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ADMINISTRATION FOR CHILDREN & FAMILIES

OFA PeerTA
Strengthening Self-sufficiency Pathways

Office of Family Assistance PeerTA Website Demonstration
Webinar Transcript
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Presenters:

- **Lisa Washington-Thomas, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**
- **Damon Waters, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services**
- **Steve McLaine, OFA Peer Technical Assistance Network**
- **Kristin Abner, OFA Peer Technical Assistance Network**

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for standing by. Welcome to the Office of Family Assistance PeerTA Website Demonstration conference call. As a reminder, this conference is being recorded, Tuesday, April 28, 2015.

I would now like to turn the conference over to Lisa Washington-Thomas. Please go ahead, ma'am.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Thank you so very much. Again, I'm Lisa Washington-Thomas.

I am the Branch Chief for the Self-Sufficiency Branch in the Office of Family Assistance, and I want to wish all of you a good afternoon. And thank you so much for joining us on today's webinar.

We only want to take a small amount of your time to highlight some of the new features of the PeerTA website. Many of you may — some of you may have participated in our focus groups. We did a usability testing as we were developing this website to find out your thoughts on the website, what worked for you, what didn't work, what were some of the improvements.

And we had focus groups with states, with tribes, and with federal partners just to get information on how we could make our site better. So, to give you a little history, as you may know, PeerTA has facilitated the sharing of information across state, tribal, and local TANF agencies that have been implementing Temporary Assistance to Needy Families programs since 1997.

And the goal of PeerTA is to establish linkages among TANF agencies and their partners serving TANF and low-income families at state, county, local and tribal levels. The PeerTA website disseminates and communicates information and supports the provision of technical assistance, facilitating a dialogue among organizations serving TANF and helping organizations learn more about innovative programs, the latest research, and as a vehicle for you to talk to your peers around the country.

So I'm going to turn our webinar over to Kristin Abner, who will talk a little bit more about the specific structure of the PeerTA website, and I'll come back a little later on to talk about some of the peer-to-peer connections that have been made; as well as my colleague Damon Waters will talk about a new feature that has been announced to the Tribal TANF programs but may not have been introduced to you — some of you on the line — and that is our online library — online training service.

So, Kristin?

Kristin Abner: Thank you so much, Lisa. This is Kristin Abner, and I am part of the OFA PeerTA Team. And I'll be clicking through the website and showing you all some of our exciting new features.

So, you'll see on your screen our Home Page. And at the top, you'll see this rotating story bar. So there's three different stories right now, and this will change, based on announcements that OFA would like to share with the field, grant announcements, things like that. So be sure you hit the "Home Page" and check out what's up on our rotating story bar, because it will be the latest information.

At the top of the page, you'll see, kind of, our four main parts of this site: we have our Technical Assistance, our Resource Library, Peer Connections, and our Online Learning Center. And we're going to be going into each one of those four things in more detail on this call.

So if you scroll down on our home page, you'll see we have "Latest Information from the Network" with important announcements down here. And then we also have our "Recently Asked Questions," which we'll discuss later on when we talk about Peer Connections on how you can connect with others doing similar work.

So right now, I'm going to click on "Technical Assistance."

So, PeerTA provides various technical assistance services to state, county, localities, and tribal organizations that are operating the TANF program. And some of our technical assistance methods have included peer-to-peer roundtables, site visits, workshops, moderated teleconferences, environmental scans, and annotated bibliographies and literature reviews.

And in order to request TA from PeerTA, you're going to click on this pink button here to get to the form and fill out all of the information on this form and in each one of these three tabs. And then to submit your request, you hit "Save." And once your request is submitted, it's reviewed by the Office of Family Assistance, and we get back to you in terms of possible technical assistance that we can provide.

So now I'm going to click on the "Resource Library," which — this is a new feature, a brand-new feature of the site as a way to catalog the many years of resources PeerTA has posted to the field. And so we have a very robust collection of research and resources for practitioners and stakeholders in the TANF and self-sufficiency fields.

And so our library has two ways to search: by doing a keyword search, or by doing what we're calling a "faceted search" using these buttons on the left. So the keyword search is very straightforward. So in this box, you can simply type in any keyword you're interested in, and then the list will load from the keyword search.

