

HOME & COMMUNITY OPTIONS

A stylized graphic in shades of grey and blue. It features three overlapping house outlines with gabled roofs. Below the houses are three stylized human figures, each with a circular head and a rounded body, arranged in a row. The background is a dark teal color with a lighter teal horizontal band at the top.

Agency Newsletter



HCO Moments

HCO employee Jennifer Laufenberg reflects on her time with the agency, and one of the many experiences that has impacted her life by working here.

When asked about my career, the first thing that often comes to mind is, "how much time do you have?" It's difficult to convey the importance of what we do at HCO and the effect it has on people's lives each day. Instead of telling you where I went to college and how I came to be at HCO, let me tell you about an individual I met here. Knowing her is one of the best examples I can give to help you understand why I come to work everyday to give of my heart and my mind.

This woman loved people. She loved pretty dresses and glamorous jewelry, huge glasses of soda, and by "soda", I mean Mountain Dew - to her there was no other soda, and let's not forget dessert! In the time I knew her, she defied each diagnosis and each doctor's prediction. While she fought, she lived. I mean **really LIVED**, in a "living life to the fullest" way that we all sometimes forget. There were many things she didn't understand: her illnesses, the medical professional's jargon...She didn't understand that the team I led to support her was largely comprised of college students and that we were her voice. She also didn't understand death; she only knew that death was something that took away the people she loved.

It is funny the things you wish for when life gets hard. When she thought no one was around, she would drag a chair over to the kitchen counter and climb up to the snack cabinet. I would tiptoe up the stairs from my office in the basement and catch her rummaging around in the cupboard, searching for her favorite treats. She would grumble disappointedly in a way that sounded more like a growl. When she got sick, all I wanted was to hear the familiar sound of that kitchen chair scraping across the floor above me again.

She fought for roughly four years. On her last day with HCO, she was unable to speak or open her eyes. Those who were coming off shifts lingered as other staff arrived, and the five of us spent the morning with her and her family: holding her hand, rubbing her back, and singing her favorite Elvis song to her. ***It is those precious moments that best explain why I am here and just how vital the work we do really is.***

This individual, who had stolen my heart a thousand times, passed away. She was amid family and friends, as well as HCO staff. I was asked to speak at her funeral, and I spent a great deal of time pondering what I might say. The word honor kept coming to mind. I felt honored to represent her friends, roommates, and all those who had the pleasure of working with her.

“Knowing her

is one of the best examples I can give to help you understand why I come to work everyday to give of my heart and my mind.”

When I spoke, I shared that past and present employees had been contacting me to express how much this woman had impacted both their careers and their lives. The number of people that I spoke with was staggering, and I began trying to guess at just how many people's lives she had touched. I came up with a rough estimate of how many HCO employees she spent time with: current staff and past staff in various departments internally at HCO, the many other providers she had worked with, then the medical professionals...the numbers became quite astounding. That number doesn't include her family members or her huge circle of friends; it doesn't include the people who knew her from the bank, the grocery store, or even the movie theater!

Like a ray of light, it hit me. There are teachers and doctors and scientists out there, striving to change the world, who only hope for such an influence! Yet somehow, it feels more special - **more honorable** - to have impacted the world as she did: to be able to affect people's lives by just being you.

So, it all comes back to honor. There is honor in every role at HCO. There is honor in being part of a team, and I feel honored to be a part of the one that served this individual. Each person I work with continues to rise to every challenge I set before them, and gives of their heart in the process. There is honor in being assisted and in assisting an individual. There is honor in knowing them and in just simply being there, especially at those times when the only easy part of our job is love.

Agency Updates

Moratorium on Foster Care Beds

The term "Foster Care" has been used to describe the type of services HCO has used to provide 24-hour care to adults with developmental disabilities for many years. The Minnesota Department of Human Services has put a moratorium -or a suspension- on the development of additional foster care beds throughout the state. This restriction can make it extremely difficult to provide support to new individuals in need of care.

HCO has worked to provide additional options for people waiting for a foster care bed. We received approval in 2013 from the State DHS to use our Family Resource Home for adults. This service provides families with out-of-home services and respite care while they may be waiting for a spot in a 24 hour care setting. This change also provides additional support options to individuals who may feel comfortable with the wrap around services they receive from HCO staff, but will continue to live at home.

The agency also is developing other housing and apartment living services that can support a person safely without being dependent on staff consistently in their home environment. With the creation of smart home technologies and fail-safe call for help systems, we can now support people without the presence of a staff in their home. These provisions have allowed us to serve more people with greater independence, which keeps more foster care beds available for those needing more extensive levels of care.

