



CASE STUDY

Connecting thousands of Oakland County newcomer students with the services they need



Located in one of California’s most diverse counties, [Oakland Unified School District \(OUSD\)](#) serves nearly 50,000 students across 80 elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as dozens of district-authorized charter schools.

OUSD’s purpose is to serve as a “full-service community district” by focusing on high academic achievement among its students and by providing access to services that help the whole child and eliminate inequity. One such service within OUSD is its Newcomer Wellness Initiative (NWI), which has been an integral part of orienting new students to the area since 2017.

Approximately 6% of OUSD K-12 students are newcomers, which equates to an estimated 3,000 individuals. A newcomer is someone who has been living in the United States for three years or less, but was not born in the U.S., and has a home language other than English.

Most of OUSD’s newcomers are refugees, asylees, and/or unaccompanied minors, and many of whom are fleeing violence, human trafficking, or persecution in their home country. While these children bring immense linguistic and cultural assets to Oakland County’s schools, along with exemplary resilience and resourcefulness, they also require intensive and specialized services to meet their academic, socio-emotional, and mental health needs.

NWI utilizes bilingual clinical social workers and school counselors to provide non-academic support to newcomers at designated newcomer sites at middle and high schools. The program historically has focused on reaching middle and high school students because of the understanding that the older a person is when they arrive in a new country, the less time they have to learn the language, acculturate, and catch up academically. About 65% of OUSD newcomers are middle and high schoolers.



CLIENT
Oakland Unified School District

SECTOR
Education

PRODUCT
Bonterra Impact Management

Not only does NWI support the student, but assistance is also extended to their families and caregivers. The NWI team uses a multi-tiered systems of support framework to guide their interventions to address all levels of student needs within the school setting. Tier one focuses on universal practices that improve the overall school culture and climate, such as cultural celebrations, lunchtime events, restorative justice circles, and workshops. Tier two offers group support targeted at addressing specific needs and themes arising in the newcomer population, including grief and loss, acculturation, empowerment, and leadership. The third tier is focused on addressing urgent individual needs, including mental health services, intensive clinical case management, and targeted attendance interventions, which may include home visits and family support.

Challenges

The 2022-23 school year is OUSD's sixth year serving students through the initiative. Over time, NWI has evolved from manual reporting and tracking to using Bonterra Impact Management Enterprise with refined data and analytics capabilities.

When the NWI team first started out, they utilized spreadsheets and shareable document software, mainly Google Suite, to track everything. As the program grew, spreadsheets and Google Suite led to issues like coding discrepancies between team members, ineffective version tracking, and data loss during personnel changes.

Growing importance of data

Being able to work with and produce unified and consistent data was important to the purpose of NWI for two main reasons.

With Impact Management, NWI has recorded 4,023 student and family touchpoints. This included **3,081** clinical case management cases within the Academic & Attendance and Health Care Access programs.

First, the caseload for each NWI social worker is exceptional. Each clinical social worker on staff with NWI handles between 60-150 students. This means that clinical case workers' time and resources are extremely valuable, and glitches or inaccuracies in data only add to their already overloaded plate.

Second, the data the initiative collects on medical, educational, and familial history needs to be visible to all in one location so when kids transfer to different schools, their service history and interventions are visible to staff at the new site. Before using Bonterra Impact Management, NWI used paper forms to collect student and family history, which brought challenges in maintaining confidentiality.

Limited reporting capabilities

Reporting was also an area that was in desperate need of proficiency. Before the support of our impact management solution, NWI's team spent hours creating a simple, single-use report, which was extremely limited in the quality and quantity of information it presented. For example, if the staff wanted to draw comparisons between two different high schools, they manually exported the data from each school separately in order to create a comparison report. The staff lacked the ability to view data from every school campus across the district and easily manipulate the data across various categories and interest points. Reporting on the team was simple and limited.

Fears of noncompliance

Compliance was another issue NWI grappled with in its early years. Due to the nature of its work with mental health information, special care is taken to not jeopardize the professional licensing of the clinical social workers and their supervisors. Clinical social workers needed to handle note-taking and file permissions with extreme care. Since social workers were relying on software like Google Documents to support most of their work, notes weren't easily stored and shared, which added another level of complexity when it came to extrapolating data for use in reporting.



