

THE INTERSECTION OF SOFTWARE AND STRENGTHS: USING INTERNET TECHNOLOGY AND CASE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE TO ASSIST STRENGTH-BASED PRACTICE

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Abstract: The focus of this investigation is the helping professionals working within American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) communities. This article looks at how innovative technology—in the form of automated case management software and Internet connectivity—can assist effective implementation of Strength-based Practice and agency services within tribal courts and the many other helping agencies that serve AI/AN populations. We seek to expand practice knowledge by reviewing the benefits that this software and Internet connectivity can offer to agency operations and exploring how they can assist case management services.

INTRODUCTION

This article will first review Strength-based Practice (SBP) as it applies to courts and helping agencies on American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) lands. The second task is to outline SBP before we turn to an examination of case management, a dominant casework practice across many AI/AN agencies. Finally, we investigate how new technology, in the form of automated case management software and the digital interconnectivity of agencies (via cloud-based or common data platforms), can assist and improve the application of SBP. As this software and Information Technology (IT)¹ are relatively new and constantly improving, there is not a sizeable body of work to build upon. Therefore, we offer a descriptive report from years of direct observation—with the hope of further contributing to a topic that has not experienced robust investigation.

¹ Information Technology (IT) is defined as the study, design, development, implementation, and support or management of computer-based information systems. IT deals with the use of electronic computers and computer software to convert, store, protect, process, transmit, and securely retrieve information (Kajan, 2002).

Improving the application of SBP calls for a beginning definition for this type of collaborative practice. Saleebey (2002) notes that SBP is a focus on the possibility and potential of clients, rather than an exclusive view of their failures and flaws. It is the effort to assess and mobilize clients' strengths (e.g., talents, knowledge, capacities, resources) in the service of achieving their goals and visions to create a better quality of life.

To frame this introduction, we turn to the six terms used in journalism—who, what, where, when, how and why. The focus of this investigation is the management and staff members working within Native communities (who). This article looks at case management within these agencies, with a specific examination of the functions and benefits of SBP (what). The setting encompasses tribal courts and the many helping agencies that serve AI/AN populations (where). (We specifically mention tribal courts as we find courts frequently lead the way for budget expenditures and early adoption of new technology, yet we are interested in all helping agencies across an AI/AN community.)

This review also examines innovative technology available to AI/AN agencies at the writing of this review (when). The critical juncture of this investigation is how the use of technology—in the form of automated case management software and Internet connectivity (how)—can assist in the effective agency practice of SBP (why).

Competent delivery of the SBP approach requires both a mindset of how helpers seek to understand clients (the viewing) and a skill set of how we practice (the doing), which combine to empower practice (Clark, 2010). We believe technology can enhance this process, with an added third dimension—a tool set—of implements or devices that can expand and improve the delivery of SBP. For example, a strength-based assessment instrument, when used correctly, provides balanced information from clients regarding both resources and deficits. In similar fashion, case management software and linking of helping agencies via a common data platform can enhance SBP in a variety of ways:

- Allowing staff members to gather and collate information with other helping agencies to better understand clients
- Improving continuity of care that fits clients' needs and schedules
- Creating pathways to increase clients' involvement in services
- Improving communication among all parties by sharing information that is more current, applicable, and accurate
- Increasing the efficiency of SB assessments

- Offering guides (e.g., text boxes and pop-up windows) within the program to channel staff members to more client-centered case planning and service monitoring.

It is also important to note the assistance this technology provides is not Native-specific but would apply equally to Western and AI/AN helping agencies. We seek to expand practice knowledge by reviewing these benefits and call for more research with AI/AN communities that are starting these technology initiatives.

SBP

SBP (Clark, 1998, 2009), as practiced in tribal courts and AI/AN helping agencies, is drawn from numerous positive models of potential, optimism, and possibility, including the Strengths Perspective (Saleebey, 1992, 2013), Resilience (Wolin & Wolin, 1993), Optimism (Seligman, 1991), Hardiness (Kobasa, 1979; Pearsall, 2003), Empowerment (Duran & Duran, 1995; Leigh, 1998), Motivational Interviewing (Miller & Rollnick, 1991; Stinson & Clark, in press), and solution-focused approaches (Berg, 1994; DeJong & Berg, 1998; Miller, Hubble, & Duncan, 1996). SBP is not a collection of techniques to apply “on” someone; it is the efforts or goals one would strive for “with” another. It has more to do with what clients have than with what they lack. It considers how people have been successful rather than how they have failed. This approach works to resolve presenting problems, but does so through a focus on potential rather than pathology.