With the moratorium and limited openings in residential services, HCO stakeholders have had to work together to help individuals with disabilities and their families plan for their future. Some people will still need the foster care model of service, but others may find alternatives that meet their needs. Our continued goal is to develop a person-centered plan that provides supports for each individual that are truly focused on the person's preferences, talents, dreams, and goals.

Recent Events

*Mike Debolt Community
Builder Award Recipients 2014*



*HCO employee Barb Kulas
is awarded the Andrew R.
Richardson Advocacy Award
at the 2014 Arc Minnesota
Awards Banquet.*



5%

The First Step on a Long Journey

For a number of years, Health and Human Service agencies like HCO have received a reduction in funding. HCO staff and stakeholders met with their legislators, attended town hall forums, traveled to the capital to rally, and wrote letters explaining why the increase was needed to stabilize services to individuals with developmental disabilities. The 5% Campaign increase that became effective July 1, 2014 is the first step on a long journey to obtain the funding needed to support both the individuals that we serve and the staff that assist them.

Home and Community Options understands the importance of providing a quality workforce to our consumers. One requirement of the 5% rate increase was that 80% of these funds needed to be used to increase staff wages and benefits. HCO employees received a 5.75% wage increase with taxes and benefits totaling \$302,262.96 - more than the mandatory 80% as directed by the legislators. By paying employees a livable wage, providers hope to reduce turn-over and provide stability to the individuals we support.

Another requirement of the 5% increase is dedicated to a quality component that requires providers to tell DHS what quality initiative they are planning. Home and Community Options has dedicated resources to continue to provide Person Centered Thinking through our Competency Based Training (CBT) and Creative Alternative Learning Methods (CALM) courses. HCO employees will benefit from hands-on training that identifies ways in which they enhance the quality of the lives of the individuals they support.

The 5% increase was an important step in the right direction. However, our work is not done. It will be vital for all HCO stakeholders to play a role in educating our friends, neighbors, and legislators on the value of having individuals we support in our Winona community, and providing high quality care from well-trained and dedicated staff.

At the 2014 Provider's Network Good Neighbor Banquet, Dick and Mary Schneider and Margaret Cassidy were recipients of the "Good Neighbor" Award in honor of their volunteerism through People of Faith.



Seussical

Home & Community Options Musical 2014

HCO's June 2014 musical production was an enormous success. We were blessed with sell-out crowds every night, and were extremely humbled by the support we have received from our community! Our production of Seussical received support from 337 volunteers contributing more than 9,400 hours of service.

The most important part of this event is that it provides an integrated community experience for individuals with disabilities, and Seussical exceeded our expectations! 20 individuals with disabilities were cast in the show, and an additional 40 individuals provided valued roles as volunteers in production related activities like set painting, vending, greeting, and emceeing (announcing) each performance. Our annual musical truly embodies the HCO Mission at its core: promoting true integration, and building lasting relationships for years to come.

Though the musical is a great experience for the local community to enjoy, this event was conceptualized as a yearly fundraiser for our organization. 2014's show netted over **\$80,000** in resources that we can apply to many needs throughout the organization. These funds help HCO provide and sustain quality services through: funding basic human need items for people striving to live independently, use innovative technological resources designed to enhance lives, and funding handicapped accessibility equipment to help people aging continue living in the most appropriate community setting.

Thank you to our directors, cast members, dedicated volunteers, the generosity of our donors, and all who helped make this show a success!

The Results are in!

Staff Longevity

A key factor in determining the quality of service provided by an organization like HCO is largely attributed to the quality of its workforce. Experience and longevity play a significant role in contributing to the implementation of successful services.

“People here truly care about their work. The people I work for and with are my second family.”

“I heard about the excellent reputation for promoting its values and integrating people into the community.

As soon as I started I was hooked.”

“The kids we serve and the young people with whom I work enrich my life in so many ways.”

“The agency has grown to meet needs, but it has stayed small in its culture and philosophy. Even though I am past retirement age, I cannot imagine life without my work.”

“I receive so much more than I am ever able to give.”

HCO has 20 employees with more than ten years of experience, 10 of which have been with our agency for more than twenty years. This retention of many core staff within the organization has helped insure quality services for the 250 individuals served.

We interviewed several of these long-term employees about their work experience with HCO, and here are some of the things they had to say:

“The needs of the individuals we support are always the priority.”

“I continue to learn about the people I serve, and in turn I learn more about myself. The culture here makes us better people.”

“Changes and challenges will come, but I have confidence we will meet those needs with the same passion that has allowed HCO to be successful in the past.”

“Our work is so important. When I see people learn and grow in their independence, it is very rewarding.”

“HCO includes individuals served, families, employees, volunteers, board members. We are all here for the mission, vision, and core values of HCO working together to make lives better.”