DATA DREAMS AND DESIRES

Found Poetry

INTRODUCTION

We're sad to say we've reached the final zine in our series about workers' experiences of data practices in Ontario's child welfare and youth homeless-serving organizations. Thanks again for joining us! We'll be ending our series on a hopeful note, exploring some of the dreams and wishes of the workers we spoke with – especially in relation to how they collect, use, and think about data.

People are more than just the data that represents them.

If you missed any of the previous zines in the series, please check them out on our website: www.socialchangelab.ca/publications.

RESEARCH FOR
Social Change
LAB

PART I:
SERIES
REVIEW

We started this project in the fall of 2023 with "Data Justice: What? Why? Where?" In this first zine, we laid out our mission: to cut through the techno-babble and bureau-speak and share how workers describe the data systems and processes involved in their everyday service delivery work.

In this first zine, we shared a bit about our lab at Trent University, who we are and how we came to focus on data practices in youth-serving social service organizations. Using the idea of "data justice," this first zine defined two of the starting points for this zine series and our ongoing research: (1) The process of turning people's lives and experiences into data is not politically neutral. (2) This process of datafication structures clients' material realities in uneven ways. By anchoring our exploration in the concept of data justice in this first zine, we aimed to attune our attention throughout the series to issues of equity, and towards an analysis of resource distribution and access in thinking about how data is created, manipulated, and used in providing social services to youth.

If you need a refresher on any of these tools or infrastructures, we recommend you look back to the previous zines in this series before reading on...

DATA JUSTICE

WHAT?

WHY?

WHERE?

Data Justice for Youth
Zine 1
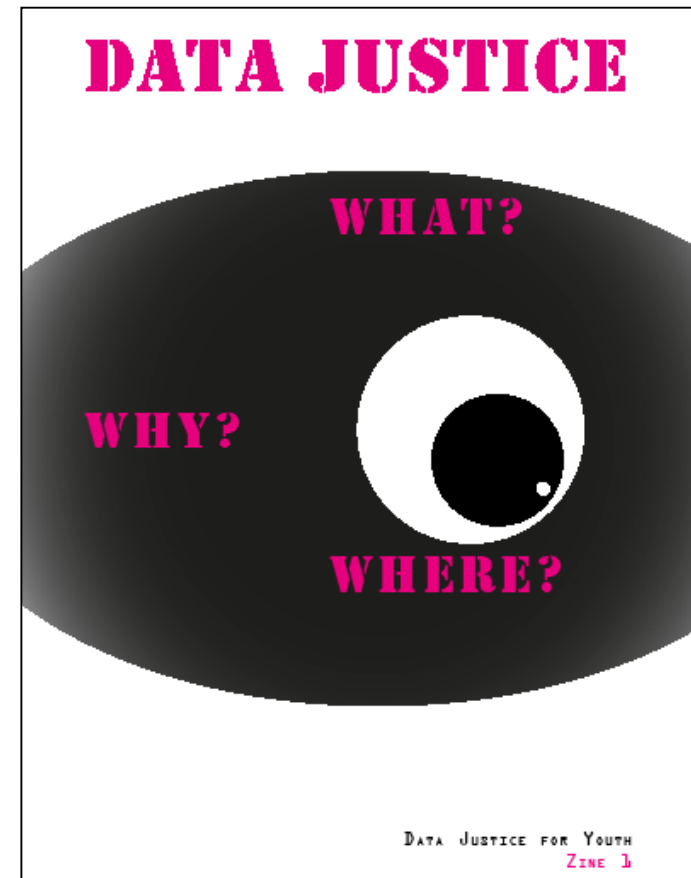
SERIES REVIEW

As we began to compile our second zine, "Data for Who? Data for What?" we realized that many of the ideas we were exploring about workers' data practices in youth homelessness organizations were relevant to other projects in our lab focused around child welfare services.

For the rest of our zine series, we therefore include insights related to both youth homelessness and child welfare organizations. "Data for Who? Data for What?" was released in December, 2023 and explores how existing data practices in these youth-serving systems prioritize compliance monitoring and reporting over enhancing service delivery and outcomes for young people.

While many people are interested in digital tools that might improve service delivery, the ideas we present in this zine suggest a need for rethinking digital data practices to align with both compliance tracking and client-centred improvements.

DATA FOR WHO?

DATA FOR WHAT?

Structuring Service Delivery in Ontario's Youth-Serving Systems

DATA JUSTICE FOR YOUTH
ZINE 2
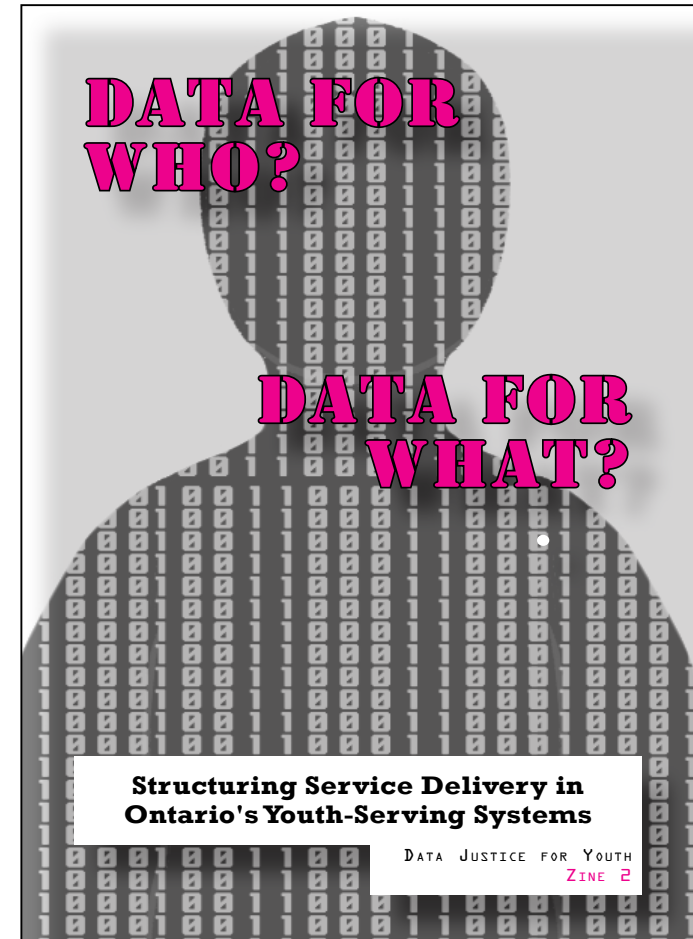
Our third zine, "More Than Just A Name," was released in March, 2024. In it, we continue our discussion of data in Ontario's youth homelessness and child welfare systems, emphasizing the limitations of relying solely on data to understand people's experiences.

