

LENOIR COUNTY CUTS CHILD WELFARE TURNOVER BY 77% WITH DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT

The emotional stress that comes with the job combined with the struggle to keep pace with documentation requirements was taking a toll on Lenoir County Department of Social Services' (DSS) Child Welfare social workers. At fault was a manual, paper-based process, which contributed to a 73% turnover rate. Since implementing Northwoods' office- and field-based document management solutions designed for Child Welfare, social workers have access to client and case information wherever they need it to provide clients more holistic, quality service. The change helped reduce turnover to 17%.

PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

- Improve case initiation and closure timeframes
- Increase face-to-face time with families
- Help reduce social worker turnover by 77%
- Save up to 3 hours on documentation per day, per worker
- Improve supervisor visibility into operations and collaboration with workers



DOCUMENTATION CHALLENGES LIMIT TIME WITH CLIENTS, INCREASE TURNOVER

The most concerning challenge was the strain of documentation. Social workers wanted to make more home visits and referrals for services but spent a lot of time documenting their work or completing forms back in the office.

The emotional stress that comes with the job combined with the struggle to keep pace with documentation requirements was taking a toll on social workers. In 2006, the Child Welfare turnover rate was 73%.

Lenoir County DSS implemented a large document management system to try to help. However, documents were often not scanned until after case closure, when they were scanned as one large file. Scanning was not intuitive so many documents were labeled incorrectly and were hard to retrieve. Social workers reverted to relying on paper case files when they were working on cases and didn't always have documentation or forms they needed during visits. Supervisors were challenged to monitor and coach workers because there was no efficient way to track down and review paper files in real time.

The inefficient processes affected case initiation rates, which hovered below the 95% state standard at 80-85%.

The process to move cases from investigation to in-home to foster care and adoption was fragmented and inefficient as well, delaying families who were trying to start safety plans or reach case closure.

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LENOIR COUNTY DSS WAS FACING MAJOR CHALLENGES IN THE CHILD WELFARE UNIT:



Balancing documentation requirements with face-to-face time with families



Accessing necessary case and client information and collaborating with supervisors in the field



Retaining talented social workers

"We only have more and more and more paperwork. It's always documentation, documentation, documentation. That's just our world. I don't know when we have time to do all this documentation and then to actually have face-to-face time with families."

– Monica Williams
Children's Services Program
Manager





"We were excited that someone was looking at our needs and putting something into place to make our jobs more efficient so we could spend our time with families."

– Stephanie Miller
Social Worker IAT, In Home Services

IMPLEMENTING DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT IN CHILD WELFARE

Lenoir County DSS implemented Northwoods' document management solution to automate paperwork for social workers and give the supervisors real-time visibility into documentation to support the workers in the office and in the field.

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT IN THE OFFICE

Documents and case information are electronically linked to the client in Northwoods' office-based document management solution, Compass® Pilot. The supervisor and workers can view current and historic case and client information as it's added to the system in the office or from the field. Documents are organized in a Child Welfare-specific taxonomy, so social workers can easily scan and index documents and quickly find the right client.

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT IN THE FIELD

Compass® CoPilot helps social workers complete documentation using an iPad® app in the field rather than paper forms and documents. Social workers electronically capture documents and case notes, take date- and time-stamped photos of families and living situations, audio record visits, complete electronic forms including client signatures, and view and share necessary case documentation with supervisors and others. When workers get back to the office, they no longer have to recreate hand-written notes or scan in signed forms because their work has already been synced between Compass CoPilot and Compass Pilot.

Additionally, social workers can pre-fill forms before they head to a visit or while in the field. Basic information such as the client's name and address can be automatically pushed into a form for a particular service or referral, saving social workers time they used to spend manually filling out the information.

DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT INCREASES QUALITY FACE-TO-FACE TIME WITH FAMILIES

Social workers say they are repurposing one to three hours every day previously spent on manual paperwork to boost family engagement, build trust, find resources for the family, and improve child safety.

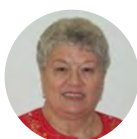
"Spending time with paperwork documents what we've done, but it doesn't necessarily deliver services to the family. When we spend more time with the family, we're able to more effectively meet their needs," said Stephanie Miller, Social Worker IAT, In Home Services.

Social workers use the repurposed time to call collateral contacts, return phone calls, or make more home visits, all of which ultimately improves relationships and client service.

Social workers were initially worried that technology could be a barrier to building relationships with families but have found the opposite to be true.

