

## **Supportive and Collaborative Culture Results in High Job Satisfaction**

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Employees of the Consortium face daily challenges to meet the needs of an economically depressed area that suffers from increased drug abuse, lack of access to mental health and oral health care services, and high rates of obesity. Despite this, at NCHC we have created an open-work environment that is supportive, collaborative, and respectful.

The North Country Health Consortium (NCHC), established in 1997, is a mature rural health network located in northern New Hampshire (often referred to as the North Country). The Consortium serves the most rural, poor, and underserved region of the state. Health outcome data reflect a regional population that suffers higher morbidity and mortality than the rest of the state, and in many cases, the United States. Although New Hampshire is identified as one of the healthiest states in the nation, the northern tier suffers premature death and chronic diseases at rates substantially higher than New Hampshire, and, in many cases, the country.

The Consortium is a member organization whose mission is to improve the health status of the residents of the North Country. The network includes 23 members from health and human service organizations in the region. Members include federally qualified health centers, critical access hospitals, home health agencies, long-term care facilities, the regional mental health organization, faith-based organizations, emergency medical services, local government, academic institutions, and other social service organizations.

NCHC is an organization with fourteen employees who work in a variety of program areas, including substance misuse prevention, emergency preparedness, community health and wellness, quality improvement, and oral health. The Consortium is also an Area Health Education Center (AHEC) and the administrative arm of the North Country Accountable Care Organization.

NCHC is a mission driven organization with a culture that encourages communication, innovation and creativity. Daily dialogue occurs among and between staff and organizational leadership that encourages everyone to determine the best way to get things done in the most productive way. By working together and learning from each other, staff members have an opportunity to use their individual skills, abilities, and knowledge in a way that most benefits programs and the organization as a whole. Staff often turn to their colleagues to brainstorm solutions to challenges that arise and they are encouraged to work together to find solutions. There is an organizational expectation that program development and implementation is approached from a team based perspective. On-going collaboration encourages increased communication and opportunities for staff to learn and grow in their own program area as well as others.

Organizational leadership empowers staff to take responsibility for their program areas and to use their own ideas, creativity, and skills to develop and implement work plan objectives. This type of work environment fosters innovation and enhances job satisfaction. Management provides opportunities for them to showcase their work both in the community and to the board of directors. Staff members often present program updates at board meetings. The result is that board members gain a deeper understanding of NCHC programs, they get to know the staff, and staff members gain recognition for the incredible work they do each day. Staff are also encouraged (when funding is available) to participate in professional development activities, including local, regional and national conferences; and in-person/on-line continuing education courses.

Monthly staff meetings provide an opportunity to share current and upcoming program activities, brainstorm ideas about how to integrate program activities, as well as to learn new information about changes in the national and state health care environment in which we do our work. A staff retreat is held off-site each year. The retreat includes personal and professional development activities that are planned by a group of staff members. At both staff meetings and the annual retreat staff are encouraged to question and reflect on the organization's strategies, effectiveness, and ability to change.

Staff satisfaction and happiness is key to the success of the organization's ability to carry out its mission. Although work expectations are high, employees are supported and encouraged to flex their schedules to meet their family and personal obligations. Staff are also encouraged to participate in health and wellness activities, with opportunities provided on-site whenever possible.

Most of all, with everything we do, we try to infuse a little fun and humor in order to keep us motivated and connected to each other, our work, and our community.

### **About North Country Health Consortium**

*Created in 1997 our mission is "North Country Health Consortium leads innovative collaboration to improve the health status of the region." In efforts to address common issues by collaboration among health and human service providers the Network engages in:*

- *solving common problems and facilitating regional solutions*
- *creating & facilitating services & programs to improve population health status*
- *health professional training, continuing education and management services to encourage sustainability of the health care infrastructure*
- *increasing capacity for local public health essential services*
- *increasing access to health care for underserved and uninsured residents of Northern New Hampshire*

*North Country Health Consortium has been a member of NCHN (National Cooperative of Health Networks) for over ten years.*