

## State Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Case Studies

# Summary of Innovative Programs Serving People with Low Income

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### Case study programs

1. **Community Action Organization of Scioto County, Ohio**, which provides employment services for youth and services for families with low income
2. **Kentucky's Targeted Assessment Program**, which provides case management to parents in the state's TANF or child welfare systems
3. **Rhode Island Works**, a state TANF program that first addresses participants' barriers to work
4. **ʻOhana Nui—Family Assessment Centers**, which are emergency shelters with on-site services for families experiencing homelessness in Honolulu, Hawaii
5. **Solutions for Change**, which provides housing, training, and support services to families experiencing homelessness in San Diego, California
6. **New Moms Inc.**, which provides job training and housing to young mothers in Chicago, Illinois
7. **Climb Wyoming**, which offers a statewide employment and training program for single mothers
8. **Business Link**, which offers job development, placement, and training for New York City residents, particularly those receiving cash assistance
9. **Community Caring Collaborative**, a partnership of 45 community organizations in Washington County, Maine, focused on helping people with low income

### Introduction

Achieving financial stability can be challenging for people who receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and for others with low income. These individuals may face serious barriers to employment, such as limited education, a limited work history, or health issues. In addition, they may need to interact with complex TANF, workforce, and support systems in their efforts to obtain and maintain employment. The State TANF Case Studies project is expanding the knowledge base of innovative approaches to support employment in states and localities by providing descriptive case studies of programs that help disadvantaged populations, including TANF recipients, prepare for and engage in work and increase their overall stability. The case studies can inform administrators of TANF and other programs about innovative practices to support employment, expand policymakers' and researchers' understanding of such programs, and highlight innovative practices for future research.

The Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, in collaboration with the Office of Family Assistance, both within the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, funded Mathematica and its subcontractor, MEF Associates, to conduct the case studies from September 2018 through September 2021. The project team identified nine innovative programs for the case studies through a scan of the field and engagement with stakeholders (see box at right for selected programs).

The nine programs, which serve people with low income across the country, represent a diverse range of service strategies, geographies, focus populations, and service environments. They each predominantly use one of the four main approaches examined in this study: (1) providing wraparound supports, (2) offering full-family transitional housing and supports, (3) delivering employment-based interventions, and (4) building collective impact and collaborative community initiatives. The programs' approaches are not mutually exclusive, but rather highlight the predominate approaches to serving participants.

This project summary presents (1) the project team's approach to identifying programs for the study and developing the case studies, (2) a brief overview of the characteristics of the programs featured in the case studies, and (3) a description of each case study program (organized by the main approaches to supporting employment). Links are provided for each case study report as well as for the project's two additional products.

## Program identification and case study development

To select programs for the case studies, the study team, in collaboration with ACF, first scanned the field to identify approaches that showed promise in providing low-income individuals with employment-related services and linking them to wraparound supports, such as child care and transportation. The team then identified programs that used these approaches by searching key websites, such as research clearinghouses on employment and training and relevant conference proceedings; holding discussions with federal staff and leaders of human services organizations; and reviewing findings and lessons from ACF projects and other studies. The team narrowed its list of potential programs based on initial discussions with program leaders to learn more about their programs and gauge their interest in participating in the project. The team ultimately selected nine programs in consultation with ACF.<sup>1</sup>

The project team conducted site visits with each program and conducted an average of 15 semistructured interviews per site with program leaders, staff who provided direct services, and staff from partner agencies. For eight programs, members of the project team conducted a two- to three-day site visit, between December 2019 and March 2020, to document each program's implementation. On average, the team visited two locations per program. In addition to staff interviews, the team conducted in-depth interviews with an average of three participants per program; a review of anonymized cases of an average of two participants per program; and observations of program activities, as appropriate. An in-person site visit to the ninth program, Business Link, was planned for April 2020 but was cancelled due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Business Link site visit was conducted virtually with program staff via video conferencing in summer 2020. Follow-up calls to learn how the eight programs that received an in-person site visit responded to the COVID-19 pandemic occurred in July and August 2020.

