Women of Worth (WOW): Family Centered Treatment Project

Grantee: Racine Interfaith Coalition

Dates: 4/01/2014 – 12/31/2017

Amount Spent: $399,394

Grant Program: Community-Academic Partnership Fund

The Challenge: Wisconsin continues to rank highest in the nation for alcohol use and misuse and women of childbearing age continue to be more likely to binge drink. The use of marijuana and misuse of prescription drugs are also rising. Research on women with substance abuse issues has demonstrated a significant correlation between women staying and successfully completing treatment and the following: provision of integrated treatment and services for their children; prenatal and other medical care; supplemental women-focused services that are gender responsive, strengths-based and trauma-informed.

Project Goal: The project goal is to provide a family-centered treatment program, Women of Worth, for the treatment of substance use and mental health disorders that by definition have highly integrated services that are accessible for women and their children.

Results: The Women of Worth (WOW) Program is a comprehensive and trauma-informed alcohol and other drug program for women and their families living in Racine and Kenosha Counties. Based on a community assessment, which identified the need for gender-specific substance abuse treatment, WOW was started in 2011 by a group of volunteers through the Racine Interfaith Coalition.

Since then, the Partnership Program has supported WOW through two grant awards. Leveraging these initial investments, WOW has now developed into a self-sustaining program housed at Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare Ascension in Racine.

The WOW program enrolled over 100 women. The 8 babies born to women during WOW were born drug free. The 86 WOW women who voluntarily agreed to participate in evaluation experienced both a statistically and/or clinically significant reduction in trauma symptoms and addiction severity. Case management services coordinated community support services, and several WOW women were able to receive their children back from the child welfare system while in the WOW program.

The project outcomes on psychological trauma are significant and serve as a take-away message for the larger substance abuse treatment community. In WOW, almost 68 percent of women screened positive for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) at baseline, and this screening rate has stayed more or less consistent over the WOW project. National statistics indicate that 33 to 59 percent of women in substance abuse treatment are diagnosed with PTSD. Thus, the amount and type of additional program resources required to meet the trauma needs of this specific treatment population may be greater than realized.

The successes of WOW were driven by strong executive committee membership that was diverse in experience, training and discipline, including the disciplines of business and marketing, in addition to social work and medicine. This convergence sparked innovation in approaches to accomplishing the WOW project goals and objectives. In addition, WOW is powered by a dedicated group of community partnerships, and its executive committee has raised over $260,000 in additional funding for WOW.