

## Case Study of a Job Training, Housing, and Family Support Program for Young Mothers

### New Moms

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**Lead entity:**

New Moms

**Service area:**

Chicago, Illinois

**Setting:**

Urban and suburban

**Focus population:**

Low-income mothers and pregnant women, ages 16–24

**Number served:**

366 in fiscal year 2019

**Initial year of operation:**

1983

### Introduction

New Moms is a nonprofit organization providing job training, housing, and family support programs to pregnant and parenting young women and their children on the west side of Chicago and the near western suburbs. The concept originated after the New Moms' founder began distributing diapers and baby formula out of her car to young mothers in the Humboldt Park neighborhood who were experiencing low income and homelessness.

Participants in New Moms' job training program progress toward self-determined goals and practice work readiness skills through hands-on employment experience in New Moms' social enterprise candle company, Bright Endeavors. The housing program offers both transitional and permanent supportive housing. The family support program supports young mothers through individualized home visits and group meetings, as well as doula supports for pregnant women. Across all three programs, New Moms partners with community-based

organizations to support participants facing mental health issues, intimate partner violence, and other barriers to stability and well-being. This case study highlights New Moms' job training program and provides information about the housing and family support programs.

**This case study includes the following sections:** [Where New Moms Operates](#); [Who New Moms Serves](#); [What Services New Moms Offers](#); [How New Moms is Organized, Staffed, and Funded](#); [How New Moms Measures Program Participation and Outcomes](#); and [Promising Practices, Challenges, and Lessons Learned](#).

#### About this report

This case study (OPRE Report # 2021-69) 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 New Moms operates

New Moms has three program locations: a central office and housing complex in the Austin neighborhood of Chicago; an office and housing complex in the neighboring suburb of Oak Park, a neighborhood adjacent to Austin; and the Bright Endeavors social enterprise in the West Garfield Park neighborhood of Chicago. The Austin location serves as the primary hub for New Moms' job training program, a center for family support services, and the transitional housing center. The Oak Park building opened in 2019 to offer family support services, and in 2020 began offering permanent housing to families. Most New Moms participants are from the west side of Chicago, though some participants travel from the south side of Chicago and other suburbs to attend New Moms' job training program.



### Economic snapshot of Chicago, Illinois

**Total population (2018):**<sup>a</sup> 2,718,555

**Median household income (2018):**<sup>b</sup> \$55,198

**Percentage of people below poverty level (2018):**<sup>b</sup> 19.5%

**Unemployment rate (2019):**<sup>c</sup> 4.0%

Sources: <sup>a</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2019a);

<sup>b</sup> U.S. Census Bureau (2019b); <sup>c</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020b).



### Snapshot of the Austin Neighborhood in Chicago, Illinois

**Total population (2014-2018 average):** 94,762

**Median household income (2014-2018 average):** \$33,420

**Unemployment rate (2014-2018 average):** 13.6%

**Austin residents employed in Austin (2017):** 3%

Source: Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (2020)

Staff from New Moms and partner organizations described the Austin neighborhood as economically under-resourced. For instance, the unemployment rate in Austin was 13.6 percent in 2018, which was nearly four times higher than the unemployment rate for the city of Chicago (4.3 percent in 2018) (Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning 2020; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020a).<sup>1</sup> Staff reported that the Austin neighborhood faced persistent shortages of affordable housing, grocery stores, domestic violence shelters, and high quality child care. New Moms staff said that most participants travel outside of Austin to find employment.

According to New Moms staff and partners, Austin is home to many grassroots efforts that address the effects of poverty, high rates of violence, and unemployment. According to one community partner, an evolving network of local organizations exists to assist people experiencing a range of barriers that include involvement in the criminal

<sup>1</sup> Unemployment data presented here do not reflect shifts in the economy that have occurred since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. See box on page 15 for more information about changes to the economy and how the New Moms responded to the pandemic.

justice system, the child welfare system, and gangs. New Moms staff and partners said residents of Oak Park with low income experience barriers similar to those of Austin residents.

## Who New Moms serves

New Moms serves young pregnant and parenting women who are experiencing two periods of developmental transition concurrently: adolescence and matrescence. Adolescence is a transitional period between childhood and adulthood that includes changes in physical, cognitive, and social development (National Academy of Sciences 2019). It is a period associated with normative risk taking and identity formation and holds promise as a time of cognitive malleability and resiliency (National Academy of Sciences 2019). Research on cognitive development reveals that the prefrontal cortex, a part of the brain associated with executive functioning, continues to mature until about age 25 (National Academy of Sciences 2019).

The transition to motherhood, called matrescence, is a developmental period of physical, cognitive, and social changes associated with pregnancy and motherhood (Raphael 1975; Sacks and Birndorf 2019). Navigating this transition in adolescence introduces a new set of challenges for a young person that include difficulty caring for a child, lack of social support and education, and economic strain (Erfini et al. 2019).

## What services New Moms offers

New Moms has three core programs—job training, housing, and family support—as well as wraparound supports for young and expecting mothers (Figure 1). New Moms designed its programs with a family-centered coaching approach in order to partner with and support young women as they experience adolescence and matrescence. Evidence-based practices, such as trauma-informed and strengths-based approaches, are incorporated across New Moms’ programs. Staff emphasize that New Moms’ intention is to partner with participants as they practice and progress towards their goals. New Moms creates opportunities for participants to have autonomy, power, and choice throughout their time in New Moms’ programs. For example, participants determine their personal and family goals and are supported to create an individual plan to meet those goals. This framing is reinforced through organizational messaging and staff language used when describing work with participants.

Many families engage in multiple programs—some at the same time—throughout their engagement at New Moms. This is based on each family’s goals and eligibility for the programs. In addition to its three core programs, New Moms brings wraparound support services onsite to reduce barriers that participants may otherwise face accessing the supports through community partners.



### Key program practices in New Moms’ job training program

- Incorporate executive skills coaching in all efforts
- Offer hands-on candle production employment experience
- Provide classroom-based job readiness training

**Figure 1. Three programs that New Moms offers**



## Framework guiding approach

Family-centered executive skills coaching serves as the framework that guides New Moms’ approach across all services. Executive skills are the cognitive abilities required to create goals, regulate behavior, and take necessary steps to achieve objectives (see Table 1 for examples). Staff said that through executive skills coaching, participants discover their strengths, which supports their growth as parents and community members. Staff aim to put participants in the “driver’s seat” to increase their sense of power and autonomy.