Each case study includes detailed descriptions of the program, including where it operates, who it serves, what services it provides, how it is organized and funded, the program's partners and their roles, how the program assesses its past performance, and program reflections.

## Case study program characteristics and locations

Through the selection process, the study team identified a range of programs to help individuals with low income or facing unemployment find and engage in work. The nine programs varied across different program characteristics including operating entities, focus populations, and geographic distribution. Three

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<sup>1</sup> Selection in this project does not connote ACF's endorsement of the practices or approaches described.

different types of entities operate the nine case study programs: (1) community-based organizations, (2) government agencies, and (3) a center of a state university under contract to a state TANF agency. All nine programs serve people with low income, although the specific focus populations differ across the programs. The nine programs operate across the United States; six are locally focused, serving a city or county, and three operate statewide (Figure 1).

**Figure 1. Geographic distribution of programs**



## Approaches to supporting the employment of people with low income

The case study programs support the employment of people with low income through one of four main approaches: (1) providing wraparound supports, (2) offering full-family transitional housing and supports, (3) delivering employment-based interventions, and (4) convening collaborative community initiatives. There is some overlap across these approaches and some programs use multiple strategies to support their participants. For example, most programs provide or refer participants to wraparound supports in addition to other services. The programs below are grouped according to their predominant approach for serving participants.

**Wraparound supports.** Three programs primarily use wraparound supports to address the barriers to employment faced by TANF recipients and others with low income. Participants with substance use disorders, mental health issues, and other barriers to employment receive wraparound supports to help increase their participation in employment-related services, training, and eventual employment. Examples of wraparound supports include mental health and substance use disorder treatment, access to child care, and transportation resources.

- 1. Community Action Organization (CAO) of Scioto County, Ohio, an employment program for youth and services for families.** CAO is a community hub of services focused on supporting people with low income. The case study focuses on CAO's employment and workforce services, in particular the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP) that serves youth and a behavioral health unit that serves youth and adults. Through integrated TANF and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act funding, the CCMEP provides eligible youth ages 14 to 24 with work experience and support services such as financial incentives and career counseling. The behavioral health unit's family navigators and counselors provide counseling and supportive services to youth and adults who have experienced trauma, substance use disorders, and mental health challenges. Key CCMEP practices include assessing youth at intake and offering incentives to encourage their participation. Key practices from the behavioral health unit include intensive case management and referrals to necessary services as well as providing trauma-informed counseling to school-age youth. The full case study of CAO is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-employment-program-youth-and-services-families-community-action-organization>.
- 2. Kentucky's Targeted Assessment Program (TAP), a promising approach for preparing people with low income for work.** Across 35 Kentucky counties, TAP provides comprehensive assessment and intensive case management services to parents who are involved in the state's TANF or child welfare systems. The program helps participants overcome barriers to self-sufficiency, which can include mental health issues, substance use disorders, intimate partner violence, or a learning disability or deficit. TAP specialists provide intensive case management to participants in order to prepare them for treatment, refer them to community-based services and treatment programs, and facilitate their follow-through with referrals and services. In addition, TAP staff provide referrals to help participants overcome structural barriers to engagement in the program, which may include lack of child care, transportation, food, clothing, housing, utilities, and medical care. TAP specialists refer individuals who are ready to pursue employment to TANF employment specialists, community-based organizations, or local employment offices. TAP's promising approach is comprised of four key program elements: (1) a comprehensive assessment to identify participant barriers, (2) co-location and collaboration with referral sources and partners, (3) advocacy for participants to ensure that the state TANF and child welfare agencies understand their needs, and (4) intensive staff hiring and training to ensure that they are experienced and able to work well with clients. The full case study of TAP is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-approach-preparing-individuals-low-income-work-kentucky-targeted-assessment>.
- 3. Rhode Island Works (RIW), a program that addresses participants' barriers before providing training and other work-related activities.** RIW is the state's TANF program, which is administered by the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS). The TANF program was redesigned in 2018 to first identify participants' barriers to employment, then address those barriers prior to directing participants to look for jobs. DHS assesses participants and helps them create a six-month employment plan, then refers them, as appropriate, to one of four vendors for supportive services. The vendors' case managers work with participants to identify their barriers to employment, such as mental health, substance abuse, housing, transportation, and child care needs, and provide referrals and resources to help overcome them. After addressing their barriers, participants can move into other program components, such as vocational training and work readiness, to prepare for employment. Key program practices include actively monitoring vendor performance and enhancing coordination among them, leveraging excess TANF funds to implement new services and programs, and prioritizing supportive services to improve participants' chances of success in employment. The

