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Healthcare Services Intranet

Project HEALTH Uses Intranets.com To Share Efficiencies in Operations Across 4 Major Metropolitan Sites



project health



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Healthcare Services Intranet



Project HEALTH **Boston, New York, Providence, RI, &** **Washington, D.C.**

Project HEALTH - a nationwide volunteer organization providing fitness and nutrition programs and health services advocacy for low-income families - is using Intranets.com to gain efficiencies in operations among its Boston, New York, Providence, R.I. and Washington D.C. offices.

**“Intranets.com
made a big economic
difference for us.”**

- Lisa Schorr,
Executive Director of
Project HEALTH.

“Project HEALTH unites medical centers, community agencies, and undergraduate students at major universities to provide underserved families with a total package of services in an effort to interrupt the well-established link between poverty and poor health,” says Lisa Schorr, Executive Director of Project HEALTH.

“With six full time staff members, and 300 volunteers, Project Health has provided over 75,000 hours of service in the past year alone -- yielding a substantial impact on the lives of 3,000 families in these four cities,” Schorr said.

“It is crucial that we share our work among the 4 offices. So many programs are similar from site to site that it makes sense to be able to take what one site has done and adapt it for the other sites.”

“Before we had Intranets.com, the technology side of that was really hard for us. We couldn’t network. Each of our offices is based in a different hospital. We were doing an enormous amount of emailing, but essentially if you wanted to know what was going on at all four sites, you’d have to phone someone at each site. It was incredibly time consuming.”

“Beyond that, we had some institutional memory, but not nearly as much as I would like, and it wasn’t widely accessible even within some of the individual sites. People were duplicating work, because they didn’t realize what had already been done. And, some of our best work was on the personal computers of student volunteers whose turnover rate was, naturally, 2 to 3 years, and when they graduated, often their documentation was not retained.”

“For all these reasons, we started looking for an intranet-based solution that would allow us to share files, assure continuity and achieve efficiencies. We didn’t have an internal tech person to compare the various products, so we hired a consultant with a product management and technology background and she recommended Intranets.com.”

“We had narrowed our search for an intranet solution down to Intranets.com and another company that would have cost us at least \$30,000 per year - that was nearly 10% of our budget at that time -- and we didn’t even know if an intranet solution was going to work well for the volunteers. So to put that much money out and find out it was not the technology that was standing in the way of online sharing, but the fact that maybe



people just didn't want to share their documents at all, was too risky. In the end, that hasn't been the case, people have taken to sharing their files very quickly on the Intranets.com service."

"Intranets.com made a big economic difference for us. When you rely on donated funds, you have to run a very streamlined organization. We have to generate a lot of activity for very little money. Intranets.com's price is affordable for us, but we don't look at it as a cut-rate solution. It's what we want and it also happens to be very inexpensive."

"For instance, Intranets.com gave us the flexibility to ramp up on the amount of storage we purchase beyond the basic service. The other solution did not allow ramps."

"With Intranets.com, if we didn't get a lot of users, it would be cheaper for us, but if the intranet got a lot of use, then we wouldn't mind spending the additional money for more users and more storage, because it would mean it was more central to our operations."

"Intranets.com saves us a tremendous amount of money by the way the pricing is structured. If one of our volunteers gets very active with it and is going to manage a database, then we create an account for him or her. If another volunteer is not very active and is just going to access a document now and then, we have that volunteer share an account with another volunteer."

"We've been using Intranets.com -- primarily to share files -- since April 2004," Schorr said.

"Right now, we run 21 different programs in these 4 cities and we are currently defining standards and best practices for all of our programs, with input from many of our stakeholders: volunteers, doctors, university contacts, families we serve, and community organizations. Our Student Advisory Board, with members from each site, is taking charge of getting input from the volunteers by publishing questionnaires and conducting focus groups. There is no way they could be working on this project together without the ability to post and share files on a folder in our intranet."

