

Case Study of an Employment Program for Youth and Services for Families

Community Action Organization of Scioto County

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Lead entity:

Community Action Organization (CAO) of Scioto County, Inc.

Service area:

Scioto County, Ohio

Setting:

Rural

Focus population:

Families with low income

Number of participants:

15,000 individuals per year on average

Initial year of operation:

1965

Introduction

The Community Action Organization of Scioto County (CAO), located in downtown Portsmouth, Ohio, is a community hub for numerous services for people from low-income households. CAO has five primary service areas: (1) employment and workforce development for adults and youth; (2) social services; (3) energy conservation; (4) early childhood development (through Head Start and Early Head Start); and (5) the Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). This case study focuses on CAO's employment and workforce development services as well as its efforts to address the needs of underserved Scioto County youth.

Among 48 community action agencies in the state, CAO is one of the few that provides employment and workforce development services. CAO administers the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title I Adult and

Dislocated Worker and Youth programs in Scioto County and is the WIOA fiscal agent for three surrounding counties. CAO also houses and operates the county's American Job Center, OhioMeansJobs, where job seekers and employers can access employment programs and services. In addition, CAO administers the Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP), an innovative statewide program that integrates funding from WIOA and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) for youth training, education, and employment services.

This case study includes the following sections: [Where CAO Operates](#), [What Services the Employment and Workforce Division Provides](#), [How Participants Access CAO Services](#), [Key CAO Partners and Their Roles](#), [How CAO is Funded](#), and [Future Plans to Enhance Services](#).

About this report

This case study (OPRE Report # 2021-72) is part of a series of nine comprehensive case studies that showcase innovative approaches for supporting the employment of low-income individuals and families, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families recipients. Each case study highlights key components of implementation, including their linkages to wraparound supports, to expand the knowledge base of these programs. The programs featured in the series represent a diverse range of service strategies, geographies and community contexts, focus populations, and service environments. The case studies are sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in collaboration with the Office of Family Assistance, both within the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Where CAO operates

Scioto County is located along the Ohio River in the rural Appalachian region of southern Ohio. The county's estimated population of 75,377 is almost 95 percent white and has a median household income of \$39,731 (U.S. Census Bureau 2018). Once an economically thriving area, Portsmouth and its surrounding region were heavily impacted by a decline in manufacturing jobs following the closures of the Detroit Steel Mill in the 1980s and the New Boston Coke Plant in the early 2000s (Community Action Organization of Scioto County 2015).

The region's economic downturn coincided with the rise of the prescription painkiller industry and opioid misuse that began in the 1990s and has continued to devastate Appalachian counties like Scioto for decades. Although the inappropriate dispensing of narcotics (often called "pill mills") that put Scioto County on the map of the opioid epidemic have since been shut down and opioid prescriptions have declined, the use of potentially lethal drugs—heroin, fentanyl, methamphetamine, and synthetic opioids—has increased.

The fallout caused by the decline in manufacturing and the opioid epidemic has led to high rates of poverty, unemployment, substance use disorder, and family breakdown. In 2019, Scioto County's unemployment rate was 6.3 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019).¹ Compared to other counties in Ohio, Scioto County has the highest rate of Medicaid recipients with an opioid-related diagnosis (62.1 per 1,000 recipients) and babies born with neonatal abstinence syndrome (76.0 per 1,000 births), which is a withdrawal condition caused when a mother uses opioids during pregnancy (Ohio Auditor of State 2018; Children's Defense Fund- Ohio 2018). Scioto County also has a high number of children placed in foster care at a rate of 24.2 per 1,000 children, which is more than two times the state's average placement rate (Public Children Services Association of Ohio 2019a, 2019b). Overall, the far-ranging effects of the opioid epidemic have taken a significant toll on families' economic and emotional well-being. Children and youth, in particular, have experienced high rates of neglect, trauma, depression, and behavioral problems.

In response to its increased need for services, Scioto County (as well as the surrounding counties) in recent years experienced an increase in federal and state funding and an influx of mental health and substance use counseling and treatment providers. This change is reflected in the county's employment data. In 2017, health care and social assistance was Scioto County's largest industry employer, employing about 31.6 percent of the county population, followed by educational services, retail trade, and accommodation and food services (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services 2019). Although community residents may have access to treatment, CAO staff and partners reported that many of the



Economic snapshot of Scioto County, Ohio

Total population (2018):^a 75,377

Median household income (2018):^b \$39,731

Percentage of people below poverty level (2018):^b 23.6%

Unemployment rate (2019):^c 6.3%

Source: ^a U.S. Census Bureau (2019a), ^b U.S. Census Bureau (2019b); ^c U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2019)

¹ Unemployment data presented here do not reflect shifts in the local economy that have occurred since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. See box on page 19 for information about how CAO responded to the pandemic.

low-income residents they serve do not have access to reliable transportation or quality affordable housing.

To provide services across its five divisions (Figure 1), CAO has two primary office locations and eight Head Start centers throughout the county where they serve participants. It also planned to open two new service locations. The two current office locations are across the street from each other in downtown Portsmouth:

- The main building is the primary service location for the employment and workforce development, social services, and energy conservation divisions. It houses the OhioMeansJobs center (an American Job Center) and WIOA program staff, such as the youth and adult career specialists, who perform intake, handle case management, and facilitate access to WIOA services.
- The second building supports the behavioral health unit, which includes counselors, family navigators, a nurse navigator, along with the WIC program and home-based Early Head Start staff.

Staff indicated that the co-location and close proximity of both service locations facilitated greater access to services for CAO participants. For example, if staff of one program is working with a participant who expresses a need for another program, such as the Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program (E-HEAP), they will first review the program’s eligibility guidelines and then escort the participant over to the main building for a warm handoff to the CAO staff who administer the program. Partners also offer services on-site at CAO locations. One partner that provides adult education services in several sites throughout the region described the importance of co-locating services at partner locations to ensure access and engagement, especially in a rural area where transportation is a barrier.

In July 2020, CAO opened the first of two new community centers in Portsmouth focused on serving Scioto County youth.

CAO is a community action agency where low-income youth and families come to access a broad range of employment and wraparound services. Although this case study focuses primarily on the services offered through the employment and workforce development division, community members have access to the full range of CAO programs (Figure 1).

Staff perspective






“Whenever [CAO staff] do the eligibility [screening] and see that [individuals] are eligible because of income ... [CAO staff] let them know about the other services that are available... They tie the whole agency together, so [participants] know what other resources are available within their office.”



