

Labor Management Project Case Study

Daughters of Jacob

Growing Change from the Grassroots

A photograph of the entrance to the DOJ Nursing and Rehabilitation Center. The entrance is a covered walkway with a brick floor, flanked by black metal gates. A white sign with blue lettering reads "DOJ NURSING AND REHABILITATION CENTER". The building is made of light-colored brick and has a large window above the entrance.

DOJ NURSING AND REHABILITATION CENTER

QCC
CCLC & 1199SEIU
TOGETHER WE CAN

BACKGROUND

Daughters of Jacob (DOJ) nursing home is a 413-bed, voluntary nursing facility in the South Bronx. It has struggled financially in recent years to provide high-quality, skilled residential nursing care, adult day services and other long-term care services.

DOJ is a participant in the Quality Care Community (QCC), a collaboration of 1199SEIU's Nursing Home Division and the Continuing Care Leadership Coalition. The QCC provides support to facilities that use a union-management partnership approach to implementing person-centered care.

This case study describes a “culture change” project at DOJ that was initiated at the grassroots level and permeated the culture of the entire facility.

THE GOALS

Management

Gilbert Preira, DOJ's chairman and CEO, strove to make DOJ a more appealing place to live (Preira served as CEO until 2010). He truly believed in having staff make as many of their own decisions as possible. “As management, you've got the big decisions that have got to be made, and then you have the day-to-day stuff,” he says. “When you engage staff to help make those other decisions, it really does work.”

Labor

Nelson Valdez, Vice President of 1199SEIU's New York Nursing Home Division, observes, “We saw that if we didn't change the environment and make it really homelike, people wouldn't want to come to live at DOJ and our members could lose their jobs.”

“From the QCC events we had learned about ‘culture change’ activities in other facilities,” says Catherine Kaufman, DOJ's speech pathologist and union member. “Our original goal was decentralized dining, but the more we talked, the more that put ideas in people's heads about what other kinds of things we could do.”

THE PROCESS

Tilling the Soil

A steering committee, consisting of key leaders from the union and management, met monthly and decided to pilot decentralized dining on one unit. Clyde Riggins Jr., a consultant with the Labor Management Project, had worked with DOJ for several years and knew that they had a strong labor-management foundation based on mutual respect. “They were already building high-performing teams to improve the quality of life for residents,” he says. “Several staff had also gone through customer service training.”

Clearing Out the Weeds

To engage some skeptical staff, the steering committee created a multimedia program, centered on a skit entitled “A Day in the Life of Yvette Fuerderer.” To the accompaniment of a soundtrack and black-and-white images of stark institutional scenes – food carts, plastic food trays, bleak-looking shower rooms and so on – Kaufman spoke from the point of view of a resident, narrating the story of a typical morning in a non-person-centered nursing home to point out things that make residents feel powerless. “When the lights went up, some people were crying,” says Kaufman.

Inspired by the presentation, the staff on the pilot floor decided to start with breakfast – a complex process that would require many steps and months of planning. Riggins guided the team in developing processes and work plans so they could meet their goals. Meanwhile, members of the committee kept spreading the word on the floor, letting staff know they would welcome any ideas about how to make life at DOJ homier for the residents.

A New Idea Takes Root

That groundwork paid off one morning when housekeeper Rosanna Altamonte stopped Kaufman in the hallway to propose an idea. “It was around 10 o'clock,” Altamonte recalls. “Some of us had been talking about how we wanted to make this place beautiful, because the residents love pretty colors. We took a new look at the walls and one thing led to another. I saw Catherine and told her we wanted to do some painting.”

Kaufman took the idea to the Gilbert Preira, who agreed to provide the paint.

“We got the paint and we asked people if they wanted to volunteer to make this place look better,” says Altamonte. “We had a couple of people from the beginning – Mr. Preira and one or two others. Then other people joined in.”

“Before we knew it, every other Saturday we were painting something new,” says Kaufman. “Then administration got bitten by the bug and hired a team of painters full time to do the rest of the floors and the residents’ rooms.”