But one of the really cool features of the library is the ability to search by these filters on the left. So what we have is, you can filter by source. And we have resources that are linked here from the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse. We also have Partner Resources, which are things like toolkits and fact sheets from other organizations.

And then we also have OFA PeerTA Resources, which are resources from the Office of Family Assistance from past

technical assistance events, toolkits that have been developed, and things like that.

There's also the ability to sort by Date, and I'll click on that real quick. And Topic Area — and this may be what is of most interest to folks, where you can click on a topic area of choice. And there are a variety of — you can click on a main topic area if you're interested in something like Support Services generally, but you can also drill down to things like Housing Assistance, SNAP, Child Care.

And there are a variety of topics and subtopics that you can choose from which will filter the results from the library. And I'll show you an example in a second. I'm going to scroll down, and we also have resources related to Tribal TANF. So if you're interested in Child Care and Tribal TANF Programs, you can click this button here.

We also have — you can filter by OFA Initiatives. These are past OFA Initiatives that have been — that have lots of resources around Rural Communities, Urban Partnerships, from the Faith-Based and Community Organizations Initiatives, and Career Pathways.

You can filter by Record Type. So if you're interested in finding something — you want to filter out, like, journal articles or a report, but you want to look at "What toolkits are out there that can help me?" — you can click on something like "Toolkit," or "I want to look at a fact or a tip sheet around a certain topic" — you can click here to kind of weed out everything else.

And we also have the ability for you to filter by ACF Region and State here. So you can see — if you want to know what OFA PeerTA events included folks from Region I, you can click here and get the results. You can also do it by State: where has Oklahoma participated in an OFA PeerTA event or any OFA TA event?

You can also filter by Geographic Area, City or County Resources, and then if you're interested in knowing where Tribal TANF programs have participated in OFA events, you can also filter by Tribe.

So what I'm going to do is show you an example: so I want to know about what OFA has done around Child Only. So I'm going to click "OFA PeerTA Source." And then I'm going to go to "Special Populations, Child Only." And then I'm going to open "Record Type." And so you can see here that as part of our interactive question-and-answer forum, we have 11 questions that are related to "Child Only." We have seven reports, and we've done one webinar.

I'm going to click on "Reports," and you'll see here that there are the events that PeerTA and OFA have done around Child Only. So I'm going to click on the first one just so you can see what a record looks like. And it's looking like it's taking a minute to load. The — all of our — anything that's in the library that is a report or OFA event will have an overview of the event here — the Title. It will also tell you the Title and Subtopic.

And then down here, where it's not loading right now, uploaded files will include the final report or short summary from the event

so you can get more information around — here we go — the agenda and the short summary from the event that occurred. So that is an overview of the Library.

And I'm going to turn it over to Lisa to discuss Peer Connections.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Thank you, Kristin. And thank you for going through the search feature. One of the feedbacks that we received when we were doing our focus groups is that people had a hard time finding anything on the website. So we're hoping that with the new search capabilities, especially the categories, the fact that they're arranged by topics, by state and region — by so many different ways — that you'll be able to find what you're looking for.

Also, the other thing that I neglected to mention is that there's been a slight name change. Before we were the Welfare PeerTA, and now we're the OFA PeerTA. We were — PeerTA was created during the transition when TANF was first enacted. But so many states and counties have different names for their TANF program that we just tried to be more generic.

So next, I would like to talk about the Peer Connections, which is the foundation of what the PeerTA website is about, because we feel that the best teachers are a practitioner who has implemented a program before. So usually, when we have roundtables — not usually, all the time — when we have roundtables or webinars, we try to highlight what you have done in the field so that you can help your peers in improving their programs.

And that's why we want to talk about Peer Connections. And through our Peer Connections, PeerTA facilitates information-

sharing across states and tribes and local agencies serving TANF and low-income families. Our Peer Connections includes an interactive question-and-answer forum and a section for innovative programs.

So what has been happening and what we hope will continue is that you will submit your questions — if you have a question about what other states are doing — and then we provide an opportunity for your peers to answer those questions.

Also, the Innovative Programs — that is a space for you to highlight what is good, what good is happening in your state.

So we will gladly accept any promising practices, innovative strategies that you would like to share, so that we can post it so that others will see.

The questions are posted by TANF stakeholders in the field and can be browsed by Topic Areas in our Resource Library. You can submit a response to your peers or you can submit your own questions. The PeerTA Network values, as I've said, peer-to-peer engagement; as a matter of fact, that's the heart of what we do.

