

The *Future of Work* for Social Services

White Paper
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Governments
are in *crisis*

01

It's time to *rethink* how social programs are delivered

Imagine if...

What if we lived in a world where every child was protected from incidences of abuse and neglect? If adult years equated to the experience of productivity, positive growth, and personal satisfaction? And for citizens needing support, what if safety nets were plentiful and sufficiently equipped with helping professionals eager to respond quickly with the right tools, the right resources, and the right insights to restore stability and empower independence?

The future of work embraces this reality.

Where we are today

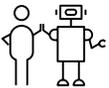
Governments take vested interest in providing safety and support for the well-being of their citizens. The protection of children and the aging, along with assistance provisions for citizens experiencing unemployment, homelessness, substance abuse, and mental illness are well-supported missions in civilized societies. Social program spend globally is on average 20 percent of government GDP budgets.¹ In 2019, however, governments are in crisis. Rapidly escalating numbers seeking government assistance, limited resources, inefficient service delivery systems, long-term government dependency, and worker burnout are forcing governments to rethink how social program services are delivered.

The need to think differently

Prior to joining IBM, I spent over 25 years as a social worker in child welfare and juvenile justice. I was passionate about my work in both private and public sector. Early on, I aligned with my clients' frustrations in their attempts to apply the same solutions to their problems, yet always expecting a different result. I realized quickly that in order to influence long-term change, I had to think differently. I had to think about the people involved, the processes in place, and the data available to create a service plan that was different than what had been unsuccessful before.

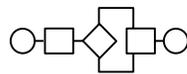
While I now work for IBM which is a company best known for technology, my goal is the same: to think differently. Yet this time I am examining the people, processes, and data surrounding government service delivery systems. And this time, I am envisioning the future of work as technology enters the equation.

IBM's Future of Work framework provides a glimpse into how industries are starting to transform their work environments through available technologies. Data is being leveraged in a more dynamic way to deliver deeper insight. Workflows are becoming more efficient and employee talent optimized. Widely used AI and other exponential technologies are leading the way for this change in all industries. By viewing current human service delivery systems through this same lens, we will be able to rethink how social programs are delivered and imagine what the future of work for social services will look like.



Talent

Optimizing talent, with human+machine collaboration



Process

Improving workflows to boost efficiency and speed



Technology

Harnessing the power of exponential technologies, such as AI and IoT



Data

Using data to generate better business outcomes

Understanding the people, data, and process in social programs

Social workers are at the very heart of public sector social service delivery. They are responsible for helping individuals, families, and communities with the resources and support they need to address challenging personal and social issues. For each individual and family member on their caseload, social workers are required to collect, maintain, and analyze a considerable amount of data and personal information.

Governments depend on social workers to be the compassionate and committed professionals to support social program service delivery models. Yet, workforce instability within the profession is severely threatening the quality of care and provision of services for citizens in need. In the United States alone, jurisdictions experience up to 90 percent of frontline worker turnover each year.²

90%

of frontline worker turnover each year.

You might be asking: Why should we care?

There is a direct correlation between workforce stability, case load size, client outcomes, and worker satisfaction. When worker recruitment and retention is high, worker performance and client outcomes are high. When worker recruitment and retention declines, job morale declines and those needing help suffer as a result.

Around the world, the challenges are being recognized:³

- In Japan, the workforce shortage significantly impacts the amount of support and services provided to the world's largest aging population—leaving many without care and assistance.³
- In Canada, the increased attention to serving those with mental health needs has caused an increased need for social workers to provide services—yet many suffer alone unable to find adequate services.
- In the UK, millions of pounds are overspent on social work contractors to serve families, as recruiting and retaining permanent social workers has become a challenge.⁴

The dependency upon worker retention and client outcomes is particularly poignant in child welfare programs where the stakes are high. Worker turnover in this service line has a devastating impact on a child's chance to be reunited with their family or to be adopted. The data speaks for itself:⁵

Case worker turnover - Adoption and reunification rates

1 Case worker	75%	Adoption Reunification
2 Case workers	17.5%	Adoption Reunification
4 Case workers	2%	Adoption Reunification
5 Case workers	0.1%	Adoption Reunification

For the future of work, current people, processes, technology, and data will need to be examined. Exposures will no doubt include further examination of the experiences of the 'people' in social services. Not only the experiences of the citizens receiving social program services, but the experiences of the social workers providing those services. If we can improve the experience for the social workers, the trickle-down effect of increased job satisfaction will result in worker retention which can then provide consistency and best of service provisions for those in need.

Future of Work

The business environment that comes to life when business processes are run by technology and merely supported by people.

Technology can
make a difference
on the well being of
vulnerable citizens

02

It's time to *act now*

Harnessing the power of technology

Can technology make an immediate impact on the well-being of vulnerable citizens and improve the efficiency of the social workers that are charged with their care and safety? Can we decrease the burden associated with government interventions and speed up access to benefits for vulnerable populations in their most urgent time of need? The answer is a resounding YES. Despite cumbersome government regulations, outdated systems, and redundant repetitive tasks, there are technology and automation best practices available today with IBM and our technology partners that can make a profound impact on vulnerable individuals, families, and children in need if we harness the power of available technology.