full case study of RIW is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-program-addressing-participants-barriers-providing-training-and-other-work>.

**Full-family transitional housing and supports.** Two programs primarily provide transitional housing and other wraparound supports for families experiencing housing instability to assist them in their eventual employment and transition to permanent housing. These interventions provide intensive case management and on-site services to meet a given family's situation and needs.

- 1. `Ohana Nui–Family Assessment Centers (FACs), a program with extensive on-site services for families who are homeless.** `Ohana Nui is a service delivery framework used across the Hawai'i Department of Human Services that is focused on supporting multigenerational families. One of the first initiatives under this framework was to develop the FACs. The two FACs provide emergency shelter and on-site services for families experiencing homelessness in Honolulu City and County. On-site services include intensive case management to help participants (1) obtain necessary personal documents to apply for public benefits, jobs, and housing; (2) apply for benefits and medical coverage; and (3) search for jobs and housing. Other on-site services, such as food banks, child care programs, and mobile health clinics, support families navigating their next steps to secure housing and work. Key program practices include providing safe temporary housing before addressing families' other needs (that is, following a housing-first approach); integrating services on-site to support families; and providing extensive engagement and interaction with families. The full case study of the FACs is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-program-serving-families-who-are-homeless-ohana-nui-family-assessment>.
- 2. Solutions for Change (Solutions), a program providing housing, work readiness training, and support services for families that experience homelessness.** Solutions is a nonprofit organization in Northern San Diego County, California. The focus of the case study is its three-phase, 1,000-day program called Solutions University (the name has since changed to Solutions Academy). Solutions University includes transitional and permanent housing; intensive case management; unpaid work experience; classes about life skills, parenting, and employment readiness; on-site mental health services; and recovery support services for individuals with substance use disorders. Participants progress through the phases as they achieve program requirements such as attending all meetings, completing hours of training, maintaining paid employment, and saving \$2,000. Key program practices include providing housing in conjunction with other services; structuring program phases with progressively relaxed rules and increasingly independent housing; and promoting participant accountability through program rules and daily schedules, frequent contact with case managers, and a zero-tolerance substance use policy. The full case study of Solutions is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-program-serving-families-experiencing-homelessness-solutions-change>.

**Employment-based interventions.** Three programs primarily provide industry and work readiness skills for individuals with low income through explicit partnerships with employers or hands-on work experience, along with connections to wraparound services. These took several forms, including social enterprises, subsidized or paid employment, and occupational training.

- 1. New Moms Inc., a program that offers job training, housing, and family support for young mothers.** New Moms is a nonprofit organization serving pregnant and parenting young women and their children in Chicago, Illinois. Participants in New Moms' 16-week job training program develop work readiness skills, practice job search skills, and receive hands-on employment experience

through New Moms' social enterprise candle company, Bright Endeavors. In addition, New Moms' housing program provides transitional and permanent supportive housing. Its family support program assists young mothers through prenatal education, doula services, postnatal home visiting, and parenting education. Wraparound services available to participants include domestic violence support, mental health services, child care, transportation assistance, and connections to food pantries and other resources. Promising practices include incorporating executive skills coaching throughout the program; providing hands-on employment experience in a social enterprise; and designing services that respond to the housing, job training, and family support needs of the community. The full case study of New Moms is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-job-training-housing-and-family-support-program-young-mothers-new-moms>.

