



CASE AIDE SERVICES
BY NORTHWOODS

Jackson County Overcoming Burnout and Turnover with Dedicated Caseworker Support

With Case Aide Services by Northwoods, Jackson County Job and Family Services (JFS) is supporting workers, promoting psychological safety, reducing burnout, and ensuring employee retention.

Summary

Like most agencies, staff at Jackson County JFS were struggling to keep up with the demands of child welfare work as cases increase in both complexity and number. This contributed to increasing levels of staff burnout and turnover. The agency partnered with Northwoods to provide Case Aide Services to workers in their investigation, adoption, and ongoing units, as well as the Ohio START program. Case Aide Services are a type of managed services, where our trusted team takes on workers' most time-consuming tasks so they can focus on families.

KEY RESULTS INCLUDE:

- Promoting worker and supervisor well-being.
- Reducing the need for overtime, helping minimize turnover and improve retention.
- Focusing on families without sacrificing administrative work.
- Improving key performance metrics and earning incentive funding.
- Improving caseworker performance with the right partner.

Challenges

Like most agencies, staff at Jackson County JFS were struggling to keep up with the demands of child welfare work as cases increase in both complexity and number.

“We have seen huge turnover in child welfare for the last several years and it all goes back to that feeling that there is simply more to be done than what is possible,” said Loree Walker, protective services program administrator.

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There is a need to urgently and quickly respond to families’ needs, and all this leads to increased pressure, overwhelming stress, and burnout.

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— LOREE WALKER

*Protective Services Program
Administrator, Jackson County
Job and Family Services*

CHALLENGING CASES CONTRIBUTING TO BURNOUT

Loree noted several factors that have increased the mental and emotional burden on workers, including more cases involving substance use disorder, more families needing mental and behavioral health services, and placement visits being further away and straining workers’ already limited time.

“The caseloads are heavier. Every CPS worker needs more hands, more eyes, more ears, more time to complete all the requirements of this job and to do it well—to make sure that safety and well-being of children is kept as the focus,” she said.

“There is more crisis to cope with,” Loree added. “There is a need to urgently and quickly respond to families’ needs, and all this leads to increased pressure, overwhelming stress, and burnout.”

BALANCING PEOPLE WORK AND PAPERWORK

Another key factor contributing to burnout and turnover was staff needing more help with their day-to-day work. They struggled to find balance between spending time with families with administrative tasks like data entry, making requests for information, getting records from providers, and completing referral forms.

“It often comes down to paperwork versus people work,” Loree said. “We know that both are needed, and both are important, but a caseworker needs to be out with families—engaging them, ensuring safety of children, building on their strengths, checking on safety plans.”

“ When I would have my supervision with my supervisor and I would make a to-do list, the to-do list felt very overwhelming and long and it would be stressful. ”

— HAYLEE GRIMM

*Social Service Worker/Intake Investigator,
Jackson County Job and Family Services*

Solution

“Day-to-day paperwork is critical and it’s essential to child protection case work,” said Tammy Osborne-Smith, director. “But it’s important for caseworkers to develop their skills to be in there with a family to make sure that they are assessing risk and focusing on transformational services that are going to help provide that family with the resources they need to overcome their barriers.”

This is why Jackson County JFS partnered with Northwoods to provide Case Aide Services to workers in their investigation, adoption, and ongoing units, as well as the Ohio START program. “Case Aide Services provide staff with the ability to reallocate their time and dedicate themselves to focusing on child safety and well-being,” Tammy said. “Staff are actually able to shift their focus, provide services and support, and share resources with families and children versus working hours on end on data entry and obtaining documentation.”

Case Aide Services are a type of managed services, where our trusted team with child welfare experience has become an extension of Jackson County JFS staff. The agency’s Case Aide team takes on workers’ most time-consuming tasks so they can focus on families.

Workers not only benefit from knowing that tasks have been completed, but also have the capacity to take further action if the task indicates that it’s needed (for example, reading and digesting the information in a report that the Case Aide team collected). Workers also benefit from using Traverse®, Northwoods’ document management software, to store and share case information with their Case Aide team and to integrate with Ohio’s Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS).

“The Case Aides can help with the releases of information, the getting of records, the referral forms, and putting documentation and details into Traverse and SACWIS to make sure that I’m doing my job more successfully, I have the records for my investigation, and I have anything I need to help the family,” Haley said. “We can spend more time talking with families, being out and in the field, and going on home visits. We have more time to do that because we don’t have to spend as much time on the paperwork.”

HOW IT WORKS:



1. Submit a request:

Caseworkers can call, text, or submit a ticket through a portal to request help.



2. Set a deadline:

Our team prioritizes tasks based on when workers need them completed.



3. View progress:

All activities and communication are tracked through a portal so both workers and agency leadership can see the status of requests.



4. View completed tasks:

Workers get an email letting them know when each task is completed.

Services

Loree says having a team dedicated to organizing and prioritizing these administrative tasks allows workers to focus on what their priorities are. "That is the work that they do in the homes with families. That's where they need to be, and that's when we start seeing better outcomes for families," she said.

Kristina Carlisle, social services supervisor, shared examples of how three of the core services have benefited her team so far.

Core Case Aide Services include:

- Records Request
- Supervision Support
- Referral Support
- Court Support
- Client Visit Support
- Community Resource Request
- Placement Packets
- Case Research
- Document Organization
- Staff Transition Support

RECORDS REQUESTS

A Case Aide team member can call external providers (think hospitals, schools, or counseling centers) to request medical records, behavioral health records, or education records, such as attendance reports or individualized education plans.

"There have been more records come into this agency since the time we've had Case Aide Services than I would say probably in the last five years or so," Kristina said. "It's been a great asset to our caseworkers, and it's been a great asset to all of the leadership within Child Protective Services because there's just so much more information that we're getting on our families and the process has been very easy."