My work at IBM has exposed me to the promises of artificial intelligence, machine learning, and completely new interactions between humans and machines that result in deeper insights and improved outcomes. Our own CEO, Ginni Rometty, has stressed that technology, particularly the use of artificial or augmented intelligence technology, should 'have a clear purpose' and 'should be in service of humankind.... to extend what you and I can do and to extend the human capability.' From my experiences with clients and our automation experts here at IBM, I feel compelled to ask those in social services to ACT NOW and take advantage of proven technology that is readily available today.

Digital Worker

A software-based laborer with skills. For example, a skill a digital worker might have the ability to capture and import handwritten notes.

Envision the Future of Work: humans + digital worker support in social services

IBM is creating a new workforce of Digital Workers. IBM's Digital Workers are capable of independently operating much of a process and working seamlessly with their human counterparts to get work done. Digital workers are designed to be industry specific and are aligned to workflows, possess specific industry skills, and have the capabilities to execute pre-defined tasks to completion. In this new Hybrid Workforce, digital workers are capable of independently and autonomously operating significant parts of an end to end process, checking in with their human worker counterparts as needed. In government social service delivery, digital workers can provide the essential support necessary to deliver exceptional experiences for workers, citizens, and families.

Wouldn't it be great if social workers had access to automated digital co-workers to support aspects of their job role so they can be freed up to do what only they can do: help the most vulnerable citizens?

Social program benefits eligibility, foster care home approval and placements, and research gathering across ecosystems are just a few examples of processes where a digital worker can provide support in social program delivery. By offloading the repetitive or administrative work, the digital workers free the human social workers to conduct more thorough professional assessments, make critical decisions, and empathize with specific citizen needs to offer the best customized services for improving outcomes.

“Our child welfare system has had longstanding challenges with a sustainable workforce. I think we owe it to the vulnerable families in our communities to re-assess work tasks and, through innovation, protect the time a social worker has with their clients. If this new digital worker could create more freedom for social workers to truly impact lives, then I think it is time to make a pivot towards a new ‘normal’ for child welfare.”

Dr. Jessica Pryce

Director of The Florida
Institute for Child Welfare

Changing the game

Studies support the fact that frontline workers in social program service delivery spend up to 80 percent of their day executing administrative tasks, leaving less than 20 percent of their day for client facing activities.⁶ Helping children and families in need often provides the greatest job satisfaction for social workers but they spend an overwhelming amount of

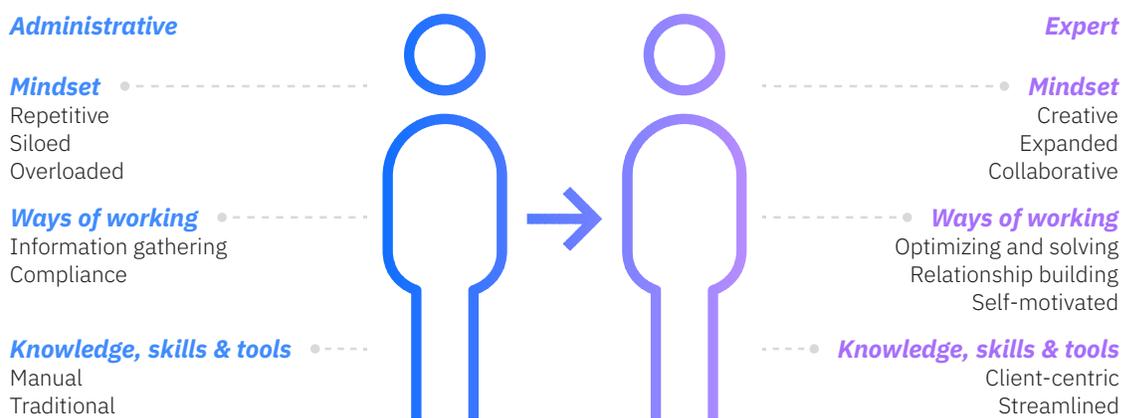
time on adhering to lengthy compliance processes, managing the vast number of participants in an individual's eco-system, and administrative tasks. Inefficiencies surrounding paper and pen documentation tasks, complex data entry systems, and manual execution of gathering information from those involved with each client are easily overwhelming. Entering a profession to help people yet becoming overwhelmed with administrative tasks is one of the largest contributors to the attrition challenges with social workers.

80%

of their day executing administrative tasks.

Digital workers are software-based, readily available, and equipped with proven technology that exists today. They are pre-trained with specific skills and knowledge for a specific process, role, and industry, to help “take the robot out of the human” as we say. Technologies like Robotic Process Automation enabled with cognitive skills like optical character recognition, natural language processing, speech recognition, and data entry can make a significant and almost immediate positive impact in the whole social services domain. The intent of digital workers is not to replace human workers, but to augment human worker roles for optimal work-effort outcomes.

