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Spotlight Long Island

How WellLife Network is using technology to achieve its mission and overcome challenges

As the nonprofit WellLife Network nears its 40th anniversary, the organization continues to meet the growing challenges of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental challenges and substance abuse issues.

We recently interviewed Sherry Tucker, WellLife Network CEO, about how it's using technology to achieve its mission and overcome some challenges, as well as how technology is creating new challenges.

Q: What is the mission of WellLife Network?

A: What we try to do each and every day is provide opportunities for the individuals we house and treat to reach their very highest potential in whatever space they occupy. We serve both children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental health challenges, and substance abuse issues.

Q: How does your organization use technology to accomplish that mission?

A: Our industry is in a major transition right now to what's called value-based payment methodology. That means we have to utilize data to measure exactly how we add value to the individuals we serve. To that end, we have several different electronic health records to ensure that we continue to use the right technology to help the individuals in our programs achieve their wellness goals. We're also working on building a robust data warehouse, which will allow us to pull together all of our data and organize it in a way that helps us measure the key indicators required for our sector, all in real time.

Q: Have you used virtual reality?

A: There's opportunity in our programs to try to use virtual reality to provide a broader array of opportunity for our participants to experience different environments – to be

able to put on VR glasses and go to Russia or go undersea and swim with the dolphins. We're interested in piloting one of those VR projects with our Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities group in our Day Habilitation program to where they could take some mini-vacations on their VR glasses when they come to class.

Q: Have you looked into using artificial intelligence (AI)?

A: We considered AI. We just couldn't justify the cost at this point. We're hoping that at some point we might be able to utilize artificial intelligence.

Q: Is cybersecurity/data security an issue for your organization?

A: It absolutely is a big issue for us. The data that we have is something that



would be of interest to those who are out there trying to hack in and steal data. So we have to be very vigilant and careful about making sure that we have a strong system in place, and it does take a lot of resources in our IT department to ensure that we have built a good, strong security system. We also have 1,800 employees, so that's 1,800 opportunities

for hackers to try to trick somebody by sending a phishing email or all kinds of different things. They're very sophisticated and they're always trying. We have hired a group to try and hack into our system as a measure to make sure that we have the right security in place.

Q: What is the biggest challenge of your job and why?

A: The biggest challenge is that there are a multitude of challenges and they can come from all different directions. Technology is one of the challenges: trying to keep up with the changes that are coming and the fact that you basically are out of date as soon as you jump into a new technology solution.

Q: What makes WellLife Network special/unique compared to other similar organizations?

A: We serve a wide array of individuals facing many life challenges – mental health; intellectual/developmental disabilities, substance abuse, family issues, homelessness and more. These services are integrated. So, if someone with a mental health issue requires residential services, we can easily access our network to provide the needed services. All of our services are "linked" and reflect our mission of helping all people reach their life's goals.

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WellLife Network Executive Offices
142-02 20th Avenue, Flushing, NY 11357
www.WellLifeNetwork.org

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