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Between caring for two 5-year-old boys before and after school and several disabled family members, as well as shuttling around her own teen-aged children, Lynn Antholzner's days are pretty busy.

Antholzner wants to open a licensed family daycare business for school-aged children at her Cheektowaga home, but just couldn't find time to attend an informational workshop to begin the state licensing process. That was until last month, when she found out about an online program that would allow her to participate in training on her own schedule.

"I was able to do it right from my home," she says. "It was easy for me to jump online, watch the video and answer the questions. I did it from my own home, drinking coffee."

The course, offered by the Child Care Resource Network, offers the beginning coursework for prospective home-based providers. Val Cooley, executive director of the Buffalo nonprofit agency, says the online training has expanded the agency's scope and allowed it to reach more potential clients, while reducing costs.

"It allows them to take the course when and as they wish whenever they have a sleepless moment," she says. "And for us, we would not even begin to be able to afford this technology."

The online training is made possible through a Community Access partnership between the University at Buffalo School of Management and the Not-for-Profit Resource Center at the United Way of Buffalo and Erie County. The partnership gives nonprofit organizations the opportunity to stream programs online, using UB's Digital Access equipment for "course-casting" to capture training or informational programs. The programs are then made available through UB's streaming server and linked the organizations' Web sites.

Already, nearly two dozen agencies have participated in the program, ranging from the Center for Hospice and Palliative Care to Exotic Cat Rescue and the Girl Scout Council of Buffalo and Erie County.

The idea is to make the same experience available to online participants as those who can travel to the agencies' classrooms and workshops. Because the events are captured from the attendee's point of view, there are no cameras in presentors' faces to interrupt the process or distract them. The technology also gives participants the opportunity to stop, rewind and review the training.

Cynthia Shore, assistant dean for corporate and community relations at the UB School of Management, says the partnership also gives UB a chance to connect with members of the community.

"We just loved that this was a beautiful combination of being able to share the expertise and the technology we have that others in the community cannot afford," she says.

In addition to expanding access to training, the program reduces costs for the nonprofits, not only for equipment or technology costs but for paying staff to deliver training.

The pilot project was started with two organizations, Consumer Credit Counseling Service of Buffalo and Compass House, followed by a cohort of eight more agencies. The third session already has 15 participating agencies.

Since the online program went live this summer, Cooley says the agency is seeing more participants in its programs.

"We're offering them the choice of taking it online or coming in and taking it directly," she says. "They love it. The other thing that it's doing for us is eliminating the people who say they're coming and don't – the no-shows."

Other agencies have used the technology to help train their volunteers. Compass House, a Buffalo shelter for runaway teens, used the program to record the preliminary section of its training for volunteers in its Safe Place program. Sylvia Nadler, executive director, says before her staff had to try to set up individual sessions and repeat the same information over and over.

"It's very hard to get a group of volunteers together. Now, they can access it at their own leisure and go back and refresh themselves."

Now the agency is considering using the technology for employee training to deliver a consistent message about agency philosophy, professional code of ethics and other areas covered for all new employees and board members.

Nadler says the agency would never have been able to offer this type of training without it being offered for free through the UB-United Way partnership.

"We're not technologically savvy enough and it takes some expertise and equipment we don't have," she says.

Joe Roccisano, director of the Not-for-Profit Resource Center, says the program meets a huge need among the nonprofit community, most of which just doesn't have the resources to offer this type of programming online.

It's especially helpful for agencies that must offer annual recertification training. That becomes difficult when the agency has staffers working 24 hours from multiple locations throughout the community and ends up offering the exact same training up to four times a week.

"I see a need to deliver important staff and volunteer training more conveniently for trainees and cost-effectively and consistently for the agencies," he says.

Roccisano says offering the program through UB was a great way to utilize an existing community resource without having to reinvent it just for nonprofits.

There is a bit of a learning curve for participants, however. Online delivery is not appropriate for all kinds of training, such as those where member participation is required. However, several agencies have found ways to use it for the standard portion of their training that comes before the interactive part, Shore says.

That was the case with Consumer Credit Counseling Services, which now must offer a 90 minute pre-bankruptcy counseling session to meet new legislative requirements. The first half of the counseling is delivered online now through the Community Access program, while the second half of the program that is more customized to the individual client is done in person.

"Then they could focus on what they were really skilled at, the one-on-one part that really needed their expertise," Shore says.