

Screening, Brief Intervention & Referral to Treatment in the Court System for Driving While Intoxicated Clients: A Demonstration Project

Executive Summary

Being arrested for driving while intoxicated leads to court appearances, fines, increased insurance rates, and sometimes worse, if anyone gets injured or killed. With a grant from the Minnesota Department of Public Safety, an innovative team of public and private organizations has designed and implemented a way to help first-time driving while-intoxicated (DWI) clients reduce their risk for repeat offenses. The initiative inserts the Screening, Brief Intervention and Referral to Treatment (SBIRT) model within the court DWI process in Duluth, Minnesota. The project work was designed, facilitated and managed by the Institute for Clinical Systems Improvement.

SBIRT is an early intervention for persons with risky alcohol use. The model consists of *Screening* to identify people at risk for developing substance use disorders; *Brief Intervention* to raise awareness of risks and consequences, motivate for change, and help set healthier goals; and *Referral to Treatment* to aid access to treatment and coordinate service for people with high risk and/or dependence.¹ The assumption is, based on evidence mainly in the primary care setting, that screening and brief behavioral counseling on reducing alcohol consumption or adopting safer drinking behaviors will reduce future risks (legal, social, medical) associated with drinking alcohol.

Led by the Honorable Shaun Floerke, Minnesota's Sixth District Chief Judge, a core team of representatives from court administration, public defense, probation, public health, an arresting agency, and a local chemical dependency treatment provider developed a process by which first-time DWI clients go through the SBIRT process within a few weeks of their arrest, as part of their scheduled time in court. This process is speeding up case processing time and helping clients address their risky behavior.

This demonstration project resulted in: court system changes and improvements, such as faster case processing time; core team benefits such as increased knowledge about SBIRT and Motivational Interviewing; and community benefits due to enhanced relationships among participating organizations. Most importantly, the DWI client benefits from this project. Clients receive valuable information about their drinking behavior and its potential impact, are guided in addressing their risky behaviors, and are referred to treatment when appropriate. Several clients expressed appreciation for the intervention, and most who have completed the follow-up interview report positive behavior changes. To date, none have received a second DWI in Duluth.

Key to successfully implementing a project like this is the mindset and passion for working with clients to address and change their risky alcohol use and behavior. It takes a team of

¹ More information about SBIRT can be found at www.icis.org.

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committed people, likely from a variety of organizations or areas of the court system working together, with common understanding and goals to successfully implement and maintain SBIRT in the court setting in this way.

Many recommendations for implementing SBIRT in the court system for first-time DWI clients emerged over the course of this demonstration project. Five priority recommendations identified by the core team are:

- Assess the overall core team mindset regarding philosophies and acceptance of the SBIRT model for this population. A willingness to understand and work out a process must be present; the project cannot be successful without common understanding and agreement at the start.
- Have a Judge champion the project. Inserting a new model into the existing court process requires interpretation of the ability to make necessary changes and the authority to make them happen. The role of the judge as the key leadership voice is paramount.
- Create a supporting courtroom culture by ensuring everyone understands the work and knows the participants. Ensure the interventionists are easily connected to the client, and able to meet with them immediately before or after they appear in court.
- The screening tool and intervention in this model may be useful in other areas, such as probation. However, it is important to understand that this screening cannot replace all other required and established assessments. Take the time to discuss and create a communications plan regarding the differences among screening, assessment, and other similar probation/court enforcement proceedings.
- Establish measures early (include recidivism as early as feasible), track and monitor progress, and tweak the process frequently in order to move toward goals.

This work has been integrated into the court process, and will continue to be sustained by the core organizations for at least the remainder of this calendar year. The team is exploring expanding the client pool to include additional offenses related to alcohol or drugs, and considering providing SBIRT training broadly, especially for court, probation, and public defense staff.