

Unite Us Connects Health and Social Service Providers to Deliver Better Care

BABEL STREET ANALYTICS

Vulnerable populations often need multiple services across the care continuum, such as housing assistance, employment services, and clinical services. While the needs of at-risk populations are connected, the organizations that meet those needs are usually not. Recognizing this pattern, first among U.S. veterans, then in other communities, Unite Us addresses the disconnect with technology that links health and social services providers, provides visibility into the entire health journey, and tracks 100% of outcomes.

The challenge

For participating providers to easily refer clients to each other, they need one master database of client records. Unite Us networks contain vetted providers across the spectrum of human, health, and social services. Unlike other directory-like systems that scrape the internet to find service organizations, Unite Us provides a distributed case management system that is shared across providers.

To work, Unite Us must maintain a single client record for each individual so that all providers in the network have a complete history of each client. Unite Us decided that names, with date of birth for verification, would serve as the lowest common denominator of personally identifying information for client profiles.

“If someone raises their hand and says, ‘I need help,’ but they’re concerned about sharing potentially sensitive personally identifiable information, we never want to turn them away,” said Unite Us CTO, Michael DeLorenzo. “We had to find a less confidential identifier that was also universal. Names — with birthdates for verification — met that need.”

Unite Us quickly discovered several challenges to using names as their cornerstone data type. Nicknames, typos, misspellings, and more were keeping the right records from being found. Instead of finding and adding to an existing client record, providers were creating duplicates — compromising the value of the data and driving up costs when the correct record couldn’t be found.

Addressing health and social needs holistically instead of piecemeal helps secure the future stability of individuals and frees up the service providers to assist even more individuals.

The solution

Unite Us began investigating fuzzy name matching methods that could be integrated into their database search tool. “Even if it wouldn’t be perfect, we wanted to at least give users a better chance of finding someone who’s already in the system” said DeLorenzo. “Plus, the problem is only going to get bigger and trickier as we add more data and more users.”

The organization moved the database onto Elasticsearch, but although some fuzzy matching was supported, it didn’t cover all the potential causes of missed matches. They needed an intelligent name matching system and found it in Babel Street Match. The capabilities in Match are compatible with Elasticsearch, it addresses common name matching phenomenon, and can fuzzy match dates — the second data type Unite Us uses to verify clients’ identities.

Finding an out-of-the-box solution for name matching allowed Unite Us engineers to focus on the technology that is core to their business. “We’re not a search company.” said DeLorenzo. “While search is important, that’s not something that we excel at building ourselves, or would want to spend the time and resources building. Match does everything we’re looking to do long term.”

The Results

With Babel Street Match, Unite Us had incredible success in improving operations and making connections for their user networks. Service

providers in Pittsburgh’s PA Serves network integrated the system in 2016 and cut the time spent on administrative tasks by 85%.

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Unite Us has seen networks connecting to one another for even more comprehensive coverage. This way, a client moving across country can be transferred from one network to another so their profile and history travel with them.

Building on their success, Unite Us continues to create more intelligent networks that serve clients better. In addition to static field data like names and birthdates, Unite Us networks include hundreds of thousands of documents of unstructured notes from case managers. Understanding and analyzing those notes can allow Unite Us to track patterns in client behaviors and ultimately create a predictive system to flag at-risk behaviors and preemptively provide care to clients before they reach a crisis state.

Unite Us can also see a more complete picture of clients’ lives as a population. By tracking trends of how and when individuals receive various services, the provider community can learn about the population’s needs on a macro level and build processes and interventions for the network to better meet those needs.

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