Spotlight on Genesis Behavioral Health

The NIATx model teaches providers to develop change projects that will improve their services; but what happens when a change is not an improvement? Genesis Behavioral Services learned that an unsuccessful change project is a learning opportunity that can lead to a real success.

In November 2008, Sara Gaska and Kim Kunz from Genesis Behavioral Health attended the STAR-SI Motivational Interviewing (MI) Workshop where they learned to use strategies like Open-Ended Questions and Reflective Listening to engage clients in treatment. After the workshop, Gaska and Kunz held a training for all Genesis staff to teach them Motivational Interviewing and to discuss how they might use the techniques to decrease clients' wait time between the initial contact and assessment appointment. Clients often scheduled their appointments more than a week out because they needed some time to come up with the assessment fee. Also, past balances due or balances out to collections were a barrier to clients returning to treatment. The change team hoped that the MI techniques might help the front line staff encourage clients to set up a payment plan for the fees and motivate clients to schedule the initial appointment within a week.

After the MI training, the change team developed a script to guide the office staff through making the initial assessment appointment. The script helped staff focus on why the client was calling by expressing empathy, using reflective listening, and asking the client when *they* would like to schedule their assessment. For two weeks before implementing the script, Genesis staff collected baseline data and determined the wait time from initial contact to the assessment appointment was 13 days. Their goal was to decrease it to 7 days. Next, the frontline staff implemented the script and collected data. After two weeks, wait time had only decreased by 1 day and their no-show rate had risen from 19% to 33%! The team needed to rethink their change idea.

During the next meeting, the Genesis change team discussed whether to modify or abandon the MI script. Although there had not been much improvement, office staff reported that they liked the script because it was a more natural way to gather information from clients. They theorized that wait-time had not improved because clients were still requesting appointments a week or two out from their initial call. The staff decided that instead of asking clients to choose their own assessment appointments, they would offer the first available appointment. Office staff implemented the modified script for another change cycle, measured the results, and discovered that wait-time to assessment had decreased to 4.6 days and no-shows had been reduced to 6%!

Despite initial frustrations, Genesis was able to use Motivational Interviewing techniques to decrease the wait-time. By re-evaluating their change project rather than discarding it, the change team was able to effect successful change.

STAR-SI Events

September 15-16, 2009

Change Leader Academy
Madison, WI
For more information, see www.niatx.net or
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October 20-21, 2009
Communities of Commitment: Building the Business Case
Madison, WI
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