



The Evidence

A Collaboration of the Programming and Technical Assistance Unit and the Evidence Based Steering Committee

April, 2010

Eckerd Youth Alternatives, Inc. Measuring Success

Eckerd Youth Alternatives provides a broad base of services (prevention programs, after-school programs, community based programs, residential treatment programs, and aftercare programs). Currently, there are more than 30 programs in nine states, serving over 100,000 youth since its founding in 1968. Our vision is to "ensure that each child has the opportunity to succeed." To do this, our mission is "to develop and share programs that promote the well-being of children and serve at-risk youth and their families." Eckerd takes research and evaluation seriously, promoting innovation, flexibility, reflection, and continuous improvement all to better hold ourselves accountable for achieving superior outcomes. Two years ago, the Eckerd Executive Leadership Team and Board of Directors identified the measurement of performance outcomes, as well as improving the quality of its organizational performance, as key focus areas. The primary lessons learned were to involve staff at all levels, to give enough time to assess and develop strong evaluation plans, to provide a continuum of connection to training (from formal training to individual coaching), and to provide individualized results with direct benefits to a variety of audiences. This article describes more about this entire process.

Eckerd Leadership team identified quality, staff, financial, external relations, and growth as the primary "spokes of the wheel" for the organization, with quality being the hub. We began by forming a Performance and Quality Improvement (PQI) Board Committee, developing a cohesive PQI Division, and re-invigorating both organizational as well as program level PQI committees. Our initial tasks for the PQI division were clear: develop an organizational Balanced Scorecard™ of key performance indicators, develop a Master Quality Improvement Plan and Toolkit, and improve electronic data collection and report functionality. Above all else, involve the key decision makers at all opportunities. Vital to accomplishing our tasks were the diverse cross-functional teams that included employees and leadership from various departments and programs. Although we could have been more efficient by creating these documents ourselves, this opportunity increased buy in from our employees, increased accuracy of the key performance indicators, and allowed us to address barriers before we started data collection. Support at the top level of leadership was crucial to make this work. We found that a tangible end product and specific timeline helped to garner support.

Our initial tangible product was our Master Quality Improvement Plan, which is a comprehensive document that establishes organizational strategies for identifying critical areas, assessing, developing and implementing quality assurance objectives and delineating procedures in a consistent and methodical way. To create this, we assessed our current systems and tools, developed a cross functional needs assessment, defined requirements, resources and deliverables, and determined implementation strategies that include training and ongoing support. We followed this with our Balanced Scorecard. The Balanced Scorecard™ concept was developed by Robert Kaplan and David Norton based on research in 1990 exploring performance measurement in companies, including operational, marketing, and developmental inputs for a more comprehensive view (Niven, 2008). For Eckerd, the Balanced Scorecard is a tool that ensures that we are consistent in the methodologies used to measure outcomes and are able to provide feedback to all levels of the organization. Indicators for performance measures were reviewed by the team and expanded to create an evaluation plan for each indicator, which included definitions, standard of success (target), instrument, respondents, data collection methods, data verification, analysis, and reporting. Standardized measures were selected across all programs as well as measures to address contract, licensing, grant, and accreditation information requirements. Again, although time consuming, this addressed barriers before they could trip up the process. To complete the loop, we also focused on methods to improve data collection and reporting evaluation data; this includes the Actuate Performancesoft VIEWS reporting software and the Totally Integrated Electronic Reporting computer systems. Having the appropriate tools to capture and report large amounts of data is critical in the monitoring of a diverse group of programs in multiple locations. Effective tools minimized the time required by staff and leadership to report and analyze quality data.

E-Nini-Hasee, located in Floral City, is a prime example of successfully measuring outcomes. Their staff dedication to the process has achieved a 100% pre-post response rate for youth successfully completing the program! Their impressive outcomes include youth increasing mental health functioning an average of 39% (anticipated change is 20%), increasing social skills by an average of 18% (anticipated change is 10%), and increasing reading skills by 2.0 grade levels and math skills by 1.7 grade levels (anticipated change is 1.0 grade levels). Ultimately, our overall commitment to evaluation and research is helping us reach our goals of defining, collecting, validating, analyzing and communicating our outcomes to make informed decisions based on evidence.

References

Niven, P. (2008). *Balanced Scorecard: step-by-step for government and nonprofit agencies*. Wiley: Hoboken: NJ.