



Montgomery County CSEA Improves Service to Clients and Reduces Paper Use with Northwoods Solution

At-a-Glance

The Montgomery County (Ohio) Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA) set out to eliminate ongoing paper, reduce their dependence on offsite storage, and provide immediate access to case files when workers needed them.

Solution

Northwoods installed and configured the Compass Software® suite of document management and appointment management products including:

- Compass Appointments™
- Compass Capture™
- Compass Forms™
- Compass Print Stream Processor™
- OnBase Document Management and Workflow

Benefits

- Ability to handle increased caseloads with current staffing levels
- 50% reduction in mail
- Instant access to case documents for agency employees
- Additional physical space available due to electronic storage
- Client service improved
- Consistent information sharing between case managers
- Improved ability to respond to audits or legal discovery
- Improved employee morale

The Montgomery County Child Support Enforcement Agency (CSEA), in Dayton, Ohio, works to provide the county's children with the opportunity for a better life by assisting with family self-sufficiency. Each day Child Support professionals interact with employers, insurance providers, courts, law enforcement, other government agencies, and parents to establish and enforce support orders to help children receive the financial and medical support they need. The agency manages 60,000 ongoing cases between their Legal and Enforcement Divisions. Case managers carry a caseload of about 1,500 cases each.

Summary

In 2007, the agency set its sights on Compass Software® from Northwoods Consulting Partners to address the volume of paper it generates in its day-to-day operations. The stated goals were simple: to eliminate ongoing paper, reduce their dependence on offsite storage, and provide immediate access to case files. Although the goals were reasonable and attainable, in the end they were a footnote to the success story that is the Montgomery County CSEA document management project.

The agency had a backlog of orders to process, which generated a lot of phone calls and duplicate mail from clients. Prior to the start of the document management project, Call Center agents could not easily access the orders, which made it difficult to answer clients' questions about the orders. Likewise, when a client reported submitting a document it was difficult to determine if it was actually in the agency's possession until it had been processed.

Compass Software alleviated these issues by making the orders and mail available to all staff almost immediately. Although caseloads are currently higher than they were a year ago, the amount of mail has been reduced by 50%. At one point after the implementation, supervisors called the post office asking them if they knew the whereabouts of the rest of the agency's mail. The system created standards, structure, and order where they did not exist prior. It demanded accountability. Despite the new "structure," 100% of the workers at the CSEA soon embraced the system enthusiastically, because they could see it dramatically cut down on their workload.

Case managers at the agency no longer have to wait hours to receive a file from the records room. Electronic retrieval is instantaneous, saving on court preparation time and allowing Call Center employees to answer inquiries immediately in most cases.

"The first thing that comes to mind about the Northwoods solution is the efficiency of being able to see everything to do with the case immediately," said Shelley Swartztrauber, Division Administrator, Montgomery County Child Support Enforcement Agency. "Before you had to request the file and wait 4–24 hours."



With a general reduction in printing taking place, the agency is no longer replacing printers as they wear out, but consolidating on group printers. The CSEA is also experiencing savings on toner and other printer consumables.

The Implementation

Montgomery County CSEA researched available solutions by interviewing other counties and chose Northwoods largely because of the successes reported by counties using the Northwoods solution. Northwoods is a software development and services company that creates its Compass Software® suite of products to provide efficiencies and cost savings to Human Services agencies.

In 2007, the CSEA chose to implement Northwoods' full suite of document imaging and scheduling solutions for its 150 users. Northwoods Compass Software works in concert with the agency's electronic document management, storage, and routing system, which Northwoods also services.

This solution provides several key functionality gains, including allowing the agency to scan incoming mail at its point of entry, with Compass Capture™ software, and make it immediately available to case managers and others throughout the agency. Streamlined completion of electronic forms, with Compass Forms™, helps case managers do their work fast and accurately. In addition, Compass Appointments™ is used by the agency to serve walk-in clients quickly and to improve communication between the front desk, case managers, and supervisors. The project kicked off in December 2007.

"Working with the Northwoods team was great," said Ms. Swartztrauber. "They were very attentive and would always follow up on any questions. Jason Heyse (Northwoods project manager) made the staff feel comfortable. When someone needed help, they always got right up and helped them."

