



Inside...



**Antwone Fisher  
to speak at NACo**



**Washington  
Update**



**Home Visiting  
Helps Families**

## Betting on Disaster Preparedness

- ★ PATRICIA K. PATE, Director
- ★ VANESSA GASTON, Assistant Director  
Clark County Social Service Department  
Clark County, Nevada

“When, not if.” We’ve heard that before. Natural disasters or public emergencies happen and it is just a matter of when, not if. However, the uncertainty of when gives too many of us the illusion it may not happen. Since 9/11 and Hurricane Katrina, emergency preparedness and disaster recovery planning have become increasingly salient to us as Americans and as public administrators. However, planning for an emergency too frequently takes a back burner to more pressing, if mundane matters, such as budgets, union issues, the chronic shortage of resources and a thousand other immediate tasks. We need to ask ourselves, knowing that it is a matter of when, not if: “How do we prepare in our communities?”

And even after just one paragraph, we know that some of our colleagues have already stopped reading this article because this topic doesn’t seem to require an immediate response. They’re right. Disasters and emergencies don’t require an immediate response until they happen, and then immediately can never be fast enough, and the time for planning is history.

As county human service administrators, we have a unique role to play in the event of an emergency. We will be called upon to provide leadership and direction, coordinate

*CONTINUED on Page 13*

### Don't Let This Be Your Last Issue!

*NACHSA's Networker is going digital!*

If you received this *Networker* solely via the U.S. postal system, please take a moment to e-mail [info@nachsa.org](mailto:info@nachsa.org) to let us know you want to receive future editions. This year's transition will still allow us to print some glossy copies, but the cyber copy will get to you much faster and is distributed more easily to county human services staff. Additionally, it helps conserve scarce NACHSA resources so we can better serve you in other ways.

*Don't delay! We hope to keep you on the list and in the loop!*

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# The President's Desk



★ BY ROBERT B. SUVER  
Director, Department of Job and Family Services  
Clark County, Ohio

Welcome to another edition of the *Networker*. We hope you find it informative and useful. If you do, please take a moment to email [info@nachsa.org](mailto:info@nachsa.org) to let us know if you would like to have future editions delivered electronically rather than hard copy. This is the transition year and your email address is needed so that you may continue to receive this important resource. Also, if you are a member of NACHSA and have a story to tell, let Manus or Jo (our co-editors) know about it for an upcoming issue.

The NACo Legislative conference in Washington D.C. was the site for our Board and General Membership meetings. Pat Carlson, a long-time board member and past officer, left the board. She is leaving county government in Colorado and returning to Minnesota. NACHSA benefited greatly from her steadfast support and human service knowledge and experience. We will miss her. We welcome Bill Brumfield, a long-time NACHSA member and director of Eligibility and Work Supports for Hennepin County, Minnesota, as he becomes the latest addition to our Board of Directors.

The Washington D.C. meetings included developing a closer working relationship with our sister NACo affiliate, the National Association of County Aging Programs (NACAP). NACHSA also took the lead in developing and promoting some new policy resolutions for NACo, including: Supporting SCHIP Reauthorization; Opposing the Medicaid Regulation Restricting Medicaid Payments to Public Providers; Supporting the Use of Unobligated TANF Funds from Previous Fiscal Years; Restoring Federal Deficit Reduction Act Child Support Cuts, and Promoting Seamless SSI Eligibility for Emancipated Foster Youth. All of these resolutions were adopted by the NACo Human Services and Education Steering Committee and ultimately by the NACo Board of Directors.

The highlight of the conference was the opportunity NACHSA was given to have member Bruce Wagstaff, Director of Sacramento County, California's, Human Assistance Department testify before the Income Security and Family Support Subcommittee of the House Ways and Means Committee. The hearing focused on concerns about implementing the TANF work requirements and the provision of the Deficit Reduction Act effective October 1 that will significantly reduce payments for child support collections. Bruce's testimony added to a number of other efforts which has resulted in pending House and Senate legislation to restore the child support cut. Great job, Bruce and all the others who have argued for this change!

Looking ahead, our next opportunity to meet will be at the NACo Annual Conference in Richmond, Virginia, July 13-17. Please come early as we are planning Friday, July 13 to be a full day of sessions to focus on human services programming. Speakers from the Richmond, Henrico County area will discuss a number of collaborations led by the business community, including work on getting pre-school kids ready to learn and addressing homelessness. We will also join our aging programs affiliate to learn about Virginia's efforts to provide an Internet link for families seeking senior services. Finally, NACHSA members will have an opportunity on Monday, July 16 to travel to a program for incarcerated persons with substance abuse problems.

Additional information on the conference will be posted on the NACHSA web site: [www.nachsa.org](http://www.nachsa.org) and sent via e-mail.

**See you in Virginia!**

# School Outreach Engages Families

## ★ DAN WILLOBY

Director, Logan County Department of Job & Family Services  
Logan County, Ohio  
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We live in an ever-changing world that affects the way our children learn. More children are from divorced and/or single parent homes and are struggling financially, socially and emotionally. Community resources are limited and families who move in and out of school districts more than once during a school year are not uncommon. All of these major transitions in a child's life can affect their learning. The School Outreach Program was designed to help families remove barriers and fill gaps that may impede their learning.

