

Northwoods Helps Agencies throughout Ohio Improve Service to Clients

In 30 Ohio counties, some 45 departments of Job and Family Services, Child Support Enforcement, and Children Services work with Northwoods products and services every day to improve service to their communities while cutting costs. Northwoods Compass Software® provides agencies with electronic document management, document imaging, front desk scanning, electronic forms, scheduling, and other service-enhancing solutions.

Northwoods Compass Software® applications work with existing state systems to help agency workers do their jobs more quickly and efficiently. The software and systems help smooth the process from registration through interview, and provide instant access to client information for follow-up or redetermination interviews.

“I really do not know how we managed before,” said Stephanie Kaiser, Project Analyst, Lucas County DJFS.

Lucas County, in Northwest Ohio, was the first metropolitan county to use Northwoods products and services. Before the Northwoods partnership, five front desk workers did their best to get people where they needed to be within 30 minutes of their arrival at the agency. Today, the average wait is 12 minutes, and three of the workers have been freed up for other duties.

Compass Appointments, developed by Northwoods, handles all appointment scheduling, tracks how long clients are waiting, and helps check in and assign walk-in clients to an appropriate worker. It is considered the traffic cop between the lobby and the case workers in the agency.

“We’ve come a long way since beginning our partnership with Northwoods,” said Mario Faz, Information Services Director, Lucas County Department of Job and Family Services (DJFS). “The Compass Appointments system drives our business, so it’s a good thing it’s so reliable. We’ve only been down for maybe five minutes since we started in early 2004.”

In the middle of the state, the Pickaway County DJFS works with Pickaway Community Action, Pickaway Metropolitan Housing, Veterans Services, and local churches to help

county residents avoid disconnection of utilities, evictions, foreclosures, and repossessions of vehicles. With Northwoods help, case managers are now able to send electronic case file information to these other organizations instantly, rather than searching through offices, piles of mail, or the records room to find specific documents. Staff in Pickaway County state that on a weekly basis they are able to quickly provide information that helps citizens avoid crisis situations. This level of service was simply not possible prior to the implementation of the Northwoods solution.

The Pickaway County DJFS is a quadruple-combined agency — an agency that combines Job and Family Services, workforce development, child support enforcement, and children services under one roof.

Employees there beam when they talk about the things they are able to do, the money they are saving, and the process improvements that their partnership with Northwoods has helped them achieve. Among these benefits are:

- Direct cost savings in shelving units, copier leases, paper, toner, manila folders, labels, hanging file folders, and labor associated with handling, filing, and storing paper
- Approximately, two hours per week saved per child support worker for time that would be spent copying and filing paper
- Better service and quicker response to client inquiries at the front desk
- Better coverage for absent workers, faster receipt of drop-off documents, better organization, and more efficient and thorough interviews with increased client participation

In the southern part of the state, the Scioto County DJFS has found that with Northwoods help they’ve been able to improve the overall interview process. According to Sharon Mundhenk, Director, Northwoods solutions take some of the work out of completing case documents and have freed case managers to be more engaged in face-to-face meetings with citizens in need, making the meetings much more productive.



In addition, appointments take less time than they used to, enabling workers to cover for each other in times of absence, which means that people who might have otherwise been turned away or made to wait for long periods of time are now able to meet with a case worker in a timely fashion. Today, people who come to the agency for help only have to wait an average of five minutes before seeing someone who can assist them.

Thanks to the outstanding efforts of the people who work there and solutions provided by Northwoods, employees at Scioto County DJFS estimate that they are 65% more efficient in their ability to manage the flow of people coming into the agency. And they estimate that case managers spend 25% less time before and after meeting with a client, since there are no longer paper forms to fill out, copy, and file.

In the words of one Scioto case manager, “It is liberating to finish an appointment, shred the application, and know that there’s no need to file away a stack of paper documents in the cabinet.”

In Scioto County, time spent with clients is now focused on meeting their needs rather than shuffling paper and managing schedules.

In addition to its existing products and services, Northwoods is constantly working on new solutions that will bring additional benefits to human service agencies, often in partnership with the counties themselves.

One project that is currently under development with the Auglaize County DJFS will help the county meet federal standards for accuracy and outreach programs. Together, Northwoods and Auglaize County DJFS petitioned the State to endorse an enhancement to its existing Northwoods document management solution. When completed, the system will enable case managers to work in a virtual office anywhere in the community, with full access to eligibility information and electronically imaged case files.

“This will revolutionize the way we do business because we will no longer be tied to our desks,” said Amy Ruppert, Business Administrator, Auglaize County DJFS.

Already, the agency is proactively visiting inmates in the county prison months before their scheduled release to coordinate work activities and anticipate future needs for assistance.

This project will not be the first time that Auglaize County DJFS has benefited from their partnership with Northwoods. Recently, the agency has contracted with architects to redesign the interior of the building because so much space is now available in the absence of file cabinets and shelving units. Using the Northwoods document management solution has freed up much needed work space and extended the useful life of the building for the 47 full-time employees working there.

In addition to the counties in Ohio that have grown to rely on the service and software that Northwoods provides, a growing number of county agencies in North Carolina, California, New York, and Minnesota are also discovering the efficiencies of Northwoods solutions.

About Northwoods Consulting Partners

Headquartered in Dublin, Ohio, Northwoods Consulting Partners is a privately held software-development company. With its Compass Software® suite of products, Northwoods offers an unmatched level of capabilities and expertise in serving the document management and client scheduling needs of human services agencies nationwide.

###