The executive skills coaching approach implemented by New Moms was developed by Dawson and Guare (2009) based in research on executive functioning. The approach has five key components that are incorporated within the New Moms’ organization and within each of its programs (New Moms 2019a):

1. **Environmental modifications.** New Moms makes changes to physical space, processes, tasks, technology, and materials to minimize barriers and reduce stressors. For example, New Moms uses automatic text reminders and plain language on required documents.
2. **Building knowledge about executive skills.** Staff and participants create awareness of their own and one another’s executive skill strengths and weaknesses by self-assessing their own executive skills, labeling executive skills verbally, and discussing them during goal setting activities. Reminders of the executive skills are posted on the walls of the Austin office and at Bright Endeavors.
3. **A strengths-based coaching framework.** Staff share a fundamental belief in the inherent strength and potential of all participants and use common language to support strengths-based interactions and clear communication.
4. **Tracking progress toward short- and long-term goals.** Participants progress toward meaningful goals they set for themselves, monitoring their progress and revising their goals along the way.
5. **Incentives.** New Moms supports coaching efforts with incentives that remove barriers and celebrate progress toward goal achievement.

As part of the standard 90-day onboarding program, all new staff hires receive core trainings on executive skills coaching. The program also includes trainings on diversity, equity, and inclusion; family-centered coaching; and trauma-informed care. Program staff attend additional training and have opportunities to practice motivational interviewing, goal setting, harm reduction, and positive youth development.

New Moms staff also use executive skills coaching to reflect on their own performance. All staff take an executive skills self-assessment and share their strengths and struggles with colleagues and program participants. Staff supervisors use executive skills coaching to support supervisees and in designing program services.

Coaches, who are staff that work directly with participants in the three New Moms programs, use executive skills coaching when interacting with participants. In interviews, coaches said their role is to build scaffolds around participants and their families to support their progress toward their self-determined goals. Coaches in all programs use motivational interviewing and executive skills coaching to create SMART goals (that is, goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely). Coaches check in with participants every one or two weeks to see what steps participants can take to reach these goals. Staff said that common goals include getting a GED, taking a driver’s education course, creating a budget, obtaining permanent employment, and opening a bank account. While coaches often work with participants on these common goals across New Moms’ three programs, the format of engaging with participants may look different based on each program’s activities. For example, participants in the job training program may work with coaches on goals at Bright Endeavors in a group setting while participants in the family support program may be more likely to engage with coaches about goals one-on-one during home visits.



**Executive skills**

New Moms staff consider executive skills as foundational and critical to achieving and maintaining self-sufficiency, as well as to being parents and community members. The New Moms executive skills coaching approach is adapted from Dawson and Guare’s executive skills coaching approach (2009).

**Table 1. Executive skills**

How we plan things	How we react to things	How we get things done
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organization</li> <li>• Time management</li> <li>• Planning/prioritization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Response inhibition</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Emotional control</li> <li>• Stress tolerance</li> <li>• Metacognition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Task initiation</li> <li>• Sustained attention</li> <li>• Goal-directed persistence</li> <li>• Working Memory</li> </ul>

Source: Dawson and Guare (2009)

### Job training program

New Moms’ job training program partners with participants to strengthen their skills, prepare for external employment, and obtain permanent jobs. Job training program activities include classroom-based learning and candle production at Bright Endeavors. The program serves parenting and pregnant women ages 16 to 24 with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, who are disconnected from school and jobs. Participants’ circumstances vary, and include living with parents as dependents, living independently as the head of their household, and receiving or not receiving public benefits. Staff reported that some participants have prior experience in food service, customer service, health care, or hospitality, but others enter the program with no previous work experience. Based on the Comprehensive

Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) test administered to participants, the average literacy grade level when participants enter the program is 5th grade.

Participation in the program is voluntary; however, once participants are accepted to the program, they are expected to participate in the full range of program activities and are paid for their time starting in their second week. Participants progress through a sequenced 16-week program in cohorts of eight or nine that begin every five weeks, overlapping such that up to 25 participants are in the program at any given

time. The program structures the cohort size and overlap in this way so expertise in candle production can be passed from cohort to cohort. Figure 2 displays the sequence of program activities, which begin with an orientation before the 16-week program begins.



### Eligibility requirements for New Moms' job training program

- Parenting and pregnant women ages 16 to 24
- Income below 200 percent of the federal poverty line
- Disconnected from school and work

### Outreach and enrollment processes include

#### environmental modifications and a focus on executive

**skills.** Participants learn about the job training program through outreach on social media, referral partners, and by word of mouth. The program offers an information session for interested participants every five weeks, with up to 30 young mothers attending each session. The presentation includes an introduction to New Moms and the job training program components, after which attendees can apply and interview with coaches to secure admission to the program.

Environmental modifications help young pregnant and

parenting women complete these steps successfully. For example, applicants are interviewed immediately following the information session to decrease the amount of time and transportation needed.