Stand-alone youth resiliency community centers

CAO is expanding its services to youth through two new community centers. The goal is to fill a perceived gap in services caused by widespread substance use issues and family instability by giving youth a safe and supportive place to go after school. The first youth center opened on July 1, 2020 and the second center is still in the early planning stages. Through the new center, CAO is providing workforce development and behavioral services to youth. To facilitate this, youth career specialists and a family navigator are located at the center. Other services will also be available to youth. In partnership with the Juvenile Justice Department, Juvenile Court, and the Ohio Department of Mental Health, the first community center will serve as an evening reporting center staffed by a probation officer for youth on probation. In addition, the center will offer (1) fatherhood classes developed and facilitated in partnership with the Ohio State University Extension office, Ohio Commission on Fatherhood, Scioto County Department of Job and Family Services, and the faith-based community, (2) counseling services, and (3) other services and supports, such as meals, arts and crafts, music, and academic tutoring

Figure 1. CAO divisions and services

 Early childhood development	 Employment and workforce development	 Energy conservation	 Social services	 WIC
<p>Head Start. Eight Head Start centers throughout the county</p> <p>Early Head Start. Offers a home visiting component to provide one-on-one support to parents</p>	<p>WIOA Title 1 adult and dislocated worker and youth program services</p> <p>OhioMeansJobs. American Job Center where youth and adults can access job and career services.</p> <p>CCMEP. Youth workforce development services integrating WIOA and TANF funding</p> <p>Behavioral health unit. Counselors, family navigators, and a nurse navigator address wraparound service needs</p> <p>Child Adult Care Food Program and Summer Food Service Program. Youth employment opportunities delivering free and nutritious food for children</p>	<p>Home Weatherization Assistance Program (HWAP). Home weatherization assistance and insulation</p>	<p>Emergency services program. Emergency cash assistance to low-income individuals</p> <p>Senior Nutrition Program (SNP). Meals for home-bound older adults</p> <p>Food assistance. Access to local food pantries and meal providers.</p> <p>Emergency Home Energy Assistance Program (E-HEAP). Emergency utility assistance to avoid disconnection during summer and winter months</p> <p>Percentage of Income Payment Program (PIPP). Subsidy that allows low-income families to pay only a percentage of their utility bills.</p>	<p>Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC). Nutrition education, food coupons, healthcare referrals and other support to youth mothers and families</p>

Note: This case study focuses on CAO’s employment and workforce development services and its efforts to address the needs of underserved Scioto County youth through the CCMEP and other youth-focused initiatives.

Source: CAO staff interviews, brochures, and website.

What services the employment and workforce development division provides

CAO’s approach to employment services

A high proportion of families in the community struggle with barriers caused by poverty and substance use disorders, including barriers to obtaining and maintaining employment. CAO’s leadership recognized that CAO could not sufficiently meet families’ needs if it offered only traditional employment services, such as resume preparation and job search assistance. In response, CAO expanded its employment and workforce development division to incorporate a behavioral health unit. The division’s behavioral health unit includes two family navigators, a clinical supervisor, and three counselors (all of whom are licensed social workers) who provide family case management, counseling, and other treatment services to CAO participants (Table 1).² In addition to the behavioral health unit, the division includes senior career specialists who oversee the youth and adult career specialists, who provide case management to support participants as they pursue employment, training, or education services. Career specialists receive ongoing training related to service delivery. For example, career specialists participate in Goal4 It! training, which emphasizes motivational interviewing and goal setting in service delivery. CAO is also a participating organization in the Growing Rural Independence Together (GRIT), a cross-county initiative in southeast Ohio that implements approaches to strengthen economic development through training and community partnerships. CAO employs or houses several other staff to support the division, including receptionists, a business account representative, and a state veteran’s representative who serves veterans at the OhioMeansJobs center. Between June 2019 and June 2020, the workforce services division served 617 participants.



Key program practices

- Full-service community action agency provides families with services to overcome challenges
- Behavioral health unit supports participants with substance use disorders, trauma, and mental health challenges
- A statewide youth program provides youth with employment opportunities, case management, and other supports

Table 1. Key roles in the workforce services division

Role	Responsibilities
Youth and adult career specialists	Provide case management to support participants as they pursue employment, training, or education services
Family navigators	Support CAO participants affected by opioids and their families by providing direct case management and access to wraparound services
Counselors	Provide trauma-informed counseling to youth and adults who have experienced trauma, substance use disorder, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other behavioral challenges

² The unit also includes a nurse navigator, who provides training and wraparound services to expectant mothers to promote healthy birth outcomes. As this case study focuses on CAO’s employment and workforce services, it does not discuss the nurse navigator role in detail.

Role	Responsibilities
Operations director and supervisors	Oversee the workforce development division and provide direct supervision of frontline staff, respectively; the clinical supervisor, who oversees the family navigators and counselors, also carries an active caseload

Source: CAO staff interviews.

Although they do not always serve the same participants, staff throughout the division reported working together to connect participants to services available through CAO and the broader community by using a family-oriented approach to case management. For example, a family navigator may connect with individuals who express an interest in counseling and employment services for themselves or other family members. In those instances, the family navigator would refer participants and their family members to a career specialist and a counselor to pursue those services. To facilitate these connections within the workforce services division, the operations director and supervisors hold weekly team meetings on case staffing. During these meetings frontline staff can discuss individual cases with each other and coordinate about recent changes in a participant’s circumstances or outstanding needs.

How participants access CAO’s employment services

Outreach occurs through word of mouth and referrals. Participants learn about CAO through word of mouth or are connected to CAO through referrals from community partners. Because CAO has a long history in Scioto County, residents and other organizations in the surrounding area are familiar with CAO and the services it provides to the community. CAO staff also conduct outreach in the community to inform relevant agencies and stakeholders about their services and programs. For instance, family navigators have met with local schools, guidance counselors, and treatment facilities to explain their role and the supports they can provide to families, while career specialists conduct regular outreach at local colleges and universities through job fairs and other events. CAO also maintains partnerships with local colleges and universities, including Shawnee State University and Scioto County Career Technical Center. Career specialists refer their participants to available postsecondary programs and attend orientations to inform incoming students about CAO’s supports and services.

Staff perspective

“A lot of the clients ... live crisis to crisis, so it’s hard for them to plan for things. They come and want help today. You can’t be employed the same day that you apply.”

