Creating High-Quality Case Management Document
May 7th, 2026

Maya Wahrman: Hi everyone. Welcome to our training Creating High Quality Case Management Documentation. I'm Maya Wahrman. I'm a licensed social worker in the state of New Jersey. I've been in refugee and immigrant services for almost a decade, actually now a decade, including in general immigrant services and refugee resettlement. I worked through Operation Allies Welcome. I've worked in the field at the state level in refugee health. I've seen a lot of high and complicated case loads and I know case notes are really important.

I know for a lot of us it feels like something we have to check off our to-do list to just stay compliant, but I'm really hoping if that's how you feel by the end of today's presentation, we'll come to an understanding that case noting is really an essential part of ethical and client-centered practice. That's why I like talking about case notes and case documentation. I hope this training will meet those needs. I'd like to thank my colleagues, Vincent and Jasmine, for supporting on the backend with the production of this webinar, dropping some links into the chat, and answering some of your questions in the Q&A function.

Before we jump into our learning objectives, I want to make sure you all know that we're really thrilled to announce that by attending today's event, you can earn 1.25 ASWB continuing education credits for free. All of this can be used to maintain your existing licensure. Please make sure to stay until the end of the event. We'll give very detailed instructions on how to complete the quick assessment and surveys to get your free CEs from Switchboard.

By the end of today's session, we hope you'll be able to explain the importance of documentation within the case management cycle, describe different elements of a case file, including case notes, service plans, and critical incident reports that adhere to most program guidelines, and apply new tools and techniques to improve the quality and efficiency of case management documentation. Let's dive in because we have a lot to talk about. We're going to start really just making sure we understand the case management cycle and what the role of documentation is within case management.

1.Case Management Cycle:
Case management is a lot of things. It's supporting a client and their goals. It's making sure you know their case well, understanding their general desired trajectory or process. It's not doing everything for your case members, but it's supporting them and letting them know what your role is, and also when you need to refer them out to other services or set boundaries. Some of the examples you'll see here on the slide are different functions of case management. Those include advocacy, assessment, planning, communication, coordination, monitoring, and service facilitation.

These all mean, how do we help clients advocate for themselves and figure out what they need in order to make their cases successful? How do we assess where they're at and what they need and help plan with them, not only for them, but more importantly, with them to meet their own goals and needs? How do we communicate with them and other family members, external agencies, schools, other institutions, to make sure that we all understand what a client or a family needs and how we can ensure effective support. That also includes coordination.

Process of organizing services and resources, making sure that everything's happening in a comprehensive and timely manner. Monitoring, checking how things are going. That's a big part of where documentation figures in. Service facilitation. How are we helping clients access and navigate their needs and removing those barriers to support? As you know, case management is a lot of things. Even if you don't have case manager in your title, you're likely doing a lot of these things if you're joining this webinar today.

There's a few approaches that we want to keep in mind in case management that we also want to center in our documentation practices. Case management should be client-centered. Clients are at the heart of our services. Whether you're working virtually or in a community center, you're going to be connecting with clients, you want to create meaningful relationships. You want to build trust. Ensure that each client's unique needs and voices are guiding your service relationship and your case management. We want to acknowledge cultural context.

A client's culture affects and shapes them, and it therefore shapes our services. Learning about cultural norms, what's appropriate or not appropriate, what kind of customs to be mindful of, how to be mindful of different communication styles, family dynamics. Traditions and other values. This is all really important in case management, especially with refugees and newcomers. We want to make sure our case management is trauma-informed. Imagining remembering that clients have had so much agency taken away from them, so much power removed that they've been fighting really hard just to get here.

We want to recognize how hard they've worked and help restore some of that agency power and control. That can be really healing and restorative in our work. This means offering choice whenever possible, validating client experiences, creating a space where clients feel safe, heard, and in control. This includes things like listening, asking rather than telling, honoring a client's pace, listening without judgment, and just trying to make this difference in rebuilding trust and promoting growth. Finally, a strengths-based approach in case management focuses on recognizing and building upon a client's existing skills, resilience, and resources.

This really empowers them to take an active role in their own progress. It shifts the focus from what's wrong to what's strong, fostering a sense of hope, capability, and self-determination. We're going to talk specifically later how we can center all these things, but especially the client and strengths-based services in our documentation. Before we do that, I want to look briefly at the phases of case management, which will help us understand where the documentation might fit in. You can't have a case management relationship without a strong initial engagement phase. Intake, assessment, and rapport building, that's the first step that you're going to see on this slide here.

This is your opportunity with initial engagement to introduce the idea of case management. What's your role? What's the client's role? What can they expect from you? What are they expected to contribute? It's really important not to rush this. This is the time when you get to know the client and they get to know you, and you all together begin to identify strengths, resources, barriers, and needs that they might have. Then you have service provision. This is the bulk of where our work happens.

It cannot happen without that initial engagement and assessment, but this is where we're meeting, we're assessing goals, we're checking in on how things are going, we're executing our service plans to move the client towards the ideal trajectory. Finally, there's termination or discharge, and that's when we plan for and try to execute a positive ending. Termination does start from day one. In that initial engagement, you have to set expectations of how long you're going to be working with the client, what they can expect when they finish the program, whether that's a time limit or when they've met a certain number of goals, they're going to end up finishing that program with you.

We know that one of the goals of case management is for the client to learn to navigate systems, access services, and build skills to meet their needs without the support of a case manager. We're trying to make ourselves obsolete. We know we won't always be there for clients to support them in all these ways. We want them to be able to do all these things for ourselves. We'll talk about this and how it affects documentation, but sometimes termination does include a handover or referral to other services, whether that's a higher level of care or a different service that better suits the client's needs and eligibility.

It's good to note that discharges are a process of closing a case, but it can have that continuity of care built in if that's appropriate. We're going to go to our first Slido activity here. You can scan that QR code or go to slido.com and put in 6733961. I want to hear from you why are case notes important and why are other kinds of documentation important. You probably wouldn't be here in this webinar if you didn't think it was important for some reason. I'd love to hear from you as you're all logging into the Slido and all your answers will come up anonymously.