Studies show that teachers' priorities are to gain more positive parent involvement in the education of their children. Champaign and Logan County schools have expressed a desire that parents become more involved in their child's learning. The goal of the School Outreach Program is to help families become more involved by providing support, linking and referring families to services and resources that address family needs which may impede learning. Such barriers may include, but are not limited to housing, eye glasses, medical assistance, clothing, food, counseling and parenting skills, etc.

Logan and Champaign are rural counties in west-central Ohio with similar populations in the 40,000-45,000 range. While both communities have excellent cooperative community resources, they are somewhat limited because of their size. The educational community, as in most areas, struggles to maintain adequate resources to continue to provide quality education to all of our children.

**“I had a student in my class with a lot of behavior problems. Through the Outreach Program, I was able to get help with behavior strategies to implement in the classroom.”**

— Judy, 2nd Grade Teacher

We believe the institution of the School Outreach Program in Logan and Champaign County school districts will lead us closer to achieving this goal. The Champaign and Logan County Departments of Job and Family Services and Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Services Board have partnered to fund this program designed to achieve those goals. The Logan County Educational Service Center, Consolidated Care, and the schools provide staff, space, telephone and other assistance that is necessary to help support the program. By collaboratively working together on this project all children and families may be served. While TANF provides major funding, those families and

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children above the 200% federal poverty level will also be served with blended funding through the Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol and Services Board.

We, in Logan and Champaign Counties, in partnership with the educational community have identified and begun to address this barrier. Based on staff input, local superinten-

**“I truly don't know what I would have done without the Outreach Worker. The worker came to my home and helped me connect with resources and she was a tremendous support for me and my daughter emotionally.”**

— Debra, Parent

dents requested that this program commence at the elementary school level in the belief that problems resolved at this level will not persist later. While the program is still in its infancy, we believe we are well on our way to having a very positive impact on the lives of the children and families the program is touching.

A school outreach coordinator is assigned in each school district to work directly with parents, teachers, and the community to address the concerns and issues of the families and school personnel in a holistic approach. They help empower families to remove barriers that may impede their child's learning. Outreach workers:

- Act as liaisons with families, school and community.
- Support and link families to services and resources.
- Help bridge the gap in communications between schools and families through intervention strategies.
- Conduct home visits to identify and better understand issues affecting youth and to develop productive working relationships with their families.
- Provide appropriate follow-up to families.
- Assist in establishing a positive relationship with families and act in a neutral role as a liaison for the school.

The program started in December 2006 and was fully staffed in February 2007. As of mid-April 2007, 240 referrals have been received from school districts in both counties.

**CONTINUED:** For more quotes from parents and school staff, please turn to Page 7.

# Home Visiting At-Risk Families

## Practice Prevents Child Abuse and Saves Tax Dollars

★ BY GAY BAKKEN

Coordinator, Dakota Healthy Families  
Dakota County, Minnesota

Almost a decade ago, the Dakota County (Minnesota) Board of Commissioners allocated \$500,000 over five years for a unique project to prevent child abuse: Dakota Healthy Families. For many years, commissioners struggled with the high cost and disappointing results of “deep-end” interventions. The County’s juvenile detention facility annual per-bed cost then was \$85,000 (\$120,000 today) *and* more than 50 percent of the young detainees were child abuse victims -- clearly, there had to be a better way.

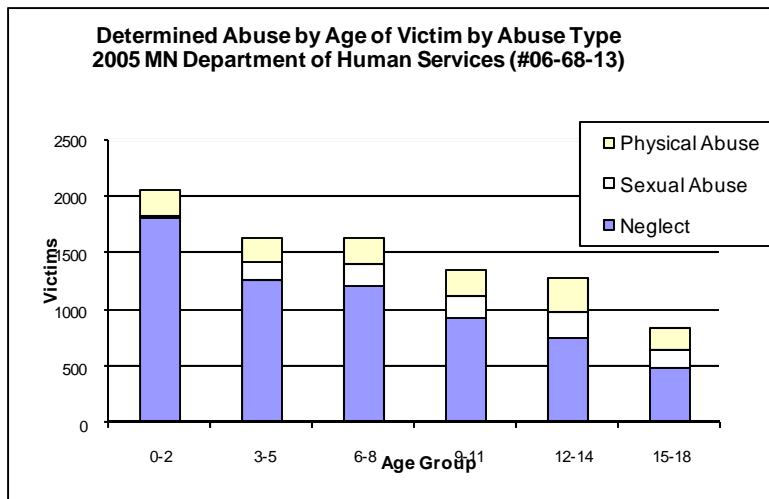
Dakota Healthy Families (DHF), an intensive home visiting program for first time overburdened parents, has proven to be a cost-effective way to reduce child protection cases. And with these positive results, the seven-county Minneapolis-St. Paul area is moving ahead to replicate the model.

The economics of child abuse prevention and the science of early brain development provide powerful support for staying the course. The consensus of business leaders, health care experts and educators is that investing in the education and health of our nation’s youngest, most at-risk children has a huge long-term economic pay-off.