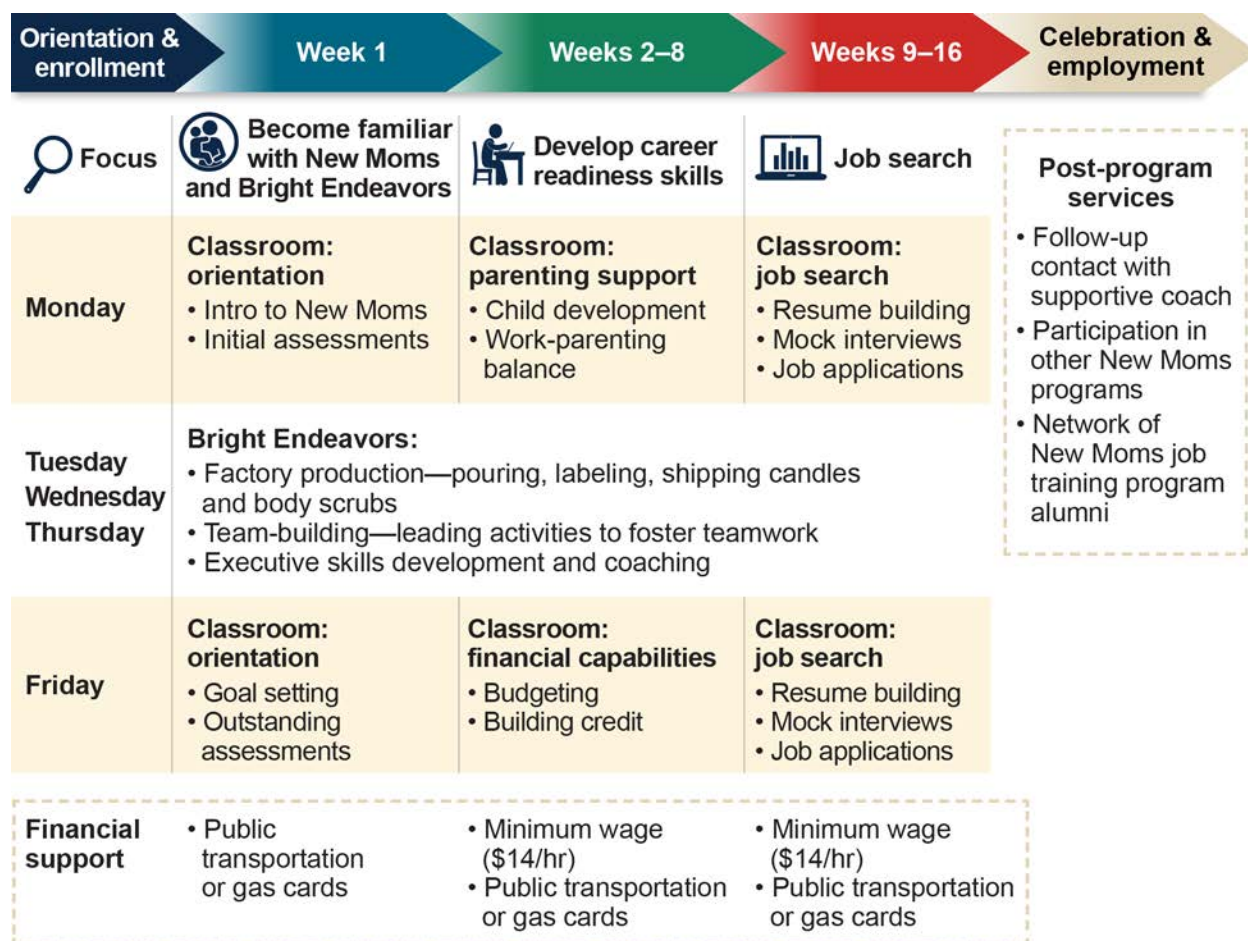
Accommodations are available for applicants with learning disabilities, such as extra support from coaches in filling out the application.

The application for the job training program includes questions about executive skills and applicants' post-program goals, as well as behavioral interview questions to assess applicants' eligibility and desire to pursue work or school. A new cohort of participants is invited to begin the program in the next cycle. If a woman is pregnant, the baby's due date is considered alongside the program schedule to determine if participation is feasible at that time or is a better fit after the baby is born.

### New Moms as a faith-inspired organization

New Moms is a Christian faith-inspired organization. New Moms offers optional opportunities for spiritual engagement activities, such as "Pizza and God," a monthly meal with the founder of New Moms that provides space for mothers to discuss faith. While New Moms clearly communicates that participation is not required or expected for mothers or staff, multiple interviewees described spirituality opportunities as one of their favorite aspects of New Moms.

Figure 2. Sequence of activities in the New Moms job training program



Source: Information provided to the case study team by New Moms staff.

### Classroom-based activities

**Week 1: Becoming familiar with the program.** The first week emphasizes familiarizing participants with the classroom and Bright Endeavors’ environment and activities. Participants tour Bright Endeavors and build knowledge about executive skills through team-building activities that help participants define and reflect on each skill. Participants also complete self-assessments on parenting stress, feelings of belonging and connection to others, as well as the CASAS numeracy and literacy-level assessment.


In addition, the first week builds in time during program hours for participants to obtain business-casual professional clothing, which is the required dress code for classroom-based activities in subsequent weeks. For days they will spend on Bright Endeavors’ production floor, participants are provided with uniforms.

**Weeks 2-8: Developing career readiness skills.** Participants complete an executive skills profile at the end of their second week in the job training program. Through this assessment, participants identify which skills are their strengths and which skills are more challenging, referred to as “strengths and struggles.” Participants make posters representing their executive skills strengths and struggles using the imagery of lit candles and warming pots, respectively. The posters hang on the walls of the Bright

Endeavors production floor to increase participants’ own awareness of their skill sets. Coaches and participants support each other to find opportunities to use their executive skills strengths.

During weeks two through eight, participants engage in classroom-based training two days per week. Participants are paid Chicago’s minimum wage (\$14.00 per hour, as of July 2020) for both classroom and Bright Endeavors production time starting in their second week of the program. Training focuses on parental support on Mondays and financial capabilities on Fridays. Participants meet with coaches in groups during classroom time to set SMART goals. Through a strengths-based coaching framework, coaches work with participants to first set long-term SMART goals and then set incremental short-term goals. An example of a participant’s long-term goal might be enrolling in college courses, which would follow attainment of short-term goals such as attending college orientation sessions and taking placement tests. Participants work with their coaches to track their progress in attaining their term goals and to build their goal-setting skills.

**Weeks 9-16: Looking for jobs.** During weeks 9 through 16, the focus of classroom activities shifts to job search. Participants complete a “goodness of fit” job search assessment that includes information about their executive skills strengths and scheduling constraints, such as hours when child care is available, to help them identify jobs. Coaches send participants job postings that might be a good fit for their strengths and needs. Participants receive two weeks of transportation funding when they get a job to bridge the gap in income until their first paycheck arrives. Table 2 provides more details about how New Moms offers incentives that are intentionally linked to participants’ achievement of their goals.