Pertinent to this article, the application of the SBP to Native cultures presented by Waller and Yellow Bird (2002) has merit, particularly because some of the strengths and virtues of Native cultures have long been used against them and reframed as deficits.² For example, Native people have been stereotyped as suspicious and mistrusting by Western business leaders who seek to start commercial ventures with tribes (Keown, 2010). Yet the genocide, ethnocide, and broken agreements AI/ANs have suffered from colonialization lead Waller and Yellow Bird (2002) to classify so-called “suspicion and mistrust” as a strength—a healthy response that enabled Native people to survive the relentless onslaught of the dominant culture (p. 53).

² In their 2002 book chapter, Waller and Yellow Bird describe 12 Native strengths: resistance, sovereignty, separation, positive cultural identity, tribal colleges, suspicion and mistrust, intertribal celebrations, kinship-mutual assistance-distributive justice, traditional healing and spirituality, storytelling and legends, humor, and political activism.

SBP Principles

Six essential principles guide and drive SBP (Clark, 2013):

1. Expect that clients have the strengths and resources for positive change. Problems are generally why clients find their way to helpers, but fixating on problems will not solve them. We must focus on strengths, competencies, and beliefs because it is these assets that will finish the job.

2. All views matter but clients' worldviews matter more. Pay attention to clients' worldviews and cultural contexts. There are many ways to look at a situation, but utilizing clients' views improves outcomes. Over 40 years of motivational research (Clark, 2015) suggest positive outcomes are improved when we include clients' views and allow for more of their participation in designing their case plans. We would do well to stay mindful of a statement made by one of the developers of the solution-focused treatment model, Berg (1994): "Stay close to the client's view of the problem and possible routes to solution, since it is he or she who will be asked to do the necessary changing" (p. 36).

3. Engagement and establishing the client/staff alliance are critical. Even the best approaches will fail if clients do not want to participate. One should start with client engagement, or forget starting at all. SBP places a great emphasis on establishing such a relationship. Why? Treatment research is voluminous and resolute on this subject: good relationships lead to good outcomes. Of the many factors that contribute to treatment outcomes, one of the most important is the therapeutic alliance (Duncan, Miller, Wampold, & Hubble, 2010). Spanning multiple helping disciplines, over 1,000 empirical studies have found evidence that the therapeutic alliance facilitates positive change outcomes (Orlinsky, Grawe, & Parks, 1994).

4. Assessments must be balanced. Hodge, Limb, and Cross (2009) note that, while AI/AN cultures exhibit rich tribal diversity, one theme woven throughout AI/AN traditions and beliefs is harmony and balance. This theme parallels the call from SBP to ensure that a balanced view of clients (strengths and successes as well as problems and failures) is assessed. It is critical to understand that any staff member can be completely accurate about clients, yet be completely unbalanced. One can assess all of the flaws and past failures and wind up with an accurate assessment of only half of the person under review if his/her strengths, skills, and past successes are not been assessed or reported. According to many traditional cultures, an individual who is out of internal harmony and balance can experience sickness (Duran & Duran, 1995). It would seem that when assessments are out of balance and incorporate only deficits, failures, and flaws, the resulting services might induce a form of illness as well.

5. Transition problems to “wants.” If we want to improve motivation, then we need to turn presenting problems into clients’ “wants” rather than considering only clients’ needs. Assessing and setting case goals based on hopes and wants will induce clients’ intrinsic motivation. This approach calls us to focus on possibility, keeping an eye on a better future, and the creation of justifiable optimism, which all promote movement toward clients’ aspirations. A diagnosis or an assessment should not become a verdict or a sentence. We do not know the upper limits of any client’s abilities to grow and change. Clients would be better served if we kept a focus on their promise and possibility.

6. Every environment is full of resources. AI/AN communities can be viewed as having multiple problems, or as Truer (2012) reports, they can be viewed more accurately as storehouses and reservoirs of energy, ideas, talents, and tools. For every young mother who wants to finish a GED or start a class at a community college, there is an older woman close by who could watch her children. Waller and Yellow Bird (2002) note that professional helpers are not always the first line of defense in many communities where informal helping systems are accessed. A focus on collaborating with informal helpers can be time well spent for staff members working in AI/AN agencies.

