



Data Warehouse “JOIN”s Oregon’s Court and Agency Systems

For over three years, the Oregon Judicial Department (OJD) and the state Department of Human Services (DHS) have contributed data to a warehouse within OJD. This data warehouse is part of an innovative system called JOIN, an acronym for the Juvenile OJIN Integrated Network (OJIN being the Oregon Judicial Information Network).

JOIN serves several functions, but it is primarily used to manage and schedule reviews of dependency cases for Oregon’s judicially-managed Citizen Review Board (CRB). JOIN replaces the manual exchange of information between DHS and the CRB with an easy-to-use system that supports case review, scheduling, and ad hoc queries for thousands of cases.

JOIN also provides data for several areas of judicial performance measurement and is used by courts for self-evaluation. The Oregon Legislature initially provided funding for JOIN development.

Identifying the Need

ASFA and its Oregon counterpart created new timelines for citizen and court review in juvenile cases. In Oregon, the CRB is required by statute to conduct reviews and issue recommendations to the court every six months. The information required by the CRB to identify and schedule cases for review was provided in hard copy by DHS. Duplicate data entry was required to consolidate the information from these disparate sources. The CRB needed a more effective way to obtain data about cases and manage its caseload.

In 2000, DHS and the courts began to explore the idea of data sharing. A three-day Joint Application Design session was attended by representatives of the courts, the juvenile justice system, the Attorney General’s office, the Office of Public Defense and DHS. Attendees developed a high-level vision and a broad statement of need for what would become the JOIN system.

The original vision for JOIN encompassed three main subsystems. The CRB subsystem was designed to support the scheduling of, preparation for and recommendations resulting from CRB reviews. The other two subsystems were designed to manage the boards themselves and to manage court caseload and information.

After the vision for JOIN was created, a planning team of IT and court administration analysts was established. Rather than embark on developing the entire project at once, JOIN was developed incrementally so that each individual piece could be tested and the planning team could learn with each step.

JOIN Operations

The JOIN data warehouse consists of data on each open child abuse and neglect case from the OJD Juvenile Oregon Judicial Information Network (J-OJIN) and the DHS FASCIS system. Key data from the agency include:

- dates the child entered care
- party information
- demographic information on children
- service provider information

- reasons leaving care
- changes in placement and
- primary language.

J-OJIN contributes information related to the official court record. Juvenile court information is entered according to strict data entry protocol. The protocol was introduced to the court in 2000, and because the courts have received quarterly reports since then and have monitored the accuracy of their own data entry, the data is considered today to be highly reliable. The DHS data on new children entering care is manually reconciled in JOIN by OJD staff on a daily basis. Periodic audit reports also assist with ensuring data quality.

The JOIN database was designed to support all eventual JOIN functions and is populated with all types of records each night, even though not all data elements are used by the current scope of JOIN functionality. There are three separate download batches:

- all children in DHS care with parent, placement and demographic information
- all placements and services ever provided for a child and
- all placements and services that were disposed of for a child on the day of the download.

The following day an OJD staff member reviews batch of new children entering care and manually matches each child with their OJD case number before updating the JOIN database. If there is no case number, a match is attempted using the child’s name and date of birth. J-OJIN and FASCIS do not share a unique common child identifier, so it is not possible to automatically match the incoming information with existing children in the system. However, the amount of manual work is limited as there is usually only about a page of new records per download.

JOIN Functions

JOIN is a warehouse of information and is primarily used by OJD staff – citizen review board schedulers and coordinators and court programs analysts. Judges do not have access to the JOIN database.

CRB coordinators use a windows-based program developed by OJD to view a child’s history and to schedule reviews. Court programs analysts query the information in JOIN to run standardized statewide reports. JOIN data is also queried on an ad hoc basis for other purposes, such as monitoring compliance with departmental performance measures, and it is especially useful for answering questions posed by the legislature and government policy-makers about child abuse and neglect cases from a statewide perspective.

Assessment of JOIN

Unlike some jurisdictions, Oregon did not experience difficulties reaching an agreement between the court system and the child welfare agency to share data. The two entities were already sharing data in order to facilitate the CRB review process, but a joint database served an important

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work management function. The request to share data was readily agreed to and was beneficial to both agencies, as DHS no longer had to provide as many hard copy reports on children in care and the CRB no longer had to do double data entry.

The greatest challenge in developing and maintaining this system has been ensuring the integrity of the data. Both DHS and OJD enter data according to data entry protocols and procedures, but interpretation of protocol and procedure may vary over time and from person to person.

Another challenge came from merging the data of two entirely different agency systems. The initial logic program was unable to “read” certain codes within the FASCIS batches and the substituted data was occasionally inaccurate. Ongoing work on the logic program used to import the FASCIS batch has, over time, alleviated some of the error in the final JOIN data.

Another issue relates to the timing of the batch transfer, which may cancel a CRB review for children who are moving placements because the DHS data shows them as having a “closed” service. Because uploads are received daily, the child would be shown as closed before the new service could be opened. As a result, an OJD staff member must manually reschedule cases that were deleted. OJD and DHS are currently exploring whether a delay in the upload of information will alleviate this problem.

An unexpected benefit to finding bugs in the system is that it necessitates maintaining an open line of communication between DHS and OJD relating to JOIN.

Due to budgetary restrictions, JOIN as it was originally envisioned was not developed in its entirety. The CRB subsystem designed to schedule and record reviews was completed, but the remaining court and CRB board management subsystems were put on hold indefinitely. Furthermore, the courts’ OJIN system is currently slated for replacement, so expansion of JOIN to include the other subsystems has also been placed on hold.

Nevertheless, the system continues to provide great benefit to the CRB process as well as to the development of data reports that assist local courts with monitoring individual cases and caseload management performance measures.

– Susan Koenig and Katheryn Yetter

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For Your Bookshelf

Achieving Permanency for Adolescents in Foster Care: A Guide for Legal Professionals. This recent release from the ABA Center on Children and the Law addresses the legal, medical, psychological, economic and social issues that often pose challenges to teens seeking permanent families. The book offers practical strategies for agency attorneys, children’s representatives, parents’ attorneys and judges through guidelines that:

- Provide answers and make suggestions about issues adolescents face while seeking permanence
- Describe different case types and propose specific solutions and approaches, including step-by-step legal and casework strategies
- Help child welfare professionals think more carefully and clearly about the best options for adolescents and
- Lessen the obstacles confronting adolescents transitioning out of foster care.

Available online at www.ababooks.org or by calling the ABA Service Center at (800) 285-2221 (Order #349-0001). Funding provided by grants from The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, The Freddie Mac Foundation and the Health Resources and Services Administration (US DHHS) through its Partners in Program Planning for Adolescent Health program.

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