**What is a “warming pot”?**

Warming pots are vessels used at Bright Endeavors to keep wax melted while participants pour the wax into candle tins. This provides a space to develop the wax into its final product.

Job training coaches and participants use warming pots as an analogy for the executive skills that present challenges for them. In addition to identifying these challenges, coaches and participants make accommodations for one another throughout the program.

**Table 2. Job training program incentives**

Participant Accomplishment	Incentive	Incentive Purpose
Demonstrating leadership and strong performance at Bright Endeavors	Team Lead position	Public recognition and opportunity for additional leadership
Completing job training program	Gift card	Financial incentive to celebrate achievement
Getting a job	Two weeks of transportation assistance	Financial assistance to cover gap until first paycheck
Completing follow-up with coach	Gift card	Financial incentive to participate in follow-up data collection

Source: Information provided to the case study team by New Moms staff.



## Production training at Bright Endeavors

Throughout weeks two to 16, participants work at Bright Endeavors three days per week. Table 3 illustrates a typical day and provides an example of an executive skills component that is used during each part of the day.

At Bright Endeavors, participants are trained in candle production. Each participant gains experience with each department of candle production: the pouring department, where hot wax for candles is poured; the finishing department, where the staff check candles for quality and apply labels; the private label department, where candles are produced for external businesses that require different labels; and the shipping department, where candles are prepared and packed for shipment to customers. Many of these light manufacturing skills are transferrable to other common areas of entry-level employment, such as customer service, hospitality, and retail.

Participants complete a performance review in their fifth and eleventh weeks at Bright Endeavors. Staff said that the review in the fifth week is an opportunity for coaches to promote participants to the team lead positions. The team lead position is an example of a program incentive, as it provides participants with a leadership opportunity in which one lead per department serves as an extension of the program staff. Team leads wear red aprons to differentiate them from the other participants, who wear black aprons, and oversee the work in their respective departments. The team leads also have opportunities for paid sales work related to Bright Endeavors outside of regular program hours, have their photos displayed prominently at Bright Endeavors, and add a leadership position to their resumes.



### Ellie's\* story

Five months ago, Ellie enrolled in the housing program and moved into New Moms' transitional housing with her two children, who are both younger than 8 years old. When Ellie moved into the apartment, she found a fully stocked unit after struggling with homelessness for years and staying in a shelter. She said, "They made sure everything was taken care of."

As soon as she moved in, Ellie signed up for the job training program, and her housing coach called local schools and daycare centers to help enroll Ellie's children. When she spoke with the research team, Ellie was in week 14 of the job training program and applying for jobs. She said that the program helped her understand the importance of executive skills at work. She has also participated in parenting support classes where she learned about stress tolerance, brain development, and parenting strategies. Ellie is earning a GED and hopes to enroll in college courses in the health care sector. She is interested in combining her previous experience in food service with her new interest in health care as a dietary aide.

Ellie appreciates how deeply New Moms coaches respect and care for each participant, noting, "People can come through the door feeling different than they felt yesterday. And they will notice, and they will pull you to the side to get to the bottom of how you're feeling.... It's not just, 'We just want you to work for us,' or give you a job. They care."

*\*Participant's name has been changed.*

**Table 3. A Day in the life at Bright Endeavors**

Time	Activity
9:25 a.m.	<b>Attendance.</b> Participants clock in wearing a uniform. They place their cell phones in a pocket placed on the wall. The cell phone pocket is an environmental modification to the physical space and procedures to reduce distractions while working and facilitate participants' success.
9:30 a.m.	<b>Workshop.</b> One participant leads an activity about teamwork, professionalism, ownership, leadership, or executive skills. These activities might include skits, games, short videos, or other creative activities to explore the definition and application of topics to participants' lives. Participants practice leadership and public speaking skills while building knowledge about executive skills through engaging in these activities.
10:00 a.m.	<b>Pre-shift huddle.</b> Each participant says what she will bring to the floor, for example, flexibility or time management. This is a way to set individual meaningful and achievable short-term goals and build knowledge about executive skills as participants refer to the skills they are working on.
10:15 a.m.	<b>Social Enterprise production.</b> Participants split into departments: pouring, finishing, or shipping and private labels. Team leads (one participant per department who is selected to oversee other participants) explain the production goals and assignments for the day (for example, pour 48 eight-ounce sugared grapefruit candles). These SMART goals are production-based and encourage attention to detail and quality.
12:00 p.m.	<b>Lunch.</b>
12:45 p.m.	<b>Afternoon shift.</b> Teams continue working toward daily production goals. The afternoon is a continued opportunity to track progress toward goals (both individual and group goals) and assess executive skills.
3:00 p.m.	<b>Post-shift huddle.</b> The group meets to discuss whether the group met personal and group daily goals. Participants can provide compliments, or "shout outs," to one another to acknowledge successes. This is an opportunity to track progress toward goals (both individual and group goals).
3:30 p.m.	<b>Clock out.</b>

Source: Information provided to the case study team by New Moms staff.

**Program policies support high participant retention and engagement.** According to program staff, the job training program has high retention rates, which staff attributed to a combination of compensation for participation, policies that encourage accountability, and strong relationships with coaches. Staff said that participants both appreciate and rely on the minimum wage for their hours and the transportation assistance.

Coaches also pointed to program policies that mimic the expectations of employers, which participants will need to meet to retain in future jobs after completing the program. These include expectations around attendance, communication, and engagement in program activities. For example, participants are expected to communicate with coaches to request time off for appointments that cannot be scheduled outside of program hours, such as a pediatrician appointment. However, the job training program is intentionally designed with the knowledge that participants hold, at a minimum, dual roles in life as mothers and employees. Coaches work with participants to problem-solve when they face barriers to work, such as if a child has a sudden health issue or when transportation challenges arise. New Moms also incorporates

accommodations into the structure of the program; for example, the classroom day on Monday is shortened so participants can attend to parenting-related errands and activities in the afternoon.