CASE MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE

Working with clients has become increasingly complicated as helping staff often are called on to manage social, medical, behavioral, and financial issues. Case management software is a computer program that seeks to simplify and improve case management tasks and duties, especially related to record keeping. Case management is a collaborative process in which a staff member assesses, plans, implements, coordinates, monitors, and evaluates the options and services required to meet clients’ health and human service needs. It is characterized by advocacy, communication, and resource management and promotes quality and cost-effective interventions and outcomes (Commission for Case Manager Certification, n.d.). Case management software has been available for over 15 years and usually contains electronic abilities for data entry, client tracking, data analysis by electronic review of records, collection and collation of evidence and outcome data, and communication and collaboration with others.

Case management software can be expensive, and technology often advances dramatically every few years. Finding efficient and effective software that ends up as a right fit for AI/AN agencies can prove elusive. It's important for agency staff to come prepared and know what is available to find the best options and features for their specific needs. There are great differences in software costs, coupled with a variety of hardware options. Space constraints do not allow an adequate review of hardware and software types and prices; however, we list some new features in case management software from the IT field to review. This list—efficiency, simplicity, security, connectivity, collaboration, and effectiveness—is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather to build a knowledge base of options.

Efficiency

Staff members are happy to tell anyone that software has automated repetitive and routine tasks—freeing up time for more important and complex tasks. For example, case management software can enable one-time data entry rather than having to repeatedly enter the same data. Case information entries (e.g., name, birthdate, address, phone number) populate and fill in every field wherever needed. If data fields require changing (i.e., new address, additional case information), then the staff member merely enters the revised information once and the software updates that information wherever it is listed elsewhere. Staff members and agency administrators can be assured that case files are current and accurate across all forms and fields, which would be hard to guarantee with paper files.

Simplicity

Information can be accessed with ease, even with cases that have a long agency history and are extremely large. The newest technology boasts the ability to move to any point, section, or page within a large case file through four clicks or less of a desktop mouse. Additionally, with cloud-based technology, there are no tools to load locally. The IT server (where the software is housed) may be 100% web based, requiring only Internet access and a common browser. Some AI/AN communities do not want any community data stored beyond their borders. In that case, an IT server can also be housed locally to keep all data on site. The simplicity with which a staff member can send or receive information—as compared to a traditional paper/manila file folder system—defies comparison.

Security

Speak about tribal records being stored “off-reservation” in cloud-based servers and many administrators get nervous. Yet a full understanding of digital files finds they are *more secure than paper files*. Digital files are electronic files that appear on a computer screen, as opposed to hard-copy paper files. Digital files can be printed to become paper files and paper files can be electronically scanned and stored on a computer to become digital files.

Digital files are fully HIPPA compliant and offer greater protection of client confidentiality than paper files. Data are encrypted and password protected. Who can access data, and at what level, are determined by agency administrators. For example, some staff members can only enter data but never withdraw data. Case management files operate with the same security as financial records used by the banking industry. It is also critical to consider that most unauthorized viewing of files, or outright theft of files, is done by agency staff members inside the building. With case management software, a digital file that is opened is forever stamped with the time/day/name of the person who opened it. Anyone who opens a file is identified, even after business hours. With digital files, there is never a time that “no one is around” to illegally view or copy materials. Paper files stored in filing cabinets or records rooms do not enjoy this level of security.

Connectivity

Case management software, placed on computers at different agencies and connected by a common data platform (see Figure 1), finally represent the ability to knock down professional “silos.” Client information can be shared easily within an agency or across community agencies, allowing for “open-but-safe” exchange of information that breaks through the frustration and inefficiency of proprietary turf wars. This ability to connect helpers and agencies reminds us that resources are only valuable if people can access them. Access is agreed upon with signed “release of information” forms and memorandums of understanding between departments or community agencies. This software can socialize silos for more effective sharing of information. Many agencies start with just what they currently share with neighboring agencies via paper (e.g., reports, releases of information, forms). Being able to share by the push of a button what in the past had to be mailed or hand delivered is a great improvement.

