

Integrating employment services into HIV care model through partnership with Department of Labor funded site

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Abstract

As part of the HRSA/SPNS Initiative Improving Health Outcomes through the Coordination of Supportive Employment and Housing Services, Fenway Health led a partnership to bring employment services for People Living with HIV to Greater Boston for the first time.

We collaborated with a Department of Labor-funded site to bring systems change to the HIV services landscape. Due to the eligibility criteria of the project, we worked with high-acuity clients who faced major challenges in HIV care, housing and employment.

After seeing that it was difficult for these clients to engage with our employment services, we adapted our intervention to reduce barriers to client engagement. Low-threshold services were more successful in engaging clients. A quarter of project participants obtained some form of employment.

Introduction

Fenway Community Health Center serves 4,300 patients and clients living with HIV annually. FCHC's public health arm, AIDS Action, which merged with Fenway Health in 2018, has long provided housing services for People Living with HIV.

In 2017, Fenway Health was chosen as one of twelve demonstration sites funded by the HRSA/SPNS Initiative Improving Health Outcomes through the Coordination of Supportive Employment and Housing Services, to develop innovative practices for providing integrated, quality HIV care while simultaneously addressing the unmet need for housing, and employment. A key component of our SPNS project was a partnership with a Department of Labor-funded site: JVS/MassHire Downtown Boston.

Among low-income PLWH in Greater Boston, at least 34% are homeless or unstably housed and 16% are unemployed or under-employed. At program entry, 18% of participants were literally homeless, 8% were experiencing domestic violence, 18% were at risk of homelessness, and 55% were unstably housed.

Methodology

The centerpiece of our innovative approach to systems changes is the creation of a partnership with a workforce development agency funded by the Department of Labor, JVS/MassHire Downtown Boston.

Key aspects of building this partnership include:

- Identification of a bilingual career navigator employed by JVS, serving as the liaison to this project;
- Development of a streamlined referral process between the Fenway program coordinator and the JVS/MassHire liaison;
- Dedicated coaching and outreach to Fenway clients by the JVS/MassHire liaison;
- Weekly case coordination;
- Data shared from JVS/MassHire to Fenway and incorporated into client progress and outcomes tracking;
- Cross-training of staff, including orientation and tours at JVS/MassHire for Fenway Health staff;
- Development of co-location of services, with employment services offered at one of Fenway's locations.

Activities

Developed an MOU between Fenway Health and JVS/MassHire, defining expectations around referrals, outreach, services and coordination →

Held key staff meetings between JVS/MassHire and Fenway staff involved with the SPNS project to define shared goals and process →

Developed streamlined referral process with project coordinator at Fenway sending all referrals to career navigator at JVS/MassHire →

Cross-trained staff, including several orientation and site tour sessions for Fenway Health and AIDS Action staff at JVS/MassHire, increasing staff understanding of employment services, location and setting →

