LGFCU Excellence in Innovation Award Project Evaluation

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FLSA Designation	Both (if applicable to a team)
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Description of Productivity Improvement

Our Staff Support and Development (SSD) team is made up of two supervisors and eight lead support staff. The mission of the SSD Team is: "To prepare new employees for a successful transition into a Human Services career; to provide continuing education and remedial training to all staff; to provide technical support; and to assist Supervisors and Program Administrator in performance measurement and quality analysis. These areas of focus are intended to unite all units and teams in Cleveland County's move towards a high quality Economic Service program with an emphasis on client advocacy."

The specific ways the SSD team meets the above objectives are:

1. New Employee Training Program.
    a. All new employees are first assigned to the SSD Training Supervisor. We average between six and eight trainees at any given time. The time a trainee spends with the training unit varies with each individual, but the average time is six months.
    b. To graduate, a trainee must complete all required trainings; have successfully increased productivity to equal a full workload while maintaining

acceptable accuracy and timeliness rates.   The training program covers multiple program policies and system functionality; and includes classroom trainings, web based trainings, virtual trainings, independent study, as well as practical/hands-on training. Each day's activities are divided to include a portion of classroom or web-based training and a portion of hands on training where the trainee observes and then performs tasks under close supervision until they are able to operate independently.

    c.   A close mentorship program is provided by lead support staff to train on the best practices and to monitor success.

    d.   Benchmarks have been established to assess a trainee's progress at various stages throughout the training program. Conferences and progress reviews are completed at designated intervals. As the trainee develops independence, their caseload is gradually increased. Initially, 100% of all cases are reviewed prior to final authorization. As they achieve an acceptable level of accuracy in each of the components of Economic Services casework, the percentage of reviews is gradually decreased.

    e.   When a trainee has successfully managed a full caseload for two months while meeting the standard accuracy and timeliness expectations; they are ready for a permanent assignment to a mainstream unit. An exit conference attended by the training supervisor, trainee, and new supervisor is conducted and an ongoing training plan is developed. The new supervisor receives an assessment which identifies the trainee's progress, ongoing training needs, strengths and areas of potential vulnerability that should be closely monitored for the remainder of their first year of employment.

2. Quality Analysis
    a.   The QA team assists with the Second Party reviews for trainees.
    b.   A monthly QA sampling is reviewed from the mainstream staff's casework.
3. c.   A Second Party Review log is maintained in a shared file accessible to all supervisors. This log captures monthly accuracy and timeliness percentages for each employee. Supervisors use this data to complete annual performance evaluations and identify concerns or coaching needs throughout the year.   This log will also be used for the Second Party Review report sent quarterly to the Division of Medical services.

4. Continuing Education training
    a.   SSD provides weekly trainings based on staff survey results; deficiencies identified from the internal quality analysis samples, various reports, state Quality Control results, and as requested from supervisors.
    b.   Training Library: All training materials, handouts, and power points developed for any trainings developed are maintained in a shared file accessible by all supervisors and lead staff. Additionally, an up to date, comprehensive list and location for all state developed and web-based trainings is maintained in the electronic library. Included on this list is an estimated time to complete the training when applicable.

        c.   One-on-one training is also provided to mainstream employees as needed for a job assignment changes or as part of a work improvement plan developed as part of Supervisory coaching or disciplinary action.

5. Technical Support
   a. NC FAST Coordinator: Monitors all system defects, updates staff on functionality changes, provides system functionality training, provides in-depth trouble shooting, submits help tickets to the NC FSAT Help Desk, and maintains a Help Ticket log to ensure timely resolutions as well as track trends and report to NC FAST when new defects surface. In addition to the Coordinator, three additional lead support staff have been trained at the state level to assist in trouble shooting and serve as a Point of Contact to the Help Desk.
   b. Monitor daily timeliness reports of pending applications and recertifications, provide alerts to supervisors when a case is approaching its due date or if a case appears not to have been processed timely. An overdue log is maintained showing the responsible worker, reason, and explanation if it is on the report in error. This log is used during our state review process as well as provides statistical information for each employee's timeliness rating.
   c. Other support functions: Several casework tasks identified as high risk are performed by the SSD lead support staff. Some examples are working and/or pre-screening various reports; Coordinating cases transferred from other counties; Carolina Access Coordination between medical providers and Medicaid recipients; NC Tracks trouble shooting; and problem solving in various case scenarios.
   d. Employee Assistance cases: To protect the confidentiality and integrity of our staff, a Lead Support worker completes applications and maintains the cases for any employees who also apply for and/or receive assistance.