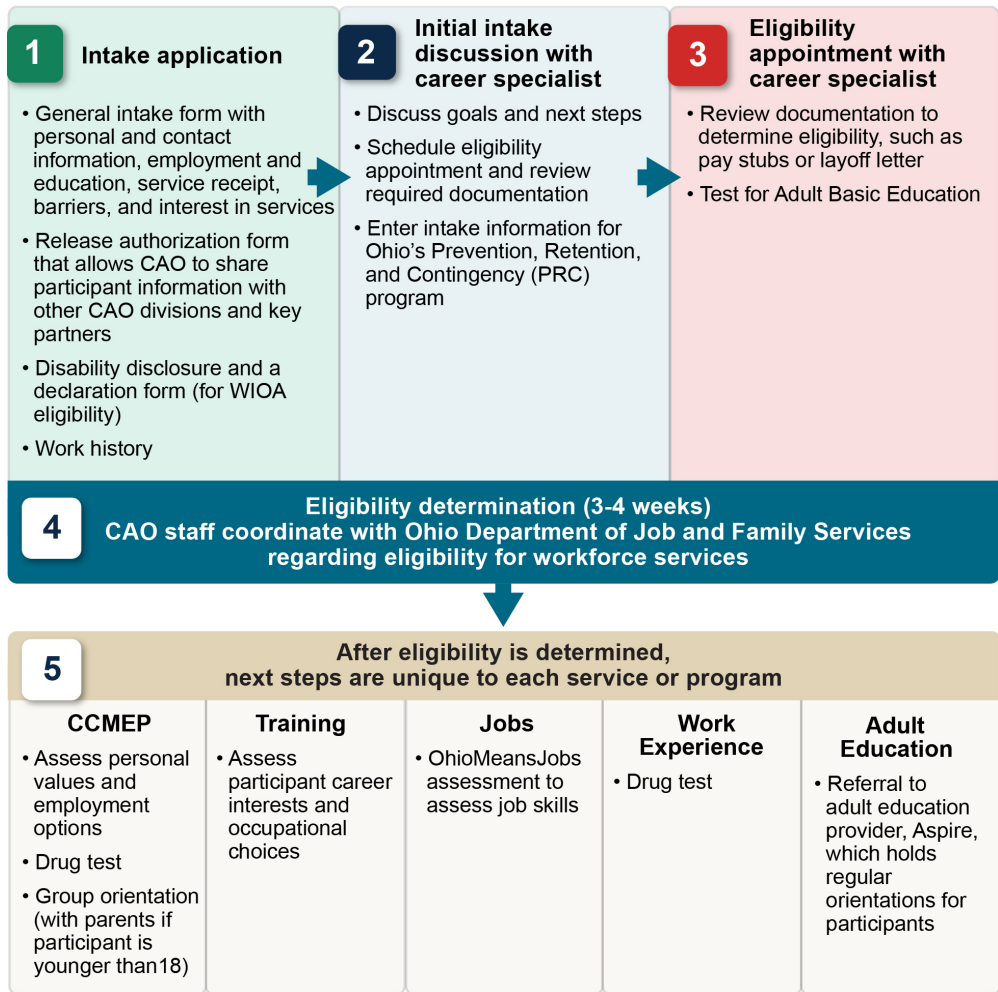
After an initial screening, the intake process varies according to a participant’s goals. Anyone who comes to CAO to receive employment services or behavioral services completes an initial intake with CAO staff, most commonly a career specialist or counselor. Unless they express immediate needs that must be addressed (for example, emergency utility assistance), the initial intake focuses on learning about the individuals and their goals to identify next steps. After initial intake, the process varies depending upon the services an individual is interested in receiving.

If interested in employment services, the receptionist will connect individuals with an adult or youth career specialist to complete their intake, depending upon their age. Figure 2 outlines the screening and intake steps based on participants’ employment goals and eligibility for services, including the associated assessments, for the various employment services offered by CAO.

Figure 2. Screening and intake for employment services



Participants enter CAO office and express an interest in workforce development services



Source: Interviews with CAO staff and partners.

Notes: CAO workers determine eligibility services and coordinate with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to enroll eligible youth in CCMEP.

Throughout the screening and intake processes, CAO staff will refer participants to other programs and services offered by CAO or to partner organizations. For example, CAO career specialists will refer work experience participants to CAO behavioral health counselors if they fail a drug test.

Employment services, including training and work experience, are funded through WIOA Title I and provided to WIOA-eligible adults, dislocated workers, and youth. Adult education and literacy services are funded through WIOA Title II.

¹ If a participant is only interested in OhioMeansJobs services, they only complete an intake application and participate in an initial intake discussion with a career specialist before accessing services. Depending on their goals and needs, they may participate in subsequent steps as appropriate.

² Resource room services include access to computers, fax machines, and telephones along with job listings, employment support, and career planning.

³ Participants take the Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE) or another basic skills assessment to determine whether they have low basic skills

CCMEP services

Although CAO offers a wide range of employment services to the community, this case study focuses primarily on CCMEP, which integrates WIOA and TANF funding, aligns relevant TANF and WIOA policies, and shares data between the two programs. The statewide CCMEP began in July 2016 and aims to improve employment and education outcomes among Ohio's in-school and out-of-school at-risk youth to overcome barriers and break the cycle of poverty. The three most common services provided to CCMEP participants are work experience, support services (including financial incentives), and career counselling. Over 80 percent of participants receive one or more of these services.



Eligibility requirements for CCMEP

- Youth ages 14-24
- Low-income (TANF recipients)
- Minor in the household (TANF recipients)
- Present barriers to employment (WIOA recipients)

CCMEP serves eligible youth ages 14 to 24. Eligible youth, who are income eligible and present barriers to employment, can enter the program in one of four ways:

1. TANF youth participants who are subject to work requirements are mandated to participate in CCMEP
2. Youth who live in a TANF household but are not subject to the work requirements may volunteer to participate in the CCMEP.
3. Youth residing in households with at least one minor child and with a family income at or below the Federal Poverty level, who received benefits or services from Ohio's Prevention Retention and Contingency (PRC) program within the last 90 days, may volunteer to participate in CCMEP.³
4. Youth who meet WIOA youth program eligibility criteria may also participate in CCMEP.

The share of CCMEP participants receiving monthly TANF cash assistance benefits varies across the state. In Scioto County, youth who participate in the CCMEP typically do not receive TANF cash assistance and, thus, they are mostly all voluntarily enrolled. In addition, CCMEP participants are co-enrolled in the TANF and WIOA programs to maximize funding and allowable program services for the participants. Most in school youth (14-21 years old) are served through TANF funding, while out-of-school youth (16-24 years old) can be served under either program. From July 2019 through March 2020, CAO served 278 youth through the CCMEP program. Of those, 57 were TANF-funded, 31 were WIOA-funded, and 190 were TANF and WIOA co-funded.

³ The PRC program is funded through the TANF block grant and provides nonrecurring, short-term, crisis-oriented benefits and ongoing services that are directly related to one of the four purposes of the TANF program.

Kelly's* story

Kelly graduated from high school and needed a job but was unsure what type of work she wanted to do. Her mom heard about CAO and its employment program for youth and encouraged Kelly to apply. Kelly visited CAO and enrolled in the CCMEP to engage in paid work experience through the program. With the help of her youth career specialist, Kelly found a seasonal job in a community food program administered by CAO. Once that position ended, she started working as a receptionist for another organization, a position that she still holds and enjoys because it provides an opportunity to learn applicable job skills. Once she enrolled in the CCMEP program, Kelly learned about the other benefits available, such as education incentive payments and tuition assistance. She decided to enroll in college to pursue a degree in health care administration and has plans to pursue a master's degree in the future. Now, Kelly goes to college full-time while working part-time at a subsidized job. Through the CCMEP, she receives incentives for turning in her passing grades each semester. She hopes to receive tuition assistance through the program once she enters her junior year. When asked to describe CAO, Kelly said, "Community Action is a place where they honestly have services for everybody. I mean, there's so many different things that they can offer to anybody."