They're track progress, give context about a case, it protects you, thorough records, it keeps the team informed. That's a huge one we're going to get into. Monitoring, funder requirements, we can't do this work without our funding, absolutely. Staff have insight into what is provided, case story, track the history, record management, protects the team, keeps a record of our work. Tracks client process, case continuity, tells the story. You can see at the top here that some of these keywords are coming up. I love seeing if you don't document it didn't happen. We're going to talk about that.

It's really about tracking progress, keeping the client at the center of this work, creating a record, providing efficient services, ensuring continuity, working as a team. It's really important, any kind of teamwork, to have good case notes and documentation. I saw something about quality assurance and compliance come in. I love that we have both the requirements and the compliance and a lot of people saying it tells a story. It tells a story of what we're doing and why we're doing it, and who we're doing it with. That's really important in that client-centered way and to keep ourselves accountable.

As I say, that accountability comes up. Having good data. We're mandated reporters, so that requires documentation. We're going to talk a little bit about that later. If there's a grievance, if someone has a grievance, you have something to refer back to as to what services were rendered. You can help highlight a success story. I love that. It allows for supervision and accountability. It's really good for reference with your supervisors. Protection, especially for minors. It shows what's working, what resources aren't helpful, so we don't provide dead-end resources. That's really great.

You don't have to keep doing the same things over and over if you've already documented what you've tried and hasn't worked. You can refer back if you forget. We're not computers, and that's okay. We're people, and we can bring empathy and then refer back for some of the finer details. Absolutely. These are all really great. I appreciate your participation. You can keep that Slido window open. We'll come back to it. Communication across team and agency, absolutely. I'm going to move on in the sake of time, but I really appreciate all of your engagement.

As we saw, so many reasons why case notes are important. Each phase of the case management cycle has different types of documentation. In your initial engagement and intake, a lot of that documentation is the introductory documents we have. You might have an assessment tool. You're going to have that intake documentation. Who's the client? Why are they registering for services? What do we need to know about them? The case notes of the first meeting, any kind of screening, if there's a mental health screening, if tfhere's eligibility screenings.

What are the ways that we can document that beginning of the relationship and to work productively together to find pathways to eventual self-sufficiency and success? Then in service provision, we have a lot of different kinds of documents. We have goal setting, which we're going to talk about how to set effective goals with clients. You can break those goals up in a service plan and talk about how you're going to try to achieve those goals. You have the case notes of all your meetings or missed meetings. You have your periodic updates, what's going on, what is to be expected, how's the progress going.

Think of it also as a way to check in on the case, make sure you're not losing track of the case. All of these are really important within service provision. Then in termination and discharge, you're going to review your service plan. You're going to have the case notes of how you wrapped up the case and a termination summary. Why is the case ending? Why is it being terminated? What are the next steps? What is the client going to refer to if they need support in the future? It really helps take time to celebrate client progress and provide encouragement. You can also offer documentation such as recommendation letters or further referrals.

This is the general overview. We're going to get into all of this. First, I want to get into that heart of why are we documenting. These are so many of the things that you touched on in that Slido. Documentation is one way that we stay accountable. I saw someone say, if you didn't document it, it didn't happen. That's the reality of our work. As social workers and case managers, we have to document. It's the only way that we can show that a meeting happened or something to refer back to, especially, as someone said, if there was a grievance.

Writing case notes and other documentation really does protect you, and it protects a client if there's some some kind of discrepancy. If you've ever helped a client with a safety risk or had an incident that needed to be reported, your case notes can prove that you did all the things you were supposed to do, and really provides that legal protection if there's a grievance or another problem. Documentation, as we said, it helps you track client progress. It helps you remember the details of each of your meetings, what you're working on, so you're not letting certain goals or things fall through the cracks.

It really supports that continuity of care, especially when working with clients over long periods or in collaboration with other service providers. A lot of the times, our documentation is a contractual requirement from our funders, from whoever's monitoring. This is really important. Our funders are spending a lot of resources to make sure that we can do the work that we do, and we want to be able to make sure that we're meeting those requirements and staying accountable to them. These case notes are not only a compliance checkoff box, but it's a way to really showcase to your funders what you've been doing and how you've been doing it.

That you're delivering services effectively and meeting the goals of your program. Documentation is a really important ethical and professional responsibility we have. To keep accurate records of meetings with our clients, again, helps protect us and protect them. It helps ensure that clients are receiving consistent and appropriate support rather than, this is something I have to do at the end of the day after I've done the hard client work. Documentation is part of doing that difficult, important client work so that we can make sure we're doing what we need to do and staying accountable to the client.

It also helps if multiple staff are involved or someone needs to step in because you have an emergency or you're out. The records help ensure that their needs are documented and someone else can step in if you're not available. That means that case notes are really vital to communication and collaboration. Whether it's within your team or if someone's reading it so that they can refer someone out, this is the record, the hub where you keep all of that information about your clients. We're going to go into our first case study and my colleague, Jasmine is going to drop it in the chat, wants you to think for a moment about this client, Blessing.

Blessing is a refugee from Nigeria with a young son, Emmanuel. During your intake meeting, you explain that part of your role is to keep notes about your meetings and her progress towards her goals. Blessing becomes nervous and asks you to please not write down anything about her case. She's worried of what you might write about her and fears that notes or direct quotes could cause her problems. She's especially concerned because she can't read the case file herself, as she never completed primary school. Keep that in mind. You can reference it in the chat. We're going to go to the Slido.

I'd love to hear from you. What might you say to Blessing to convey the importance of case documentation while still being sensitive to her concerns? Think about you can actually phrase what you might say to Blessing. To be sensitive to her concerns while explaining to her why case documentation is important. Absolutely. Emphasizing her information would be kept confidential. I'm writing it down, but only my supervisor, maybe a monitoring funder has access. This is not shared with anyone. It can't be used against you at any time. That's a really good one.