This zine explores how standardized data tools can shape workers' perceptions of the young people they serve and considers frontline workers' subjective experiences navigating these tools. The zine aims to encourage readers to consider the humans behind the data – or hopefully even in front of it.

MORE THAN JUST A NAME

Worker subjectivity in Ontario's youth-serving systems

DATA JUSTICE FOR YOUTH
Zine 3
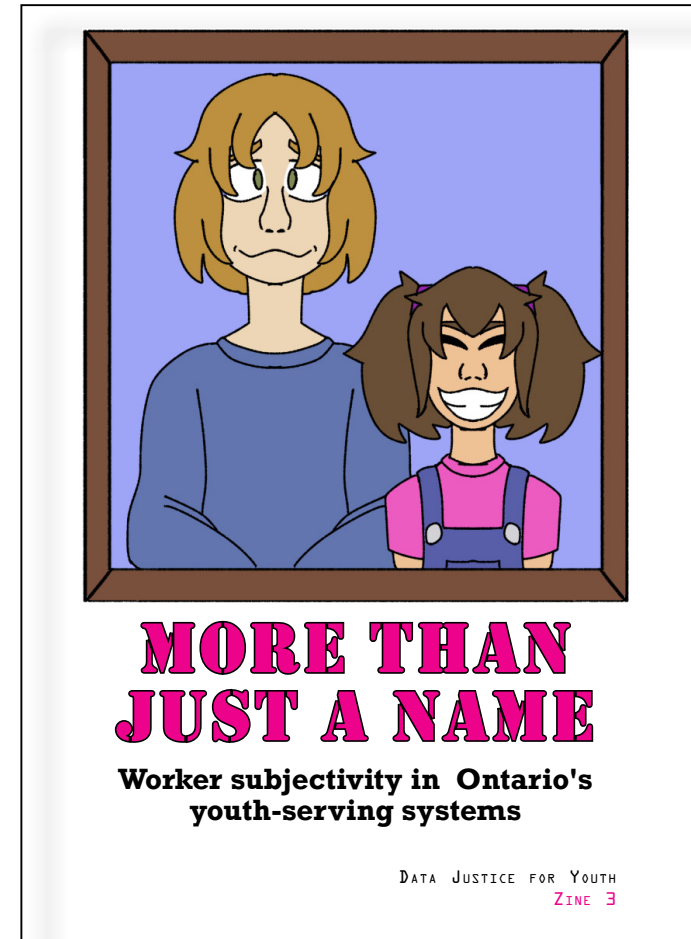
SERIES REVIEW

Finally, this fourth and final zine, presents an edited series of data poems drawn out of the rich, qualitative data we gathered from over 100 managers, supervisors, and frontline staff in the child welfare and youth homelessness sectors throughout this project. Although we prepared the poems – deciding which parts of excerpts to share, inserting line breaks, and separating the poems into categories – the texts are simply the words of our research participants. We went through all the passages that mentioned workers' hopes or aspirations and sifted out the kernels of wisdom that became the data poems presented here.

We've split the poems into six categories. Although the different groupings overlap and several poems could fit into more than one category, we hope that organizing the poems thematically will help readers think through the patterns that emerged during our study. The six categories of data poetry are: (1) Rethinking Data Practices: An Overview, (2) Client-Centred Service, (3) Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, (4) Data Analysis and Reporting, (5) Sharing or Consolidating Data, and (6) Data and Technology (or Not).

We would like to extend a warm thank you to our participants for sharing generously about themselves and their work. As you will see, when these fragments are gathered into this collection of poetry, the dreams of workers in Ontario's youth homelessness and child welfare systems seem quite consistent, sometimes even repetitive. We heard the same things from various people, over and over again. Seeing these patterns made it clear that the issues behind workers' desires are systemic and cannot be overcome by individuals on their own. It will take a collective solution with support from the top down and the bottom up. As you might notice as you read through this zine, another thing that many of the poems have in common is how realistic and achievable people's aspirations are. We hope that by sharing these hopes here, we can advocate for these changes together.

PART II:
FOUND POETRY

RETHINKING DATA PRACTICES: AN OVERVIEW

Soap Box
It would have accurate data,
It would be user friendly,
There would be equity across the system,

And it would be easy [exasperated sigh]

In a Perfect World
In a perfect world the data would measure meaningful outcomes.
Whether we met this or that within a certain timeline probably doesn't give us an accurate representation of whether kids are safe,
or families are doing well,
or parents need what— get what they need

in a perfect world, we would have data that really guides us to do better.
And we don't use our data that way,
and we haven't even got to the point where there's enough integrity in our data to start doing that.

So, I guess that probably went beyond what your question was,
but I wish people would believe more in the power of having this data.
And for it to evolve into something more meaningful
in terms of how it could determine our services.

Working Nine-to-Five
My dream also would be like...a system where it just let people work from 9 to 5,
because another concern that I have about my workers is that they have families.
I mean, we have after hours workers and I just—
you can see people burning out.