### Prevention Pays Off

Art Rolnick, Senior Vice President of the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, has found significant economic benefit in high-quality early childhood programs. After examining the research, Rolnick concluded that investing and intervening *as early as possible* with the

most at-risk youngsters generates an impressive return of 16 percent in the form of less crime, better working schools and a more educated work force. According to Robert Lynch, researcher at the Economic Policy Institute, government investment in a comprehensive early childhood development program for all children from low-income families would reach a break-even point in 17 years, and by 2030, the benefits would exceed costs by \$31 billion.



### Short-term Savings

So far, Dakota County’s outcome study shows short-term savings. This study was the first of its kind nationally to demonstrate that home visiting for the most at-risk families produces immediate cost avoidance/savings. University of Minnesota researchers concluded that due to program interventions over a two-year period,

only 7% of the most at-risk DHF families had confirmed cases of child abuse, compared with 53% of similar families in a comparison group.

The conclusion is that DHF almost pays for itself in the short term by avoiding cases of child abuse. The study also showed that providing DHF’s preventive services to one family costs about a quarter of the expense of investigating and prosecuting a single case of abuse in the County’s child protection system (\$26,000 per case). Dakota County Board Chair (2006) Kathleen Gaylord said, “As long as our outcomes are this good, we’ll continue our investment to serve even more families with Dakota Healthy Families.”



### ***A Parent's Perspective***

This mom enrolled in DHF when she was seven months pregnant. Her twins graduated from DHF at the age of four. During their participation in DHF the family received 138 home visits. Here is what she had to say about her home visitor:

*“You taught me about stuff that I didn’t know. How to deal with the kids when I’m angry, depressed, stressed. I learned parenting skills... how to adapt to the kid’s temperament.*”

*You gave me resources, encouraged me to get my GED and helped me get the twins enrolled in Head Start.”*

### ***Metro Alliance for Healthy Families***

A regional approach for DHF makes more sense than being successful only in one county. At-risk families are often the most mobile, but need consistent services no matter where they live. Outreach to families without regard to county of residence fits as families choose health care providers among the region.

Noting the DHF’s results, health and human services directors from the seven counties in the Twin Cities metro area committed to its replication in the region. In August 2005, the Metro Alliance for Healthy Families was established as the organizational structure for the metro-wide expansion. A joint powers agreement has been approved by counties and initial replication begins in March 2007.

### **Success Factors**

So what makes DHF successful? Four key interlinked factors are critical:

**Budget for a longer timeframe.** DHF budgets are developed with a 2 to 2.5-year horizon. This timeframe is essential for achieving program outcomes because it assures families that long-term support will be available to them and it encourages experienced well-trained staff to stay with the program.

**Focus on the target population.** DHF works with families facing the greatest challenges to parenting success *before* their parenting patterns are established. A standardized assessment tool identifies families in greatest need; first-time parents are enrolled either prenatally or when their baby is born.

**Provide services intensively and long-term.** A look at abuse victims by age suggests that families require frequent contact and support, particularly during the first two years when parental stress is greatest and parent/child attachment occurs. Building the skill and confidence of new parents requires consistent, frequent support over time. Home visits end when a child turns four and is connected with community-based early learning opportunities.

**Build trust by focusing on parents.** A responsive and dependable relationship between the home visitor and the family is critical to success. Staff is sensitive to the values and culture of the families and familiar with community resources. And for program management, retaining staff is paramount to sustaining trusting relationships – the cornerstone to success.

### **Conclusion**

Breaking the cycle of child abuse and neglect is extremely difficult – but the savings in human lives and dollars is incalculable. Targeted weekly home visiting has shown tangible results in Dakota County, and the regional approach being launched this year in the Twin Cities shows great promise of extending that success.

#### **FOR FURTHER INFO**

- ★ Visit <http://www.dakotacounty.us> - search for “DHF”
- ★ **GAY BAKKEN**  
(651) 554-6370 or [gay.bakken@co.dakota.mn.us](mailto:gay.bakken@co.dakota.mn.us)

# Antwone Fisher to speak at NACo

*Conference is July 13-17 in Richmond, Virginia*

Antwone Fisher, author of Finding Fisher and the subject of a movie about growing up in foster care and aging out of the system, will address NACo's closing general session on Tuesday, July 17 at the Greater Richmond Convention Center in Richmond, Virginia.

As mentioned in the President's Column, NACHSA is planning a full day of sessions Friday, July 13 as well as a mobile workshop to visit the Henrico County jail substance abuse treatment program Monday, July 16.

Additionally, all NACHSA members are welcome to attend the National Association of County Aging Programs (NACAP) meetings on Friday, July 13.

NACo's Human Services and Education Steering Committee will meet Saturday, July 14. All resolutions and the NACo platform sunset at the annual conference, so there will be policy discussions both at the NACHSA meeting and the committee meeting. Additionally, the committee plans to consider new policy on reauthorization of the food stamp program.

There are several educational sessions and a symposium on health care that might be of interest to NACHSA members. The mobile workshop will have limited space, and some of the workshop times may change.

