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2009, a year in review

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As with many Americans and business operators, I must admit that I won't be sorry to see 2009 end. I have had the pleasure of working in this field since 1979 and specifically in Vancouver since 1985, although we've seen up's and down's in the economy and funding priorities, this is clearly the toughest environment we've had to adjust to. Of course I'd love to wave my magic wand or look into my crystal ball and promise everyone that 2010 will be much better, like everyone else I have to adjust to changing economy and market with the same amount of hope and guess work we all muster.

Even with my caveat above, I can report continued growth and quality improvements to expand and enhance services. In 2008, we over had 6700 admissions to services, in 2009 we have exceeded 7000 admissions. Our individual clinical staff, program managers and administrative staff have embarked upon a year of quality improvement as well as staff and program development.

In this newsletter, you'll hear from a number of our program managers about these changes, in all of them, you'll hear the pride they have for their staff. Anyone who knows me has heard me go on at length regarding what I believe is Lifeline Connections' primary strength: our resilience. This resilience comes from a staff that takes pride in their work and understands the importance of the work they do within the community that they reside. So, although it is easy to become discouraged with the current economic picture and the cuts we're always responding to, I still remain hopeful as we enter to 2010.

It is with great sadness that I am writing to let you know that the NW Deaf Addiction Center (NWDAC) is closing. Unfortunately Lifeline Connections is in the same position that many businesses are in with the current economy and the Board of Directors and management have found it necessary for us to reduce our costs of operation. After careful consideration, these cuts have resulted in the closure of NWDAC effective 12/15/09.

When NWDAC was conceived approximately eight years ago, it was with the intent to make it a regional center for delivery of language specific services to the deaf or hard of hearing. Despite offering a high quality, language specific and culturally sensitive treatment environment at a manageable rate given our ability to avoid the need for ongoing interpreter services, we are not able to secure referrals and funding from other states. This problem does not come as a surprise; during these difficult times with budget cutbacks, contracting for public services out of state is not possible.

While we are closing the residential program, we will be expanding the outpatient services available and attempt to provide as much integration of clients into existing programs within the agency. If you have any questions about these changes, please do not hesitate to contact me.

In closing, I want to thank all of the Lifeline staff, Board of Directors, and community partners who make everything that we do possible.

Lynn Samuels, CEO



Mindfulness

Hello to all our clients and constituents and Happy Holidays to all. It's that time of the year when we begin to take stock of all that has happened and discover that it's already one decade into the century.

As we mature, time seems to move at a different rate, so it seems for Lifeline Connections as we age as an organization.

Having now been here three years as the Director of Clinical Services, I have been aware of how time often answers most problems. Sometimes my 3 year old mentality steals my mindfulness, however, when I am in a good space my insight whispers "wait""this too shall pass."

Mindfulness reminds me that I am responsible for the effort not the results, I am not the fixer and often if I go tramping through someone else's life when uninvited the grass won't grow where I have stepped.

Mindfulness let's me remember that I am a spoke in the wheel, not the wheel, and being right-sized has an emphases on "right" not being made smaller.

Mindfulness allows me to see all the good folks and their hard work around me. The detox worker who has to clean up someone's vomit for the third time, as the patient curses them for taking care of their needs. The mental health professional who struggles with a client not able to keep appointments and is rude when engaged. The kitchen cooks and helpers that put all the love and comfort they can into food that not only can nourish the body but also soothes one's emotions, without a word of "thanks."

The residential worker and the counselor who are struggling to keep someone in treatment while their families and children worry about their loved one relapsing, as they have done before when they left treatment after three days.

Our court counselors who struggle to balance treatment goals with court dictates so clients get the best possible treatment experience. Youth therapists reaching out to the many kids that without all the help we can give will be adult clients if they live. And always there are our out-patient counselors and social workers, so few in numbers, balancing large caseloads, few resources, and an endless supply of somewhat entitled folks wanting.

