
Susan Burton Team Excellence Awards

2019



Arkansas Department of Human
Services

Recognizing Teams at DHS

Susan Burton worked for the Arkansas Department of Human Services for 27 years and retired from the Division of County Operations in 2019, just a few months before her death. In one of her last emails to her team, Susan wrote, **"There are almost a million Arkansans who can access health care because of the work WE do ... They don't know us. They don't know our names. They don't even know we exist. But they are depending on us. We have a great responsibility. We are a great TEAM ... and for that, I am GRATEFUL."**

In honor of Susan's commitment to and legacy of teamwork, DHS launched these awards in the winter of 2019 to celebrate the many hard-working teams at the Department. Each quarter a winner and 1st runner-up is selected in four categories: customer service, program improvement, operational improvement, and innovation. Overall winners are announced for the year from the quarterly winners.



Overall Winner

2019

Elevating FOIA

Improving Customer Service, Tracking and Transparency

With a focus on improving response times and customer service for Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, DHS created a three-person FOIA team in the Office of Communications and Community Engagement (OCCE). OCCE then created a guide for the Department that outlined applicable laws and redaction requirements and fundamentally changed how FOIA requests are processed, including adding liaisons for every division and office to serve as the point person for FOIAs in that area, creating a comprehensive tracking system and online fillable form, and improving customer service by sending acknowledgement emails and regularly communicating the status of requests. In 2019, the unit processed over 1,000 requests with fewer than 9 being untimely.



Team Members

Rebekah Lee, Brian Daugherty, Zaisha Heardmon, Sara Norwood, Matthew Gooch, Anne Lasowski, Nicole Powell, Mark White, Paula Stone, Robbie Nix, Steven McKnight, Rachael Veregge, Kirk Lane, Ruthie Brown, Jocelyn Potter, Kim Davis, Matthew Tatus, Elizabeth Pitman, Kara Maack, Wanda Goree, Jeff Pardikes, Sharon P Jones, Martina Smith, Jim Brader, Michael Brechlin, and Amy Webb.

Lessons Learned

When you identify areas struggling to handle large volumes of work, start by talking with the people who are doing the work. Ask them where in the process they struggle – not who is to blame. Then map out the process from start to finish. That will identify gaps and areas for opportunity. If you see a need to pull together people from across your organization, work hard to create a cohesive team. It makes a huge difference.

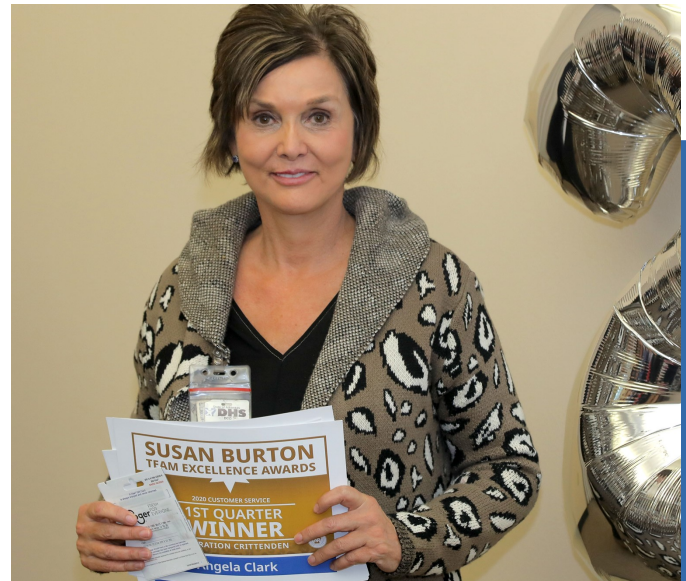
Customer Service

WINNER - OPERATION CRITTENDEN

The Division of County Operations Crittenden County office was struggling with timeliness issues and complaints caused by turnover and not being fully staffed. Leadership in the county formed a team that included people in all positions, from clerical staff to Area Director, and created a detailed plan to eliminate the backlog, track the work daily, and implement monitoring to ensure backlogs remain a thing of the past. Prior to this effort, clients in the county waited 20 days or more for an interview appointment. Now appointments happen in 5-7 days and application timeliness has improved.

