



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES
Office of Family Assistance

Skills Development To Improve Employment Success

**OKLAHOMA: INTEGRATING HEALTHY
RELATIONSHIP TRAINING INTO TANF
ORIENTATION TO EQUIP PARTICIPANTS
WITH CRITICAL SOFT SKILLS**

The Oklahoma State Department of Human Services (OKDHS) has long been a leader in the development of innovations in healthy relationships programming. With WorkForward, the agency is preparing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) participants for employment by bridging its relationship education experience with its job training program. By focusing on soft skills development and navigation of workplace relationships, this integrated approach is laying a foundation for helping TANF participants obtain and sustain employment.



TANF *Works!*

Integrating Innovative Employment & Economic
Stability Strategies into TANF Programs

EMERGING PRACTICE SERIES | 2018 - 04

THE TANF CHALLENGE:

What Issues Do TANF Programs Face?

TANF programs face the challenge of helping participants both obtain good jobs and maintain their employment. While they may accomplish these goals, programs sometimes find that participants lack the “soft skills” needed to fully succeed in the workplace, such as communicating effectively and resolving conflicts. Far too often TANF programs connect participants with job opportunities, only to learn a short while later that the employment has ended. These participants may have had the skills to perform the job duties but lacked soft skills proficiency.

Surveys of business leaders consistently yield the same results – they seek employees with strong “soft skills” for their workforce. Employers may vary in what skills they desire most across different employment sectors, but most include communication, problem-solving, and collaboration on their top-10 list. Improving these skills among job seekers has become a critical component of any strategy to ensure that employees are more work-ready. Employers often view these skills as both lacking in entry-level employees and essential for job retention and career advancement. Simultaneously, there is often little time or support for such training in most employment programs. TANF staff are thus challenged to meet this need for soft skills training to achieve desired outcomes for both participants and employers.

THE INNOVATIVE SOLUTION:

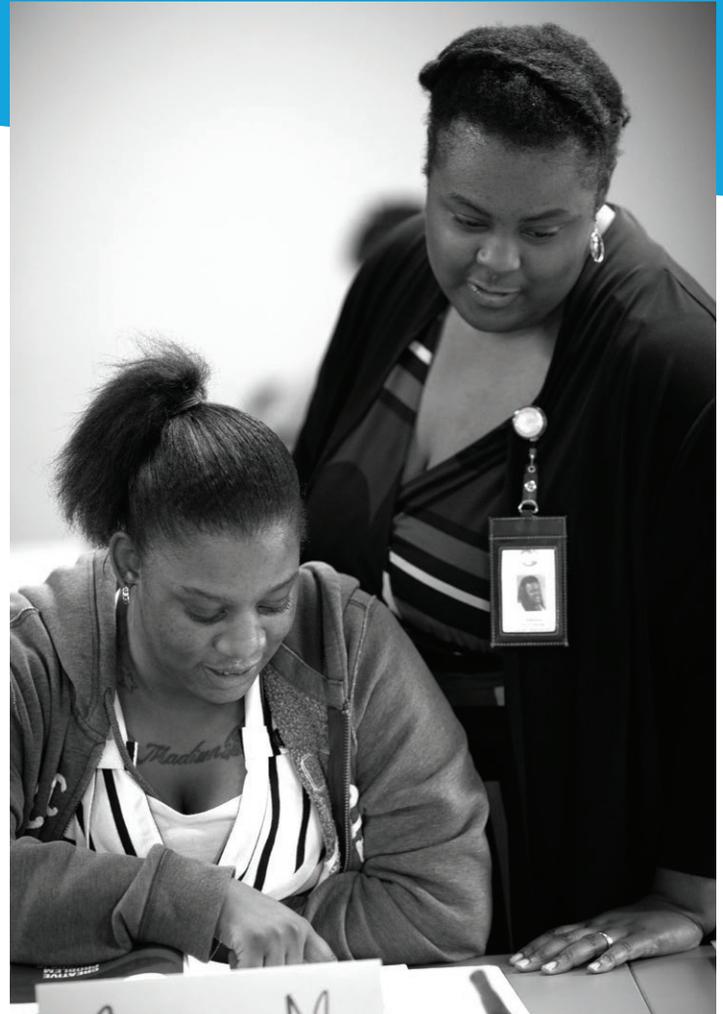
What Solution is Proposed to Address These Challenges?

Soft skills improve the employability and productivity of TANF participants, and relationship education provides a solid foundation for many of these skills.

While TANF has been funding healthy marriage and relationship education (HMRE) services for almost two decades, this brief focuses on the innovative practice of fully integrating relationship education into a work readiness program, an approach adopted by the Oklahoma Department of Human Services (OK DHS).

