

## **Spotlight on Unified Community Services of Grant & Iowa Counties**

One of the most important aspects of the NIATx model is that it helps agencies improve services for clients and also strengthen their own bottom line. Agencies with a strong financial position are able to continue serving clients and advocating for the work they do. Lynn Madden, NIATx coach and CEO of the APT Foundation, points out that many funders and stakeholders, such as county boards, may not be familiar with the details of substance abuse treatment, so the business case is an effective communication tool. Showing that your agency is using resources efficiently and effectively can help you make the case for continued and increased funding. Unified Community Services of Grant & Iowa Counties' change project to decrease waiting time is an excellent example of how changes that benefit clients can benefit agencies.

The change team at Unified Community Services was concerned that the length of time clients had to wait between completing their assessment and entering treatment presented a serious barrier. In order to decrease clients' waiting time, Unified Community Services began conducting open groups and utilized a DHS 75 variance allowing them to increase group sizes from 8 to 10 people. Each time group attendance fell below 10 people, the next person on the waiting list was invited to join. By offering larger open groups, Unified Community Services decreased clients' waiting time from 28.2 to 17.5 days- a 67% decrease! Also, since clients were able to enter treatment more quickly, percentage of clients successfully completing treatment increased from 48% to 100%!

Decreasing waiting time to treatment clearly benefited the clients, but it also benefited the agency. Increasing the number of people per group decreased clients' waiting time and allowed Unified Community Services to serve more people. Figuring out the business case for a change can be confusing, but Unified used simple averages that could be communicated easily. After implementing the change, group sizes increased by 1.73 people. The group rate is \$50 per hour, and groups last 1.5 hours. This equals a revenue increase of \$129.75 per group or \$17,000 over 14 months!

The importance of the business case is not always that it represents the actual financial impact of a change, but often that it creates a compelling argument for it. Unified Community Services collects payments based on a sliding fee scale, so they do not actually collect all of their billable revenue. For the six months prior to increasing group size, Unified collected \$1,137 per month from group clients. Afterward, they collected \$1,222 per month- a 7% increase. Although their actual revenue increase was not as dramatic, the business case is still a valuable tool. It is a clear argument for sustaining the change and demonstrates the agency's commitment to providing top-notch services that utilize resources efficiently.