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SYSTEM'S CHANGE BREAKTHROUGH!

Revised Outreach Efforts Lead to Addictions Treatment Increase

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BOSTON - The Boston Public Health Commission's *Entre Familia* program, a twelve month residential treatment program for substance abusing Latina women and their children, has enjoyed an **increase in the number of admissions** over the past year. This change follows the project team's efforts to increase the number of client referrals by engaging all treatment staff in outreach activities.



Project Team

At the forefront of these efforts we find Hortensia Amaro and Rita Nieves, the two Executive Sponsors for this project. These two individuals continue to find ways to engage project staff in trying to achieve two of the major project aims: to increase admissions into the project and to increase rates of continuation among the women served. "We are fortunate to have a team that continues to think outside the box and find creative and innovative ways to improve our systems and services", says Hortensia Amaro while announcing this breaking news at the press conference she held in October 13, 2004 at City Hall Plaza.

A diverse and talented group of individuals spent numerous hours in conducting these outreach activities including: Ana Alvarez, Maria Cabrera, Ana López, Luz M. López, Iliana Ojeda, Bethany Stuart, Lucy Zayas, among others.

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An Idea is Born: Outreach Plan Gets Revised

One afternoon in April while discussing the problem that only a very small percent of those needing addiction treatment receive it, the staff at *Entre Familia* decided they were going to see what they could do about it. Staff decided they needed to enhance the procedures currently in used to market the program and to conduct both client and agency specific outreach. During this planning session it became evident the need to maximize the project's resources by focusing the attention towards key agencies that generate most of the referrals. Many suggestions and good ideas were expressed by the team members making this session a very productive one. As a result, the project's existing outreach plan was revised to reflect the ideas and suggestions of the group. As Beth Stuart, one of the Clinical Coordinators present at the session stated "Experience has taught us that outreach activities need to be ongoing. Let's stop trying to reach every single referral agency in the state and concentrate on those that we know will yield the most referrals. Let's focus on the amount of agencies we know we can handle."

Together as a team the members decided to prepare a list of all the organizations and agencies in various geographic areas around Boston that serve women in need of substance abuse treatment. As a result of this brainstorming process the following agencies were identified as primary targets of the project's outreach efforts: The Department of Social Services (Child Protective Services), The Department of Correctional Facilities and the Detoxification Centers. Each staff member was assigned an agency or a particular task related to the revised outreach plan. For example, the two Executive Sponsors were responsible for meeting with the State's Commissioner of the Department of Corrections to identify ways to improve and increase the referrals to *Entre Familia* from the various facilities across the state. Although each member had a different type of activity to carry out, the marching orders were the same

for everyone: (1) to introduce or re-introduce *Entre Familia* and its services to their assigned agency, (2) to highlight the changes that have taken place at *Entre Familia* to improve client access and eliminate barriers to treatment, and (3) to establish lasting linkages and collaborations with the agencies. New collaborations were established and previous collaborations were strengthened. Fortunately for this team, the *Entre Familia* program has a Process Improvement Coach that was instrumental in facilitating this change process and assisted the team in thinking creatively. The coach, (as we like to call him) Don Holloway, helped the staff develop strategies for conducting outreach. The change team staff also participated in the *Admissions Interest Circle* calls to share ideas and outreach strategies with other members of the NIATx learning collaborative.

Admissions Increase

To track the impact of the outreach, staff tracked admissions and questions were added in the intake forms to find out how clients heard about the program. The number of admissions per month increased as can be seen in the graph below. The overall trend (red line) shows that admissions have increased. To see if the change in admissions was due to simply seasonal changes, they also looked at

admissions for the same months in the year before (yellow line) and saw that admissions this year were still higher.

What did the *Entre Familia* program learn?

The team realized that several staff members need to be included on an ongoing basis in outreach efforts to increase and maintain adequate numbers of admissions. Although time consuming and sometimes draining, they realized it was worth it.

"Let's stop trying to reach every single referral and concentrate on those that we know will yield the most referrals" Beth Stuart

Next Steps

After the first round of visits to agencies and presentations were conducted, a number of other activities are in process. These include: planning for a series of trainings for all staff on how to establish long-term relationships and collaborations with agencies, implementation of a toll free number for client intakes and referrals and dissemination of agency specific promotional materials. (See sample of promotional materials developed specifically for DSS below). "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has" – Margaret Mead, said. And the staff at *Entre Familia* proved her to be right. Indeed, this team of dedicated providers has some experience with trying to change the world and has a history of meeting big challenges; from implementing *Entre Familia* from the ground up, to integrating mental health and trauma into their services, to developing and implementing specialized services to pregnant-postpartum women, to integrating job training, stress reduction and spirituality interventions into substance abuse treatment and the list goes on and on We can only wonder what STAR they will be reaching for next.