Also, our Innovative Programs that have succeeded in helping TANF participants achieve self-sufficiency and may help facilitate the creation of peer-to-peer matches between and amongst states.

We also include Field Connections, which are agencies and organizations that may be valuable to you. Information is included in both federal and state agencies.

So now I'll turn it over to Damon Waters, who will talk about our new Online Learning Center.

Damon Waters: Thank you, Lisa, and good afternoon everyone. Like Lisa and Kristin have mentioned, the Office of Family Assistance now offers free self-directed, online training modules on topics related to Tribal TANF and state TANF programs.

Each module includes links to other topical resources, as well as interactive questions to help participants assess their understanding of the content. You can log onto the site, register for a particular course, and you'll get a confirmation about your registration. And then, you participate online in the training course.

As you can see on the screen now, there's two available courses right now: Tribal TANF Data — The Basics and Tribal TANF — The Basics and Beyond. These were developed in close consultation with our Division of Tribal TANF Programs, and there's currently a few more modules that will be coming up in the near future.

Kristin's going to walk us through just quickly what logging in looks like.

Kristin Abner: Yes — so if it's your first time here, you'll want to create a new account. I don't think it's going to let me do it, Damon, since I already have an account. But once you sign in, you'll get a confirmation e-mail helping you complete the registration and in accessing the module.

Damon Waters: And it's as easy as that. Kristin's already logged in, and I'm sure she's taken both of the trainings. And we look forward to everyone else signing up, and stay tuned for additional modules in the near future.

To talk about another feature that we have on the new one is our newsletter. Kristin?

Kristin Abner: Yes, thank you Damon. So finally, we just want to close with — if you haven't already — for you to sign up to receive our weekly newsletter by clicking the "Newsletter" tab at the top. And we send weekly e-mails with the latest information from the field and from OFA, research and resources, and toolkits and anything related to supporting TANF families in achieving self-sufficiency.

So — and that is the website. And I think we will move to the facilitated virtual Q&A. So Steve, I'm going to turn it over to you to go over how folks can ask questions.

Steve McLaine: Great. Thank you to Kristin, Lisa, and Damon for those presentations, providing a wealth of important information about the new website that we can all use as we work with our TANF programs and families.

So we'd like to open up for questions. At this time, as you'll see on the screen, you can submit questions by using the Chat Box in the lower left corner. Simply type into the Messaging Box and press "Send," and we will address the questions as soon as possible. While you are doing that, we did get one question already during the presentation, and the question I believe was

related to the Resource Library in terms of searching: "Can you filter by multiple categories?"

Kristin Abner: Yes.

Steve McLaine: Okay. That was easy.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Can you give us an example, Kristin?

Kristin Abner: Sure, yes. So if you want to search for — "Child Only" is in my head since that was my example — but if you want to search for anything published on "Child Only" in 2015, and you are interested in knowing if ACF Region I participated in that, then it's "2015," "Child Only," "Event" — you can click on those three things, which will give you that information.

Steve McLaine: Great. The next question is: "Is there a way to review this presentation?" I can handle that one — that's probably the only question I can answer. Yes, this presentation is being recorded and will be posted on the PeerTA website for review. I will also post that in the Chat Box as well as the PeerTA site URL for you to take down for your use.

Next question: "When conducting a search, how are the results prioritized?" And also: "How can I have them be prioritized chronologically?"

Kristin Abner: They should load in chronologically when you conduct a search. We are looking at adding an option to sort by relevance and by — chronologically in the future.

Steve McLaine: Okay. Sounds good.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Okay. Was that it, Steve?

Steve McLaine: Yes, I think that was the last question.

Lisa Washington-Thomas: Okay. Well, I just want to thank everyone for participating. If you have any questions later on about the PeerTA website or any other questions for us, please send them to PeerTA, P - E - E - R - T - A at icfi.com, and we will gladly answer them.

Also, please feel free to request TA. We have been very successful in developing environmental scans as well as roundtables and site visits, sending one state to another or one tribe to another.

So we look forward to working with you in the future, and please contact us if you have any questions. Have a good afternoon. Thank you.

Operator: Ladies and gentlemen, that does conclude the conference call for today. We thank you for your participation and ask that you please disconnect your line.

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