I'm seeing confidentiality. We don't share with third parties. Promise to read out your case notes so she'll understand. I think that's great. How can you show her, this is what I've written, so if you can't read it, but I'm going to read it out so we can agree on it together. You can weigh in. You can let me know what else you'd like me to add or change. Explaining her rights responsibly. Offer a copy to have an interpreter read it. That's maybe a good idea depending if that's something that she wants. Seeing a lot about confidentiality that you're using the case notes to review together to meet her goals.

That it makes sure that you can bring her adequate services. I need to document what we work on to effectively help you. I think that's great language. Explaining that she has the choice to engage in services and that the notes are confidential. Great. These are coming in hot and fast, which is awesome. I think reading them to her after can help her feel more comfortable. Hey, do you agree? Is there anything else you would want to add? Documentation is important and sometimes required to receive external services such as SNAP. That's a great one. Explaining how that interacts with the confidentiality process. Showing active listening and affirming her concerns while also sharing it to protect her case.

You can say, "I understand why this is concerning, but we really want to make sure that we can keep a record so we know what we're working on with you. I just want to explain to you the importance of having these notes to document our meetings and our goals. The notes will be read to you in case I'm missing anything from your end." These are really great. I hope, even if I haven't been able to read yours out loud on the screen, that you've been able to practice what you might say in this situation. Read out and translate, if needed, your case notes with her for her own benefit. Absolutely.

Tell her if there's some staff change or one of my colleagues has to step in, this makes things more professional, safer. Explain it in a way that makes her comfortable and builds confidence that this is part of a safe space and it's to provide better services and focus. Absolutely. I'm going to move on because of time, but I really appreciate your engagement. You can keep Blessing in mind. Next, we're going to talk about the case file. On this next slide, you're going to see a sample case file organization. This is how you might organize a paper file.

Your agency might have their own system in place. You might be using an electronic record-keeping system with digitized copies of documents. We're going to discuss confidentiality and security of both paper and electronic documentation later. If your agency wants to transition to electronic case management systems, Jasmine's put in the chat a tool that you can use to maybe assess the cost and fit of some of those programs that are out there for you. This is a sample case file that's a paper case file. As we go through this, think about how this aligns with your agency's organization or protocols, because having a consistent organizing strategy is not just about keeping things tidy, it really helps create efficiency in case management.

We're not looking for things. We're not repeating things. All documents should be stored chronologically. That's true for both paper and electronic files. You're going to add your newest paperwork on top. For digital systems, a good practice is to include the date at the beginning of the document title. In your intake documents, you're going to have where the client signed to initiate services, where you went over client rights and responsibilities. Your consent forms, everything about confidentiality, releases of information, if they were necessary with other agencies.

This is really those pieces when you were talking to Blessing that you're going to emphasize, this is what the case note is, this is how we're going to use it. This is how we're not going to share it. These are your rights and responsibilities. Do you have any questions? That's really important to spend the time doing all this documentation and intake and documenting signatures. Either the client has read it and signed or the client has verbally consented, especially if you're doing virtual services. In your intake documents, you're also probably going to have copies of their identification and any income verification that they have.

These are the things that show their eligibility for the case, who they are, what you need to know, and keep stored securely, but what information you need to support them through the case. Then you'll probably have your case notes next, and these should be in chronological order. That helps maintain a timeline of interactions. It should be easy to see what has been going on with the client, what's the story of the work. We're going to get into this more in a moment. Then you're going to have your service documents. Service plans, assessments, what are the assessments that you're doing with clients? What are the periodic updates? Are you reassessing at three, six, or 12 months?

It might contain your case closure or termination paperwork. Finally, in the back, you're going to have just other case management documents. The referrals that you've made, copies of applications to food benefits, to housing assistance, discharge paper from hospitalizations, school enrollment documents, maybe screenshots of key text messages. The things that aren't case notes and aren't the official documentation of your file, but other things that you want to keep in the file to stay organized and know what's going on. Make sure that you know the rules and protocols for your own agency or your own state, especially when working with case files for minors where the rules can differ.

1.Case Notes:

We're going to talk about Case Notes now, which are a record of the interactions between client and case manager. This is the documentation a lot of us are familiar with. It's often where we spend the most time. It serves as a detailed record of these interactions. It captures key information from your meetings with clients, and they're critical for tracking progress, what services were provided, and what the client outcomes are.

This, I just want to emphasize again, they say if you didn't write it down, it didn't happen. It's very hard to prove something actually occurred if it's not in your case notes. It's always important to make a documentation moment out of it. What to include in case notes, please remember these six W's. Who was present? Was it the client, the caseworker? Was there an interpreter? Were there additional people present like family members or friends? You can refer with initials or the client if it's within their case. The what is what happened, what services were provided, what happened in the meeting. Write those in a chronological order to create a cohesive narrative.

This is where you're telling the story. When, note the exact date and time of the meeting, including the start and end time. 11 to 11.47 AM. Where was the meeting? Was it virtual? Was it in the office? Was it a home visit? Were you together at a community resource like a food bank? Why did the interaction happen? Explain the purpose of the meeting. Was it scheduled to discuss employment goals? Was it unscheduled? Was there an emergency, an urgent need for rental assistance or was it a walk-in visit? What next? What are the next steps that you and the client have agreed on and the timeline for the next meeting?

Within this, you're going to want to document also if a client doesn't show up for a scheduled appointment or anytime you call them or talk to them on the phone. These notes can be brief, even just one sentence, but they're essential to say, hey, we talked, or the client didn't answer, or the client didn't show up for the meeting. Helps you recognize patterns and show the extent of your efforts, especially if a client says, "Hey, you haven't talked to me in two months," you can say, I called you every week and you didn't answer. I've been trying to schedule a meeting.

