

OFA Successful Methods of Addressing Ethnic and Racial Disparities in TANF Programs

Damon Waters: On behalf of the Office of Family Assistance, thank you for joining today's webinar addressing racial and Ethnic disparities in TANF's service delivery. We're extremely happy to have a wonderful panel of expert presenters to discuss this important topic with you.

I'm Damon Waters again, from the Office of Family Assistance, and I'll be facilitating today's webinar on behalf of our Director, Nisha Patel, and our Branch Chief, Lisa Washington-Thomas.

Today's webinar will offer an opportunity to discuss challenges related to racial and ethnic disparities in TANF service delivery, and share strategies from some of our state peers to address and eliminate those disparities. Despite notable economic gains made during the past decade, minority families in the United States continue to face barriers to achieving financial self-sufficiency and economic stability. We can understand this issue due to a growing body of research in this area, and several TANF programs are included in the discussion today about how to interpret and respond to disparities among TANF recipients.

Our conversation today will focus on understanding where discrepancies exist, utilizing program data to analyze disparities, and collaborating to tailor services and ultimately eliminate racial and ethnic disparities.

Today we hope to achieve a couple of objectives: understanding the problem of disparity in TANF service delivery due to race and/or ethnicity, and the challenges experienced by TANF programs. Learning how one program conducts an analysis of disparities by race, ethnicity and other demographic variables. And the uses of different types of data and information to enhance operations. Hearing experiences and lessons learned from program collaboration to tailor services for refugee TANF recipients and immigrant populations. And also we're hoping to get some information about learning about cross-system collaboration to identify and eliminate disproportionality and disparities affecting children, families, and vulnerable citizens.

We are pleased to have four dynamic presenters who will be leading our conversation today about addressing racial and ethnic disparities among TANF programs. Throughout the presentation you will have an opportunity to ask questions through the Chat box in the bottom left corner of your screen. We encourage you to ask questions, and if your question is for a specific presenter or program, please be sure to specify that.

If we do not get to everyone's questions, we will provide a Q&A that will appear on the PeerTA website along with a transcript and audio recording of today's webinar. That recording and the transcript should be available in the coming weeks along with the slide presentation.

During the webinar there will also be a series of polling questions that will appear on your screen. Please answer each by clicking on the radio button next to your selected response. Doing so will not only allow us to guide the discussion, but will also share additional information that may inform practice.

So let's get started. Our first polling question for all of you is, have you examined the presence of ethnic and racial disparities within your TANF program? Again, have you examined for the presence of racial and ethnic disparities within your TANF program? Press yes, no, or we are beginning to examine for this issue.

And our results should start popping up on the screen. I'll give it a couple more seconds to collect some data. Again, have you examined for the presence of ethnic and racial disparities within your TANF program? Yes, no, or we're beginning to examine for this issue.

So we will start showing those results. And while we're compiling those, our first presenters come from Ramsey County, Minnesota. We will first hear from Leigh Ann Ahmad. Leigh Ann is a Program and Evaluation Analyst at the Ramsey County TANF Minnesota Family Investment Program. She has previously served as a Director for MFIP Program, overseeing employment services, refugee employment services, the ARMHS Program, and AmeriCorps. She holds a Masters of Applied Social Service Administration Social Work with a focus on community development from Case Western Reserve University and a Bachelors of Social Work from Ohio University.

Joining Leigh Ann, is Larry Timmerman. Larry is a Senior Program Evaluator in Ramsey County, Minnesota's Office of Research and Evaluation, conducting program evaluation and research primarily in the areas of public assistance and workforce programs. He has served on the board of the Minnesota Evaluation Association and holds a Masters in Public Administration with a Graduate Certificate in Health Administration and a Bachelors Degree in Political Science, all from the University of North Dakota.

I would now like to turn it over to our colleagues in Minnesota. Leigh Ann.

Leigh Ann Ahmad: Thank you, Damon. Thank you to everyone for giving us this opportunity to share with you our journey through discovering what it is that we can do within our TANF programs to reduce the disparities.

We come to you from Ramsey County, which is the second largest county in Minnesota, second to Hennepin, which houses Minneapolis. St. Paul is in Ramsey County. We are the second largest county but, unfortunately, the leader in terms of poverty and disparity. This is due to size and population density.

