

County Opioid Summit

First Steps to Healthy Babies - A partnership between Sanford Health, Red Lake Family and Children's Services (FCS), and Beltrami County Health and Human Services

Initiative Story

For years, collaborative groups in Bemidji and surrounding communities had been discussing the complex issues that service providers in our area face. We are a rural community, centrally located near three large Reservations, and Bemidji is a hub for services. Our community faces barriers including a high poverty rate, overtaxed resources, lack of transportation/affordable housing, and high out-of-home placement rates. We noticed an increasing trend in number of babies diagnosed with Neonatal Abstinence Syndrome at birth. A lot of the mothers did not receive prenatal care. Subsequently, many of those babies who tested positive for drugs at birth went straight into foster care. Most of our foster placements in our county are tied in some way to substance use issues in the families we serve. We decided to focus our attention on preventative efforts with pregnant women. We received three years of funding from *PrimeWest Health's Community Reinvestment Grant* and our collaborative program came to be.

Program Intent

First Steps to Healthy Babies uses an intensive case management module aimed at ending prenatal substance abuse and encouraging a healthy, sober lifestyle through supportive relationships, education, and health services. Case management is provided in a non-judgmental way, using harm reduction and motivational interviewing styles, and close collaboration between agencies. Part of our program's goal was to implement a Medication Assisted Treatment (MAT) clinic for when use of buprenorphine is appropriate. We meet the client where they are at -- and help them to set goals from there.

Implementation

Partnerships and planning began immediately when the grant was received. Three partner agencies took different approaches to case management, operating within their own scope, but working closely together to serve our intended population. Simultaneously, staff met with area agencies and began to do outreach and community education via meetings and presentations. Approximately one year into the grant, we also partnered with the local mental health center to provide chemical dependency counseling to the clients who would benefit from outpatient services. Any client who participated in our MAT clinic, was also referred there for counseling.

Results

In our 4th year, we have seen a decline in the number of babies testing positive for illicit substances at birth. Our community is supportive of our program, and there is less stigma associated with seeking help. In addition, we have seen a significant increase in the number of babies going home from the hospital with their parents rather than into foster care. We hope to continue our collaboration. Beltrami County and Sanford Health continue to fund the case manager positions and operate as originated. Red Lake sought alternative funding when the grant was complete, and they are now offering services through chemical health rather than FCS.

Lessons Learned

- Collaboration is key. It helps to partner with other agencies who serve this client population;
- It takes time for clients to trust that they won't get into trouble for coming forward for help;
- This population can be difficult to locate. Serve them right away, if possible, because they may not come back;
- There are not enough resources (beds) for inpatient CD treatment for pregnant women in the state;
- There is always more paperwork than you think. Plan your timelines accordingly. (Especially with MAT); and,
- This is a population that doesn't plan ahead. Set small goals. Incentives or transportation make a big difference.

Contact Information

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