

Spotlight on St. Croix County

The St. Croix County Behavioral Health Department provides education, treatment, and support to county residents and families affected by alcohol or drug abuse. They offer a range of services, including: Intervention, Outpatient Treatment, Intensive Outpatient Treatment (Matrix Program), Case Management, and an Intoxicated Drive Program. St. Croix County joined the STAR-SI Project in the spring of 2008 and recently reduced clients' waiting time from assessment to first treatment session from 77 to 43 days and the number of clients on the waiting list from 30 to 11 by offering a brief treatment option to appropriate clients.

To begin the Change Project process, two AODA counselors and the clinical supervisor conducted a walk-through to gain a client's perspective on their agency's intake process and to determine areas for improvement. The walk-through showed the Change Team that the long wait list presented a serious barrier for clients seeking treatment. Once the Change Team had decided to focus on reducing waiting time, they used the Nominal Group Technique and focus groups with clients to find a possible solution. The team concluded that one way to shorten the wait list would be to offer brief treatment to clients who are reluctant to enter the regular treatment course, such as those who are still using despite going through treatment many times, or those who have been sober for an extended period of time without ever being in treatment.

St. Croix's brief treatment option offers clients information about substance abuse and treatment to make it a positive experience for reluctant clients. After staff identify a client who is appropriate for brief treatment, they tailor the session to the client's specific needs. For example, if the client has had quite a bit of treatment, they may concentrate on a fairly narrow goal to create a success to build off of later. On the other hand, for a client who has been sober for a period of time, they might discuss coping strategies or relapse-prevention. Brief treatment has enabled St. Croix County to effectively serve clients who do not wish to enter the regular treatment course, and to decrease the waiting time for others.

Encouraged by the success of their brief treatment change project, St. Croix County has launched a follow up project to reduce waiting time even further. They have added two 8 week groups geared toward clients that may not need the longer Primary/Aftercare of matrix group, but would benefit from the group process. The St. Croix change team expects to open up two treatment slots for every client seen in these shortened groups.