



## TANF participants who were offered employment coaching and those offered traditional case management had similar short-term outcomes: Impacts of Goal4 It!™ at 9 months

Employment coaching involves trained staff working collaboratively with participants to help them set individualized goals directly or indirectly related to employment and providing motivation, support, and feedback as participants work toward those goals. Unlike most traditional case managers, coaches work in partnership with participants and do not tell the participants what goals they should pursue or what action steps to take in pursuing them. Research suggests that coaches may help participants cultivate self-regulation skills—skills such as persistence, focused attention, organization, emotional regulation, and time management—which are critical to success in employment.<sup>1</sup> For more information about how coaching can help participants, please see [this brief](#).

To explore the potential of employment coaching for adults with low incomes, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation in the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, contracted with Mathematica and its partners Abt Associates, MDRC, and The Adjacent Possible to conduct an implementation and impact study of four coaching programs. This brief presents the first impact findings for Goal4 It!, a structured employment coaching approach used as an alternative to traditional Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) case management. These findings are based on a comparison of the outcomes of TANF recipients who were randomly assigned to either receive the Goal4 It! program or traditional case management. Outcomes are from the first 9 months after study enrollment and collected through surveys and records from human services agencies. At the time of the survey, most people offered Goal4 It! had received some coaching but were no longer receiving coaching from the program. For a more detailed

presentation of these findings, please see [the impact report](#).

### About Goal4 It!

Goal4 It! provides employment coaching to TANF recipients in Jefferson County, Colorado in place of traditional case management. Participation in Goal4 It! or traditional case management is mandatory for TANF benefit receipt in Jefferson County. Goal4 It! is an employment coaching program with a structured four-phase (Goal, Plan, Do, Review and Revise) goal-setting process with program participants that involves setting goals and identifying challenges to reaching them. It was designed by Mathematica and partners.<sup>2</sup>

Goal4 It! participants are expected to meet with their coach in person monthly if they are unemployed and once every 2 months if they are working, and to make progress toward goals they set. Failure to meet with their coach or conduct activities that participants agreed on with their coach can impact their TANF cash assistance. Study participants randomly assigned to the Goal4 It! group could receive program services only while they were participating in TANF. Participation in Goal4 It! was short—on average, program participants remained in the program for about 3 months and had four interactions with coaches during the year after study enrollment. Program leadership indicated that the resources required to implement Goal4 It! were only marginally more than for traditional case management.



More information about Goal4 It! is available in the study's [program snapshot](#) and [report on program implementation](#).

## Impacts 9 months after study enrollment

**Goal4 It! did not improve goal-setting and attainment skills.** A survey asked study participants how much they agreed with eight statements about setting goals and working to meet those goals. Scores on this measure indicate an average response across the eight statements and range from 0 (“strongly disagree”) to 3 (“strongly agree”). Goal4 It! and control group members had similar scores on goal-setting and attainment skills (2.19 and 2.22, respectively).

**Goal4 It! likely had a small, positive effect on self-reported earnings, but the impact was not statistically significant.** Survey responses suggest that Goal4 It! increased earnings by \$66 per month, an increase of about 9 percent relative to the control group’s average earnings of \$755 per month. This impact estimate was not statistically significant, which means that it would be common to find an impact estimate of this size if the program had no effect on participant outcomes. Further analysis suggests Goal4 It! had a 71 percent chance of having a positive impact on average monthly earnings, but only a 24 percent chance of the impact exceeding \$50. Analysis of the timing of these impacts suggests small, likely positive impacts that emerged early on but faded out after 7 months.

**Goal4 It! did not have an effect on earnings in jobs reported to the state unemployment agency.** In addition to survey data on self-reported earnings, the study team also collected data on quarterly earnings reported to the Unemployment Insurance (UI) agency. These data exclude earnings from self-employment, gig work, and

## Summary of 9-month impact findings for Goal4 It!

### Impacts on Goal-Setting and Attainment Skills



**-1%**

Lowered goal-setting and attainment skills by 1 percent.



It would be common to find an impact estimate of this size if the program had no effect on participant outcomes.

### Impacts on Monthly Earnings



#### Self-reported earnings

**+\$66**

It would be common to find an impact estimate of this size if the program had no effect on participant outcomes. The impact was likely positive but small.



Impact tended to fade out after 7 months.

#### Earnings reported to Unemployment Insurance agencies

**-\$40**

It would be common to find an impact estimate of this size if the program had no effect on participant outcomes. The impact was likely near zero.



Size of impact was similar throughout the follow-up period.

### Impacts on Economic Hardship



**0%**

No difference in levels of economic hardship.

other jobs that are not reported to the UI agency. The data also exclude any earnings that employers are required to report to the agency but may not have reported. Goal4 It! and control group members had similar amounts of UI-reported earnings (\$706 and \$746 monthly) and the impact was not statistically significant. Analyses suggest that Goal4 It! was unlikely to have increased or reduced these earnings by more than \$25.

**Goal4 It! did not reduce economic hardship.** The survey asked respondents whether they faced six specific economic hardships, such as going without medical care because of cost or not being able to afford enough food. Goal4 It! and control group members reported similar levels of economic hardship: the average scale scores were 3.00 for the Goal4 It! group and 3.01 for the control group, a difference that was not statistically significant. Thus, on average, in the 9 months after study enrollment,

members of both groups had experienced about 3 of the 6 economic hardships included in the survey.

## Further results to come

Follow-up analyses 21 months and again 48 months after study enrollment will address whether the impacts of Goal4 It! persist, grow, or decline. Will the small increase in self-reported earnings lead to impacts on economic hardship in the future? Or will the positive effects fade over time? A report on the program's impacts at 21 months after study enrollment, anticipated in 2023, will start to answer these questions.

To receive updates from the study as these and other findings become available, you can request to join the project listserv by emailing [coaching@mathematica-mpr.com](mailto:coaching@mathematica-mpr.com).

## The Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations

This study is testing four employment coaching programs designed for people with low incomes. It assesses the implementation of the coaching programs and—via an experimental study—their impacts on study participants' self-regulation skills, employment, earnings, self-sufficiency, and other measures of personal and family well-being. Publications produced as part of this study to date (available on the [project website](#)) describe the programs, document the study design and analysis plans, and provide findings on how the programs were implemented.

## Endnote

<sup>1</sup> Locke, E., and Latham, G. (1990). *A theory of goal setting and task performance*. Prentice Hall.

<sup>2</sup> None of the staff involved in the development of the Goal4 It! program worked on the evaluation.

### Submitted to:

Hilary Bruck, Sarita Barton, Lauren Deutsch, and Elizabeth Karberg  
Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families,  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre>

### Contract Number:

HHSP233201500035I / HHSP23337018T

Mathematica Reference Number:

50327.04.600.500.000

### Submitted by:

Quinn Moore  
Mathematica  
1100 1st Street, NE, 12th Floor  
Washington, DC 20002-4221

This brief is in the public domain. Permission to reproduce is not necessary. **Suggested citation:** Quinn Moore, Tim Kautz, Sheena McConnell, Ankita Patnaik, Owen Schochet, and April Wu (2023) "TANF participants who were offered employment coaching and those offered traditional case management had similar short-term outcomes: Impacts of Goal4 It! at 9 months" OPRE Report #2023-165. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## Connect with OPRE