Collaboration

New technology can link agencies together to share information, replacing a hit-or-miss “grapevine society” with a more complete “digital society.” Protocols are put into place—with proper authorization—to share data by organized methods. Critical information about clients, as well as information about community services and resources, can be pooled. Gaps in services can be detected and duplication of services can be corrected, with quicker response time and less wasted effort.

Effectiveness

Agencies seek more uniformity in their services. Agency directors hope that evidence-based practices, risk assessments, and other approaches will be applied consistently from office to office. The odds of uniform delivery are increased with the use of software. Text boxes and pop-up windows can be designed to appear on computer screens, reminding staff members to include necessary information or ask critical questions. Software can help guide these efforts without surrendering human decision making. This software also can harness the power of feedback to allow needed corrections in a case plan, which can be made available through in-the-moment feedback (Miller & Tilsen, 2011), instead of requiring departments to wait to gain feedback about service outcomes until the services have ended.

Customization

Customization means modifying software to tailor forms, tribal logos, and procedures to suit the agency that purchases the software. For example, the look and format of a child protective services report form might differ dramatically from one AI/AN community to the next. Agencies do not have to leave behind important and well-used tools and methods, but must ensure that vendors can move forms, charts, and databases into their software systems. Forcing staff members to learn to use a new form, simply because the vendor could not customize the existing one, is both poor service and culturally dismissive.

Finding customizable case management software (i.e., telling computers what to do, rather than using out-of-the-box software that was developed away from AI/AN communities and that leaves the computer telling staff members what to do) is key to efficiency and ease. Is the software built by Native developers who have worked in AI/AN agencies (“process first”) rather than by technicians from Silicon Valley (“product first”)? Grandbois (2005) notes that

many Western-trained practitioners and advocates often are not prepared to provide culturally competent services for AI/AN people that respect their belief systems and history. We find this problem can occur with the products and services of Western software companies as well. More Native software companies, staffed by AI/AN personnel, recently have emerged and are working to fit their products to agency processes—so critical for customization and buy-in. The Spirit Lake Nation (Fort Totten, ND) and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians (Belcourt, ND) are two examples of tribes that have researched and secured software companies staffed with Native developers and IT technicians. It is suggested that AI/AN communities that are interviewing software vendors consider screening providers about staff composition and assess the company's values.

How Case Management Software Can Assist SBP

The first author has provided training in SBP for over 18 years, delivering programs to agencies located both off and on Native lands. Staff members often left these training sessions feeling energized and eager to implement SBP upon their return to work. Yet tracking research in post-training follow up (Clark, 2008) found that changes were not always achieved. Out of several considerations that blocked implementation, one obstacle seemed consistent—the policies and procedures of the agencies did not support SBP. The individual had changed but the environment had not.

To review how technology might help the integration of SBP into agency services, we need to examine the common day-to-day efforts of agency personnel. There are six standard case management functions that are common to all casework efforts: engagement, linking, assessment, case planning/implementation, advocacy, and monitoring. If case management software and Internet connectivity can increase staff efficiency and effectiveness, it would be evident within these case management duties.

Six Case Management Functions

1. Engagement

To what extent can software “engage” a staff member? A first benefit involves software's ability to help with the mountains of paperwork—an oft-cited contributor to job dissatisfaction and staff burnout (Miller, Hubble, & Mathieu, 2015). Buy-in is quick when staff members realize how software can reduce workloads. High-volume, routine, repetitive tasks that require extensive paperwork are the very tasks with which software helps. Paperwork time is reduced, thereby

increasing face-to-face time with clients. For support staff who work in records management, feelings of effectiveness and job satisfaction are substantially increased (M. Dennis, personal communication, November 24, 2014).

Training to use the new software is another important feature for engagement. After purchasing expensive software, many agency directors have been frustrated to find staff members reluctant to use it. Onsite training that uses simple, easy-to-understand terms and is based on incremental steps can help those who are anxious about a computer's complexity.

When onsite trainers leave, are "job aids" left behind? These aids are often paper copies that offer step-by-step instructions for a multitude of tasks, coupled with audiovisual libraries full of short how-to videos that offer round-the-clock reference help for problem solving and skill building—and encouraging engagement and confidence.

2. Linking

If the system is housed on a network, then accessibility can extend to others, beyond the person to whom the case was assigned. A network means all computers within an agency communicate with one another and become an agency filing cabinet. Digital files placed on this shared system can be edited, as long as the person has the authorization and clearance to access them.