All the people that I started with at this agency are no longer here.
There was 10 of us and I'm the only one.

I think if we had more measures in place to support people to just, you know, like sign off at 5,
then things would be better
because now working from home, it's like people know that you have your laptop,
people know that you have your phone,
you're always on the clock and so I worry about not having that break.

In an ideal world, everything would shut down at the end,
like unless it was a crisis,
so that people could just take that break that they need.

RETHINKING DATA PRACTICES: AN OVERVIEW

My Dream is a Sort of System of Systems
Right now
We talk about prevention in shelters
People are already in crisis
We're not preventing anything

The database feels useless
You're putting so much work in
And we're just throwing it in the garbage
Which I think is probably common

We're stretched pretty thin
Worker burnout comes from the systemic issues
More than it does from the work with youth directly

Data in some ways
Became detrimental to youth

Data is the proof
It was used to de-validate what they needed

Everybody knows there's issues
If you actually want to fix something
You have to be willing to change

So much is not working
I know that's changing
It's a slow change

Young people
Children
Should get what they need when they need it
That's it

Service providers should be freed
To provide young people what they need when they need
it
On the ground

That is my dream for this
For us

Protecting Children
how do we help families
interface with various systems
that were created to help them fail?
think through
innovation.
a system where you add something
then it responds
gives us options.
works like Google,
a Facebook algorithm for data
as intuitive as my phone.
social histories more cohesive
better thought out.
integrating all those different systems
that collect information about families.
see the entire intake.
seamless in terms of current services
and past services provided.
the accounting and reporting pieces easier.

more ability for frontline staff to see into reports.
easy for workers to navigate.
clear on alerting timelines.
access whatever data I need.
get my own report.
some kind of dashboard for Journey to Zero.
build in agency specific triggers
related to procedure and policy.
we'll call them dreams, instead of criticisms.

PART II:
FOUND POETRY

CLIENT-CENTRED SERVICE

Balance

I really try to find a balance between numbers,
quantitative and qualitative.
I really know that the qualitative piece tells a story
and I do know that every data has a story, right
and it shouldn't be looked at as black and white.

So how does the story,
how is there a story behind the data?
because you and I might have similar data,
but we come from 2 total frame of references
and have 2 total experiences
how the world treats us is totally different.

So I'm always conscious about that
and that's why I said,
"how can recipients be involved in their own data collection"
or, yeah, because their story is told from
how we understand and input it. Right?

Unless we're double checking with them
and go, "is this right?"
and sometimes we do
and sometimes we don't to be honest.

Client-Partners

It should be a system that allows recipients of service to be able to
add some of their own data.

That might seem weird,
but if we look at them as partners and collaborators...

"I don't know the data,
it's your data I'm just keeping it,
it's your data, you know?"

What does that look like?

Another thing:
for people to have easy access to their data.

CLIENT-CENTRED SERVICE

Transparency
What do we share with our clients?
Most agencies don't share any written information with clients.
Imagine you're going to buy a car or a house and you have nothing to hand—
You just have to go buy whatever the lawyer tells you.
This is how we operate.
This is not right.

Of course a lot of information may be confidential
but we need to have a system where a client would be able to log into their file
and at least see some aspects...

So, this is something that should be done.

We, quite often, have clients saying,
"Can I have my file number?"
A lot of my colleagues are like,
"No, this is internal."
Like, why not? Just give them the file number.
Unfortunately they are not going to be able to do anything with it.

It would be nice if they could.

Of course you can get a disclosure
which is a complicated process.
You get everything in a package:
thousands of pages.
And then you get rather frightened...

We need to have a way for clients
to log into CPIN
and see their own end.

Look
The most important thing to remember in social work:
people are at the center of service.
Look through the lens of the systemic pieces,
as well as resources.

Be intentional around institutional racism.
We've robbed children of their identities
by placing them with people who don't resemble them.
An awful history that we continue to try to reconcile.
Focus more on prevention
as opposed to protection.
Set a vision that's grounded in safety,
away from investigating people.
We know that doesn't work.
Help folks understand the systemic barriers,
not in a transactional way, but in a real-life way.
Move towards more partnership and collaboration.
It shouldn't be looked at as black and white.
Find where there is success and celebrate.
Dig in and find out what exactly happened that made it a success.
Then spread that so people get excited.

Desires for Children in Care
A system where
I can read why I was taken,
why I'm still in care,
efforts made for me to be reunified with my family
in a paragraph.
A system that allows me
to add some of my own data.
If we look at each other as partners and collaborators.

FOUND POETRY

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

How?
How do we think through kind of case studies?
How do we think through kind of innovation,
creative ways of thinking in and through cases?
How do we move away from a linear process?

Because when we think about equity,
and when we think about inclusion,
and thinking through EDI,
it's not linear.

So how do we have a tool that is not Eurocentric?
That's really thinking through cultural safety?
Thinking through and designed for those we actually
interface with at child welfare?
And not kind of those middle class values?

I think that's going to be hard to achieve, but I think we
can do it.

A Bit Racist, Right?
Okay, I—
it's controversial, but I know this is the research
environment
and so therefore I can give you open, honest answers:
I think that we need to take, you know—
the human aspect is the most important thing in social
work.
That needs to be there.
But at the same time, we need to take the prejudice out of
it....

We think that they are going to be non judgmental.
That's what we teach them to do.
We think that there is no prejudice.
We think that they are going to be understanding of the

clients,
but we have no clue.

So I like to see the data governing
and calling us on our prejudice.
Right?
I like to see the data telling us
that you are becoming a bit racist here
Right?

I know it's—
I'm sounding alarming but that's what I like to see.
Right?

Missing Matching
If I have a Black child from Granada
who has autism,
I can't go into the system
and say
'this is kind of the profile of the kid;
can you give me all the homes within the GTA
that may meet those demographic areas?'