Other staff talents came out of the woodwork. “We learned that some guys in the engineering department had carpentry skills we hadn’t known about,” says Kaufman.

“They made a really nice chair rail on the second floor. One man, Mr. Mills, made a beautiful cabinet for one of the dining rooms.”

As a result, Kaufman says, “the physical building looks so different, from the minute you walk in. When someone comes in to tour the building, they see people who care. And the residents like that the place looks fresh and clean.”

The building’s much-needed facelift gave the staff a lift too. Sharon Smalls, CNA on the night shift, recalled several failed attempts at person-centered changes. “At the beginning we were a little skeptical that this project wouldn’t go anywhere,” says Smalls, “but this time we, the staff on the unit, took it in our own hands. We started by painting to give the floor a lift, and it took off from there.”



Mr. Marco Bautista gives DOJ a new coat of paint.



Handmade cabinet for the residents’ dining room, compliments of Mr. Rohan Mills.

New ideas continued to blossom; these included more personalized approaches to bathing and welcoming new residents to the unit.

Progress did not always run smoothly. Both the Director and Assistant Director of Nursing resigned. Some people failed to carry out their assigned tasks, and others resisted new approaches to care. But a core of committed staff, residents and union and administrative leadership kept moving on.

Branching Out

Energized by the newly-decorated environment, the staff tackled decentralizing breakfast. Institutional-style tray delivery was replaced by dining rooms where residents would eat family-style, sitting in regular chairs in place of wheelchairs, with place settings, servers, and hot and cold serving stations.

“

The food hasn’t changed. We didn’t start ordering in from Tavern on the Green or something. But when it’s presented on a plate, not a tray, and brought to you by someone with a smile, asking ‘How do you like your coffee?’ and ‘Would you like butter or jelly on your toast?’ it makes a big difference. The human interaction is back to being human.

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Catherine Kaufman, DOJ’s speech pathologist and union member

OUTCOMES

- **Increased residents' satisfaction:** Altamonte observes, "You can see the people are happy. The residents stop you and say, 'I love this.' And that's the kind of thing that makes you happy and makes you want to do more."
- **More participation by residents, who feel free to voice their opinions:** "Residents are not afraid to say what's on their minds. If they're shy, we encourage them to talk one-on-one with the staff members they know and trust, so we can get their input that way," explains Smalls.
- **Greater communication between departments:** "Nurses said, 'I never really knew what the dietary workers did. I never appreciated what went into planning and delivering a meal.' And dietary staff said, 'We saw the tickets about what everyone needed, but we never really understood before from a nursing standpoint how important it was for everyone to get the special meal they need,'" says Kaufman.
- **Better teamwork and support among staff:** "We mop floors. We do anything," Smalls says of herself and the other caregivers on her unit. "You have to go a little bit above and beyond. 'It's not my job' doesn't work on this unit. It's everybody's job."
- **A waiting list to live and work on the pilot unit:** "It's a more homelike setting. It's not like a nursing home," says Smalls. "Two years ago, I would not have recommended this unit to my parents. Now I would. We changed that."

LESSONS LEARNED

- Transformation doesn't always take a lot of money: Kaufman says, "You can do a lot with a very little if you put your mind to it. How much does a can of paint cost?"
- Engage others in the change process: "If you don't give people the opportunity, you're never going to know what they can do," says Preira. "I've been very pleasantly surprised by the hidden talents of our staff and what they have accomplished."
- Lead with the heart and take risks. "Not everything we've tried has worked," says Kaufman, "but if you keep yourself focused on what you want to accomplish, you can get there."



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Gilbert Preira, DOJ's chairman and CEO

CONCLUSION

Visionary leaders will seek to engage staff at all levels of their organization, provide them with training in teamwork and communication, and then get out of their way. Gilbert Preira shares, "We're in financial distress. I had to constantly go to the unions, to the vendors, to consultants and say, 'We don't have any money, we don't have this, we don't have that.' But, what we do have now is a spirit that I'm proud of. I can point to very concrete things that the staff accomplished because they're proud of DOJ and they want things to be better for the residents. This is what excites me – and any manager who doesn't get excited at that doesn't belong in the job."



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