

Pilot Project Explores Residential Client Experience

The impact of any program is best measured by how it affects the clients it serves. Accordingly, in the late fall and early winter of 2008 and 2009, the Addictions Foundation of Manitoba (AFM) conducted an assessment of the residential client experience in the province.

The residential program gives clients opportunities and assistance to address their relationship with alcohol, drugs or gambling in a highly structured environment. “Evaluation of client outcomes is something that a program like ours always needs to do,” says Jim Marnoch, a counsellor at the James Toal Centre in Winnipeg. “It tells you what you're doing right as well as what you're doing wrong.”

The client experience was assessed using four criteria:

1. A client's motivation for change (pre and post program)
2. Client satisfaction with the programs
3. Connection and engagement with the counsellor
4. Overall thoughts

The purpose of the project was explained to the approximately 300 clients admitted into the residential program's five sites during the assessment period. The surveys were conducted confidentially, with no names recorded. Clients completed one survey related to motivation (based on the URICA scale¹) during their first

week in the program and another addressing motivation, satisfaction and engagement during their final week.

Results

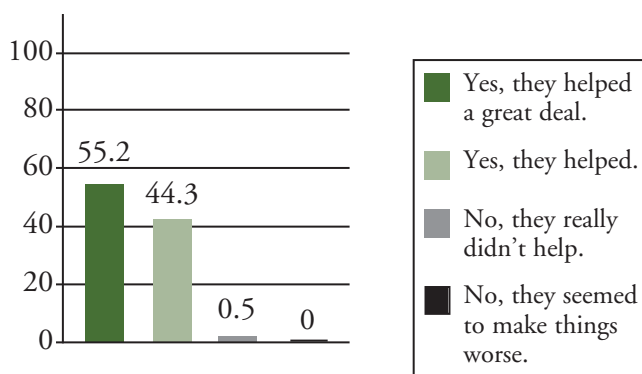
“The results on the whole were quite encouraging,” notes Marnoch. Approximately 67 percent of clients stayed in the same stage of motivation to change (of those, more than half fit into the prepare/action stage), while about

16 percent moved up to the next stage.

On the other hand, approximately 18 percent of clients moved from a more motivated state at the beginning

Continued...

CSQ-6: Have the services you received helped you to deal more effectively with your problems?



¹ The University of Rhode Island Change Assessment (URICA) scale is a 32-item self-report measure that includes 4 subscales measuring the stages of change: Precontemplation, Contemplation, Action and Maintenance.

of the program to a less motivated state, indicating that improvements to the program could always be made. A future project investigating the reasons behind these shifts – both forward and back – could provide more meaning to the statistics. Clinical staff has also indicated that, for some incoming clients, cycling back a stage to a more realistic self-assessment of their motivation is a necessary prerequisite to making positive choices.

On the second survey, clients were asked to answer eight questions related to their level of satisfaction with the program. Out of a possible 32 points, clients rated services at an average of 28.14. Results ranged from 19 to 32.

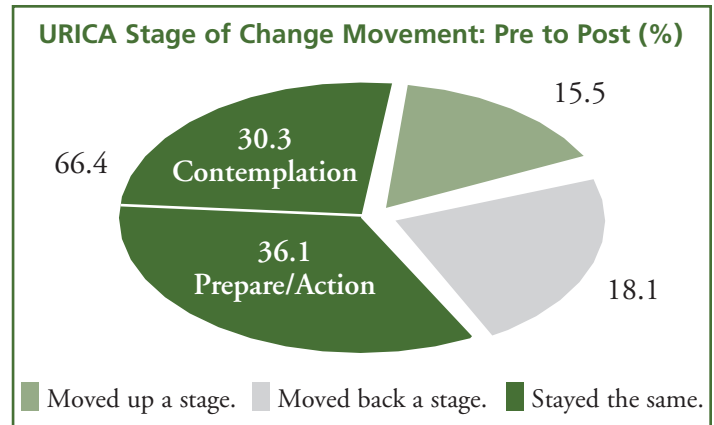
When asked whether they felt the program had helped them, only one of the clients responded “no,” with 99.5 percent in the affirmative category. “I enjoyed the experience and found it to be very helpful for my problems,” wrote one client, “and I would recommend it without hesitation to anyone with similar problems in their life.”

Equally positive were clients' assessment of their engagement with their counsellor. Out of a possible score of 84, clients gave the program an average of 70.7, with a range of 34 to 84. This is particularly important because research has shown that the therapeutic alliance between client and counsellor is a key component of treatment outcomes. “Speaking for myself, the jobs these counsellors do are most amazing,” wrote one client, “they put you right on track and take time to show you your goals in life, because life is too short to live with addiction.”

Changes Resulting from the Assessment

While clients rated the overall program very highly, they also pointed to a few areas that could be improved. Outcomes, including comments, were shared and fully discussed with AFM staff, including Provincial Supervisors, Senior Management, Board of Governors and those staff involved in the project.

As a result, client concerns about dated overheads, videos and reading materials were addressed with the



acquisition of some new materials for the program. Participants also expressed a desire for more one-on-one counselling. “We now ensure that in the first three days, they definitely get some one-on-one,” says Marnoch, acknowledging that there had previously been gaps in meeting this basic practical need.

“I think that doing these kinds of projects is essential,” he adds. “We're so busy that we can forget to look in the mirror. But you have to.”

How the AFM's Residential Program Compares

Clients' ratings of satisfaction and engagement were either comparable or higher than results of other studies using similar tools. While it is important to take into account political, contextual and programming differences in studies conducted outside of Manitoba, the URICA scale has been widely used to assess clients similar to those of the AFM. However, it is true that this form of assessment does not necessarily capture the clinical changes that AFM staff see every day. A broader standardized set of program indicators across provinces and territories would enable a more accurate comparison. Nevertheless, even without benchmarking, the residential client experiences assessment provides a wealth of information and useful insights into how well the program is working and what areas of residential services may need to be enhanced.