

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast  
Virtual Reality: The Next Step in Caseworker Training TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; Chad McDonald, University of Utah College of Social Work; Matt Davis, University of Utah College of Social Work

[00:00:00]: [Music Introduction]

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:00:02]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You'll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

**TOM OATES** [00:00:34]: Welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. I'm Tom Oates and we are all about connecting you to the latest information, innovations, unique perspectives surrounding child welfare, adoption and foster care to help you in your work improving the lives of children, youth and families. And a reminder, you can subscribe to the Information Gateway podcast on Apple Podcasts, GooglePlay, Spotify, SoundCloud and Stitcher. You know, training is a huge topic – the combination of new caseworkers, new techniques and practices drive the need for training. However, that at times can conflict with limited resources and the need to gather folks together all at the same time or in the same place while they're managing large caseloads.

[00:01:21]: Along with all that is the risk of gaps between what may be learned in a classroom or training setting and the actual competencies and practices being put to work in the field, with real families and in real homes. So, is there a better way to use time and help teach, measure, build and reinforce the skills for casework? Well, perhaps virtual reality is the path forward - and it is a reality right now in Utah. Today on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, the advancement in virtual reality training - specifically for home visiting - and we've got a great conversation with Chad McDonald and Matt Davis, both Research Assistant Professors at the University of Utah's School of Social Work. Now, in partnering with Utah's Department of Children and Family Services, and the University's Games and Applications Lab, they're leading the development of a Virtual Social Work Training and the first component is their Virtual Home Simulation.

[00:02:18]: Now, while online training is not exactly new to the field, the steps they've taken to advance the capabilities, increase the training's ability to replicate real life situations and track progress - it's moving VR training forward. Now you can actually check out a demonstration of the training. We've posted a few links so you can watch the Virtual Home Simulation in action and see what trainees would see over on the home page to this podcast. Just go to [www.acf.hhs.gov/cb](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb) and search podcasts, you can find this episode on virtual reality training and you can actually watch Chad explain the simulation, put on the virtual reality goggles and see what a student would see in the training. So, in this conversation, we dive into the impetus of the training, partnering with DCFS, developing the curricula and the tool itself, along with the advancements the Virtual Home Simulation offers. So pleased with this conversation, and we hope you are too. Talking Virtual Reality Training with Chad McDonald and Matt Davis from the University of Utah here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast.

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[00:03:28]: Chad McDonald and Matt Davis, guys, welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

**BOTH** [00:03:33]: Thank you. Thanks for having us.

**TOM OATES** [00:03:34]: Guys, let's get right to it, when we're talking about training, clearly we're trying to address some key workforce gaps and issues, but, specifically with the type of training, this virtual training that you're dealing with, what were those gaps that you identified, you know, some time ago and said, hey, you know, we need to find a better way to do these things?

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:03:54]: Right. So, given our experience working with child welfare here in Utah - for both of us, quite some time now in our different roles - we began to realize more and more that the opportunities for practice just were not as prevalent as they should be, as they are in other industries. For example, in aviation or in the military or, you know, in education or even medicine, where they, in many cases are given the opportunity - I think you were saying, Matt, that even Wall Street people now can have an opportunity to practice their skills before they're actually put on the job, if you will.

[00:04:37]: And, the way it works right now in social work is that mostly they are learning on the job, you know, they are, they've got a brief intro, maybe some new employee training where it's a lot of didactic lecture-based learning with PowerPoints and then they get sent out there. And, in some places there's elements that they've built in that are more supportive of learning, such as coaching and what have you. But, for the most part, this virtual reality tool is intended to fill that gap of a lack of practice for these workers. Taking what they've been discussing in these training rooms, practicing to their heart's content to try to get to a certain skill level before then they're asked to demonstrate and perform on the job out in the field.

**MATT DAVIS** [00:05:27]: I would add to that, too, we know that in industries where people perform but don't have practice - so, structured practice - they get, they learn strategies to get through their day, they learn strategies to do their job, but they do not reliably become experts. And, what you need is a way to practice in order to have a way for the average performer to reach expertise. So, that's kind of where we're trying to come up with this, you know, what can we do to make it so that child welfare has a way to practice without having to go into someone's home?

