



IMAGINE GROUP



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On January 1, 2020, our client went live as the Administrative Services Organization (ASO) for one state Department of Health, Medicaid, Behavioral Health program. The contract, valued at \$198 million, has a five-year base period, followed by one two-year option. The ASO is responsible for managing behavioral health services for individuals with Medicaid eligibility, as well as certain uninsured and grant-funded individuals. The ASO also manages the provider organization network and service utilization for the Applied Behavioral Analyst (ABA) program for children and youth with autism. As part of one of the largest health care providers in the world, our client was poised and ready to take on this challenge and to replicate their solution all over the world. They chose The Imagine Group as their Recruiting and HR Business Partner to fulfill the mandatory Minority Business Enterprise (MBE) requirement on the contract. At peak, The Imagine Group has had 177 Full Time Employees (FTEs) serving this population and their families.

Imagine taking on this new challenge just weeks before the onset of the pandemic and administering a \$198 million dollar contract that involved hundreds of professionals. Our client was taking a vulnerable population into uncharted waters. They needed a partner who could stand up a team of experienced and dedicated professionals capable of providing oversight, customer service, claims management and provider payments without fail.

Acute care services, the treating and stabilizing individuals experiencing brief but severe illness, play an important role in the continuum of health care services. However, the financial challenges of these services have become almost unsurmountable, as evidenced by the reoccurring announcements of acute care provider bankruptcies and consolidations. Two of the top reasons for these challenges are worker shortages and attrition. Both can be controlled with the addition to the contract of an experience staffing provider like The Imagine



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Group. Financial sustainability of these programs requires an understanding of market drivers and strategies to reengineer the business model including tactics for addressing workforce and price increase pressures.

Our client needed a partner who could step in and take over the HR function. Focusing on the goal of enabling best practice and best outcomes, the HR partner needed to center their plan on the building and retention of the team.

While still under consideration to be the MBE partner, discussions included past performance to ensure the company aligned with the client's vision to ensure successful implementation and execution. One of the client's Business Development Leaders visited our office, toured the facility and met our staff before The Imagine Group was formally invited to serve as a MBE partner. After formally being offered the contract The Imagine Group also had the opportunity to attend the Pre-Bid Conference. At the Pre-Bid Conference, The Imagine Group was also able to introduce our client to a Service-Disabled Veteran Partner (SDVP) whom The Imagine Group had partnered with repeatedly.

From the beginning the Imagine team worked closely with the client to fully understand the tasks in front of them and the client's preferences and processes. We addressed topics ranging from software integration and operations to analytics, goals, culture, core values, preferred work styles and cadence of leadership. At the time, The Imagine Group had no idea how important the knowledge sharing in these areas would be to sustaining the contract.

The Imagine Group leveraged this new found knowledge to hire 80 junior adjusters for the platform who would serve as claims processors. This team was based at the company's growth site in Northern Minnesota. Starting in October 2019, the vetted associates began training in classes of up to 40 participants. Imagine representatives from the Baltimore office were onsite for the orientation



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of each class, along with a licensed benefits consultant to meet the team, orient the new hires to the platform partnership and oversee onsite reviews of benefits and benefits enrollment. Imagine reps also met with local workforce professionals and conducted job fairs in the area to build a pipeline. To continue to provide this level of service and more, The Imagine Group opened an office near the corporate growth site in February of 2020 and provided local staff, dedicated to the platform.

By late fall of 2019, The Imagine Group was asked to also take on the customer services platform and the administrative support platform, bringing the grand total of contractors to nearly 200 by March of 2020.

To fill the positions quickly and to aid retention, the salary was minimum wage plus \$5.00 per hour, The Imagine Group staff also offered traditional comprehensive healthcare coverage, that met the affordability index under the Affordable Care Act (ACA). To aid in retention, this benefit was offered after only 30 days on the platform. As another differentiator of the benefits package, The Imagine Group gave each associate employer paid life insurance, Accidental Death, and Dismemberment (AD&D) and long- and short-term disability. Associates also had the option of choosing a Minimum Essential Coverage Plan that was very cost effective and provided protection from penalties under the ACA at the time for both the company and the individual. Additionally, The Imagine Group provided PTO which met the Earned Sick and Safe Time (ESST) standard for local employees and 7 paid holidays per year as well as referral bonuses for new hires referred to The Imagine Group by our associates.