Forms needed to aid clients are filled out electronically in Compass Forms, which helps case managers complete them quickly and easily with automated tools that insert client demographic information from a database into the appropriate fields. This software saves a great deal of time previously spent by case managers on repetitive data entry. Completed forms are automatically filed into the agency's document management system for easy retrieval. The form is then routed to the appropriate worker or unit. At any stage in the process, the original case manager, or any employee with the proper

authorization, can check the status of the request.

"We use Compass Forms for everything we send out," said Ms. Swartztrauber. "We have a group of forms that we send to obligors along with a last chance letter."

Where the agency used to keep shelves of blank forms throughout the work areas to provide easy access for workers, they now are able to reclaim space, since forms are now housed online. And since case managers no longer need to keep stacks of files on hand, workspaces are more organized and tidy in general.

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Division Administrator

Document Management

When clients drop off or mail in documents, they are scanned into the document repository using Northwoods' Compass Capture software. Capture helps agency employees accurately and quickly scan documents into the system. Capture can also route documents to a specific worker or workers.

"Jason's suggestion to cut off all paper at a set point worked very well," said Ms. Swartztrauber. "You can't have one unit receiving paper while another is all electronic."

Northwoods automated a number of business processes for the agency that reduce paper flow and increase efficiency:

- Call Center/SFRC Referrals — Helps the Call Center handle client phone inquiries by allowing workers to complete an e-form and route it to a specific unit or worker, instead of by printing the request and sending it by internal mail to the appropriate person or persons.
- 7001 Legal Referrals — Lets workers track the progress of legal referrals throughout the process.
- PSU Referrals — Helps the Payment Summary Unit (PSU) manage all new/modified court order, which arrive at the rate of 100-150 per day. The PSU Referral process also handles internal referrals from the Call Center when a client phones and has a payment question the Call Center worker cannot answer. These referrals are all handled electronically.
- Modification (Review and Adjustments) Process — Tracks both automatic reviews of cases and those requested by a parent. Each review determines if an adjustment/modification is needed to the support order.
- Electronic mail delivery — Documents received at

the front desk, through the mail, or elsewhere in the agency can be routed almost immediately to the worker or group of workers that need to act on them.

Rather than tie up agency workers with the task of scanning documents for its open case files, the agency is sending the files to a contractor who batch scans the documents. Agency staff first remove duplicates and prep the files, then the contractor sorts and scans the contents. The electronic images are then loaded into the CSEA's document management system.

"It's the only way to go," said Ms. Swartztrauber.

Agency employees are scanning new documents for current cases as well as those for new cases. Already, over 50% of the agency's open files have been scanned.

Document Management in the Legal Department

After a year with the solution, Montgomery CSEA is seeing positive results. One of the most obvious improvements is in the legal referral process and how the agency handles the support orders that the process generates. Prior to the Northwoods solution, the agency had a four month backlog of new orders (approximately 4,000) that needed to be entered into the case management system. They were unable to always serve clients in a timely manner because documents were getting lost in the process. They sometimes had to ask clients to resubmit documents.

In 2005, Legal was moved from the prosecutor's office to the CSEA and integrated with Enforcement. This created a number of issues because Legal had its own file system. The Records Center's rule that files could only be checked out for 48 hours also created a headache in Legal because the attorneys generally needed the files for extended periods.

Under the old paper-based process, case managers in Enforcement sent referrals to the Legal department, which is housed on a different floor of the agency. Case managers would email a referral, which was printed off in Legal and added to a staff attorney's inbox. In addition to sending the email, case managers would print a screen from the case management system that would be picked up by an aide and hand delivered to Legal. This process generated a lot of paper and created the potential for documents to get lost.

With no reliable tracking mechanism, referrals might sit on a printer too long and be discarded, or they might get misplaced in the mountain of referrals received by Legal. For

these reasons, case managers often sent duplicate referrals, which compounded the number of referrals in Legal.

"Now everyone can see the documents at the same time," said Sarah Fields, Legal Division Administrator. "These days, I get frustrated when I have to use a paper file."

When attorneys or case managers need to go to court, they now take a laptop computer instead of the paper files they used to take with them. The laptops have a number of security features to protect client information, like VPN tokens and encrypted flash drives. The paper files constituted a security risk, because a client's personal information could accidentally be lost or stolen. Staff also often had to first sort through the files to weed out unnecessary documents and make the files more compact and portable. The new procedure also saves paper since staff members no longer have to print extensive pay histories for each case that goes to court.

