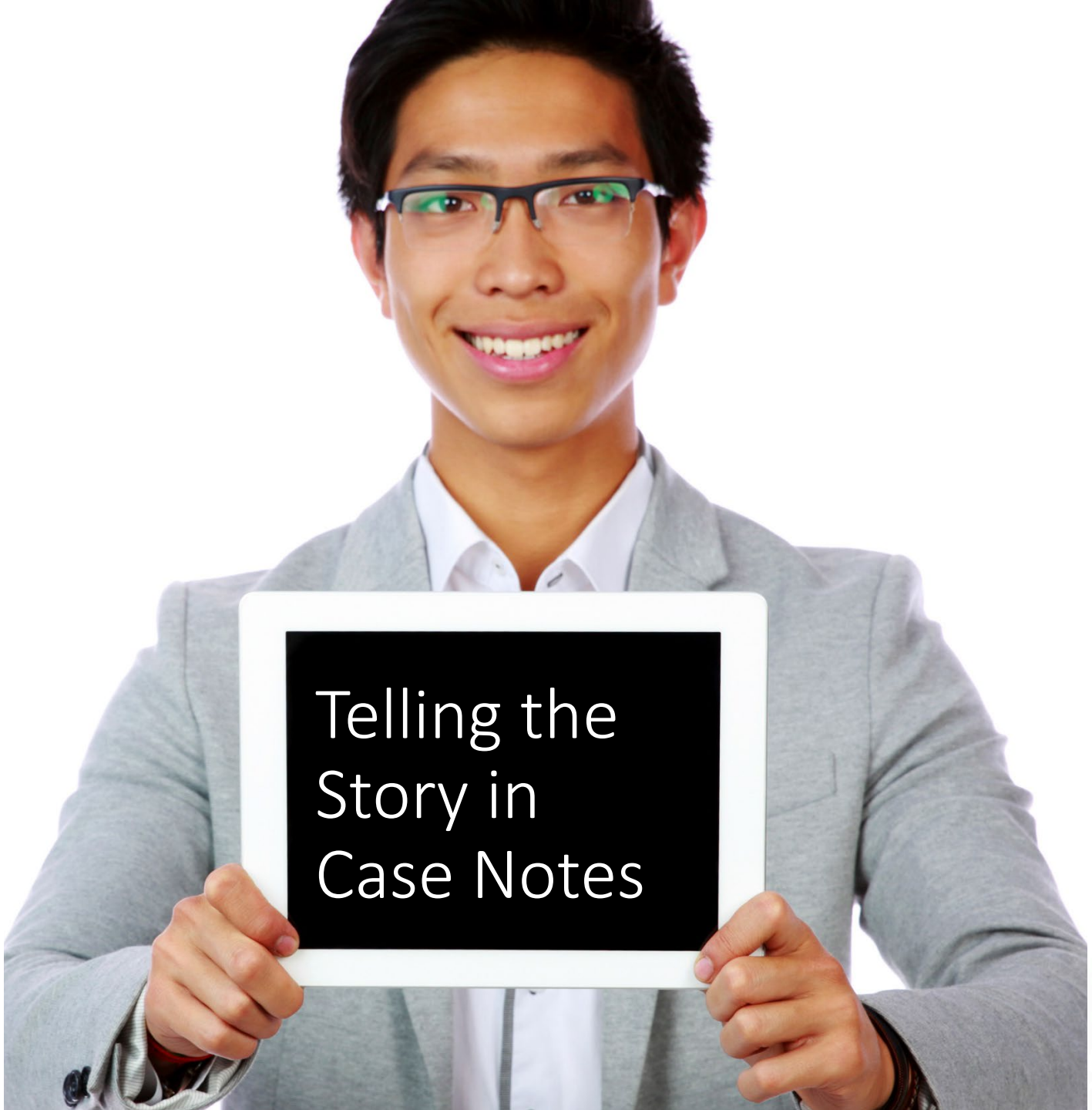

Telling the Story in Case Notes

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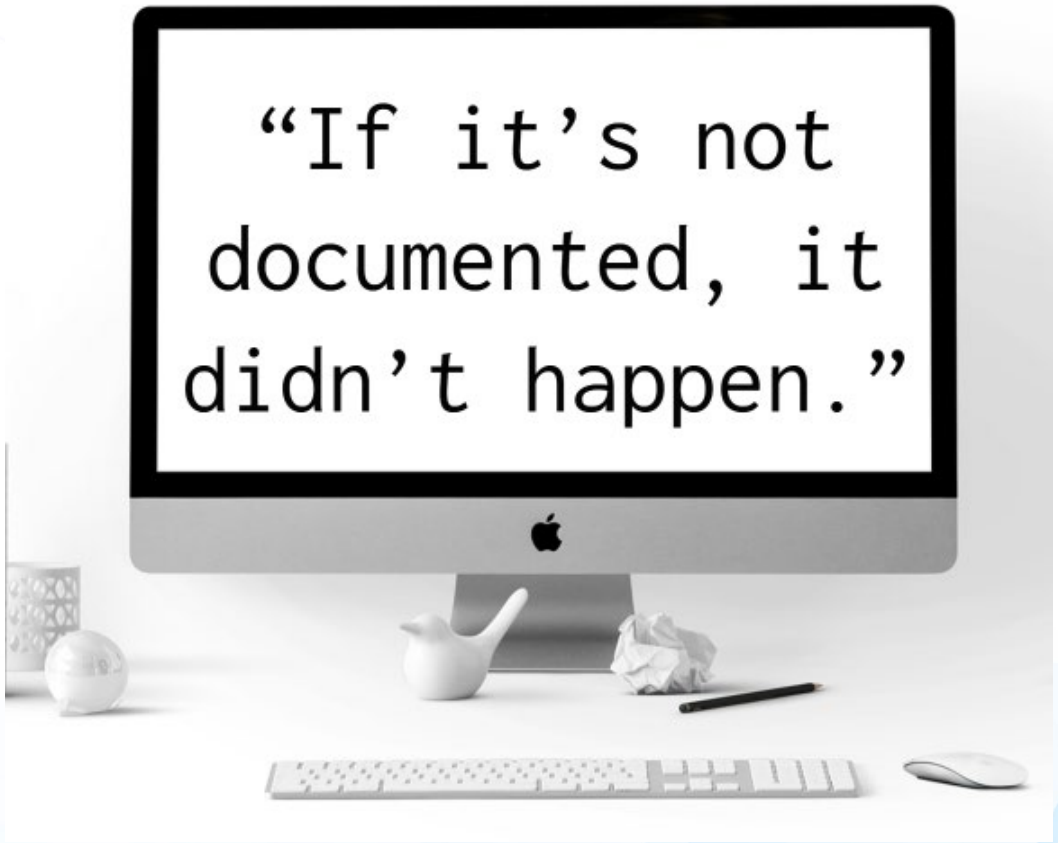
Learning Objectives

- What are case notes
- Why do we write them
- How can we tell the story best



Case notes shouldn’t be kept a secret. They need to tell a story that any reader can appreciate.

Defined

case notes

(keɪs nəʊts) *or* case papers (keɪs ˈpeɪpəz)

plural noun

Case notes are

- a **note** recording the interaction with or progress of a customer/client.
- They can cover success or failure and may include:
  - Documentation
  - Service strategies
  - Recount of conversation or appointments
  - Requested follow-up by customer or partners.

What happens when:

- You win the lottery and say, “Hasta luego” and your team tries to pick up where you left off?

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Do

- Use professional terminology as well as correct capitalization and punctuation.
- Address the circumstance with relevant details.
- Base notes on FACT. Observations are facts.
- Avoid bias by leaving out opinions and assumptions.
- Spell out acronyms at the beginning before using them.

Don’t

- Use slang, street language, clichés or jargon.
- Use metaphors or similes; just say what you mean directly.
- Write in code so that no one understands.
- Write about personal details that do not impact the case.
- Include Personal Identifying Information.

