



Backline Customer Success Story: Douglas County Youth Detention and Behavioral Health Center

After Doubling Youth Center's Care Capacity, Secure Messaging Works to Close Technology Gaps for At-Risk Kids



About Douglas County Youth Center

- **Location:** Omaha, Nebraska
- **Serving:** 900 adolescent patients annually, ages 8-18
- **Staffing:** 26 medical and behavioral health providers and specialists
- **Care services provided:** Pediatric care, prenatal care and education, psychological crisis intervention, urgent care, and emergency services
- **Website:** <https://youthcenter.douglas-county-ne.gov/>

As the county seat to Omaha and the most populated local government in the state, Douglas County is a major health and human service provider in the State of Nebraska. Nowhere is that more evident than at the Douglas County Youth Detention and Behavioral Health Center, where care staff only ever refer to the children who temporarily reside there as 'patients.'

Youth center patients, from ages 8 to 18, arrive with an extraordinarily complex set of healthcare challenges. On a recent day, those challenges included helping prepare a young mother for not only childbirth but childcare, psychiatric services to diagnose and treat a teenage boy with a long family history of mental illness, and intervention services for a child dealing with the trauma of sex trafficking, to name just a few.

Approximately 900 adolescents are ordered to the center by the legal system each year, and all of them receive a thorough physical exam within 24 hours of arrival. The results often point to multiple medical and behavioral health disorders, including hard-to-treat chronic diseases and congenital issues.

The Challenge

"We have to be all things to these kids at all times because life, very often, has not been easy or kind," said Pamela Agee-Lowery, RN, the youth center's nurse manager for more than 15 years. "At an age where good health is a given for most people, our kids are dealing with obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure at 12, 13 years old. Gunshot wounds. The prospect of losing their teeth to decay. Things no child should be faced with. And that's a lot for a small clinical staff to deal with, especially when most of them are contract providers who don't work onsite."

For years, Agee-Lowery and her staff arrived at work every morning and wondered, "how." How in the world would they coordinate multidisciplinary care for at-risk children with little more than phone calls and faxes to manage a growing and increasingly complex caseload? In the age of electronic health records and patient privacy, care center staff continued to pass emails back and forth, played phone tag with the consultants providing specialty care, and spent a lot of time counting and recounting important details to keep their patients moving forward in their care plan.

Then the pandemic hit, bringing restrictions that prevented contract providers from entering the building and limiting in-person interactions between staff. Care coordination became an even more pressing issue than it had been before, creating urgency for Douglas County leaders to begin searching for a care collaboration solution capable of bridging gaps in technology and administration.



Today, care staff send an average of 1,300 secure messages every quarter, leveraging the kind of care coordination that makes significant improvements in patient care outcomes possible. For the youth center, that means overcoming barriers to medication adherence with secure messaging that keeps the care team focused on getting prescriptions filled faster and patients staying on their prescribed therapy for longer, even after discharge.

“We were a little archaic, to be honest,” recalls Carrie Rahman, lead for Douglas County’s electronic health records team. “Our challenge was to find a platform that our team could adapt to quickly, given our limitations using technology, but one that could also take us to a place of being ready to learn and do more with technology over time.”

The Solution

Douglas County implemented Backline as a secure messaging solution for the youth center in the early days of the pandemic, turning on group chat functionality and 1:1 SMS texting to increase the speed and efficacy of clinical communication between the center’s onsite care staff and the many clinicians and case managers who work off-site on contract.

Any concerns or hesitancy among the care team soon dissipated. The implementation was quick, and the impact was felt immediately. One of the first things Agee-Lowery noticed as a manager was a subtle shift in her team’s tone and mood. Like a weight had been lifted.

“I would get these messages, like ‘Hi! I just had an idea,’ or ‘Here’s something I noticed today with this patient,’ and I found myself doing that, too,” she said. “Backline freed us up, a little at first, then a lot, to think about our team and our patients in a more productive, collaborative way.”

Major efficiencies in workflow soon followed. Less lead time for patient consults was needed. Less waiting to get a child scheduled and seen by a provider meant more time to confer with specialists. Without paper trails to chase down and with far fewer calls and emails to return, more time was spent providing care to kids who needed it most.

The Success Story

“Backline has improved the nature of our care visits and increased our efficiency exponentially. Before Backline, our nurses could feasibly see 10 patients in a day. Now, we see 20 patients a day. That’s incredible. And in terms of crisis intervention and medication turnaround, we’ve cut days out of the process of getting a child seen by a specialist or changing a medication order. There are conversations that come up suddenly and need to happen quickly to put the care plan to work for the best possible outcome for that child. Backline enables better communication in every way that communication happens, from quick conversations to in-depth care team planning sessions, to electronic document sharing and signing. We never have to worry about safety or HIPAA compliance, which is great. Backline makes that mountain before us so much easier to climb.”

—Pamela Agee-Lowery, Medical Department Nurse Manager,
Douglas County

“With county government operations and administration, technology is always a little slow to come around. We were a little anxious about implementing Backline as a new technology platform. But we needn’t have worried. This was a really good platform to get us ready for the next stage in our growth, which is to implement an EHR. That’s next, and we’ll be ready for it later this year because of Backline. Now we’re excited to try new technologies.”

—Carrie Rahman, Applications Supervisor,
Douglas Omaha Technology Commission

Corporate Headquarters
9420 Key West Avenue, Suite 230
Rockville, MD 20850

Satellite Offices
Mesa, AZ
Germantown, MD

866.263.6511
sales@drfirst.com
www.drfirst.com

