

SIMR Practice Brief

Adopting a Motivation-Driven Approach to Case Management in HMRE Services

Case management is a common component of healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) services. As a condition of their grant funding, HMRE grant recipients that serve adults include strategies to address participants' needs by providing direct services or linking to a broad array of community-centered supportive services. Many HMRE grant recipients that serve youth also offer case management services to their participants.

Many social service programs are beginning to explore a motivation-driven approach to case management—in other words, one that prioritizes identifying the goals that participants want to achieve and the steps they can take to do so.¹ Through the Strengthening the Implementation of Marriage and Relationship Programs (SIMR) project, two HMRE grant recipients—Family Services Agency of Santa Barbara County (FSA-SB) and More Than Conquerors, Inc. (MTCI)—adopted motivation-driven approaches to case management and tested it through rapid cycle learning. Based on their experiences, this brief provides five tips for implementing motivation-driven case management as part of HMRE services.

The transition to motivation-driven case management can be a major change, and organizations should seek the support of experts when considering it. Although motivation-driven case management has promise as a component of HMRE services, it has not been tested in an HMRE context to determine its influence on participant outcomes.

¹ Derr and Joyce 2020



How is motivation-driven case management different from a more traditional approach?

Traditional approaches to case management often involve an initial meeting with a participant to assess their barriers and challenges, followed by referrals to community organizations for help addressing identified needs. While traditional case management can be strengths-based, starting with an assessment of barriers and needs raises the possibility that a case management relationship begins with a reflection on what has gone wrong in a participant's past—which may contribute to a lack of success.² In turn, this can create an unequal dynamic where the participant and case manager are the help-seeker and the problem-solver, respectively.

What is rapid cycle learning?

Grant recipients in SIMR tested strategies using a rapid cycle learning approach. Rapid cycle learning is a method for quickly and iteratively testing strategies to strengthen programming. It often involves successive cycles to pilot strategies, collect feedback from staff and participants on how these strategies are working, and gather data to demonstrate whether the strategies are supporting improvement. Based on what grant recipients learn, staff can refine and test strategies again in a subsequent learning cycle.

In contrast, motivation-driven case management is forward looking. Motivation-driven case management focuses on the participant's strengths, capacity, and autonomy to change their own life. The case manager concentrates on supporting participants to set their own goals and build skills that will help them achieve social and economic success.

Family Service Agency of Santa Barbara County (FSA-SB)

FSA-SB offers HMRE services to adult couples and individuals in Santa Barbara, California. As part of HMRE services, FSA-SB family advocates provide individualized case management and economic stability services. FSA-SB been an HMRE grant recipient since 2015 and a Responsible Fatherhood grant recipient since 2020.

More Than Conquerors, Inc. (MTCI)

MTCI offers HMRE services to youth ages 14 to 19 in the Atlanta, Georgia, area. For SIMR, MTCI focused on HMRE services provided to 9th- and 10th-grade students in two high schools in Gwinnett County, Georgia. HMRE services include at least two meetings with a case manager. MTCI has been an HMRE grant recipient since 2006.

What is SIMR?

Strengthening the Implementation of Marriage and Relationship Programs (SIMR) is a national evaluation overseen by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, with funding from ACF's Office of Family Assistance. It aims to strengthen the capacity of healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) grant recipients to improve their services by addressing implementation challenges in three core areas:

- 1. Recruitment.** Challenges related to identifying and communicating with potential participants, as well as enrolling them in services.
- 2. Retention.** Challenges with initial and sustained participation in services.
- 3. Content engagement.** Challenges related to sustaining participants' interest and attention during activities and services.

Through SIMR, Mathematica and its partner, Public Strategies, collaborated with 10 HMRE grant recipients (five that serve adults and five that serve youth) to engage in iterative, rapid-cycle learning aimed at strengthening grant recipients' services. These organizations are funded by the Office of Family Assistance from 2020–2025. Through this work, the team cocreated, tested, and refined promising strategies to address recruitment, retention, and content engagement challenges. The study had two main goals: (1) to improve the service delivery of grant recipients in the study and (2) to develop lessons for the broader HMRE field about promising practices for addressing common implementation challenges.

For more information about SIMR, see the study's [project page on the OPRE website](#).