SUPERVISION (CASE CONFERENCE) SUPPORT

Someone from the Case Aide team participates in scheduled case review sessions with Kristina and her staff to help identify to-do items, create tickets, and complete the related tasks. Because the Case Aide is tracking the to-do list, Kristina can focus her attention on the worker's questions and concerns about the case.

"Whenever we have a review of the case, the Case Aide will volunteer to take on some tasks that they are able to do as far as reviewing the case, putting together discovery for court purposes, or even asking questions and going over the case with the staff," Kristina said. "If we're discussing a case and I say that we need medical records, then it is done right then and there. This has been very helpful."

COURT SUPPORT

The Case Aide team can help staff prepare for court hearings, remind them of key dates and legal deadlines, and compile documentation and records for the agency's legal team.

"I know the Case Aide has familiarized themselves with the case before, met with my staff members, asked them questions, and talked about court testimony with them," Kristina said. "Our Case Aide has met with our attorney and knows what the expectations are when they go to court, and the attorney has provided questions that the Case Aide would then go over with the staff member just so they can prepare answers."

Results

Loree says Case Aide Services give Jackson County JFS workers the support they need to be successful. "It's really not a luxury. It's more of a necessity now to have that additional support to do this work," she said. "The peace of mind of knowing that they had help has just been such an added value. It's irreplaceable."

"One of the biggest things that we've been working on is climate and culture," Tammy said. "Creating a psychologically safe environment, supporting staff, reducing burnout, and ensuring employee retention is always a high priority. And through Case Aide Services, we've been able to support staff in new ways."

FOCUSING ON FAMILIES WITHOUT SACRIFICING ADMINISTRATIVE WORK

Workers can rely on the Case Aide team to consistently complete administrative tasks accurately and on time when they're on the road or have more pressing priorities or emergencies. "The caseworkers have more time to engage families because they are not worried about the administrative tasks that they're not getting done when they're not at the agency," Kristina said.

She said it's especially helpful that Case Aide team members are available throughout the day to consistently communicate with providers to quickly collect records and complete referrals. "The Case Aides are able to make calls and follow up on that information when a lot of times those are things that get lost with caseworkers because they're out visiting people, trying to determine appropriate services, and maintain the safety of children."

REDUCING THE NEED FOR OVERTIME, HELPING MINIMIZE TURNOVER AND IMPROVE RETENTION

Tammy said that staff have been able to reduce the amount of overtime they're working, a lot of which was previously dedicated to data entry or making repeat phone calls to service providers to complete referrals and obtain records and documentation.

"Any time you can reduce overtime leads to a reduction in staff burnout. And when you reduce staff burnout, that contributes to and supports staff retention," she said. "We have been fortunate enough to see staff stay and continue working. As a result, staff are becoming better trained, developing their critical thinking skills, and becoming the ideal caseworkers that we need to have out in the field working with families and children."

IMPROVING CASEWORKER PERFORMANCE WITH THE RIGHT PARTNER

Tammy said Northwoods has demonstrated a commitment to serving clients for years and this collaborative partnership has been no exception. "The team at Northwoods has listened to our challenges, they've continued to develop improvements focusing on supporting the caseworkers, and those caseworkers are the ones that are out providing those critical services to families and children. Their profound understanding of this important work has been crucial in changing and improving the caseworker performance through Case Aide Services," she said.

"Northwoods was able to be intuitive and to really problem solve and develop solutions to meet our unique needs here," Loree added. "It became very apparent that their success was driven by our success. They want to help our workers to feel better about the jobs they're doing and support them in this important work."

PROMOTING WORKER AND SUPERVISOR WELL-BEING

Workers feel safe and seen by having a trusted professional to talk to who knows their work, has navigated similar situations, and can help them manage their ever-growing to-do list.

She credits Northwoods Case Aide Specialist Molly, with whom Haley routinely works, for making her work more manageable. “Molly has been there at every case conference and been able to take half of my workload. She is able to help out with so many things that I used to do on my own. Molly has been there for me when I’ve been overwhelmed and stressed with work, calling her and asking for help, and she’s told me ways that she can help me in creative ways that I wouldn’t think of,” Haley said.

Kristina said being able to ask the Case Aide team to provide administrative support is equally impactful for supervisors who often need to fill in to help staff.

“I have several people that I’m supervising and don’t always have the amount of individual time that I would like to have to spend with each individual staff member,” Kristina said. “If I have a worker that is stressed out or has a lot to do, I may ask the Case Aide to check in with them. If I have somebody that’s removed three children or has multiple court hearings in the week, I may say that it’d be really nice if you could see if there’s anything you can do to assist. The Case Aide provides support to the workers in that way, which as a result helps me not have so much on my plate.”

IMPROVING KEY PERFORMANCE METRICS AND EARNING INCENTIVE FUNDING

With additional support from Case Aides, workers are now able to document their home visits faster, which helped them improve two key performance metrics: home visits completed and assessments/investigations completed on time. Jackson County JFS improved the average percent of Composite Visits Met from 48.3% in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2022 to 86% in FFY 2023—a 38% improvement. As a result, the agency earned a one-time most improved financial Best Practice Incentive Award from the Office of Families and Children to support a positive workplace culture and worker well-being.

“When it comes to retaining staff, the fact that we got this incentive gives everybody the sense that we can reach our goals. Everybody wants to work someplace where they can be successful and feel good about what they’re doing,” Kristy said.



About Northwoods

Since 2003, Northwoods has focused only on human services. Our tools and services continue to evolve, but we remain focused on being the experts in helping human services agencies do what they do best: helping people. Agencies throughout the country use our software and services across multiple program areas to better collaborate to serve their community.

Learn more: teamnorthwoods.com