Please go to the NACo conference website for logistical information and descriptions of the educational sessions: [www.naco.org](http://www.naco.org).

## Schedule of Events

### Friday, July 13

- 8:30 a.m. - 12:45 p.m. NACHSA Educational Sessions
- "No Wrong Door" Aging Services
  - Business Collaborations to Address Homelessness
  - Ready-to-Learn Public-Private Partnerships

2:00 – 5:00 p.m. NACHSA Board and Membership Meeting

### Saturday, July 13

- 8:00 – 9:30 a.m. Aging Subcommittee
- 9:30 – 11:00 a.m. Education, Children and Families Subcommittee
- 11:00 a.m. – 12:30 p.m. Welfare, Social Services and Immigration Subcommittee
- 1:30 – 4:30 p.m. Human Services and Education Steering Committee

### Sunday, July 15

- 9:00 – 10:00 a.m. Opening General Session
- 1:30 – 2:15 p.m. Learning Theater with Conference Exhibitors

### Sunday, July 15 cont.

- 2:00-3:15 p.m. *Educational Sessions - Block I*
- Catching Medicaid Fraud the Easy Way
  - Starting Off on the Right Foot – Getting Youth Engaged and Connected
  - Economic Development One Family at a time: A Strategy for Rural Communities
  - Combating the Youth Obesity Epidemic: Innovative State and Local Collaborations

- 3:45 – 5:00 p.m. *Educational Sessions - Block II*
- Aging Out of Foster Care: The County Role in Transitioning Foster Youth to Independent Adulthood
  - How to Put "Action" in Your Meth Action Group: Utah's Experience with Meth Reform

Evening Conference Wide Event at the Jamestown Settlement

### Monday, July 16

- 9:00 – 10:15 a.m. *Educational Sessions - Block III*
- Lowering Juvenile Detention: Breaking the Cycle of Recidivism before it Starts
  - Organizing Volunteers in an Emergency
  - Healthcare as an Economic Engine for Rural Counties

CONTINUED from Page 3

## School Outreach Engages Families

Here are some additional comments from participants in the School Outreach Program:

"I truly don't know what I would have done without the Outreach Worker. I was at the lowest point of my life. We don't have any family here to help my daughter and me. I have cancer and I was in a bad accident. The worker came to my home and helped me connect with resources and she was a tremendous support for me and my daughter emotionally."

— Debra, Parent

"I am a single father with four children. I was very reluctant to seek any help or enroll in any government programs in fear of their involvement in my family's life. The Outreach Worker explained the programs and benefits that I may be eligible to receive. Through his encouragement and knowledge of the resources, I was able to get some assistance for my family."

— Glen, Parent

"The worker also worked with the family, teaching them strategies in handling the child's inappropriate behaviors at home. The discipline strategies were implemented at home and school and collaboration from the parents and teacher, working as a team, was very instrumental in turning the inappropriate behaviors into appropriate behaviors. Thank you so much for the School Outreach Program. I really believe we have overcome the barrier that had impeded this student's learning."

— Judy, Teacher

"We feel very fortunate to have the School Outreach Program in our school. The worker is a real advocate for our families. At the elementary level we can work on the prevention of problems instead of trying to repair damage. Teachers are using this service extensively."

— Shari, Principal

"The Outreach Program has been an asset to our school. It has enhanced the programs already in place and the worker is able to reach the families by home visits and encourage them to attend meetings and get involved in their child's education."

— Susan, Guidance Counselor

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

★ Dan Willoby—[willod@odjfs.state.oh.us](mailto:willod@odjfs.state.oh.us)

★ Louise Burgess—[lburgess@cci.bhp.com](mailto:lburgess@cci.bhp.com)



*"My mind travels back momentarily to some of the visions I made up for myself – that I would become a family man, a good provider, a strong, loving husband and father, in a secure, love-filled home."*

— Antwone Fisher  
*"Finding Fish"*

"Finding Fish" is the story of a boy who made it in the world with the help of a few good souls, and by believing in himself.

Antwone Fisher will address the NACo conference at the Tuesday, July 17 closing general session.

#### Monday, July 16 cont.

- 10:45 a.m. – noon *Educational Sessions - Block IV*
- Jail Diversion 101: Components that Matter
  - Interoperability: Can You Communicate Successfully?
  - Running a Meeting the Right Way
- 12:30 – 2:00 p.m. Learning Theater with Conference Exhibitors
- 2:15 – 4:00 p.m. General Session

#### Tuesday, July 17

- 9:00 – 10:15 a.m. *Educational Sessions - Block V*
- Taking Your County into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century – Aging, Communities and Growth
  - Speaking in Tongues: How to Communicate with Non-English Speakers in a Disaster
  - Lowering Juvenile Detention: Breaking the Cycle of Recidivism before it Starts
- 10:30 a.m. – noon Closing General Session
- 2:15 – 4:00 p.m. Election of NACo Officers and Business Meeting
- 7:00 – 10:00 p.m. Inaugural Gala Reception

# Washington Watch



★ **BY TOM JOSEPH**  
NACHSA Liaison, Waterman & Associates

## Congress Tackles Human Services Issues

Over the past few months, Congress has begun to tackle a number of health and human services issues, providing county human services administrators and their elected officials with opportunities to affect the legislative process. While most legislation is still pending in committee and await mark ups, there are some items that have seen some action.