Other factors within Ramsey County is that, 51% of our TANF recipients have a high school diploma or GED. This is in comparison to our statewide average, where 91% of our residents have completed their high school diploma or GED. Also within our TANF program in Ramsey County, those who represent the categories of race of African-American and American Indian self-identified at eligibility make up about 40% of our case load. Forty-three percent. Forty percent are African-American and three percent American Indian.

In order to address the disparities, we got together as a Ramsey County Department and said what can we do to re-look at the way we service TANF. And in order to address disparities, we realized that we have to look at the cycles of poverty, how they affect families and communities, and then we must change the way we serve TANF recipients. In this we shifted to readdressing our strategic priorities, the top three being reduction in racial employment disparities, strong

strategic partnerships with our communities, and taking a look at how we measure our outcomes and focusing on what we call 4Es: engagement, education, employment, and employment retention.

Since 2013 to present, we have been going through what we call a major systems change for our TANF programs. In doing so, we've paired our MFIP work requirements, the TANF work requirements, so that they are more closely aligned with the ideas of career coaching and education, particularly in addressing GED and looking at how do we build stackable certificates.

We've also developed and executed in-depth strategies to reduce racial and employment disparities, which we'll talk a little bit more about today.

And finally we've shifted from a process-outcomes based system, what we call counting the beans for WPR, to what we call a family-centered guided self-determination based in lifelong learning informed program. And lifelong learning means that we believe that learning doesn't end at high school, or Associates degree, or at training, but that learning is – and it's not just soft skills either. But it's about an overall cultural wellness, a family wellness, and the ability to set goals.

In all the work that we do, we're consistent about being content, process and evaluation focused. So we do attend a number of conferences, read and do our research, we work closely with the University of Minnesota and other entities, and we are actively participating in the ACF Academy where we're able to exchange a lot of information and do site visits and meet with other like-minded colleagues.

From that content, we go into process, which is our evidence-informed design, and then we're always evaluating. We have 1.5 evaluation staff within our department, and we, you know, look at both qualitative and quantitative data. And for the qualitative we focus our efforts in getting data from the participants we serve, and we have a nearly monthly focus group, and we do surveys through our participants' program attendance, what did they like about it, what they didn't, and we're constantly looking at what are some alternative well-being measures that we can incorporate into our programs. And so it's a cycle of content, process and evaluation.

So, what is culturally specific for Ramsey County? We are consultant informed, so the consultant helped us to come up with the definition. We've hired, and we always have hired, individuals who represent those affected most by our disparities, so individuals representing the African-American community and the American Indian community. They join us at all levels of programming. They sit with us in our "Everybody In" consortiums. They help us to publish information through "Everybody In". They sit with us during our participation with the ACF Academy. They sit alongside with us as part of our attendance of the Government Racial Equity, which is a statewide initiative, and they even come in to some of our programming and do case consultation with us to help us better understand all angles of the individuals that we're serving.

Through that work with the consultants, we learned that we should define culturally specific as follows. And I'm going to highlight number three where we talked about that services are delivered in a manner that acknowledges or are responsive to the historical legacies of racism, inequality and poverty which have negatively or profoundly impacted African-Americans' and

American Indians' access to and success with education and employment opportunities. So we're really focused on looking at the root of the issues and understanding the importance of having people understand where they came from and that the burden of their experiences isn't always their fault, that it comes from a history of poverty and racism and inequality.

From that definition in the guidance of our consultants, we issue RFPs seeking culturally-specific employment services vendors. And those vendors are selected after meeting that definition as part of their requirement in partnership with us they participate in a disparity reduction task group where we try to align some commonalities. They are always a first priority for any extra initiative we have, so if Ramsey County applies for some state career pathways funding or work experience funding, for example, we always extend an offer to those organizations that are culturally-specific American Indian and African-American and give them first priority to access services.

We give additional monies in their contracts so that they can conduct culturally-specific activities for their staff and participants, and we allow them to choose what they want to do. And so some examples, our American Indian Family Center has used monies for hosting pow-wows, and training staff, and hosting talking circles. And the African-American provider has hosted picnics. They've taken participants to theaters. So they're very creative with the money that they use.

And so from this we're also constantly looking for best practices to help shape future interventions so that we can understand how better to strategize and target service to African-Americans and American Indian families.