By implementing digital workers to assist social workers, we can free up the human professionals to spend more time in the field completing expert work. This means more time spent making impacts in the lives of their clients and less time and effort spent on tasks that are unnecessarily manual and time consuming. Removing the repetitive tasks, administrative tasks, and some of the tasks associated with a client's eco-system will enable a significant shift in what a social worker's role will look like tomorrow.



The new model of human and digital workers in social services

Shifting the repetitive nature of the work to digital workers that run the processes and bring humans into the loop should

be the new way of working for public sector agencies and commercial companies alike. When our IBM Automation Leader Gene Chao talks about the “Future of Work”, he talks about the fact that today we are in a world where humans run the processes supported by technology but we are rapidly moving into a world where technology runs the processes supported by people.

Using existing technology from IBM and our ecosystem partners, our clients can establish new ways of working to maximize the expertise of their employees, lower operational costs, increase regulatory compliance, offer new products and services, and improve the experiences for employees and the citizens they serve. In the realm of child welfare, for example, these digital workers can accelerate and improve the welfare benefits of children and families in need.

Taking this model and our best practices around the Digital Workforce, the model below is an illustration of how the humans and digital workers would interact specifically in the child welfare service line:

Human + Digital Advocate

Pre trained workers with ability to learn new skills



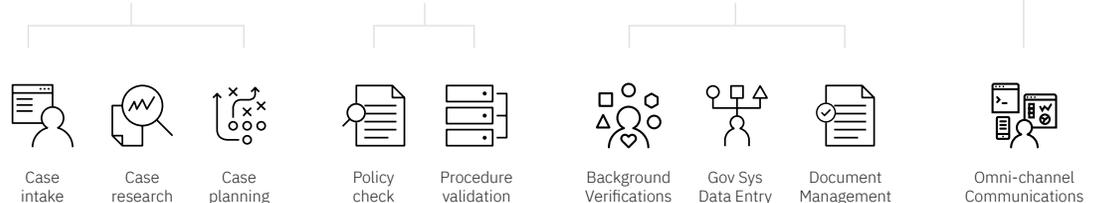
Digital Worker

Pre trained workers with ability to operate workflows and learn skills



Digital Skills

Ability to execute a series of tasks within a process



Act now

The reality is that government social programs have continued to do things the same way for a long time and expecting different outcomes. If we expect to attract younger workers to government job roles and retain satisfied employees long term, we must examine the current people, processes, technology, and data collected in social programs. We need to envision the way that work gets done, how services get delivered, and optimize the work experience for the social worker. Digital workers and the underlying technology are readily available today and offers a very compelling capability

for social services. Digital workers are not dependent upon large system overhauls, new interfaces, or large-scale transformations. Digital workers use the same systems that their human counterparts do today they just do so faster and with no errors. Digital workers never get tired, never call in sick, are not afraid to ask someone for help or clarification, can process more tasks, and reach out to more ecosystem partners than any human social worker can or ever will. If we can think big but start small with digital workers, government agencies can immediately realize benefits and can more rapidly impact the lives of the individuals, families, and children being served today.

Resources

¹ OECD, "Social Expenditure Database," 2018, <https://www.oecd.org/social/expenditure.htm>

² Child Welfare Information Gateway, "Worker Turnover," <https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/workforce/retention/turnover/>

³ Quartz, "The Future of Aging: The most important job in the world is one no one wants anymore," December, 12, 2018, <https://qz.com/1490065/the-most-important-job-in-the-world-is-one-no-one-wants-anymore/>

⁴ The Guardian, "Councils spend millions on agency social workers amid recruiting crisis," April, 7, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2019/apr/07/social-work-recruiting-woes-see-councils-pay-millions-to-agencies>

⁵ Florida TaxWatch, "Challenges Facing Florida's Community-Based Child Welfare System," 2015, <https://flchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/TaxWatch.pdf>

⁶ Locum Today, "Social workers spend 80% of time on admin," May, 28, 2018, <http://locumtoday.co.uk/article.php?s=2018-05-29-social-workers-spend-80-of-time-on-admin#.XXJgC6l7k6U>



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About the author

An orphan child. A foster youth. An adopted teenager. Leah has been all three. Her younger years of life were tightly woven into the state child welfare system. She often wondered why somebody wasn't doing anything to improve experiences for children in care. Then the realization hit her at the age of 14: SHE was that someone.

Leah obtained her MSW from Florida State University and spent years working as a social worker in public and private sectors, primarily in the areas of foster care, adoption, and juvenile justice. Engaging with children and families in crisis commonly included deep work in the mental health, substance abuse, economic services, medical, and criminal justice space, as well. Today she leverages her extensive knowledge in social programs and in technology to assist agencies in creating the experiences they are seeking for their social workers, for their clients, and for their business.

**For more information on this technology,
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