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:06:09]: Right. We would never allow a pilot to go up in the air with a group of people before we had a certain degree of certainty that those people were gonna be safe in that pilot's skill level.

**MATT DAVIS** [00:06:23]: Although, we used to let pilots do that and unfortunately, they crashed a lot. And now, we don't because pilots know, they have simulators and they don't crash as much.

**TOM OATES** [00:06:35]: Yeah, and the more you learn, the more you can apply to that simulation so you can continue training down the road. So, clearly the idea presents itself and then it's alright, who can we help serve and so you, kind of, knock on the door over at the State of Utah and walk into the agencies and present this concept - what was their initial reaction?

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:06:57]: Right. So, they were all on board, I mean, it was like a no-brainer to them. They were like, well of course, we've always known - and, I think most jurisdictions would agree - that there are ways to improve their training to be more skills or competency based. I mean, even now, the Council on Social Work Education, CSWE, moved from content to competency or outcome based, right. I think everyone understands, it's like a no-brainer type idea. What they did, also express though, is that they worried about their own resources in themselves developing this type of tool. At which point, then, we were able to discuss us going at it for use in other avenues, using the IV-E fundings, not necessarily having them always at the table every meeting we had, but using them more as one of the stakeholders that would regularly consult with us on what they need and what direction we should go - which is the role they're taking now.

[00:08:03]: But, we're even finding that their reaction then and now is, in many cases, they still struggle conceptualizing what it even looks like. What is this tool, this virtual reality learning tool - and sometimes, people are conflating the idea with simulation labs, you know, or role-playing, even, because that's their context, where a lot of role-playing is happening and they think it might be something along those lines.

**TOM OATES** [00:08:31]: So, when you, you know, have this, and I think the freedom for you guys to develop without having to constantly go through, kind of, these stage-gate reviews gives you a little freedom, as long as you have this goal in mind. But, I'm interested, now, because you talked about the constraint - and that's cost. So, applying the Title IV-E, the educational grants with the university, what were the hurdles, were there hurdles, was this an easy, was this easy to fund, was this easy to get off the ground or what were the, kind of, challenges to say, hey, we wanna apply these grants in this type of way?

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:09:06]: We have a really good relationship with our agency here in Utah. One where we have more than just the IV-E training and education grants, for example, even the waiver demonstration evaluation and what have you, which Matt has been a large part of. And so, there's a lot of good collaboration already occurring and in terms of gaining, accessing the funds to develop this, it was simply a matter of finding the place where it fit within our current contractual agreement, which is in the training and education of our BSW cohort. Those who are preparing for work with DCFS through this IV-E program and so, that's where this tool is being, you know, I know this tool is being implemented in that way right now, within the IV-E BSW students who are preparing for work, to go to work for that. Would you add to that, Matt?

**MATT DAVIS** [00:10:09]: No, I think that's right.

**TOM OATES** [00:10:11]: So, you've got the idea, we clearly have the need, you've now found a way to get the funding off the ground - let's just talk about, now, developing the training itself. So, it is the Virtual Home Simulation Tool, we'll call it VHS and, I guess in 2019, we can call it VHS and not confuse anybody for that old tape of Smokey and the Bandit II that's sitting there collecting dust somewhere.

**MATT DAVIS** [00:10:31]: Yeah, we were showing our age, because we were concerned about that.

**TOM OATES** [00:10:34]: Haha! So, you've based this, clearly, and we're talking education, so we're talking about learning - walk me through what you've called, you know, your two-theory learning approach, here.

**MATT DAVIS** [00:10:50]: Yeah, sure, so the most important thing, I think, to remember about technology and using it in learning situations is just because we have some new technology does not mean it will increase learning effectiveness. Years and years of research have shown that it can just be the same or it can even depress learning effectiveness. So, what we wanted to do was develop a tool that would be effective and in order to do that, we looked at two different theories. One is Multimedia Learning Theory and then the other is Deliberate Practice. Multimedia Learning Theory at its most basic is basically addressing how the learning content should be presented in a way that the user doesn't become overwhelmed but still keeps them interested in coming back. So, it's just how you present and create the virtual reality training.