² Joyce and McConnell 2019

Motivation-driven approaches to case management tested in SIMR

FSA-SB and MTCl made their case management motivation driven by integrating goal attainment models into their approaches. While traditional case management approaches may involve setting goals, motivation-driven case management intentionally focuses on teaching the goal setting process as a way to solve problems, building participants' skills to handle challenges when they encounter them in the future. The process of setting and making progress towards a goal is as important as the end goal itself. FSA-SB implemented Goal4 It!™, which involves a replicable, four-step process that is based on research that links self-regulation and problem-solving (Figure 1).⁴ Each step in this structured goal attainment process is designed to draw on self-regulation skills to identify and pursue a meaningful goal.⁵ Through coaching, individuals learn each step in the process so that they can set and attain their own goals. With practice, these four steps can become habit for participants.⁶ MTCl used an approach similar to Goal4 It! to integrate goal attainment into its case management services for youth.

What is self-regulation?

Self-regulation is the process of coordinating one's thoughts (cognitive regulation), emotions (emotional regulation), and behaviors (behavioral regulation) to achieve one's goals. It is linked to success in many areas including relationships, education, and emotional well-being. Self-regulation develops from infancy through adulthood.³

A model for motivation-driven case management: Goal4 It!™

[Goal4 It!](#) is an evidence-informed framework for setting and achieving goals in human services.⁷ It is grounded in a broad set of strategies for improving child and family outcomes.⁸ Goal4 It! has been used extensively in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and workforce programming. The SIMR team's work with FSA-SB marks the first time that Goal4 It! has been integrated into HMRE services, though other models exist and may be in use.

Figure 1. Four steps in goal attainment



³ Bandura 1990; Bandura 2005; Murray et al. 2015

⁴ Zelazo et al. 1997

⁵ Zelazo et al. 2008; Cavadel et al. 2017; Zimmerman and Schunk 2011

⁶ Derr and McCay 2018; Cavadel et al. 2017

⁷ Goal4 It! was developed by Mathematica based on a wide range of research, including the Goal-Oriented Adult Learning Strategies (GOALS) project funded by ACF (Cavadel et al. 2017), and in partnership with state and county TANF and workforce programs and research partners..

⁸ Derr and McCay 2018; Center on the Developing Child 2017

Why motivation-driven case management can be a good fit for HMRE services

A motivation-driven approach to case management in HMRE services builds relationships and can strengthen participants' capacity to create their own change instead of relying on others. Adopting a motivation-driven approach requires people and organizations to think differently about their work and their relationships with participants.

Motivation-driven case management can help build strong relationships with participants.

A motivation-driven approach to case management focuses on meeting people where they are and addressing what matters most to them. This method helps case managers develop a deep understanding of a participant's experiences and what drives them—including what motivated them to seek out HMRE services. Helping a participant choose what they want to work on rather than dictating their journey for them encourages the case manager to focus on building the participant's skills. This approach also encourages the participant to trust the case manager because they might be more likely to feel heard and listened to.

“ The most helpful part [of case management] was being able to hear my goals out loud. [Also] someone helping, supporting my goals, and helping to achieve them.

MTCI participant

A motivation-driven approach can encourage retention and long-term engagement. The case manager empowers a participant to set motivating goals and identify steps to attain them, and then holds the participant accountable. A participant might be more likely to continue attending services if they feel seen and heard in their interactions, and if they begin to see themselves as capable of breaking old habits instead of bound by their past experiences, barriers, and challenges.

Motivation-driven case management can equip staff with new methods and techniques to build participants' skills. In guiding the goal attainment process for participants, the case manager draws on motivational interviewing techniques and related practices, as well as approaches connected to trauma-informed care. [Motivational interviewing](#) and [trauma-informed approaches](#) are common components of HMRE service delivery and are frequently recommended as training topics for HMRE service providers.⁹

Five tips for adopting a motivation-driven approach to case management in HMRE programs

This section offers five tips for adopting a motivation-driven approach to case management. These tips are drawn from the experiences of FSA-SB and MTCI. Although these strategies are promising, they will require more rigorous testing to understand their potential influence on outcomes of interest.



► **Tip 1. Determine why motivation-driven case management might be beneficial for your participants and identify the challenges it might address.** Having clarity about the “why”—in other words, the potential benefits, challenges, and the cultural and structural fit of motivation-driven case management—will help anchor the change and gain buy-in among case managers and participants.

