

PROMISING PRACTICES



Indiana service provider charts a smarter course

When you want the job done right, do it yourself. Globe Star, LLC took this popular saying to heart in the service provider's quest to find the right software to fit its business needs.

Named after a ship, Globe Star provides supported employment and prevocational services; behavioral and crisis intervention; and residential, respite, and community services for individuals with developmental disabilities. Globe Star's nautical theme is carried out by staff members, called crewmembers, who include caregivers (direct service workers), navigator mentors (supervisors), and servant leaders (persons who assist with coordinating the services). The persons served are recognized as individuals.

For many years, Globe Star had used a Windows®-based scheduling program plus a database. The scheduling program managed caregiving and other shifts, while the database contained information about crewmembers and individuals. Unfortunately, the two applications didn't work well together. Moreover, both of these programs worked independently in each Globe Star office, making coordination among the provider's six Indiana locations difficult.

Globe Star servant leaders began a search for a program that would handle both the scheduling and data management functions and could be networked among all offices. They could not find a single suitable program for the Macintosh® platform, which Globe Star preferred. They investigated hiring software consultants to write a customized program, but the cost was exorbitant.

Early evaluations of software led Globe Star Executive Director Anthony M. McCrovitz, Ph.D., to conclude that a single software did not exist to meet all of Globe Star's business needs.

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Putting out the good word: Information about the Promising Practices series

We are offering a series of short articles on a variety of promising practices that CARF surveyors have observed during surveys from 2004 to the present. There is no particular order that we follow in presenting this series of short reports. The purpose is not to rate one organization over another, but to encourage U.S. and Canadian community providers to dialogue with one another and to encourage creative solutions to individual service designs and organizational business practices and thereby achieve effective and positive results in each organization's community.

Although there are indeed a number of ways to approach conformance to a standard, what makes organizations given an exemplary

That was when Michael Griffin, who had worked for Globe Star for five years as servant leader, volunteered to take the software development helm. He submitted a proposal to write the software himself.

"At the time, I thought how hard can writing a database be? People do it all the time. Turns out, it's not easy," Griffin reflects with a smile.

Globe Star's leadership approved Griffin's proposal, and he quickly set sail creating a secure, web-based database solution to serve all navigator mentors and servant leaders. The software was destined to become known as Polaris™, named for the North Star. "Designing Polaris has been an amazing journey," Griffin adds.

Using a calendar template, Griffin designed Polaris with the FileMaker® database creation program. (FileMaker is popular with small-to-mid-size companies and not-for-profits because of its quick development time, ease of use, and cross-platform flexibility.)

After a month of successful testing in Globe Star's Chesterton office, all of the service provider's locations were networked into the program. Since then, Griffin, who now serves as the information technology servant leader, has continued to build new features and improve existing ones to help Globe Star navigate its business using Polaris.

An early goal of Polaris was to help the provider's navigator mentors to schedule individuals' time efficiently and in accordance with contracts. Polaris exceeded the goal. It is designed to coordinate planning, scheduling, updating, billing for services, and running payroll reports. The same data flow from one task to the next -- all tailored to suit how Globe Star and its funding sources operate.

Polaris has become more than just a database to manage individual information, contracts, crewmember information, and shift schedules. Increasingly, navigator mentors use Polaris for new tasks, such as creating daily quality-of-life sheets, sign-in sheets for services, and monthly summaries. The capability to run custom forms for each individual helps Globe Star caregivers to document progress on the individuals' goals. Polaris has also cut paperwork that navigator mentors used to have to handwrite. Now, they enter these data into the system once, and Polaris can move the data to where they need to be.

"I intended Polaris to make the navigator mentors' lives smoother," explains Griffin. "They work hard, and the software should free, not burden, them."

When asked about upcoming developments, Griffin laughs, "Don't rush the developer!" He continues, "But seriously, I plan to add more features that will allow us to further decrease navigator mentors' paperwork and refine tools to streamline the financial operation of our organization."

Polaris truly helps Globe Star to chart a course that's smarter -- not

rating stand out is their professional and strategic response to an observed service or business need, always designed with input from their stakeholders and based on those individuals' quality expectations.

We hope you enjoy the series. We encourage you to contact the identified representative in the article to get more information about their services.

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Below: At the helm of Polaris™, Michael Griffin demonstrates display options for the software. Polaris for iPhone® and iPad® is in development.



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