[00:11:51]: The other part is Deliberate Practice Theory which is having kind of a popular moment right now, there's quite a few books about it - do you wanna explain, Chad, what, kinda how that works?

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:12:02]: So, deliberate practice is this idea that we're given the opportunity to practice behaviors that are just beyond where our current skill level is. Of course, they've popularized, especially with Malcolm Gladwell's literature, this 10,000 hour, you know, benchmark, which really doesn't mean anything if the practice you're going through every day isn't going beyond your skillset or isn't happening the right way, right? So, Deliberate Practice Theory guides the construct, our framework and the experience of this user so that they have all of this time to practice, but then also builds in the guidance of a coach or a mentor by providing this immediate feedback to them based on how their performance was, where they can improve upon in their practicing. So, they're getting this every single iteration and it's tracking them over time, this isn't just a one and done, this is tracking the progression over time for them.

**MATT DAVIS** [00:13:02]: Yeah, I was gonna say that I think it's important to remember that Deliberate Practice has been applied in other areas such as, well, aviation, mathematics, chess, learning sports - and it's shown to have incredible improvements in the level of the average performer. So, the things I like to think about is, you know, the records keep getting broken in the Olympics. We've gone beyond what we think is physiologically impossible. If you get in a plane nowadays, you're way safer than you are if you're in your car. All of these things were brought about, the argument is, by like Erickson and others is they developed this method of Deliberate Practice so that it's not just the one and, you know, one in a million person that can reach these levels of expertise, it's the usual, the average performer can.

**TOM OATES** [00:14:02]: It's a combination of that 10,000 hours and that's just, you know, that arbitrary number, but if it is being implied to continually stretch somebody, not to overexert - you know, you mentioned sports in terms of let's say, somebody wants to get stronger, nobody just puts 100lbs on them and says, alright, lift this now. You start with 10, then you move to 12, then you move to 15 and once you've acquired the skill for that level, it's slowly stretching to build those skills. And so, you mentioned the Olympic record. So, Olympic records aren't broken by 50%, they're broken incrementally. So, there's the idea of slowly taking what somebody's already learned and building upon it versus just tossing somebody into a situation that they'd be completely unfamiliar with.

**MATT DAVIS** [00:14:49]: And, you also have, you know, you see all the Olympians, they go to the Olympics with a coach. These are experts, they're the best in the world, they still have a coach. And, you watch football, a lot of times during the halftime, you know, they say what are you gonna focus on, coach - the coaches say the fundamentals, blocking, tackling, you know, it's having a coach and being able to break it down into component skills that you can practice over and over and over again with feedback.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:15:21]: Right, that Olympian is there as a result of spending, in cases, days and weeks on a single transition between two moves to make that a smooth transition. I mean, breaking it down into small enough elements that we don't see what it looks like a graceful performance on the ice, but that every single piece has been deliberately over and over again talked until it was perfected to the point we're seeing.

**TOM OATES** [00:15:45]: Alright, back to the actual practice at hand when we start talking about using this for your BSW students that eventually would go into the field. Well, you talked about, you know, what a coach would want to see and how a coach would then teach and learn - let's talk about the curricula and the outcomes that you're looking for. So, with this, you've got a lot of directions you can go, you clearly have a strong relationship with DCFS, so who are all the various partners and stakeholders that helped you guide this as you're developing it?

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:16:15]: Well, naturally, obviously DCFS and SRI, here. We have used both end users within DCFS and our caseworkers, as well as the BSW students in not only in our iterative testing with them, our user testing, but also even beforehand in our conceptual designing of this all, asking them in what ways they might most, you know, have a learning experience and what that tool would need to look like. For example, there are some applications that are doing virtual animation and yet in our focus group, the people who developed it, it was clear with both BSW students and DCFS caseworkers that they thought that a virtual photography platform would feel more realistic and hence, be more conducive to a learning environment for them.

