2020

SUCCESS STORIES SHARED

FROM THE HUMAN SERVICES COLLABORATIVE BODY

Human Services Collaborative Body
Livingston County, Michigan

Time for Reflection

2020 HSCB Survey Results

As we move through the initial pandemic response and work to reopen after COVID-19, we need to take a moment to reflect on the path we took. We had to adjust, adapt and persevere. Now, we need to celebrate our hard work and collaboration as a community, and as agencies and individuals.

It took all of us working collaboratively to successfully manage this journey. We must remember to thank and appreciate those who helped along the way.

We also must reflect on the lessons learned and the gaps or needs which were highlighted by this pandemic.

Here is a collaborative collection of shared successes and lessons learned from community agencies and members of the Human Services Collaborative Body (HSCB).

We need to appreciate all of the work and dedication of each organization and individual who supported all of those in need in our community during the onset of the pandemic. We still have a long way to go, but now is a time to reflect and share our successes of the past seven months.

QUESTION 1:

What THREE THINGS were key to your ability to adapt during the onset of the pandemic?

HSCB agencies identified ***adaptability*** as a crucial component of the initial and ongoing management of COVID-19.

Many agencies identified that **thoughtful leadership, collaborative teamwork, flexibility, creativity and clear communication** within an agency helped to unify and support the agency as a whole.

Another common theme centered on the importance of quickly ***shifting to a virtual world***. Connection to technology allowed many agencies the ability to continue to offer services using a new platform.

Support, information and guidance from community partners and all levels of government were essential for continuing to provide services while implementing sound protocols to keep everyone safe.

Lastly, several responses included the importance of utilizing ***self-care strategies*** to manage stress and uncertainty in order to better maintain a clear and more positive mindset.

"Our biggest challenge was keeping up with all the policy changes at county, state and national levels and finding ways to serve those who do not have adequate access to technology."

"Community support, community partners & dedicated staff and volunteers."

QUESTION 2:

What was the biggest challenge?

Leading through an unprecedented pandemic without clear established guidelines presented an array of challenges and difficulties for all agencies including:

- Many agencies spoke to the abrupt nature of changes that required immediate action while managing and balancing safety and service delivery.
- Accessing PPE, especially initially, was a significant barrier for some agencies.
- Additionally, shifting to technology did not come without obstacles including: managing lack of access to technology, connectivity issues and the need for tools and troubleshooting support.

QUESTION 3:

What was your biggest success?

When reflecting on their own response to COVID-19, many agencies identified common strengths. Despite overwhelming barriers and uncertainty, most agencies only experienced ***limited interruption of services***.

Across the County; leadership, staff and volunteers **adapted quickly** to new technologies and were **creative** within any constraints presented. **Innovative** ways to serve clients were identified and implemented.

Many partners envision these new ways of reaching those they serve to be a benefit well beyond the COVID-19 crisis.

"Our biggest success was our team rallying together and without hesitation, stepping up to "get the job done." Our staff displayed dedication and perseverance throughout a demanding response (and continues to!) in order to protect the health of the community."

QUESTION 4:

What was an important lesson learned from this experience?

In looking back on the events of the past 6 months, there are some clear lessons to be carried forward.

- Organizations must be prepared for the unexpected, remaining flexible to adapt to even the quickest and most unimaginable change.
- When faced with intense disruption spanning personal and professional realms, many identified that they were sustained by extending patience, grace and encouragement to themselves and to others.

QUESTION 5

Were there any unmet needs or gaps in service which should be part of a community plan moving forward?

The survey revealed there were some agency unmet needs. The most identified unmet need was for support - support for those in recovery, senior supports, school and children supports and the need for support groups on multiple topics.

Transportation was also referenced in the survey as an unmet need. "Initially there was no non-emergency public transportation available to take individuals to testing sites." Many community members lack reliable transportation, and it impacted their ability to navigate the helping systems.

Additional Unmet Needs

- Technology needs:
  - Internet
  - Phones/Devices
  - Zoom
- Direct care workers
  - Living wages
  - Mitigating risk to their families
- Housing
  - Eviction diversion
- PPE
- Cleaning supplies
- Partnerships
- Volunteers
- Domestic violence and neglect concerns

QUESTION 6:

If you could have done anything different, what would you have done?

Most survey respondents agree that in retrospect, leadership and staff did the best they could navigating uncertain and stressful times. Without a crystal ball, it was impossible to be fully prepared for the disruption that the COVID-19 pandemic wrought.

Implementing technology early was key to connecting staff to staff, and staff to the community members they serve.

"When news first emerged about the spread of COVID-19 internationally, it was difficult to discern if/when it would arrive in Michigan, and how serious of a threat it would be. Knowing what I know now, I would have pushed to be more proactive, rather than taking a wait and see approach."

Additionally, there was a technological learning curve for all involved, slowing the return to service or provision of alternative services.

If faced with the same situation, leadership would reach out and work with staff and clients earlier and more often. Time and quality of communication was lost to the assumption that the crisis was to be short-lived.

It is now clear that every community organization would benefit from creating contingency plans to prevent future interruption of service, whatever the source of the emergency may be.

Your Best

If you always try your best
Then you'll never have to wonder
About what you could have done
If you'd summoned all your thunder.

And if your best
Was not as good
As you hoped it would be,
You still could say,
"I gave today
All that I had in me."

Barbara Vance

"Our sense of community has deepened."

"This pandemic really helped uncover how critical the coalitions really are..."

"There continues to be a strong sense of community, support, and camaraderie among the many human services agencies in the county. Although there is competition, the agencies continue to work well together for the benefit of our clients and the greater community."

FINAL THOUGHTS

The global COVID-19 pandemic has far reaching impacts on our world, our state and our local community. Each HSCB agency and all of Livingston County continues to face the fluid landscape and complex nuances of COVID-19 within Livingston County.

The Sharing Success survey provides a powerful opportunity to reflect on each unique story while also highlighting the shared successes, challenges and lessons learned from our community partners. Similarities in reports abounded, and the most compelling and overarching commonality among agencies is the evidence of resilience. Despite varied and difficult challenges, agencies have emerged with increased collaboration, creativity, adaptability and exploration of new and innovative solutions to balancing safety and service delivery.

Due to the necessity of rapid change, some shifts have created opportunities for improved strategies or modalities for work flow and service delivery that likely will continue to improve and evolve even after the pandemic is behind us. The collective resilience and coordination among our community as a whole is also well noted. While there has always been a rich sense of community among provider agencies in our county, the survey reports that this sense of belonging and connection has deepened since COVID-19's onset. Agencies have utilized our established collaborative relationships as integral support throughout this crisis and the appreciation for these connections shine clear in the survey responses.