Description of why this project was initiated

Following the implementation of NC FAST as well as the adoption of a more holistic approach to service delivery, we found that our overall accuracy, timeliness, and customer relations had begun a decline and staff were overwhelmed with a sense of inadequacy.

Statewide, the overall implementation of the new NCFAST system was riddled with problems that critically effected the timely delivery of Food and Nutrition Services, Medicaid, Cash and Special Assistance. Additionally, Health Care Reform brought major policy changes and further challenges for the implementation of NC FAST and the new NC Tracks system. Across the state, accuracy and timeliness plummeted to a critical level, drawing public criticism. At this point, the focus had to be on getting cases processed as quickly as possible. Cleveland County was able to be among the first to resolve the backlogs created by these turbulent events however, it came at cost.

We were affected by several consequences of these challenging times.

1.   The learning curve was huge. Because the nature of our work is Human Services rather than business, we did not have an option of delaying production or declining business for training. Additionally, supervisors would need to learn at the same time as our line staff.

2.   The training materials and processes we had used for decades were no longer affective. There was a critical disconnect between our training processes as compared to our new way of doing business. Workers had to â€˜unlearn' many practices and concepts that had been strongly ingrained in previous trainings.

3.   Additional supervisory tasks associated with a change of this magnitude meant supervisors had less opportunities to gain the practical experience that comes from â€˜doing the work.' Even as workers began to gain competencies, supervisors felt left behind.

4.   Reports supervisors traditionally used to monitor staffs progress and accuracy were no longer available for a significant length of time. This put supervisors at another disadvantage in evaluating their employees' success and detecting misinterpretations of policies.

5.   Morale was low and our quality of work had suffered greatly. Staff who had been successful prior to these changes became frustrated with their lack of success.

6.   An increase in our turnover rate was another consequence. Supervisors were so overwhelmed with training their new staff, they had no time to evaluate existing staff or provide them with the training needed to successfully make the transitions. Misinformation went undetected which meant older staff were providing newer staff incorrect information.

In 2014, as we began assessing the damage of â€˜the storm,' we determined that a lack of accurate training was our biggest need. A survey revealed that employees felt that "training was not being given the priority that was necessary for them to be successful." No one had time to work with them and often they had to seek advice from multiple people to get a full resolution to a case with multiple programs.

We initially launched a new employee training program. Our hope was that by providing the initial training in a separate unit, it would allow supervisors more time to focus on stabilizing the existing staff. And since new employees didn't need to â€˜unlearn' old methods and had proven to learn the new system quickly, we felt that our training methods needed to be different for them.   In this program new employees were assigned to a training supervisor who worked with them for approximately eight weeks to provide the basic policy and system functionality training. The idea was to give them the basics, and then let them get the hands on experience from the unit as had been our tradition.

This turned out not to be an effective solution in itself, as â€˜hands on training' primarily came from mentorship received from experienced co-workers. We soon realized that there were many discrepancies in the instructions new employees were receiving from their various mentors. They became confused and soon after being released from the training unit, they struggled to continue their success. This further affected employee retention and job satisfaction.

We realized that we needed a program that provided complete training for new employees throughout their training period; but also a strong training program for our existing staff that provided consistency of information. We needed a training program that incorporated all program policies, system functionality, time management, and the best organizational practices to effectively manage the new universal caseloads.

A formal system of support activities also emerged as a need.   Technical support was needed to gain competency in the function of this complex system; and to stay abreast of the frequent changes that resulted from resolving defects, implementing new phases, and adding enhancements. We also needed a more effective way to provide supervisory support and a more effective system for monitoring accuracy and timeliness to meet the state and federal requirements.

Our conclusion was that we needed to pool together a team of employees who had successfully learned the skills necessary for success in our new world, and make them available to assist the 80+ staff who are responsible for administering our public assistance programs.