[00:17:14]: And so, the BSW students and other jurisdictions, naturally, other states, we have our stakeholders that we would be interested in making sure this is something that is meaningful and accessible to them, as well.

**MATT DAVIS** [00:17:33]: And, in terms of developing it, we've worked really closely with our Therapeutic Games and Applications Lab here at the university up in Health Sciences. This is something where you can't just give your idea to the computer and the game guys and say go for it. We had to learn about how to develop something like this technically from them, they had to learn about the content, what kind of learning metrics we wanted and so we meet with them every couple of weeks. We have these, you know, it's a really intense relationship where they're using an Agile model development they call it where we do these two week sprints, they, you know, they develop like prototypes and then we look at them and we go through them, so, it really has taken a number of people all with different expertise to get it to the point where it is now.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:18:33]: Right, I mean, engineers and producers and artists to work on this and being able to make this - and when they give it to us, we test it out and the next two weeks, they're running with whatever suggestions we have as a result of our feedback from our students or ourselves in practicing.

**TOM OATES** [00:18:52]: Yeah, so as you're building upon it, because, as much as it's easy to kind of have an idea in the back of your mind of here's what I envision - what they final product turns out to be and the path you take to develop that final product can take you in a lot of different directions. I'm curious as you were developing this, as you were engaged, especially DCFS - what were kind of those must haves? I mean, you mentioned, you know, no animation, let's not try to make this a cartoon, let's try to make this as realistic as possible and use photography - what other were those kind of must haves that once they started to realize what this would be that they really wanted to see in, or that they didn't want to see?

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:19:32]: Right. You know, that's a good question. They were very, I mean, given our partnership, you know, it wasn't, they weren't very demanding in what it should look like, but one thing that we were all certain was that the skills that were going to be a part of this virtual reality learning experience needed to be skills that could be broken down and operationalized, mechanized to a point that they, we could actually, it would actually be something we can measure, if you will. And, we quickly, also came to the consensus and we still don't have an answer to this idea, but, not all skills necessarily are best learned or taught through a virtual reality platform. So, the must haves that we discussed were being able to identify skills that could be better learned through a virtual reality platform and can be broken down and operationalized in that way.

**MATT DAVIS** [00:20:33]: And the operational part, clearly specifying what a skill is, you know, you have to have that in order to give feedback and it's difficult in child welfare or in social services, broadly, a lot of times we speak in generalities, we might talk about family engagement. So, if you're gonna teach that with a virtual reality experience, you have to specify what does that mean and it can't just be, well, be warm and empathic or that kind of stuff, you have to say well, what's the character going to do, what will the person say, what qualifies as a good response, bad response. So, that takes a lot of thinking about, and some decisions as to what we're going to do in terms of the experience.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:21:25]: As basic as the skill of engaging sounds, for example, when you start to have a discussion about how that looks in a learning, in a virtual learning tool and how to measure, there are, the engaging covers, I mean, that's so ubiquitous within social work, right, and in other industry, that it really can become overwhelming to try to break it down this far. For example, even in this tool that we've developed, it's not in, we're not even bringing in other individuals yet, right. But, so, we're finding that these ideas that have been talked about for decades within child welfare, social work in particular, people still are trying to grapple with what they actually mean and this is providing a really good opportunity for us to break it down in ways that have never been thought of before that can tell us concretely, ah, that's what engaging looks like or that's what assessing looks like.

**TOM OATES** [00:22:27]: So, we've got more than just, you know, like you guys mentioned, as much as we talk about, like, you guys worked with the Games and Applications Lab, this is more than a game and it's got features on it that I want to kind of walk through now that maybe separates itself from other virtual reality training, or quote unquote, online training. Now, this is part of the Virtual Home Simulation, or VHS, is part of a bigger suite that is kind of still in concept, right?