OK DHS has transformed its TANF orientation process, working with its long-time private provider, Public Strategies (PS), to create a two-week program launch that better prepares its clients to navigate the relationships that affect job attainment and retention. Participants can achieve five objectives through orientation: learning about and completing TANF requirements, determining their best career pathway/job search option, forming a relational network that will assist in achieving career goals, building confidence and relationship competency, and tackling critical employment resource-building tasks.

Over the two-week period, this orientation model is designed to help participating TANF clients demonstrate a significant improvement in their ability to communicate effectively with others, progress in navigating through their barriers, and show a gain in employment hope, a measure that has proven to positively impact the employment outcome of low-income individuals.¹





ALIGNING INNOVATION WITH RESEARCH:

What Is Known That Provides Confidence This Idea Can Work/Will Matter?



RELATIONSHIP SKILLS TRAINING

Relationship skills training has historically focused on improving marital and couple verbal and nonverbal skills that may lead to stronger marriage commitment and family stability. Programs nationwide are now integrating this relationship training across many settings because of evidence from ongoing research² that individuals can learn these skills and principles, that these skills can be taught in a variety of settings by a variety of service providers, and that couples who learn these skills can maintain them over time and may experience increased relationship stability.

Research has shown that opportunities for low-income couples to work together to build relationship and human capital assets together, such as communication, problem solving, conflict management, companionship, and social support skills, are associated with families managing stressors more effectively.³ Similar skill-building is now being implemented in workforce settings through grants funded by the Office of Family Assistance (OFA).⁴



TRANSITIONS AND KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Research indicates that individuals experiencing life transitions (such as a change in relationship status or new work situation) are more likely to accommodate and integrate new information and actions into their life's practices, making work readiness programs a good opportunity for growth and learning.

Research also shows that skills learned in one setting can be transferred to another. HMRE educators often apply knowledge transfer techniques

to their training to demonstrate that skills are applicable to both home and work. Further, research has shown that integrating relationship education into existing services is a cost-effective strategy to combat family fragmentation and strengthen families as they move toward self-sufficiency.⁵



RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT TRANSFER

Skills acquired through HMRE can be applied in the workplace with supervisors, direct reports, coworkers, and customers. Companies are now emphasizing soft skills in hiring decisions and recognizing the connections between relationship skills and work performance.⁶ One survey found that 22 percent of the employee respondents saw "personal relationship issues" as their biggest distraction at work, while "people issues" within the workplace were identified as a top stressor by 31 percent of employees.⁷

Other studies have highlighted the correlation between marital stress and job turnover, the cost of employees' divorces for businesses, and the long-term profitability of employers sponsoring workplace relationship training.⁸ These reports, especially when commissioned by corporations, indicate employers' interest in investing in their employees' personal well-being and interpersonal skills.

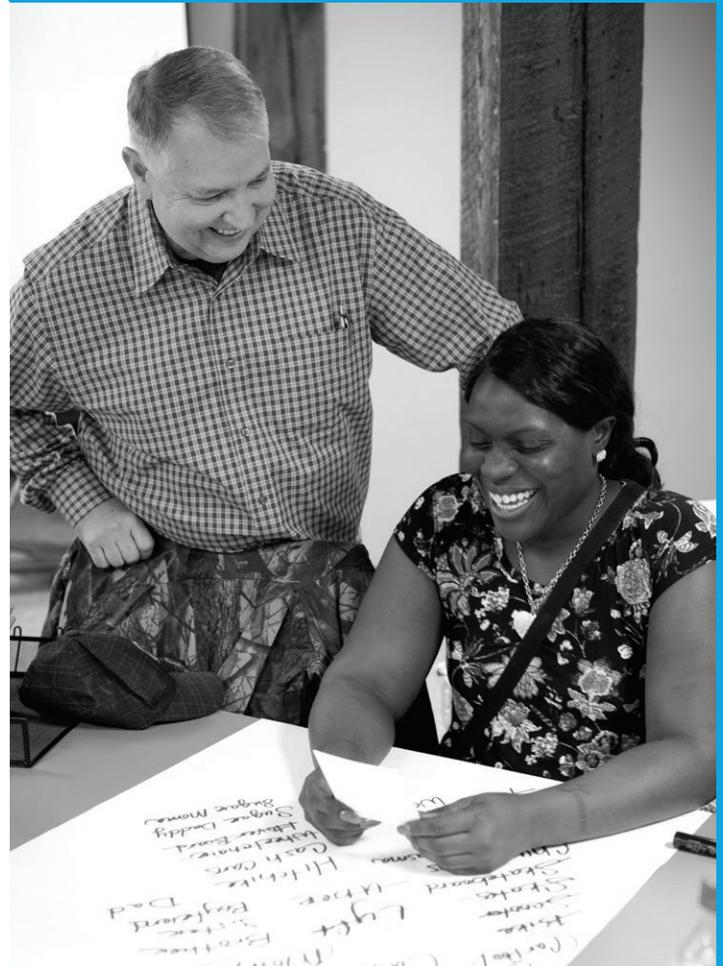
Healthy relationship skills are often not taught at home or in school. As a result, organizations around the country, including TANF programs, are beginning to integrate these soft skills into their job readiness programs to help low-income clients achieve both family and economic security.⁹

PROGRAM MODEL:

What Is Being Done?

