



Fletcher McCusker and his team have turned one of the healthcare industry's rarest niches into a high-demand service. Michelle Rivera reports.

Providence Service Corporation



Where the Heart Is



Studies show that nearly 60% of Americans in poverty who schedule an appointment with a caseworker don't show up for it, said Fletcher McCusker, CEO of Providence Service Corp. It's not that people don't feel like going—more than half are no-shows because they lack a way to get there. Providence Services never has this problem because instead of clients going to them, they go to the clients.

“Our customers are like the people who couldn't leave New Orleans—even in the face of a hurricane, they couldn't find a ride, a bus token, or money for a cab. The biggest type of relief we provide our clients is bringing them the services they need so they don't have to worry about transportation,” McCusker said.

Right place, right time

Providence Service started eight years ago as an exclusive home-based provider of behavioral and mental health services to Medicaid clients. The \$140-million company doesn't operate any facilities. Instead, it prefers to serve clients by going to their homes, schools, neighborhoods, and work places. The business currently has 160 office locations in 24 states, but the offices don't serve as a meeting place for clients and Providence employers. It's used as a home base for medical records and appointment scheduling. Employees don't need to go to the company's office, said McCusker.

Providence Service doesn't provide any commercial services, and it does no contracts with HMOs or traditional insurance companies; all

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of its contracts are on behalf of government beneficiaries. Since 2001, the company has been in constant demand, said the CEO. Its most recent quarter revenue was up 80% compared to last year.

“This business has been extremely successful because we continually attract new state and county governments that are interested in contracting our services,” McCusker said. “The number of beneficiaries has been increasing every year—mix that with the fact that there are few providers that offer services like ours. We're at the right place at the right time.”

That's good news for a company that's not allowed to market its services. Since it contracts with government beneficiaries, it's not allowed to court them away from another provider. “No client can access us unless they are referred to us by a government caseworker. All of our clients are third-party referred,” McCusker said.

“However, our task is to make sure those caseworkers are familiar with our services and





our willingness to provide services to their clients.”

McCusker said Providence’s home-based services give clients an edge over facility-based assistance. Instead of typically helping just one client, Providence can benefit an entire family in the household. The company’s family focus has been a huge advantage because it’s dealing with whatever it encounters in the home.

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kids are unruly. We help the families regain household stability.”

In most cases, Providence ends up helping up to three, four, five, or six clients as opposed to one. “If there is a boyfriend that the mother, our client, is struggling with, we’ll intervene with that. If her kids aren’t going to school, we’ll take them to school. If the kids are involved in substance abuse, we’ll get involved,” he said.

Safe and sound

Most of Providence’s clients live in difficult neighborhoods (DC, South Chicago, South Phoenix, and South Central LA, among others),



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but that doesn't deter Providence from going to clients' homes. This is significant because most poverty rates are up again for the fourth year in a row, said McCusker, which contributes to the high demand of its services.

"When you think about the behavioral health system, it has never been provided as a home-based service. It has always been traditional outpatient clinics, programs, residential treatment centers, and hospitals," he said. "None of those outreach to the client; we're really the first company that responds to them within 72 hours of contact."

This type of service has prompted McCusker to take several safety initiatives to protect his 4,500 employees. "Providence has done extensive training to prepare employees for any kind of problem, but astonishingly in more than eight years of service and 35,000 current clients, the company has never had an incident," he said.

Providence arranges for community escorts in the most difficult of neighborhoods. In the rare event that an employee does deem a household too dangerous or unsafe, he or she can require the client to come to one of the 160 offices, which McCusker said are rarely used for that purpose.

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McCusker said the company no plans to venture out into another area of healthcare—the niche Providence is in is good enough for him. "There are some smaller providers that do what we do, but we're the only provider of any scale that is exclusively devoted to home-based behavioral health and assistance," he said.

"We know we're good at this, and there's a huge demand for our services. We can barely keep up with the requests. We have no interest in developing a brick-and-mortar type of facility. There are enough of those. We intend to stay purely home-based, and we'll continue to be available to clients who like to see their care delivered to their homes," McCusker said.