Our providers include the YWCA Service to African-Americans, the American Indian Family Center, and the Network for the Development of Children of African Descent, also known as NdCAD. We also have a FAST2, which is an IPS model where it's a demonstration right now where we're trying to discover whether IPS services, which are evidence based, have a positive effect on reducing disparities, which is length of time on MFIP and higher wages for those families identifying as African-American, American Indian.

And as part of that FAST2 model, we have case consultation, which is common to the IPS model, but we included in the case consultations alongside with the health providers and the case managers and the mental health workers, cultural consultants. So we have individuals representing African-American and American Indian communities helping us to see through the lens of the historic trauma as well as current strengths-based resources what we can do to strengthen our work with the individuals. So they participate in case consultation. These consultants have also hosted four separate trainings that are specific to our staff to help them understand historic trauma and to know about what are some strengths-based resources and what are the strengths of the culture that we can draw upon.

And finally we have what we call the Lifelong Learning Model, which I'll talk more about later.

What we learned is that it is a partnership, and it's about learning from one another. What we say matters. How we recognize participant engagement matters. One thing that we learned very early on is the use of "unleashed power" and "guided self-determination" rather than the word "empower." Why is this important? Because when we say empower, we're implying that we, the

County or the TANF provider, have the power and we're giving it to the participants. We know from our community partners that this does not work. This causes a big rift between the trust relationship, and so we began to look at things through the lens of unleashing power. The participants already have the power, we're there to just use our tools, such as coaching and motivational interviewing and our "My Bridge of Strength" to help release power.

We find creative ways to build relationships and count hours. For example, American Indian Family Center has told us that that desk relationship isn't always the most effective at getting people to share what their real issues are and that the trust isn't built around sitting at a desk, but rather when they have community events or powwows or just hanging out in the Family Center encouraging and strengthening families, that's when the real conversations happen.

So we said, okay, we hear what you're saying, go ahead and count those hours as engagement. And that is a unique shift in the way that we document engagement and hours, and we've seen real positive turnabout because of that.

We understand that cultural wellness is important for family stability. So, you know, our cultural partners tell us all the time, you need to know where you came from to know where you are going. And that's an old adage that all of us know, but we actually put it into practice that taking the time for families to understand their history, the historic trauma they underwent, and where their roots are, where they came from, is critical before they can be stable in jobs. Now they might be able to get a job, but as you'll see later, that stability in the job is challenging, and so identifying the root cause of the challenges and celebrating the culture is important.

And finally, the organizations act as mediator. They help us to talk – by being community based, they talk to the folks and they say, now go back to the County and take what you've learned and unleash your power and tell them what you need to stabilize your family. And if that's what you need before you're going for job readiness, go ahead and take a few weeks or a few months to work on working on your family while job searching, and then go ahead and get that job.

And then finally we also look at reducing isolation and dispelling the myth of self-made success.

We are embarking a new pilot, and this is alongside with Mathematica, and this pilot is taking a look at the role of stress and the role of executive functioning and the ability to set goals with success. And so this is based on evidence from the Harvard study on executive skill development and poverty and how people with poverty – experiencing poverty – have sort of a text bandwidth of not being able to use their executive skills to the full ability. We all have strengths and weaknesses, so really identifying what those are and applying those through a goal setting methodology, from this pilot we hope to be able to find out whether or not intensive goal setting, stress reduction and executive skill development more positively impact African-American and American-Indian families and reduce their disparities.

Now I'm going to hand it over to my colleague Larry.

Larry Timmerman: Thank you, Leigh Ann.

I'm going to move really quickly through our last eight slides, but you will have access to the presentation, as I understand it, going forward. So you'll have copies of this, too, and you can ask us more questions.

How is a racial disparity determined for Minnesota TANF programs? In Minnesota, racial disparities are determined using the self-support index, which was developed in the state of Minnesota in 2002 as our primary outcome measure for TANF programs. And so it is also the only measure that Minnesota uses that has bonus funding for exceptional performance. And I won't get into all the details about that, but what it means to be successful in the self-support index is for participants to be working 30-plus hours a week or off TANF cash grant. And that would be during a measurement quarter.

The way it's measured is a one-year, a two-year, and a three-year measure that uses a base measurement quarter and then looks a year out, two years out, and three years out to see if the participant is achieving at that level. So Ramsey County is one of 18 Minnesota counties to receive the bonus in 2015, and three out of seven metropolitan counties received it.

