

# PROMISING PRACTICES



## Web opportunities lead to greater transparency, efficiency

*By Michael Mamot, OPTIONS Family of Services*

For many years, the OPTIONS Family of Services website ([www.optionsfs.org](http://www.optionsfs.org)) was conventional and ho-hum. Organizations such as ours often fall into a belief that their websites must be static and drab if they are to reflect their nonprofit status.

The belief was shaken when we discovered that, with minimum investment and effort, our website could become a dynamic tool in our day-to-day operations.

When we first proposed posting our company's policy manual on the website, several staff members expressed misgivings about the manual being available for anyone to read. After discussion, we agreed we did not need to hide our policy manual from the public eye. We figured people might read the manual if they were holding us accountable for following our own policies or if they were seeking a cure for insomnia. Either reason was fine with us.

Previously, it had been an onerous task to update printed policy manuals at all OPTIONS' sixteen locations spread across the Central Coast of California. Over the years, we had grown reluctant to revise policies because our process for updating a manual at each location was so cumbersome.

Moving the policy manual online enabled us to revise policies for all locations within minutes after new policies were approved. We notified employees by group email of the changes.

Gratified by the success of posting an online policy manual, we added our employee handbook to our website. Then we added more documents such as our emergency plans, continuity of operations plan, annual reports, and quarterly outcomes reports.

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### Plan to attend the CARF 2012 ECS International Conference

Leaders in the rehabilitation field from across the United States and Canada will address "Building the future in uncertain times" at the CARF 2012 Employment and Community Services International Conference, February 27-28, 2012, in Tucson, Arizona. For information or to register, visit: [www.carf.org/international\\_conferences](http://www.carf.org/international_conferences)

### About the ECS Promising Practices newsletter series

An organization receiving exemplary recognition in its CARF survey report stands out because of its professional and strategic response to a service or business need. CARF presents these ECS Promising Practices articles to encourage dialogue among service providers and to offer examples of creative solutions for improving service

Eventually, requisitions for maintenance, purchases, and vehicle repairs were channeled to a new database that was web based. We created a portal on our website so that staff members' requests could be directed electronically to specific administrators for approval and then to appropriate departments for action. The web-based database allowed staff members to track the status of their requests and know when to expect repairs to be made or materials to be purchased. The online forms also saved time and resources because information no longer needed to be reentered from paper forms.

We also introduced an online satisfaction survey for the persons served.

As a nonprofit, we could not afford to purchase expensive software to run all of these operations, let alone a technician to program and maintain them. Our website was created by staff members using a freeware service designed for ease of publishing professional websites.

With the freeware, the cost is minimal for creating and maintaining the website. Another benefit of the freeware is the capability to quickly create and update webpages, upload links, add forms, and capture information in our database.

Although not elegant, our website has proven to be incredibly efficient and functional. It has greatly enhanced our capability to share resources with all of our locations, and it has allowed us to become more data driven and objective in our operations. Most important, it has made our organization more transparent to all stakeholders.

Since we have posted numerous documents and forms online, we have not received a negative comment or report of misuse.

Far from being a static and drab collection of words, our website is now one of our most helpful operational tools. Our most recent [CARE](#) survey report said that OPTIONS demonstrates exemplary conformance to performance improvement standards. "Sharing performance information with internal and external stakeholders is a vital aspect of improving the services of the organization. The OPTIONS' website is user-friendly to persons served, staff members, and other stakeholders," the report said.

The report added, "The website is exemplary in its transparent display of the organization's philosophy and mission. It is of tremendous value to persons served, family members, and referral agencies who are interested in extensively learning about the organization's services, programs, and management processes."

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quality.

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