⁹Friend et al. 2020; Friend et al. 2022

To that end, FSA-SB and MTCI defined a clear motivation for change. FSA-SB leaders felt that staff interactions with participants were transactional and focused too much on process. They viewed Goal4 It! as a way to provide case managers with a structured approach to meaningfully engage participants. The organization's leaders thought this framework would better support individual growth and learning, as well as relationship building.

■ Reflect on your “why” when considering changes in practice

In SIMR, grant recipient staff participated in interactive working meetings with the SIMR team to identify and prioritize implementation challenges and develop approaches to address them. The following questions can help your organization focus on the change you want to make to improve service delivery:

- What challenges or issues in your organization might these practices help you address?
- How do these practices differ from business-as-usual?
- What benefits might you see if you make this kind of change?
- What challenges might you face in undertaking a similar effort?
- How do these ideas and practices fit within your organization's vision?

For more information on identifying implementation challenges and solutions, see [Developing Strategies to Address Implementation Challenges Facing Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Grantees](#).

MTCI leaders wanted to make the case management component of their HMRE services more robust, but staff faced limitations on the time they had available to have in-depth meetings with youth. MTCI staff recognized that by focusing case management on goal attainment, they could make interactions with youth more meaningful and relevant. The box above provides a set of reflection questions for organizations looking to adopt motivation-driven case management or other practice-related changes.



► **Tip 2. Start small—pilot and learn.** When introducing a change, especially one like motivation-driven case management that aims to affect behaviors and mindsets, it is important to start small and expand after you have figured out how to do it well. To that end, FSA-SB leaders opted to start by using Goal4 It! in case management in three of the organization's programs as a way of testing its potential for use countywide in all Family Service Agency locations. This made it easier to identify the staff that would participate in

the pilot process and limited the ramifications of the changes. In other words, if the approach did not work as intended, then FSA-SB could easily recalibrate without disruptions to the organization. MTCI elected to test the goal attainment framework for case management with students in about half of its workshops for one school semester to determine whether the approach was feasible and worth continuing. After their initial pilots, FSA-SB decided to scale up Goal4It! to other programs operated in Santa Barbara County, and MTCI decided to continue using a goal attainment framework in future semesters.



► **Tip 3. Align program forms and processes.** To adopt a motivation-driven approach to case management, programs might need to update organizational forms and processes, such as participant assessments and other case management tools. Existing tools might not give staff the supports needed to implement these approaches if they do not reinforce the new approach to service delivery. This means that in addition to identifying the “why” or motivation for making this shift in case management, an HMRE organization

also needs to consider what characteristics, processes, and procedures might help or hinder the change from taking hold.¹⁰ Based on the experiences of FSA-SB and MTCI, HMRE programs looking to adopt motivation-driven approaches to case management should look for ways to:

¹⁰ Scaccia et al. 2015

1. **Streamline assessments and paperwork**

to reduce sources of stress and create space for meaningful conversations focused on what matters to participants rather than their past.

2. **Make tools accessible**

to case managers by saving them in a central location and ensuring the tools are available in locally relevant languages.

3. **Update data systems**

to reinforce the motivational approach, such as developing a standardized case note template that emphasizes goal progress.

4. **Reinforce goal attainment**

in other program components, such as workshops.

Streamline assessments and paperwork

FSA-SB looked for ways to reduce stress on participants and create more space for relationship building and meaningful conversation. This led to replacing several existing assessments with one assessment tool designed to support motivation-driven case management (Appendix A).

MTCI replaced a lengthy needs and barrier assessment with a goal attainment worksheet (Appendix B) to help participants identify a meaningful goal they wanted to work on, break that goal into achievable short-term steps, and anticipate challenges and obstacles they might face and ways to get around them.

For more information on how to reduce paperwork in your program, see this [brief](#).



► **Tip 4. Build case management skills as a team.**

Making the shift to motivation-driven case management involves a different way of interacting with participants and an upfront and ongoing investment in staff training and development. Strong implementation requires time and space to practice, try, fail, and learn in order for staff to build confidence and skills. FSA-SB and MTCI received training for staff, supervisors, and leaders that included time to practice using the new case management techniques

and tools. Both organizations reinforced the initial training through ongoing staff development. For example, after the training, FSA-SB and MTCI provided staff with opportunities to practice goal attainment conversations with colleagues and supervisors, including role-playing different scenarios they might experience.