There isn't anything that exists really like that.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Data Wish List
We joined together to buy Stats Can data
so that it's a more affordable way to do things—
We haven't—
that's something that's on our wish list
in our equality department
is to start to utilize some of that
for mapping purposes
and those kinds of things,
but we haven't yet.

Another reason we really want to get our race-based data
to a point where we feel like we really have a good
picture of our clients
because then we can start to look at what does that look
like in proportion to those clients in the community.
And you know,
where are we seeing over representation of say,
Black families or
Indigenous families,
those kinds of things.
But until we know the full picture of our own, we can't go
looking and comparing.

Caveat
One project is specifically for black families. The other
project is for any family,
but again we find it is black families that are being
diverted.
Then again, looking at the amount of openings in a three
month period of time
for black families, and then how many, say, showed up at
consultations,
how many were transferred,
how many were closed,
but again the caveat with that is,
the data that's pulled is where the primary parents is
black.
Therefore, if mom is white and dad is black, we're not
getting those.
Therefore, even though we have a number, it's not the
truest number
and that's where all of this can be really tricky because
we know
that numbers speak to data
which speaks to power
which speaks to change and movement,
but we then still don't have the absolute right data
because of these other components.
So, if we were able to track where primary caregiver is
not black
but secondary parent or other parent is black, whether
they are or are not in the picture,
that would then give us a more truer sense of who we're
serving
and where we're serving
and what we're doing with them.

Why can't you? Why? Is that--

That's a CPIN questions. I've no clue.

EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

To Delete Ourselves
We're talking about how
to make the shelter system more efficient.
I don't even believe shelters need to exist.
We're trying to find a way to delete ourselves,
not to make ourselves better.
There are bigger problems elsewhere that can be
addressed.
Diversion and prevention needs to be explored more.
Building awareness and engagement
between the client and their information.
The worker burnout comes from the systemic issues
more than working with youth directly.
Not policing youth.
Generation of the by name list:
it's kind of a series of reports
that take like a full day to do.
Start talking about Indigenous data sovereignty.
Right now, the number of Indigenous people
on our By-Name List is under-represented.
The same thing goes for gender identities.
It's very likely underreported
because we haven't had the conversations
in a way that encourages people to disclose.

Race-Based Data Race
I think we could always do better at collecting race-
based data in housing and homelessness,
like that is, I think, something that we don't do enough.
I don't even think that's on HIFIS, like that's not
something… It might…
But I think it's interesting to collect that type of data
because it presents a need.

But again, like, even like just historically,
like data collection,
racialized and Indigenous communities,
it's like scary dark and icky.
So like I get also why folks don't want to engage.

But I think it's really, really important.

Like just in the last year,
like we've seen
like more than half of our youth are Black. And that's
like really new. Yeah. So,
there's an increase in Black youth,
there was an increase in Indigenous youth,
and there's an increase in like queer youth. So…
Right?

PART II:
FOUND POETRY

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Moving the Needle
Reporting has a key role to play...

which is also a bit challenging because sometimes you're like:
"I just want to be able to write a report that tells me how well we are filling out x".
And sometimes the x isn't available to you in reporting, so you can't create something to monitor it.
And if you can't feed that back to supervisors

...then it's really hard to move the needle.

All Things Data
Toronto is my inspiration
for all of the wonderful like evaluation types of dives that they do to understand.
Like, let's take like everyone who moved 'Inactive' in the past three months,
what do we know about them?

My role is like all things HIFIS,
all things research,
all things evaluation,
all things data.

And as a result,
the nice evaluation work that we would love to do,
we just don't get to.

But Toronto continues to inspire me
every time I hear about some deeper dive
into people.
I know they did one recently where everyone who was housed

and then returned,
it was automatically kind of flagged to be like,
'okay, let's find out what happened, and let's see if we can address this.'

I'm like, let's do that here!
But like, we just don't have the time,
when you're like all things data.

Leaving the Assembly Line

I always like to take the example from, you know, Toyota manufacturing.

When the entire manufacturing line is really part of that line
the worker who works in that area can see the end product,
because that makes—
gives that connection, and meaningfulness.

Now look at our child protection data system:
people are not seeing the end product.
You know, okay I put
Date of Birth here. I put the
race of this person here. I said that
okay I verified this concern of this person, or
this dad hit the child, or mom, hit this child.

So therefore one half is verified. Right.

But we don't—
we are not seeing the end result of it.
So, that is where I think the data can do magic...

So right now with the data
we have hundreds of years of data in the system,
fragmented sitting all over the place. But we have
no clue what worked well for this family. Right...

So then it becomes like a robotic process.
It's very automatic process and data is not responding
back.

Dog's Breakfast

Like nobody's consistent about how they put in an address,
nobody types their phone number in the same way,
they could be a big string of numbers,
or you know,
some people put the dashes between them,
and CPIN doesn't force them to do it a certain way

so then you end up with a dog's breakfast of stuff.

And then when you try to, like—
even postal codes!
Like when you see how people type in postal codes,
some of them have no capitals,
some of them are squished together
some of them are separated,
like it just—

CPIN doesn't lock down some of that stuff
that would be so simple to lock down so that
we could get better quality data out.

But they haven't seemed to develop that part of the platform. I don't understand why.

Manual Review

You have to manually go through each file and search various things to see if these things are there...

In Toronto we have an overrepresentation of Black youth and children and youth in our care.
We also have a lack of provider families that identify as Black or Black biracial.
But if someone asks me how many we have I would have to go through each individual one and look it up.
That, you know, out of 90 families that would take a long time to do.
So there's no system where I can search our providers and really look at their sort of range of acceptance and compare that to our kids.
I think that for me that would be something that would be

extremely helpful in the adoption piece.

DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Exposing the Back End
That analysis is not happening on the front end.
Therefore we are unable to ensure the data quality.

If we are able to do that at the front end,
if you give more ability for our frontline staff to see what they are recording
then they will reflect, right?