You can demonstrate this if it's in your notes. It highlights your diligence and ensures there's a clear record of your work. If you come to a point where you need to terminate a client for not attending sessions or not being compliant with program standards, that is going to be your record of that issue. We're going to look at a Case Note example. You're going to think about how we might make this a more effective case note. I'll read it and then we'll go to Slido. Client and case manager discussed client's difficulty paying her rent this month. Case manager will look into rental assistance options for this month. Client thanked case manager.

Thinking about that, how might you make this a more effective case note? Jasmine has popped those six Ws in the chat again. Please, I'm also going to pop the actual case note in there for your reference. How might you make this a more effective case note? Please type into Slido. Give folks a moment to warm up. All right. Date and time. Possible options, what to do next. Why is the client having a hard time paying rent this month? Who was present? What's the rent situation? Was there interpretation? What are the next plans? Absolutely. We need details.

I think that why is really important because is this something that needs to be addressed in other parts of the case? What's the follow-up plan? What are the barriers the client is facing in this hard time? What language did this interaction happen in? Absolutely. Did the monthly budget change? Are there new expenses? Loss of income? What are the other needs? Absolutely. Okay. These are great. You have a good sense of how to improve this case note. With that, we're going to move on to service plans.

Service plan is an essential part of effective and ethical case management. Depending on your program, these might go by different names, such as a family self-sufficiency plan. Whatever they're called, they're an important roadmap for working with your client and figuring out how to help meet their goals and needs. Jasmine's put in the chat a great blog about family self-sufficiency plans and why they're so important in client-centered services beyond just compliance. When we're making a service plan, we're really going to want to collaborate with our clients and prioritize their voice and their needs, use that client-centered approach to identify their goal and action steps together.

Service plans should include some of the following elements, the area of need. Why is the client seeking support? What challenges they're addressing? Next, you're going to want to document those strengths and supports. What are the resources that the client can use to help achieve their goals? What strengths are they bringing to the table? This can really be a great way to build rapport with a client to help highlight to them what their strengths are. Someone may not have asked them that before, and help shift the focus from their deficiencies to their opportunities.

It sets clients up for success and it keeps them motivated. Goals are the general statements of what the client wants or needs to accomplish. These can include short-term goals, like completing a job application, and long-term goals, such as achieving stable employment. We're going to come back to that in a minute. The objectives are the specific action steps that you and the client will take to achieve the goals. They should be more detailed than the goals themselves and outlined that how will we get there, how will we make these goals happen, and in what timeframe.

Then the target end date in the service plan. Maybe that's the end of your service relationship or this part of the service plan, but you should have a realistic timeframe for completion, knowing that dates can be adjusted, but you're going to provide an estimate. Then any program-specific modifications. What the additional requirements are for the specific program you work in, what other details are needed. We're going to go back into this goal setting because this is a really important part of service plans. We want to set SMART goals, which will help clients really meet those goals and decrease misunderstanding.

The S stands for specific, so ensure that a goal is focused and clear enough that everyone can easily understand it. M is for measurable. Be sure to include information on what success will look like by using numbers or percentages when it makes sense. Really make that concrete. Goals should be achievable. Be sure to think about if a goal is too easy or too difficult within the timeframe that you set. Relevant means that the goals are meaningful. They're within your scope that you're able to help clients with and that the clients also care about them. Finally, they should be time bound. There should be a target end date for each goal. That goes with the achievable. What is the timeframe in which you could actually have one of these goals?

An example of a SMART goal can sound like the client will sign up for and attend weekly English classes at the community center within the next three months. An objective for this goal will include ways that case managers will help the client achieve this goal, as we've previously discussed. Let's talk about short-term SMART goals. We want to think first about those shorter-term, more achievable goals, which might mean breaking up the long-term goals into smaller steps. We want to keep those realistic, especially when they're short-term. What's manageable within a 90-day period or one year that's also within compliance for your program?

You're going to want to balance those program requirements with the client's priorities. There are going to be certain things that you have to meet as part of your program, but make sure that you're taking the client's priorities into account even with those short-term goals. You're going to be reviewing your short-term goals regularly to help see the progress that you've made, what steps still need to be taken. This also reinforces a sense of achievement because you're taking small steps all the time. It helps keep your clients focused. You're going to update these goals as needed.

Clients might start with a specific goal but then shift to something different. That's okay. You want to set short-term goals, but you also want to be flexible and adaptable. As you're updating, think about how can we stay mindful of the bigger picture and what they're hoping to get for. Short-term goals, they have to be time-bound, that T, in SMART goals. Setting a clear timeframe helps provide structure and accountability for both client and case manager. We also want to think about our long-term SMART goals. We don't want to give up on the bigger picture. Help guide clients to visualize their ideal future.

What are they working for? A lot of times, this is why a client chose to resettle, often uprooting their entire lives, meeting a lot of challenges. It represents the hope and opportunity to work toward a life closer to what they've dreamed of achieving. This really provides purpose and direction, even if it's not immediately time-bound. Then you're going to want to break those into more achievable and incremental goals that align with those aspirations. This is where you can take those bigger goals and think about how you might make them more time-bound, which ones you're going to address in your time together.

Within those, once you've broken it down, you want to prioritize the immediate tasks and the objectives that you're going to take to meet those goals with their future in mind. This is the way to make these smaller steps part of acknowledging the bigger picture. You're going to get to acknowledge and work on the smaller milestones along the way that is just as important as reaching those bigger long-term goals. We do want to make sure that we're talking to clients about their ultimate goals. Buying a house, achieving better English proficiency, uniting with family members through legal family reunification.

Try to avoid discouraging or dismissing their dreams, even if they seem ambitious, because then you're going to work on what are the smaller steps we need to take to get there. We're going to get to the feasible, but let clients dream and share with you what their ideal future is. Giving space to discuss these bigger reach goals is really vital. It builds a lot of trust in that trauma-informed and strengths-based way. It allows clients to feel seen and supported, and it helps you work with them to differentiate what's required or achievable in the short term and what will take a lot of time and persistence to accomplish.