**Coaches offer post-program services.** Participants complete the program after participating in the program for 16 weeks or when they get a job. Participants often get a job between weeks 12 and 14 and subsequently exit the program early. New Moms holds a Milestone Celebration to celebrate and reward participants' program completion achievement. After participants complete the program, coaches are in contact with graduates at least once a month. According to coaches, the follow-up conversations with graduates "establish a culture of caring," whether via text, email or in-person connection.

The program also can provide post-program supports and social connection. As of early 2020, New Moms had started hosting alumnae events each quarter to foster a sense of community. Staff said New Moms participants trust their coaches, and the culture of a sisterhood encourages alumna to stay involved post-program.

## Housing program

The housing program partners with the Chicago Housing Authority to provide both transitional and permanent supportive housing services to women ages 18 to 24 who are pregnant or parenting and experiencing homelessness, which could include living in a homeless shelter or an overcrowded living situation, such as living doubled- or tripled-up in a one or two-bedroom apartment. Program staff said that market-rate apartments are in high demand but in short supply in the community.

New Moms' newer Oak Park housing location opened in early 2020 and includes 18 permanent housing units of both one- and two-bedroom apartments. The remainder of this section will describe the transitional housing services provided at New Moms' original housing location in Austin, which opened in 2013.<sup>2</sup>

**Outreach and enrollment are conducted through the Chicago housing system.** Housing services are integrated into Chicago's large network of transitional housing programs. To access the program, participants complete an assessment of housing instability and homelessness at a Coordinated Entry Access Point, which puts their names on a waitlist for all transitional housing programs in Chicago. Individuals also complete a Chicago Housing Authority application and indicate their interest in the New Moms program. The Chicago Housing Authority coordinates with New Moms and participants when an applicant is selected for the program.

**Participants receive transitional housing services.** New Moms' Austin location has 40 transitional housing units for mothers and their children who are experiencing homelessness. The Chicago Housing Authority requires that participants pay 30 percent of their income for rent. Residents can live in these units for up to two years, or until they turn 25 years old.

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<sup>2</sup> The site visit on which this case study is based was conducted in January 2020 and focused on services in the Austin location. Only one resident had moved into the Oak Park location at the time of the site visit, and the site visit team did not visit that location.

The units are studios or one-bedroom apartments that include a private kitchen and bathroom. They are fully furnished and include home goods such as sheets, pans, and cutlery. Each floor has a playroom and a laundry room, and there is an outdoor playground in the building courtyard.

Coaches facilitate community-building activities for residents, which include weekly parent support groups, monthly housing meetings, and group outings to places such as the Chicago Children’s Museum or zoo. Weekly parent support groups and monthly housing meetings are designed to foster a sense of community and focus on topics such as parenting skills and financial management.

**Post-program services support participants’ exit from transitional housing.** The program’s housing locator, a staff member focused on helping participants find housing, works with residents while they are in the program to identify their next housing arrangement. The locator can help families make the move to new housing and work with partner organizations to obtain items for their next living space. All participants also receive six months of post-program coaching after they exit New Moms’ housing.

Residents work with their coaches to move into stable housing when they complete two years of transitional housing. Stable housing opportunities differ across participants and can include options for independent housing or living with family. According to staff, there is a shortage of subsidized and affordable housing on the west side of Chicago, so very few residents are able to make that their next move.

## Family support program

The family support program provides prenatal education and doula services and postnatal home visiting and parenting education services to young women. Family support program staff use the Parents as Teachers™ (PAT) model, an evidence-based parent education model that supports participants through partnering with parents, facilitating positive interactions, and reflecting with parents on their child’s development (Parents as Teachers 2020).

Eligible participants include women who are younger than 24, who are pregnant or parenting a child up to five years old, living at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line, and live or stay in one of 12 Chicago or 8 suburban zip codes that surround the New Moms’ Austin and Oak Park locations. Doula services are available for pregnant women starting at 28 weeks and for six weeks after their child is born.

**Participants are recruited through multiple methods.** An outreach specialist recruits participants through a variety of sources, including social media. Participants also learn about the program when they visit the emergency pantry located at the Austin location or participate in the housing or job training programs. Referrals can come from local hospitals, local health clinics, and offices of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infant, and Children (WIC). Staff said every housing program participant who is pregnant has used doula services. Doulas refer participants they work with to the home visiting component of the program after the participant gives birth.

### What is a doula?

Doulas are trained to support women through pregnancy and childbirth. New Moms doulas might accompany participants to doctor appointments to help them understand and ask questions; make birth plans; answer questions about child development and pregnancy; and support participants in person during childbirth and in the months following.

**Prenatal services include doula services and support groups.** Each pregnant participant is assigned a trained doula who visits weekly to educate the pregnant participant about pregnancy and delivery, discuss her preferences for childbirth and parenting, provide emotional support, attend childbirth, and conduct follow-up visits after the baby is born. If a participant is experiencing homelessness, doulas can meet her at a shelter, community site like a library, or at New Moms' locations.

According to program staff, doula services are an empirically supported method for reducing medically undesirable delivery outcomes such as Cesarean sections or long labors. Doulas also encourage participants to advocate for themselves during medical appointments and when in labor. Staff said that they discuss how participants may experience discrimination when they enter a hospital due to their age or race. Doulas accompany participants through labor and birth at the hospital.

Staff described emotional support as a critical component of the doula program, as most participants rely on their doulas for support and coaching beyond answering questions about pregnancy. Staff said doulas often form strong bonds with participants because they are "with someone for a very intimate and vulnerable time" in their lives and "the relationship goes deep." Some participants choose to involve partners or family in their doula visits, which may include family members sitting in on medical appointments or home visits so they can learn as well.

Doulas also work with participants to navigate challenges outside of their pregnancy. Staff said that for participants, an immediate crisis takes priority over learning and preparing for childbirth, whether it be experiencing homelessness, domestic violence, or challenges as a single young mom. In these instances, doulas work with participants to address immediate needs while still making progress toward long-term goals.

Doulas also support participants with child care challenges. Most participants do not have any maternity leave from their employers, and some must return to work as soon as two weeks after their child is born. However, many child care centers do not accept children until they are at least six weeks old. Doulas help participants find subsidized child care and assess the quality of potential child care options.