- 2. Climb Wyoming (Climb), an employment and training program that serves single mothers with low income.** Climb is a nonprofit organization that provides career training and placement for single mothers who are eligible for TANF across six sites in Wyoming. As needed, site staff provide applicants with referrals and connections to supports such as child care, transportation, and housing assistance to reduce participation barriers prior to program enrollment. Once enrolled, cohorts of up to 12 participants receive (1) six to eight weeks of training for jobs that are in high demand, (2) job matching services, (3) six to eight weeks of fully subsidized job placement, and (4) Climb Days that focus on life skills education and mental health services. Promising practices include referring applicants to support services prior to program enrollment, providing tailored job training and subsidized job placement along with guaranteed full-time employment in an in-demand industry, and supporting participants' mental health. The full case study of Climb is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-employment-and-training-program-serving-single-mothers-low-income-climb>.
- 3. Business Link, an employment program that serves people with low income.** Business Link is a program housed in the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) that serves people who receive cash assistance, including TANF and state assistance for individuals without children, those who have exceeded TANF time limits, and other individuals who live in New York City. Business Link provides three core services: (1) job development and placement, (2) the Job Training Program (JTP), and (3) the Shelter Exit Transitional (SET) jobs program. All city residents can access Business Link's job development and placement services, which match residents to jobs identified by job developers. The JTP provides cash assistance recipients with six months of full-time, paid placements in city agencies along with work readiness training. Similarly, the SET program provides cash assistance recipients in the shelter system with 20-week subsidized employment combined with work readiness training. Key practices include providing employer subsidies for hiring individuals with low income, creating close relationships with employers, and dedicating staff to work with job seekers who experience homelessness. The full case study of Business Link is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-employment-program-serving-people-low-income-business-link>.

**Collaborative community initiative.** The final program addresses the challenges faced by people with low income by creating a collaborative of community partners and helping their participants navigate the community's resources to address their needs.

- 1. Community Caring Collaborative (CCC), an approach to improve community-based services for people with low income.** The CCC is the backbone organization of a network of 45 community organizations and individuals focused on improving the lives of people with low income in Washington County, Maine. It provides four main services: (1) convening groups of community service partners or members to build trusting relationships, collaborate, and share information; (2) incubating programs to address emerging community needs, such as Family Futures Downeast, a two-generation program designed by the CCC and its partners; (3) providing training and technical assistance to partner staff on poverty, trauma, substance use, cultural competency, and other requested topics, and how to implement CCC-incubated programs with fidelity; and (4) operating core programs that support multiple partners, such as the Dream Fund that awards small grants to remove the financial barriers of partners' participants. Promising practices from the CCC include building collaboration across diverse organizations, designing and implementing participant-centered programs, building the capacity of partner organizations, and providing flexible funding for addressing participants' barriers. The full case study of CCC is available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/report/case-study-collaborative-approach-improving-community-based-services-people-low-income>.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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#### Other products from the State TANF Case Studies project

- 1. Designing Participant-Centered Programs: Participant Reflections on What Works Well in Social Services Programs.** This forthcoming brief explores the perspectives of people participating in the case study programs based on in-depth interviews conducted during site visits. It highlights what interviewees most appreciated about these programs and how the services supported their goals.
- 2. Providing Employment and Training Services During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Lessons From the Field.** This webinar explored the experiences of leaders from three employment and training programs while continuing their training programs and other employment services during the pandemic. A recording of the webinar is available at <https://www.mathematica.org/events/providing-employment-and-training-services-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-lessons-from-the-field>.

#### Disclaimer

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