**Participant's name has been changed.*

CCMEP assesses youth at intake. All participating youth receive an initial assessment of their reading and math levels (using the Test for Adult Basic Education) and of their interests; attend an orientation that includes a presentation by a mental health counselor; are prescreened for mental health and supportive service needs; undergo a drug test if they are interested in a work experience placement; and meet with a youth career specialist to identify their educational, postsecondary, or employment goals and the services and supports needed to achieve them. Depending upon the youth's needs, youth career specialists will refer them to the family navigators, counselors, or outside service providers in addition to offering more traditional employment services. For example, in-school youth can participate in up to 750 hours of paid work experience at any given worksite and may participate in multiple paid work experiences depending on their age and career goals. At CAO, youth career specialists have a caseload of approximately 50 to 60 participants.

CCMEP offers incentives to encourage youth participation. In Scioto County, CAO uses WIOA- and TANF-funded incentives extensively to encourage participation and retention in the CCMEP for both in-school and out-of-school youth. For example, CCMEP participants can receive incentives ranging from \$20 to \$100 for meeting school attendance goals; attaining a high school diploma, GED, or recognized credential; maintaining a 3.0 grade point average in high school or a postsecondary institution; completing work readiness workshops; and participating in work experience positions.

The specific incentives available to a CCMEP participant must be tied to their individualized CCMEP action plan, which lays out their goals and action steps for meeting those goals. The local workforce board and TANF agency approves the specific mix of incentives








CCMEP program for youth

CAO's CCMEP program integrates funding from WIOA and TANF for youth training, education, and employment services. Youth who participate in CCMEP receive support from a youth career specialist and are eligible to receive incentives that encourage their participation and retention.

available at the local level. For example, because the limited public transportation in the Scioto County region makes it difficult for participants to access employment opportunities, CAO is authorized to offer CCMEP participants an incentive for completing a driver’s education course and obtaining a driver’s license. Before receiving the incentive for the driver’s education course however, participants must complete a life-skills financial education course (Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation [FDIC] Money Smart), which consists of multiple modules.

CAO staff described the incentives as an effective way to recruit and engage youth participants. Table 2 highlights several CCMEP incentives offered by CAO.

Table 2. CCMEP goals and incentives

	CCMEP goals	Incentive amount
	Attainment of a degree or certification, including a GED, high school diploma, credential, or apprenticeship	\$100
	Placement in employment or education, including the military and postsecondary education or training	\$50–\$100
	Skill gains, as evidenced by the Test for Adult Basic Education score, school attendance, and grade point average	\$25–\$50
	Completion of workshop, including workshops on parenting, financial literacy, life skills, and job search	\$20
	Completion of driver’s license education course	\$349
	Pass driver’s license test and obtain driver’s license	\$100

Source: Program materials provided to the site visit team

Youth can exit CCMEP in a variety of ways. A CCMEP youth participant may exit the program under the following circumstances:

- Participant enrolls in post-secondary education, military service, or unsubsidized employment and no longer needs CCMEP services
- Participant is awarded social security disability insurance (SSDI) or supplemental security income (SSI) and has applied for services with the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities (OOD)
- Participant has not engaged in CCMEP services or activities on at least five occasions without explanation and CAO has made reasonable efforts to serve or reengage the program participant without success
- Participant is ineligible for TANF or WIOA funding or CAO lacks the funding for which the participant is eligible.

Other workforce services

CAO also is an important resource for services for adult and dislocated workers and for employers.

- **Workers.** Adults and dislocated workers can access WIOA and other employment-related services through the OhioMeansJobs Center. In addition to working with career specialists, if applicable, on career goals, individuals can participate in the center’s workshops on employment topics to assist participants with job searches, resume writing, and interview skills. CAO develops a monthly one-stop calendar to inform participants of upcoming events and activities. Tuition assistance is available to adults interested in participating in training offered by WIOA approved eligible training providers. Veterans may work specifically with the state veteran’s representative, although all career specialists are available to assist veterans.
- **Businesses and employers.** CAO maintains partnerships with regional business partners to assist employers and support economic development, including the Portsmouth Area Chamber of Commerce and the Business Resource Network of Adams, Brown, Pike and Scioto counties, which includes 51 business partners across the region. CAO’s business account executive can leverage CAO resources and its network of partners to provide workshops, address staffing needs, support employee retention, or enable business expansion. For example, if an employer partner identifies a need, CAO might work with the Alcohol, Drug, Addiction, Mental Health Services (ADAMHS) Board of Adams, Lawrence, and Scioto counties and the Ohio Bureau of Works Compensation to provide training for supervisors on how to manage workers in recovery.

Behavioral health services

CAO family navigators and counselors serve participants in need of behavioral health and supportive services. If a participant expresses an interest in behavioral health services, the receptionist or the adult and youth career specialists will connect individuals to a family navigator or counselor to complete their intake, depending on their needs. Figures 3 and 4 outline the screening and intake process, including the associated assessments, for family navigator and counseling services respectively.

Family navigators and counselors typically work one-on-one with participants to address their needs. As appropriate, they help participants access other wraparound services and programs that CAO offers (Figure 1). For example, one family navigator described coordinating with staff at CAO’s early childhood development division and WIC division to assist a parent with her WIC application and paperwork to enroll her child in Head Start. Family navigators and counselors also receive extensive training in a variety of topics, such as trauma-informed care and adult resiliency, attending trainings on an as-needed basis.

Family navigators provide intensive case management supports. The two navigators are qualified mental health specialists, work primarily with CAO participants—adults and youth—affected by opioids and their families to provide direct case management support and facilitate access to wraparound services. In February 2020, at the time of data collection for this case study, the family navigator positions were