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:22:58]: Right. It's still being developed, I mean the domains and everything are in and website, web presence is being, is under construction right now, VSWT, or Virtual Social Work Trainer, but it's, we perceive it to be a suite of skills, if you will, like, sort of like the Adobe Creative Suite, or Creative Cloud, where there's all sorts of different applications within that, within Adobe that focus on a specific area, you know Photoshop or Acrobat or what have you, right. And, so, we picture a similar

type of model where within child welfare the key skillset that a child welfare worker might need to have and VHS is just one of those modules. In fact, we're working on another one right now, VMI, Virtual Motivational Interviewing and we can get into that later.

[00:23:51]: But, one thing that sets this apart, really, is not only this whole creative suite, if you will, of these skills, but that, you know, first of all, the virtual photography - there are some out there that are virtual animation like we've talked, some that I've seen just do like a panoramic, if you will, you can't go up and down and you're just kind of stuck on a pole rotating and it's kind of hard to get a perspective on certain things that you might want to get a closer look at in that. Others - and this really is an interesting piece - some just have an assessment of risks, for example, where VHS really has built into it a huge cadre of possible protective factors that might be addressed with the caregivers or protective capacities of those caregivers.

[00:24:44]: And so, helping to, I mean for example, we had one of our experts here in Utah testing this tool get all the way through it and then afterwards saying, oh my gosh, I didn't focus on any positive things in this home, at all. And she's one of, she the administrator in the State of Utah for one of these things. So, and it's nothing against her, just that this work can become so negatively skewed or, you know, we get involved because there are problems and so, people tend to focus on those problems, right? So, that's another aspect of this, the strengths we build into this, but then even, perhaps even most importantly are the user analytics.

[00:25:28]: We have built in and spent a considerable amount of time on the infrastructure of this tool such that there's, its necessary, user authentication is a part of this, so that they authenticate with VSWT and can go in and start practicing with any of these skills - currently VHS and soon to be online the VMI - but then this tool is tracking it and that's made possible through this user authentication. It knows exactly who's logging in, how long they're practicing, what they're doing when they're practicing and where they're going, which then leads me to this final piece of the expert feedback that's built in.

[00:26:07]: Really necessary in learning, the literature supports this element of a coach or mentor in that transfer of learning. And being able to immediately see results compared to how the expert profile would have gone through this home, for example, in VHS, to make this home observation of these protective factors or these possible protective capacities or these risk factors, the performance of a novice or less experienced user is then getting feedback from a cadre of experts, the algorithm then provides this user with this idea of what the expert might have done if they were going through this same scenario.

**TOM OATES** [00:26:54]: The neat thing about that is you talked about a coach. Well, coaches over time also learn and coaches grow their own coaching skills so that the expert feedback algorithm, you know, from what I'm hearing from you, it's always kind of tweaking, it's always got this ability to grow from the more experts who are able to chime in, because, you know, as we talk about and you guys talked about competencies and skills, that's not necessarily the same as two plus two equals four because the way somebody approaches something, the way somebody views something, you know, that's, that's, that can be interpreted a few different ways, but the more experts you have in, they're able to chime in and you're starting to get, maybe more than one coach, kind of collectively where all the coaches can agree, but then the more you talk about what else is learned along the way - I think that's a really neat component, because it adds to the longevity of a training like this.

**MATT DAVIS** [00:27:49]: I like the way you put it, I like to think of it as less of the correct answer than what does the collective wisdom of experts say and that can vary by location and over time.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:28:06]: And by jurisdiction, yeah, each jurisdiction may have different ways they go about something and so this tool has the ability to draw out the jurisdictional expertise and provide that expert feedback specifically for their own workers in that jurisdiction. So, that way we can keep it individualized to the jurisdiction that might be needed. But, you're right, this tool, this expert algorithm, if you will, is designed, is constantly gathering this feedback from experts and it's feasible that someone over time can move from being the user, or the worker, or student to becoming on the expert side, to begin contributing on that side. There are stops and filters for that type of thing to make sure we don't have too much noise, but, certainly it is constantly being added to what I'll call the expert profile.