Supervisors are critical in building skills and supporting implementation

Skill building is an essential part of adopting a motivation-driven approach to case management. Supervisors provide case managers with direct support and guidance during this transition, and so they must become familiar with the approach.

Supervisors at FSA-SB began using Goal4 It! with staff to set personal and professional goals, before staff used it with participants. This helped supervisors build confidence with Goal4 It!, enabling them to support their case managers as they began working with participants. It also helped case managers understand what the experience with Goal4 It! might be like for participants.

For more information on Goal4 It! in supervision, see this [fact sheet](#) and this [brief](#).



► **Tip 5. Collect feedback from staff and participants.** Collecting feedback from staff and participants who are engaged in motivation-driven case management can help practitioners uncover what is working well, where there are challenges, and what practitioners could do differently to strengthen implementation. FSA-SB, for example, conducted listening sessions with staff and supervisors to understand whether Goal4 It!

was working as intended and how its use could be improved. In response to this feedback, FSA-SB leaders created flow diagrams and tip sheets that provided guidance on where and how to use the steps in the framework. MTCI administered short paper surveys, called exit tickets, to participants. Based on the feedback from the exit tickets and discussions with case managers, MTCI streamlined initial case

management meeting materials and changed the process for follow-up meetings to increase the number of case management sessions available to all participants. For more information on participant feedback and data collection strategies, see the brief [Using Data to Guide Program Improvement in Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Services](#).

Next steps

Each grant recipient only began to implement motivation-driven case management in SIMR and had more work to do to refine implementation. However, their experiences suggest that motivation-driven approaches to case management can be a good fit for HMRE services. Adopting a motivation-driven approach to case management takes time and intention to create buy-in within an organization, and it requires commitment to changing staff mindsets, behaviors, processes, and procedures. Motivation-driven case management should also be tailored to a program's specific context and needs, and grant recipients interested in adopting them should seek the support of experts. Grant recipients are encouraged to reflect on the strategies from this brief and other SIMR products and consider how the strategies might work in their contexts. Through testing and evaluation, grant recipients can continue to contribute insights that benefit the HMRE field.

Grant recipients can find more information about the SIMR study and findings from other SIMR sites in the full reports for the study, additional practice guides, and a digital essay. These resources are available on the [Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation SIMR web page](#).

References

- Bandura, A. "Self-Regulation of Motivation Through Anticipatory and Self-Reactive Mechanisms." Nebraska Symposium on Motivation, vol. 38, 1990, pp. 69–164.
- Bandura, A. "The Primacy of Self-Regulation in Health Promotion." *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 2005.
- Cavadel, E., J. Kauff, M.A. Anderson, S. McConnell, and M. Derr. "Self-Regulation and Goal Attainment: A New Perspective for Employment Programs." OPRE Report #2017-12. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2017.
- Center on the Developing Child. "Three Principles to Improve Outcomes for Children and Families." Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Center on the Developing Child, 2017.
- Derr, M., and J. McCay. "Goal4 It!™: Science-Informed Approach to Achieving Economic Independence." Washington, DC: Mathematica Policy Research, 2018.
- Derr, M., and K. Joyce. "Options for Building Coaching Practices into TANF Programs: A Comparison of Five Models." Washington, DC: Mathematica: May 26, 2020.
- Friend, D., S. Baumgartner, P. Holcomb, E. Clary, H. Zaveri, and A. Overcash. "Pathways-To-Outcomes: How Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Program Activities May Lead to Intended Outcomes." OPRE Report #2020-52. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020.
- Friend, D., L. Mattox, A. Buonaspina, A. Hennigar, S. Baumgartner, and A. Valdovinos D'Angelo. "Strategies for Addressing Common Implementation Challenges in Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education Programs: A Guide for Supporting Design and Improvement Efforts." OPRE Report #2022-314. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022.
- Joyce, K. and S. McConnell. "Employment Coaching: Working with Low-Income Populations to Use Self-Regulation Skills to Achieve Employment Goals." OPRE Report #2019-67. Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2019.
- Murray, D., K. Rosanbalm, C. Christopolous, and A. Hamoudi. "Self-Regulation and Toxic Stress Report 1: Self-Regulation from an Applied Developmental Perspective." OPRE Report #2015-21. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015.

Scaccia, J.P., B.S. Cook, A. Lamont, A. Wandersman, J. Castellow, J. Katz, and R.S. Beidas. "A Practical Implementation Science Heuristic for Organizational Readiness: R= MC2." *Journal of Community Psychology*, vol. 43, no. 4, 2015, pp. 484–501.