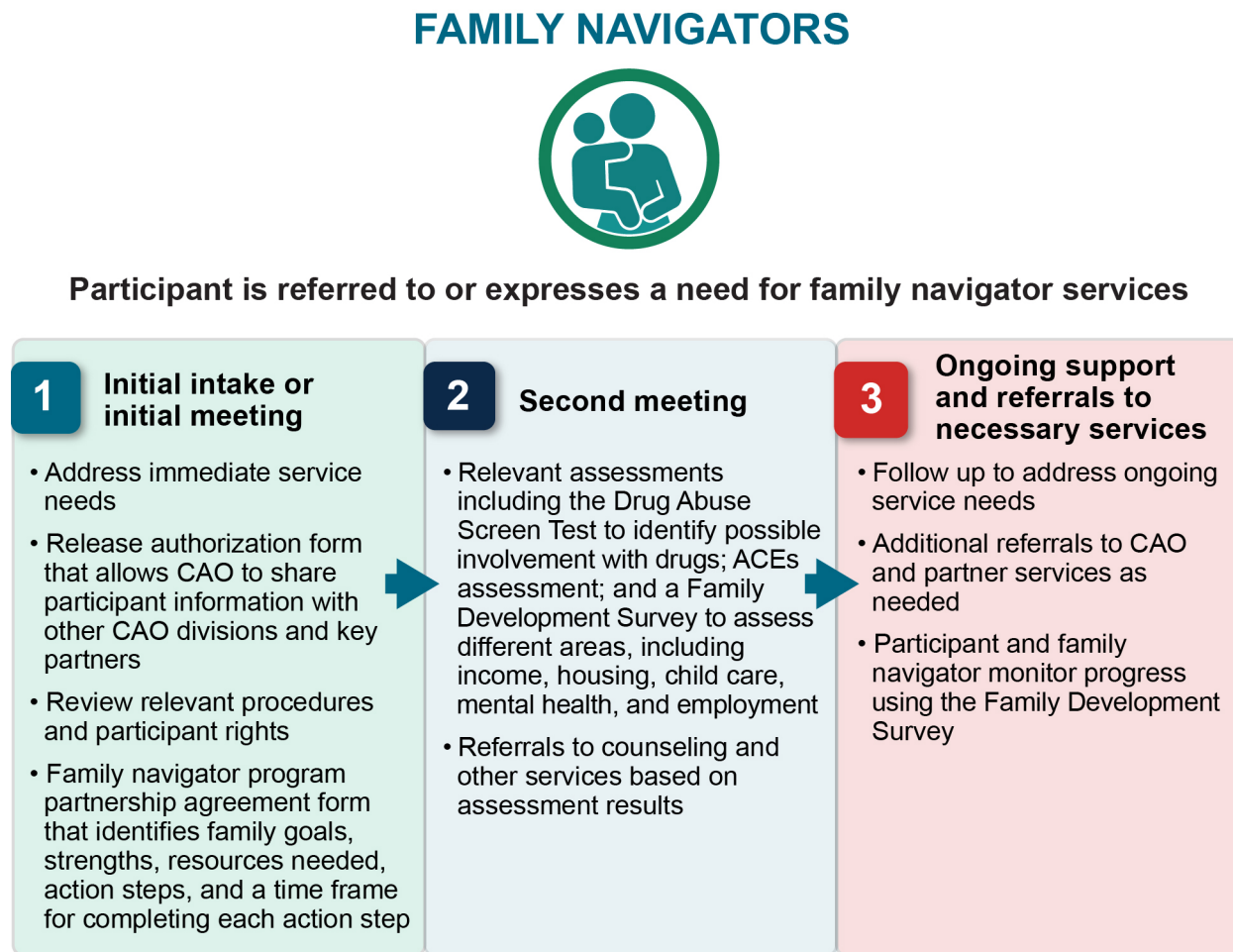


Training topics for family navigators and counselors

- Health insurance marketplace
- Qualified mental health specialist training
- Trauma-informed care
- Child therapy
- Adult resiliency
- Suicide prevention
- Ohio Workforce Case Management System (the state case management system used by CAO)

new at CAO, so they had relatively small caseloads of three to four participants each. Family navigators work with participants to identify their strengths, needs, and goals. They then determine the action steps needed to achieve those goals and document them in an action plan. In addition, the family navigators facilitate participants' access to needed services, such as housing, the federal government's free cell phone and inexpensive service plan program (Lifeline), substance use or mental health treatment, and transportation. To identify which services are of most immediate need, navigators ask participants to rate their priorities and then refer them to a list of providers that can address those needs.

Figure 3. Screening and intake for family navigator services



Source: Interviews with CAO staff and partners.

Note: Family navigators serve participants who can benefit from their services, but focus primarily on serving individuals, family members, or youth affected by opioids.

The family navigator who conducts the initial intake will keep the participant on his or her caseload. Throughout the screening and intake processes, CAO staff assess eligibility for other services and make necessary referrals to CAO and partner organizations. For example, if a participant expresses a need for a job then the family navigator will refer them to a career specialist.

The navigators may serve one member of a family but will ask about the family's interest and needs to reach others who might also benefit from CAO services. For example, a family navigator worked with one participant at the STAR Community Justice Center, a minimum-security correctional facility focused on rehabilitating nonviolent offenders. The participant said that his partner was looking for employment,

so the family navigator reached out to the partner directly about the workforce services available through CAO. The navigators also hold group sessions on various topics, such as life skills and finances, which are open to the community.

Family navigators receive referrals from a wide range of organizations and programs, including mandatory referrals from the drug courts and voluntary referrals from the family reunification court, STAR Community Justice Center, local schools, CAO's OhioMeansJobs center, and other sources. Scioto County covers a large geographic area, so family navigators try to meet participants in places that are convenient to access. Even though the family navigators have the option of providing participants with a bus pass, the pass's usefulness is limited given the lack of public transportation in Scioto County. As needed, family navigators can provide transportation for participants using a van maintained by CAO.

Staff perspective

"Some of the participants aren't used to people being encouraging to them. They are used to feeling like a failure, like they are missing the normal things that everyone else has."

Laurie's* story

Laurie connected with a CAO family navigator after receiving a voluntary referral from the family reunification court. The judge requested that Laurie work with the family navigator to obtain stable housing and counseling services for her oldest child. The family navigator worked with the court and probation officer to address Laurie's immediate needs. After meeting with Laurie, the family navigator made a referral to CAO counselors to conduct a diagnostic assessment and provide mental health counseling for her child. Although Laurie applied for housing assistance on her own before their first meeting, the family navigator provided moral support when her initial application was denied. Laurie's second application was approved, which provided stable housing for herself and her two children. After Laurie obtained housing and received counseling, the family navigator planned to help Laurie enroll her youngest child in CAO's Early Head Start program and help Laurie pursue her GED. If Laurie is interested in pursuing a GED, the family navigator will refer her to CAO's adult education partner, Aspire.

**Participant's name has been changed.*

In general, participants connect with the family navigators when they are in a crisis. The navigators continue to work with participants until their needs are addressed. However, continued engagement after their immediate service needs are met can be a challenge. One CAO staff member explained that "engagement is not something [participants] have been exposed to in a positive way." So, family navigators focus on alleviating their immediate stressors while establishing a relationship that will encourage participants to come back and seek help in the future.