“

Our whole life prior to [Bonterra Impact Management] was spreadsheets. There would be 50 notes on one student — some of them would be mental health notes, some of them would be case notes — and we'd have to sift out certain notes and some notes would need encryption or need to be kept in a separate document because of legal safeguards and others would have to be filtered and then sub-filtered again. So that was definitely time consuming, dealing with all of these small things to get to the information we needed.”

— **STEPHANIE NORIEGA**,
LCSW, program manager of the
Newcomer Wellness Initiative



I'm a clinical social worker. I'm not very tech-savvy, so there was definitely a learning curve. My skills and ability have really been stretched in a good way. Our software specialist that works with us [at Bonterra] is amazing and has given us really customized support. We'll come to him with a need to create a special form or a customized report and he'll work through it with us and support us through the process. He helps us find the best and easiest way to do what we need to do."

— **STEPHANIE NORIEGA**,
LCSW program manager of the
Newcomer Wellness Initiative

Solutions

NWI recently began using Bonterra Impact Management to introduce a more robust and sophisticated method of tracking newcomers in one centralized place. The dynamic impact management solution works side-by-side with OUSD's centralized student portal software which collects general information from each student — such as attendance, educational history, demographics, and family contacts — during enrollment and throughout the year. That information feeds into NWI's database, which is then used to supplement casework at the initiative.

Our impact management platform allows the team at NWI to collect, track, and manage thousands of student profiles in one place. The team can organize information, monitor services, and keep forms structured in an efficient manner. This unified structure helps NWI identify new students during the enrollment process, organize its case files, track successes such as touchpoints and connections, stay compliant with regional and federal mandates, generate compelling reports, and so much more.

Unified enrollment and impact management

NWI utilizes the Bulletin feature in its Bonterra Impact Management instance, which allows them to track student responses on intake forms — which monitors students' basic needs, educational history, and stressors — and filter those responses as needed. For example, clinical social workers can view intake responses on the medical access history collected on a certain date to pinpoint how many students may not

have Medi-Cal but are requesting services for dental and vision care. That then allows the clinical social workers to help schedule for school-based clinic care and organize release and consent forms for students that are in need.

Legal support is also a pressing issue for many of the newcomers who NWI serves. The school district uses Bonterra Impact Management to connect its participants with partner organizations that specialize in immigrant law. A few years ago, NWI formed a partnership with the Immigrant Family Defense Fund, which provides NWI with an attorney to help with initial consultations. The attorney uses the impact management solution to identify unaccompanied immigrant youth before she uses Bonterra Impact Management to refer them to immigration organizations or private lawyers in the area. She can also input legal immigration data directly into the impact management software so that the clinical social workers can view individuals' legal journey.

Quickly track success with reporting

NWI is an exceptional example of how our impact management solution can be used to track success using easy-to-generate reporting. These reports have helped NWI identify needs and gaps early and efficiently. This results in NWI being able to better monitor both student touchpoints and the fulfillment of student needs. By using Bonterra Impact Management software to track touchpoints, NWI can work with school administrators in a better and more informed manner. For example, if a team member from NWI looks at a student profile and recognizes a missing intake form, the team member can use that information to follow up with their teacher or school counselor to make sure the student gets access to help if they need it. Stephanie adds that schools have even asked her team to generate reports directly within the impact management solution of the students that have not had touchpoints, which helps the school identify gaps.

Introducing Bonterra Impact Management has also made it easier for NWI to create an all-in-one electronic case folder that helps them track services a student receives, from their mental health progress to their involvement in various support programs. The clinical social workers, for example, are no longer entering case notes in one Google Sheet and their mental health notes in another sheet. NWI's team has been able to put everything in one place so that they can move fluidly from one folder to the other all in one system that's equipped with permissions rules and robust notes that can be easily shared and categorized by users.

This more intuitive impact management solution is helping NWI to work towards achieving its goal of connecting more students to more support programs, which Stephanie says is one of the biggest indicators of progress for the team thus far.

With the reporting capabilities of Bonterra Impact Management, the NWI team is now able to paint a detailed picture to funders and partners in a matter of hours, rather than days. This has helped the team at NWI sustain funding from OUSD year over year and maximize the dollars that it receives from the school district.