In a pilot project that began in 2017, DHS launched *WorkForward* in Oklahoma County as a means of improving both the employment outcomes and customer experience of TANF clients. The state engaged its longtime TANF private provider, Public Strategies, to bring innovation and emerging practices to its system through privatization of the orientation service. This included expansion of the orientation period from one to two weeks for improved client decision-making about career pathways, and integration of more robust work readiness/HMRE content into the orientation curriculum.

DHS uses the orientation period to complete TANF requirements and testing, meet with clients to develop action plans, and introduce participants to its education and training/job search partners. During the two-week orientation, content from the research-based *Winning the Workplace Challenge*¹⁰ is integrated with *WorkForward*,¹¹ the work readiness curriculum prepared by the PS team. TANF participants receive about one and a half days of direct healthy relationship content and ongoing coaching interactions that are rooted in HMRE skills. They also experience a program culture organized around building self-confidence and relationship competency.



Oklahoma's strategies for developing a HMRE-informed TANF orientation includes:



Integrated Work Readiness and HMRE Concepts to Equip Participants With Skills:

WorkForward educators deliver highly targeted work readiness content, which is available in modules and adapted for the unique needs

of low-income populations. Winning the Workplace Challenge offers a full day of HMRE content to equip participants with the relationship skills they need to achieve workplace success. The content is offered in tandem, allowing skilled educators to weave concepts and reinforce learning objectives across modules.



A Targeted Response to Meet Employer-Driven Demand

As employers continue to seek applicants with stronger soft skills, DHS maintains a commitment to building the relationship

competency of its TANF clients through its orientation process. With a focus on concepts like goal setting and effective communication, participants can gain both the skills and confidence needed to offer local employers the solution they need.

“When we first launched relationship education into our TANF orientation years ago, there was a surprising but important unintended consequence. In the TANF office where we piloted the first HMRE workshops, the County Director reported a significant drop in complaints by clients against workers, crediting the improvement to the addition of the HMRE curriculum to our orientation. No other change to operations had been made. In addition to [this improvement], he personally observed client interactions with TANF workers that were more constructive. We realized then as an organization that the skills clients were learning would be transferable to their relationships with future employers. As a result, in different ways, we've been significantly [investing] in the integration of healthy relationships content in the TANF program since that time.”

- PAULETTE KENDRICK
OK TANF Program Manager



A Relationship-Driven Culture to Support Employment Goals

The Oklahoma TANF pilot is organized to foster the development of a relational network that will improve client success. In addition to the orientation workshops that teach relationship skills and principles, the *WorkForward* staff form strong supportive relationships with participants as they move through activities. Through this process, TANF workers coach participants in setting realistic employment goals. Relationships are also initiated with education and training or job search partners to move individuals towards employment success.



High-Energy, All-Day Sessions to Build Confidence, Employment Hope, and Job Readiness

TANF participants engage in a two-week-long orientation that allows for aptitude testing, exposure to career pathways, and the development of individual service plans. Research-informed content for workshop sessions, delivered by skilled facilitators, helps participants gain the soft skills and relationship competency they need to be more successful in navigating their path to long-term employment. Hands-on activities and personalized attention equip each TANF client to engage in job search activities or additional employment training.

The combination of job readiness skills, relationship competency, and informed career plans increases self-confidence, employment hope, and commitment to program participation for TANF participants.

The combination of these program components has positively affected TANF participants, providing a high-energy, self-motivating start to the path toward economic stability. Participants report that learning relationship competency skills and understanding the impact that their personal lives can have on their job search and work life success is an area of life that they had never thought about or been taught to navigate.

Some TANF participants move directly into employment from completion of the orientation activities, an unanticipated result.

The goal of the TANF orientation is to move clients into the TANF program with the best plan for success in achieving long-term economic stability for their family. However, some participants have gained enough confidence and utilized the training and resources in *WorkForward* to move directly into employment opportunities without the need for additional education and training or job search support.

The integration of HMRE curricula into employment programs is gaining momentum.

Each of the HMRE products developed for the Oklahoma TANF system and its clients has positively affected thousands of people at different points in their life journey over the past decade. In addition to the many Oklahomans who have benefited, human service agencies in other states are now offering programs that blend HMRE and employment services, a direct result of TANF's earlier, innovative engagement with the HMRF field (see next page).