Security is tight. Staff members' levels of access will depend on what actions they will perform in shared files. Making files publicly available to a shared system does not mean they are available to anyone at any time. Digital files still comply with HIPPA conditions, and all necessary release of information forms are still signed. Many can add data to a digital file, but only select individuals can view a file and far fewer, with the highest authorization, can take data from a file. Consider an agency that performs drug-screening urinalysis for referred clients. A staff member can be authorized to immediately enter the results of that morning's test into clients' files, but s/he would not be allowed to view the files. Sharing agreements, access trees, and authorizations for who can access which files are well planned, agreed upon, and very strict.

Considering the term *linking* ushers in the issue of Internet connectivity. The terms "digital exclusion" or "digital isolation" can be applied to many AI/AN agencies. There are two issues related to isolation. First, many areas across Indian Country lack Internet access (Sullivan & Louten, 2013). For AI/AN agencies that lack Internet connectivity, there are versions of case management software that can be loaded directly onto staff computers. The second issue speaks to agencies that are connected to the Internet, yet still remain isolated from each other. In these

instances, staff members may be connected to the larger world via the Internet within their homes, but at work, lack any connection to agencies that are located down the street or even with a co-worker in the office right next door.

This problem is further compounded by the fact that, once connected, agencies often lack the openness to share data with other organizations. Schoech (2010) reports, “In larger agencies, data often resides in outdated remnant systems that serve their intended purpose but hinder connectivity because data is isolated in unlinked information silos” (p. 10). Landsbergen & Wolken (2001) point out that, due to the lack of mutual trust among agencies, each agency often ends up collecting its own information about the same subject. It seems agencies are very eager to view information from their neighbors, but seldom want to share their own data with others.

Here is an important intersection of SBP and case management software. SBP calls on organizations to begin a culture of sharing by viewing knowledge as belonging to the collective good, rather than as proprietary pieces of data (Menon & Brown, 2001). Historically, the power of Native cultures was found in their ability to share information and link with each other. Waller and Yellow Bird (2002) cite “kinship, mutual assistance and distributive justice” as one of the 12 strengths of Native peoples while reminding us, “In many Indigenous societies, human beings are inextricably interconnected through a complex web of relationships, including relatives by blood, clan, tribe and adoption” (p. 55). It would seem that, to find our collective strength, we who work in AI/AN agencies are called to reclaim our culture, or—put another way—go “back to the future.”

Aside from individual networks within any AI/AN agency, all helping agencies can be linked across an AI/AN community via a digital platform. Figure 1 represents a reservation linked via a digital platform.

The various issues and benefits related to sharing data are too broad for the scope of this article. For the purposes of this review, we note three important reasons to share information: 1) coordinating and integrating client services, 2) overcoming distance and rural isolation, and 3) gathering the most current and accurate information for client assessments and case planning, which comes from all who have knowledge of and contact with the case.

Figure 1
Example of a Reservation Linked by a Digital Platform



3. Assessment

SBP reminds us that assessments are one snapshot of a person's life. They are never to be thought of as the total sum of a client. They remain important efforts that guide case plans and calculate services. Case management software and Internet connectivity offer two benefits—standardized assessment and more current and comprehensive case information to improve decision making.

Standardized assessment ensures that the same assessment instrument is used for all clients (standardized) and is accurate, measuring what it is supposed to measure (valid). Also, it should make no difference whether clients are assessed in the morning or afternoon, one day or the next, or by one worker or another (reliable).

Case management software helps the process because staff members avoid repetitive data entry and clients do not have to undergo similar assessments at multiple agencies. Repetitive entry of the same data has plagued staff members, but it can also lead to inaccurate reports from clients. Research shows that, the more clients have to fill out the same assessment form, the more inaccuracies result (M. Dennis, personal communication, November 24, 2014). With an agency using a common data platform, the client data could be readily available (with client permission) and automatically filled in to the new form, so staff members at the next agency only have to ask assessment questions that are specific to their field.

There is a second benefit to strength-based assessment assisted by case management software and Internet connectivity. Edwards et al. (2009) state, "There is a move away from opinion-based decision-making to decision-making that is grounded in evidence" (p. 554) When

agencies have the ability to collaborate in real time on clients they share, it can help overcome the two greatest obstacles to successful assessment, inaccurate and incomplete information. Simply put, more accurate and complete information that assesses both risk and protective factors (deficits and strengths) allows for more effective decision making for developing the case plan. In the absence of automation, we ask staff members to gather such data by “trying harder” in a manual fashion, or by going door-to-door between agencies and often across communities—all considered weak responses to a large problem.

