

Shiawassee Co., Michigan: Embracing a Community Network to Support Recovery from Addiction

Introductions

Amy Conrick In 2017, the Federal Transit Administration funded efforts in seven communities to improve transportation for people going to healthcare appointments. Each community chose a different focus for its project and assembled a multi-sector team of colleagues who had expertise in their chosen focus area. As they worked to address their chosen issue, they followed a human-centered design process called design thinking.

In this video, we asked the Shiawassee, Michigan team to talk about their efforts to assist clients in finding transportation to the multiple weekly appointments they must attend related to their substance abuse treatment.

Let's listen as the team describes the problem they were addressing, the solutions they came up with, and the impact they hope those solutions will have on individuals in their community.

MaLissa Schutt In our community, we currently have a movement of professionals in the recovery world if you will that created the Alliance for a Drug-Free Shiawassee. So the issue is at a forefront in our community right now.

Marlene Webster My organization is a local grassroots organization that I founded six years ago. And our goal is to address poverty barriers for people to help them move from poverty to possibility, we say. And so we work in local neighborhoods where there are high concentrations of people in poverty. And we pair them with mentors called navigators, who helped them start to overcome some barriers to move forward.

Samantha Ardelean Shiawassee Hope sits on the Shiawassee Drug Court team as community resource liaison. We connect Drug Court participants to navigators to help them coordinate their transportation needs.

Bringing the Issues into Focus

Sari Colbry Drug Court participants are required to attend several appointments a week. They have to see myself, the case manager, the probation agent, have Drug Court with the judge, have two individual counseling sessions, a group counseling session, two peer support groups, and random drug testing.

Samantha Ardelean One of the conditions of Shiawassee Drug Court is mandatory drug testing, otherwise known as a drop. What that means is participants are assigned a color upon entry to Shiawassee Drug Court. The participants must call a hotline every single day to see what color has been called. If they do have to report that day, they have to show up to a particular place

within two hours of finding out. Getting to your mandatory appointments that are required in Drug Court is not optional. If you miss those or are late to those, you could possibly get a sanction and end up in jail.

The Research Phase

MaLissa Schutt When I was doing the research, I had the opportunity to interview Drug Court participants and got to know them and had the opportunity to involve them in the process.

Marlene Webster We met one young man who was walking 16 miles a day to meet all of the requirements of meetings and appointments to participate in Drug Court.

Sari Colbry We found we needed to educate the public about addiction, recovery, and the requirements of specialty courts.

Samantha Ardelean As we did our research, we found that there were many transportation issues in Shiawassee County for Drug Court participants, one being that the transportation that is available currently is not on demand. There really is no best case scenario. For SATA currently, you have to call and have your appointments lined up within 24 hours, so there's no possibility that let's say if you live in Vernon, which is about 20 miles away from Corunna, that you're going to be able to call that day and get an appointment.

MaLissa Schutt Our service in Shiawassee County is not countywide so there's rural areas of our county that do not have the bus service. So we needed to look at some creative ways that did not require a great deal of funding because funding is always an issue to be able to help those Drug Court participants that are in the more rural areas and having difficulty getting to the Drug Court requirements.

Marlene Webster As a recently elected county commissioner, one of the issues that does impact our community deeply is transportation. And we need to be looking for these sort of innovative solutions that create a local grassroots answer to a complex problem. There won't always be federal dollars or tax dollars to come up with solutions to these kinds of issues. And local innovation really is a key answer to solving some of these problems.

The Solution

Samantha Ardelean One of the most innovative parts of my team's solution is the community safe space.

Marlene Webster So our solution was to create a community hub and to look for a building close to Shiawassee County Courthouse, where we would be able to have a bank of bikes, a team of volunteers, and a space where Drug Court participants could stay between appointments. They could work on their GED, they could work on job applications, maybe they could just have coffee or have even an NA or AA type meeting at that location. Lots of resources for them in that

hub, but have a place from which they could constantly connect to whatever sort of transportation they might need.

Samantha Ardelean I love the idea that there would be a place that Drug Court participants could go to not only solve their transportation needs, but to possibly work on their GEDs, to access a computer so that way they would be able to apply to jobs online, and do other things that they would need to do, all while getting their transportation problems met.