RESULTS:

What Has Been Learned/Achieved?

TANF participants' skills have improved for seeking and maintaining pathways to employment and careers/jobs.

Participants consistently report that the soft skills they learn during the TANF orientation and their *WorkForward* workshops have helped them gain a competitive advantage in achieving their employment goals. In a 2019 survey:

85% of participants reported that they now have the skills to land a well-paying job.

87% felt more comfortable talking about their strengths during interviews.

84% now know how to communicate their skills through a resume.

Better equipped with communication and conflict management skills, they have improved their ability to navigate interactions with their colleagues, build healthy support networks, and stay focused on their plans.

HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP/WORKFORCE EDUCATION SITES



Family and Workforce Centers of America (FWCA)

ST. LOUIS

FWCA has integrated the *Within My Reach* curricula with its work readiness content for its Department of Labor funded programs, offers *Within My Reach* in a two-week long class for single individuals (TANF clients are many of the participants), and has incorporated their HMRE training into the Missouri Work Assistance TANF Work Readiness Workshops, which span a 4-week period.

“ The HMRE curriculum has given our TANF customers the opportunity to learn new skill sets in making quality decisions and learning new listening and communication techniques, while engaging others. These skills sets are valuable not only in their personal life but also on the job!

- **CAROLYN SEWARD**
President/CEO



The Parenting Center

FT. WORTH

The Parenting Center's Empowering Families project combines relationship education, employment and training, financial education, and parenting education in 8-week workshops that are provided in both English and Spanish. This healthy relationship program uses *Family Wellness* as its curricula and recruits low-income families for services.

“ In the Empowering Families program, we combine healthy relationship education with financial coaching and employment training. In both your relationship and your job, communication is vital to success. Time and time again, we have had folks in our program say things like 'the things that you taught us about communication in my relationship I used with my boss! And both went great!'

- **PAUL GRAVLEY**
Executive Director



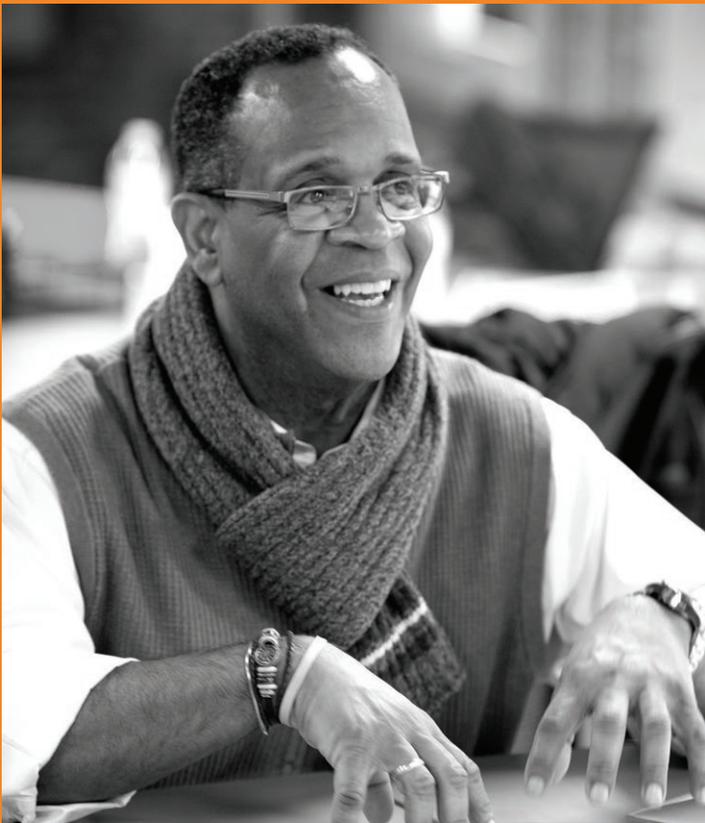
People for People, Inc.

PHILADELPHIA

Project DAD serves non-custodial fathers through 60 hours of intensive employment services. The *Within My Reach* curricula is bundled with the *NPCL Fragile Families* curricula for young fathers and *Preparing for the Work World*, a soft-skills curriculum. This responsible fatherhood program is funded through an OFA HMRP 5-year grant.

“ Our fathers understand the importance of having healthy relationships at home, in the community, and at the workplace. This is important because their relationships at home and in the community affect their ability to be employed. The relationship education also helps our fathers learn how to handle disappointment and frustration. When they learn this in their personal lives, it is less likely they will have an outburst when they are employed.