"Their schedules are all over the place so for them to get each other on the phone and ask for what they want would be difficult, but they can all go to the intranet at any time of day and post their documents and see what others have posted there."

"Before adopting Intranets.com, we had been sharing files on the password protected section of our public web site. A volunteer without a technology background might accidentally disrupt a file, enter unwanted changes into other files, or even wipe out our entire web site."

"Intranets.com, with its permission-based access, gives us the ability to provide different privileges to different individuals."

"Also, before we started using Intranets.com, we had some really bright students put systems and databases together for us with fairly advanced technology, but it became almost a burden to us, because when they moved on, other students didn't know how to work with these systems and couldn't retrieve the data."

"But now, with Intranets.com, somebody who is comfortable just in a basic way on a computer can sit down and design a database that the next year somebody else can readily pick up, and if a field is out of date, eliminate it and add a new field. It's all very accessible."



“Most of our student volunteers are pretty savvy in terms of using the intranet and computers, but they don’t necessarily have a technology background. The fact that they can sign up as a volunteer and immediately sit right down and access a file in the Intranets.com Document Manager, or input to a database file, makes a huge difference to us.”

“We want all our volunteers to share their work, not just a few people who understand technology. We want volunteers to be able to work from home computers that don’t necessarily all have the same version of Microsoft Access or even the same operating system. We don’t have a situation where we’re issuing people computers and we can set standards for them. Intranets.com, with its web-based access frees us from all these concerns.”

“Intranets.com allows us to really leverage the fact that we are a multi-site program.”

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“For instance, we are actually just moving data from our other Access Databases onto Intranets.com. Our new Contacts Database on Intranets.com will include information on all our volunteers, alumni, mentors, donors and other contacts and it will be accessible to everyone who needs it.”

“Altogether, Intranets.com is making it easier to be more efficient. It’s saving us a lot of time, but the bigger gain is the increase in work quality; people’s work benefits so much from collaboration with others in similar positions. Intranets.com allows us to really leverage the fact that we are a multi-site program.”

Sharing Promotional Materials

“Often we want to share anything from a recruiting flyer to an annual appeal letter. We’ve got a program in Boston that’s developed a permission slip for children’s field trips; I don’t want Providence starting all over again to develop a permission slip.”

“Many of our programs not only improve children’s health but enable them to be active and have fun, and we use photos to communicate the energy of the programs to potential partners and funders, as well as to share the fun with volunteers, children in the programs, and their families.”

“Now, we post the photos on our Intranets.com site, and that way everyone can access them. For instance, if our Washington, D.C. office is producing a flyer for their Asthma Swimming Program and they want a good picture of children in the pool, they can go onto Intranets.com and access photos from any of our four Asthma Swimming Programs in Boston, Providence, New York, or D.C. and use those.”

Training Programs

“Now, when I’m preparing for a training session on a particular topic, I can just go into our Intranets.com training folder and look at all the past training sessions on that topic, from national and all of our local sites, and pick and choose training exercises from that.”

“Or, if I’m writing a proposal for funding for a program we’ve had before at another site, I don’t want to start with a blank piece of paper; I want to pull together everything we’ve ever written about that particular program before and pick out the best of it. If I had to call everyone in four different cities, that’s a lot of time. It’s easier to access our Intranets.com Document Manager and browse through the files.”



“I use the Intranets.com Search Function. We try to encourage people to tag their documents with key words, so colleagues are able to find what they are looking for just by browsing.”

“We’re actually using Intranets.com to try to encourage people to change the way they work and think about their work. For instance, what you are doing with your program for children with sickle cell disease in Washington D.C. may be more relevant to the sickle cell program in New York, than to a fitness and nutrition program in D.C. We are trying to encourage people to communicate across sites and work across boundaries on common issues and programs.”