**TOM OATES** [00:28:55]: Yeah, and I want to remind folks that we're gonna have in the show notes a link to a video where you can actually see Chad go through the VHS and actually see what he sees as he's got the glasses on, so it gives you a great sense, when he talked about the photography not only going from left to right, but up to down and you really feel yourself immersed in this home. So, you touched on it a little earlier and so I want to dive into, you know, putting this into practice right now - so walk me through how VHS is currently being used.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:29:26]: So, right now there are, like we mentioned our BSW student body, there's a class that we, that's called the Impact of Child Abuse and Neglect and we've integrated this tool, VHS, this module, into their coursework where on a pre-post format they are coming together, they're then practicing the tool and the tool is great in that the tutorial in how to use it is built into it, much like a new app you download, you see some features and it walks you through it, it recognizes is this the first time that you've set up and logged in, well, let's walk you through a tutorial of how to use this tool. Because, we certainly want to, as much as we can keep the tool from being the reason for anti-learning, right, we wanna get the tool out of the way as being an obstacle to learning.

[00:30:13]: So, you've got the tutorial and then they go and practice all they want. Some students practice ten minutes, some students practice ten hours. And then they come back and we can see that spread and the change in their performance - from the person who's practiced ten minutes to the person who's practiced ten hours. And so, then they come back and do like a post test, if you will, of walking through another home, making another home observation to try to measure the impact of this tool on their skill development.

[00:30:46]: We're also looking at, of course, using this in other states, gathering the expert consensus data, as well as use of it within their own front line or novice users or student bodies, depending on which jurisdiction's looking at it. And that's in various stages of implementation right now.

**TOM OATES** [00:31:04]: So, walk me through this, now. Let's say you've got a student, give me a sense of the experience in going through the Virtual Home Simulator.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:31:13]: Right, so, because we wanna make this as accessible to as many people as possible, there are several different platforms this is available on. There's a virtual reality platform where someone can don some goggles, right, and the tool recognizes if that's connected and they're able to then see this whole home and they start outside of the home and actually can read the case files if they'd like - they should - to find out the reason for referral to go look at this house and then they can

go about the home and because we know we can't give them physically a large space to move about, if they have these goggles on, they can actually just sit in their chair in their office still, or just stand in front of their desk because we've created, we've built in these reference points throughout the home that they can move between so that they don't have to walk about themselves, if that makes sense.

[00:32:12]: So, they're just rotating, they're 360 looking up and down, left or right. If these, if the technology isn't connected to their computer then it's designed to just push out on a regular PC or a Mac. And, they're doing the same thing, you can steer with your mouse, scroll about and see all the way around you, any point you wanna look, you can look, do a full 360, left right up or down. Moving about this home and they're looking for, based on the case circumstances, items that might suggest to them risks to the minors that are in the home or possible protective factors or capacities of these caregivers. I know those are two distinct things and we kind of combine them in this conversation, but items that they might wanna follow up with on the caregivers that can be regarded as potential strengths that can be built into any planning, you know, for use to successfully reach the outcomes of the child welfare involvement.

[00:33:13]: So, they go about these homes and there's several different homes, several different scenarios, they need to read the scenario to get better context for what might be a risk and what might be a strength and they get to identify by putting a pin, a red or green pin in each of these items and then their rationale, why they decided it was a risk or why they decided it was a positive thing. And then, of course, at the end, they get to sort of summarize their activity. We call it here in Utah and activity log, you know, where they describe their home visit and their conclusions in general about that visit.

**TOM OATES** [00:33:52]: So, based on this, guys, what are the first kind of benefits that you're starting to notice? I know it's just kind of been rolled out and you've got the BSW students but, where are you seeing the benefits from VHS as it stands today?

**MATT DAVIS** [00:34:05]: Yeah, so I should say that what we wanna do is make sure that it is effective like we were talking about at the beginning. So, we have a line of research that we're following. Our initial efforts were focused on feasibility - could this actually be done and we've shown that it can be. And then we've moved to usability and we've been testing it with different folks, the experts, the BSW students and what we find overwhelmingly is that they like it, they want more. There is sometimes issues with people getting a little bit nauseous or sick. We actually took that feedback and have really reduced that quite a bit to where it's a rare event now.