Pretty quickly here, we're going to go through what a periodic update looks like. Basically, this is when you're checking on client progress towards service plans or goals. You're checking and evaluating where the client is in their service journey. Specific to the client, it might be if there's any special things you need to keep in mind or if they're particularly vulnerable, if there's program or agency requirements, if there's a court mandate to stay on top of other program requirements that you have to check in on and not lose sight of, if there's funding requirements around this. Periodic updates are often routine. That's just to help stay on top of everything. They might be required by your program, or it just might be a best practice, so you're not losing sight of a particular client, you know where they're at and how all the progress is going towards their goals.

Periodic updates are a great opportunity to get a client's perspective on the services they've received. How did they feel about the support? Could you work with them better? Could something be improved? These conversations allow you to explore also why they still feel they need services. It helps you tailor your approach to their needs and maybe identify barriers that are making it hard to actually meet those goals.

With timely and thoughtful updates, you keep clients on track, you're adapting to their needs as they change, and you strengthen the impact of your support. Finally, another kind of documentation is your termination summaries. Some of that might include a termination or closure letter, the formal notification to the client that their case is being closed. Of course, you don't want this to be the first time they've heard about termination. You want to always introduce termination to your clients early during that initial engagement phase and not have it be a surprise.

This is where the official thing they can reference that their case is closed is given to them and then put in the case file. It might have a referral or a resource list attached to make sure that clients have ongoing support for their remaining needs. Your file might have a closure checklist. This would be something completed and approved by a supervisor. This checklist should be as thorough as possible and act as the final audit of the case file.

This ensures that all required documents are accounted for and the file is complete. Then you might have a summary of services. What were all the services provided during the case management period? Some kind of summary of what the client received and the progress they made toward their service goals. It's a great opportunity to review their progress in general. Again, if you feel comfortable and they feel comfortable, you can also ask clients about their working experience with you and any areas you could improve.

You're going to want to also state why their case is being closed and make sure that the client really knows and acknowledges that. You're closing the case, and anyone who reads the file in the future will understand why the case was closed. This can be, the client met all their service goals, they're no longer eligible for the program, or they stopped attendance and became unreachable. For some programs, you might have a transfer of services form. That's when a client transfers internally to another program or case manager.

You're going to want to make sure any change in status is documented so the client experiences a smooth transition. Make sure that any releases of information you need are signed. When you're closing a case or transferring services, you might be sharing important documents or returning copies to clients now that they're not in your program, sensitive information. It's a best practice to have a signed acknowledgement that clients have gotten their documents and termination letter for you, so there isn't confusion later. Just like a case note saying, "Hey, we gave all this back, the client signed here, they received it." If they lose their ID, they don't say, "Well, you never gave it back to me."

You can show them the signed acknowledgement that they did. All these termination documents help close out the file professionally, make sure the client's ready for next steps, and meet compliance requirements to make sure the file represents everything you've done in your time together. We're going to go to another case study. I want you to meet Samer. Samer is a special immigrant visa, SIV, holder from Afghanistan. Although he has been in the United States for some time, you were only recently assigned to be his case manager.

After reading his case file, you learn that delays in receiving his Social Security number have impacted his ability to secure employment. In your first intake meeting, Samer tells you he hopes to pursue a college degree but needs to find stable employment to pay for tuition. He is anxious that he has not made much progress towards his goals. You have that for reference in the chat. I'd love for you to try writing a SMART goal for Samer, considering both his hopes and barriers.

Jasmine's also put in the chat the reminder of what SMART is, so specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound. Even if you only hit some of those points, I want you to start thinking about how to help him write these concrete goals for considering both his hopes and barriers.

[pause 00:44:41]

These folks are typing. This is great. This takes a little bit of time, so we'll spend a moment here. [silence] Work toward obtaining Social Security card and employment permissions first. Breaking down those bigger goals into what's incremental, what needs to happen so that the next thing can happen. Start with something that's readily available. Sometimes that low-hanging fruit can help motivate and then feel like your case is moving. Meanwhile, while you're working on that, the client can work on improving their English. He can start studying. That's something he might have more control over than when his Social Security card comes.

Secure long-term employment in the next three months and then apply to college. I like the measurable numbers. Within the 60 days, he'll apply for a card. He'll apply to at least five entry-level jobs in order-- These look great. You guys are typing too fast for me to keep up, which is awesome. You're going to verify what's happened and then write what you're going to do to help support him. I love these arrows, so how you're going to expedite the request, what the steps are you're going to take after.

Checking if he has a high school diploma. That's going to change how these SMART goals go. Absolutely. Remind him of, I think, what's important first, and what's achievable for us, and think about the order in which it's going to be most successful. Absolutely. These are really great. Keeping Samer in mind, we're going to go to our next Slido. Thinking about, how might documenting your service provision support Samer in meeting his goals? More about what the documentation is going to do to support his case, given these awesome SMART goals that you've all drafted.

Give you a moment here. It keeps track of a timeline and progress. It measures the achievements. It provides a record of his progress to him as he's accomplishing these smaller, more achievable goals. It'll help remind him what he needs to do and how you can support him. Absolutely. It shows both what you and him are doing to help support his goal. It helps keep everyone accountable. Absolutely.

It definitely helps with motivation to see how much work you've done together. Sometimes, if you don't see that, you're only thinking about what still needs to happen. Breaking it into those small steps, both for motivation and for digestibility, is really helpful. Case documentation helps you do that. Great ideas, everyone. We still have quite a bit of content to get through. I'm going to move on to specialized documentation. Thank you so much, all of you, for participating.

There's a few kinds of specialized documentation required in more rare or specific circumstances. This goes beyond the typical case notes you might write on a day-to-day basis. These don't arise often, but they can arise. I've done all of these kinds of documentation, pretty much, so it's important to know how to handle them. We're not going to really focus on them here, but just briefly outline. Jasmine is putting some resources in the chat for each one of where you can learn more at Switchboard.

