They had the will, they had the way. They had a technology plan.

Clearbrook rolls out a technology plan with impressive results in integrating and updating their old ways of doing business

Clearbrook is a nonprofit human service organization in a northwest suburb of Chicago. In 2003, it conducted a comprehensive evaluation of its technology system and discovered that client demographics, medical, program funding, and goal objective data were being stored in multiple, unconnected databases in different formats. With an eye on efficiency, Clearbrook decided to take a long-range, comprehensive look at integrating its technology system.

Over the next few months, Clearbrook researched internal processes and the reporting requirements of the state of Illinois and other funding sources to learn how to integrate its system. Then the organization created a plan. It had an end goal, but also had multiple barriers to overcome first. For example, Clearbrook looked at its information technology (IT) staffing to determine its adequacy compared to the amount of work needed in an IT rollout. Opting not to overburden its two current IT staff members, Clearbrook created a new IT staff position funded by two board members.

Clearbrook continued to address the different business functions to streamline data entry and access to information. The person demographics and billing system was the first module to be developed. The next step was to develop a system to contain information related to a person's individual goals and objectives. Because this would allow direct care staff members to record data daily for all goals for every person served, Clearbrook had to develop not only the database capabilities, but expand the network infrastructure to all its sites (an additional 28 group homes and 4 training/administrative locations). It installed digital subscriber line (DSL)/cable Internet access and configured thin client terminals – computers configured to access only Citrix® servers to run agency applications – at its remote sites.

However, the biggest barrier – the lack of computer knowledge by the organization and direct care staff members – wasn't solved so quickly. Clearbrook decided to use its time and attendance system, Kronos®, as a training tool. Furthermore, it developed a staff member performance-based goals program in which staff members are assigned goals that address agency objectives and core values. Goal progress information, interdepartmental feedback, and achievement levels are now available in the database system. Clearbrook integrated computer training sections into its direct service provider orientation training and plans to expand the computer/application-related trainings to all Clearbrook staff members. The majority of the direct service providers have enjoyed learning new computing skills and seem eager to learn how to use the new site communication log and internal e-mail system.

Clearbrook accomplished its goal of creating a data collection system that allows direct service providers to search for individual goals by site, open the goal data collection form, and record data. Now case managers have instant access to data and are able to evaluate a person's performance with the click of a mouse. This process saves approximately six to eight hours a month of manual computations that were being done by the each of the organization's 40 case managers.

Clearbrook's technology system continues to develop with expansion of the use of its systems to address individual behavioral goals, site task lists, third-party client medication data, e-mails, and training materials/videos. With a detailed plan, well-trained staff members, and a focus on effectiveness, Clearbrook's IT improvement continues to enhance current service delivery.

For more details about Clearbrook's technology plan, please contact Don Frick at DFrick@clearbrook.org

Questions or comments about Promising Practices? Email us at rbibby@carf.org