In our line of work, confidentiality is the thing we take most seriously. So being able to have mental health notes that only certain people can see has been the best thing that's happened to us. It's how we honor and hold information for our students."

— **STEPHANIE NORIEGA,**
LCSW, program manager of the Newcomer Wellness Initiative

Easy data privacy compliance

Because NWI hires clinical social workers to deal with mental health information, the clinical social workers are regulated by the California Board of Behavioral Science and must adhere to strict data privacy laws. In the past, this was challenging and created many roadblocks for its clinical social workers. Now, by utilizing the impact management solution, they can keep everything in the same place and even share case files with authorized teachers, family members, and other support programs, while keeping privileged, confidential clinical work files separate when needed.

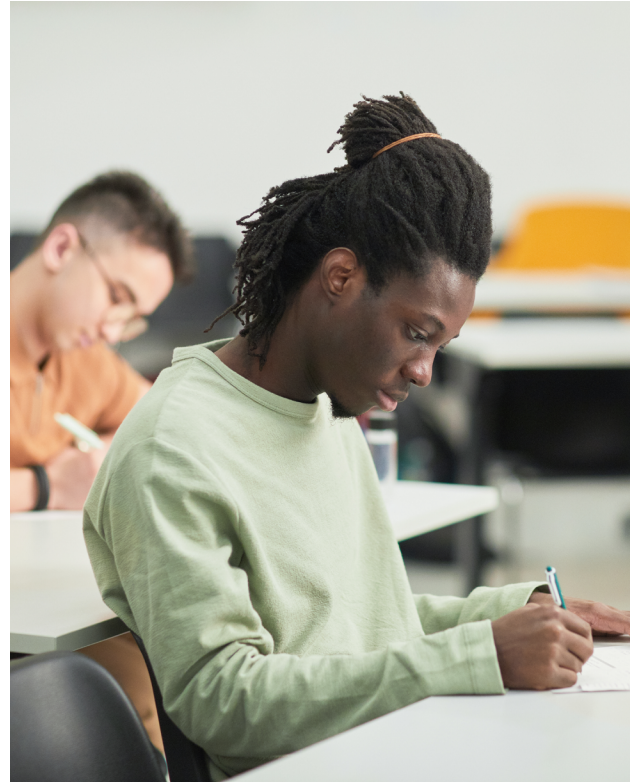
Impact

Tracking and reporting on NWI's impact with OUSD's newcomers became easier for Stephanie and her team after the introduction of Bonterra Impact Management. The NWI team was able to release several compelling, tangible results from the 2021- 22 school year. Take a look at the team's impact.

Student-centered support

NWI recorded 4,023 student and family touchpoints, which included:

- 99 crisis responses
- 902 student wellness check-ins
- 436 family interactions
- 3,081 clinical case management cases within the Academic & Attendance and Health Care Access programs
- Over 500 individual and group sessions of therapeutic services



Community-centered support

NWI developed a financial literacy class in partnership with the Community Development Finance program to help 45 of Rudsdale newcomer continuation students open bank accounts, gain **basic budgeting skills, and understand the banking system of the United States.**

School-centered support

- Piloted the Global Ambassador Mentorship Program focused on the district's Mayan Mam students at three high schools
- Re-engaged about 100 disconnected students to enroll back in OUSD schools or in adult-education
- Helped Clinical Social Workers receive funding to support cultural and graduation celebrations for their schools

Community-centered support

- Connected about 15 families with community resources to help with emergency housing relief
- Developed a financial literacy class in partnership with the Community Development Finance program to help 45 Ruidale Newcomer Continuation students open bank accounts, gain basic budgeting skills, and understand the banking system of the United States

Looking ahead, Stephanie and the team at NWI plan to utilize even more advanced reporting and tracking capabilities to sustain its initiatives. It also will leverage surveys within the impact management solution to improve and advance its services to OUSD's students and community for years to come.



School-centered support re-engaged about 100 disconnected students to enroll back in OUSD schools or in adult-education.

Ready to create lasting social change?

Get in touch today.

Request a demo of Bonterra Impact Management