Nobody comes to work thinking
I'm going to do a bad job of collecting this data, right.

So, if as a worker if I open my tab
and I see that,
okay 70 percentage of my files,
or my people,
I haven't filled my racial data,
if it's right there,
then there is more accountability.

But now what happens is all that data sets
are fragmented
and being captured in different spaces.

So, from a frontline practitioner, what is more important:
filling that data books or providing service?

Data Quality
Reporting has a key role to play there too,
which is also a bit challenging because sometimes you're like,
"I just want to be able to write a report that tells me how well we are filling out x"
And sometimes the x isn't available to you in reporting,
so you can't create something to monitor it.
And if you can't feed that back to supervisors and workers
and say like, "this is where we're really falling down in terms of data completeness,"
then it's really hard to move the needle on that, in terms of better data.

Myself
I would be able to pull data
myself
so I can look at it on a regular basis
myself
so I don't have to rely on anyone.

Do Better
I think in a dream world,
the data that we pull
would really help us understand
the population that we work with...

It would really help us understand
how we can
do better,
where we can
do better...

For me, it would really be
understanding our community.
It would be really nice to be able
to compare to other communities...
so we can understand where we need to
do better.

I mean, we know we need to
do better.
We think we understand our community,
but I don't really think that we do...

Outcomes vs Compliance

Just because somebody is compliant
visiting their youth
doesn't mean that most of their, you know, service gaps
have been resolved,
or that the outcome was good for this youth…

That really speaks to documentation,
but also speaks to visitation.
I don't know if that talks about quality of care,
so that's also something that supervisors need to pay
attention to.

And the outcomes.
You know, like one thing is to make sure that you have
documented everything and, you know, you have
checked off everything on a list,
but what's the outcome of our environment?

…Because the audit can look amazing.
We have completed everything that we need to do in
terms of documentation,
but our outcomes could be still poor.

Dream Big

My biggest wish
would be that we
could pull out any
thing that gets
entered in
to CPIN or
whatever system
we would use.

We don't have access to all the data that's being put in.
The ministry does. Like it's there! But they've never given
access to the back-end tables that would allow us to
create reports from them. Even though it's been asked for
for 6 years.

And I don't know
what that's about.

Interfacing: Families or Technologies?

My dream data system:
I would love a Child Welfare thing
that just basically
all my workers would have to do is put in their notes,
and from their notes, that would be able to complete the
assessments for them,
populate the reports for them,
so that they can spend less time worried about all those
recordings
and more time just being engaged with families.
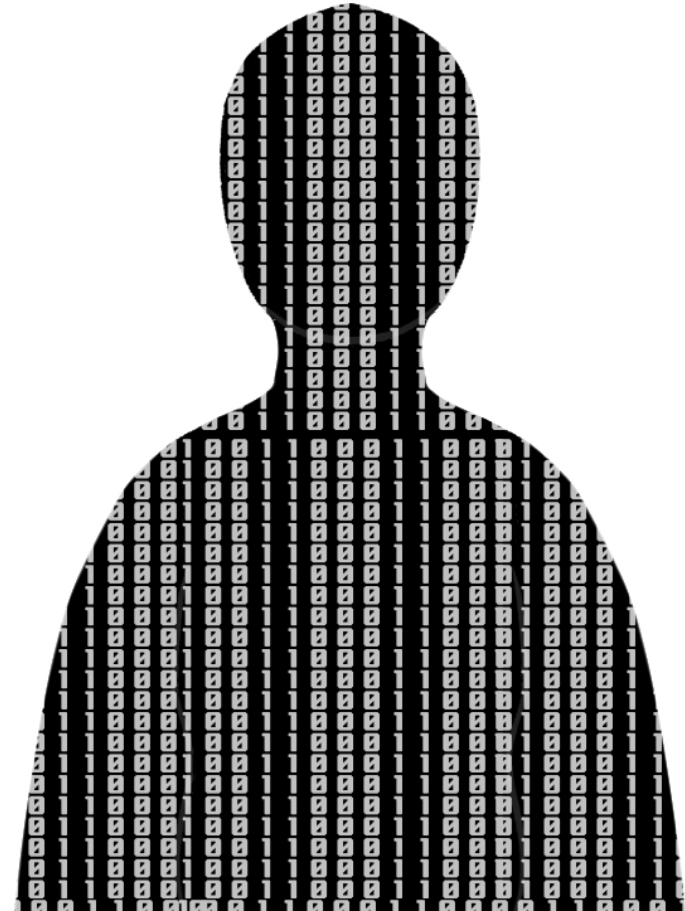
DATA ANALYSIS AND REPORTING

Abracadabra
If I could wave my magic wand,
our social histories would be more cohesive
and better thought out.

In our old system,
you would have
the social history
sits in the child's file.
You would have any adult
who is involved
with that child
in that social history.

What happens now with CPIN is,
because the social history sits on the person record,
each family member has to have their own social history.
Then you have to upload because,
and then when you close the family file,
you can't access that anymore.

So, you have to download the file
from the social history for the adult social history.
You have to then make it a word document
and you have to upload it onto the child's file.
So that they can then have the social history
present with them.
You can get back to it.
If an adoption is happening...
we can get it to them.

But my fear is sometimes,
if it's not linked properly,
or someone forgot to upload it,
like, you can get to it...
you can do a record inquiry
and you can reopen the person record
and all of those kinds of things
but I just, I think that's one of,
for me, I feel like we've figured out CPIN enough
that we can, you know, our workarounds are working.

But I,
that's one piece that note,
you know,
our workaround is still a bad workaround...

That's the whole thing with CPIN,
like, you're— you always feel like
you're sort of mining for information.
Because, you know, if you're trying to find one thing...

So, they have what's called the information tree,
or some people call it the waterfall,
depending on what agency you're at,
but like if you click on the little picture
there's like this little arrow
you can get all the files that were open
and you can see the history.

