



Connect the Dots' Green Start Program at Hamilton Family Center

SAN FRANCISCO, CA – In Spring 2008, the Hamilton Family Center (HFC) decided to launch Connect the Dots's Green Start program to make the necessary changes towards environmentally responsible operations. HFC, a San Francisco based organization focused on promoting independent living in low-income families, provides food, shelter, and a comprehensive array of support services that promote self-sufficiency to families as they find and maintain housing.

Challenges

Like most nonprofits, HFC consists of individual staff members who, if asked about the possibility of making HFC operate in a greener fashion, would enthusiastically endorse making necessary changes to address growing environmental concerns. However, most staff members lacked the time to pursue greener options, and intentions remained mostly unrealized. On the rare occasion where individual staff members did take the initiative to move towards more energy-efficient lighting or better recycling practices, these actions were slowly communicated throughout the organization and thus remained independent and isolated to specific facilities. Connect the Dots found that each HFC's three facilities is managed by different staff responsible for their own operations (process and purchasing) with their own list of priorities.

This meant that there was:

- No formalized way to leverage information learned about green practices and vendors from one department to another (e.g. no comprehensive plan or resource guidebook);
- Duplicated staff time learning about existing city and utility programs (e.g. energy efficiency and water conservation) for which HFC was eligible;
- No volume discount purchasing for HFC because each department had their own vendors and accounts;
- Long elapse time to bring about piecemeal changes;
- A sense of being overwhelmed by the amount of changes necessary compared to the free time individuals possessed to accomplish these changes.

Solution

HFC and Connect the Dots teamed up for 3 months to integrate sustainable practices into their internal processes. The Green Start program designed by Connect the Dots provided:

- step-by-step documented guidelines that resulted in a Environmental Impact Plan to ensure that changes become a permanent part of HFC standard operations;
- a vision and roadmap for how the organization will reduce its environmental impact;
- an environmentally-preferred purchasing policy that was immediately put into practice;
- environmentally-responsible actions that enhance HFC's mission and values, including the community it serves;
- tracking mechanisms to document the economic benefits as well as the environmental impact of activities;
- a comprehensive approach taking full advantage of the programs available to conserve water and energy.

"Looking at the Green Start Summary Report showing the metrics of our efforts, it astounds me that we accomplished all that in what seems like such a short time!"

– Devra Edelmann

Program Director of HFC Transitional Housing Program



**Connect the Dots
Case Study:**
Hamilton Family Center

Connect the Dots Case Study: Hamilton Family Center

"By taking advantage of these existing programs (like the energy efficiency rebates), we've tightened our operations to start building a budget for future upgrades. We're moving on to solar energy, higher waste diversion and better transportation alternatives."

– Nick Utley

Program Assistant of the Hamilton Residence and Emergency Center

Results

Within 3 months, HFC realize financial, environmental, and cultural benefits, such as:

- **\$8,553** in rebates and free equipment. It projects an **annual savings of \$15,467** in lowered utility costs (energy, water, and waste services).¹ That's **12%** of their annual utilities cost;²
- An anticipated **20% reduction** in water usage³ while increasing its recycle/compost diversion rate from 50% to 60%;⁴
- An anticipated **reduction of 33%** in electricity consumption;⁵
- Changed staff habits that **reduced office paper consumption by 25%**.⁶
- Hosted informational sessions for the residents of its residential facilities on recycling/composting and water conservation;
- Purchasing arrangements with local, greencertified businesses for 30% post consumer waste paper, remanufactured toner cartridge, compostable foodware, and non-toxic cleaning products at competitive prices;
- Establishment and formalization of an internal Green Team consisting of members from all programs to spread the lessons learned and the enthusiasm from one facility to all others. This team charges the ways to further reduce HFC environmental footprint.

1. On-site assessments from *SF Energy Watch*, *Norcal Waste Systems*, and San Francisco Public Utilities – Water Conservation program.
2. Based on 2007 estimated utilities cost
3. *San Francisco Public Utilities – Water Conservation*
4. Actual change in waste services
5. Projected savings from the *SF Energy Watch – Energy Efficiency report* compared to 2007 electricity usage
6. Reduction in actual procurement of office paper product

Key Success Factors

We believe that several factors have led to the success of Connect the Dots' Green Start collaboration with HFC:

- HFC benefited from full support and motivation at all levels of the organization, including the Executive Director, Facility Manager, and Program and Administrative Staff.
- Connect the Dots and HFC team members regularly met to report back on actions assigned to both. We held each other accountable and more importantly, kept each other motivated.
- San Francisco has a strong ecosystem of services, programs, rebates, and providers to promote sustainability. Once organizations understand the support that is available, they can quickly accomplish a lot at less cost and effort.



Maikhanh Nguyen

Executive Director and Co-Founder

Phone: 415.830.5858

Maikhanh@connectthedotsnetwork.org

If you need to print this, please consider printing on both sides to reduce the amount of paper used.