

Case Study

Directions for Living



Directions for Living
LIFE GETS BETTER HERE.™

Location: Clearwater, Florida

Year Founded: 1982

Number of Employees: 250+

Policies Highlighted: Flexible Work and Scheduling

Every day the staff at Directions for Livings (DFL) walks through their front door with one goal in mind: provide children and families in the Tampa Bay area with the needed support to end the cycle of trauma in their lives. Since 1982, Directions for Living has provided trauma-informed and often life-saving social services to children and families in the community. Over that time, the company has grown to more than 250+ employees, as a result of their innovative approach to delivering results-oriented treatments/services coupled with a growing demand for their social services program.

For DFL, their own critical need emerged when the company began to experience a high staff turnover rate due to the pandemic, job fatigue and employee caregiving responsibilities at home. **“That’s when the epiphany happened,” said April Lott, LCSW, President & CEO of Directions for Living. “We knew we had to take a deeper look at what our employees were feeling and the different reasons driving them to leave their positions.”**

It quickly became clear when they began to meet with their employees. A direct result of these employee huddles, surveys and town halls, Lott affirmed what she believed was taking place saying, “We learned that in order to keep our staff happy, healthy, and productive we needed to ensure they received above-average opportunities for self care and family time. They needed family friendly employment policies.”

Directions for Living implemented their first set of family-friendly policies in 2007 and added additional policies in 2016 and 2020. “We believe it starts with the staff. If they are happy, healthy, and respected, then they will also be passionate, productive and drive positive outcomes for the clients we serve,” added Lott.

The staff at Directions for Living participate in employee engagement surveys several times a year and hold monthly townhalls with the CEO. This provides the staff with an opportunity to share ideas, make suggestions, and ask questions. “There is complete transparency about policy decision making,” explains Lott. For example, they heard from several employees how they had not seen their families during the Christmas holiday season in several years due to the brief paid company holidays (only Christmas Day and New Year’s Day were official days off). Lott also pointed out saying, “Two days was simply not enough for them to see their loved ones.”

This prompted Lott to propose a new company-wide holiday policy to the DFL board: a week off that would ensure her employees would get the much-needed paid time off during a special time of the year.

“We know from experience that our amazing staff can’t do incredibly hard work if they don’t first know their own families are taken care of. We are always asking questions and learning from our employees about what they need to be able to be their best selves, personally and professionally. It is a constant evolution. I am so proud of the work we continue to do to improve family-friendly practices at DFL,” emphasized Lott.



When implementing these types of policies, a company the size of DFL faces several challenges, including how to provide increased employee benefits and still continue to deliver the same client services at cost.

The biggest challenge faced by Directions for Living was funding and additional approved paid time off can have a financial impact on the company. But through creative initiatives such as fundraising events and grants they triumphed over these challenges.

During the pandemic, transitioning to hybrid schedules and the implementation of telehealth became more prevalent making it easier for funders, partners and clients to embrace these dynamics.

In a span of 10 years, different policies have been implemented, which have resulted in a decrease of employee turnover by 15%. Lott affirms, “You can’t exactly quantify happiness, but you can certainly reduce turnover. **“Holding onto employees longer, keeping them happier, ensures our long-term success and most importantly, the clients we are missioned to serve are more supported and successful than over.”**

Sample Benefits at Directions for Living:

- Paid-Time Off Rollover
- Breastfeeding spaces
- Flexible schedules
- Wellness holidays + gifts
- Remote work