- **KIRK BERRY**
Director



A FIELD VIEW OF THE EMERGING PRACTICE:

Voices from the TANF Agency

Engaging a private provider as a partner has been critical to program success.

With contractual partners, OK DHS has been able to engage a wide range of experts in developing innovative strategies and tools, implementing community-based services in customer-friendly environments, and utilizing high-quality trainers and materials to shift cultures, processes, and outcomes.

“ We have worked in close partnership with our primary healthy relationships and TANF service provider for over a decade, each contributing our expertise, to innovate for the benefit of our clients. Our collaboration is a model for public-private partnership that I’m always glad to share with others.

- LINDA CAVITT
State Deputy Director of Programs, OK DHS Adult and Family Services

Educators that know how to build a working alliance with participants are most effective in achieving outcomes.

It is crucial that educators have an understanding of workplace contexts and the challenges TANF participants face in obtaining and retaining quality jobs and careers. Further, the ability to form useful connections with participants includes having a working knowledge of the many other factors potentially having an impact on an individual’s current success, such as adverse childhood experiences, executive function deficits, a lack of networks and supports, and capacity and resource challenges. Adapting curricula and classroom environments and teaching with an authentic and relevant voice play important roles in making the learning experience accessible and applicable to the future workplace experience of TANF participants.

“ We pay attention to the services that are offered to our customers and, on occasion, I’ll stop in and observe a *WorkForward* workshop. The content is so empowering and the educators are so dynamic that I never fail to come away feeling motivated and inspired. It’s such an amazing experience to see the interaction between the workshop leaders and our clients, watching learning occur right in front of you about things that you know will make a difference in someone’s life.

- PAULETTE KENDRICK
OK TANF Program Manager

Experience with healthy relationships can vary widely among participants.



TANF clients may come from backgrounds that have not emphasized relationships as something that is within their control. They may never have had healthy relationships modeled, leaving them unprepared to engage appropriately in life

and work situations. Relationship education ensures a common baseline of understanding among participants by presenting the basics of healthy relationships and decision making. Over a two-week period, workshops, quality educators, and a host of supportive staff provide opportunities for modeling new skills and life behaviors and coaching about alternative responses to situations.

“ Many of our clients come in lacking relationship skills, but they can't put a name to it. No one has ever taught them [these things]. And that affects their working environment, because the [way they react when they're] hurt or the way they get their way is to fight. For many people, that's what they're used to doing at home. That's what they know— whoever yells the loudest gets results.

- **CARENDA WOOLRIDGE**
OK DHS County Supervisor

Coaching is key to participant success in applying the skills taught during orientation.



Participant-centered coaching reinforces skills that clients learn during workshops and ensures that they continue to think about and incorporate these skills into their lives and employment. Hands-on learning and engagement with content in

a variety of ways play an important role in building curriculum concepts into habits. Participants engage with educators, job coaches, OK DHS staff, and each other to apply what they are learning.

“ Coaching is so important because of the learning curve participants go through in the workshops. Some information we provide is so fundamentally different from their own experience. Not only are they learning new information, but they often have to learn to operate with a whole different mindset.

- **JAMES WALL**
WorkForward Educator

STEPS FOR INTEGRATING RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION INTO JOB TRAINING PROGRAMS

- 1 Determine which relationship education program best fits client needs
- 2 Determine which sessions, or if all sessions, add value to employment success; consult with curriculum developers for their expertise
- 3 Integrate the relationship education modules with job readiness modules
- 4 Train agency leadership, educators, and coaches/case workers train in the curriculum
- 5 Create a fidelity checklist to ensure curricula are delivered as planned
- 6 Gather feedback from participants to ensure content is relevant and understood
- 7 Reinforce important elements through coaches/case workers' modeling and practice

TANF SUCCESS IN ACTION:

Crystal's Story



One look at Crystal and it is hard to imagine a more confident person. "On the street they call me 'Rock Star,'" she said, with a broad smile. Because that's what Crystal is – a rock star at her job with Skyline Ministries' Thrift Store, where she has already advanced from a front-desk position to head of her section. However, her career path doesn't stop here; she already has plans to advance further. "Last year my section made \$11,000. I'm on track to double that this year." In addition, her rock star status isn't confined to the workplace. She is also a rock star engaging in homeless outreach, which she does in her spare time.



But Crystal was not always this confident. When she came to the TANF Orientation at Public Strategies and went through the *WorkForward* program, she had been living on the streets. A relapse into methamphetamines after almost a decade of sobriety had caused her to lose her job, her house, her car, her freedom, and her 11-year-old son. When she came out of jail, she was determined to stay sober so that she could get her son back. Because of that, she intentionally chose homelessness over staying at friends' houses. "The only places I knew to go to stay would be [with] drug users. I knew I wouldn't stay clean," she said. Even still, on her last night of homelessness, she feared she would be arrested again. It was then that she reached out to her OK DHS caseworker, who directed her to City Mission and then to Public Strategies. This was her turning point: "29 days after that I had my son back."

