Spotlight on…Dane County Systems Projects

Over 40 Substance abuse treatment agencies throughout Wisconsin have utilized the NIATx model to increase access to and continuation in treatment. Simple tools like the Walk-Through and the Change Project Form utilizing the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle help providers identify and remove barriers to treatment. These tools are not only helpful at the individual agency level, but have also been used to make major improvements in treatment systems. Since December 2008, Dane County has been using the NIATx model to improve hand-offs between agencies and reduce the waiting time to treatment county-wide.

Starting in January of 2009, Strengthening Treatment Access and Retention (STAR-SI) partnered with the Dane County Chemical Dependencies Consortium to begin utilizing the NIATx model to help them achieve their county system wide goals. In May of 2009, representatives from 17 organizations and programs in Dane County attended the Consortiums Annual Summit and were trained in the NIATx model. At the Summit, participants identified hand-offs between agencies as a system-wide concern that could be addressed using the NIATx model. When clients finished treatment at one agency they were often referred to another level of care at another agency. Unfortunately, referrals between agencies were a confusing process with long wait times, so many hand-offs were never completed. Research shows that clients who fall through the cracks have higher rates of relapse than those who successfully complete the next level of care, so incomplete hand-offs were very concerning to the leaders in Dane County who work with the delivery of addiction treatment. In order to begin implementing improvements in the delivery system, Sue Moran, Clinical Area Manager, Mental Health Center of Dane County, led a change team with representatives from the Dane County Department of Human Services and four providers: Mental Health Center of Dane County, ARC Community Services, Hope Haven, and Tellurian. The team began meeting once a month to identify possible changes, discuss the data, and then decide how to proceed with the next rapid cycle. After each meeting, agency representatives were responsible for taking the information back to their staff to implement at their agency.

Although a formal Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) had been in put into place to begin prioritizing clients referred from Dane County participating agencies to address hand-offs between agencies, the team learned that without the structure of the NIATx model, results weren't being achieved. To date, there have been a number of successful rapid cycles within this project. One of those successful rapid cycles was when the team organized presentations by each agency to share information about their programs. Following this sharing of information, there was an improvement in referrals. Another successful rapid cycle included a "Dessert Meet and Greet" where providers throughout Dane County had the opportunity to meet each other over desserts after work on a Friday afternoon. By breaking down barriers, creating a smooth referral process, and improving communication between agencies the Dane County MOU Group has decreased clients' transition time between programs from 10.5 to 5 days and increased the rate of successful referrals from under 5% to over 60%!

The MOU Change Project had been so successful that the change team decided the NIATx model could also be used to address other system-wide concerns. Todd Campbell, Substance Abuse Services Manager at the Dane County Department of Human Services, was concerned that a small number of

clients who are repeatedly in and out of treatment use up a large proportion of County resources and create longer waiting lists for other clients. In order to address this problem, the team began a separate change project to place these clients in appropriate treatment that will lead to better outcomes, better use of resources, and shorter waiting times for other clients.

After identifying the clients to focus on, the change team developed a Release of Information Form for county-funded clients that would allow the team to discuss the best treatment options for the individual.   The change team meets monthly to identify clients on waiting lists who have been in and out of treatment at multiple agencies in the past. After the client signs the Release of Information Form, the team is able to identify services that will best meet the client's individual needs and lead to successful recovery.   In addition, the change team compares waiting lists to identify clients on multiple agencies' lists, therefore gaining a more accurate county wide wait list. The goal of the Dane County Wait Time Change Team is to get clients into treatment that best meets their needs so that they can achieve successful recovery. Fewer clients re-entering treatment means that more resources are available for other people and fewer duplicates on wait lists enables other clients to get into treatment sooner. Since October of 2009, the number of county funded clients on waiting lists has decreased by 35%!

Dane County has used the NIATx model to improve treatment system-wide. By convening change teams with representatives from the Dane County Department of Human Services and multiple providers, they have been able to identify barriers to successful treatment and improve services for clients county-wide. The NIATx model has been such a useful tool, that Dane County is now exploring ways to build it into their contracts with providers. They hope that it can provide a framework for continued improvement and encourage collaboration with providers system-wide to increase client access to and retention in treatment.   The Dane County Systems Projects are great examples of how providers can work together to improve services for everyone in the community.

If you would like more information about the Dane County Systems Projects or how to set up a system-wide change project in your community, please contact Deanne Boss, STAR-SI Project Coordinator at 608-263-0304 or Deanne.Boss@fammed.wisc.edu.