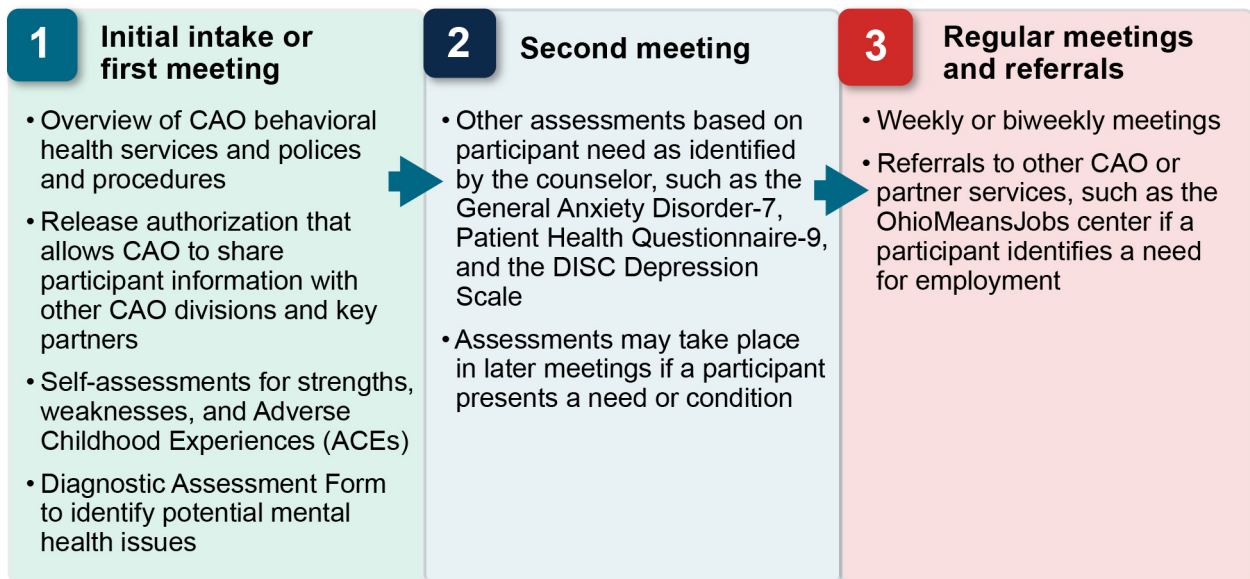
Intensive case management with access to a range of services

Family navigators, counselors, and career specialists work one-on-one with participants to address their needs. As appropriate, they introduce participants to other specialists on staff who can help participants and their families access any other wraparound services and programs that CAO offers.

Figure 4. Screening and intake for CAO counseling services



Participant is referred to or expresses a need for counseling services



Source: Interviews with CAO staff and partners.

Note: Participants are referred to counselors if they express an interest in counseling services. CAO counselors are fee-for-service and work with participants who are eligible to receive counseling services through Medicaid or private insurance.

The counselor who conducts the initial intake will keep the participant on his or her caseload. Throughout the screening and intake processes, CAO staff assess eligibility for other services and make necessary referrals to CAO and partner organizations. For example, if a participant expresses a need for a job then the counselor will refer them to a career specialist.

Counselors provide trauma-informed supports, primarily to school-aged youth. All three CAO counselors are licensed social workers and the clinical supervisor is a licensed counselor with an early childhood mental health credential. The counselors, including the clinical supervisor, have their own caseloads of 40 to 55 participants. They are responsible for providing trauma-informed counseling services to youth and adults who have experienced trauma, substance use disorder, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, and other behavioral challenges. Counselors do not have specialized adult- or youth-focused caseloads, but they mostly counsel school-age children and adolescents. They also provide one-on-one coaching for parents to provide additional support and encourage them to use appropriate coping skills when interacting with their children. After discussing participants' goals and expectations, counselors develop a treatment plan for each participant that incorporates specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, time-based (SMART) goals that are aligned with their needs. If

participants require specialized counseling or other mental health services that CAO cannot provide, the staff will make referrals to out-of-agency provider partners.

CAO counselors receive referrals from community partners (for example, local schools where they meet with students during the school day) in addition to receiving in-house referrals from the workforce adult and youth career specialists or staff from other CAO programs. For example, the counselors offer early childhood mental health consultations at CAO's Head Start centers when a need is identified. Counselors also provide services to participants at CAO sites; participants' homes; and other community locations, such as a McDonald's restaurant, depending on the needs and comfort level of the participant. The length of each session and the frequency of sessions vary based on a participant's need. Typical sessions range from 35 minutes to one hour and occur weekly or biweekly.

Staff perspective

"A lot of kids don't have stable home lives and are going through bad things. [CAO] uses a trauma-informed treatment approach and focuses on trust and rapport with that child. It's really important to assist children in naming their feelings and how to address them in an appropriate way."

The length of time in care also varies across participants. Initial treatment plans are set for 90 days and counselors reassess participants' interest and needs after 90 days. However, they do not typically set end dates. When a participant is ready to end counseling services, there is a discharge period during which the counselor prepares the participant for the end of counseling.

According to CAO staff, due to the presence of many substance use disorder treatment facilities in the area, there is a shortage of licensed staff with independent licensure in the Scioto County region. As a result, CAO struggles to compete with other providers in the area to find and retain qualified counseling staff with specialized credentials.

Key CAO partners and their roles

CAO works closely with several organizations that serve Scioto County and its surrounding region. CAO believes that partnerships are important because the organizations all have the same goals and serve the same families. Depending upon the nature of the partnership, CAO might refer participants to its partners, receive referrals from its partners, or provide services for its partners. For example, a career specialist and family navigator worked together to provide a participant with transportation, a Social Security card, and a free cell phone and affordable service plan before referring him to the Opportunities for Ohioans with Disabilities, which could support his specialized employment needs. During intake, participants sign a release of information to indicate which agencies CAO can share their information with. If a participant does not provide permission to share information with a particular agency, CAO staff will explain how that agency is involved in services and allow the participant to update the form as needed.

The key partners highlighted in this case study include Scioto County courts and criminal justice agencies and an ADAMHS board. Other important partnerships include education providers at all levels, including 10 local K-12 school districts, local universities and technical colleges, Aspire (an adult education provider), and local businesses and employers. These strategic partnerships enable CAO to meet the diverse needs of its participants and community, while avoiding duplication of services.

CAO has partnerships with four local juvenile and adult specialty court programs. Through these partnerships, CAO provides employment services and wraparound supports to participants. CAO staff, including at least one youth or adult career specialist and one family navigator, attend weekly specialty court sessions and participate in a team of about 20 community providers that helps develop individualized treatment plans for court participants, discusses their progress, and changes treatment plans as needed. Depending upon a participant's needs, the treatment plan could include a mandatory referral to CAO to participate in employment services (for example, work experience) or receive assistance from the family navigators in obtaining additional wraparound supports. In addition to participation in the drug courts' treatment team, CAO receives voluntary referrals from the STAR Community Justice Center, a local alternative incarceration facility focused on rehabilitation, and the Community Transition Program, which serves people with a history of substance use disorder and mental health barriers as they transition from correctional facilities into the community. For both programs, CAO staff connect with incarcerated individuals in person or through videoconferences to provide case management and arrange for necessary services before and after their release.