### Maya's\* story

A home visitor told the case study team the story of Maya, a participant in the family support program. Maya, who was a new mom, told the home visitor her living situation had become unsafe due to a recent shooting. The home visitor and Maya worked together to outline a plan that focused on the goals Maya wanted to achieve. These goals included obtaining safe housing and supporting her child's development. Maya obtained safe housing for her child at her grandmother's home and temporary housing for herself on the couches of family friends. She kept her important belongings on her body and other possessions in her car. Although Maya was unable to stay at her grandmother's home with her child, she focused on supporting her child's development through implementing the consistent care routines of regular breastfeeding sessions and a regular sleep schedule. In addition, Maya did not miss a day of work while she navigated these changes. Maya's home visitor celebrated these successes.

*\*Participant's name has been changed.*

Doulas facilitate prenatal support groups, open to pregnant young women receiving doula services or participating in New Moms' other programs. The groups aim to create a supportive environment for participants to engage with other young pregnant women and learn about pregnancy and motherhood.

**Postnatal services include doula and home visiting services.** After the child is born, participants can receive both doula services and home visiting services from a coach, or home visiting services only. Doulas visit mothers weekly for up to six weeks and educate them about children's social-emotional development. Home visiting coaches visit mothers weekly or biweekly and focus on child development, on-going coaching support, and parenting education. Doulas and coaches can visit participants together.

Coaches assesses children's development at two, six, nine and 12 months using the Ages and Stages 3 and the Ages and Stages Social Emotional Questionnaires. The Life Skills Progression Screening, an assessment of parental life skills and child development specifically designed for low-income populations, is also administered by coaches (Life Skills Progression 2011). Mothers are screened for postpartum depression and referred to mental health counseling services if needed. Staff said that coaches emphasize how warm responses to children's needs are important in early development and that social interactions with a child begin even while the child is a newborn. Coaches share activities to support parent-child interactions, nurturing, and motor development. Guided by the PAT curriculum and materials, staff said home visits involve activities such as working with new mothers to build healthy habits with their babies, learn their child's cues for sleep and hunger, and build trust between the mother and child.

Young mothers receiving home visiting services are also connected to community partners for additional support as needed. Participants' most common needs include permanent housing, food, and employment. Coaches may also refer participants to the Chicago Housing Authority, through which they could apply for the New Moms housing program, or benefit programs such as WIC and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Staff also refer home visiting participants to physical and mental health providers.

### Wraparound services and other supports

To connect participants in any of its programs with supports that go beyond the in-house capacity of New Moms staff, the organization relies on partnerships with community-based providers and refers participants to other benefit programs. When possible, New Moms brings wraparound services to the Austin and Oak Park locations. In line with the components of executive skills coaching, New Moms aims to partner with mothers across all three programs to identify what they need to work toward their goals and reduce barriers to addressing those needs. Services are never mandatory, though staff might encourage participants to take advantage of them according to the participants' expressed goals. The types of services available to participants include the following:

- **Domestic violence support.** New Moms has a long-standing partnership with a local agency that supports women experiencing domestic violence through providing legal resources, parent-child therapy, group and individual counseling, transportation, housing search assistance, and other advocacy. The partner organization assigns a domestic violence advocate to work with New Moms participants in the Austin neighborhood. Each participant develops a work plan based on her own goals and needs, with physical and emotional safety always as the primary goal. Depending on the needs of participants, the advocate might spend meetings working on safety planning, looking for safe

housing, or discussing parenting skills. The advocate also conducts a “Domestic Violence 101” presentation for each cohort of the job training program and occasional support groups for toxic relationships, open to all New Moms participants.

- **Mental health services.** New Moms partners with a nonprofit Chicago-based agency that aims to interrupt the intergenerational passage of abuse and trauma by providing mental health counseling to parents and children. A therapist spends two 10-hour days per week at New Moms’ Austin location. Services are free to participants in all New Moms’ programs; currently most referrals come from the job training program. About half of the cases are mothers only, 25 percent are mother and child dyads, and 25 percent are children only. Therapists see participants as often as weekly, and there is no time limit to services. Services last for an average of 10 sessions, excluding participants who only meet a therapist once. Counseling costs are covered through grants the provider has obtained.
- **Child care.** New Moms staff refer participants to community-based child care and child care subsidies, or call providers directly to enroll children on behalf of participants. New Moms maintains formal agreements with three to five child care providers, who each hold two to three slots for participants in New Moms’ job training program. Participants use child care subsidies to pay for care at these centers. In general, New Moms staff said there is an adequate supply of child care providers in the neighborhood, including centers in walking distance of the Austin location, but said these providers may not meet the quality standards held by participants and coaches. Staff from all three New Moms programs help participants navigate local child care options by coaching and practicing how to ask questions of providers and assess quality. Many participants also rely on informal networks of child care that exist between participants and family members living both in and outside of New Moms.
- **Transportation.** Coaches give program participants public transportation cards or gas cards as needed. Staff said they also coach job training participants to prepare transportation back-up plans to avoid missing work and sustain their employment. As mentioned in the job training section, participants receive a two-week bus pass after securing external employment to ensure they can get to and from work before they receive their first paycheck.
- **Other wraparound services.** New Moms connects participants to food pantries and events at community-based organizations offering food or other supplies and sometimes provides transportation to access these resources. New Moms also operates an emergency services pantry in the Austin location that is stocked with diapers and wipes and open to all community members on Mondays and Fridays.