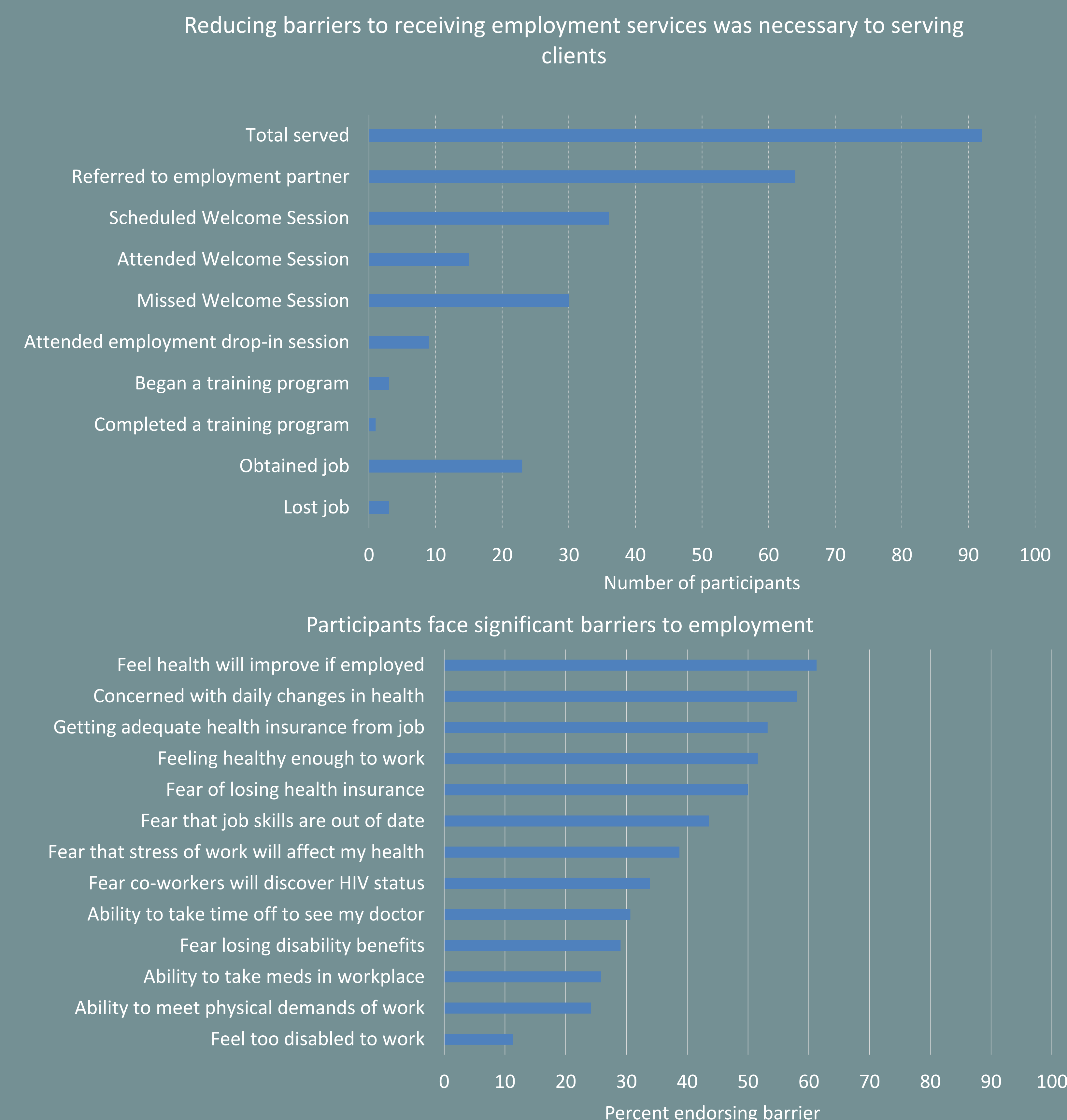
Developed introductory flyers for clients and direct service staff, to encourage referrals and engagements →

Developed data sharing and weekly case coordination calls to facilitate client level coordination and to track program progress on a systems level.

Addressing barriers:

- By tracking client outcomes and looking at a cascade of client engagements, we observed a trend: very few clients attended an initial session at JVS/MassHire, meaning that there was a significant gap between number of clients referred and number of clients who completed an initial meeting to engage in services.
- To address this barrier, the Fenway and JVS/MassHire staff collaborated to develop co-location of services at the main AIDS Action office.
- The career navigator was on-site one afternoon each week, providing low-threshold services on a drop-in basis.
- The drop-in employment services hours coincided with other existing programming, including housing search drop-in hours and legal services clinic, with the goal of facilitating clients' access to employment services.

