
CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Team Performance Training: Lessons from Alaska on Team-Based Care

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Southcentral Foundation (SCF) is an Alaska Native customer-owned health care system responsible for providing health care and related services to approximately 65,000 Alaska Native and American Indian people in southern Alaska. Approximately 20 years ago, SCF took responsibility for primary care, taking over from Indian Health Services, and made major changes to the system to support the provision of high-quality relationship-based care asked for by the Native community. These changes included establishing Integrated Care Teams (ICTs) to provide care to patients (who are called “customer-owners” at SCF). Although training is provided for new ICTs, SCF also realized the need for training of existing teams (in all disciplines) to support innovation and increased performance. SCF’s Team Performance Training was created to accomplish this goal.

The training is for ICTs and other teams at SCF to help them learn to navigate through conflict, recognize how varying work styles function within teams, and build team cohesion. Topics include self-awareness, communication skills, team dynamics, navigating conflict, and navigating change. The training is taught by instructors from SCF’s Development Center, many of whom have experience working in other areas of SCF, such as medical and behavioral health.

The training was developed a few years ago by SCF based on principles from other SCF trainings, adapted for team performance. The training has helped care teams provide better care to customer-owners, and internal SCF teams work more efficiently with each other to support the organization. In part due to strong team dynamics and relationship-building skills, 97 percent of customer-owners are satisfied with the care provided by SCF, and SCF has also achieved 95 percent employee satisfaction. SCF has been able to sustain these high levels of satisfaction for years, in part due to trainings such as the Team Performance Training. SCF has also offered the training to other organizations, which have achieved positive results in team dynamics as well.

SCF’s experience has shown that robust trainings programs that focus on communication and relationship-building skills, such as the Team Performance Training, can improve efficiency, quality, and satisfaction. However, an organization must be open to changing and revising trainings based on feedback from participants, as well as data collected about team performance pre- and post-training. And the organization needs to clearly communicate the benefits of training to encourage employees to take advantage of training opportunities. If these things are done, team-based trainings can lead to improvements across an organization.