts but on this technological front definitely that there's that there's support for families in a way that that is sensitive and thoughtful and um Tammy Sandoval asked this question will this recording be shared widely because cuz there's a bunch of peeps that need to hear this so the answer tammy is yes it will be shared widely and I think John Kelly has a mind to turn some of this conversation into a podcast as well so we will we will be distributing and sharing this and you could be sure that we will be covering these issues in in our publication and trying our best to stay abreast of what's going on in the research world and when we don't know we can always look to Scooter and Molly to help us help us figure it out so thanks everybody and have wonderful holiday season and a happy 2021.