Quantifiable results (sustainability, cost savings, cost avoidance and/or a higher level of service). Indication of what resources were used and what was done with any accrued time savings

Our Staff Support and Development Team has provided the following results:
- A higher quality, new employee training program that has increased the success rate of new employees
- Addressed the training needs of existing staff
- Morale and job satisfaction has improved
- Supervisors are able to provide more effective case reviews, progress evaluations, and more quickly identify when an employee is struggling
- Supervisors are able to engage in more team building strategies
- More organized and consistent technical support
- The development of a Quality Analysis program that provides data driven solutions
- Timeliness rates have improved

Since funds were not available, we had to let go of many traditional ways of organizing our department to utilize the staff available. To achieve what is now our Staff Support and Development Team we re-allocated two supervisors and eight lead workers to this team. The supervisors selected had demonstrated special skills in training, quality assurance measurements, and in analyzing data. During periods of higher turn-over, we have had as many as 13 trainees in the new employee training program; but now average between six and eight.

Our first success is evident in the trainees who graduated and were then placed in a permanent unit. These newest employees have quickly become some of our most successful employees.

Removing these two supervisors from the mainstream of our workforce resulted in an increase of one employee per unit for the remaining supervisors.   Removing the lead workers helped re-establish the supervisor's role as the primary source of guidance and support for the individual units. This had been compromised during our initial implementation phase of NC FAST. Traditionally, lead workers were assigned to a specific unit and supervisor; and assisted those supervisors with training of new employees, providing technical support and mentorship to the case workers in the unit.   These persons are now called our "Lead Support Staff" and they still perform these same activities. However, instead of working with a specific unit, they now are available to provide support to everyone in the department without overshadowing a supervisor's role or authority. Bringing all the lead staff to the SSD team enabled us to capitalize on each individual's strengths and expertise to provide better support to all employees. Since the supervisors no longer receive new employees until

they are fully trained and are successfully managing a full caseload, they experienced time savings by making these changes.

These time savings have been instrumental allowing supervisors to focus on stabilization of our mainstream staff.
Supervisors were also surveyed initially to determine what they needed to be more successful. Trainings were provided to them to ensure consistency throughout the department. This has empowered them to provide more quality case reviews and to be more abreast of their employee's progress and identify when someone is struggling. If their efforts of coaching aren't successful, the employee can be referred to the SSD team for more extensive training. This has been helpful to prevent costly turnover.

Another advantage is that we have been able to establish benchmarks at various points during the training period to more quickly identify when a trainee is not advancing at the rate or level that is needed to be successful. At this point we can engage in more extensive coaching to help that trainee become successful. If they are unable to correct the deficiencies and disciplinary action or termination is necessary, it is handled appropriately to prevent the mainstream supervisors from having to invest time dealing with an unproductive employee.

Our Continuing Ed training program provides our experienced staff more accurate, consistent training than they had been getting when relying on peer training. Feedback had revealed that existing staff were very frustrated with feelings of inadequacy. They felt that their ability to be successful was not as great as newer staff because they had to learn things â€˜on the fly.' Supervisors completed surveys to identify what staff needed to be successful. This was the start of our Continuing Ed program. The feedback from these trainings has been very positive and staff now indicate they feel much better about their jobs. We continue to provide weekly trainings to cover deficiencies found through our Quality Analysis program and any policy changes that are implemented from the state level.

A recent evaluation survey sent to all employees asked staff to rate several areas for recent Continuing Ed trainings provided. Between 90% and 97% felt the trainings were helpful and well organized. Also, 87% indicated they had implemented changes as a result of these trainings.

No financial costs were incurred. We feel our program will contribute to future cost savings by reducing staff turnover and avoiding penalties that could cost the state and our county over a million dollars in Food and Nutrition penalties alone. Additionally, improved competency is directly related to greater job satisfaction and a higher quality of customer service.
Our Staff Support and Development program continues to improve and develop. It provides us the flexibility to adjust as our needs change. We feel this program has a very sustainable future in our agency.

Other descriptive information

This project has been central to our agency's goal of providing more holistic services to our customers. During 2013 and 2014, our department suffered the effects of what has been called the

most critical challenge ever faced by North Carolina's Social Services agency's. This tumultuous period dramatically changed our business processes. Our experience was not unlike every other NC county. We wanted to do more than survive; we wanted to thrive. Our Staff Support and Development project is how we began our 'rise from the ashes' so to speak. It is an ongoing project that continues to reveal more and more opportunities to further develop our staff and improve our business processes. It also realigns our practices and training to our original goal of a more holistic approach to providing services. Our Staff Support and Development program is a sustainable program that will continue to provide many positive rewards for us now, and in our future.