At the TANF *WorkForward* program, Crystal found commonalities and support among her fellow classmates, while also learning new social skills. The result was a new, healthy support network that she still relies upon. She found confidence in her own voice by building communication skills and, through those skills, she ultimately gained the ability to take and use criticism as a positive force in her life and work.

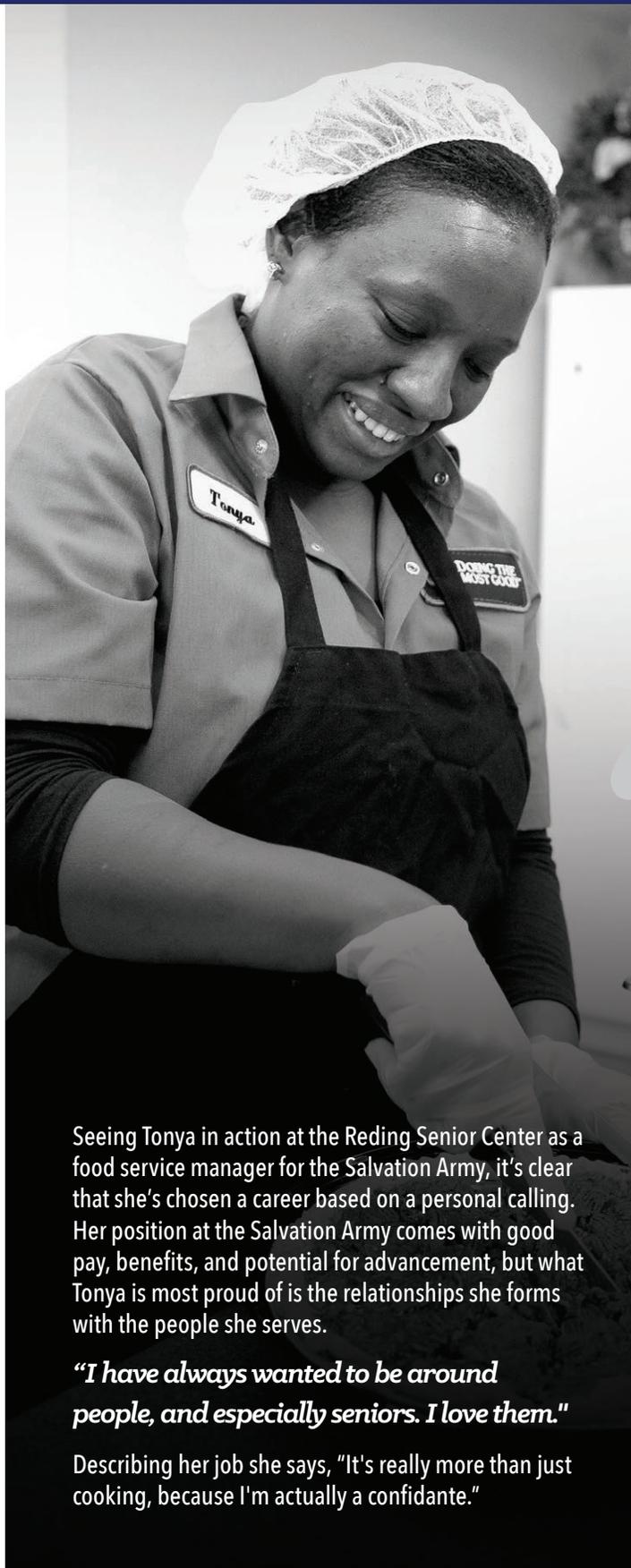
She also learned that attitude plays a crucial role in the ability to create, maintain, and communicate a personal brand – an idea she took with her from her time in the program and into her addiction recovery. "I thought, '[I] have to put a better brand out there.' I started talking

“ Constructive criticism is hard to deal with. Before this program, I would have left my job. 'I'm out of here, I can't do this. I'm not doing it right.' It doesn't bother me anymore.

in the meetings. I started chairing the meetings, because your brand... it really is everything." She credits this personal brand with her success in landing the job at Skyline: "I went in there and did everything the program told me to, and tried to do more. That's why I got hired."

A crystallizing moment came at the end of orientation when an educator took Crystal aside and said, "I believe in you" – a moment that she says epitomized the hope she and her classmates felt during their time at *WorkForward*. "You saw all of us come to life there. All of us came in pretty broken, we were pretty lost, and we were pretty bleak about our future," Crystal said. "When we left, we all had a new pep in our step. I had a dream that things might be okay."

