

A Novel Approach Goes National

The idea of recognizing a highly effective direct service worker with a cash award was novel. “Our sector’s culture doesn’t promote singling out superstars,” said Michael Shaver, CEO of the Children’s Home Society of Florida. “We have a tendency to think about performance from the perspective of what we see from the top of the organization, which is aggregate data.” Being a Superstar Foundation Award Partner meant comparing data about the effectiveness of nominated individuals. Who was making the greatest difference in children’s lives?

Yet, the idea resonated with a leadership team that had made talent development a priority. An award felt like an interesting way to draw attention to how important each and every person’s role is. “Our best direct service workers build strong relationships with children and families, make smart use of data, and are laser-focused on outcomes. They have a huge impact,” said Chief of Staff Andry Sweet. “The award validates their skills and shows the entire organization that producing the best possible results for children is what matters most.”

Richer Performance Conversations

The process went like this: Managers nominated frontline workers for the award, and a committee of senior leaders reviewed the nominations. Selecting *one* Superstar was tough and involved a good deal of healthy discussion and cross-channel communication about impressive individuals all the while reviewing the substantiating data.

“It’s been eye-opening,” said Michael. “I’ve never seen this kind of performance conversation take place in any other organization I’ve worked.” Direct service workers were enthusiastic to see one of their own recognized and celebrated the winner. Senior leaders enjoyed learning about stellar direct service work that ordinarily would not have come to their attention.

The review process also provided some new insights for the organization. There was an influx of nominations and stories from some locations, where data was clearly used more effectively than in other locations. It helped the leadership ask questions about what was going well and how those lessons could be applied elsewhere. Specific actions, like introducing new training to improve talent development, resulted.

“Recognizing direct service workers’ high performance and exposing leaders to the nominations during the selection process has been good for our organizational culture,” said Andry. “It has elevated everyone’s awareness and helped us create alignment with performance goals throughout the organization. It has helped us have better conversations about how to make a difference.”

Going National

Michael shared the organization’s experiences—and some of the stories of stellar direct services—with the board of the national membership organization, the Children’s Home Society of America. “I could see the light bulb go off,” he said. “Moving forward, we want to hear about superstars in other organizations in the network and learn from each other. Board members were ready to move to action really quickly.”

Starting in 2017, participating Children’s Home Societies across the country will select their own internal winners. Each organization will submit its Superstar to the national board, and the Children’s Home Society of America will advance the best performer to the Superstar Foundation’s national competition for the opportunity to win a second prize.