



The Learning Center for the Deaf Turns to UGL Services for Professional Facilities Maintenance

Flexibility and responsiveness to student needs is basis for success...

The Learning Center for the Deaf was founded in 1970. It was the first school in Massachusetts to depart from the "oral" method of education and to advocate the use of sign language in addition to spoken English. In 1988, TLC became a bilingual and bicultural school, placing it among the first in the nation. TLC is dedicated to fostering an informal, creative atmosphere and a commitment to full communication access, student-centered learning, academic challenges, and rich, meaningful learning experiences.

TLC is a day and residential school located on a 14-acre campus in Framingham, Massachusetts where early childhood through high school programs are offered to a student population of 210. A second campus facility in Randolph, Massachusetts offers parent-infant through 5th grade education, serving the area south of Boston.

TLC Framingham also includes the Walden School. The school has a nationally recognized program that serves deaf students from nine states, aged eight to 21, who are challenged by severe social and emotional difficulties that were not successfully addressed in other academic and residential settings.

Due to the nature of the student population, TLC faced unique facilities maintenance challenges that made it difficult to address long-term facility needs. For this reason, in 2009 Christopher Huggins, TLC Director of Business & Operations, decided to seek a professional facilities services company to manage the school's maintenance and oversee custodial, landscaping and other subcontractors.

Explained Huggins, "It was clear to us that the maintenance needs for our 17 buildings had grown and that we required additional oversight, expertise and support. We had heard good things from other schools like ours that have outsourced and felt that it was cost-effective and successful. UGL Services' name came up and we gave them a call. They were the most willing to really adjust to our needs and customize the service. They agreed to take on our current employees, which was also important."

The in-house, five-person staff remained as UGL Services employees while Karl Kuhn was brought in as Account Manager. Kuhn prioritized outstanding maintenance tasks and set up a preventive maintenance program. A school-oriented computerized maintenance management system (CMMS), called SchoolDude, was implemented and became the work order management and dispatch system. Now, faculty and staff use this web-based software to make service requests to Kuhn. The requests are dispatched by Kuhn and he reports back to the requestor when the task is completed.

"We combined the maintenance staff's experience at TLC and their excellent skills with our management expertise and the automated work order management system to move towards day-to-day and preventive maintenance programs that help raise the overall condition of the campus," said Kuhn.

PROJECT SUMMARY

Customer: *The Learning Center for the Deaf (TLC), Framingham, MA*

Industry: *Education for deaf day and boarding students, including students with behavioral issues.*

Situation: *TLC turned to UGL Services to bring professional maintenance management techniques.*

UGL Services: *Maintenance & operations*

Results: *Significant improvement to the campus. Completed several special projects using existing in-house staff.*

Flexibility Delivers

Yet, Kuhn soon discovered that meeting TLC's needs required more than just standard operating procedures and textbook responses. His first challenge, one that continues today, was to learn American Sign Language (ASL) in order to communicate with the two maintenance staff members who are deaf, as well as the students. He continues weekly ASL classes at TLC in order to continually improve his communication skills.

Because of the student makeup TLC also presented several unique maintenance challenges. Students at the Walden School have severe emotional issues. There's a tremendous amount of damage, especially when students are first introduced to the residences and campus. Said Huggins, "The kids are allowed to damage things; we usually do not restrain them because experience shows that it's therapeutic to let it happen and that the damage stops pretty quickly."

Beyond dealing with the ebb and flow of destruction by new students, Kuhn and his staff have tried to proactively address the issue. "Karl supported having kids pick their colors to see if it would make a difference with kids who were previously destructive within their bedrooms. Working with the kids on having a sense of ownership has had positive results," said Huggins. The staff has done other things at the Walden School to make it homier, such as placing artificial ivy and planters in the cafeteria that were high enough to be out of the kids' reach.

Visible Results

New management, a flexible approach and a dedicated staff have paid off. In just over a year the six-member team have completed scores of projects, from establishing building emergency books for every building, to completing several renovation projects, planting trees and shrubbery, and bringing scheduled preventive maintenance tasks current.

"We do it with in-house staff," said Kuhn. "We were hired for facilities maintenance, but we've been doing a lot of in-house construction, we've done grounds keeping and given a lot of special attention to these old buildings."

The efficiencies that Kuhn introduced delivered additional benefits. Commented Huggins, "Karl was able to reduce our overtime expenses keeping our costs in line. Outsourcing to UGL provided a much better product without an increase in cost to the school."



Entrance to TLC gymnasium

There were several noteworthy projects:

- The UGL Services staff was integral in helping TLC qualify for three prestigious accreditations: the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC); the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD); and the Council on Accreditation (COA). Walden School is the only residential treatment program serving deaf students in the USA that is accredited by COA.
- The maintenance staff created a park-like setting for an outdoor area. The area had been neglected and was overgrown with shrubbery. The staff pruned the shrubs and added some salvaged patio blocks, plantings, bird feeders and a few benches. They



Refurbished outdoor area

also encouraged people to bring in flowers. The result is that the outdoor area has become a focal point on the campus.

- The in-house maintenance team reconfigured the middle school classroom building over the summer converting an open classroom concept school to a traditional building with separate classrooms. Sheetrock walls were built to replace a series of cabinets and temporary plywood dividers. Commented Huggins, “The staff was amazed when they returned. The carpenters converted a section of the middle school that looked terrible and made it look wonderful – a place that we were embarrassed to take parents before – we’re now proud of.”
- UGL Services assisted TLC in replacing the gym roof. Kuhn checked with vendors that had worked with the company in the past and with other roofers in the area. The competitive bid resulted in a savings of about \$25,000 for the school.

The overall condition of the campus has greatly improved. “It’s clear that Karl and the staff care. I think that what we had hoped for has happened. The work is better organized and the staff is more productive due to Karl’s management skills. Everything is pretty much on schedule and the campus is looking a lot better,” concluded Huggins.