Environmental Online Food Handler's Certification Course

LCDHD
Lake Cumberland District Health Department
A Healthy Today for a Brighter Tomorrow

Act | Plan
Check | Do

Quality Improvement Story Board

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PLAN

Problem Statement

Our food service community has limited access to food handler certification training due to limited staff/time of the local health department to provide an adequate number of certification courses. In an industry such as food service, there is often a high turnover rate, and we are often unable to train new employees as quickly and efficiently as we would like.

Aim Statement

An opportunity exists to improve the delivery of food handler's certification training. The online class will:
  *Increase districtwide overall sanitation scores of food services by 5%. (Baseline: ~88-90% districtwide)
  *Increase # of food handlers trained in proper food handling techniques by 25% within our district. (Baseline: ~150 year)
  *Revenue will cover health department cost of courses
  *Decrease risk of restaurant associated foodborne illness outbreaks by improving employee's knowledge of safe food handling procedures

Process Outline & Relevant Data

Current trainings were inefficient and expensive due to limited staff; we weren't covering our costs and were experiencing an increase in foodborne illness (e.g, statewide Hep A outbreak). The environmental director presented data to the district board of health and proposed all food handlers in our district be required to take food handler training and the motion carried.

We started this project to make training available to as many food service employees as possible, in a way that would be convenient for them because establishments with certified handlers have improved sanitation practices.

An online course would be available 24/7/365 so new employees could earn their certification from the comfort of their home on demand.

Identify Potential Causes

Potential causes identified during brainstorming sessions:
  *Lack of affordable and convenient training for food handler's
  *Limited access to the food handler courses taught at health departments. We are not able to offer multiple classes as often as we would like due to the cost and time involved. Staff & their time are limited and we cannot hire more staff due to budget constraints
  *Generally, there has to be a certain # of participants sign up for each class taught by an environmentalist so that we can cover some of the cost
  *The class takes about 3 hours to teach, plus the prep work which is time consuming and ties up valuable staff

Identify Potential Solutions

Develop an online food handler's course.
When we have establishments that require the food handler's certification and we do not have a class scheduled, we have to advise them to use available online courses, which puts us at a disadvantage as we are not sure of the quality of content and also lose out on some revenue that we could be collecting.

Improvement Theory

If we can provide the classes electronically then more individuals will be able to take the training, therefore increasing knowledge of food handling and decreasing foodborne safety issues throughout the district. We could also charge a small fee for the online course to cover costs of program upkeep & food code changes.

DO

Test the Theory

Development of content for online module began and we realized our technical limitations as far as collecting fees, keeping track of certificates, etc. and started searching for a company that could provide affordable solutions, resulting in a profit-sharing agreement with a company (we provide all the content and they provide all the technical support). KDPH adopted the 2013 FDA national food code which stated all food managers had to be certified via a national or HD approved course so we thought other HD's across the state might need this and pursued partnerships with them also.

CHECK

Study the Results

During development of the course, the PDCA cycle was repeated several times as content corrections were needed and technical issues arose. The former state ENV director vetted the content and made suggestions. Then the course needed to be revamped so that it would flow better in other languages. The course is now available in Spanish with the help of certified translators.

The basic platform was developed and went live on August 1, 2018 with 5 local health departments, including LCDHD on board. From that time until July 2019 we had 85% of Kentucky health departments utilizing this platform for their required trainings. 8,960 individuals across the state have now completed the course.

Accurate overall sanitation score comparison of the data is not possible at this time due to the pandemic restrictions in place. However, we do feel that there has been a decrease in violations during recent inspections.

Revenues are covering all associated costs of the course and has even generated some funding for each LHD involved, even though they have no cost or time invested, they just place the link on their website they share in the profit.

ACT

Standardize or Develop New Theory

The online course developed during this project was adopted. Improvements continue to be developed. For example, a phone app was developed to let inspectors check certifications while in the field. The app is currently being tweaked to recognize which restaurant the inspector is at and will automatically populate all associated certificates for them.

Future Plans

So far, it has been easy to get HDs on board because they want something tailored for KY, so hopefully, 100% of KY LHDs will utilize this training platform within the year. The state HD is considering trying to get course nationally recognized.
Also, we will be adding an evaluation/feedback feature to survey clients for feedback and improvement suggestions, making the course available in Mandarin, make electronic receipts available for payments and have better support functionality.