

First Call: Using Technology To Support Clients on the Road to Recovery

First Call Alcohol/Drug Prevention and Recovery, Inc., is a nonprofit organization committed to serving those affected by substance use in the Greater Kansas City area. For 55 years, First Call has helped thousands to champion their recovery by offering high-quality clinical, educational, and prevention services. The organization's forward-thinking, innovative approach to care has been instrumental in developing technology that supports clients wherever they are in their journey.

First Call's foray into technology began with the Community Care Link (CCL) electronic health record system. CCL grew out of a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant and was eventually purchased by the Jackson County Community-Backed Anti-Drug Tax—known as COMBAT—as a means to streamline data for its 26 publically funded agencies. “Being able to share records means that when a client walks in, someone can go into the database, complete a couple of security features, and access a client's file, even if they were seen at another location,” said Emily Hage, First Call project manager. “We want our clients to tell their story once. If they were assessed a month ago, but they are back in the system and need help, we don't need to make them tell their story all over again,” she added.

To expand CCL's functionality, First Call recently launched a SAMHSA-funded Mobile Motivational Enhancement Therapy portal (known as Mobile CCL) to enable clients to have access to a variety of online resources from their computer, tablet, or smartphone. With a click, clients can update their files, send and receive secure messages from their clinician, complete activities as part of their treatment plan, and document their progress in a journal. “Our number one priority is to use technology to make things easier and more accessible to clients,” said Emily. “The portal provides a safe, secure way for the client and clinician to stay in touch.” It is even spurring unexpected results. Emily reported that since launching the portal, there has been an increase in family service activities; namely, from loved ones of those suffering with addiction who are participating in their seven-session “How to Cope” program and are looking for an extra level of support from a family services counselor.

First Call is exploring strategies to encourage people to actively use their technology. In addition to a newly designed WordPress Web site, staff have dedicated considerable energy to a multipronged marketing campaign that engages with potential clients through radio, bus, and Web-based messages. Customized Google Analytics will help determine the most effective Web strategies. First Call also has the benefit of onsite tech support to incorporate new modalities and refine existing ones. As a result of recent user feedback, for example, the team is building texting capabilities into their system. “[Being] responsive to the community and the partners is a great way to encourage future buy-in,” said Emily.

For Emily, it is important not to make assumptions about people's willingness or ability to use technology. What matters most is having sufficient options to meet a client's needs when they're needed most. “When an individual or family member is at the breaking point, it is really

difficult to find out where to turn,” said Emily. As the name suggests, “Mobile CCL is another way for people to make that first call.”