



CLIENT:

Curry Community Health / Freedom Healthcare

Through a multi-pronged internal and external communications strategy, A.wordsmith helped CCH navigate a potential reputation-damaging situation with compassion and professionalism.

Client Description

Curry Community Health (CCH) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that connects Curry County residents with excellent public, community and behavioral health services. From substance use disorder counseling, 24/7 crisis response, supported employment, assertive community treatment, adult mental health and case management, CCH made it its mission to empower every resident (regardless of demographics, socioeconomic status or sexual orientation) with immediate access to care. When continuously evolving contractual obligations and budgetary constraints enforced by the County on state-funded programs created an increasingly disruptive, inconsistent and unstable environment for CCH employees, clients and partners, the organization made the strategic decision to dissolve operations and transition into a new entity, called Freedom Healthcare.

Project Description

By disassociating with the County and narrowing their scope of services to individualized therapy and psychiatry, Freedom Healthcare had a unique opportunity to redefine their purpose, revive their business operations and better serve the evolving needs of the community. Initially, this meant that all programs within the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) behavioral healthcare contract would be transferred back to the County. Yet considering the community's lack of confidence in the County's ability to provide adequate continuity of care, CCH agreed to partner with the Oregon Health Authority (OHA) to provide the Community Mental Health Program (CMHP) services to patients in Curry County for another six months.

Given the contentious nature of the situation and significance of this shift for employees, patients and coordinating care organizations, CCH consulted A.wordsmith to manage their brand reputation. To be successful in this endeavor, we defined and executed a multi-faceted internal and external communications campaign designed to identify internal champions, foster an open and honest dialogue, articulate the business decision, impact and value, bolster morale and ultimately instill confidence and excitement in the future direction of the company – reassuring patients, employees and partners that CCH's commitment to the community remained stronger than ever.

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Key strategies included:

- **Meeting with key stakeholders** to uncover their communications objectives, heritage, core audiences, and the anchor narratives, emotions, descriptors and services that bring the value of CCH to life.
 - **Conducting an exhausted industry audit and competitive analysis** to identify opportunities for CCH to expand on current issues and trends, debunk misconceptions associated with mental health, address points of contention in the community, and shine a positive light on the dissolution.
 - **Leading a series of interviews with critical stakeholders** to extract their insights, experiences, successes and perspectives on the company, its areas of differentiation, specific challenges and pain points the organization was seeking to correct, etc. We focused these interviews on the people who were telling the CCH story with patients, partners and recruits on a frequent basis.
 - **Equipping senior leadership with succinct, consistent, transparent and authentic messaging** needed to communicate company changes to employees, patients, provider partners and the community in a positive and impactful manner.
- This included developing a thorough messaging framework, go-forward communications strategy, FAQs, letters to respective audiences (intended to provide regular updates to key audiences during intervals in dissolution process), website and social media copy, press releases and crisis response statements to ensure the leadership team was speaking from a consistent, united front.
- **Identifying key spokespeople** responsible for delivering the message to internal and external audiences, and ensuring they're equipped through breakout sessions, prep sessions and trainings (coupled with detailed scripts).
 - **Sharing potential outcomes and scenarios** so partners, clients and patients could visualize how the new would materialize over the long-term. This prevented uncertainty, confusion and skepticism.
 - **Listening, engaging and connecting** in an authentic way so all partners, clients and patients' perspectives, fears and ideas were valued and considered.
 - **Presenting an inspiring vision** for the future direction of the company.

Key Results

A.wordsmith helped CCH navigate a potential reputation-damaging situation with compassion and professionalism. Following the multi-pronged internal and external communications strategy execution, CCH expressed that employees' and patients' level of confidence and enthusiasm around the dissolution and future company direction improved exponentially. After a series of internal breakout sessions, prep sessions and trainings (coupled with detailed scripts), CCH's senior leadership was able to better articulate the business decision and value to ensure each audience understood the overarching benefits (and impact) to them/their role, and how it aligned with the company's long-term vision and growth trajectory. Additionally, as the client began to seek the agency's counsel on other related and unrelated matters, we successfully expanded our project scope into new areas of strategic capability – including developing Freedom Healthcare's website copy, new patient forms and more.