

This is the fourth in a series of DHSS quality-improvement success stories. Each program featured follows a four-step model for creating and implementing change. The model is called Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA).

Creating Faster Responses to Hotline Calls

Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline calls are getting answered faster, in about 2.5 minutes compared to 30 to 45 minutes two years ago.



(Left to right) Central Registry Unit Assistant Chief Joseph Salter, Adult Protective Services Systems and Training Unit Chief Waunita Schwandtner, and Central Registry Unit Chief Cindy Jobe discuss a hotline case.

Problem

The Central Registry Unit maintains the statewide, toll-free hotline for reports of alleged abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation of persons age 60 and older, and adults with disabilities between 18 and 59. When Cindy Jobe took over as registry manager in May 2012, it was a time of change. There were numerous complaints from the public and other state agencies regarding frustrations when trying to reach the hotline. People were upset regarding the length of time they were on hold and the time it took staff to answer calls and set-up and send reports. Registry employees were dealing with the rollout of a new Web-based software system called Case Compass. Due to frustrations with the new computer system, tensions ran high. In addition, calls were dropped, forcing customers to call back repeatedly, which pushed up call volume drastically. Workload bottlenecked from staff facing long “please-wait” times in between data screens.

In those early days, volume rose as high as 9,127 calls in October 2011. Abandoned calls numbered around 5,000, and the registry could handle only about 30 percent of calls. The intake and set-up time for a report was very lengthy, up to 30 to 45 minutes.

“We had what I call ‘the perfect storm,’” said Cindy Jobe, bureau chief. “Lives could depend on us getting help to the public as quickly as possible. We had to act quickly to rectify the situation.”

(Continued on Page 2)

Creating Faster Responses . . .

(Continued from Page 1)



Keith Feisel, left, adult protective community worker II, and Bobbi Jo Garber, deputy director of the Division of Senior and Disability Services, take Adult Abuse and Neglect Hotline calls.

Plan

Step 1

Jobe analyzed the strengths and weaknesses of the registry issues and made a list of what needed to be tackled, in order of priority. She discovered she needed an assistant bureau chief, someone who could be a team leader and a direct-line supervisor for the registry's 17 staff members. An assistant chief would allow Jobe time to focus on the registry's overall performance management. Joseph Salter, an experienced registry staff member, was promoted.

Step 2

Managers met with division administration to go over a plan of action. Then they met with Waunita Schwandtner, bureau chief of the Adult Protective Services Systems and Training Unit, the Case Compass vendor and the Core IT/Program Team. The group decided to work together to identify the problems staff experienced at intake. Schwandtner sat with registry employees as they received hotline calls and watched them input data into Case Compass to learn about glitches and wait times.

Schwandtner identified obstacles, such as registry employees having to enter information on eight different screens. Each time they maneuvered between screens, a "please-wait" message appeared that could last up to 4.2 minutes. Additionally, staff experienced problems with a lengthy assessment screen.

Step 3

Jobe and Salter and division administration completed a study to identify the registry's peak call periods—mid-morning, late afternoon and Saturday mornings. A weekend worker was hired to help with call volume, bringing the registry staff total to 18. Existing staff schedules were readjusted to meet the call volume during other peak periods and to provide early morning and late evening backup coverage.



Central Registry Unit Assistant Chief Joseph Salter likens the quality-improvement process to a relay race.

Hotline hours were extended one hour earlier and one hour later— from 8 a.m. to 7 a.m. and from 11 p.m. to midnight. More time allowed law enforcement, hospital and nursing home staff, and other mandated reporters to call the hotline after their 11 p.m. shifts ended or began, while information was still fresh in their minds. This also improved issues with peak periods.

Registry management also created an online mandated reporter form that allowed suspected abuse and neglect incidents to be reported by fax after midnight. This also helped alleviate the daytime call volume.

Do

Schwandtner worked with the Case Compass software developer to create mock-up screens and tested those screens with registry staff. The goal was to create one expandable input screen to make the intake process efficient and faster. Registry employees participated in the process every “click” of the way, and most of their suggestions were implemented. Employee morale skyrocketed as a result.

“It went from, ‘I hate this system,’ to staff members feeling like they had ownership and an investment in the system,” Schwandtner said. “Staff members now say, ‘Here’s what’s wrong, and we have the solution.’”

Check/Act

Today Central Registry Unit employees use only one intake screen to complete a report about an alleged abuse, neglect, or financial exploitation incident. Employees are much more efficient in processing reports. The average speed to answer calls is 2.5 minutes, compared to 30 to 45 minutes two years ago. Furthermore, the hotline handles 80 to 90 percent of all calls received, up from 30 percent two years ago.

Central Registry Unit Assistant Chief Salter likens the quality-improvement process to a relay race.

“The Central Registry Unit is the first leg of the race,” he said. “When we pass the baton to field employees, we have to ensure we don’t drop it. We strive to get it to them as quickly and efficiently as possible, to do the best we can to protect seniors and disabled adults from abuse and neglect.”