"I have definitely seen a change in the way that I interact with my families since Northwoods. I'm able to give them more attention, more of my time. We can involve the families and they can complete their own case plan and their own referrals. It gives them that sense of responsibility and ownership in their case planning and case process," Livingston said.

"We're doing better social work than we were before. Social workers have more time to spend with the families. There's no rush to get back to document."



– Susan Moore
Retired Director

HOURS SAVED IN AN AVERAGE 8-HOUR WORKDAY

1

KAHALIA LIVINGSTON
SOCIAL WORKER, IAT, IN HOME SERVICES

2.75

ALESHA POWELL
SOCIAL WORKER, IAT, ASSESSMENTS

3

JESSICA CHATMAN
SOCIAL WORKER, IAT, ASSESSMENTS

MORE TIME FOCUSED ON CHILD SAFETY



Spend more face-to-face time with families



Better manage, complete, and edit documentation



Make more home and school visits



Call more collateral contacts



Focus more time on complex or intense cases



Better review case history when assigned a new case



Consistently hold child and family team meetings when transferring to in-home services

SOCIAL WORKER TURNOVER REDUCED 77%

Over the past decade, Lenoir County has made several changes to help reduce stress and improve day-to-day work for social workers including:

- Offering more competitive salaries
- Upgrading antiquated computers and other equipment
- Implementing electronic document management in the office and field

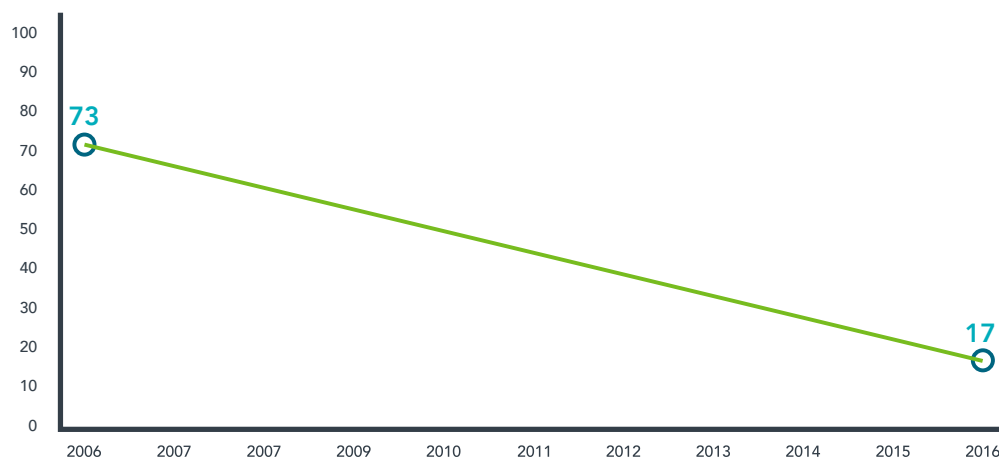
As a result, turnover in the Child Welfare unit decreased dramatically by 77% over 10 years from a 73% turnover rate in 2006 to a 17% turnover rate in 2016.

"I have seen a difference in their morale. They appreciate the investment in the system. It's helped to retain workers," Williams said.

The changes have been so beneficial for social workers that many live in other counties but commute to Lenoir County to work.

"This system has a lot to do with why I'm here. I commute an hour and a half one way, every day to this job because I am aware that all of the surrounding counties where I live don't have this system and they are doing paperwork. I don't plan on going anywhere else because I know what type of stress that could add to my day," said Alesha Powell, Social Worker IAT, Assessments.

TURNOVER FROM 2006-2016



"It greatly reduces the stress level. I feel like I can just jump up and go with the tablet. The worry level has gone down with this technology, definitely."



– Jessica Chatman
Social Worker IAT, Assessments



"Having systems that help us do our jobs, help us manage our time, help us to be more effective in the work that we're doing helps with burnout and turnover. We feel more confident in what we're doing. We feel like we're being supported. The fact that we even have this system shows that our management team wants us to succeed. They want us to be doing a good job of serving the families that we're working with."



– Kahalia Livingston
Social Worker IAT, In Home Services



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– Alesha Powell
Social Worker IAT, Assessments



"Being able to speak with my supervisor when I'm out in the field has given me the opportunity to get feedback about some things that I may have concerns about. It prevents me from making a second trip, which frustrates the family."

