PROGRAM SNAPSHOT: Goal4 It!™

JEFFERSON COUNTY COLORADO
Human Services

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Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations

To learn more about the potential of coaching to help Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income people reach economic security, OPRE awarded a contract to Mathematica Policy Research and Abt Associates to conduct an evaluation of employment coaching interventions. The evaluation will use an experimental research design to examine the effectiveness of coaching interventions that aim to help low-income individuals succeed in the labor market. It will also examine the implementation of the coaching interventions, the impact of coaching on self-regulation skills, and the role of self-regulation skills in generating any impacts on employment outcomes. Descriptive findings will be available in fall/winter 2019 and impact findings will be available beginning in 2021.

For more information visit the project's web page or email us about receiving regular updates on the project.

Goal4 It!™ in Jefferson County, Colorado is part of a select group of employment coaching interventions being evaluated under the Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations, funded by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE), within the Administration for Children and Families.

How does Jefferson County implement employment coaching?

The Colorado Works Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in Jefferson County is piloting Goal4 It!™ for work-eligible TANF recipients. Goal4 It!™ is a coaching approach developed by Mathematica Policy Research in partnership with the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University, other experts in the field, and practitioners across the country. It aims to improve participants' executive functioning and other self-regulation skills—such as the ability to stay organized and control one's emotions—in the short-term and increase economic security and decrease reliance on public assistance in the long-term.

What is employment coaching?

Coaching involves a trained staff person or coach working with a participant to set personalized goals, as well as supporting, motivating, and providing feedback over time to the participant as he or she pursues those goals. The coach is not directive but works collaboratively with the participant.

It uses three primary strategies: (1) strengthening core skills, (2) reducing external sources of stress, and (3) creating responsive relationships within and beyond the program.

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- **Assessment.** During the first meeting with a participant, Goal4 It!™ coaches partner with participants to examine their strengths and needs in four life areas: (1) work and education, (2) family stability and well-being, (3) legal issues, and (4) financial health. Rather than focusing on the identification of barriers or challenges, this assessment approach is intended to jumpstart the goal setting process by clarifying what is most important to the participant.

- **Goal setting.** The coaches help participants set meaningful goals, break goals down into manageable steps, develop specific plans to achieve the steps, and regularly review goal progress and revise their goals or plans. The Goal4 It!™ approach to goal pursuit focuses on evoking the participants' true motivation; creating strong implementation intentions ("if, then" plans) to overcome obstacles to goal achievement; and facilitating self-reflection about what the participant has learned and how to move forward.

- **Coaching frequency.** Coaches meet at least once per month with participants who are not working and more frequently with those who are experiencing a crisis, such as becoming homeless or being at risk of losing custody of their children. Coaches meet with participants who are employed at least once every two months. All participants meet with a coach as long as they are still receiving TANF benefits.

- **Coach characteristics.** The Jefferson County coaches have case management experience through either TANF or other programs. Most are TANF case managers who were trained in the Goal4 It!™ coaching approach. All of the coaches have at least a bachelor's degree.

The evaluation will compare the effectiveness of Goal4 It!™ to that of Jefferson County's traditional TANF case management. The traditional case management, administered by Jefferson County career and family coordinators, focuses on creating an individual plan that incorporates the federal TANF work requirements and monitoring recipients' progress on and compliance with that plan. In contrast, Goal4 It!™ coaches focus on individual goal setting and pursuit using Goal4 It!™ tools, such as documents to plan goals and determine goal action steps.

How is Goal4 It!™ funded and whom does it serve?
Goal4 It!™ is funded through the TANF block grant as part of normal program operations and serves TANF recipients who are subject to work requirements.

Where and when is Goal4 It!™ being evaluated?
The evaluation is being conducted in Jefferson County's TANF office. Study enrollment began in October 2018 and will continue for about 12 months.