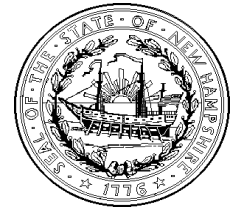


Client Focus: RISE to the Challenge

New Hampshire Division of Family Assistance

Background: The New Hampshire (NH) Division of Family Assistance (DFA) administers programs and services for eligible NH residents providing financial, medical and food & nutritional assistance, help with child care costs, and emergency help to obtain and keep safe housing. Family Assistance staff determine initial and continuing eligibility, the amount of benefits and deliver benefits using federal and NH guidelines and policies. DFA administers seven major types of assistance to thousands of NH families and residents.



- Food and Nutritional Assistance assists individuals and families through the Food Stamp program.
- Medical Coverage assists disabled and elderly adults, blind individuals, children, pregnant women and families through the Medicaid and NH Healthy Kids Programs.
- Medicare Beneficiaries Savings Program assists individuals who qualify for Medicare coverage through the Social Security Administration by paying some of the associated costs of Medicare coverage such as monthly premiums or required deductibles.
- Emergency Assistance assists families with dependent children who may qualify for TANF in obtaining and keeping safe and healthy permanent housing.
- Employment and Training Programs and Support Services assists adults receiving cash benefits through the TANF programs or the Food Stamp Benefit Program.
- Child Care Assistance assists parents engaged in work, training or educational activities leading to employment to afford quality care for their children.
- Benefit Issuance: Cash assistance is issued twice per month via Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) or Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT).

Challenge: Determining and issuing accurate and timely benefits is no small task. Federal and state policies and regulations change and often conflict among programs. The population served is sometimes transient and the need is always critical – sometimes desperate. Achieving – let alone maintaining – quality customer service is a daunting challenge. A preliminary needs analysis at a 2003 DFA-wide conference, the reasons for less-than-stellar customer service within the organization became apparent: staff were reeling from personnel cuts, an unsupportive government, and a growing – and increasingly desperate – clientele.

Solution: No single solution can possibly increase customer service and sustain it over the long haul, especially when those servicing the customer need a little “servicing” themselves.

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It was important that DFA leverage its best practices as it sought to 1) identify skills and behaviors that are known to work in this challenging environment, 2) recognize key contributors throughout the organization, and 3) refocus ALL activities on its core mission: provide service to their clients.

To this end, Entelechy suggested a multi-pronged approach to instill a mindset of client-focused best practices throughout DFA. Our suggested approach included:

- *A Best Practices Kickoff Training Event.* This event was designed to:
 1. Introduce to all of DFA staff the elements of the program.
 2. Provide DFA executive leadership a platform to describe the importance of this organizational focus.
 3. Introduce/reinforce skills that were critical for achieving best practices in client focus in each individual.

This event was called *Client Focus: RISE to the Challenge* and is outlined in detail on the next page.

- *Best Practices Communication.* Since best practices are continually being defined throughout the organization, it was important that they be identified and publicized on an ongoing basis for others to benefit from their use. Employees wanted to hear from other employees their examples of best practices in action so they could adopt/adapt the practice in their own work.
- *Management Reinforcement.* Adoption of best practices often required management intervention to remove obstacles, encourage employees, and provide the feedback and recognition that is so important to adopting/adapting new behaviors.

It was important that elements from this initiative link to current training programs, supervisor meetings, management meetings, State Office meetings, the Information Library site for sharing, and others.

Most important, it was critical that daily activities and decisions develop, reinforce, and continually build on this broad cultural focus of the organization.

Client Focus: RISE to the Challenge – outlined on the next page – was created to meet the unique challenges faced by NH DFA; Entelechy drew from its *High Performance Customer Service (HPCS)* for skills critical for superior customer service.

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Topic	Content
Leadership Perspective	The program is introduced by DFA's Director as a key component of the <i>Client Focus: RISE to the Challenge</i> initiative. A link is made between this program and the results of the DFA Conference work.
Program Introduction	Participants get an overview of the training and what has led to this being an important initiative. A link to the Client Satisfaction Survey is made. Participants will introduce themselves and share expectations for the training. Parking Lot introduced.
Recognize Your Clients	Participants identify their internal and external clients. Provide analogy to rowing and the North Star – Pulling Together to RISE to the Challenge. Participants walk a mile in the shoes of their internal and external clients creating a broader understanding of how their decisions and actions impact their clients.
Initiate in Ways that Ensure Client Focus	Participants work with case histories, scenarios and real-life situations (good, bad, and ugly) to solve internal and external problems while identifying Best Practices. The solutions are related back to world-class organizations using similar solutions. Examples of Best Practices within DFA are discussed and analyzed. Statistics and storytelling linked to DFA Best Practices (i.e., parachute makers)
Sense the Needs of Your Clients and Peers	Practice communication skills with client focus ensuring more effective handling of internal clients, external clients, and challenging client situations. Skills discussed center around strengthening relationships, communicating with clarity and care, and being proactive and responsible. Discussion of how to make the Code of Ethics live in everyday activities.
Everyone has an Impact!	Participants are shown how their daily decisions affect their peers, clients, and the DFA Organization. Proactive Personal Initiative is introduced and then discussed as a critical piece of their role at DFA. Discussions of the culture, its drawbacks and messages. Establishment of a new set of cultural guidelines. Attitude impact discussion.
Pulling it All Together	The training day is reviewed with key points highlighted.
Commitment Action Items and Influencer Action Items	Participants declare specific behavioral changes (action items) that they will implement. Influencer Actions Items (those organizational items that may prevent them from attaining specific action items) are identified.
The Manager's Role	Managers are shown the importance of their reinforcement to the training and discuss any challenges they may have. Influencer Actions Items are reviewed and solutions identified.
Management Reinforcement Tools	Action item commitments are reviewed and an action plan established.

Results: NH DFA has put in place measures that are supported at the federal level as outlined in the report conducted by the Office of Administration for Children & Families entitled *Delivering Effective Customer Service Final Report*.

The report cautions, "Understand that good customer service takes time, patience, persistence, consistency in message at all levels, accountability, courtesy, respect, and emphasis on team players." We'll be watching NH DFA as they RISE to the customer service challenge in the coming years.