Staff perspective

"We are making an all-out effort to collaborate. If we have this funding, they have that funding—what can we do on behalf of our common participants? We want everybody involved."

The ADAMHS board of Adams, Lawrence, and Scioto counties is a relatively new and important partnership for CAO. The ADAMHS board manages the public mental health and addiction treatment and recovery system in Adams, Lawrence, and Scioto counties by contracting with provider agencies to deliver services. CAO is one of the board's seven direct service providers in the region. CAO staff in the behavioral health unit provide behavioral health services to individuals not served by Medicaid or private insurance. The ADAMHS board also oversees CAO's role in the Community Transition Program, which connects individuals being released from prison to service providers who help them address their mental health and substance use disorder barriers. In addition, the ADAMHS board was a key partner in the establishment of the new youth resiliency community center and helped CAO attain funding for the center, which will support drug prevention efforts among youth populations (for example, by providing after-school programming).

Adult and juvenile drug courts

Drug courts are an intervention for individuals recovering from substance use disorders that are designed to deter them from future involvement in the criminal justice system. Drug court participation is often an alternative to incarceration or a formal criminal charge. Programs require participants to abstain from substance use and hold them accountable while providing treatment and other services (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2018). Scioto County has two drug courts—one for juveniles and one for adults. To enroll participants in the Scioto County adult and juvenile drug courts, drug court administrators assess potential participants' need and fit for the program. Drug court participants must be diagnosed with a substance use disorder.

If the drug court program seems appropriate, individuals receive a program overview to assess their level of interest. During a "stabilization period," which may include detoxification, needs assessments, and other services (Bureau of Justice Assistance 2004), participants have a month to decide if they want to participate in the drug court program. If they agree to participate, they must demonstrate their commitment to treatment and are held accountable for their progress (for example, they must go to counseling) before entering the program.

Once they enter the program, participants receive support from a drug court coordinator and attend drug court meetings. At drug court meetings in Scioto County, the judge and drug court coordinator come together with a treatment team of about 20 community representatives, including service providers, counselors, volunteers, mentors, and school principals (for juvenile court), to address the unique needs of each participant. The judge and coordinator match participants to members of the treatment team who align with their needs. Drug court coordinators are responsible for giving updates to providers and the judge about the progress of each participant. They administer incentives, such as movie passes or gift cards, if participants are doing well with their treatment. Drug court coordinators may also administer sanctions if a participant relapses or makes another mistake but noted that sanctions are less harsh to align with recommendations from the National Drug Court Institute.

As part of their job responsibilities, at least one adult or youth career specialist and at least one family navigator from CAO attend drug court weekly as members of the treatment team. CAO's primary role in the drug court is to address employment needs and provide counseling services, but it may also provide family navigator services if a need is identified.

Participants are involved in drug court for an average of 10 months; however, the length of involvement is individualized based on their needs and circumstances and may last for several years. After Scioto County drug court participants complete the active phases of the program, drug court coordinators monitor them for two years.

How CAO is funded

CAO has a yearly budget of \$18 million, with the workforce division comprising approximately one-quarter of the agency's funding. As an organization, CAO has wide access to both state and federal funding streams, which are strategically used for various different services according to the expenditure rules of the particular funding source. In February 2020, CAO reported using 15 to 20 different funding streams. The funding sources for the workforce division, which houses the organization's behavioral health unit, include WIOA through the Workforce Development Area #1 Board, TANF through the Scioto County Department of Job and Family Services, two U.S. Department of Labor grants (one for disaster emergency relief and one related to the opioid crisis) through the Workforce Development Area #1 Board, and funding from the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. CAO also has contracts with the ADAMHS Board and a contract with Ohio University that funds the nurse navigator through an Ohio Department of Health grant.

The CCMEP program greatly expanded the funding available to CAO for youth services. It fully integrates funding from the WIOA Title I youth program with an allocation from the state's TANF block grant. It receives about \$1 million in TANF funding and \$300,000 in WIOA funding per year. The majority of in-school youth are funded by TANF dollars; whereas, out-of-school youth and all youth follow-up activities are supported through WIOA funding. To ensure the services are seamless for participants, CAO co-enrolls CCMEP participants in the WIOA youth program or adult program when possible. As noted above, 68 percent of CAO's CCMEP 278 participants were co-enrolled in TANF and WIOA.

In 2016, CAO sought and received accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF®) at two of their sites, a time-intensive step that enabled CAO to expand its behavioral services to include behavioral health and substance use disorder counseling. CAO is also certified by the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services. CAO's licensed clinical counselor supervisor and mental health counselors (who are licensed social workers) are funded through a fee-for-service payment model; they bill their hours to Medicaid or private insurance.

How CAO measures program participation and outcomes

CAO typically collects participant information, including income, service receipt, and household information, during intake or as part of an eligibility assessment for its services. CAO formally monitors and reports outcomes for WIOA and CCMEP participants.⁴ CAO also collects and reports other demographic information in the aggregate, including gender, age, race and ethnicity, education, and barriers to employment.

CAO uses the Ohio Workforce Case Management System (OWCMS), which is the state's internal data system for gathering data for WIOA and other workforce programs (Ohio Department of Job and Family Services 2018). The OWCMS includes basic information about each participant, including eligibility, income, service receipt, and household information, along with case notes. It also collects information on CCMEP and TANF-funded services as well as all DOL-funded employment programs, including WIOA. CAO staff can view and enter notes for each participant, which helps them understand participants' needs, eligibility, and past service receipt. In addition to OWCMS, individual CAO staff members implement their own tracking and monitoring systems. For example, a family navigator maintains an Excel spreadsheet to track referred participants, including where the referral came from, the services provided, and the participant's status (active or non-active). In the future, CAO leadership would like to better integrate the divisions to achieve a more coordinated full-family approach to service delivery, which will require enhanced data systems with the capacity to share data and integrate data systems across divisions.

CAO's partners have their own separate systems that are not connected to the OWCMS. They provide data to CAO staff as needed. For example, CAO's adult education partner, Aspire, monitors and tracks

⁴ For WIOA adult and dislocated workers, CAO tracks the five primary performance measures required under WIOA: (1) employment in the second quarter after program exit, (2) employment in the fourth quarter after program exit, (3) median earnings in the second quarter after program exit, (4) credential attainment, and (5) measurable skill gains toward a credential or employment. For WIOA youth, CAO tracks six CCMEP performance measures that also align with WIOA youth performance measures: (1) education, (2) training, or (3) employment at program exit and in the second and fourth quarter after program exit; (4) median earnings in the second quarter after exit; (5) credential attainment rate; and (6) measurable skill gains.

data in a system called ABLELink. Although Aspire staff track information in their own system, they send CAO a report on a monthly basis that includes information for participants referred by CAO, such as whether they engaged in services.

