



An employment coaching program using home visiting showed promise in improving TANF participants' outcomes: Impacts of FaDSS 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.¹ 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 Family Development and Self-Sufficiency (FaDSS), a home-visiting coaching program for recipients of Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). These findings are based on comparisons of outcomes of study participants randomly assigned to either receive FaDSS or be in a control group. 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 FaDSS had received a substantial amount of

coaching, and many were still receiving coaching from the program. For a more detailed presentation of these findings, please see [the impact report](#).

About FaDSS

FaDSS offers employment coaching during home visits and aims to help participants become self-sufficient and enhance their family's functioning. It is offered to TANF recipients, but is administered by Iowa's

Department of Human Rights rather than the Iowa TANF agency. It's a well-established program—it has operated for more than 30 years.

FaDSS coaches aim to meet with participants in their home at least twice a month in the first 3 months, and monthly thereafter. Participants can stay in FaDSS while they are receiving TANF and for 7 months after they leave TANF. About 40 percent of FaDSS participants were still participating in the program 9 months after study enrollment.

Participation in FaDSS is not mandatory for TANF benefit receipt. All TANF recipients were required to receive traditional case management as part of Iowa's TANF program. Study participants randomly assigned to the FaDSS group could receive employment coaching in addition to this case management. More information about FaDSS is available in the study's [program snapshot](#) and [report on program implementation](#).



Impacts 9 months after study enrollment

FaDSS improved 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”). FaDSS increased how much people scored on this measure by 5 percent (2.23 for the FaDSS group versus 2.12 for the control group), a difference that is statistically significant, which means the impact estimate was larger than would be expected if the program had no effect on participant outcomes. This suggests that coaches were successful at helping participants set and work toward goals.

FaDSS likely had a small, positive effect on self-reported earnings, but the impact was not statistically significant. Survey responses suggest that FaDSS increased earnings by \$94 per month compared to the control group’s average earnings of \$633. This impact was not statistically significant, which means it would be common to find an impact estimate of this size if the program had no effect on participant outcomes. Further analysis suggests FaDSS had a 80 percent chance of having a positive impact on average monthly earnings, but only a 19 percent chance of the impact exceeding \$50. Analyses also suggest that the probability that FaDSS improved self-reported earnings increased over time.

FaDSS did not have an effect on earnings in the type of 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 agency. These data exclude earnings from self-employment, gig work, and other jobs that are not reported to the unemployment

Summary of 9-month impact findings for FaDSS

Impacts on Goal-Setting and Attainment Skills

+5%

Improved goal-setting and attainment skills by 5 percent.



The impact estimate was larger than would be expected if the program had no effect on participant outcomes.

Impacts on Monthly Earnings

Self-reported earnings

+\$94

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 increase over time.

Earnings reported to Unemployment Insurance agencies

-\$54

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

-10%

Reduced economic hardship by 10 percent.



The impact estimate was larger than would be expected if the program had no effect on participant outcomes.

insurance agency. The data also exclude any earnings that employers are required to report to the agency but may not have reported. The impact on this type of earnings was not statistically significant. Analyses suggest that FaDSS was unlikely to have increased or reduced this type of earnings by more than \$25.

FaDSS reduced 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. FaDSS reduced the number of reported economic hardships by 10 percent (2.71 for the FaDSS group versus 3.03 for the control group), a statistically significant effect. This reduction may have occurred because of the small increase in self-reported earnings, though that increase was not statistically significant. It may also have occurred because

coaches referred participants to outside services and supports or helped participants manage their limited resources more effectively.

Further results to come

Follow-up analyses 21 months and again 48 months after study enrollment will address whether the impacts of FaDSS persist, grow, or decline. Will more interactions with coaches lead to increasing impacts? Will the improvements in goal-setting and attainment skills lead to higher earnings impacts in the future? Or will the positive effects fade over time as participants leave the program? 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.

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

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

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