The Building Bridges Initiative: Overview and Purpose

The Building Bridges Initiative (BBI) is a national effort to identify and promote best practice and policy that will create strong and closely coordinated partnerships and collaborations between families, youth, parent/youth peer partners, community and residential service providers, and oversight agencies. The overall goal of the work of BBI is for families and youth who receive a residential intervention to realize sustained positive outcomes post-residential discharge, such as decreased readmissions to congregate care, improved family relationships and home stability, permanency, and successful living in the community.

Toward this goal, BBI seeks to:

- Build partnerships and collaborations among residential and community providers, families, youth, parent/youth peer partners, and policy makers towards achieving positive outcomes for youth and families.
- Identify and promote practice and policy initiatives to ensure that comprehensive services and supports are family-driven, youth-guided, strength-based, culturally and linguistically competent, individualized, evidence and practice-informed and consistent with research on positive outcomes post-discharge.

BBI is guided by five Core Principles Family Driven/Youth Guided, Cultural and Linguistic Competence, Clinical Excellence and Quality Standards, Accessibility and Community Involvement, Transition Planning and Services – (between settings and from youth to adulthood).
Practices that implement the BBI values, principles, and aims are identified on a Performance Guidelines and Indicators Matrix, available on the BBI website:
http://www.buildingbridges4youth.org/sites/default/files/Building%20Bridges%20Matrix%20Final%20for%20web_0_0.pdf

The Spanish version of the Performance Guidelines and Indicators may be found on the website at:
http://www.buildingbridges4youth.org/sites/default/files/6_BBI_Performance_Guidelines_and_Indicators_Matrix_Performance_Guidelines_and_Indicators_Matrix_0_0.pdf

This document along with the Core Principles constitute and describe the BBI Framework for residential intervention. The Self-Assessment Tool was developed to assess the degree to which these practices are being implemented in an organization or jurisdiction, to be used for quality improvement purposes.

The Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) Overview and Purpose

The Self-Assessment Tool (SAT) is an instrument designed to be used with groups of residential and community staff, parent/youth peer partners, families and youth to assess the activities of a residential provider and community partners against best practices consistent with the BBI Framework. The purpose of the SAT is to facilitate quality improvement activities for an organization and community partners as well across organizations, for example in Quality Improvement Collaboratives. It uses a rating scale regarding the degree to which practices are being implemented, to generate discussion among different stakeholders about how program and community efforts to implement best practices can be enhanced and supported.

Specifically, the SAT can be used to explore:

1. how closely organizations (both residential and community-based programs) serving children, youth and their families adhere to shared principles and recommended best practices;
2. different perceptions regarding the working relationships among youth, families, parent/youth partners, and residential and community provider organization staff; and
3. differences between stakeholder groups and between organizations that can lead to quality improvement initiatives grounded in specific practices.

The SAT was purposefully designed to be used with an extensive range of both residential interventions (i.e., residential programs; group homes; crisis residences) and community-based partner programs (i.e., schools; community mental health clinics; child welfare agencies; juvenile justice agencies; and other community programs that interface with residential interventions, such as day programs, home-based services, family support groups).
Content of the SAT

- The SAT surveys the extent to which desired practices occur, from the referral process through the youth’s discharge and return to the community.

- The SAT Glossary defines the terms used in the SAT for user reference.

- The SAT takes about 30-45 minutes to complete in its entirety.

- The tool requests information about role of the respondent (youth, family, direct service staff, managerial/supervisory, administrative, parent/youth peer partners, community partner, other). This required information is important for data analysis and identification of opportunities for improvement.

- The purpose of the SAT is to stimulate, guide and direct quality improvement efforts geared toward improving the immediate and long-term outcomes of residential interventions. It can be used within a single organization or with a number of organizations as part of a quality improvement collaborative. It is NOT a measure of compliance.

- A consent statement guarantees that responses are anonymous and confidential.

Approaches to Administering the SAT

- The SAT should be completed by staff (at all levels) from both residential and community-based provider organizations, youth, families, parent/youth peer partners, representatives from local government and other funders, and anyone else who would be in a position to observe and comment on the work being done with youth and families.

- The SAT can be completed in its entirety or in one or more of its specific sections at any one time. This affords organizations and jurisdictions the opportunity to use the survey results to focus and prioritize improvement efforts on specific practices that were rated relatively lower than others. Often the sections on Family-Driven and Youth-Guided Practice have proven to be foundational to transformational changes.

- It is important for an organization or jurisdiction to intentionally plan how it is going to use the SAT- which sections, data collection and analysis details, follow up processes, etc.

- Frequently, but not always, it is the residential provider who initiates the SAT process as the focus is on the experience of youth and families who have received these services. Respondents to the SAT, however, should also include community-based service providers.