[00:34:55]: But, overwhelmingly, the students say hey, this is the kind of training I want, because it's realistic, but it's under controlled conditions. But, what we wanna do then is move from usability to our next studies will focus on pre-post test of knowledge gain and skill gain. So, basically efficacy testing, does it work under controlled conditions? And then we'll be testing it in everyday conditions. So, doing effectiveness testing and that's where, for us, I think, you know, the rubber meets the road, it has to make a difference in actual practice. So, right now we have promising results, but we're not at the point where we can say its effective training for sure.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:35:42]: But even if we go back to your point on the students really wanting to do this and thinking like it's something they would keep coming back to, you know, that is, I spent years in training in Utah and it's hard to create a training that someone says, hey, I want more of that. And, this tool has hurdled that apparently, so far in our initial feedback. We have a survey that every user provides us, you know, we ask every user at the end about their experience including some of the, you

know, adverse illness affects that they might experience, that's how we know that that's decreased dramatically.

[00:36:19]: But, this training, the fact that I am now getting requests from these students who are no longer in this class or from other people who have had time to practice on it, requests from them asking if they can be provided more opportunity to continue to practice this whether or not they're in this class suggests in and of itself the value that they see in it in their preparation for work in the field.

**TOM OATES** [00:36:42]: As just evaluators or just in terms of even the, you know, professors and teachers that would be implementing this is there a difference in terms of measuring a student's progress? Does VHS allow for maybe a better way to track a student's progression versus you got a 90 on the test and you did it again then you got a 95 - are you able to get more out of what a student is potentially learning or where they are being stretched?

**MATT DAVIS** [00:37:13]: I think absolutely, because we know that typically, your ability to know something, to say you know something is totally different than your ability to do something. And what we're starting to get into here is testing the ability to do something. People try to do that with role plays, simulations, it's difficult to do those, though, on a widespread basis and it's also difficult to repeat those at a consistently high level of quality.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:37:46]: Right, I mean just simulation labs, for example, there are some jurisdictions that are cranking through ten workers in four hours - well that might seem like a high speed for some, but that, it just doesn't work for other jurisdictions, I mean and that's a one and done deal. How can, providing that simulation lab environment for these workers over and over again at the, from the, at the convenience of when you are able to at your own desk is a huge benefit that is not, before this time, provided for these. And so, yeah, certainly it is something that sets us apart from the other experiences there we're getting.

**TOM OATES** [00:38:23]: You mentioned that there's, you know, clearly besides Utah there are other jurisdictions, other states that are showing some inquiries to you guys about this - for another state that kind of listens to this or someone who's got a great agency or university partnership or a partnership with, let's say, somebody who can work in the IT field and work on this - what's the guidance that you would then give to those states or agencies as they're even contemplating, you know, investing in a sort of virtual training?

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:38:54]: So, yeah, that's a good question if they're contemplating investing in a virtual training, you know, one of the first questions that typically comes up is like the cost, for example. And, I mean, everybody needs to know, I mean for any investment, even if it's just time, not money, they would, I would suggest that they do it in a way that they are gonna be able to know how to tell if they're getting out of it what they want out of it. And so far some of these other platforms that we've looked at don't really have that capacity, except for in the standard feedback loop, you know. Where they go through this experience and then they talk about that experience together as a group. But like Matt had suggested having this high-level consistency of presenting these scenarios to them over and over again and then being able to measure the performance of these people allows us to answer that question of what are we getting out of this?

[00:39:56]: Now granted, we don't know yet that a certain skill level in VHS equates to a certain performance out in the field. But, as Matt was saying, that's one of our future steps with the efficacy of it, to answer that question, to compare how they're performing here and whether or not the does actually translate to the field or to what strength. But, still a state who is considering investment in this needs to have in advance, before they invest in it, an understanding of what they want to get out of it and - what would you add to this?