The year began with the administration's submission of its FY 2008 budget in early February. Many of the proposals offered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) were submitted in previous budgets and rejected by the Republican leadership. With the Democratic takeover of both sides of Capitol Hill, many of their proposals will not even get a hearing this time. Congress has already rejected proposals to cut the Social Services Block Grant by 30 percent and the administration's package of eligibility restrictions combined with fewer dollars to operate the State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

It was easy for the House and Senate leadership to reject the proposed cuts in those and other programs. It is harder to find consensus and new federal dollars to invest in health and human services programs.

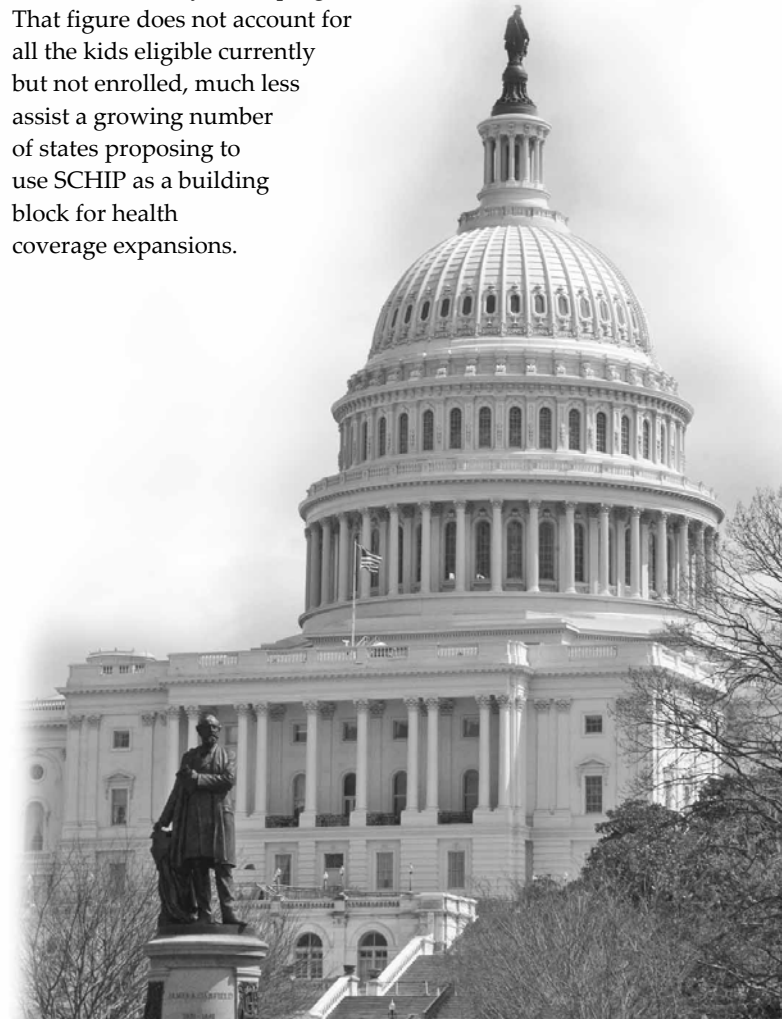
The National Association of Counties (NACo) was given the opportunity to help set a county human services agenda for the House of Representatives in March when a NACo representative testified before the key Ways and Means subcommittee with jurisdiction over many human service programs. NACo tapped Bruce Wagstaff, Director of Human Assistance in Sacramento County, CA. NACHSA and the County Welfare Directors Association of California helped craft Wagstaff's statement. NACo urged the Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support to craft legislation restoring the flexibility for families and administrators under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program. Wagstaff also urged that the cuts to the child support program be restored before they become effective October 1. NACHSA also provided a separate statement for the hearing record which included comments NACHSA members provided to me from across the country.

As of this writing, HHS has said that the final regulations implementing the Deficit Reduction Act changes to TANF will not be published until fall and no legislation has been introduced to restore the flexibility under the program. Child support has seen some activity, however. Soon after the hearing, Subcommittee Chair Jim McDermott (D-WA) introduced H.R. 1386 to restore the ability of state and county governments to

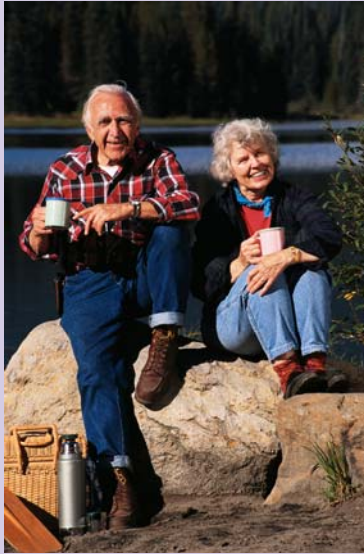
use their earned federal performance incentive funds as match for additional child support. The bill has generated a lot of interest and support among Democrats but support from the Republican ranks has been tepid. Fortunately, the Senate companion measure, S. 803, has garnered bi-partisan support. Led by Senators Rockefeller (D-WV), Coleman (R-MN) and Cornyn (R-TX), the bill is pending in the Senate Finance Committee and will likely see action at some point this year. Given the tight federal budget, at issue is finding federal savings in other programs to offset the \$6 billion cost over ten years needed to restore the cut.

