

Greenbelt Profile: Willo Sullivan

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Willo Sullivan, a Program Manager in Graduate Medical Education (GME) at Dartmouth-Hitchcock, recently completed her first Greenbelt project.

Willo has worked in the health care industry for almost 30 years, taking on roles in management, finance, and education throughout that time. She started at D-H in 1995, in what was then called Patient Financial Services, as a Patient Counselor. She

has since worked in GME Radiology as a Resident and Fellowship Coordinator, in the Medical Staff Office as a Senior Credentialing Specialist, and in her current role in GME as a Program Manager.

While working in Radiology, where the department embraced the idea of working collaboratively on quality improvement, Willo became interested in process improvement work. “A project was being completed that involved administrators, nurses, technicians and physicians,” she says. “It was impressive to see the progress that a team could make even when they were coming from different views, different roles, and different needs. I wanted to be part of that kind of positive change.”

In early 2016, Willo joined her first Yellowbelt project team and completed her Yellowbelt certification. She has since taken the Greenbelt class and notes that the class gave her the opportunity to see tools in action, including tools that weren’t used in the first Yellowbelt project she worked on. “It was like a full project condensed into five days, including teamwork, role playing, and a supportive staff that provided a very comprehensive curriculum” says Willo.

Willo’s first project, GME Program Coordinator Development, sought to create a better delivery of information and expectations for new GME Program Coordinators and their mentors in the first year of training. “Without defined expectations and training tools it can be difficult for the new coordinator to fulfill the requirements of the position, and difficult for the mentor to know they have covered all of the areas necessary to get the coordinator started in the right direction,” says Willo. “We created a toolkit of information to support the coordinator through their first year. In addition, we wanted each mentor to be a ‘learning facilitator’ rather than simply the person with all of the answers.”

During the completion of her project, Willo made sure to use the tools and processes from the Greenbelt curriculum as

much as possible. “Sometimes it seemed like a lot of extra effort to use a tool and to believe that it would give you the outcome or additional information you needed to move forward, but it usually did,” she notes. “Allowing the process to happen takes commitment from you and your team. One of the facilitators in class once said, ‘Sometimes you have to see the process being done to really understand it,’ and they were right.”

Willo emphasizes the importance of the support she received from her teammates, coach, and classmates. “Not only were my teammates great – all current coordinators so they were also heavily invested in this project – but my coach Vicky was a rock. She is quite patient and encouraging, which was

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really needed sometimes,” says Willo. She also points out the value of the community created by the Greenbelt class, saying that she often received necessary encouragement by running into classmates and catching up on project progress. Willo’s coach Vicky adds, “Willo kept the team engaged from the kick-off meeting with the ice breaker right through to the end of the project. Because she understood the coordinators workflow she was able to schedule meetings around key timelines. She kept team members informed if meetings were missed or rescheduled. The structure she put around managing the project helped the team to create a great toolkit that will help new coordinators through their first year in the role.”

Overall, Willo says that the DMAIC process has impacted how she approaches her work every day. She says, “You begin to critically think about your tasks; is this the best way to do this? How might we cut some waste out of this process? What are the barriers to our success?” Looking ahead, Willo notes that it’s hard not to consider turning every problem into a Greenbelt project now. “There are many causes that come up during a project that are out of scope and you have to put them aside. Some of them you hope will work themselves out with the change. Others might become projects down the road.” Willo is an great example of someone who has been able to extend the skills taught by Greenbelt from the classroom, to a successful project, and now to her day to day work.