When I look deeper I see the reception staff and the frontline administrative staff that meet head on in the trenches with hurting, angry and demanding prospective clients. While I have done all these jobs in my career, I have never done it with the grace and dignity that all our Lifeline staff does each day. My mindfulness reminds me that I am grateful today that I know and have the privilege to work with such folks.

Dan Clune, Clinical Director

The Human Resources department had a very busy year in 2009! Some of the major changes we made included transitioning to ADP for our Payroll, Human Recourses Information Systems, COBRA and 401k administration. The change in vendors was a large project which required many hours of data entry and reconciliation to ensure accuracy. Other highlights for Human Resources include a new applicant tracking system, a successful 401k audit, and personnel file preparation for the DASA audit.

Lifeline currently has 155 employees. Over the past twelve months 61 employees were added to the team and 61 employees terminated their employment (15 were due to a reduction of force). You could say we "broke even". Additionally, Human Resources processed over 500 personnel related changes including new hires, terminations, promotions, changes, leave of absences/FMLA, supervisor changes, etc.

We've enjoyed serving the Agency this past year and look forward to a wonderful 2010!

Sue Lindsey, HR Mgr.

DETOX 2009

During the last year Detox has served over 1,500 individuals, many of whom subsequently entered primary treatment. Each client is seen by an physician within 24 hours of admission to assess for severity of symptoms, need of medication and to assess for issues that the client hasn't realized were a problem. We try to do health teaching with each client depending on their needs.

Lifeline is pleased to have added nursing staff and an extra physician for weekends. We now have a nurse manager and two LPN's for evening coverage seven days a week. We hope to add a two more nurses to insure 24/7 coverage.

At the beginning of the year we were seeing a steady mix of people with either an alcohol or methamphetamine primary with a few opiate clients. In the past few months we have seen an explosion of opiates, especially heroine, with a large portion of them younger than 25 years old. A lot of them report they started using pills and graduated to heroin when they found it cheaper and easier to get.

Our Detox floor staff does a great job caring for our clients and with the support of the licensed staff the clients have a much more comfortable withdrawal. We will continue to review our client needs and program services to insure the best possible outcomes for those we serve.

Leah Rhodes, Program Mgr., Residential

Addiction Counseling Competencies

During 2009, the Lifeline management team learned a new supervision model used for planning, directing, monitoring and evaluating the work of another to improve performance. John Porter of Pegasus Training & Consulting helped lead the large improvement project by teaching the clinical supervision model. Supervision must be conducted on a regular basis to provide feedback. The TAP 21, a Technical Assistance Publication Series by the US Department of Health and Human Services, contains information on the knowledge, skills and attitudes of professional practice for addiction counseling. This tool can be used in conjunction with the supervision model to evaluate the work of others and create learning plans to improve performance.

A change team was appointed to keep the project on task throughout the year. It was made of six managers; three were clinical program managers and three were administrative managers. Competencies for the clinical category were finalized and administrative core competencies were developed for management and administrative staff to use similar to the TAP 21 for supervision. Sustainability meetings continue as the model will be implemented beginning in 2010.

The long term goals are to: create a tool for measuring job performance; create a tool for evaluating potential employees; improve the interviewing and selection process; and create performance and training plans. This will improve the quality of care for all of our consumers.

Cindy Stevens, Risk & Quality Assurance Mgr.

2009 has been a good year for the residential program. Our focus for improvements has been in three major areas: increased productivity, safety for all, and better clinical programming. As the admission coordinator, Jeannie Ross has increased the number of sources outside of Clark County that refer clients for treatment and she maintains good relations with all of our referral sources. Jeannie Harper has helped to increase the number of detox clients we serve by giving them direct access to inpatient services immediately following medical stabilization.

The strength of the clinical program shows in the addition of staff leadership. An assistant program manager, two clinical leads and five RFS leads provide coverage, support and supervision 7 days a week. We have added two new-client orientation groups per week and have placed a greater emphasis on the importance of support from family and friends to recovering people accessing residential services. With the combined efforts of the entire treatment team, we have a lot of momentum for on-going projects in 2010.

