Unemployment is up. The economy is down. Families are in crisis. Child support offices across the nation are struggling within this environment and striving to maintain a consistent level of service to parents and their children. Like many other strained urban IV-D offices, the Jefferson County, Kentucky (Louisville) office is constantly examining its business processes in an effort to keep up with the heavy demand for services, and to improve service delivery.

The Problem: Providing Good Customer Service in the Face of Rising Demands

Over the past year, the Jefferson County child support office has been faced with a large number of paternity establishments that have strained the staff and the Family Court; a very significant increase in modification filings, many resulting from mass lay-offs and reduced work hours by two of the County’s largest employers, Ford and General Motors; and a corresponding increase in phone calls and walk-in customers.

Although the office staff prides itself on customer service, the desire to meet customer expectations for the County’s 62,000 cases can be overwhelming. As a result of the rising number of paternity establishment and potential modification cases, caseworkers see customers back-to-back with little time to update the system with the new information gathered during the interview; much less to prepare, print, and assemble motions before proceeding to the next waiting customer. In 2011, for example, the County Office received approximately 800 calls per day and assisted 23,283 walk-in customers.

Paternity Establishment - To assist the large number of pro se litigants in paternity actions, Jefferson County had already developed conference dockets for all pre- and post-judgment motions in 1996. The dockets are quite successful, with at least 70% of the cases settled and agreements tendered to the court off-docket.

While this process helps pro se parties successfully resolve child support cases in court, the Jefferson County Office identified a need for meaningful assistance prior to the legal filing.

Modification - A pro se motion to modify support used by the local Family Court is available on Kentucky’s automated system. During the interview process, caseworkers ask customers questions regarding income, health insurance, childcare, and extraordinary circumstances. However, after this information is gathered, caseworkers
spend a significant amount of time obtaining and researching income information in order to determine whether the required 15% change exists to support a modification. If the requirement is met, they then spend time performing calculations according to guidelines, printing forms for parents’ signatures, and answering questions that arise. The time spent on modifications consumes much of the caseworker’s day.

The Solution: Find a Proven Partner to Create On-Line Access to Forms and Information

The Louisville Legal Aid Society (LAS), located near the child support office, also saw an increase in child support customers’ need for legal services. The LAS had previously developed document assembly and technology-related projects for pro se parties that included online self-help divorce forms, small claims court petitions, criminal record expungement motions, and videos on foreclosure and bankruptcy. The LAS maintained a Self-Help Center in its building dedicated to the use of these products.

The Jefferson County Child Support Office was aware of the success of the LAS in the area of on-line customer assistance, and recognized that educating parents on the front-end processes could help reduce their phone calls, office visits, and appointments. Through the award of a Section 1115 Grant Announcement, Jefferson County seized the opportunity to collaborate with the LAS to create online information, forms, videos, and a user-friendly method for filing a motion to modify child support.

The Child Support Division (CSD) and LAS felt that educating parents about child support services could significantly reduce parents’ time at the child support division and increase the efficiency of caseworkers. Through this 1115 grant, parents would learn their rights, be able to gather the information needed to support their requests to modify and, hopefully, lessen their frustration with the legal process.

The CSD and LAS developed self-help forms that included an application for child support services, a motion to modify support, and a child support calculator. The forms are created through a process that uses Lexis Nexis HotDocs® and A2J Author® software. The A2J Author® software is the program that the user sees during the interview process, and makes completion of a complicated or intimidating form easy for pro se parties. The software program prompts the parent-user to answer basic questions in a step-by-step format. The software contains “help bubbles” that the user can click for more information. See the example below:
At the end of the interview, the program populates the answers into a completed form or assembled motion. The user can save, print, or e-mail the form. The process mimics a face-to-face interview with a caseworker, and thereby frees the caseworker to spend time elsewhere. The self-help forms may be accessed by visiting [www.kyjustice.org](http://www.kyjustice.org).

The CSD and LAS also collaborated to develop three online videos to inform customers and potential customers about Title IV-D child support services and to provide responses to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ). Both agencies believe that educating a parent prior to an in-person office visit leads to a more efficient use of the customer’s time, reduces frustration, and helps the parent understand the ins and outs of the legal process. The videos may be viewed on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/user/LegalAidKy](http://www.youtube.com/user/LegalAidKy).

To get the word out about the new resources, the Jefferson County Office produced a business card-sized information card. The cards are available in the child support office lobby, the Family Court Clerk’s office, the local IV-A office, and at the LAS Self-Help Center.

*The Future: Improvements and Recommendations for Other IV-D Agencies*

From April 2011 to present, the success of the project has been evaluated by counting the number of website views: access doubled after the resources were publicized. The child support calculator has proven to be the most popular site with 8,566 website views. The most popular video is the Child Support in Kentucky-FAQ.

While there has been success in making the information and forms accessible to the public via the website, there is room for improvement. One recommendation for
improvement is to survey customers about the types of forms or information they deem important and use a short online survey that requires completion prior to allowing them to print the forms. The survey should be designed to assess whether the customer found the forms to be useful, appropriate, and efficient.

Since the Jefferson County Office has not seen a large number of completed forms, it has made some changes in strategy. The current plan is to allow caseworkers to use the online forms during the modification interview process. Although technology is helpful and will continue to be used for the benefit of the public and child support staff, some parties still prefer personal interaction. In changing the approach, the interview and form creation happen simultaneously and the child support office can take advantage of the assembled and ready-to-go forms once they are printed. A benefit of completing the on-line forms during the interview is that parents have the chance to see that the forms are user-friendly, which may encourage them to visit the website in the future. As this technology continues to be evaluated, the ultimate goal is to decrease the amount of time spent in appointments, reduce office visits, and simultaneously improve customer satisfaction, as well as caseworker efficiency and effectiveness.

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