The first one is mandatory reporting, which someone already mentioned in the Slido. This applies to situations involving abuse or neglect of children and vulnerable adults. If you need to make a report to Child Protective Services or Adult Protective Services, you have to document that call in detail with the incident number, the name of the staff you reported to, and other relevant information. Your agency might have a special form for documenting this. It's good to familiarize yourself before you find yourself in that situation. We do have a lot of resources here on Switchboard about mandatory reporting with refugee populations, including the one that Jasmine shared in the chat.

Next, we have critical incidents. Think about if a first responder is called in an emergency, police, ambulances, or if a client has a medical emergency in your office, and you need to call 911. Most agencies have a specific form for documenting critical incidents. If a client's gone missing, if a client has died. Jasmine has put our toolkit in the chat, including a lot of sample documents on how to move forward with this specialized documentation.

There are other crises, safety concerns, such as suicidal or homicidal thoughts or actions. How to help keep clients safe if they're thinking of hurting themselves or others. There might not be specialized forms for these situations, but it's still important to document them thoroughly and carefully. If there's a situation of intimate partner violence, family violence, you need to be cautious, and case files can really help protect the client as you figure out what to do. If the case file is accessible by other family members, including an abusive partner, for example, or an abusive parent, make sure that any notes about safety concerns are kept separately.

Jasmine's put some information in the chat about safety planning. In all of these situations, you want to prioritize client safety. Then, once you've ensured that safety, inform your supervisor or manager. Ask yourself, who have I checked in with about this situation? All documentation should be done in a timely manner. We're going to get into that in the last section, but timeliness is especially key with these kinds of critical incidents.

Write your notes as soon as possible once you've ensured a client's safety. If you've accompanied a client to the hospital and you can't do it right away, just do it as soon as you can, and inform your supervisor as soon as you can as well. This hopefully isn't part of your everyday work, but being prepared ahead of time is crucial. Your attention to detail and timely communication can make a significant difference in ensuring the best possible outcomes for your clients.

3.Tools and Techniques:

Finally, we're going to get into tools and techniques to improve the quality and efficiency of case management documentation. We got a lot of questions pre-submitted about how do I do this more efficiently and effectively. Hopefully, we're going to address some of that here. In a good case note, think about what you're not going to include. You're not going to include your opinions or commentary. You want to stick to the facts, what's observable. You also, of course, don't want to include false or unrelated information. We want to be accurate, factual, and concise, as objective and neutral as possible, accurately representing the services provided to the client and the client's progress.

You're going to want to think about what details, even if they're true or they might be interesting, are not necessarily helpful or relevant to the specific program or the purpose of these case notes. Some sensitive information, if it's not a mental health, say, or a legal program, might not be relevant in this case note. Then it's written down, even if it is held confidential. You want to think about what's most relevant to the case, and then also make sure that it's accurate.

Then you're going to want to avoid emotional reactions or value judgments. Their case notes are not the place to express your frustrations or your assumptions about the client's situation. You should talk about frustrations with your supervisor, but the notes should remain professional and impartial. Avoid language that reflects any personal feelings or maybe your biases. Again, thinking about those observable behaviors, facts, and actions.

If you're feeling unsure about the way that you wrote something or what you wrote, try to think about, to help you decide, consider how your client would feel if they read your note. Would they agree with what you said happened? Would they feel respected by the way you described them? Even if you had a disagreement, does it seem respectful? Did you document the disagreement in a more detached and neutral way?

Let's practice. In this case, the case note is client and case manager met for a scheduled appointment to discuss employment. Client doesn't like any job options I give her and refuses to interview. Client is hard to work with and maybe needs a new case manager. Think about what are some words or expressions used in this case note that you might want to avoid? Jasmine's also placed that in the chat. We'll go ahead and go into Slido with that question. What might you change about this case note? What do you want to avoid that you're seeing in this case note?

Hard to work with. That's not observable or factual. That's a feeling. I think they're hard to work with. Doesn't like-- You don't know what the client likes. Absolutely. Maybe he needs a new case manager. That might be something you want to talk about with your supervisor, but you don't want to put it in the notes. Absolutely. There's a lot of judgment of the client. You're assuming you know how she feels. She doesn't like the jobs. There's a lot more curiosity that this case manager could come to anyway, but definitely not writing these things down in the case note. Absolutely. Displaying your own frustrations with the narrative. There's a lot of opinion.

Yes, lazy, that's not a good thing to write in the case note. That's not observable or neutral. Absolutely. These are great. Some other documentation considerations we want to think about are to include client voice. Thank you all so much for the Slido. I want to make sure we get through everything, so I am going to move on. I really love your engagement. We want to make sure that we center client voice whenever possible. This can include using direct quotes from clients, which help capture their perspective and ensure accuracy in the documentation, but really centering the client and their wants and their needs within this note.

Case notes should be comprehensive, so covering those six W's, but also concise. You don't need to write a book for each note. Sometimes, if there's too much description or fluff that detracts from the usability of the note, if someone has to sift through a lot to get the story, a few sentences should be enough to cover everything relevant and not include too much irrelevant information, especially if it's sensitive information.

You're going to want to write those notes, again, in chronological order. Makes it a lot easier to remember what happened and ensure someone else reading can follow the sequence of events. This helps also highlight patterns or changes over time as you're reading the notes, which can be crucial for tracking progress or identifying issues. You're going to want to track not only what you did in your case notes, but what you have left to do. That makes case notes a helpful organizational tool, and it really helps give a better flow to anyone who's reading the case notes. "Okay, this is what's been done, and this is what is serving." A lot of you said that case notes are a good memory refresher. Let the case notes work for you.

