CALiO™ – Cornerstone of Evidence-Based Practice for Nationally Dispersed Field Professionals

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Abstract

One of the greatest challenges for field professionals is ready access to research, guidelines, protocols and best practices that contribute to evidence-based practice. This is particularly true for professionals working in agencies that provide social services, without access to academic or organizational collections. The problem is further exacerbated when the professionals are located in local organizations throughout the U.S. and abroad.

The Child Abuse Library Online (CALiO™) was launched over a decade ago by the National Children’s Advocacy Center to specifically address this problem.

The National Children’s Advocacy Center, a non-profit organization funded primarily through federal grants and other contributions was first established more than 30 years ago, and remains the primary center for training and information dissemination.

Over 900 Children’s Advocacy Centers, structured as formal working collaborations between law enforcement, district attorney offices, and health and victim services agencies combat child maltreatment.

This paper offers an overview of the unique needs of widely dispersed field professionals working with allied goals but varied expertise, the fundamental principles guiding the policies and services of CALiO™, and an overview of usage patterns by these professionals.

In addition to the targeted services of CALiO™ for the professionals affiliated with Children’s Advocacy Centers, CALiO™ has expanded its purview to include all professionals in fields related to child abuse and neglect, domestic and globally. These professionals include employees of Child Welfare Services and other social agencies, law enforcement, and the courts, and medical and mental health professionals who are not allied with Children’s Advocacy Centers.

This paper also discusses CALiO™ Collections, the open access repository of multilingual scholarly and research publications, practice guidelines and international documents. CALiO™ Collections contains over 2,700 open access publications, videos, and materials related to child maltreatment, trafficking, and commercial exploitation. The unusual strategy for populating CALiO™ Collections and its usage are briefly examined.
Introduction

In the second half of the 20th Century, health professionals, social agencies and law enforcement were alarmed by growing awareness of the scope of a scourge plaguing the country: child abuse. The numbers were staggering. More than one million cases of abuse of minors were being reported annually. One in eight girls and almost as many boys were victims of sexual abuse by age 18. And that was just the tip of the iceberg. Even greater numbers of children were victims of physical abuse, emotional abuse and severe neglect. (U.S. DHHS, 1995-2014) Cases of child sexual and physical abuse have abated somewhat in recent years, but the number of cases of neglect remain stubbornly high at more than 500,000 annually. (Finkelhor and Jones, 2012; Finkelhor, Saito and Jones, 2015)

In the early 1980s, Robert E. “Bud” Cramer, the local district attorney in Huntsville, AL, a city built around NASA and the aerospace industry, developed a strategy for attacking the problem. A formal MOU working agreement was established to coordinate the efforts of law enforcement and prosecutors, medical and mental health services, social workers and prevention personnel, and other community agents. Members of these groups formed a multi-disciplinary team dedicated to reviewing and addressing every report of child abuse. (Cramer 1985)

Thus was established the first Children’s Advocacy Center (CAC). In the years since that time, the CAC model has propagated throughout the U.S. and now is being adopted in other countries. There are currently approximately 900 CACs, all structured on the original model, all now accredited or in the process of accreditation by the National Children’s Alliance (NCA).

Figure 1: National Distribution of Children’s Advocacy Centers (image courtesy NCA)
The center in Huntsville became the National Children’s Advocacy Center (NCAC), an agency that now provides training and services for multi-disciplinary team members from the many CACs operating around the country, as well as professionals in other agencies and organizations that address child abuse issues.

**A Library for Child Abuse Professionals**

Among the first services offered by the NCAC in its early years was a telephone reference service for any professional dealing with a child abuse case, anywhere in the U.S. A small collection of professional journals and reference texts supported their efforts.

By the early 2000s, the NCAC had an in-house research team, a busy training department offering courses throughout the year, and programs for developing CACs. For the first time, a professional librarian came on board. An intranet was created to provide in-house electronic access to core journals, expert collections, bibliographies and other digital resources to the NCAC staff. Within two years, the electronic collections were made available to multi-disciplinary team members of other NCA accredited CACs, thus establishing the foundation for today’s digital library.

As librarians well know from personal experience and many decades of published investigations (e.g., Revere 2007), the information needs of professional practitioners, no matter what their specific field of concentration or expertise, differ from the information needs of academic library users and researchers.

**Guiding Principles**

From the outset, based on research and professional experience, the development of the digital library was guided by fundamental principles founded upon basic assumptions regarding the information needs and information seeking behavior of practitioners. Three basic assumptions about child abuse professionals were articulated.

**Assumption 1**
Our digital library users are smart, educated and committed to providing the best services possible.

**Assumption 2**
Our digital library users seek information for decision making, problem solving and improving services, not research, personal edification or entertainment.

**Assumption 3**
Our digital library users function under tight time constraints and with limited funding. They do not have easy access to professional libraries or personal subscriptions to professional journals.
These three basic assumptions about the primary clientele served by the digital library serve as the foundation of the three principles that guide its services and collections.

