

Spotlight Article

Florissa – Dixon, IL

Florissa is a unique collaborative of agencies that provide services to children and their families. They represent diverse types of providers, including developmental disabilities, mental health, public health, education and medical with the commonality being to serve children. The network primarily serves youth 0-18 but also provide education and support for families, providing training and increased awareness to adults supporting and working with children.

The network's initial focus was serving youth with autism but because of their rural location they needed to target youth with developmental, medical, social, emotional or behavioral difficulties.

Ms. Watters states numerous benefits of the network beginning with providing its members a means for learning and understanding what each organization does and provides referral sources back and forth. The network also allows a psychologist and a pediatrician to be available for consultation. Additionally, this collaboration helps improve access to specialty treatment. A final member benefit mentioned is training. Unique, quality training that wouldn't otherwise be available in the area.

Like most networks, Florissa faces numerous challenges. One of their biggest related to billing. Because they are comprised of different types of organizations there are different regulations, rules and governing bodies. This complexity of that made it harder and take longer to accomplish billing procedures. The network was able to tackle this obstacle and put a billing system in place. They are also enrolled as a provider in a large third party payer network. Both are huge accomplishments.

Being a health care provider in a rural area also adds challenges compared to those serving urban areas. In Florissa's case access to specialty services is a problem. Services such as pediatric neurology are not available nearby. Relatedly, transportation is an obstacle which makes accessing providers, particularly specialty providers that much more difficult. On the flip side, their rural environment has some advantages. Most notably, the relationships. Providers know each other and most have been around a long time and respect each other. This helps them to tackle some of the tough challenges they face. Providers are more efficient with services and resources and this results in better, more personal care. Because of the collaboration and communication, the network is getting the most out of its funding and resources.

A couple means of support for the network and its leadership are attending conferences, such as NCHN's educational conference and leadership summit as well as participating in training calls. Ms. Watters explains that even if the topic doesn't

directly apply to their particular network, there are always pieces to be pulled out and applied to their needs.

I asked Ms. Watters, based on her experiences as a network leader, what advice she might have for a developing rural health network? Her reply was to plan on more time noting that everything takes longer than anticipated. She adds an important piece is relationships and needing to invite the right people to the table.

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