4. Case planning/Implementation

Phillips and Berman (1995) note that case management—assisted by software technology—increased staff members’ ability to match clients’ identified needs. It also improved service coordination while increasing the number of relevant referrals. Consider a staff member logged into a AI/AN community network where he or she can access local resources, by topic, in a format that is both community wide and up to date. If an agency changes its criteria for admission, has new hours, or has relocated, staff members know of these changes in real time. Phillips and Berman (1995) add, “A social service agency cannot effectively apply case management as a service delivery system without reviewing, evaluating and reprogramming its information processing capability” (p. 89).

A common data platform connecting agencies across a community can increase the amount of available client information to enable more accurate decisions and illuminate ways to proceed. Think of puzzle pieces dumped in disarray (manual information gathering by one individual), and then consider the completed puzzle picture gleaned from a shared file.

5. Advocacy

Advocacy is partnering with and working in support of clients and ensuring choice to find all the options available. Advocacy is realized when agencies make use of case management software and Internet connectivity, which can “advocate” for multiple parties—clients, staff members, agency supervisors, and agencies themselves (as seen from the perspective of agency administrators).

Advocacy-Client. Case management software using Internet connectivity can now allow a client information portal. There is much help to be realized by providing persons in treatment with access to information from sections of their files. Resources are only helpful if people can access them. A client information portal can allow clients to communicate with their providers

and monitor their case plans. The portal can be constructed as a one-stop site for helping them stay on track. It changes the old system of “who you know” to a new system of “you can know” to increase clients’ empowerment. With this portal, clients can:

- Check next appointment time, agency hours, location/address, and any particular building information to help increase the success of first visits;
- Check their treatment status (intake, evaluation, inpatient treatment);
- Monitor their own attendance record;
- Receive special notices from their case manager or enable other resource staff members to post messages to their account;
- Check on the due date of assignments and agency requirements;
- Check financial issues and balances due, with the ability to pay balances online;
- Print documents (e.g., 12-step attendance forms, schedules for recovery meetings and parenting classes, job openings);
- Schedule appointments online, and request services (e.g., a checklist with a send button for those who need a ride, child care, food, housing, employment).

As with all digital file procedures, the types of information that can be accessed (permissions, authorizations, open vs. controlled) are governed by the agency. We use what we can to leverage clients’ connectivity and inclusion. Many clients own smart phones, or can borrow a phone or computer to check their file.

Advocacy-Staff. Staff members are supported by time-saving features that allow more efficiency. Paperwork duties are reduced considerably where descriptive data are entered only once and then auto-updated to other sections of a file. Software helps overburdened workers stay organized, with monthly, weekly, and daily calendars popping up to note pending assignments and deadlines. Most software programs have home screens that quickly display all pertinent data. Staff members also are able to look over their full caseloads with a summary screen, with reminders and cues for cases that are missing forms, notes, or other mandatory paperwork.

Case management software also can be utilized as a strength-based tutorial. As described earlier, cues and text boxes can pop up to help staff members stay focused on important efforts for SBP. For example, Saleebey (2002) notes that one such effort is assessing client needs—and doing so *from clients’ own perspectives*—honoring their ideas and requests wherever possible. In this example, a pop-up window can remind a staff member that a client had requested an employment referral, acting as a prompt to ensure the staff member completes this task. There is versatility to this software feature, as pop-up windows can be programmed to help coach and

guide staff members to increase fidelity. When high caseloads and hectic schedules overload staff members, a pop-up window's ability to remind them of needed efforts or upcoming events can ease distractions and reduce mistakes. It is important to note that these prompts suggest directions, offer advice, and guide efforts—but they do not take discretion away from staff members or force decisions upon them.

Advocacy-Supervisors. These at-a-glance features also are available to line staff supervisors, who can instantly bring up any staff member's caseload to assess if casework is completed and files are up to date. Their drive to ensure staff accountability by keeping an eye on task completion is simplified. For their department needs, they can evoke automated assessments and generate weekly, monthly, quarterly, or annual statistics to substantiate objectives and goals.