Clear

- Any reader should be able to understand the content included in a case note. Who is speaking about whom. What is being said should not include acronyms unless all readers will understand. If where something happened is relevant, it should be included. Include the why, if an activity is not normally noted. Case notes should be written in full sentences.
- Good Example: 1-18-18 3:15 PM This writer spoke with Mary Smith regarding her Paid Work Experience (PWE) activities at Senior Care Homes. Mary indicated that she is fitting in comfortably and refreshing all skills learned in training. *Submitted by Jane Smith, Case worker.*

Concise

- Brevity is advised, but relevant information should be included.
- Good Example:
  - Shilondra completed Adult Basic Education training today with a 97%.
- Poor Example:
  - She completed ABE today.

Useful

- Facts related to the activity and interactions. Avoid including opinions, derogatory language or emotive language. Subjective opinions are qualified with relevant background information, theory or research.
  - Good Example: James confronted another case worker today with abusive language and physical threats. Police were called to the agency.
  - Poor Example: I was scared when James told MaryEllen that he was going to beat her up. He cussed at her and got up in her face.

Relevant

- Items recorded should be in direct relationship to the case note being entered. If a comment does not impact the activity being recorded in the case note, it should not be included.
  - Good Example: A family member called today to report that Mary was involved in a car accident and will be in the hospital for an extended period.
  - Poor Example: Mary's sister called to report that Mary was doing drugs and rammed into a semi-truck. She is going to be in rehab for 6 weeks after she recuperates from the surgery to repair the broken bone in her femur.

Timely

- Case notes should be entered as close to the conversation, activity, or interaction as possible so that accuracy is not compromised.
  - Today this writer spoke with James about starting the next class in welding. He will….

Identifiable

- If not automatically added, include date and time of case note for readers to follow a progression of activity.
- If not automatically added, include your name and position for clarification to other readers.

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The SAR Model – Situation Action Result

- Situation
  - Describe the participants current goal, strengths, and relevant support elements for employment and housing stability.
  - Consider:
    - Employment goals
    - Strengths, experience, credentials or interests
    - Support services needs
    - Move the participant forward
  - Asset-based approach

- Action
  - Document what was provided
    - Career planning
    - Program or training services
    - Referrals & Services
    - Employer connections
    - Follow-up activities and next steps

- Results
  - Document expectations
    - Decisions or next steps
    - Referrals or appointments
    - Enrollments
    - Increased access to resources
    - Expected Changes because of actions

Keep the note clear, factual, relevant, and focused on progress toward the participants goals.

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SAR Case Note

Situation
Action
Result

- Example 1 – Training Support
  - SITUATION: Participant is seeking full-time employment in healthcare and has prior customer service experience but has no healthcare credential. The participant is currently in temporary housing and identified reliable transportation as important to maintaining both employment and housing stability.
  - ACTION: Career planner reviewed JTED training options, referred the participant to a healthcare credential program, provided a transportation support referral, and coordinated with the Home Illinois housing partner regarding ongoing housing services.
  - RESULT: Participant enrolled in training and confirmed transportation for the first two weeks. Housing partner confirmed continued engagement. Career planner and participant will review training progress and employment leads at the next contact.

- Example 2 – Employment Progress
  - SITUATION: Participant completed occupational training and is ready for employment. The participant identified consistent income as a priority for moving from transitional to more stable housing.
  - ACTION: Career planner reviewed the participant's updated resume, practiced interview responses, and provided referrals to two employers with openings aligned to the participant's training.
  - RESULT: Participant submitted two applications and scheduled one interview. Follow-up is planned after the interview to review progress and determine whether additional support is needed.

Frequency

Daily	Quick interactions like phone calls, texts, or emergencies.
Weekly	Review of interactions and activities for the week. Daily items may be summarized in this note.
Monthly	Progress from the month either positive or negative.
Quarterly	Highlights of a case activities for the previous quarter.
Initial	Highlight the conversation of an initial interview, orientation or assessment. This may be a lengthier case note.
Completion	Upon completion of activities and case is being closed out, recap the overall case compared to the initial case note.