How to address burnout issues is a big question in health and human services and there is a parallel phenomenon in the broader health care workforce, including those who process payments to life saving behavioral health providers. Vicarious trauma is “the emotional residue of exposure to traumatic stories and



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experiences of others through work; witnessing fear, pain, and terror that others have experienced.” At the organizational level, managers see the effects of burnout and vicarious trauma in high turnover rates, absenteeism, interpersonal conflicts, and increased cynicism towards leadership, other staff, or even consumers.

Imagine also had the privilege to work side by side to address this phenomenon on the platform by identifying:

- The signs of vicarious trauma, its impact on health care providers, and who might be the most vulnerable.
- Organizational actions for supporting healthy teams.
- Tips on self-care, finding more meaning in work, and reclaiming your calling.
- A growing body of research about another source of stress, multi-tasking.

It’s essential to engage with a HR partner who can help manage your workforce and support them in navigating increased demands on their time and talents and help manage the all-too-common effect of stress on your team.

Imagine did this by creating the robust benefits package described above as well implementing performance reviews with salary increases and various other rewards for excellence. During the pandemic, leadership on both sides created the “masked crusader” award to recognize exceptional work and leadership with an annual event that plays out over several weeks of nominations and voting as well as weekly recognitions for “Spotlight” award winners whose names who consequently become eligible for monthly drawings with cash prizes!

This unusually robust benefits package and the customer service provided to the associates by our team limited attrition and built committed partnerships.



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It also kept the Imagine team, client and associates accountable to each other, helped to assure the success of the contract and, most importantly, invested in the care of the Medicaid clients (recipients) and their families.

In the health and human services industry, consumer experience is not just a metric but a driving force that shapes outcomes and success. According to a recent American Hospital Association survey, nearly 80% of consumers who switched providers cite difficulties in doing business, bad experiences with staff, and inadequate digital solutions. The Imagine Group was able to provide and train administrative staff who excelled in their service to the customer, eliminating concerns about bad experiences with staff for all stakeholders.

With the inclusion of technology in the role, The Imagine Group needed to make sure customer service was still at the focus of the hiring process. The Imagine Group was able to deliver on the promise to provide highly qualified candidates who understood the task and the goal and to , collectively, to the occasion.

Studies have shown that from the first call to invoice, consumers are nine times more likely to stay if the provider organization is easy to work with.

The Imagine Group worked closely with the client on several key initiatives that would ultimately bolster the team's effectiveness in ensuring that the provider organization would be as easy to work with as possible for all stakeholders. As the HR partner on the contract, it was important that we could meet the prime contractor client where they wanted to be and contribute to their continued and ultimate success in meaningful ways.

The client took an inclusive stance throughout the entire process, preparing The Imagine Group to hire, vet, and manage the team. Open communications



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with them helped us appreciate the following truth's about providing the right tools to enable us to attract and retain a winning team:

- The importance of data to drive decision-making and business intelligence, particularly in training and managing productivity, accuracy, responsiveness etc.
- How advanced automation can attract the right workforce and help them work at the top of their skill set, staying true to your organization's mission.
- The need for a single platform that integrates with the entirety of the healthcare ecosystem.
- Tips for remaining competitive, deploying extremely usable technology to meet diverse needs, and invest in your growth.
- The importance of basing services on client needs and learning how to innovate to meet them.
- A template for developing educational programs to support workforce needs as you continue to grow.

Providing a continuum of care requires dynamic, multi-dimensional solutions. It takes a technology forward workforce to support multi-dimensional solutions. While many behavioral health organizations have invested in various software solutions to support their operational needs, technology silos consistently cloud organizational visibility. With multiple disconnected systems, it can be easy to lose site of the big picture, to the detriment of the bottom line.

By educating ourselves for the challenge ahead and staying close to our client with daily meetings and follow ups, The Imagine Group was able to staff this important contract and understand the whys and hows of supporting our client to their ultimate success and the success of the state Medicaid program. We worked with our client on the following important initiatives to achieve this success:



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- Combining service data and labor cost allocations to determine the true cost-of-service delivery.
- Developing methods for measuring financial efficiency across programs by budgeting at the position level.
- Creating strategies for connecting data and integrating systems for organization-wide insights into financial performance and client outcomes.

In summary, there is no element of platform success in which The Imagine Group was not a partner. The solutions the Imagine Group provided to our client are the result of both reliable trusted practices in the staffing industry and innovative and collaborative teaming. What set this contract apart from all others is the success of this socially essential contract that took place during the worst time to do business in modern history; proving that The Imagine Group is a world class, top tier organization.