TANF SUCCESS IN ACTION: *Tonya's Story*



Seeing Tonya in action at the Reding Senior Center as a food service manager for the Salvation Army, it's clear that she's chosen a career based on a personal calling. Her position at the Salvation Army comes with good pay, benefits, and potential for advancement, but what Tonya is most proud of is the relationships she forms with the people she serves.

"I have always wanted to be around people, and especially seniors. I love them."

Describing her job she says, "It's really more than just cooking, because I'm actually a confidante."

Tonya said that her time in the TANF Orientation [in *WorkForward* classes] helped her build skills that positively impacted all the most important relationships in her life, from co-workers to her employer to her sons, who are three, 12, and 13 years old. The life lessons she learned helped her and her sons weather a terrible time in their lives.

Tonya's path to stability began with a move away from her lifelong home in Baton Rouge and an abusive relationship. She moved to Oklahoma hoping to reconnect with her mother and extended family, a support system she used to keep her mind off the life and family she left behind. That extended family included her grandmother, a central figure in Tonya's life, who taught her to cook, pray, and look out for those less fortunate than herself. "She served everybody in the community and her neighborhood. Everyone who was homeless knew to come to her house. She just gave them food. Therefore, when I grew up I was like, 'You know what? I want to follow in my grandmother's footsteps.'"

“*WorkForward* really put an important stepping stone in my life. It leveled me, because I knew I wanted to do cooking, but the program brought out more.

WorkForward helped Tonya build on her strengths and experience and set goals for where she wanted go in life. After she earned her GED, she enrolled in the culinary arts program at Platt College. She says her time in *WorkForward* helped her anticipate barriers to reaching her goals and make plans to stay on track: "I needed that support. It was just so empowering, you know?"

Tonya also learned conflict management skills that helped her navigate uncomfortable interactions with colleagues and is eager to pass on her knowledge to her sons. "My 13-year-old looks at me and he gets it now - what this whole journey is for. He says, 'Hey, Mom, you're in college!'"

TANF SUCCESS IN ACTION:

Daphne's Story



Daphne, mother of three, knows firsthand the far-reaching effects a bad personal relationship can have on family stability and the ability to provide for one's children. After fleeing a dysfunctional relationship, Daphne came to Oklahoma with very little means to support herself and her children. Now, thanks to the skills she learned in *WorkForward*, she is the administrative assistant for the City of Choctaw, a job with benefits and possibilities for advancement.

When Daphne started the program, she had varied work experience and skills but an incomplete education. She needed help building her confidence and interview technique. *WorkForward* helped her understand how to apply her strengths and history to the jobs that employers wanted to fill. "It wasn't just working on your resume," Daphne says. "It was more about the positive things they would pull out of you and help you learn about yourself."

That new strengths-focused mindset, coupled with the communication skills she learned in class, were critical to getting a good job. "When I went to the interview [for the job I wanted] I really spoke up about all the different experiences I've had and how much I've always wanted to be the person in the office that helps everybody. They liked that I was willing to be flexible and learn different kinds of tasks," says Daphne. She landed the job.

The relationship and communication skills that Daphne learned in the *WorkForward* program were so valuable, she has kept her binder of class materials nearby in the two years since the orientation. She shares the key concepts with people she meets. She's learned about managing expectations – what other people expect of her and what she can expect from other people. She's also come to understand what was so unhealthy about her previous romantic relationship and how to model positive relationships for her children in the future.

“ *WorkForward* really helped change my thinking.

Now, instead of feeling overwhelmed at work when a customer is unhappy, she applies skills she learned in *WorkForward* to meet the conflict head on. That confidence helps her better serve the city residents. "Now I'm able to really handle stuff a lot better and I'm happy to run to the front desk if I hear [someone complain]. I'm like, I can help you with that!"



The Choctaw city motto is, "Celebrating the Past, Enjoying the Present, and Preparing for the Future." It's as if the city leaders knew Daphne was coming. Prepare for the future she did when she showed up to *WorkForward*, and kept showing up. As a result, she is now enjoying the present, immersed in positive reminders about how people should treat each other and faced with countless opportunities to live out the lessons she learned.

