



Brief Overview

After several years of development, trials and refinement, we commercialized Mainstay about two years ago; we're currently operating in 14 states, supporting both waiver and ICF settings. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) funded our initiative at the highest level possible based on our successes in achieving simultaneous financial upsides for providers and dramatically improved health for people with disabilities. The USDA is interested in broader expansion of the program as a way to stem the rampant, unnecessary obesity and secondary illness among this vital population. Legislators have asked for Mainstay's help to write guidelines and specific benchmarks regarding nutritious food implementation and BMI achievement for waiver settings—some of which have already been enacted into law.

We don't sell food. Rather, we streamline menu planning, meal preparation, grocery shopping and nutritional tracking, so that—quickly and sustainably—costs and staff time are reduced, while quality-of-life upsides register. The program is generally bottom-line positive within the first two months, thereafter delivering ongoing financial benefit.

We primarily accomplish these positive changes through our online Pinpoint® program that is useful whether you have computers in your individual settings or not. We painstakingly took the time to design a system well within the realities confronting social service providers and their DSPs, so it would be far more help than hindrance.

How We Started

Our initiative started while one of our founders was the Executive Director of an agency in Chicago with 300+ consumers with developmental disabilities and 30+ residential settings. The following were our goals, which remain at the core of Mainstay's mission:

- Reduce the obesity rate and improve the health of consumers. At the start of the project, 50% of the residents were obese (a BMI over 30) with a preponderance of secondary illnesses such as diabetes and hypertension.
- Understand, control and materially reduce food costs. Prior to the initiative, grocery expense was growing at double the rate of inflation and food frequently went missing out the back door.
- Reduce the cost of PRN medications, such as Colace.
- Improve the knowledge base and productivity of managers and staff surrounding menu planning and meal preparation while enhancing overall choice, taste, meal satisfaction and involvement of interested consumers.

We accomplished all of the above in our initial implementation, which drew the attention of multiple stakeholders, family members and new funding sources. Based on ongoing feedback from staff and consumers, we continue to improve our systems, deliverables and outcomes; our efforts and results are the basis for the USDA's keen interest in our expansion and are the foundation for the rapid growth among our commercial customers.

The Specifics of Our Program

Our cost cutting and better nutrition program is based on several factors that are uniquely

allied with the needs and goals of budget-sensitive provider organizations, consumers with disabilities, and inexperienced and busy—often high turnover—staff:

1. Choice-based, flexible, diverse and involvement-centered.

Our program, recipes and menus absolutely adjust to the likes and dislikes of the individuals in each setting—ICF or waiver. We've designed our initiative so that it increases staff and customer involvement in the menu selection and recipe preparation processes.

Our backend system is particularly robust with over 6,000 food items and hundreds of recipes created by our full-time chef—a graduate of one of the country's top culinary institutions—who has been designing menus for people with disabilities and high health risk for over a decade. The breadth of foods served increases dramatically among our users.

Our menu capabilities include flexibility for general, mechanical soft, GFCF and diabetic needs, with all beverages, snacks and meals costing approximately \$2.99 to \$3.99 a day per person.

2. Reduced food costs.

The system must save more money than it costs—i.e., it must be cash-flow positive. Providers determine that their food costs (computed on a per person per day basis) are declining 20%+ after the start of our program. This is consistent with the outcomes we have repeatedly achieved over the past six years.

Again, the food cost reduction—far beyond the cost of our program—is occurring simultaneously with the improved nutrition of the menus. We are steadfastly mindful of portions and keeping people filled up; we achieve healthy results by re-portioning plates with calorie-light, nutrient-dense meals. It's a subtle shift, but an all-important one that we help staff navigate. Additionally, in one hundred percent of our implementations we curtail longstanding food theft, so that it is virtually eliminated.

3. Health improvement.

The increased health of the consumers is evident over a variety of parameters. Obesity rates are down, as are blood pressure levels. Blood sugar levels in diabetics decrease, in many cases to the point where doctors determine that consumers no longer need prescribed medications. Regularity improves for virtually all consumers, allowing many PRN and other non Medicaid-reimbursed medications to be reduced or discontinued.

4. DSP productivity.

With our system and readily available reports, DSPs indicate they are spending less time in the kitchen and grocery store, and are much more prepared and confident regarding meal preparation and serving nutritious foods in the appropriate amounts. Via the information our system delivers, managers are able to view cost and health trends, and can intervene proactively when unplanned deviations occur. As a result, socialization surrounding mealtime is often greatly enhanced.

5. Ease of implementation and ongoing use.

We know that staff can't easily add one more thing to their to-do list every day. As a result, we've streamlined implementation so that start up is as uncomplicated as possible. With management support and endorsement, we can have the program completely up and running within one month's time to everyone's satisfaction—and usually, utter amazement.