Finding new funding for the SCHIP health program is at the top of the congressional HHS list this year and that quest places it in competition for funds for other human services programs such as child support. Up for reauthorization this year, SCHIP needs an additional \$12 billion over the next five years just to keep pace with enrolling the same number of children currently in the program.

That figure does not account for all the kids eligible currently but not enrolled, much less assist a growing number of states proposing to use SCHIP as a building block for health coverage expansions.



# Millions Saved by Changing Health Care Applications Processing



Hennepin County, Minnesota is on track to receive \$45 million in uncompensated care funds, thanks to innovative process improvements that redesigned how applications for health care programs were handled while providing a higher level of service to clients.

Hennepin County Medical Center (HCMC) is the last public hospital in Minnesota. For more than 25 years, Hennepin's Human Services and Public Health Department (HSPHD) has had an Eligibility Support Services unit at the hospital to obtain applications for health care programs in a timely manner, but there were many challenges.

The State of Minnesota required in-person client or patient interviews for many of the applications, but 35 percent of all self-pay patients were discharged within 24 hours, making it imperative to secure health care applications and necessary forms as quickly as possible.

Many of the patients were from counties other than Hennepin, requiring their home counties to process some of the paperwork. Some work also needed to be assigned to other HSPHD units, which caused delays in processing.

Two pivotal changes helped HSPHD streamline the process and recoup millions in uncompensated care:

- Minnesota eliminated the need to interview all clients or patients in person.
- HSPHD developed a team structure to manage client cases faster and better. The team includes staff from HCMC and the county's Multi-cultural Services unit, interpreters for non-English speaking patients.

The results are:

- Application processing time has been reduced by 10 to 15 days.
- The number of health care applications processed increased by 61 percent in one month and the health care application denial rate is at 10 percent.
- By tracing HCMC billables, the team identified more than \$8 million that could be recovered on just 24 percent of the cases processed.
- The county is saving approximately \$7,800 in annual courier costs.

"This is just the beginning," said William Brumfield, HSPHD Area Director. "We've greatly increased the number of applications – we think we're getting almost everybody who comes to HCMC, which, in turn, affects the billables."

"In 2004, we got about \$8 million in billables. In 2005, the first year of the new system, we increased that to \$25 million. This year, we're on track to get \$45 million. We believe the application approval rate will continue to increase, which means a decreased amount of uncompensated care, which is tied directly to property taxes. This is smart government."



## The Networker's going digital!

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**Don't miss the scoop in every edition of Washington Watch.**

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# Northwoods Helps Agencies throughout Ohio Better Serve Their Clients, Today and Tomorrow

In 30 Ohio counties, some 45 departments of Job & Family Services, Child Support Enforcement, and Children Services use 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 technological solutions work with existing state systems to help agency workers do their jobs more quickly and efficiently. Its software and systems help smooth the process from registration through interview, and provide instant access to client information for follow-up or re-determination 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



Northwood Consulting Partners is a  
NACHSA Corporate Member

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 — combining JFS, workforce development, child support en-

forcement, 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.

INTERESTED IN CORPORATE MEMBERSHIP?

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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 such project was envisioned by Charles Venable, Researcher, Mahoning County DJFS. After the full Northwoods Compass Software™ suite was up and running at the Youngstown agency, Mr. Venable saw an opportunity for an additional innovation. In the past, the county had a manual, but effective way of balancing workloads by assigning difficulty factors to each case. It was a labor-intensive effort, but resulted in an even distribution of work, ensuring that no single worker was overburdened, which could lead to increased employee turnover and poor accuracy rates.

Mahoning County approached Northwoods with the challenge of automating the load balancing of casework in their agency. The result is a soon-to-be-released software solution, Compass Balance, which automatically calculates case complexity and determines what cases to assign to which employees in order to achieve optimal caseload balance across the agency. In addition, the program will:

- Allow supervisors to disband a caseload for a worker who goes on leave, then equally disperse the work among other workers, and finally reassemble the caseload when the worker returns
- Minimize burnout and errors by overburdened workers, saving tens or even hundreds of thousands of dollars in potential sanctions resulting from

errors.

- Replace the 80 hours of staff time that Mahoning County spent each month to balance cases manually

- Help agencies make better hiring decisions by clearly documenting staffing needs

Once it is tried and tested in Mahoning County, the Northwoods solution will be available to other county human services agencies to help them more efficiently balance their caseloads.