### How New Moms adapted during the COVID-19 pandemic

By the end of June 2020, Cook County had been particularly hard-hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, experiencing 1,757 cases per 100,000 residents, substantially higher than both the Illinois and U.S. averages of 1,129 and 821 cases per 100,000 residents, respectively.<sup>a, b</sup> As public health measures took effect in April 2020, the unemployment rate in Cook County rose to 17.3 percent; it dropped slightly to 15.6 percent in June 2020.<sup>c</sup> In response to the needs of participants as a result of the pandemic, New Moms did the following:

- **Transitioned to virtual service delivery.** In the job training program, New Moms shifted to holding virtual classroom activities, with staff facilitating discussions and lessons via the Zoom videoconference platform. According to New Moms staff, participants said they preferred the virtual job training classroom activities over the in-person activities because they could be with their children while working and building a community with their cohort. In response to this feedback, New Moms plans to continue virtual classroom training after the pandemic ends. Across New Moms' three programs, coaches provided executive skills coaching in a virtual format. Coaches worked with a couple of mothers to reduce barriers to virtual participation, such as Internet connectivity and consistent access to a space to participate in virtual activities. Coaches also provided alternate one-on-one meetings if a participant was not able to attend scheduled activities.
- **Adapted job training program components.** The job training program enrolled two cohorts, rather than three, to reduce the total number of mothers present at Bright Endeavors at any given time. Cohort size was also reduced from up to nine participants to seven, and the 16-week program was condensed to 12 weeks. The physical space and shift schedule at Bright Endeavors was adjusted so participants could adhere to social distancing guidelines while continuing candle production and team-building activities.
- **Tailored job training content to COVID-related concerns.** Coaches revised classroom training content to align with participants' current pandemic needs. For example, during discussions about financial literacy and budgeting, participants adjusted their budgets to account for less spending on transportation and increased spending on cleaning supplies.
- **Provided materials to meet basic needs.** New Moms collected donated materials (for example, cleaning supplies) that are not covered through support programs, like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. To reduce access barriers, coaches delivered the donated materials to participants.

Sources: <sup>a</sup> USA Facts (2020); <sup>b</sup> Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center (2020); <sup>c</sup> U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020c).

## How New Moms is organized, staffed, and funded

Since its founding in 1983, New Moms has grown and increased its capacity to serve young mothers experiencing poverty and housing instability. The leadership team is composed entirely of women, many of whom bring experience in nonprofit management, community development, social work, and coaching.

### Program staffing

Each of the three New Moms programs is led by a director and staffed by a team of support coaches who manage participant cases (Figure 3). Outreach specialists conduct outreach for the family support and job training programs.



Figure 3. Simplified New Moms organizational chart



Source: Information provided to the case study team by New Moms staff.

The **job training program** is staffed by three coaches and two Bright Endeavors operations staff who interact with program participants in slightly different roles.

- Supportive employment coaches lead some classroom activities at the Austin location and support participants as they navigate their personal barriers, develop goals, and manage crises.
- The employer engagement coach facilitates job search in the classroom at the Austin location, builds and maintains relationships with employers, and follows up with program alumnae.
- Two production and training specialists are operations staff at Bright Endeavors and act as supervisors, providing technical instruction on making candles and leading pre-shift team-building activities.

The **family support program** at the Austin location is staffed by a home visiting manager, four coaches and two doulas. An additional home visiting manager, four coaches, and one doula work at the Oak Park location.

The **housing program** is staffed by three coaches at the Austin location and one at the Oak Park location. A housing locator helps participants find housing as they transition out of the program.

**In hiring, New Moms staff prioritize relevant experience and a commitment to a family-centered coaching mindset.** They also aim to utilize a racial equity lens in hiring, and staff use standardized interview questions and rubrics to reduce unconscious bias when interviewing job candidates. Qualities such as emotional intelligence, empathy, flexibility, and the ability to build strong relationships with participants and other staff are valued by New Moms. There are no strict education or training requirements for coaching roles at New Moms.

In 2019, New Moms created a Director of Learning and Innovation position to improve program design and operations. The leadership team at New Moms hopes this position will help the organization build stronger programs and systems through internal testing and reflection as well as through sharing New Moms’ experiences and practices through external partnerships and learning communities.

**New hires receive training on the organization’s approach and their specific roles.**

In addition to the training around executive skills coaching discussed above, staff have one-on-one meetings with leadership staff and department heads in the first few weeks in a new role. Supervisors are trained in reflective supervision, a model that promotes collaborative reflection between supervisors and staff through active listening and thoughtful questioning, which is used throughout training and daily interactions. Program staff said the first couple of weeks emphasize orienting oneself to the organization before working with participants directly. Staff also complete trainings specific to each program area. For example, coaches in the family support program receive an additional training on the PAT curriculum (Parents as Teachers 2020), while coaches in the job training program participate in workforce development trainings. Staff across programs also receive ongoing trainings in trauma-informed practices and family-centered coaching.



**Training topics for New Moms staff**

- Executive skills and goal setting
- Diversity, equity, and inclusion
- Family-centered coaching
- Trauma-informed care
- Program-specific topics

## Funding

New Moms’ operating budget is over \$5 million and derived from a diverse set of funding sources. In fiscal year (FY) 2019, New Moms expended nearly \$5.4 million across all program areas, with similar amounts expended for job training (34 percent), housing (28 percent), and family support services (32 percent). The largest sources of funding included government contracts and grants (\$2.22 million) and support from foundations and corporations (\$1.37 million).

Key government funding sources for the job training program include Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) funding and Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding from the City of Chicago. Participants are eligible for WIOA if they are not attending school, ages 16 to 24, and pregnant or parenting (U.S. Department of Labor 2019). Revenue from Bright Endeavors also contributes enough to cover the direct costs of operations and materials, plus some indirect costs. New Moms also began receiving a portfolio grant from The Roberts Enterprise Development Fund (REDF) in 2016, which is a five-year investment in Bright Endeavors. As a REDF grantee, New Moms has access to a network of informal advisors and social service programs that staff can visit and learn from.

According to program staff, the job training program costs about \$11,300 per participant, including classroom materials, curriculum delivery, coaching, wages, incentives, job placement and employer engagement, and long-term retention supports.

The housing program is funded through sources including the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Illinois Department of Human Services, and the city of Chicago. The family support program receives funding from Start Early (formerly Ounce of Prevention), the City of Chicago, and the Illinois State Board of Education.

New Moms leadership staff said they have worked hard to eliminate the effects of siloed funding streams so that participants do not feel the complexity of the funding that is used to support them. For example, if a participant in the job training program is pregnant and needs support services, no staff person should

feel limited in connecting her with the doula program, even though the funding behind the two services is different. New Moms leadership staff said that this level of flexibility is crucial, given the many ways participants enter and exit programs, or see their needs change over time.

