



Goal-Driven Coaching Model and Career Pathways Strategy

The Office of Family Assistance's (OFA) Policy Academy for Innovative Employment Strategies (PAIES) was an intensive technical assistance (TA) initiative in 2019-2020 for six programs across four jurisdictions interested in improving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) practice. During the initiative, participating teams received dedicated coaches, strategic planning, access to expert consultants, and tailored written resources. Additionally, they participated in several convenings, peer exchanges, and virtual trainings.



Background

Building on their commitment to move from a transactional to comprehensive case management model with an intentional emphasis on career pathways, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services (DJFS) joined PAIES to refine approaches in both coaching and career pathways services. Previously, DJFS had launched a statewide Comprehensive Case Management and Employment Program (CCMEP) for work-eligible individuals and opportunity youth (ages 14-24) in response to a primarily compliance and transactional focused case management approach. Over time, CCMEP has become permanent in Ohio's 88 counties and has broadened its focus to serve all participants.

PAIES Objectives

At the start of PAIES, DJFS' coaching (Goal4 It!™)¹ and Career Pathways efforts were at different stages of development, with Goal4 It! pilot-ready in one county and career pathways in initial development. Goal4 It! and career pathways share a common vision: to ensure all Ohioans connect to meaningful employment. Through PAIES, DJFS sought to build upon what it began with CCMEP and to translate this vision to its career pathways strategy and move counties from "a job is enough" mentality to launching TANF participants into career pathways. DJFS' initial PAIES goals were to:

- Pilot Goal4 It! and Career Pathways efforts in four counties.
- Create a statewide Goal4 It! implementation plan.
- Develop a career pathways strategy and curriculum, as well as case manager and participant guides at the state and county levels.

PAIES Challenges, Adaptations, and Accomplishments

While DJFS originally envisioned Goal4 It! and career pathways as separate models, their pilot implementation revealed a need for integration. DJFS moved towards combining and aligning handbooks, training, and curriculum. The now aligned and integrated Goal4 It! model creates an integrated statewide support strategy for moving participants towards in-demand careers. Ohio describes its combined coaching and career pathways as a "Goal4 It! model aligned with a career pathways strategy."

DJFS deployed the integrated Goal4 It! model in four pilot counties and completed the pilot phase in Summer 2020. Recognizing that communication is essential to the success of a multi-tiered, complex effort like Goal4 It!, DJFS developed a comprehensive outreach and communication strategy with consistent messaging and an emphasis on engaging local leadership to understand and accept the new approach by emphasizing its added value. DJFS used several platforms—webinars, regional trainings, ad hoc technical assistance, and bi-monthly newsletters—to accomplish their communication goals.

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One of the key lessons learned from the pilots was the importance of building momentum by training county leadership, and then supervisors, and then case managers. Ensuring buy-in at the leadership level supports long-term sustainability for the Goal4 It! model and career pathways strategy. To date, all participating pilot staff have received training, and DJFS recruited 21 new county cohorts (Summer 2020) to implement the integrated strategy. Despite the potential challenges of a state political administration change during PAIES, DJFS retained administration support and resources, and leadership feels confident they will proceed to statewide implementation.

Aware of the impacts case manager and service provider turnover would have on training staff across 88 counties, DJFS developed a supervisor training plan, as well as a cadre of local trainers, on-demand videos, and business process training to ensure fidelity to the model. Addressing leadership changes at the state and local level, DJFS emphasized patience, persistence, collaboration, and the creation of champions at different levels to move the model forward successfully. Doing so required a culture shift to embrace not only self-direction but communication, engagement, and commitment. By using pilot testing to identify challenges and refine their approach, DJFS identified the need for iterative engagement across state and county levels. These pilots have also become champions of the Goal4 It! model.

Invested in sustaining what it started, DJFS has taken targeted steps to maximize success, including:

- Documenting strategies to ensure fidelity to the model during its summer 2020 expansion.
- Emphasizing consistent training.
- Maintaining updated curriculum guides aligned between Goal4 It! and career pathways.
- Gathering support to build organizational capacity to supervise and guide culture shift.
- Being agile and efficient in training and implementation in response to reduced revenues statewide while sustaining quality.

Next Steps

Ohio began PAIES with two initiatives at varying stages of maturity. Dedicated to an employment-focused culture that meets participants where they are, Ohio used the PAIES experience to refine these approaches, remaining nimble and flexible as they learned and applied lessons about pilot testing, stakeholder engagement, and training. Ohio will continue to expand implementation to additional counties in 2021. Lessons learned from pilot counties will guide Ohio's future training, curricula, and organizational capacity efforts beyond PAIES.



Moving Forward During COVID-19

Due to the COVID-19 crisis in 2020, Ohio grappled with addressing remote work challenges while working through the difficulties of large-scale systems change. DJFS rolled out training and communications on the coaching model and career pathways strategy virtually and supported staff collaboration via Microsoft Teams. Program leadership shared information about employee assistance resources and hosted regular officewide meetings to ensure staff felt connected.

¹ Mathematica (n.d.), Goal4 It!™: A science-informed approach to achieving economic independence by activating motivation and commitment to change, <https://www.mathematica.org/features/goal4-it>.