Online Alumni Database

“Project HEALTH has been around for 8 years and we’ve got alumni interested in knowing what one another are doing, so we are putting together an online alumni database using Intranets.com. We’ll limit the information alumni can see online - to alumni email addresses, geographic location, occupation or school enrollment. Then that public database will link to another Intranets.com database that only our staff can access which will contain the more detailed information we need to send our newsletters to alumni.”

“As the number of our alumni increases and our alumni program gets more intensive, we’ll be able to expand our intranet and its uses without making any huge architectural changes. The flexibility of Intranets.com -- to use as much of it as we need or want and no more or no less -- is very valuable to us.”

“Intranets.com has proved helpful in so many ways.”

“In a meeting recently, a new volunteer was asking many, many questions - sidetracking the agenda. Another volunteer responded by walking up to the whiteboard and writing a web address on it: www.projecthealth.intranets.com and telling the new volunteer to go there to get all the answers to his questions - the information was already posted on our Intranets.com intranet.”

Advantages for Fundraising

Intranets.com has also been helpful in documenting what Project HEALTH is accomplishing, and communicating that information to the people and institutions that provide its funding.

Ms. Schorr explains, “We’ve used the Intranets.com Database Manager to aggregate statistics from our hospital-based programs, such as the Family Help Desk, where we have hundreds of families coming in for help; Intranets.com allows us to keep track of people coming to the Family Help Desk for help with health-related issues such as food stamps, housing, and immigration status. Keeping track of how many families come in, what issues they ask about, and what kinds of help and resources the program provides helps us to keep the program focused and know what types of additional resources we need. It’s powerful to be able to update the hospitals we work with about the needs of the patient population, and it gives us the data foundation we need to justify requests for funding from the institutions and individuals that support us.”

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Staffing Advantages

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“As we looked around to find it, we wanted to have our intranet technology mirror the way we worked. There weren’t too many options that didn’t require a full time IT person on staff. And, when you only have 6 full time staff people on 4 sites, that’s not an option.”

Indeed, Project HEALTH’s small staff, with their 300 volunteers, manages a very impressive range of programs and Intranets.com is an integral part that management.

“We’re trying to accomplish many things - working to promote health and well being through programs ranging beyond medical services advocacy to nutrition and fitness, to lifestyle changes, to disease prevention.

The following Project HEALTH programs all use Intranets.com to share document and database files among the 4 sites:

Family Help Desk/Community Resource Center provides families entering pediatric primary care clinics with information, referrals, and advocacy on issues such as housing, job training, childcare, and food.

Project Baby works to ensure that new mothers leave the hospital with information on how to obtain basic necessities such as health insurance and infant car seats.

Advocating Success for Kids works with parents, doctors, and teachers to address the individual needs of children with learning disabilities and behavioral problems.

Women’s Resource Center provides women and their families with information, support, and advocacy on health-related issues.

Asthma Swimming Program teaches children with asthma the science behind their asthma and strategies for managing their disease while improving their lung capacity through swimming.

TIDES provides children who have Type 1 diabetes with mentoring, peer support, lessons on the science behind diabetes, and strategies for managing symptoms.

Girls Fitness & Nutrition (FitNut) and Boys Sports & Nutrition (SportNut) Programs combines exercise and lessons on nutrition to improve the health of adolescents who are obese or at risk of obesity.

Ujima provides peer group activities, tutoring, and mentoring to immune-compromised children.



STRIVE provides mentoring, tutoring, health education, college preparation, and peer support for teenagers with sickle cell disease.

“We look upon Intranets.com as a mission critical tool that helps us attain across the board efficiencies in all of these programs,” Schorr said.

“Project HEALTH is now entering a growth phase and we expect to launch five more sites by 2008. Intranets.com will be a vital piece of the expansion process, linking the growing number of sites together the way our current sites are linked -- enabling new sites to build on the experience of existing sites, and enabling those of us who will spend an increasing proportion of our time traveling the Project HEALTH network to continue our work seamlessly while we’re on the road,” Schorr concluded.

