



Using Community Engagement to Drive Decisions

If you enjoyed Sean Carey's article on how to apply strategy to your organization, then you might be interested to learn how Luthercare has embraced this very concept by focusing on community engagement to drive their decisions - *and their culture*.

Luthercare is a non-profit organization that provides long term care and short-term rehabilitation along with occupational, speech and physical therapy in health care centers located in Lititz and Lebanon, Pennsylvania. In 2013 Carl R. McAloose, President and CEO, of Luthercare, shared in a newsletter that when reflecting on core values, "what best describes this spirit of giving back and being connected is the term 'Community Engagement.' By that, we mean to tell the story of all the ways in which our team members, residents, families, donors and volunteers impact the communities in which we live and serve, making them better places and enhancing lives."

DRIVE was hired by Luthercare in 2016 to provide leadership training to the management team and we had the privilege to witness first-hand that community engagement is not something that Luthercare does, it is something that has been woven into every aspect of their culture. Focusing on community engagement is in the very fabric of what Luthercare stands for, this of course includes the residents and the staff.

I had the opportunity to connect with William Snyder, VP of Marketing & Philanthropy, at Luthercare. He explained to me, "Community engagement distinguishes Luthercare. We are facing outward, not inward. That's how we look at community engagement. We're not islands – each of our communities are embedded within the community where they exist."

This year Luthercare received the Community Engagement Award from Holleran and was recognized for connecting with the communities in which they live and serve.

Luthercare is making engagement part of their ongoing DNA. Snyder described that community engagement helps direct business decisions. Snyder used the example of Luthercare's decision to continue to pay real estate taxes on their residential living cottages and apartments, even though their non-profit status would alleviate them of this responsibility, but they do it, "because it gives back to the community."

"When we told them, the residents cheered. They are proud to give back to the community. They use local services and they really want the schools to be strong for our community's future," said William Snyder.

"We encourage team members to be involved and give back," said Snyder. Both staff and

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residents give back to the community. Luthercare regularly shares stories about how their residents and staff are giving back to the local community in their newsletters, including sharing “warm fuzzies” - stories of people being caught in the act of a good deed. Examples include residents volunteering for a local habit for humanity, and inviting a local artist to share their talent – even having them create their holiday card.

Community engagement most certainly includes milestone goals of engaging residents and staff – more than 75% of Luthercare residents are originally from Lancaster County, and many staff participate in local events.

Michele Metzler, Administrator, Luther Acres Healthcare Center, has been part of the Luthercare family for ten years. “We always hear that we are a welcoming community – everyone describes our team members as warm and caring individuals.” Visitors feel the inviting energy.

By centrally focusing on community engagement Luthercare is also focusing on engaging residents and staff, “when you have engaged team members who value their jobs they value their residents,” says Metzler. She intentionally makes it a point to always say thank you to our team members and when she receives feedback from a family member or resident, the feedback is given directly to the team member right away (often in a hand written thank you card - a favorite here at Drive!).

As for as the residents, Luthercare is committed to getting to know the residents individually. “It’s so valuable to honor who they are.” When planning their holiday party this year they asked known residents who worked as secretaries if they would be in charge of stuffing the invitations. When students from a local school visited to sing Christmas carols, students were introduced to a few of the residents who were teachers. “It’s important to help the children relate as well,” said Melzler. For example, if a first-grader comes to visit and sing Christmas carols and a resident happened to be a former 1st grade teacher, Luthercare goes out of their way to help make this personal connection.

Luthercare started with “why” by aligning their entire organization around community engagement. They created a vision based on their mission of the organization, and then they worked with team members at all levels of the organization to make sure they developed goals and action steps on how to execute their plan.

If you’re interested in applying strategy to your organization and you missed Sean Carey’s article, be sure to check it out on www.cultureoutcomes.com/blog

Special thank you to the folks over at Luthercare for taking the time to talk to me and share how they have applied strategy to their organization.

This article was written by staff member Allison Duda.

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