The Northwoods solution saves on court preparation time because staff members do not have to request and wait for files, and referrals and orders are fast and easy to retrieve. In addition, attorneys no longer have to wait for audits to be completed on the case to begin the preparation for the court hearing. Prior to the implementation of the Northwoods solution, in preparation for court, the paper case file would first be routed to the Audit unit then to the Legal Division. The new processes allow for these tasks to occur simultaneously.

When clients had scheduled appointments, the staff had to retrieve the file and make copies of documents for the client to sign or reference. Today, the Legal staff simply prints the documents when the clients actually arrive for their appointments, thus eliminating printing when a client is a no-show, which is an all-too-frequent occurrence.

When orders came back to the agency from the courts, they came with duplicate copies, three for each order from the courts, and sometimes in rapid succession. Case managers had no way of knowing if additional orders had been issued. Sometimes they would process orders only to later find that the orders were building on previous orders that had not been processed.

To solve this problem, Northwoods created a workflow solution so that case managers can track new court orders, which are scanned when received. Now when the Enforcement Division needs the Legal Division's involvement with a case, they have a number of internal electronic documents that initiate

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Shelley Swartztrauber

and track the request so that workers in each division can monitor its status. When a request is submitted, it goes to an electronic “Tickler” file, which reminds the appropriate employees when action is required on the request.

“Before Northwoods, we were having a huge problem with orders because they were coming from everywhere, from two courts, and from administrative processes, and we couldn’t tell where in the process the orders were,” said Ms. Swartztrauber. “Now with the new referral process, case managers can always find them right away.”

Client Flow and Scheduling

Compass Appointments is used at the front desk to improve service to walk-in clients, who arrive at the agency without scheduled appointments. Before Northwoods, front desk staff would attempt to find someone to help a walk-in client by calling case managers according to a round-robin list. This was a time-consuming process and sometimes resulted in long waits for clients.

Now, when walk-in clients arrive at the front desk, they are put into a queue in Compass Appointments, which notifies a designated set of case managers via pop-up window on their monitors that a client is waiting. If the client is not served in a timely manner, Appointments will automatically escalate the appointment by notifying supervisory staff who can make sure the client is seen.

Compass Appointments is also used to schedule group appointments such as genetic testing and administrative hearings.

More Results

The Montgomery CSEA staff attributes its 50% reduction in mail, compared to 2008 levels, to the immediate availability of documents for retrieval. This allows Call Center workers to see what documents have already been received. Prior to Northwoods, Call Center workers had to rely on notes and screens in the case management system to indicate if documents had been received. If a document had not been noted as received, the worker would request that it be sent again. Naturally, this resulted in a lot of duplicate paper in the file.

“With the volume of mail going down, our case managers can now handle more work than they would have been able to before,” said Ms. Swartztrauber.

The agency is now able to consolidate printing needs on group printers and is no longer buying printers for individuals. Prior to automating their business processes, agency workers printed screens from SETS (the state case management system) as their means to communicate between departments. Now that the business processes are automated, they no longer print these documents.

“Now everyone can see the documents at the same time. These days, I get frustrated when I have to use a paper file.”

Sarah Fields
Legal Division Administrator

“We printed things constantly... a lot of documents,” said Ms. Swartztrauber. “Now our communication with Legal and from Legal is much better.”

The agency is beginning to see extra capacity in the records area and may be able to assign some staff to other duties soon. The records room is still reorganizing.

The agency is preparing to destroy old case records, which will save on rented storage and free up even more space within the agency building for other uses.

Additionally, administrators are now able to track initiatives and determine what is most successful within the agency. For instance, they can easily see whether last chance letters or suspensions are getting the best results.

In its first year with its new system, Montgomery County CSEA has already lowered fixed costs while improving efficiencies. The new processes are helping the agency keep up with increased demand.

“Since installing the Northwoods solution, the overall caseload at the agency is up about 2,000 cases for a total of 60,000,” said Ms. Swartztrauber. “We’ve been able to absorb the additional cases without adding staff.” ■

Northwoods is a software development and services company dedicated to helping Human Services agencies meet state and federal performance standards, improve customer service levels and staff morale, and dramatically reduce agency operating expenses. Headquartered in Dublin, Ohio, Northwoods serves more than 70 agencies in five states.