Marlene Webster So when I think about the value that this will bring to Drug Court participants, one of the things that is true for Drug Court participants is they have really sort of chaotic lives. In a community hub, a place where you can sort of always check in and know that there's someone there not only with a transportation solution, but maybe with other answers or just a listening ear as well. I think that adds a lot of value that we didn't anticipate to have in the beginning.

MaLissa Schutt In our solution, we chose to use volunteer drivers that would help to transport the Drug Court participants, specifically those in the rural areas of the county, that need to get into then the hub for the services for Drug Court.

Marlene Webster And it will benefit our community because it will give a chance for people to be involved as volunteers. And it sort of helps overcome some of the stigma of what people who use substances are like, when you can get community members involved in helping come up with solutions for them, like this one does. And then, it will also benefit our organization, Shiawassee Hope, because it streamlines what has sometimes been a very complicated thing for us to be able to arrange all different sorts of rides at random times without this centralized solution.

Samantha Ardelean I would hope that the value that our solution would provide for Drug Court participants is that they would have one less worry while they're entering the program. As a Drug Court graduate myself, I know firsthand that there are so many stresses that come to being in Drug Court as well as being in recovery. Being fresh in recovery means that you're spending a whole lot of time navigating with counseling, figuring things out, making new friendships, figuring out childcare, trying to get employment. And so just knowing that there's one less stress of having to figure out how you're going to get to all those places is a huge benefit in itself, so that way you can actually focus on the good things that you need to be focusing on in order to recover.

Marlene Webster I think that the most innovative part of our team solution is that we came up with a solution for transportation that goes beyond transportation and looks at the whole person and helps to meet other needs as well.

Applying Design Thinking Techniques

Marlene Webster I had never worked in the design process before. And I was a little skeptical, but I really enjoyed going through the process. And at the end could really see the value of what we had done.

MaLissa Schutt The design thinking tool that helped us the most was the idea generation session which allowed us to stay just in the issue and not jump to the solutions.

Marlene Webster It takes a lot longer than just coming up with a solution on your own. But in the end, the solution is much better than if you had just generated an idea, sort of sitting in your own office. Going through sort of digging all of that out was very helpful. As we went through the design process, I think one of the most impactful parts was when we looked at the stories of individual Drug Court participants, and understood that transportation was just one sliver of all of the sort of needs that they had in their life for all the things that they needed to meet to be part of Drug Court. And so in order to come up with the transportation solution, we had to sort of address all of those other needs as well.

Samantha Ardelean The design thinking strategy that I believed helped our team the most was the assumption testing. It gave us the opportunity to receive direct feedback from the Drug Court participants who were the ones who would be requiring the solutions.

Building a Lasting Partnership

Samantha Ardelean One thing that happened throughout this process was that in the beginning, Drug Court participants were not allowed to ride with other Drug Court participants. It was a rule, it was mandatory, and there was no wiggle room. However, throughout the process and the judge being updated on our work group's progress and what was happening, that rule was lifted. And so I think that because of the work that we started doing and the conversations that started taking place around the topic of transportation, that the judge started seeing things from a different light. And so now, Drug Court participants are allowed to ride with other approved Drug Court participants. For instance, if a Drug Court participant is riding to a 12 Step meeting, he or she can pick up other Drug Court participants, and so therefore that Drug Court participant that is riding along no longer has issues with transportation and has to figure that out.

MaLissa Schutt The partnership that was developed did not exist before this grant process and has allowed each of our agencies to understand how we work and how we can work together to solve the issues.

Conclusion

Amy Conrick From the Shiawassee team, we learned about the concentrated efforts of individuals to overcome their behavioral health and substance abuse issues and face into the many difficulties that are part of that process. You heard the team talk about how it's nearly impossible

for the individuals to make the many required appointments they have because of a lack of transportation. In the team's solution, the safe community space that they are creating will allow the participants to have a place where they can engage in productive behaviors but also meet with a transportation navigator who will help them figure out their transportation issues. By creating a solution that was directly informed by these clients experiences the team hopes that its solution will be able to help solve at least the transportation piece of this puzzle.

You can learn more about the work of this team and all the other teams at the Center's website at nc4mm.org/challenge-2017. And don't forget to use the number four (4) in the website address.