But I just—
you can get it if you know how to get around CPIN.
I think that that's the problem,
not everybody is super proficient in it.
And because it's a really big system,
it's clunky.
I just think that it is not user friendly in the least...

If I could wave my magic wand,
it would be a system that we could
find what we need, easily.
That would— we wouldn't have had to
create a dashboard that actually
our system and the milestones
would actually tell our workers
when their things are due at the right time.
And that the accounting and reporting pieces
would be easier.

50 Characters
So attachments is a big issue because you can't see them
in terms of how many are being uploaded
and you can't do any sort of analysis in a file about the
attachments
because you can't see any details about them.

Contact logs are where workers put their notes,
and there's all kinds of clicks
where you know
it's the type of contact log
and for what purpose
and those kinds of things
that kind of filter it down.

And we can filter those kinds of things.

And they have let us have
in reporting
the first 50 characters of the subject of the contact log.
So it's a very—
as long as people follow some sort of rules
[laughs]
about how to name their contact log,
like what they're using in the first 50 characters.

In reality that doesn't work so well because workers are
very busy,
and they're trying to get their stuff done
and trying to go back to the document to say,
"How am I supposed to like label this contact log so that,
you know,

3 years from now, Jennifer can find such-and-such?"
That really isn't high on the priority list
and shouldn't be... .

PART II:
FOUND POETRY

SHARING OR CONSOLIDATING DATA

<u>"Okay, like, we don't know anything about you. You haven't been staying in our shelter. Tell us about yourself"</u>

This is the whole point of HIFIS
is that you don't need to have those conversations more than once;
you don't need to be telling your story more than once;
that information should be there;
you should be using it.

Think of it like going to the doctor.
How annoying would it be
if you like filled out a form
and you said,
"I'm here because I have a cough,"
and then you went into the doctor,
and they're like,
"Why are you here?"
You're like,
"I have a cough. Didn't I just tell you that on the form?"
Like.
And then you have to go to the next person and the next person.

And so, I think in many ways that's happening, "Okay, like, we don't know anything about you. You haven't been staying in our shelter. Tell us about yourself"
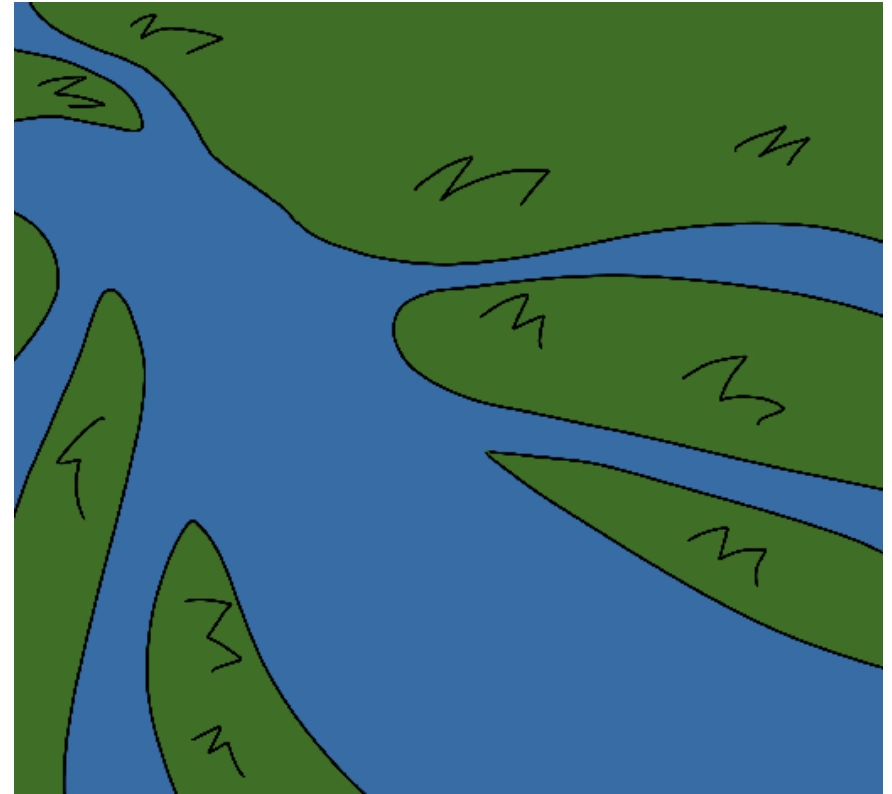
SHARING OR CONSOLIDATING DATA

Access
my biggest wish is to be able to have that access
to software like EMHware.
So if the Ministry funded that, or if there was a way...
Access to that would probably be great so that we could
easily just update a worker,
or if that information was just in that file anyways
and we could see what their notes are saying as well.

Because oftentimes,
I forget to send an email
or give them a call,
to be honest.

So just making things more streamlined. The siloing—
I can't stand the siloing that occurs in this field.
So, just being able to access my files
anywhere,
at any time,
where it's secure,
that would be awesome.

Let's Get Together
I think that it would be taking in a lot of perspectives
in terms of service providers,
families,
workers,
management.
Like everyone coming to the table to think in and through
transformational practice
and what would need to then happen in order for us to
get there.

My Dream
It would allow me as a worker, or supervisor, anyone
looking at a client record
to understand the story without having to dig into,
you know, post closets in the system.

I think we have to do a bit of that now.
I think we have to do a bit of that.

So that's concerning.

It would allow me as a worker
at the Children's Aid Society of Toronto
to understand,
to have the same understanding
of a case
that I looked at that, you know,
the Children's Aid Society in Peterborough
would have the same understanding...

Which seems kind of like a no brainer
but because our agencies, you know, choose
to document things in different places
and in different ways
we might not all look in the same places
for information
and come away with a
different understanding.