- There are essentially two different ways to administer the SAT. BBI uses Survey Monkey for administration of the SAT, to enable thorough data collection and analysis. The tool can be distributed to the identified respondents electronically, the primary approach. Alternatively, some organizations may schedule several meetings with key staff and stakeholders to complete sections of the SAT, either electronically or in hard copy, with ensuing discussion of the topics as a group in real time. These groups can be convened based on role (e.g. family members, youth, line staff, administrators, parent/youth peer partners, community partners) or in mixed groups. If completed in hard copy BBI requests the organization to enter the data into the BBI Survey Monkey provided to it.
Regardless of whether the SAT is completed individually or in groups, it is ideal to create opportunities for respondents to discuss the results together and collaborate to identify needed organizational and systemic changes suggested by responses to the SAT. Thorough, broadly representative participation by those who complete the SAT and in the follow-up discussion of results and actions facilitates the identification of quality improvement activities.

- Repeating the SAT at intervals (e.g. one year) following the implementation of quality improvement actions provides comparative data from which progress can be assessed.
- For some programs and/or communities, it could become standard practice for all families and youth receiving residential intervention to complete the SAT a month to six weeks following discharge (so that the ‘post residential’ questions can be answered).
- An alternate approach would be to administer the SAT at a single point in time to get a ‘snapshot’ of the family and youth perspectives. With this approach, as many families and youth as possible should complete the SAT. At a minimum, 20% or 10 families (whichever is larger) and 20% or 10 youth (whichever is larger) who have received services in the past 6 months should complete the SAT. Note that all families and youth should be offered an opportunity (and support) to participate.
- Using the SAT with the original group of participants (or as many as still are active with the organization and available plus new hires) after a given time period (e.g. 12, 18, or 24 months) could give the residential program an opportunity to measure changes made or a quality improvement collaborative the opportunity to learn from each other.
- Tailored outreach may be needed to secure the participation of youth and family members. Some youth and families may need facilitation and/or support such as: having the SAT read to them, being able to ask questions, completing the SAT in a group setting; translation into their native language, or the option to complete the SAT section by section over a longer period of time.
- In pilot tests, youth and families provided more feedback when they completed the SAT while supported by group or individual facilitation. A parent/youth peer partner can also use the SAT as part of an exit interview or follow-up interview after discharge. Whether by these means or others, the full benefit of this self-assessment process is only achieved by successfully involving family and youth.
Summarizing and Interpreting SAT Results to Improve Your Community’s Practices and Policies

- Behind every SAT response is a full and complex individual story, as well as the story of an interconnected system of services. The SAT provides a window into respondents’ perceptions regarding the degree of implementation of the Building Bridges practices and principles for youth and their families – it is not an objective assessment of compliance.

- After the administration of the SAT closes, the results should be summarized and analyzed to identify strategies for quality improvement. It is critical to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of individual responses.

- Results should be shared broadly with partners, but particularly with those who completed the SAT. Everyone reviewing the results should be reminded that the SAT is meant to encourage collaborative discussions and joint action in support of youth and families, and to participate in such discussions accordingly.

- In interpreting the data, look at the range of ratings for all of the questions within a group (Youth, Family, residential staff by level, community partner, and Other Respondents). Differences in ratings between groups should also be reviewed for indications of where to explore variability more deeply.

- Some sample questions to identify opportunities for policy and practice change include:
  - Which SAT questions show the largest differences in ratings, or proportion of Don’t Know/Does Not Apply?
  - Do particular respondent groups differ in their responses?
  - What are the likely reasons for differences in ratings?
  - To what extent do practices differ between groups/individuals?

- Ideally, discussions about SAT results will lead to beneficial change – immediate and longer-term quality improvement efforts implemented both within individual provider organizations (of all types) and among all partners in an effort to improve coordination and collaboration. Typical questions that a community might consider include:
  - Are there changes in communications, processes, policies or practices that can be implemented immediately which might reduce some of these differences or improve the ratings?
  - What long-term, multi-party changes could be implemented to potentially address some of these differences?
  - How will your organization review progress to ensure that implemented changes and quality improvement efforts have resulted in actual improvements?
SAT Administration Strategies

To help you with your efforts to administer the SAT in your organization, we have provided the following strategies that were demonstrated in pilot testing to simplify SAT administration procedures. You may add procedures in a number of these steps, but the following provides a useful outline of how to proceed with administering the SAT in your organization.

- **Choose** an individual to lead the full SAT administration process.
- **Identify** who will provide administrative support (e.g., send emails, track progress, data entry, data analysis, etc.).
- **Identify** individuals who will complete the SAT including, but not limited to: parent/youth peer partners; residential and community provider organization staff; current and formerly enrolled youth; families of current and formerly enrolled youth; government agencies that work with the program; referral sources; and community organizations and leaders who would interact with the organizations and the youth and families.
- **Determine** how SAT respondents will be contacted.
- **Determine** who will communicate the purpose of the survey (ideally a key leadership person) and how the communication will be transmitted with the link to the survey (email, pre letter, etc.).
- **Determine** dates for administration of the SAT to open and close, and for review of the results.
- **Include** contact information for questions, the due date for completion and a number to call for support in completing the electronic survey.
- **Provide** other support, answer questions and follow up with reminders to non-responders.

You may contact a **BBI Core Team Member** at infobuildingbridgesinitiative@gmail.com to inquire about additional support and technical assistance with administering the SAT, analyzing results of the SAT and/or next steps in quality improvement from the SAT.