How CAO adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic

As of June 2020, Scioto County had recorded 46.5 COVID-19 cases per 100,000 residents, compared to the national rate of 821 cases per 100,000 residents.^{a,b} Despite a comparatively low case rate, Scioto County's unemployment rate spiked to 14.9 percent in April 2020 before dropping to 8.9 percent in July 2020.^c To respond to the evolving needs of its participants and to better serve its community, CAO did the following:

- **Stayed open to meet community needs.** Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, CAO has never closed its physical offices. Even during the early months of the pandemic, CAO maintained a minimum number of staff at its office locations while adhering to social distancing guidelines. CAO staff estimated that 15 to 20 participants came in each day for assistance filing for unemployment or to access their food assistance programs. During this time, workforce division staff (including youth and adult career specialists, family navigators, and counselors) primarily served participants virtually through Zoom video conferencing, but some staff were also available to serve participants in person.
- **Implemented additional safety precautions for in-person services after April.** All staff in the workforce division returned to CAO offices in May. CAO implemented social distancing by spreading staff members across three CAO buildings, including the new youth community center, and remodeling the spaces to safely serve participants. CAO added plexiglass partition barriers to every desk so staff could safely work one on one with participants and required masks and temperature checks for anyone who entered the buildings. To ensure everyone had access to a mask, CAO purchased cloth masks for staff and participants of CAO programs and provided disposable masks for AJC customers and other community members who came to CAO offices to access other services.
- **Created new services and expanded or adapted existing services to meet the increased need for food assistance.** Beginning in March, CAO started a new service to support local schools by delivering meals to 31 sites throughout the county until the end of the 2019–2020 school year. CAO also expanded its Summer Food Service Program to additional sites, started a new after-school meal distribution program for families for the 2020–2021 school year, and adapted its mobile farmer's market program by making it a drive-through. CAO's food assistance programs continued to provide work experience opportunities for CCMEP youth participants. In August 2020, CAO staff estimated that it was providing 10,000 meals per week to community members.
- **Enrolled and engaged participants virtually.** CAO established several new processes to facilitate enrollment in its workforce programs that continued after all staff returned to the office. One such process included using the flexibility provided through a state waiver from the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services to allow verbal signatures. However, CAO still experienced an overall decline in enrollment in its counseling services and its CCMEP youth and WIOA adult programs since the start of the pandemic. Moving forward, CAO is exploring ways in which staff can better engage adult participants to promote enrollment and participation. For example, CAO would like to offer financial incentives to adult participants, similar to those available to CCMEP youth, and provide virtual work experience opportunities for youth. CAO is also working with a partner agency to develop and identify places in its rural community for Wi fi hotspots that will help its participants connect virtually.
- **Addressed the safety needs of employers.** CAO worked with several partner organizations to distribute personal protective equipment toolkits, including masks and bottles of hand sanitizer, to approximately 200 employers in the Scioto County region.

Sources: ^a USAFacts (2020); ^b Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center (2020); ^c U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020b).

Future plans to enhance services

CAO is a long-standing community-based service provider in the Scioto County region. For decades, it has adapted its organization to address the needs of the community through its programs and services. By incorporating a behavioral unit into the workforce services division, CAO enhanced its ability to address the mental health needs of participants. By adopting an approach that focuses on youth and families, it can support the holistic needs of the participants, families, and communities it serves.

Looking forward, there are still many ways in which CAO leadership reported making improvements that will enable it to better serve community residents in the future:

- **Building on community partnerships to facilitate a more coordinated approach to serving participants.** Although CAO can meet a variety of participant needs, staff realize that they are not the only organization serving residents of Scioto County. They recognize the importance of collaborating with different providers in the community to effectively serve participants and avoid duplication of services. They will continue to partner with other organizations to leverage funding and resources that will enable them to run their programs more efficiently.
- **Adding a peer support specialist to the behavioral health unit.** In February 2020, CAO planned to hire a peer support specialist for its behavioral health unit. The peer support specialist would work with participants struggling with substance use disorders. Unfortunately, it has been difficult for CAO to find someone for this role due to the CARF and WIOA Youth criminal background requirements: candidates must have previously had a substance use disorder and be able to pass a background check. By summer 2020, CAO was in the process of hiring a candidate who had successfully completed the program requirements.
- **Enhancing preventative services available to community youth before they become involved in the criminal justice system.** There are a limited number of services available to youth before they find themselves in trouble. CAO sees itself as well positioned to fill these gaps in available services because it already provides early childhood services through Early Head Start and Head Start and then reconnects with Scioto County youth as adolescents through the CCMEP program. The opening of two new youth community centers will represent an important milestone as CAO progresses in its goal to reach and serve youth in Scioto County.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Methodology

The State TANF Case Studies project seeks to expand the knowledge base of programs that help low-income individuals, including TANF recipients, prepare for and engage in work. The project is showcasing nine programs selected because of their different approaches to working with these individuals. Mathematica and its partner, MEF Associates, designed and conducted the study.

To select programs for case studies, the study team, in collaboration with ACF, first identified 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. These approaches might increase self-sufficiency directly by helping participants find employment or indirectly by providing supports and alleviating barriers to employment. The study team identified four approaches, or domains:

1. Wraparound supports
2. Full-family transitional housing and supports
3. Employment-based interventions
4. Collective impact and collaborative community initiatives

Within each domain, the study team then identified potential programs by searching key websites, holding discussions with stakeholders, and reviewing findings and lessons from ACF and other studies. The next step was to narrow the list of programs based on initial discussions with program leaders to learn more about their programs and gauge their interest in participating. The final set of case study programs was selected for diversity, in terms of geography and focus population. Case studies of these programs illustrate the diverse practices operating around the country to assist TANF recipients and low-income individuals in finding and maintaining employment. Their selection does not connote ACF's endorsement of the practices or strategies described.

For each program selected, two or three members of the project team conducted a site visit to document its implementation. For eight programs, team members conducted two- to three-day visits to an average of two locations per program. The visit to the ninth program was conducted virtually via video conferencing due to COVID-19 pandemic travel restrictions. Each site visit consisted of semistructured interviews with administrators of the program, leaders of their partner agencies, and the staff providing direct services. The site visit teams interviewed, on average, 15 staff per program. During in-person visits, the teams also conducted in-depth interviews with an average of three participants per program and reviewed anonymized cases of an average of two participants per program. In addition, teams observed program activities, as appropriate.

For this case study, two members of the research team spent two and a half days at one CAO office in downtown Portsmouth, Ohio in February 2020. The team conducted semistructured interviews in one-on-one or small-group meetings with 10 CAO staff members, including administrators and frontline service providers, and 9 representatives from various CAO partner organizations. The team also conducted in-depth interviews with two participants and reviewed anonymized case files for one participant with the family navigator. The team conducted a follow-up telephone call in August 2020 with a program leader to learn how CAO responded to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

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