The three guiding principles for CALiO™, which have informed and motivated development since its vestigial stages in the early 2000s, are:

**Principle I: Ease of use**
Resources meeting user-defined needs should be easy for them to identify and locate.

**Principle II: Documents, not citations**
Immediate delivery of electronic versions of the resources, meeting time-sensitive needs, not bibliographic citations to publications they must track down.

**Principle III: Training and Service**
Provide users with the skills to find what they are looking for and personalized assistance when they need it to assure the best possible results for users.

The second principle drives the most important difference between this practitioner-oriented library and academic and research libraries. The purpose of CALiO™ is to deliver relevant documents into the hands of professional clientele, not to generate long lists of citations that they must then track down. The professional collections of CALiO™ consist of full text databases and specialized collections of other digital resources (audio and video training resources, digitized expert collections, open access materials, etc.).

The public collections of CALiO™ resources are a more recent addition to CALiO™ but the development of these collections follows the same basic principles. These resources in the open access collections are primarily intended to serve child abuse practitioners who are not affiliated with CACs, and the presumption is that their information seeking and use motivations and strategies are similar to our CAC clientele.

The first principle is equally important. CALiO™ clientele are not expected to manipulate multiple bibliographic database search engines. A single Google-like custom keyword search box (powered by EBSCO EDS) serves as the primary interface and simultaneously searches all of the full text databases as well as the collections of open access resources. The search facility is complemented by an array of pre-scripted search links on topics central to the efforts of child abuse professionals.

The signal strategy with CALiO™, based on research on practitioner information needs and experience, is to provide clientele with a selection of relevant documents immediately. Site design is focused on usability, with an emphasis on intuitive choices for information seeking. Tutorials offer guidance for managing more complex searches and CALiO™ librarians provide workshops on finding information for evidence-based practice.

However, if a user is unsuccessful, wishes to pursue further research, or wants to obtain a specific publication that is not in the full text collection, they contact the library by email or phone, and we quickly assist them – thus the third principle: service.
Figure 2: CALiO™ Entry Page for Logged-In Professionals
Collections for CAC Multi-Disciplinary Team Members

Since the CAC model coordinates the efforts of professionals from several fields of expertise, the clientele of CALiO™ professional collections is diverse. Mental health practitioners constitute a sizable percentage of users. Forensic interviewers represent a specialized field. The information needs of law enforcement, criminal investigators and legal professionals are quite different. Social workers, child advocates, family counselors and prevention experts are also part of CAC multi-disciplinary teams. Policy and organizational management, including accreditation, funding, lobbying and local relationships overlay the direct services to children and families.

Child abuse professionals motivated by a passion for their mission to eliminate abuse and provide the best possible outcomes for victims. However, the past 10 to 15 years has seen an increasingly stringent movement toward evidence-based practice among all health and social service professionals. The emphasis on translating research into practice has further energized the necessity of tested methods and strong theoretical models.

Through CALiO™ multi-disciplinary team members of CACs are able to access password-protected collections of professional journals, training programs, expert analyses of complex issues, reviews of legal cases, organizational management and funding resources, policy briefs, and other materials. As might be expected, these collections have grown significantly over the past decade. Subscription full text collections now include four full text EBSCO databases, the APA PsycARTICLES database, and individual subscriptions to core journals not included in the databases. In addition, collections of published and unpublished research and scholarship by experts in areas of law, psychology, epidemiology, and policy have been created.

Open Access: Beyond the CACs

Funding for CALiO™ comes from grants awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, Office of Justice Programs. In recent years, DOJ has encouraged greater outreach and access to organizations and agencies beyond CACs that combat child abuse. These include, of course, professionals who work in agencies like Child Protective Services and non-profit organizations such as Childhelp USA and Prevent Child Abuse America, since their members typically lack access to the professional literature.

Simultaneously, the National Children’s Advocacy Center has been extolling the CAC model in other countries and providing training for child abuse professionals globally. With limited resources, the international agencies invariably enquire about access to the CALiO™ professional collections, which we cannot provide, of course, due to federal and contractual limitations. And there is always interest from the public, often families of abused children seeking information.

The boom in open access availability of scholarly publications now affords an opportunity to, at least partially, meet the information needs of these diverse groups. Thousands
of publications – from professional journals articles to government-funded research reports to state and local documents – are now available through open access.

The problem, of course, is that these resources are scattered around the country and around the world in institutional repositories or buried on the websites of government agencies or other organizations. If it is difficult for most people to effectively search bibliographic databases, it is immensely more difficult for people to find open access resources that address their interest.

These circumstances motivated CALiO™ to develop a strategy for extending its purview. The result is CALiO™Collections, a repository of open access resources pertaining to child maltreatment. CALiO™Collections is now the entry point to the CALiO™ website. It looks very similar to the home page of the professional site behind the login. It features a similar Google-like search box powered by the same EBSCO EDS, but with results limited to repository holdings.