Ideally
Because we get a lot of requests, different people;
so we have the school liaison wanting this data,
we have this person over here wanting to know the this
data,

I would love one place where, if we can build in that—
you just click a button, and all the child's info comes up,
and all the different segments come up.

Because that will save so much time for worker in terms
of—
because every new referral has to be done from blank.
But if we already had something that was already made
up...

So ideally, that is my dream that we have a system
that, you know, we can generate some kind of report,
and all the things are there that we can just input.

SHARING OR CONSOLIDATING DATA

Privacy
Are we allowed to look at it?
Are we not allowed to look at it?
At what point do we need to look at it?
Where do we need consent to look at it?
Where and when is it accessible?

I had one worker sort of saying,
"Oh another worker just put a contact log in my file,
and I didn't know that they could do that."
I was like, "oh I didn't know they could do that either."

So, I think we're all trying to figure it out.
I mean, what's ridiculous is we're coming up to
7 years of something,
that was March 2015.

So, you know,
we're still figuring it out,
7 years later.

One Spot
We have HIFIS and everything,
but ideally, it would be really nice
if there was one giant database
that everything went into,
and it was very user friendly.
And the reports that we needed,
it would be very easy to pull those reports.

And I have to admit with EMHware,
it's very, very easy for that now.
It's much easier than it was...

But if everything was just streamlined
in one spot,
that would be, ideally, an easier process.

Transitions
I know the shelter system has a system
where they can see where youth went
from shelter to shelter.
We should have something like that.
A province wide database
that stores all the youths' information.
Better to track stats and access to services.
I could pull up all their mental health stuff
that they've identified in the past,
rather than asking that question again,
triggering them.
We could use our time so much more wisely,
provide more accurate support for the youth,
if we're all on the same page.
It's really about the relationships,
including working with other intersecting systems,
as a way to truly prevent homelessness.

Side by Side
it is very repetitive
and hard sometimes
to put all the data we collect
on multiple different databases.

And just remembering if you put it on one,
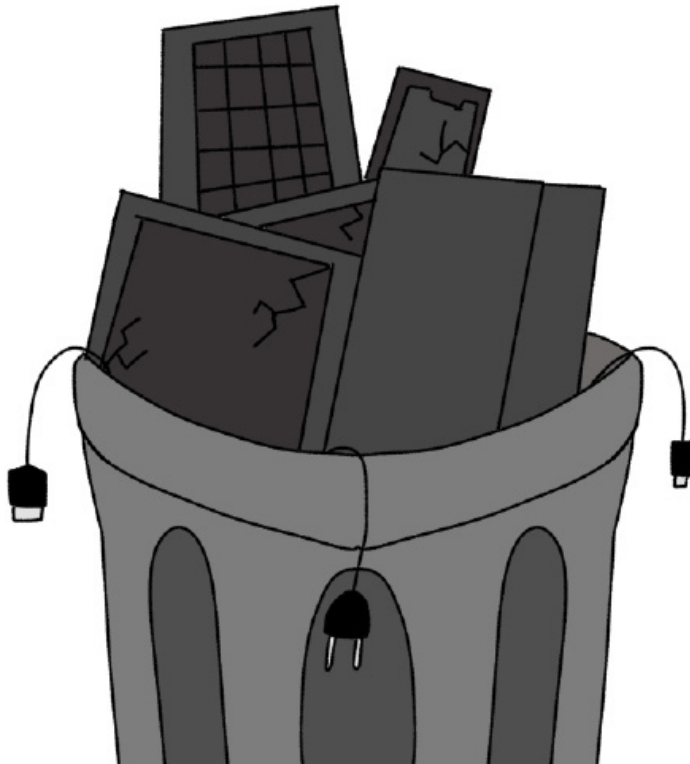remembering to put it on the other database as well.

It would be awesome
if they kind of went
side by side

and if you uploaded to one database,
and you were able to directly upload it to the other one.

PART II:
FOUND POETRY

DATA TECHNOLOGY (OR NOT)

Open Defect T-Shirts

So, when CPIN was launched there were about 1,300 open defects.
Things that we asked and, you know…

Of course many of us coming back to our agencies,
some people are still looking at us.
"CPIN sucks a lot because of you."

Others understand because we asked.
Actually, we even made a t-shirt, our team,
which was like protesting the ministry.

We were like really shocked to see
the system was being launched.
We asked for way more.
We asked for everything to be in.

It was presented to us.
This is the idea.
We have time.
We are rock and roll.
Just throw everything you guys need at us.
We have so many working groups.

I feel like a lot of the work that was done with the working
groups went somewhere.
It was not even—
It still sits in an open defect at the ministry.

DATA TECHNOLOGY (OR NOT)

Iterative Training
Ideally it would be helpful if they trained us all again
because the reality is when they first started the training,
the majority of us are no longer in those positions.
That's why there's like all these gaps,
because like I, when CPIN first came out, I was an intake worker.
Now I'm a supervisor of an ongoing team.
Very different! [laughter]

What they do right now is they have this online video
that you can watch
that can show you how.
I watched the CPIN video for being a supervisor and
what I needed to do,
and I have learned more from my colleagues
than I learned from that video.

Forever Wrong
One piece that we all kind of get frustrated with
is that it's really hard to even know your due dates and compliance
because it's not something that's, like, easy to find

often CPIN is actually, like, will give you one day and
time and then you use that date and time but it turns out
that date and time is wrong.

I don't know why we still can't figure this out.
The 7 days or forever wrong.

So, we legit count on our fingers like day 1 is the day the
case was opened on. Day 7 is...

Click Click Click
In order to document one thing,
you might have to click on 10 different spots...
And outcome plans requires you to click on many
different screens

before you actually end up to where you want.

People Make Mistakes
I don't—People make mistakes,
and I don't know if anyone's talked about
E forms? ...this was our old recording system...
in that system you could go in and fix things.
So, if you caught your mistake, you could go in and fix it.
Now, to fix the mistake it's a pain in the butt to actually fix it.