Leah Rhodes, Program Mgr., Residential

The Lifeline Connections Adult Outpatient Unit has undergone some exciting changes in 2009. Our dedicated professional staff provided quality care to over 1000 patients. We have added a Program Manger Position filled by John Anderson MSW. He is responsible for assisting with daily program operations and coordinating the flow of chemical dependency assessments.

We now offer a Recreation Therapy group facilitated by Jennifer Bimberg MSW. Jennifer also oversees the Therapeutic Gardening program and incorporates some of the gardening activities into the Recreation group. That group provides alternative resources and activities with an objective of stronger self awareness and understanding. Methods for recovery support are presented via use of traditional and alternative activities and skills. Information is offered on relaxation techniques, yoga, music therapy, listening skills, gardening and nutrition to name a few. This group has been a nice alternative for those individuals who have prior experience with more traditional group therapy and those who are interested in adding to their support system.

The Adult Outpatient Unit is also pleased to be expanding services to Deaf and Hard of Hearing patients. We are adding groups and staff. Mary Jacobs CDP is joining Jackie Blair MEd., CDP in providing treatment for that special population in our outpatient program.

Maria Calvert, Program Mgr., Mod A

Holiday Wishes

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all of you who have been so generous, compassionate and supportive here at Lifeline Connections the very best of holiday wishes, knowing that the economy has strained many of us, I am beginning to better learn the meaning of gratitude. I have come to experience more gratitude for the persons in my life than ever before, even as I must admit that I fall short of expectations on many occasions.

Gratitude is embedded in the recovery experience, and seems to me now to be one of its hallmark features. For myself, it means carrying on with some modicum of thanks and appreciation for the small things as well as the large ones; of finding life to be, in spite of its banality and sorrows, the place where creativity and dreams of a more promising future can still be realized with much effort on our parts to keep the hopes we hold dear alive and pursued.

In the spirit of this season, I extend from my family to yours, a wish for health, peace, and prosperity. May we take the time and make the effort to help make the world around us a bit more peaceful, meaningful, and positive, even as we realize the limitations we have and the pain often inherent in the human condition. Thank you all again so very much for all you have done for others, and for your ongoing efforts to make Lifeline Connections a place of hope and new beginnings.

Best holiday wishes once again,

Dan Beavers, Medical Director



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IT Corner: Treatment & Technology — The Geeks Speak !

Change remains the one thing that is constant at Lifeline and the IT Department isn't immune.

ELECTRONIC HEALTH RECORD: As reported in our last edition, we were reviewing proposals from 4 major vendors and their EHR offerings. We have had some really exciting demonstrations from all of them and are super excited about the way an EHR will enhance the way that we do business.

We believe that we are on the home stretch of the selection process and should be entering into the logistics of finalizing the relationship with the successful candidate. At that point we'll begin working on the implementation time line. We are very eager to hit this ball over the fence.

NEW ASSESSMENT DATABASE: As a precursor to the EHR, the Calvary is on the way in the form of a new database being developed to assist in completing assessments and companion paperwork in a more streamlined and efficient manner. The database is currently operational and in early beta testing stages. We are very pleased with the progress being made on the development of this project and hope to have a final beta test implemented with a larger group of participants, shortly after the holidays.

Since the last installment of the IT contribution to the newsletter, Bill and I have continued to grow Lifeline's network by leaps and bounds. We have added several new servers dedicated to handling our e-mail, user files, antivirus, spam filtering and databases, along with a dedicated accounting server and web server. We have also bulked up all aspects of our security precautions and monitoring.

We're proud of these enhancements and of the fact that these things allow Lifeline employees to more effectively do their work. Our mission in the IT Department is simple: we're here to serve, and we take it seriously.

Mike Branch, Mgr., IT Services