And Leigh Ann went over our demographics a little bit. The other two of the seven metropolitan counties are the most rural. So Ramsey is the most urban of the seven.

Racial disparities exist in other racial groups other than African-American and American Indian in the state of Minnesota, but primarily it's African-American and American Indian. And what it means to be a racial disparity on the self-support index is to have a performance outcome that's five percentage points below whites, in that measure.

The last bullet here for the self-support index in Ramsey County, whites most recently at 53.5, that's for the one year. African-American, 44.7. And American Indian, 37.9.

This first chart is a measure of initial engagement in the work-related activities. So when we first came up with this measure, we noticed that those communities with racial disparities in Ramsey County had lower rates of initial engagement. And you can see through this chart over the last year, both our organizations that deliver these services have increased significantly and now are right at the county average.

And on the three year self-support index that I highlighted in the first slide, you can see in the – for AFC and the American Indian community, which is the orange bars, increase over time. And pretty flat so far with the YWCA and the African-American community. But some of the more recent data that we have on the one-year rate is that for the YWCA they're about one percent higher than they were year-over-year, and also one percent higher than African-Americans for the county at large. So we're seeing some progress there, too.

And the last chart – another way that we're looking at employment within Ramsey County's TANF program, is this is those MFIP for three consecutive months with income. And with income in this case means that they are working full time at a minimum wage, whatever the minimum wage is at the time. And I say that because Minnesota is increasing its minimum wage as others are. So to be included in this, the individual would have to be working with the equivalent of full-time, at minimum wage, during that quarter.

And you can see in both communities, also have increased over the last year.

And with NdCAD, as Leigh Ann mentioned, and gave an overview of the services at NdCAD, I just want to point out two highlights. The first and third bullets indicate the increases for parents who have gone through their Parent Power program, in engagement, education and employment. And the third bullet gives some sense of the degree to which that has increased, which is pretty dramatic.

The second bullet is the most recent data we have on the program for children increasing reading levels through their Sankofa program. And SPPN, is the St. Paul Promise Neighborhood, which is a neighborhood with a high concentration of poverty in St. Paul. You can see 89% of the kids attended the program. One hundred percent demonstrated increased reading, 96% increased reading levels. So a pretty significant increase there, too.

And Leigh Ann actually covered most of FAST2, so you'll have this slide for reference. But I just want to point out the last bullet. The ones in green mention culturally specific or racial disparity. But FAST2 is very specific about racial disparity reduction as a strategy, and through that process there's in-depth discussions about race and equity and the necessary resources that families need in order to achieve the same long-term success as measured by the SSI, which is our self-support index.

So far in FAST2, this is during the first year of implementation. We've had statistically improvement in or impact in those enrollment assessments, job search education and training, and social services. We've also had a statistically significant increase – or I shouldn't say increase – in the rate of those employed or coded as employed in the test group versus the control group. So FAST2 is a randomized control study. So the 228 in the FAST group were randomly assigned to that group. And of the 228, 29 are American Indian and 199 are African-American.

And we'll continue to – this program runs at least through June of 2016, and we'll have another report in the fall, so we'll be following up on all of this and having more data to share.

My final slide – or our final slide – is the proposed strategic directions to the RFP release in 2018. As a county we submit a request for proposal for the full system of employment services through the TANF programming every five years. And so this outlines the goals as have been established through this cycle and the things that we'd like to focus on going forward. And so you will see, in the second bullet, the second part of that, including those most negatively impacted by historic trauma and racism. And Leigh Ann I think did a really good job of giving the background as to where we were, where we're at now, and where we see us going. And this slide helps to pull that altogether.

I know we went a little long, so I want to be sure we can turn it back and maybe we can answer some more questions later.

Damon Waters: Thank you very much Leigh Ann and Larry. I will say that Ramsey County has received a lot of attention for their participation in our National Policy Academy that OFA is sponsoring, and this initiative is part of their plan to address some of those issues and their program. So we're very excited about having Ramsey County present.

And now we want to actually ask another poll question before we go into our presentation from our colleagues in Colorado.

Our next polling question is, do you have mechanisms in place to provide culturally-specific services? Yes, no, or we are beginning to examine for this issue. Again, do you have mechanisms in place to provide culturally-specific services? Yes, no, or we are beginning to examine for this issue.

We'll take another couple of seconds. And it looked like on the first one everyone is in the beginning stages for the most part, beginning to really look at the racial and ethnic disparities challenges. And this question also looks like people are really starting to think about that.

