

Illinois Strengthening Treatment Access and Retention-State Implementation (STAR-SI): Spread and Sustainability

Theodora Binion Taylor, Director of the Division of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse (DASA) at the Illinois Department of Human Services has championed the state's commitment to extending process improvement statewide through the Strengthening Treatment Access and Retention-State Implementation. Throughout the project, Director Binion Taylor has stressed that process improvement will continue in Illinois after the funding period ends, and that the state will develop ways to facilitate and help providers spread and sustain their improvements.



The Illinois STAR-SI application included a spread and sustainability plan that the partnership built upon. As the project matured, the state-level team identified opportunities to expand its spread and sustainability efforts to the state staff and all funded providers.

The Illinois project hosted two STAR-SI learning collaboratives in each year of the project. In Years 2 and 3, interested providers outside of the STAR-SI group were invited to attend. These events promoted valuable peer-to-peer networking that also promoted spread and sustainability.

The state change team scheduled monthly calls with STAR-SI providers and coaches for the first Monday of each month.

The regular conference calls will continue, and the state has recently received approval to offer web-based conferencing as a way to collaborate and conduct meetings with providers across the state.

At the state level, a weekly teleconference helped keep all state change team members up-to-date on the project.

The state team also used the Smart Alerts feature on the DASA web site to share information with all funded providers. These e-mail bulletins transmit timely news and regulatory changes.

A February 2009 Smart Alert <http://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=42873> invited all Illinois funded providers to a special one-day informational session titled "Improving Client Engagement and Retention: Using NIATx Methods to Improve Agency Processes and Performance."

The state team hosted these one-day sessions at three different locations in the state, to make the opportunity available to as many funded providers as possible.

The aim of the sessions was to introduce providers to process improvement and to a new data report developed through the STAR-SI project. With STAR-SI carryover funding, Illinois developed a “provider performance” data report on access and retention measures.

Interested providers were required to complete a registration form in advance of the information session, which allowed the state team to run the provider performance data reports for the providers in attendance. “These data reports will play a vital role in the STAR-SI spread and sustainability efforts, with performance-based contracting becoming effective in 2010,” explains Peggy Alexander, deputy director of DASA and State Change Leader for the STAR-SI project.

State, provider staff, NIATx coaches and peer mentors presented at the sessions. Nearly 100 providers attended the three sessions combined.

The Illinois project also identified the NIATx Change Leader Academy early on as an ideal spread and sustainability mechanism. “Because DASA is committed to building process improvement into all of our activities, we wanted to develop a pool of state and provider staff who are not only knowledgeable about process improvement, but can also lead change in their own organizations,” says Peggy.

Change Leader Academies have been offered at different locations in Illinois in May and September 2008 and May and June 2009. Recognizing current budget constraints, DASA invited all state-funded providers to participate at no charge. Peggy encourages other states or systems to consider offering a Change Leader Academy early in their projects. She comments, “The NIATx Change Leader Academy is extremely helpful for newcomers because it gives an overview of the model and also builds leadership skills.”

Kellie Gage, Federal Project Manager at DASA and STAR-SI state coordinator, is prepared to participate as a trainer in the future Illinois Change Leader academies. Her expertise in process improvement will support the state team’s efforts to spread and sustain process improvement when the project ends. Kellie has observed that providers are spreading process improvement in their own organizations. She comments, “Many of our providers offer mental health as well as substance abuse treatment, and those who are gaining more confidence with process improvement are conducting change projects in their mental health settings.”

The Adopting Changes to Improve Outcomes Now (ACTION) Campaign has been another effective method to spread and sustain process improvements throughout the state. Director Binion Taylor sent a Smart Alert bulletin alert encouraging all providers to enroll in the campaign as a way to learn more about process improvement.

Forty-five Illinois providers enrolled in the campaign, the majority of them with no previous experience with process improvement or NIATx. Adds Kellie, “The ACTION

Campaign was another tool that allowed us to spread awareness of process improvement beyond the group of participating STAR-SI providers. It was also great preparation for those who later attended one of our learning collaboratives or a Change Leader Academy.”

The Illinois provider association, Illinois Alcoholism & Drug Dependence Association (IADDA) IADDA is a statewide organization representing more than 100 prevention and treatment agencies, as well as individuals who are interested in the substance abuse field. IADDA has helped support the state’s spread and sustainability efforts in Illinois by promoting the ACTION Campaign.

Illinois state and provider staff attended the NIATx Summit/SAAS National Conference in 2007 and 2008, presenting on their state’s activities in conference workshops. The conference has served as a skill building and networking opportunity for the Illinois teams, providing motivation, inspiration, and ideas on how to spread and sustain the project’s efforts.

The Illinois team is also participating in the NIATx Community of Commitment, Whole System Change. The Illinois project targets performance-based contracting, which focuses on access and retention. Thus the Whole Systems Change Community of Commitment will help strengthen STAR-SI’s effort to prepare all funded providers for performance-based contracting.

In another sustainability effort, the DASA Help Desk staff will be trained in process improvement, to assist providers who need direction.

Spread and sustainability efforts will be on the agenda of upcoming conferences: a joint DASA/IADDA event for all providers and a closeout meeting with the STAR-SI providers, both scheduled for September 2009.

Concludes Peggy, “The STAR-SI project is helping us build a culture of process improvement statewide.”