Lessons Learned

Each office is different. What works in one office might not work in another. So focus on the end results and the clients. Getting input from several offices made this plan work. And we weren't afraid to tweak the plan along the way to make it better.



RUNNER-UP TRANSFORMING CSTP EDUCATION SYSTEM

In July 2019, the Civilian Student Training Program (CSTP) became part of DYS, resulting in changes to almost every aspect of the program. One of the most drastic changes – and one of the most important for our clients – was the transition from being a non-accredited school to being part of the Arkansas Consolidated High

School, in which DYS provides an ADE-approved education to students via Virtual Arkansas (VA) and includes special education services. CSTP went live with an online system in time for the next class of students, ensuring students will get credit for the classes they take.

Program Improvement



RUNNER UP ELIMINATING FRAUD BACKLOG

In early 2017, the Fraud Unit's pending investigations had dramatically increased to 2,273 unworked cases. Several attempts to decrease the numbers were unsuccessful due to unrealistic goals, high employee turnover, failure to monitor and lack of organization. In May 2019, the Office of Security and Compliance began to tackle the backlog. Due to the teamwork of the entire Fraud Unit staff, the first three phases of this project finished ahead of schedule, and the Fraud Unit has identified over \$1 million in overpayments since August 2019; with a total of \$1,371,741.31 for the fiscal year thus far. This exceeds the total overpayment identified for all state fiscal year 2019 by approximately \$200,000.

WINNER - TRANSFORMING FORENSICS

The Arkansas State Hospital gets about 2,000 court-ordered forensic mental evaluations each year and most were not completed timely. Additionally, the orders were tracked through an antiquated database and by paper, making it difficult to assess a growing backlog of overdue evaluations. In 2019, the team mapped the evaluation process and changed many aspects of that process. It changed internal workflows, manually cleaned data to ensure it was accurate, updated contracts to better serve clients, and came up with additional ways to help get defendants mental health treatment without a need for an evaluation.

Lessons Learned

Let the goal drive the workflow. Think outside the box when you can't get past an obstacle or the easy solution *hire more staff) isn't an option. Communicate and work as a team.



Operational Improvement

WINNER - ELEVATING FOIA

One key to overhauling the process for handling and responding timely to FOIA requests was the creation of a dashboard that is now used to track requests. The dashboard also helped DHS for the first time fully capture the amount of requests coming in and identify more ways to streamline the process.



RUNNER-UP - IMPLEMENTING ROCKET MATTERS

The Office of Chief Counsel moved from a paper-based case management system to a system called Rocket Matters, which required manually moving more than 4,000 case files. As a result, field attorneys have more time to focus on the practice of law. Data reporting is now in real time and more accurate.

Innovation

WINNER - THE BLUE UMBRELLA

DHS has long advocated for businesses to hire and support individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities. Jobs and income-earning opportunities offer a sense of purpose, critical social connections, and a way to be active in their communities. To increase these opportunities, DDS created the Blue Umbrella gift shop, a place where artisans from human development centers and communities can sell things they make. That meant creating and building a full-scale retail operation from scratch. The result is Arkansas's only state-run store that exclusively sells items made by individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities.

Lessons Learned

States and businesses should give these individuals an opportunity to work. The public will support mission-driven efforts. Hire someone with retail experience to ensure success.



RUNNER UP PASSE BENEFICIARY COMMUNICATION EFFORTS

The new Provider-led Arkansas Shared Savings Entity program was complex and far different than families of clients with developmental disabilities or behavioral health issues had ever encountered. To launch it in a way that beneficiaries could really understand, would take a massive and strategic communication effort. Communications worked with DMS and DDS to create a strategic communications plan, extensive online and print resource materials, a website, and a comprehensive social media plan that included hosting Facebook lives to answer beneficiary questions in real time. Taking such a comprehensive approach provided valuable lessons for future program launches.