The budget for CALiO™ is quite modest compared to academic and research libraries. Establishing an institutional repository was a challenge. One complication is that the National Children’s Advocacy Center does not run in-house servers. Everything is contracted out. So, for CALiO™Collections, it was necessary to find an institutional repository hosting service. Most of those services are marketed to academic and research institutions and are far beyond the budget of CALiO™. Fortunately, a new start up, dSpaceDirect, was launching with the goal of offering repository hosting services for non-profits and smaller institutions with limited budgets.

CALiO™Collections (http://calio.org) launched in May 2015. CALiO™ librarians scour the repositories and websites around the world, identifying high quality open access resources pertaining to child abuse and trafficking. New bibliographic records are created, with expanded descriptors and if needed, new summaries, to improve searchability, and link out to the publications themselves.

The basic assumptions and guiding principles that form the foundation of all CALiO™ development and services has engendered a completely new approach to the application of repository software than is commonly deployed. It is an innovation that rethinks the mission of an institutional repository – deviating from the norm of archival collection of locally produced resources to achieve an open access working collection for professionals.

This emphasis on creating a practical working collection of open access resources designed to address the needs of field professionals nationally and even globally has encouraged a concept of the institutional repository as, not a collection of publications, but as a service that links professionals with clearly defined information interests to open access resources, wherever they might be housed, that are relevant to their needs.

As a result, only a small percentage of the resources itemized in the bibliographic database that is the CALiO™Collections repository are actually produced by NCAC or located on NCAC-controlled servers.
The CALiO™ Collections repository has grown at a rate of approximately 100 documents per month, presently numbering about 2,700 items. The majority of the collection is composed of open access scholarly and research publications from professional journals, with a smaller percentage being government publications. Although predominately English language and U.S.-centric, the collection is international in scope with an increasing number of publications in French, Spanish, German and other languages.

**Figure 3:** Growth of the CALiO™ Collections Repository

![Growth Graph](image)

**Use of CALiO™**

Usage of the CALiO™ professional collections has steadily increased since its inception. Some of the increase can be attributed to ongoing efforts to promote awareness of CALiO™, workshops on information seeking for evidence-based practice at conferences related to domestic violence and child maltreatment, and the increasing availability of full text resources.

However, the greatest increase in usage can be attributed to advances in the application of information technologies that interface with clientele. The greatest impetus to CALiO™ usage has occurred in the past two years, dating from the launch of the new, user friendly website with the prominent Google-like comprehensive search facility and the new CALiO™ Collections repository.
Since the CALiO™Collections repository represents an innovation in access to subject specific resources for widely dispersed clientele, which remains a rather labor-intensive enterprise, usage patterns for this portion of CALiO™ has been of particular interest.

Over a span of 18 months, more than 22,000 unique visitors have searched for information in CALiO™Collections. Recent months have seen an average of more than 1,500 search sessions. Although 80% of the use of these open access resources has come from U.S. users, the CALiO™Collections repository has been searched more than 1,000 times by British users, and more than 100 times by users from Spain, Netherlands, Germany, France, Brazil, Australia and China.
Over the same period, the CALiO™ librarians have responded to more than 1,000 requests for assistance obtaining publications and case-related information resources from child abuse professionals.

Conclusions and Future Research

Practitioners in fields addressing child abuse are well educated and motivated, but they are not researchers or academics with the time or the experience searching bibliographic databases. The basic assumptions about the information needs and information seeking behavior of these professionals provided the foundation for guiding principles that inform the collections and services of CALiO™. The core professional collections of CALiO™ which are accessible only to members of the multi-disciplinary teams of CACs, has been supplemented by creation of an open access working library, CALiO™ Collections, intended to serve child abuse professionals in the U.S. and internationally who are not affiliated with CACs.

CALiO™ establishes a model for delivery of professional resources to widely dispersed practitioners – not only those affiliated with a particular organization, but also professionals working in similar fields in other organizations, nationally and internationally.

In 2015, the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Victims of Crimes recognized the success of the CALiO™ model and sought recommendations in its efforts to improve “research into practice” initiatives in support of evidence-based practice throughout the vast federal agency.

The innovative CALiO™ Collections repository strategy has proven extremely successful. Incorporating authoritative open access resources on timely topics like human trafficking and corporal punishment maintains currency and enhances appeal to a wider audience of professionals. However, it has proven impossible, as yet, to automate identification of relevant publications, and the policy of adding descriptors to records in order to ensure optimal search success for users remains labor intensive.

Preliminary results of a recent qualitative study of CALiO™ clientele from multi-disciplinary teams of CACs in seven states revealed that use of CALiO™ resources may vary by sub-discipline even within the field of child abuse. There was a distinct perception that members from the disciplines of Forensic Interviewing and the health professions saw the value of using CALiO™ for easy access to current research in support of ongoing best practices. The value among these disciplines was considered to be less case-specific and more general knowledge support in nature. On the other hand, the perception was that members from the disciplines of law enforcement and child protective services would value and use CALiO™ solely if they were aware that it contained resources that were very quick and easy to access, and that met their very case-specific needs. These initial research results suggest directions for further evaluative research regarding CALiO™ clientele and usage.
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Endnotes

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