Endnotes

- ¹ Hong, P. Y. P. and Choi, S. (2013). The employment hope scale: Measuring an empowerment pathway to employment success. *International Journal of Psychology Research*, 8(3).
- ² Markman, H. J., and Rhoades, G. K. (2012). [Relationship education research: Current status and future directions](#). *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 38(1), 169-200.
- ³ Orthner, D. K., Jones-Sanpei, H., Williamson, S. (2004). "The Resilience and Strengths of Low-Income Families." *Family Relations*, v53 n2 p159-167 Mar 2004
- ⁴ Friend, D. and Paulsell, D. (2018). [Research to Practice Brief. Integrating Healthy Marriage and Relationship Education \(HMRE\) and Employment Services: Design Choices of Two HMRE Grantees](#). OPRE Report #2018 51. Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Retrieved from: <https://www.mathematica-mpr.com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/integrating-healthy-marriage-and-relationship-education-hmre-and-employment-services-design-choices>
- ⁵ Markman and Rhoades (2012).
- ⁶ See, for example: Cote, J. (2018). [What are soft skills and why are they important in the workplace?](#); Berger, G. (2016). [Soft skills are increasingly crucial to getting your dream job](#).
- ⁷ ComPsych Corporation Employer Survey (2012). *Employees more distracted by their spouse than their cell phone while at work*. Cited in National Resources Center for Healthy Marriage and Families, *Promoting Healthy Relationship Skills for Employees: A Guide for Workforce Professionals*; ComPsych Corporation (2017). [Three out of five employees are highly stressed, according to ComPsych survey](#).
- ⁸ Ahituv, A., and Lerman, R. I. (2004). [Job turnover, wage rates, and marital stability](#); Turvey, M., and Olson, D. (2006). *Marriage & family wellness: Corporate America's business? A Marriage CoMission Research Report*. Minneapolis, MN: Life Innovations, Inc.; Silverman, R. E. (2007). [Working on your marriage – at work: Realizing that a happy staff is more productive, employers offer relationship training](#).
- ⁹ Arnold, A. L. (2016). [Research brief: Setting the stage for successful integration of relationship education](#). National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families.
- ¹⁰ PREP for Individuals, Inc. (2012). *Winning the Workplace Challenge: Getting Along and Getting Things Done*. Greenwood Village, CO.
- ¹¹ Public Strategies. (2016). *WorkForward*. Oklahoma City, OK.
- ¹² Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families. (2018). [TANF Financial Data - FY 2017](#).
- ¹³ Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation. (July 2008). "Putting Marriage on the Agenda: How Oklahoma Laid the Foundation for Its Marriage Initiative." *ASPE Research Brief*. Office of Human Services Policy, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.



The United States Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance funded this technical assistance activity, managed by Public Strategies, under contract number HHSP23337005T, Integrating Innovative Employment & Economic Stability Strategies into TANF Programs (IIEESS).

The following individuals at Public Strategies contributed to this report: Jerry Regier, Mary Myrick, Ellen Holman, Kelly MacNeil, Crystal Buggs, Michelle Watson, Sharon Park, Mollie Lovera and Adrienne Samuel. Photography by Nicol Ragland. A special thanks to the Oklahoma Department of Human Services for their contributions and to the TANF participants who so willingly shared their personal stories.

Submitted to Damon L. Waters, Contract Officer Representative, OFA.

Further Resources

- [Promoting Healthy Relationship Skills for Employees](#) (National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage & Families)
- [Marriage & Family Wellness: Corporate America's Business?](#) (Marriage CoMission)
- [STREAMS Evaluation of HMRE Programs](#) (OPRE/Mathematica)
- [Couples Focused Employment Program](#) (Mathematica)
- Howard Markman, Jack Myrick, and Marcie Pregulman. (2006). Marriage Education in the Workplace. *Journal of Employee Assistance* (3) pp. 12-15. <https://www.questia.com/magazine/1G1-150851826/marriage-education-in-the-workplace-both-marriage>

Contact & Partner Principals

Oklahoma Department of Human Services

Linda Cavitt, State Deputy Director of Programs
OK DHS Adult & Family Services
linda.cavitt@okdhs.org

Paulette Bushers Kendrick, TANF Program Manager
paulette.kendrick@okdhs.org

Public Strategies

Chabria Easter, Project Manager, WorkForward
Chabria.Easter@WorkReadyOklahoma.com

TANF EMERGING PRACTICE SERIES

The Emerging Practice Series highlights strategies being deployed by TANF Agencies and their partners to address the needs of TANF participants seeking to gain and sustain meaningful employment. These ideas are often in the innovation stage, yet show promise for consideration by other TANF programs based on implementation success and evidence from related research. This innovation by TANF Agencies is critical to an on-going learning agenda and to the ultimate development of Promising Practices, which are ultimately documented through a more rigorous process.

Each publication is structured with a similar format:

- **The TANF Challenge:** What Issue(s) Do TANF Programs Face?
- **The Innovative Idea:** What Solution Is Proposed to Address These Challenges?
- **Align Innovation with Research:** What Is Known That Provides Confidence This Idea Can Work/Will Matter?
- **Program Model:** What Is Being Done?
- **Results:** What Has Been Learned/Achieved?
- **A Field View of the Emerging Practice:** Perspectives from the TANF Agency
- **TANF Success in Action:** TANF Participants' Perspectives