

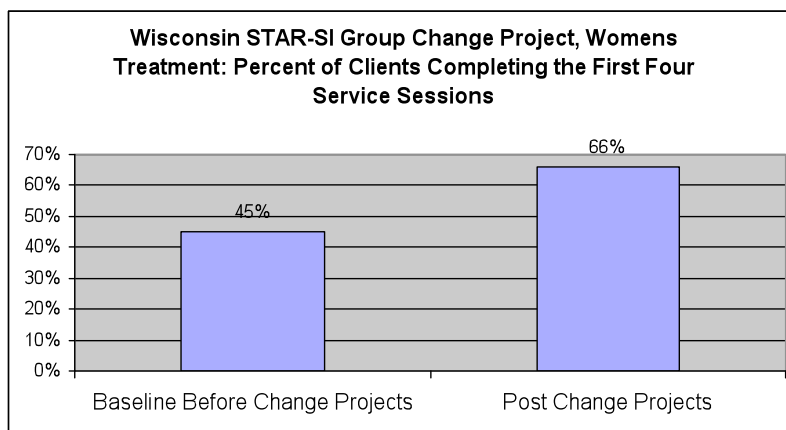
STATE CHANGE PROJECT 2

Retention Performance

Can fresh-baked cookies improve client retention in treatment? An interesting, outside-the-box question. A Wisconsin psychiatrist working with adolescents once said, “As long as I had his favorite candy bar in the candy tray, John came to our sessions.” Was it really the candy bar? Or was the candy bar just a symbol of the psychiatrist’s caring for his patients, which kept them coming back? In this group change project, the Wisconsin STAR-SI project puts it to the test.

The Wisconsin state substance abuse agency (also the STAR-SI agency) funds four special women’s treatment grants in four private non-profit treatment centers around the state. At the encouragement of their state contract administrator and with an added incentive of reduced paperwork, the four agencies attended NIATx Process Improvement 101 training and signed up to participate in STAR-SI. To **Plan** the group change project, the providers were asked to decide as a group on a single NIATx measure they would all improve. The four agencies agreed to address the aim of increasing retention to the fourth treatment session, but stipulated that they would each be allowed to implement their own unique change ideas.

The group change project began in the fall of 2007 with each agency **Doing** their unique plans. The



four providers implemented a variety of change ideas including offering fresh-baked cookies to clients during appointments, spending more time explaining services to clients, having clients set their own treatment objectives, addressing barriers to attending sessions, reminder calls, introductory letters from counselors, and gift card incentives. The four providers participated in a STAR-SI-sponsored group teleconference each month for the next several months as they implemented their change

projects. The conference calls gave them an opportunity to share their progress and exchange ideas. Brief individual phone contact was also made with them each month.

Having four providers implementing unique change ideas was a challenge to **Studying** the results. However, it was clear that the providers who put forth the best efforts in implementing client-focused change ideas had better success. The two providers judged as putting forth the best effort achieved increases in retention to the fourth treatment session from 65 percent to 92 percent and 55 percent to 81 percent with an average increase of 26 percentage points. One of these two providers had 100 percent retention to the fourth treatment session during three-fourths of the reported months! The other two agencies judged as not putting forth as good an effort, largely due to staff turnover, achieved smaller increases averaging 15 percentage points. Overall, the four projects achieved a 21 percentage point increase in retention.

The final **Act** of this group change project was a heart-felt congratulation to the four agencies for their accomplishments from the state STAR-SI agency and encouragement to sustain their gains by keeping an eye on retention in the months ahead. Did the fresh-baked cookies work? You decide.