## How New Moms measures program participation and outcomes

New Moms served a total of 366 mothers in FY 2019 (New Moms 2020), with many mothers engaging in multiple services across the job training, housing, and family support programs. Table 4 displays the number of participants who overlap across programs as well as the number of participants who participated in only one program across both the Austin and Oak Park locations. Four participants were active in all three programs in FY 2019.

In FY 2019 in the Austin location, 125 mothers participated in the job training program, 123 mothers with 124 children participated in the family support program, and 62 mothers received transitional housing services. In Oak Park, 108 mothers with 156 children received family support services in FY 2019. In FY 2019, about 45 participants used both the doula and home visiting program components of the family support program. Several data collection efforts, described below, detail participant and program outcomes.

**Table 4. Number of participants by program type in FY 2019**

	Job training	Family support	Housing
Job training	79*	21	25
Family support	21	200*	10
Housing	25	10	27*
Total	125	231	62

Note: Numbers followed by a \* symbol indicate the number of participants who participated in *only* the program named in the column title.

Source: Information provided to the case study team by New Moms staff.

### **New Moms collects program data in order to improve services and comply with multiple funders.**

Duplicate data entry is required in multiple systems, including funders’ required systems and New Moms’ master internal performance management system. The internal performance management system, Efforts to Outcomes, helps leadership staff track and manage participant data from program enrollment through 24 months of post-program follow up. New Moms hired a team of technology consultants to produce customized performance management reports from the data entered in Efforts to Outcomes.

All staff interviewed by the case study team said that creating and customizing data collection systems and processes, as well as dedicating staff time for data collection, is resource intensive. Staff at all levels acknowledged that ensuring data are entered accurately and in a timely manner also requires commitment and investment of staff time. Follow-up outreach to former participants is also resource-intensive but allows New Moms to track long-term outcomes. For example, coaches follow up with participants after they leave the job training program to track job placement, job retention, housing retention, and other outcomes at 30 days, 60 days, 90 days, six months, 12 months, and 24 months. The job training program offers financial incentives for participants who provide this information after they complete the program.

New Moms leadership staff reported being strategic about what data are most important to track and use proxy data to reduce the burden on participants when possible. For example, rather than track children's immunization records, staff can use enrollment in early childhood programs as a proxy because these programs require immunization.

**A pilot studied implementation of New Moms' executive skills approach.** New Moms' pilot experience with its executive skills coaching strategy, studied by MDRC in 2016 with the support of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is described in a white paper on the pilot implementation (Dechausay 2018). Staff said that participants and coaches responded enthusiastically to the coaching approach instead of a more traditional, transactional case management approach. The Annie E. Casey Foundation and Global Learning Partners (New Moms 2019a) described New Moms' expansion of the implementation of executive skills coaching into the job training program, as well as plans to scale the model into the housing and family support programs. As part of this expansion effort, New Moms created an Executive Skills Implementation Toolkit (New Moms 2019b) for other workforce development programs interested in the approach.

## Promising practices, challenges, and lessons learned

New Mom's staff noted four areas in which they have continued to learn and develop their programming.

- 1. Value and complexity of operating a social enterprise.** New Moms staff pointed to Bright Endeavors as a key part of their job training model and expressed confidence in its value in providing hands-on opportunities for participants to apply the work readiness and soft skills they learn in the classroom. However, adding a social enterprise to a nonprofit social service organization requires substantial slack in operating budgets and staff expertise. One New Moms staff member said, "We are social workers by training, not wax experts, or wholesaling and logistics and shipping [experts]. There's so much to running a small business, and the skillset of staff who are social service providers does not always match up with these skills that are needed for a small business." Another New Moms staff member pointed out that the cohort model of the job training program means the candle company has a 400 percent turnover rate—an inefficiency that is baked into the business model and can present challenges to staff who manage production, marketing, and operations. Challenges aside, staff said that the project of operating Bright Endeavors has forced the organization to stretch and grow in exciting ways: "Sometimes there can be tensions between running a business and running this program—this can be healthy but challenging."

- 2. Managing diverse funding sources.** A diverse array of funding contributes financial stability to the organization but also brings challenges, leadership staff noted. New Moms leadership staff shared that they aim to find, maintain, and increase funding, especially for grants operating on one-year cycles. Staff supervisors also take on additional burden, as they work to ensure their teams correctly track required participant interactions and outcomes across multiple data systems.
- 3. Seeking research and interested in feedback.** New Moms' services incorporate a range of evidence-based practices, such as motivational interviewing and strengths-based approaches. Beyond these practices, New Moms is constantly searching for new methods and successful strategies to borrow from peer organizations. New Moms leadership staff described themselves as “a little nerdy”— always on the lookout for research projects and journal articles that can offer new evidence and ideas to adapt for New Moms, and quick to share articles with staff as required reading. New Moms has sought technical assistance from larger research organizations and foundations and hopes that its own research and practitioner toolkit can support and inspire other organizations serving similar populations. One staff member said, “We lean on these opportunities and try to create them... If someone offers us something, we will take advantage of it.”
- 4. Responding to the needs of the community.** Since its creation, New Moms has designed its services to meet the needs of the surrounding community and focus population and tailors service delivery to each participant using the executive skills coaching approach. By listening to participants and coordinating with other community-based organizations, New Moms staff reported that they identified and filled gaps in services in three key areas: housing, job training, and family support. The executive skills coaching approach supports young pregnant and parenting mothers as employees, parents, citizens in their communities, and developing adolescents. This approach has built cultural buy-in from staff and participants acknowledging that each participant is capable of accomplishing her goals through leveraging her inherent strengths, skills, and resilience.

#### 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 study 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 the Administration for Children and Families (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 target 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 conducted a two-and-a-half-day visit in January 2020 to New Moms' Austin location and Bright Endeavors. The team conducted semistructured interviews with 12 New Moms staff, including leadership staff and specialists from all three program areas, and two staff from community partner agencies. The team conducted in-depth interviews with two participants in the job training program. The team also reviewed anonymized case files for two participants and observed production training and career readiness activities at Bright Endeavors and classroom-based components of the job training program. The team conducted a follow-up telephone call in July 2020 with a program leader to learn how New Moms responded to the COVID-19 public health emergency.

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