– Alesha Powell
Social Worker IAT, Assessments

SOCIAL WORKER AND SUPERVISOR COLLABORATION ENHANCED

Thanks to native iPad apps and Compass CoPilot, social workers are collaborating with supervisors from the field in a variety of ways:



Skype™ or FaceTime® to show living conditions or injuries to children during a visit versus describing the situation at the office or on the phone. This helps social workers when making critical decisions, like removing a child from a home.



Playback of audio recordings in Compass CoPilot to convey the tone of a conversation or support decisions.



Date- and time-stamped photos in Compass CoPilot of children and living conditions to document immediate concerns, or changes over time, can be immediately synced and viewed by supervisors or reviewed back at the office.

Social workers value the real-time collaboration with their supervisors. It helps them handle issues with a family immediately instead of making a return trip. It also validates their decisions about safety. Instead of feeling isolated, social workers feel like they are part of team working to improve child safety.

"You're able to just validate for them that they're on point. What you said was accurate. You handled yourself in a professional manner and we appreciate that," said Renee Kennedy, Social Work Supervisor, Foster Care and Adoption.

"I've even had workers to Facetime® me from the field, which is very helpful because I can see firsthand what they're seeing. I was able to determine that the child needs to be removed that day because it was that bad."



– Anita Starkey
Social Work Supervisor, Assessments & Foster Home Licensing

DEMONSTRATING COMPLIANCE AND MEETING DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

Continuous electronic access to documentation gives supervisors visibility into cases they never had before. The process to complete required dictation checks and record reviews is seamless. Supervisors don't have to interrupt social workers by pulling their paper case files away for reviews.

Lenoir County DSS better demonstrates how it meets documentation requirements under Child & Family Services Reviews and improves outcomes.

"I like the fact that a worker can document in Northwoods and it tracks the date and time that they are doing their documentation. As a supervisor, that helps me make sure they are doing their documentation," Kennedy said.

CASE INITIATION TIMEFRAME ABOVE STATE STANDARD

Social workers used to be notified of a new case by receiving a paper report on their chair. Then they began the tedious task of searching for historic information on the child or family. It affected their ability to initiate cases in the required timeframe.

Now, with electronic case notification and access to client and case history, social workers are consistently exceeding the state standard.



The revamped process also helps cases move from unit to unit inside Child Welfare. Previously, in-home social workers had to wait for assessment social workers to complete dictation before they could access any part of a case file to review it. Because documentation is now scanned in and entered as it's received, there is no delay.

"As soon as I'm assigned a case, within five minutes, I can go and look at it and become familiar with the people involved and the situation," Miller said.

CLOSING OR TRANSFERRING CASES TO FOSTER CARE OR ADOPTION FASTER

In-home social workers are documenting on their iPad during visits or using the audio recording feature to help complete documentation during downtime, so they no longer scramble to finish documentation at the end of a case.

"With Northwoods, my cases are probably closing on average two weeks earlier. I'm not spending as much time trying to hunt down information," said Kahalia Livingston, Social Worker IAT, In Home Services.

Faster case closure helps the agency meet timeframes and helps the social workers focus on families with more complicated cases.

Most importantly, faster case closure is helping reduce trauma to children because they can either be reunified with their families or start the foster care or adoption process as soon as possible.

**"It's worth every penny.
Find the money to purchase it."**



– Susan Moore,
Retired Director



"This has been life changing. I feel like I'm providing quality services to the families that we serve by spending more time with them. Gone is the stigma of what's presented on TV about child protective services social workers just going in and stealing children from their families, just making a profit."

- Jessica Chatman
Social Worker IAT, Assessments

CONCLUSION

With Northwoods' office- and field-based document management solutions, Lenoir County DSS' Child Welfare social workers are no longer torn between completing documentation on time and spending quality time interacting with clients. Because social workers can use Compass CoPilot to capture critical data, access necessary case documents, and complete state and local forms in the field, their documentation is up to date and accurate. The agency is retaining talented social workers, who are less stressed and more motivated because they have more time to focus on engaging clients, building trust, and delivering quality service.

ABOUT NORTHWOODS

Northwoods only focus is helping state and county human services agencies increase client service levels and productivity while cutting costs — allowing them to do more with less. Northwoods' human services software solutions are designed around caseworkers and social workers, not data. Our Compass® products automate the flow of client and case information based on how caseworkers throughout the agency need to use it. To learn more, visit teamnorthwoods.com.

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