And things that I find, again, for a worker, that I feel like
are demoralizing,
and when I was supervising frontline,
I had to really think about
before I sent something back.
So, in E forms,
if I was reading someone's report or home study or safety
whatever it was,
and there were some typos and grammatical errors,
I could just fix them.

[Now] I have to send it back,
I can't fix them.

And I just,
I—so I have to decide, 'okay they spelled 10 words
wrong, and they've missed some punctuation, am I going
to send that back to them? For that?! Because everything
else is fine. Or am I just going to approve it?'

Three Year Wait
The last person I helped apply was told it would be 3 years
before their name came up on the list,
so that's not really super helpful.

DATA TECHNOLOGY (OR NOT)

Luckily for Us
It's about like,
how do we make sure HIFIS is designed that the users
want to use it
and are using it well,
and they see it as being a tool that's going to help them
do the work and help them serve clients?
If it's not that to them, then we have a problem
because that's what it needs to be for them
in order for it to become something that generates
meaningful data,
and something that helps them with their day-to-day
practice.

So, if we say:
"You need to enter every time you hand out a snack,"
and they're like: "that's a nightmare for us,
like we don't want to do that,
we don't have the time,"
then that's a problem.
Luckily for us,
we have a street outreach team who's like:
"We want to enter all of that stuff."
So we're like, okay, great.

Driven by Data
The
data
isn't,
sort of,
driving
our work
or changes
in our work...

That's not quite there yet.
And that is exactly what we want...

For Data's Sake
Yeah, data's cool...
like love it,
it's cool to see those outcomes.

But again, it's hard when—
Like at the end of day,
all around in my job,
when I think of data:
I collect data because I have to collect data.
And right now, I don't see a benefit.
Like, well, there is a benefit because
I have to,
like it's part of the job.
But when I'm thinking of like,
"oh, my goodness,
how is this positively impacting the homeless youth I
serve?"
it's not.
It's just ensuring that the same funding I've got is going to
keep going...

And we continue to try our best to provide good service
to youth,
which again,
it's changing,
and it's becoming
more chronic and
more intensive.

So hopefully, this little thing with the other collaborators
in the community,
when we try to make this roadmap that we're going to
show the city
to be like, we need more stuff, like,
hopefully that'll do well
so that might be good data.

But otherwise, like,
we do data,
but really, when I think bigger picture,
I'm doing data to uphold the system that youth are
accessing.

DATA TECHNOLOGY (OR NOT)

Sorting Impossibility
Like you can give me the best prioritization model,
the most magic data system collecting data,
give me outcomes about
'oh, my goodness,
provide this kind of service,
look at these, you know, percentages, etcetera,'
but like if I get a really cool data system that says:
'all these youth...would benefit from transitional housing,'
what good is that to me when there's [only] 19 beds...that
provide transitional housing?

So, I know we're talking about data
but if data is gonna give me a bunch of great numbers
and great outcomes,
who cares if I can't do anything about it?

Data-Driven
I know we try
but there's times where I don't think we're getting what
we need.
And my intent is to,
if possible,
either realize that we are working smarter and not harder,
or to realize, you know,
we're not doing anything.
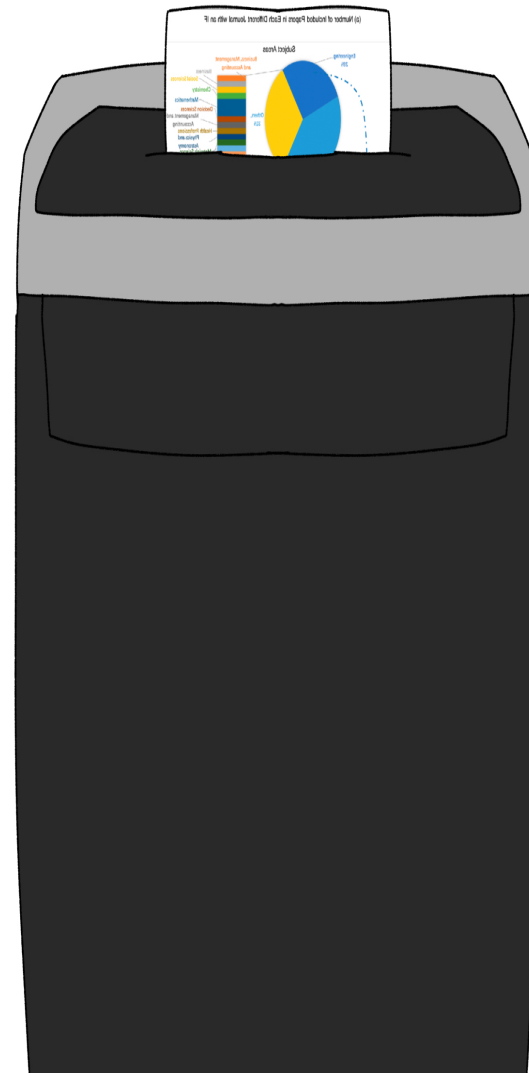
Throughout this zine series, our lab has grown and changed. Sarah Cullingham, who dreamed up this zine project and led the first zine's creation, has left the lab for new adventures on the West Coast. This final zine was put together by Aron Rosenberg, a postdoctoral research assistant with Trent's Research for Social Change Lab. It relied on contributions from Sarah Cullingham, Thamer Linklater, and Axel Lavictoire (who did all the illustrations). Our lab manager, Will Pearson, who provided formatting support for our first three zines has also recently moved on from the lab. Layout and editing support for this zine was provided by our new lab manager, Collin Chepeka.

Thanks for reading!
www.socialchangelab.ca
Summer, 2024

RESEARCH FOR
Social Change
— LAB —

DATA JUSTICE FOR YOUTH is a series of zines produced at Trent University's Research for Social Change Lab.