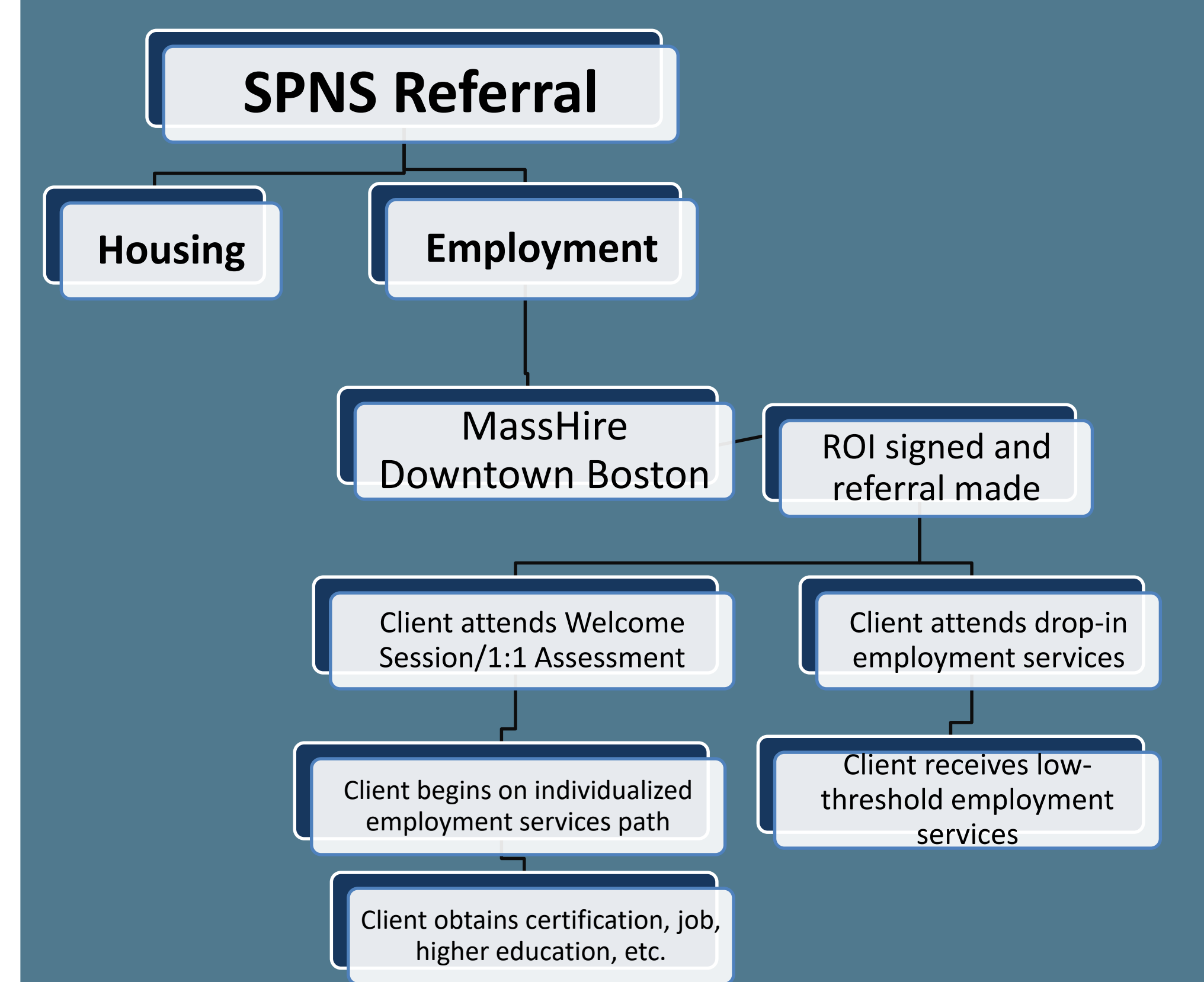
Results



Lesson learned

- Familiarity with services and locations at partner agencies is critical.
- Key activity: Cross-training between Fenway direct service staff and MassHire on an ongoing basis to ensure new staff receive training, with trainings held at JVS/MassHire.
- Onsite trainings and tours of office allows for increased understanding of services provided, barriers that may affect clients, location, and logistics of accessing services
- Create introductory materials for clients, including image of career navigator and short bio. Create introductory materials for direct service staff, including case managers and housing advocates, as quick-reference guide for eligibility and referral process.
- Establish consistent practices around outreach attempts. Clients served by this project presented with multiple barriers to engagement. JVS/MassHire adjusted their practices, increasing the number and methods of outreach attempts made. Discuss anticipated client barriers with partner agencies early on.
- Co-location of services was a key change within this project. Using data and client coordination discussions, we identified a gap, possible causes, and developed a solution. Co-location allowed us to offer the most low-threshold and client-centered services.
- While participants faced significant barriers to employment, the vast majority (94%) wished to be employed now or in the future.

Referral flow



Acknowledgements

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