**MATT DAVIS** [00:40:30]: I would say, too, that it's important as a state to say how is this going to be used within our workforce development plan overall. This is not a standalone, I don't think it should be used as a standalone. There's different ways you could use it, you could use it as a post-training support for workers who needed help, you could use it as a like a certification process, you know, where a worker practices to a point where they get a certain score. But in order to be effective, it's going to have to be, the state's going to have to have a plan on how they implement it, integrate it into their overall workforce development.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:41:11]: Just having the tool is not sufficient. You know, they need to be able to know exactly and willing to implement this into their infrastructure so that it's not just a standalone event for these workers, that they've had their classroom training, there's a place for that, they've had it demonstrated to them by the trainers or the instructors in front of them, they then get the chance to maybe roleplay it a bit, simulation labs, even. And now, let's go off and practice as much as you can, as much as you need to and for some, it's feasible they might only need, they might need far fewer hours to get to a certain level of proficiency. But that's the beauty of this type of consideration for these states that are looking at this, is we can adapt to that, instead of always having to schedule a training and invite people, we don't know exactly who might need to be there and typically we hear people say, well the people that needed it most are the people that aren't here, you know, and this is going out to them and matching up with where they're at and what they need.

**TOM OATES** [00:42:16]: Finally, guys, just I want you to think about five, ten, fifteen years down the road, because we are moving in this direction, what excites you the most about the future of virtual reality training when it comes to child welfare?

**MATT DAVIS** [00:42:35]: That's a big one. For me, I think having a suite of tools that train different areas, a library that a worker can go to and say I wanna get better in this area. Maybe they're thinking about trying to do a lateral transfer or something and they need new skills and this is kind of like an on-demand learning situation. I think, too, that I mean the holy grail is you could have individualized learning paths as they go through and, I mean, right now, that's just not possible.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:43:10]: Right. For me, I, yeah, like you suggested, Matt. It's the ability to move this conversation that for so long has remained in how to make this training better and do you think this training is gonna help you do your job better - moving it from that to being able to say how are you performing in this circumstance, down to, down to a quantitative level and being able to finally start to talk about skill level and competency as it directly relates to performance in the field. And, for me, that would really raise the professionalism of the workforce and our capacity to address the needs instead of just punting on what actually we need to do to try to turn the trends the direction we want them to go.

**TOM OATES** [00:44:00]: Chad McDonald, Matt Davis, guys I appreciate the time - really exciting, just really like where this is going and pleased that we had a chance to talk about this and thank you so much for where you are right now in your journey and excited to see where you guys go in the years to come.

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast  
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Guys, thank you so much for spending your time, for the work you're doing and for being part of us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

**CHAD MCDONALD** [00:44:26]: Thanks for the invitation, Tom, it's always a pleasure.

**MATT DAVIS** [00:44:29]: Thank you. Take care.

[00:44:33]: And so, I encourage you to check out the demos of VHS. There are a few links to videos on this episode's page. Just head over to [www.acf.hhs.gov/cb](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb) and search podcasts. And there's also a link that we've got to that initial demo of the VMI training that Chad spoke of. So, we'll also point you to additional training resources, including CapLEARN – that's the Children's Bureau's online learning portal with a series of online trainings, videos and other resources to build capacity and to address family engagement, continuous quality improvement, dealing with sex trafficking, and working with the Indian Child Welfare Act, and other topics. Also, if you find yourself looking for other training resources, tools to share with families, research and data, state statues and policy guidance, you can just head on over to [www.Childwelfare.gov](http://www.Childwelfare.gov) and visit Child Welfare Information Gateway.

[00:45:27]: So glad you are joining us here on the Information Gateway podcast. Of course, you can find us at ApplePodcasts, GooglePlay, SoundCloud, Stitcher and Spotify. So, check out all the previous episodes and subscribe to get each new episode every month. My thanks to Chad McDonald and Matt Davis from the University of Utah's School of Social Work – and of course thanks to all of you for spending the time with us here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. My name's Tom Oates – have a great day!

**FEMALE NARRATOR** [00:45:58]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at [childwelfare.gov](http://childwelfare.gov) and is a service of the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The views and opinions expressed on this podcast do not necessarily reflect on those of Information Gateway, or the Children's Bureau.