CS 509 Development Project

Background

The Department of Developmental Services (“DDS”) (<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dds/>) provides various services to persons with developmental disabilities. A developmental disability is defined as a long-term chronic condition such as blindness, deafness or autism. To qualify for DDS supports, a person must be mentally handicapped with a functional IQ of 71 or less. This functioning is combined with other conditions such as autism, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, obesity, or other disability. DDS is tasked with providing residential and employment opportunities for adults who are mentally handicapped. DDS outsources these functions to vendors.

Customer

Your customer is a health care organization that provides both day and residential programming to individuals with severe developmental and mental health issues. The only contract this organization has is with the state Department of Developmental Services.

The residential programming unit owns, operates and staffs multiple group homes for disabled adults. The group homes can accommodate 4 to 6 individuals. The homes are staffed 24/7 by support staff who are trained to care for the individuals. The staff are also trained to distribute medications and restrain the individuals should they become violent.

The day programming unit owns, operates and staffs several sites at which disabled individuals come during the day for programming. The programming can include exercise classes, “jobs” which include sorting cans and bottles for recycling and shredding papers.

Problem Statement

Because of their disabilities, the clients can be difficult to work with. Further, the clients can become violent and need to be restrained at times. The restraints (if not done properly) can injure the client.

Staff members handle many kinds of drugs some of which have a high value as street drugs. Since staff are generally low-paid workers, there is strong temptation for them to steal medications.

In some situations, clients make false accusations of abuse against staff members.

Any of these situations result in an abuse report which must be investigated and resolved.

The initial abuse reports will be entered by direct staff and forwarded to supervisors for review. After review the reports are submitted to the Disabled Persons Protection Commission (a state agency responsible for abuse review). The report will then be forwarded to the Investigations Division of DDS. An investigator will be assigned who will interview all parties involved. The investigator will write a Disposition Letter documenting whether or not there is sufficient evidence to support a finding of abuse and making a recommendation for an appropriate resolution to the matter. The agency reporting the abuse must answer the recommendations, indicating the corrective action taken. Finally, the DPPC issues a Decision Letter which summarizes the history and results of the investigation.

All of these documents must be reviewed by the Human Rights Committee for the organization. If the Committee does not agree with the finding of the investigator, they can file an appeal requesting a review of the investigation. This has to be done within 30 days of the decision letter stating the finding.

This is the workflow that should happen for an abuse investigation:

1. An allegation of abuse results in creation of an abuse report by a staff member at the agency.
2. The abuse report is mailed or faxed to DPPC by the agency.
3. The DPPC receives the report, and assigns an investigator.
4. The investigator performs an initial investigation and sends a Disposition Letter to the agency.
5. The agency responds to the Disposition Letter, describing the corrective actions taken to resolve the allegation of abuse.
6. The DPPC issues a Decision Letter to the agency and to the chair of the agency’s Human Rights Committee.
7. The Human Rights Committee reviews the documents and decides whether to appeal the Decision Letter within 30 days of the Decision Letter.
8. The DPPC sends the Human Rights Committee the results of any appeal.

Massachusetts maintains an online system known as HCSIS, the Home and Community Services Information System (<http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services/services-by-type/intellectual-disability/provider-support/home-and-community-services-info/>) where agency staff that have proper credentials can retrieve the status of active investigations.

Unfortunately, the Human Rights Committee often never receives detailed information concerning the circumstances of the original incident. This makes it difficult or impossible for the committee to make any reasonable decisions about appeals. As a result, clients may be exposed to abuse (a violation of their human rights) and staff may be subjected to unwarranted disciplinary actions.

Examples of things that go wrong:

1. Abuse reports have no background information only a report that abuse occurred. There is no context for the abuse allegation.
2. Abuse reports are not filed in a timely manner, sometimes hours or days after the events documented.
3. Preliminary investigation findings have no mention of what the original incident was. For example, an investigator may find insufficient evidence for abuse, but there is no record of the event or the evidence that was examined.
4. The Decision Letter is missing information regarding the original abuse report. As a result, the Human Rights Committee members have no basis on which to make their decisions.

Affected Users

Direct Support Staff to clients (the people working day to day with the clients)

Direct Support Staff supervisors

Disabled Persons Protection Commission

Department of Developmental Services/Division of Investigations (investigation unit)

Human Rights Committee (outside reviewer) Chairman

Project Scope

Required Functions

1. Direct Support Staff can input pertinent information about an abuse incident into a laptop, tablet, or smartphone application as soon as it happens. This application produces an abuse report and sent to all necessary staff members of the agency.
2. The application verifies that all necessary information is provided.
3. The application redacts information that should not be displayed or preserved, even if the user enters confidential information.
4. Reports that are in the process of being reviewed and investigated are maintained on a central computer for the organization.
5. The central computer provides the capability for supervisors to track the status of abuse reports (list of active reports and their status).
6. The central computer provides the ability to print reports which can be mailed or FAXed to the Disabled Persons Protection Commission. For the necessary report information, see the PDF form here: <http://www.mass.gov/dppc/docs/form-19c-reporting.pdf>
7. The system tracks investigation reports by the Public Log Number (provided on the investigation report).
8. The system can provide hard copies of the initial abuse report for use by the Human Rights Committee.
9. The system provides the ability to purge documents based on established retention criteria.

Additional Functions

1. Provide a virtual investigation file for each incident of alleged abuse including the ability to scan and save Disposition Letters, responses, and Decision Letters for each investigation
2. Track appeals requested by the Human Rights Committee
3. Provide a calendar display which shows action dates for each active investigation, and deadlines for requesting appeals.
4. Provide an audit trail of accesses to the system.

High Level Deliverables

* Client and “central server” application code.
* Installation and usage documentation
* Design documentation package (some of these documents are due during the course as group assignments; the completed design package is due at the end of the course).

Related Documents

DPPC web site with additional information and links: <http://www.mass.gov/dppc/abuse-report/>