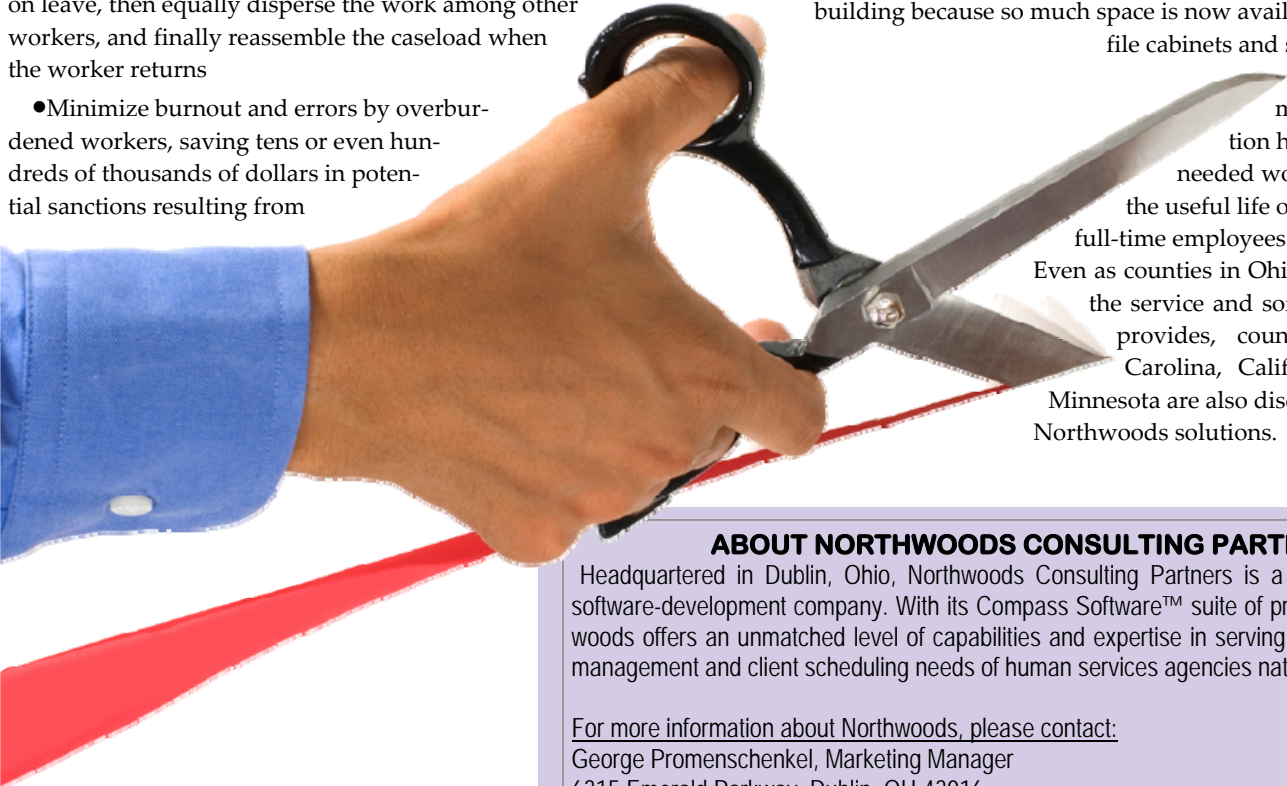
Another project that is currently under development with the Auglaize County DJFS will help the county meet federal standards for accuracy and outreach programs. Together, Northwoods and Auglaize County DJFS petitioned the State to endorse an enhancement to its existing Northwoods document management 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 re-design 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.

Even as counties in Ohio have grown to rely on the service and software that Northwoods provides, county agencies in North Carolina, California, New York, and Minnesota are also discovering the 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.

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# Free EITC and Tax Preparation Assistance Secure Resources for Sacramento Families

★ **BY LUCINDA SERYNEK**, Communications and Media Officer  
Department of Human Assistance, Sacramento County, California

“When she came in the door to have her taxes done for free, she had no idea that in about an hour I’d be telling her that she would be getting an EITC refund of almost \$3,000,” said Harm Wilkinson, tax preparer for the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance. “In fact, that money helped her buy the car she needed to be able to accept the job she had just been offered.”

Completing its eighth year of a partnership with the IRS, the Sacramento County Department of Human Assistance provides free and confidential tax preparation and information about EITC, the Earned Income Tax Credit, available to low- and moderate-income individuals and families.

A refundable tax credit for people who work but don’t earn high incomes, the EITC has been called the largest poverty reduction program in the United States. Almost 21 million American families received more than \$36 billion in refunds through the EITC in 2004. These EITC dollars had a significant impact on the lives and communities of the nation’s lowest paid working people, lifting more than 5 million of these families above the federal poverty line.

The EITC is in addition to any tax refund they may already receive. In most cases, in California, the EITC

does not affect eligibility for benefits such as food stamps, cash assistance, Medi-Cal, SSI or subsidized housing. Eligible taxpayers could pay less federal tax, no tax or even get a tax refund from the IRS. Approximately 24,000 Sacramento County families are potentially eligible for EITC, yet many of them are not taking advantage of this credit. In fact, American taxpayers forfeit \$2.5 billion each year by not filing their tax returns.

In the first year of the partnership, the IRS trained 40 Sacramento County employees who prepared and electronically filed nearly 700 tax returns claiming approximately \$1 million in refunds. Since then, more than 450 county employees have been trained to electronically file tax returns and help taxpayers apply for the EITC.