Advocacy-Administrators/Agency. Software can generate reports with ease from all case data to assist awards, grant requirements, reporting requirements, and community needs. Such software also improves the ability to gain needed resources. Administrators can quantify change for any individual case, but also can monitor changes and track all cases within their agency. These tracking and reporting abilities also are available at the highest level to aggregate community data. When all agencies are connected via a community-wide common data platform, the work that grant administrators must accomplish is supported. They can simply set data parameters and choose the fields to gather both historical data and up-to-the-minute reports from all community groups.

6. Monitoring

The conventional notion of monitoring is to remind staff members that, once a plan is implemented, the case manager should remain open and flexible to changes that may be needed. No plan is static, as client lives and linked resources are dynamic and ever changing. Yet the important question for busy workers is, "Who is to monitor?"

There is merit to having many "eyes" on a case and gaining input from multiple agencies regarding a common client. Many staff members can recall a case that ended badly, as no one could see the case in its totality and intervene, due to insulated files. These cases did not fail because the information was not there, but because the information was not shared.

Monitoring is greatly enhanced by a common data platform that links agencies and allows collaboration among agencies who work with a common client. We do not believe monitoring via this technology has to be "Big Brother" or "Big Bully." Rather, this dual nature—technology coupled with SBP—ensures greater balance, client participation, and dignity.

WRAP UP

There are five issues we wish the reader to consider as we close:

- 1) The call for cost-saving measures seems constant. Some agency directors find that the time-saving features of automated case management software can help already too-busy staff members respond to rising workloads. These features allow them to keep their current staffing levels and help existing workers operate more efficiently. Can a tribe help to ward off the effects of shrinking budgets by linking all helping agencies via the Internet through the help of a common data platform? Shoemaker (2009) believes sharing knowledge is the key to managing shrinking budgets. We call for more investigation into this issue.
- 2) Research regarding Strength-Based Case Management (SBCM) supported by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, completed by Rapp and Lane (2013), found using SBCM increased client linkage to treatment and retention in care. Getting people into needed services and keeping them in services can be a motivator for using SBP in Native case management services.
- 3) The principles of SBP sync with core values for much of Indian Country. SBP provides a way to shift the professional discussion from a deficit focus to one of strengths and values of diverse peoples. The dominant Western society brought us the “science of falling down”; the SBP approach has the ability to bring AI/AN helping efforts to a “science of getting up.”
- 4) We authors seem to have unbridled optimism about the benefits found within this software and Internet connectivity. While we are not fanatical enthusiasts, we remain unapologetic regarding the payoffs we believe lie in wait for communities that incorporate this technology. Phillips and Berman (1995) note, “Computers differ from other tools in that they are not passive, that computer technology participates actively in shaping its own environment” (p. 11). With the right software, community services can be shaped to empower strength-based, client-focused, and outcome-informed strategies that better connect helpers and clients.
- 5) We are not completely optimistic; there are many reasons for concern. Most funding comes by way of categorical grants—grants where money may be spent only for narrowly defined purposes. Categorical funding may not allow the expense of new software. There also is financial overhead and extra effort needed to join all helping agencies into a common data platform. Training must be completed, and a certain amount

of pushback from staff members would be expected. Agreements must be reached, security protocols fashioned, and memorandums of understanding negotiated for data to be shared. Effort is needed from within an agency, among tribal agencies, and from helping groups beyond community borders.

CONCLUSION

Native helpers tend to value learning in a collective way. Yet Western culture has seemed to turn helping into isolated or individual efforts. Some AI/AN communities have made progressive efforts to connect multiple helping agencies and to provide strength-based services to clients in truly innovative ways. Can Native cultures break the stranglehold that silos and categorical financing have wrought on their communities? We call for more research and practice knowledge of this Internet connectivity and make a call to follow AN/AN communities that are starting these initiatives. Western communities, for all their technological rhetoric and bluster, have not yet been able to name one community that has brought all their helping agencies into shared connectivity. The White Bison prophecy (Native Heritage Project, 2012) has many variations; the essence of this prophecy predicts that the salvation of the world will begin with Native people. Might the White Bison prophecy begin on Native land, realized in part by the tribes that have implemented this new technology? Might the Native world bring about this harmony, to unify all nations by once again unifying, from within, each Native community.

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