

# Meeting Clients Where they Are

“A lot of our clients have been hurt so often - they hear what you’re saying but what’s really going to make a difference is what you do.”

**M**iles of flat, pine-forested land and the Okefenokee swamp cover much of the nearly 5,000 square mile, 8-county area served by Unison Behavioral Health in South Georgia. EIS coordinator Chris McClellan says, “We’re spread out. I drive up to 45 miles to get to a testing site and I might go through one little town with a single red light. The other 40 miles I see nothing but pine trees.”

Based in Waycross, Chris has been offering HIV testing, full time, for 12 years. To reach clients in numerous “small clinics and jails, two detox centers, and our new MAT program,” he stays on the road. This quarter he tested 173 people from 20 different sites.

His approach is to meet people where they are – literally traveling 100’s of miles in a day. But in a rural area where stigma around HIV and substance use tends to run high, the true meaning of meeting people where they are, says Chris, is “keeping a real open mind and realizing that if someone is in jail or a detox center it defines a decision that they made; it doesn’t define who they are.”



Chris McClellan, Unison Behavioral Health, Waycross

“A lot of our clients have been hurt so often - they hear what you’re saying, but what’s really going to make a difference is what you do. They watch what you’re doing. Do you act like you’re embarrassed when you’re around them? Because they are really going to pick up on that. Are you taking part in the stigma or do you really feel differently?”

“Don’t give up. You never know when you’re going to have that moment that’s going to change your life or somebody else’s.”

“I think when you’re working with somebody who is in a dark place, they’re a lot more likely to get tested if they don’t feel like they’re being judged. I want people to smile when they see me. This job makes me feel like I can make people’s lives just a little bit better.”

Asked if he would like to share anything that has helped him in his work Chris replied, “Don’t give up. Just don’t ever give up. You never know when you’re going to have that moment that’s going to change your life or somebody else’s. So just keep on keeping on.” ■