“This has been a great experience for everyone involved,” said Bruce Wagstaff, Department of Human Assistance Director. “We’ve been able to provide important help for our community, which has produced big returns for them and our local economy.”

“At the office where I prepared and filed taxes, we did about 300 returns with refunds totalling more than \$700,000,” said Wilkinson. “Those funds most often are then spent right here in Sacramento County.”

Overall, this year the department prepared 2,646 returns resulting in EITC refunds of



\$2.3 million, and \$4.1 million for state and federal tax refunds. And in the last seven years, DHA and partner agency staffs have prepared more than 21,000 tax returns. The total EITC dollar amount claimed was more than \$22.9 million, and total state and federal income tax refunds returned was \$29 million.

“The services are very beneficial for me and my family. The refund helps me provide things for my family that I probably wouldn’t be able to otherwise,” said Jessica Garcia, a member of the community who had her taxes prepared by DHA.

Typically the department provides these services January through March.

## FOR FURTHER INFO

★ <http://www.irs-eitc.info/>

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# Betting on Disaster Preparedness

on-going services, and the gathering and sharing of information and resources during and possibly long after the initial emergency. What is required of us is more than coordination at the time of an event. Beyond crises management, we need to create and maintain resource networks. If we've not created collaborative relationships before a disaster strikes, how can we expect to create them in the midst of all the complex issues that come with any emergency?

Since Hurricane Katrina, our role has changed to one of primary point of contact, often accompanied by a wide range of responsibilities including management of a Disaster Recovery Center. Our experience in Portland, Oregon, and Las Vegas, Nevada, showed these responsibilities can include:

- Assessing the disaster survivors' needs, both short-term and long-term;
- Anticipating and coordinating social and health related services for affected populations;
- Organizing and coordinating with other government entities, non-profits, faith-based organizations, for-profit businesses and community-based service providers within and outside a Disaster Recovery Center;
- Establishing operational procedures and coordinating staff and volunteers;

- Conferring regularly with officials from FEMA and the State and County's Office of Emergency Management as well as officials representing various service providers;
- Establishing and coordinating payment mechanisms for human service-related resources; and
- Developing shared information and communication systems.

It is important to remember that these responsibilities may come to us even if the disaster hasn't happened within the confines of our county. Hundreds of communities across the country became part of the emergency response to Katrina when we sent experts to the Gulf Coast and hurricane survivors came to our communities. For some of us that work continues today.

It is imperative that we each create, update, and adapt an emergency response plan that clearly identifies our department's role and responsibilities and involves our partners. It must address where decision-making authority resides and what functions the agency will manage. Our responsibility as those who hold the public trust is to take action by creating and implementing a plan which requires staff training, on-going updates, interagency collaboration and responsive flexibility well before we are required to take action because a disaster has come to our doorstep.

While the exact needs and risks vary depending upon our geography and infrastructure, the need to plan remains the same for all of us. "When, not if" means that we each need to be prepared. As we write this article, we look out our office windows on a world-class view of the Las Vegas Strip to the south of us, and the coroner's office to the west. It is more than just symbolic that the Clark County Department of Social Service sits in between. If there is a disaster in one of our resort-casinos, many with a guest population the size of some towns, we are on the front line of response. Our community is counting on us to help residents and visitors alike as a key part of a larger system.

Some of our colleagues may never read this article because for them there is a more pressing matter than emergency preparedness. And hopefully, they will be ok in betting that they will have time to plan before disaster strikes. However, even in Las Vegas and Clark County, gaming capital of the world, that is a bad bet to make. Who is counting on you? What bets are you willing to make with their lives? How prepared is your county? What do you see out your window?



MANUS O'DONNELL



JO WEBER

## Editors' Notes

BY MANUS O'DONNELL AND JO WEBER

### THIS COULD BE YOUR LAST ISSUE!

The editors encourage you to sign up to receive the electronic version of *THE NETWORKER*. As mentioned in our last issue, we are going electronic in order to save the cost of printing and mailing this publication. Printing and mailing are the largest part of our expense.

### SO LOOK FOR THE ARTICLE IN THIS ISSUE THAT GIVES YOU THE SIGN UP LOCATION.

P.S. from your friendly editors: It's [info@nachsa.org](mailto:info@nachsa.org).

On a personal note, as we enter summer, it's a perfect time to pay attention:

- Take time to smell the roses
- Tell someone each day that you love them
- Walk a mile for yourself, but take company along
- In silence there is wisdom to hear clearly
- Smile, it's contagious!

*Enjoy your summer!  
-Jo & Manus*

## *Our Mission*

To promote and strengthen networks of county and community human services that protect children, families and elderly, and that support self-sufficiency of disadvantaged populations. And, to participate in formulating and advocating the human services policies of the National Association of Counties.

The **NACHSA Networker** is published quarterly by the National Association of County Human Services Administrators, an affiliate organization of the National Association of Counties. Submissions are welcome from all members. The **NACHSA Networker** is not responsible for errors in submissions and reserves the right to edit all articles for publication.

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