



Creating Sustainable Initiatives to Retain and Maintain Health and Social Services Professionals on the Lower North Shore

(Measure 2: Retention and Distance Professional and Community Support Program)

(November 6th 2006 to March 31st 2007)

The Coasters Association, in partnership with the Centre de Santé et de Services Sociaux de la Basse-Côte-Nord (CSSSBCN), received a Training and Human Resources Development Project from McGill University, for seven weeks from February 13th to March 31st, 2006, Phase 1, under the Retention and Distance Professional and Community Support Program, to conduct a needs assessment on the issue of hiring and retaining English Professionals on the Lower North Shore.

The objective of this needs assessment was to develop Phase II which is a two-year proposal that would lead to the improvement of hiring and retaining Health and Social Services Professionals on the Lower North Shore. The long term intended outcome is the increase in access to Health and Social Services for English speaking residents on the territory. Another objective of this needs assessment is to contact institutional and community-based objectives (i.e Education & Health and Social Services) it is hoped that these contacts will lead to partnerships that will help to address the hiring and retention of English-speaking Professionals on the Lower North Shore.

One of the Coasters Associations first and maybe their largest dossier remains to be issues dealing with Health and Social Services. The organization continues with great effort to work on the improvement of the H & S.S, since its inception in May 1989.

This project comes at an ideal time for the Coasters Association and the CSSSBCN, according to the administration at the CSSSBCN, they have recently faced one of their worst years in history of retaining their English-speaking H & S.S professionals. Through this needs assessment, conclusions and recommendations have paved the way to move forward in Phase II.

Phase II is Building Sustainable Initiatives to Retain and Maintain Health & Social Service Professionals on the Lower North. This project is in collaboration with McGill University and the Centre de Santé et de Services Sociaux de la Basse Côte Nord. Phase II began in November 2006 and will end on March 31st, 2007. A steering committee was formed at the very beginning of this project, consisting of seven

members, three members being from the CSSSBCN as well as three members from the Coasters Association, along with a consultant, from the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN). Together, exploration of different possibilities to improve the retention and recruitment of employees through the creation of community guides, an employee buddy system, also a more in-depth evaluation of the transportation and lodging concerns brought forth in the study; as well as commence the groundwork to receive and maintain interns in 2007-2008 has been worked on with great effort. Also, being researched, is the establishment of an internship management training curriculum that will aim at stabilizing the number of professionals servicing the population. We will be developing training tools for the internship management program, as well as a support system for interns via video conference, telephone and or internet. Equally important, is the design of an on-going training program in fields targeted by employees and administration so that staff can maintain or upgrade their skills.

The project has four key areas, the first being a training program given to CSSSBCN employees, whereby they can properly evaluate, support and monitor interns. The second is a partnership with educational institutions to develop a system to support students via video conferencing, telephone, internet, and face to face meetings. Thirdly, a buddy system where new employees and interns could be matched with staff in the area, so transition into the community could be easier, and a community guide produced that could provide new recruits or students with a map of the village, services, phone numbers, etc. The fourth measure being the design of a recurrent training program that would include French/English Emersion program whereby interns and staff could receive language training, leadership training, etc.. Courses could be designed to be given via video conference on a continuous/regular basis.

In accordance to the workplan, the following initiatives have taken place to advance the retention and recruitment project:

Community

A community guide has been drafted in both official languages and includes maps of villages and location of stores, post office, banks, etc... resource information of daycares, babysitting services, employment agency numbers, organizations and community events and programs available that will be given to new employees and/or interns coming to a village on the Lower North Shore. We are hoping to have the guides available on the CSSSBCN web site sometime later in the year 2007.

An employee buddy system questionnaire has been created in both official languages and will be sent by mail to each employee's home address. This will help create a list of employees of the CSSSBCN with

similar profiles to the person being hired. The expected results of implementation of the employee buddy system is to have less staff turnover in the clinics which would enable the population to become more comfortable with their Health and Social Services provider, therefore, smoother integration into the community.

A process is in place to implement the buddy system within the work environment, steps such as flyers, and memos to staff will be distributed as soon as the administration gives the approval to move forward with the distribution.

Transportation and lodging is of big concern for people coming to live on the Lower North Shore. We are in a remote and isolated area, especially during the winter months. Travel is much more difficult, due to poor weather conditions, this however, is more of a reality than a problem, and the CSSSBCN are trying their best to develop a plan to make isolation during the winter months more bearable. Various initiatives and action plans are in place and have already started in certain communities to renovate and refurbish hospital lodgings especially transits along the coast, revisions are being made to make the transits more private and modern.

Formation

A training needs analysis and skills audit survey was created in both official languages to help determine where skills need to be upgraded and/or refreshed, also to discover which employees are interested in participating in intern management training. The training needs analysis is expected to give CSSSBCN administration a detailed and proper idea as to which development training is considered to be essential by staff in order to maintain or upgrade their skills.

Numerous conversations with McGill University have taken place to discuss the ongoing obstacle of accepting interns on the Lower North Shore and possible solutions to enable CSSSBCN employees to participate in the on-line supervision course, which will help them evaluate and supervise students. However, due to limited resources and no recall list, it is very difficult to allow staff to participate in the supervisory course, which is also treated as extra work, as there are no budget or personnel resources available.

Ongoing efforts are to research other health establishments that are in a similar situation as the LNS to discover any possible solutions to help us with this obstacle of living in a remote area. As well to find scenarios that can help the CSSSBCN staff to upgrade or refresh their skills with possibilities such as an employee exchange program.

Intern Partnership Agreements

The CSSSBCN have been participating in teleconferences and meetings with various educational facilities with the hope to obtain a written agreement between hospitals, schools, and CSSSBCN on the internship structure. Their objectives are to meet with potential partners to discuss needs and terms of agreement. The expected results are to improve access to Health and Social Services in the English Language through improving training which will thereby improve the stability of H & S.S Professionals.

On March 2nd, five nursing students along with their teacher, came from Université de Trois Rivières à Québec to go to St-Augustin and Pakuashipi to do a community health stage, they were in their 2nd year of their bachelor's degree studies. An update of their experience will be noted when we can speak with them in the near future. However, the clinic in St-Augustin did report that the nursing students really enjoyed their experience and would consider returning to work on the Lower North Shore in the future.

Extension approved

It is also with great pleasure to announce that in April 2007 until March 2008, Phase III has also been accepted. Initiatives to move forward to implement and promote the work done in Phase II is set to begin within the next few weeks.

Conclusion

In conclusion, through our needs assessment three key areas were brought forth as to why personel do not stay on the LNS. These were lack of social integration, loss of professional skills and transportation and lodging concerns. There were various solutions created to these key problems. Our organization forsees that with the implementation of our social integration plan which will include a community guide and a buddy system there will be a smoother integration within the community.

Also, with the design of an ongoing training/support program professionals will have the ability to maintain and upgrade their specific skills. Lastly, the development and implementation of an action plan will improve the lodging and transportation problems of employees on the Lower North Shore.

Marissa Lavallée

Project Coordinator