



A Center of the Public Health Institute

Creating a Legacy of Capacity-Building

Terry Stone, Former Executive Director
The Center Orange County – Santa Ana, CA

Terry, a veteran executive director, was fairly new to his position at The Center Orange County when he began participating in the ODS program. Almost six months into his position, Terry realized that he had inherited a set of challenging circumstances. Terry said The Center Orange County had followed a common trend among nonprofits of “chasing the money” without making strategic decisions about growth. Terry added, “The organization had gone through rapid growth without planning for it properly.” When he started participating in the ODS program, Terry was in the process of evaluating The Center’s programs, creating a fundraising plan and restructuring the organization.

He said that the individualized technical support and the on-site sustainability training were some of the most helpful aspects of the program. “The work that [our technical support provider] did around sustainability was very helpful, for example asking difficult questions and having a hard conversation about our programs. Her way of letting the staff come to the information and helping them make their own decisions made all the difference. Also, she really did her homework in understanding our culture.”

When asked how the ODS program influenced him as an executive director Terry said, “How it affected me the most was that it gave me the confidence to question some of the old thoughts and ideas I often encounter as a new executive director. For example, when I started my new position, the board’s ideas about where they

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wanted the organization to go and my ideas about where the organization should go were different. If I had not been through the ODS program, I may not have been as likely to question everything. The ODS program gave me the confidence to move to a new level in terms of my skill set. The skills were there, but they weren’t honed. Part of it came from the executive director retreat and hearing from executive directors outside my field and the guest speakers. There were little nuggets of information that I took away – about marketing, how we set up our programs, etc. By the time we got to the on-site sustainability workshop, I felt it was okay to say that something was not going to work. I had permission to think differently.”

The ODS program not only affected Terry, but some of his staff as well. He described the difference in their capacity, “I noticed among the staff who were new, the ones I had hired, that they took on that critical eye. They started to look at what was and wasn’t working and re-tool the programs. Overall, the organization was less likely to be satisfied with the old way of doing things. They were looking at how to change the organization for the future. They had a better sense of what needed to be done to help it change.”

In Terry’s current position, he is now the one who provides capacity-building support to LGBT centers across the country and works with executive directors to build *their* skill sets. Terry said, “The association had been around a long time, but when I got here, I began to develop a technical assistance program.” Terry described how the legacy of the ODS program shaped how he provided his own technical assistance and how he envisioned CenterLink strengthening the community of LGBT centers. “Participating in the ODS program helped me be a better provider of capacity-building to our centers. I would say to them, ‘Let’s talk about how to sustain your program, how to think differently and how to work with your board.’ The things I learned in the ODS program really colored or affected the way I carry out my job. For example, I was doing some board training about six or

eight months ago. We were looking at the role of the board and we started looking at what they wanted to do and what was do-able. In the list of what they were doing, I asked 'Does this create revenue? Does the community buy into it? Is the program achieving the desired results?' This was what I learned in the ODS program. We began to

take the list of programs and we identified one or two things that were taking up a lot of the executive director's time and weren't getting results."

Another way in which the ODS program directly influenced Terry's capacity-building vision was his commitment to creating a peer network among executive directors of LGBT centers. "Another success is that we have built a network of folks. The CenterLink board members knew each other, but all the executive director members didn't know each other. We created venues for them to get together and learn from each other. Now they don't feel that they're going through this alone."

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