Zelazo, P. D., S. M. Carlson, and A. Kesek. "Development of Executive Function in Childhood." In *Handbook of Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience* (2nd ed.), edited by C. A. Nelson and M. Luciana. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008.

Zelazo, P.D., A. Carter, J.S. Reznick, and D. Frye. "Early Development of Executive Function: A Problem-Solving Framework." *Review of General Psychology*, vol. 1, no. 2, 1997, pp. 198–226.

Zimmerman, B., and D. H. Schunk. "Handbook of Self-Regulation of Learning and Performance." New York, NY, and London, UK: Routledge, 2011.

Title: SIMR Practice Brief: Adopting a Motivation-Driven Approach to Case Management in HMRE Services

OPRE Report 2023-074

March 2023

Authors: Alex Bauer, Scott Baumgartner, Pamela Holcomb, and Daniel Friend

Submitted to:

Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation
Administration for Children and Families
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
330 C Street, SW
Washington, DC 20416
Attention: Samantha Illangasekare and
Rebecca Hjelm, Project Officers
Contract Number: HHSP233201500035I/75P00119F37045

Submitted by:

Mathematica
1100 First Street, NE, 12th Floor
Washington, DC 20002-4221
Phone: (202) 484-9220
Fax: (202) 863-1763
Project Director: Robert Wood
Reference Number: 50898

This brief is in the public domain. Permission to reproduce is not necessary.

Suggested citation: Bauer, A., S. Baumgartner, P. Holcomb, and D. Friend. "Adopting a Motivation-Driven Approach to Case Management in HMRE Services." OPRE Report #2023-074, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023.

The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, the Administration for Children and Families, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. This report and other reports sponsored by the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation are available at www.acf.hhs.gov/opre.

Connect with OPRE



Appendices

Please note that both appendices are part of a larger suite of tools connected to Goal4 It!, and the tools provided here are just examples.

- A. Stepping Stones to Success Assessment Used by FSA-SB
- B. Goal Attainment Worksheet Used by MTCI

Appendix A. Stepping Stones to Success Assessment Used by FSA-SB

Goal4 It!™

Stepping Stones to Success

MY NAME DATE / /

MY SIGNATURE

1 What is your overall stress level right now? (FILL IN A CIRCLE)



2 Where do you feel you and your family currently are in these areas of life? (Fill in a circle in each Pathway row)

		AREA OF SIGNIFICANT NEED	AREA OF NEED	STABLE, BUT COULD IMPROVE	THRIVING		
Housing ▶	My family doesn't have housing.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	We have stable and safe housing.
Dependent Care ▶	We have no child care.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	We have reliable child care and a reliable back up plan.
Transportation ▶	We have no transportation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	We have reliable transportation and a back up plan.
Personal Well-Being ▶	My personal well-being needs my attention.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I am doing well and am fully able to work.
Family Well-Being ▶	Family challenges interfere with my progress.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	My family is doing well and supports me.
Social Support ▶	I have no social support or my network is not supportive.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I have consistent and effective social support.
Financial Health ▶	My income is not enough to cover my basic living expenses.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	My income is stable, I am current on my bills, I have money for saving or spending.
Legal ▶	I work certain jobs or I have lost jobs because of my legal issues.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I have no current legal issues.
Education/ Training ▶	I don't have a high school diploma, GED or entry-level certificate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I have a degree or industry recognized certificate(s) in a high demand occupation.
Job Search/ Skills ▶	I don't know where to find work; the jobs I apply for don't hire me.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I am being invited to interviews and/or I have been offered a job.
Employment ▶	I am working in a survival job that I don't like or I am not working.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I love my job!

3 What is one goal you have for today's meeting?

4 Do we need to update any of your information? (Example: address, phone number, email, employment, etc.)

Appendix B. Goal Attainment Worksheet Used by MTCI



MTCI Goal Planning Sheet

INITIAL MEETING

My Name:

Today's Date:

MY GOAL

WHAT DO I WANT TO DO?

Imagine how you would feel if you accomplished what you want to do...

MY PLAN

STEPS TO ACCOMPLISH MY GOAL

WHAT COULD GET IN MY WAY?

POSSIBLE OBSTACLES:

WHAT CAN I DO TO OVERCOME THESE OBSTACLES?