Audience

Customer	Writing for customer follow-up and progress requires that the customer understand the actions required including due dates and specifics tasks.
Co-Workers	Regular, thorough case notes allow co-workers to pick up a case and know what happened or needs to happen.
Administration	Tell a story so that anyone who deals with a multitude of cases can track progress, or lack of progress, to determine how to position or re-position a customer as necessary.
Partner Organizations	Wholistic case management with multiple agencies or organizations involved will need to tell a story so that all partners know what the other is doing with or providing for a customer.
Funders	Grantors will want to see that monies are being expended with positive results.

Like a press release

- Who
- What
- When
- Where
- Why
- How
- And, Next Steps

Pull it all together

- Who
  - Who did the contact involve
  - If the information isn't included in a case record, include all information related to all parties involved.
- When
  - When did the contact occur
  - When should it have occurred
  - When are you documenting the interaction
- What
  - What is the reason for the case note.
  - What activity or lack of activity precipitated the case note.

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Add the details

- Where
  - Did the activity occur at school, one-stop center, off-site?
  - Is it relevant to note the location?
  - Is it useful to note the location?
- Why
  - Why is the case note being written.
  - Is it relevant to the note why something is being noted?
  - Is it useful to note the reasons for the case note being written?
- How
  - How something is going to be executed could be included in a case note, especially if a partner is going to be responsible for the execution of the activity.

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Good Examples

1-18-18 3:15 PM This writer spoke with Mary Smith by phone regarding her Paid Work Experience (PWE) activities at Senior Care Homes for our monthly follow-up. Mary indicated that she is fitting in comfortably and refreshing all skills learned in training. We scheduled an appointment for 2-15-18 as her PWE will be complete on 2-12-18 to discuss next steps. *Submitted by Jane Smith, Case worker.*

3-15-17 2:20 PM This writer spoke with Mary Smith at orientation this morning. Mary and I completed the orientation packet at the office, where we reviewed program parameters with Mary. Mary signed the appropriate documents from the packet that are filed in her paper record. Mary took a TABE test - scored an 8.6 in reading and a 6.8 in Math. She will be enrolled in Adult Basic Education (ABE) since the program in which she wants to enroll requires a 9.0 minimum score in reading and math. Mary completed the background information section and indicated that a potential barrier to employment is a lack of transportation. There were no other self-identified barriers. Next steps for Mary include assigning a bus pass, and scheduling a start date for the next available ABE session. She will return to the office on 3-17-17 as she had a doctors appointment on 3-16-17. *Submitted by Jane Smith, Case worker.*

Who What When Where Why How Next Steps

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What type do I choose?

- Assessment
- Orientation
- Referral
- Background
- Placement/Employment/Exit
- Individual Employment Plan / ISTEP / Individual Service Strategy / Training Plan / Career Service
- Monthly Contact
- Two Way Communication
- Post-Exit Follow-up

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Useful

Advised
Assessed
Assisted
Clarified
Confronted
Counseled
Discussed
Directed
Encouraged
Focused
Identified
Recommended
Referred
Reflected
Structure
Summarized
Supported
Urged

Avoid

Abnormal
Abusive
Anxious
Dangerous
Delusional
Demanding
Disturbed
Hysterical
Immature
Impulsive
Irrational
Overwhelmed
Resistant
Suicidal
Threatened
Troubled
Uncooperative
Unfit

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Resources

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Resources	
Intro to Case Notes for New Social Workers	https://www.oercommons.org/authoring/8157-intro-to-case-notes-for-new-social-workers/view
Australian Association for Case Workers	https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/2356
Experience Works	http://www.experienceworks.org/site/DocServer/Case_Management___Writing_Effective_Case_Notes.pdf?docID=23124
Cook County Workforce Board	http://www.workforceboard.org/Portals/0/ThePartnership/ProviderOrientation/Guidelines_for_writing_good_case_notes.pdf
Workforce GPS	https://ion.workforcegps.org/-/media/WorkforceGPS/ion/Files/Effective-CC-Case-Management/Case_Notes_Documentation.ashx
Career Source – Citrus Levy Marion	www.floridaobs.org/docs/workforce-professionals/art_of_case_notes.ppt

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