Urban Partnerships for Welfare Reform: National Academy

Using Technology to Improve Service Delivery

Cleveland

Key Features

- **The Pre-Employment Screening Tool** is a computer-based assessment tool that screens for barriers to employment such as AoD (alcohol and other drug), mental health, domestic violence, literacy, child abuse, physical and learning disabilities, health issues and motivation

  - The Screen streamlines the findings into one summary, informing Self-Sufficiency Coaches of client needs. This up-front information is designed to allow for enhanced self sufficiency planning through better program and job match, and improved employment outcomes

- In addition to individual forms for each of these barriers, the Screen features multiple specialized tools:

  - **GAIN-Q** detects issues requiring intervention in physical, emotional and psychological health areas
  - **Washington 13** is a nationally recognized set of 13 questions that reveals the likelihood of a learning disability. The 13 questions are weighted, and the database automatically calculates the score as answers are submitted
  - **O*NET** allows people to explore work-related interests and potential careers that build upon those interests
  - **Vocational Findings** is the summary report created at the end of the screen and submitted to the Self-Sufficiency Coach prior to the Intake Appointment

- Information is entered directly into a centralized database across 7 sites, where it is stored for analysis and utilized for program and strategic planning

Successful Strategies

- Front line buy-in was critical for program success

- The RFP specified that the Screeners be credentialed and/or certified in AoD, mental health or employment and training

- Screening staff received intensive training from EFS on its programs and services, as well as cross training in the various disciplines reflected in the screen

- Vocational Findings Summary synthesizes self-disclosed and observational data into recommendations used by the front line staff for self-sufficiency planning

- For those whose screen indicates AoD or mental health issues, clinical staff is available to conduct full assessments, on-site daily

- Electronically entering assessment data into the database during the screening interview is much more efficient and effective than pencil and paper instruments

Surprises

- For the pilot, the instrument and database were quickly developed, yet it held up to modifications without compromising the data

- Almost one third of cash applicants do not subsequently open a case suggesting that information and referral provided during the screening interview may be an effective diversion strategy

- Volume: 95 % of the 6,000 screens conducted since July 1, 2005 have occurred prior to the intake appointment with the Self-Sufficiency Coach

- Third party, non-County staff conducting screens is effective at eliciting candor with clients; the link between disclosure and subsequent benefit issuance is likely to be less threatening

- Data files, particularly in the Gain-Q, became much larger than anticipated, occupying significant space first on the individual computers, then on the server

Challenges

- The database has undergone several functional applications, beginning as a paper/pencil tool, progressing to individual databases housed on each screener's computer, and finally being stored on a network server with all screeners having access

- Self disclosure at the point of application continues to have drawbacks, as barriers remain hidden until the applicant develops a rapport with their worker

- Screening clients the same day is critical, as no-show rates for rescheduled screens remain high

- Modifications must be made to the database to streamline and standardize data collection while maintaining the integrity of the data

- On-going training must occur to ensure that the screeners are all aware of changes in policy, benefits, and contracted services

- Evaluating the long-term outcomes of the program requires analysis of multiple, segregated, cumbersome data systems, all of which have their limitations

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Replication Advice

- Involve staff at various organizational levels in development and implementation of program

- Build the database before the program is implemented, identifying key stakeholders' data needs, and streamlining and coding responses where possible

- Develop a guide to include field descriptions and response definitions to improve standardization by screening staff

- Design a data collection system that will support the existing work flow

- MIS/IT support is needed from both the County and the Provider and there must be a clear delineation of duties and roles

- Regular feedback from stakeholders and assessors is critical in order to make adjustments

Managing During Change

- EFS piloted the Pre-Employment Screen at 2 sites the first year to work out bugs and assess the value of the program. Other 5 sites-business as usual

- We "flipped the switch" on July 1, 2004--ready or not (every new OWF applicant walking in the door at the pilot sites received the screen after July 1)

- Initial screens were completed manually until the database was "ready" and paper screens were subsequently entered so that no data was lost

- We solicited feedback during the pilot year from clients, front line staff, managers, and the provider staff and modified the screen to reflect staff data needs

- We competitively procured a contract for year two, to bring the pilot to full scale and spent time promoting the "program" to the non-pilot sites utilizing pilot staff

- We rolled out the modified screen to all 7 sites beginning with the new contract and program year

Visions for the Future

- Both processes and outcomes will be evaluated, using quantitative and qualitative indicators to answer:

  What percent of new OWF cases receive a screen?

  What percent of those who are screened open an OWF case?

  What percentage of the recommendations that are made by the screener, result in a corresponding referral to a provider?

  Has the provider no-show rate decreased? The drop out rate?

  Has the overall participation rate increased?

  Are the employment outcomes higher for those who receive a screen?

- The next modifications to the database will be in place on July 1st
  – Testing is currently under way

- To ensure the client is informed and involved in his/her self-sufficiency planning, EFS will develop a client notification letter to automatically generate at the end of a screen, informing the client of specific services and programs he/she may be interested in based upon his/her responses to the screening questions

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