Finally, case notes do need to be timely in order to be helpful. Ideally, your case notes would be completed by the end of each day before you leave the office. I know we don't live in an ideal world. You all have a lot of competing demands on your plate. Sometimes your day ends in a home visit. You don't go back to the office, so you can't securely write it down. That's okay. Do your best to get it written within 24 hours, maybe 48 hours max. You really want to make sure you're not forgetting or misconstruing or missing any key details when you're writing your notes, so that they can be as accurate and useful as possible.

When you're writing case notes, we want to identify and incorporate client strengths. This helps incorporate a client's individuality into your documentation, keeps that strengths-based focus. There are so many ways that you can incorporate. These are just some examples of client strengths. If a client knows many languages, that multilingualism, their faith and strong religious beliefs that help them go, their intelligence, their follow-through. These are really great ways to highlight what's unique about a client and how they'll achieve their goal.

An intelligent client might use that strength to help get their first job. If you work with a client who's very kind and friendly, you can elevate that to them, that they're going to use that strength to help them get new housing. Their personality might help them when talking to a new apartment manager at a new housing unit. Wherever possible, we want to identify and elevate those client strengths.

In case management documentation, it's really helpful to use templates and tools. It's a great way to streamline the process and ensure important details are consistently captured. Jasmine has put our customizable template in the chat. Templates can improve consistency. They can serve as a quality control measure. Make sure important data is entered for each case. You might miss information if you're not using a template. They also serve as that memory aid for staff. You don't have to remember every detail of what needs to be in every documentation every time. That really saves you valuable time by streamlining the process of writing notes.

Templates should be customized for each program so they capture all the important details relevant to your programming and any requirements from funders. Case notes are an important place to collect the data about your programming and showcase that important work you're doing. A template should also be broad enough, at the same time, that you can capture the unique elements of each client's case and allow for that client voice. What you don't want is case notes that look like they've been copy-pasted or they all look the same. That's not helpful to showcase your work, and your individual clients and also funders don't like it.

A way to assure quality within cases or through pure case file reviews, this can be implemented at your agency to improve the quality and compliance levels of your documentation. This is a way to prepare for an external audit. This could look like the supervisor selects files and assigns reviewers, being careful not to select files that are too sensitive to share with others as in the agency, the staff, then review each other's files. They utilize a checklist that encompasses all of the requirements and needs for that documentation. Then the file would go back to the case manager to fix any deficiencies or errors.

Finally, the file goes back to the supervisor to review and sign off. This could happen on a monthly or quarterly basis. You might review one to two files at a time. It could be open or closed cases. We recommend that agencies schedule time for staff to do this together to make it less of an administrative burden. A really important piece of case noting and documentation is protecting confidentiality, which we've stressed a lot in this presentation. It's everyone's responsibility, not just the people writing it, but anyone who's working around the filing cabinets or with client information. Everyone has a part to play in protecting confidentiality.

As we saw, for example, in our case scenario with Blessing, it builds trust with clients. If they think you're going to share details about their lives or their struggles with other members of the community, or that you're not going to be a good steward of their records, they will likely have a difficult time trusting you or opening up to you. We're also seeing a lot of important information, Social Security numbers, sensitive health information. We're all responsible for keeping that info safe.

At the same time, it's important to inform your clients of the limits to confidentiality. There are times we saw that in the mandatory reporting paperwork, documentation, your critical incident reports, all of that. There are limits to confidentiality. If someone's going to hurt themselves or others, if a vulnerable child or adult is being harmed. You want clients to know that ahead of time. If an emergency ever arises, it doesn't feel like a surprise. It won't feel like a breach of trust. I'm seeing also in the Q&A that someone has asked, for government-funded programs, we can't guarantee complete confidentiality. How can we navigate explaining this to clients?

Really, the best policy here is honesty. A lot of the confidentiality things are very strong and protective for clients. If your funder is a government agency that can access that information, if it could be subpoenaed in some court proceeding, that's something you do want to inform to the client. The client can always opt out of the program. That might be something they have to participate in in order to be a part of your program. They usually don't have to participate in your program.

You want to make sure that all that information is available to the client, that you talk about those things. Again, with the limitations to confidentiality, as this excellent question raises, think about what is really relevant to this case. If you don't need to include details that are really sensitive because you're working in an education program that isn't touching on a client's legal status, think about leaving that out. Think about what those limitations to confidentiality might be.

In order to help keep our clients' information safe, we want to use releases of information, encrypted emails when we're sending emails out to everyone. The releases of information is a form that you would sign with an external organization before you give out information that the client has signed off, "Yes, you can share my information with this education agency in order to support my goal." Usually, a client can revoke that release of information at any time. You want to use safe technology protocols, keep your password safe, help your client's information from not getting stolen on the internet.

Really think about confidentiality when it comes to electronic record sharing. This is really important, especially now in an age of generative AI and other kinds of technology. You might want to use speech-to-text dictation to help get your case notes done more quickly on your phone. Clients might be sending you photos on WhatsApp. You want to really think about how you're safeguarding all this information. Whether you're using a personal phone or an office phone, that you've thought through the confidentiality. If you're using generative AI, that you're not putting in any personally identifiable information, and that client information is not being used to train new models of generative AI.

Never share any client PII with an external AI platform. If you're using paper files, make sure that you're locking them in filed cabinets that aren't accessible to most people, only a limited number, have the access to the keys. Not all case notes should be read by everyone, except the trained staff who need to use them or write them. Make sure you're locking your computer screens, you're using those strong passwords. If your company has multi-factor authentication, all these things are really important to keep our clients' information safe.

I'm going to skip this last Slido or this next Slido so that we have time for the case scenario at the end, and just go straight into some time management tips. For time management, we want to prioritize our tasks. It's so hard to fit in case notes when so many other things are going on, but think about what do you need to get done today and how are you going to get there, just like those SMART goals, but for yourself.

