

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

OFA PeerTA Webinar – Coordinating Services for TANF and Child Welfare Families

April 24, 2018

QUESTION: One obstacle is often childcare. It's expensive and TANF dollars are not enough to cover childcare expenses, and there are times when they don't qualify for childcare subsidies. Looking for a recommendation.

ANSWER ~ Holly Morales: Well, this is Holly at Cook Inlet Tribal Council. Within the employment training services department, that's where we have the tribal TANF program. Fortunately, enough our TANF program is able to provide 100% childcare subsidies. Obviously, in Alaska childcare is expensive because of the cost of living. And at times, unfortunately, the subsidy, the maximum pay amount, does not cover the entire amount. We have worked in partnership with the Luqu Kenu program to figure out a long-term solution or using supportive services at times. But, unfortunately, that does sometimes mean that they will go with in-home care versus a center, which is at times higher quality care.

But, we also house in the same department a childcare assistance program. Our TANF can do post-TANF childcare services for up to 12 months, but because of funding we can now do it for two months, and then we have families transition to our childcare assistance program, which is subsidy based on income.

I know this is a constant struggle. We have our Early Head Start program where, if they are eligible under our services, we do waive the co-pay because it's a childcare partnership program. So, they typically have a subsidy but we've worked it out with our CCDF program so we can waive those subsidies for families.

The thing is consistently looking at the services you're providing and how you can make changes that are allowable under the law regulations in order to meet the needs of the family.



QUESTION: Is there any data on the number of kinship providers who did not apply for TANF benefits or become licensed foster care providers due to the federally-mandated child support obligation that would accrue against their family?

ANSWER ~ Gerard Wallace: Well, you hit one of the really rough topics in the child-only grant area, which is the obligation for the parents to support and how that is a deterrent to kinship families seeking this grant. We, offhand, I mean we have – our database has our number of kinship applicants and we ask them whether they are successful in getting it. I'd have to go back and see if we have data on why they didn't – if we had categorical data or why they didn't go for it. But I know the State agency doesn't collect that data.

I'd make a comment on it that in New York, one of the values of having a kinship navigator program in the State capital has been, for the past 18 years – that we are a partner with the legislature and with the State agencies in trying to improve circumstances for these families. And one of the things we've done is enhance the exemptions from providing – cooperating with

information about the parents for the caregivers. There's an exemption that has always been around, which is a good-cause exemption for domestic violence. But, we've added one that says if the caregiver believes that they themselves or the child would be subject to emotional or physical harm if they gave this information, they are exempt.

And the other thing, and I don't know if this is Federal law, but in New York State, the social services law says that the penalty for failure to cooperate for providing information about the parents is a 25% reduction in the grant, it is not an elimination of the grant. And even in New York where we have that law—again, I don't know if it's national—but we do find local departments will tell people, “if you don't help us, you won't get the grant,” and that's a misrepresentation of what the law says. So, information can be helpful there.



QUESTION: What was your biggest challenge in building your coordinated approach and how did you overcome it?

ANSWER ~ Gerard Wallace: My program – what I presented on today, was actually an element of the program that we thought was a key factor in not having families fall through the cracks. I mean, the service array and all that is another story. But, not having families wind up in that awful example I gave you, which is a quote from a grandmother about 8 years without services, we wanted that to happen. And when we went in to talk to the temporary assistance people, there was not much resistance there. But on the child welfare side, there was resistance. And I can sum it up in the fact that they are overwhelmed and they did not want another thing to do. And yet, when we were able to explain to them the circumstances which I kind of briefly alluded to in the presentation, and kind of humanized these families, and seeing – let them see, as many of them did originally – but certainly kind of augmenting what a resource they were for the child welfare system and how successful they could be, that when they understood that they were not having to just let them go, so to speak, they bought into it.

So, it was a conversation with information and based on the good will of the child welfare folks who were there for the right reason. They're there to help children.

ANSWER ~ Deborah Northburg: We noted many challenges throughout the process of collaboration, time and resource being the most challenging factors in moving toward a more collaborative, coordinated service. As mentioned, the sustainability planning that allowed us to come together with input and determine some shared values is something that we have used to create engagement and motivation around working together. The other most important thing is being able to demonstrate the positive impact on participants that we share when we work better together.

And we recognize in our relationship with the State system they are also very, very overwhelmed and asking that the TANF workers or the child protection services workers add something else is not very effective. And so we consistently look to find efficiencies in the system and highlight any value added to the process that reduces some of their burden. It's an ongoing conversation.