

Peer TA: Director's Den

June 2014: TANF's role in re-engaging low-income non-custodial fathers in the workforce



The Director's Den is a special section of the Peer TA website that was created to facilitate communication between the Director of the Office of Family Assistance (OFA) and TANF program stakeholders. Periodically, the OFA Director will provide timely insights and useful information. This article seeks to address current issues related to the program, poverty, and American families. I welcome (and encourage) your feedback and communication through peerta@icfi.com.

Last year, the Urban Institute [reported](#) that approximately 16.5 million men live below 200 percent of the federal poverty level. According to recent data, more than [one in six men](#) between the ages of 25 and 54 – approximately 10.4 million men – are not working.

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is a vital resource for many individuals and families, including low-income non-custodial fathers. TANF funds, generally, can be used to provide job skills training or re-training activities, employment placement services, subsidized employment, employment counseling services, mentoring and tutoring services and financial counseling services to non-custodial fathers. This flexibility offers many men a vital lifeline to the workforce. Throughout the country, TANF programs are providing support for services to non-custodial parents (NCPs) in a variety of ways, including through supports for education (Adult Basic Education, Education for Sustainable Development, and General Education Development/GED), skills training and on-the-job training. For example, [Wisconsin](#) utilizes the state's TANF program to serve non-custodial fathers and provides case management, job search and job

retention services to facilitate entry into the labor force. The state's Children First and NCP programs offer a variety of services meant to help non-custodial fathers provide financial support for children.

Another state example is the TANF-funded [NCP Choices](#) program in Texas. Started in 2005, NCP Choices has helped thousands of Texans overcome substantial barriers to employment and career advancement while becoming economically self-sufficient and making consistent child support payments. The services provided to NCPs mirror those provided to TANF recipients under Texas' Choices (TANF) program. The services emphasize Work First, and include (but are not limited to) job referrals and job search assistance, job development, support services, short-term training, subsidized employment/work experience, GED and English as a Second Language classes and job retention and career advancement assistance.

As the Brookings Institute states in [this](#) Social Genome Project report, "[The best hope to solve the male employment problem is to accelerate the movement toward expanded work programs.](#)" TANF offers that hope, and is a viable option for building pathways to economic security for low-income men, non-custodial fathers, children and families. Creating such opportunities is a complex endeavor requiring innovation, public/private partnerships and greater collaboration across systems. The ability to increase economic stability for children and families provides TANF programs with stronger incentives to fully engage non-custodial fathers, and the flexibility

inherent to the block grant allows for tailored supports and services to each individual's unique needs.

In the announcement of this year's [My Brother's Keeper](#) White House initiative, President Obama affirms that the reconnecting of families and communities requires a focus on "[responsible fatherhood](#)". This includes helping fathers to provide financially for themselves, their children and their families. OFA will continue to work with TANF programs, partners and stakeholders to develop and share approaches that have shown promise and can be implemented to improve the economic stability of non-custodial fathers. With so many men at the margins of economic promise, this is the time for forward thinking that can dramatically alter the lives of more than 16 million men, as well as their children, families and communities.

Until next time,
Earl