Number two is to set boundaries with clients. This is not the focus of today's webinar, but it's just a reminder that it's not only okay, but it's required, it's professional to set boundaries with clients so you can have time for your other responsibilities. That includes documentation. Documentation is not an afterthought when you're considering how many cases you can take on. It's part and parcel of the work. Jasmine has shared our newest tip sheet, and I think our webinar on boundaries. Hopefully, this will help you find some more time for documentation.

You're going to want to schedule time to get your notes done. If you're diligent to sticking to this, if it's in your calendar, this can be extremely effective. Ask your manager if you can block out time on your calendar to get notes done. If you're having trouble concentrating, try to set a timer for 15 minutes and just write as many notes as possible during that time. Sometimes those short bursts are the best we can do.

In order to get those notes done, try to limit distractions. There's so much going on, clients coming in and out, emerging needs. It can be hard to focus. If you work in an office with a door, shut that door, write a note that you're not available because you're concentrating on writing notes. Don't interrupt unless there's an emergency. Wearing headphones can be helpful. Another thing is not letting case notes pile up. It just can be more daunting to do case notes as they pile up. Even if you can only squeeze in 15 minutes before you leave for the day, if you write that one note, that's one less note to write later, and it's probably more accurate and more useful than a note you write several days later.

Finally, consider using a template. We shared some templates, whether it's the critical incident report templates or the case note template. Try not to use all that mental time and energy just remembering what to write in a note, but spend it, "Okay, what did we actually work on with the client? This is where I can fill it in to create a good case file." We're on to our last case study. I want you to meet Esperanza and Diego. You are a very busy service provider with many cases and competing priorities. You have been assigned to work with Esperanza and Diego, a married couple from Colombia.

Esperanza was a tailor, and Diego was a mechanic before arriving in the US. Because they have useful transferable skills for employment in the US, you anticipate their case being a lighter addition to your caseload. When you meet with them for service planning, you learn they are both very nervous about their new life in the US and do not feel they're adequately prepared for the challenges ahead. Jasmine's pasted that in the chat. These are our last two Slidos for today. How might you center Esperanza and Diego's strengths in your case management approach? Here are a few of those strengths and how you might highlight them as you work with them.

I see lots of people typing at once. That's great. Hardworking and experienced. Yes. What ways can being hardworking really support their goals and what you're trying to do with them? What experience do they bring that will help them succeed? Their professional experience. Ask them to identify it in each other, perhaps if they have a hard time talking about themselves. I love that. It can be easier to elevate your partner or someone you care about than yourself. If that feels uncomfortable, find other ways to talk about it. I really love that one.

Letting them know that the skills they have are things that will help them succeed. That will help them get a job. They're bilingual and educated. These are things that take years to accomplish. Those are experiences they can hit the ground running with. They have a support system built in. Absolutely. Focus on their strengths and past work experience. Let them know how they're qualified. Sometimes just that reassurance that, "Hey, these qualifications are helpful. Those transferable skills are there. How can we help you showcase that?"

Validating their concerns, but showing them, "Hey, you have a lot of these skills, and I've seen other clients succeed in this way." These are wonderful. We'll move on to our last Slido, which is how might you highlight these strengths in your case management documentation? Thinking about those same strengths that you mentioned, how are you highlighting them in the case documentation?

If anyone. Excellent. Asking open questions with the copies of their certificate. Showing, "Hey, these are the documented skills that we have, and it's in your case file." Referencing if they're part of conversations or referrals to other programs. Using the facts. Highlighting their willingness to learn and adapt to a new environment. Talking about it as you set the goals, and then write those goals down in a service plan. Absolutely. Help them with resumes if they don't have them, and case notes. Adding notes of their professional experience.

Two to four strengths that show what their achievements are. Documenting their degrees and credential equivalency, as well as those softer skills and abilities, their work history. These are all great things to do in that intake documentation and service planning. You can show them how they're going to meet their goals. This is awesome. Putting in their resume when you build a resume with them, and keeping that updated as part of your service goals. These are really wonderful. I really want to thank you for your engagement.

I see Jasmine has done a really wonderful job answering your questions in the Q&A, and I've answered one live. I think that's all we have time for today, but we're always available if you have further questions. We do hope that by the end of today's presentation, our learning objectives, that you're now able to explain the importance of documentation within the case management cycle, describe different elements of a case file, including case notes, service plans, and critical incident reports that adhere to most program guidelines, and apply new tools and techniques to improve the quality and efficiency of case management documentation.

You've been here. You stuck it out. We're really excited to get you. You're free CEs now, 1.25 ASWB continuing education credits. Scan this QR code. Click the link in the chat that Jasmine sent. Once you've completed your knowledge check there, and there's a couple of quick surveys, that system will automatically generate your CE-approved certificate. Even if you're not interested in the CUs, if you could just click that link or scan the QR code, we'd really love your anonymous feedback. It's the same link. I'll give everyone a few seconds now to open that up. If you complete it now, just like case notes, it's one less thing for you to do later.

We'd really love to get you that free CE. It can be useful even if you're not a social worker. We'd really love your feedback on how to improve this training and other trainings in the future. I'll give you all a few more moments to scan that QR code or click the link. [silence] Just in our last 30 seconds or so, I want to highlight that we're going to send these slides out to you all soon, within 24 hours. We have a lot of recommended resources here. You can keep practicing these things. That e-learning course on top is also CEU-accredited. It's an interactive course, so that you can try this yourself.

You can keep practicing these skills. I'm going to put that out. Jasmine's already put that in the chat. Thank you. We have a guide that accompanies this webinar if you want to read more about this. We have that case note template. We have a blog about making case management paperwork work for you. We have a lot of resources. You'll be getting all these links in the slides after attending. Just make sure that you fill out those CE surveys. Otherwise, we will email you with all this information.

Our last slide here is how you can stay connected. You can always submit a technical assistance request. Go to our website. Check out our other resources. Follow us on LinkedIn. We'd love for you to stay in touch. Thank you so much for engaging so thoughtfully and participating today.

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