

Spotlight on Brown County Systems Project

One key component of the NIATx model is improving communication between everyone involved in the change project. Agencies using the model often find that communication between staff members and different departments improves as a result of implementing change projects together and sharing results. When the NIATx model is used at the system level, providers and funders find that building stronger relationships and open paths of communication helps create seamless care for clients and improved access to treatment. In August 2010, Brown County launched a county-wide process improvement project by initiating a workshop to provide NIATx training and identify areas to work on.

On August 4, 2010 Brown County and STAR-SI co-sponsored a process improvement training for area providers to begin a system-wide change project. 31 people from Brown County Human Services Department and 5 area treatment agencies attended; some experienced STAR-SI providers and others completely new to the NIATx model. Lynn Madden, the facilitator, not only taught them how to apply the NIATx model, but also led them through the Nominal Group Process to identify systemic issues to address. Participants identified two areas to focus on: 1) building a better understanding of other programs and funding sources available to clients to improve referrals, 2) instituting a “no wrong door” policy to ensure that clients are able to enter the treatment system regardless of who they contact first. In order to accomplish these goals, the participants realized that they would need to focus on strengthening their ties to each other.

Over the next six months, Brown County agencies will focus on improving communication amongst the county and treatment agencies in order to improve referrals to different levels of care. Each month, the participants will take part in a teleconference to discuss the change project. In addition, there will be two provider hosted networking events to give agencies an opportunity to share information about their programs. These teleconferences and networking events will keep providers up to date on the types of services available in the community and build open paths of communication that will improve the referral process for clients. When counties and agencies work as a team, everyone wins: the county uses resources more efficiently, agencies increase referrals, and clients receive better treatment. The Brown County System Change Project is working toward a more effective treatment system that includes collaboration amongst agencies and ensures better access for clients.