I'm sure we'll have some more questions for Ramsey County and also for Colorado towards the end, but now I would like to turn it over to our colleagues in Colorado. First we'll hear from Kit Taintor, who is a State Refugee Coordinator with the Colorado Refugee Services Program, a program of the Colorado Department of Human Services. Its mission is to ensure the effective resettlement of refugees and promote refugee advancement past self-sufficiency into long-term integration. The mission is met through the collaborative partnerships of CRSPs, contractors, mainstream service providers, county and city staff and services, and local systems such as education and health.

Kit's educational background includes studies at Tulane University's School of Public Health and International Health and Development concentrating on Medical Anthropology and in English Literature at the University of Virginia.

Kit will be joined by Katie Griego. Katie is the Director of the Division of Employment and Benefits with the Colorado Department of Human Services. She guides the state's efforts to help vulnerable families and individuals become safe and economically stable in partnership with 64 counties and numerous community and advocate partners. She has been a guiding force in helping to ensure individuals have an ability to thrive within their own communities. Her biggest accomplishment at CDHS has been modernizing programs to make them easier for customers and workers in order to be responsive to the needs of the most vulnerable citizens in Colorado. This led to better outcomes for families, including employment. Ten thousand low income individuals were able to find employment since 2013. She received her Bachelor's degree from Midland University.

I will turn it over to Kit and Katie.

Kit Taintor: Thank you so much, Damon. Good afternoon, everybody.

We'll be covering today how we in Colorado used a change in our structure and in our model to address disparities that we were seeing in outcomes and services for Colorado refugees. You hear myself, Kit, and Katie both speak through this presentation, and our tag team approach should be viewed as evidence of our cross collaboration that trickles down to counties and to providers as well as our clients.

I'll give you an overview of our state and the way that we're set up, challenges that drove the opportunity to redefine how we serve refugees, the model we've been utilizing, and our key takeaways.

Katie Greigo: Good afternoon. This is Katie. We wanted to first start with an overview of how Colorado works. So under Colorado's state supervised county administered model, Colorado has a highly-evolved TANF program, so as a result, all 64 counties through the Department of Human Services, have a great deal of autonomy in their design and implementation of their Colorado Work Program, which is our TANF program.

We serve many individuals from different backgrounds. For example, Colorado is one of eight states with a Hispanic population of over one million, and our counties are well equipped to serve this population. Colorado is certainly in several of the same or similar efforts underway as Minnesota, as Ramsey County as outlined for you, and today we're going to really focus in on our partnerships in terms of the refugee population.

This map here just provides you kind of a look at all of our 64 counties and what this means in terms of our partnership with them. And Kit will provide a little bit more detail as to what counties were most frequently in partnership as we serve our refugees in our coming slides.

Kit Taintor: My office, the Colorado Refugee Services Program, oversees refugee resettlement in the state. Coordination looks different in every state. Here in Colorado the state oversees programs but they are contracted out – direct services are contracted out under a network of providers specifically set up and equipped in cultural fluency and language capacities to serve refugees. The largest populations that we see in Colorado mirror national trends, so we see populations from all over the globe. Other states, Minnesota, potentially sees refugees primarily from one country, to say Somalia. Perhaps in the Atlanta area you have more from the Democratic Republic of the Congo. But Colorado does see the full spectrum of the other populations that we see, which is a great benefit for the diversity of our communities, but also creates challenges for those who intend to serve them.

The vast majority of our refugees are resettled in three main areas. That's all on the Front Range, so on the east side of the Rocky Mountains, and in three main metropolitan areas, Colorado Springs, Greeley and Fort Morgan as well as here in the Denver Metro Area. So that's about six of the 64 counties on the previous map.

The way that the program is structured is that we, again, contract all those services out to refugees. And two of the things, key points, that we contract out is the help for refugees to access benefits and secure employment. And that looks the same for what a lot of the county staff or the county frontline workers are doing as well.

Some challenges that were faced by the counties which drove our exploration of this model. While the refugee population represents less than one percent of our state population, it accounts for over 30 different languages and 30 different backgrounds and ethnicities. If you're a frontline county worker looking for, let's say, a Rohingya interpreter, that can be quite time consuming and burdensome, both administratively and sometimes emotionally as you try to track people down who could be quality interpreters.

We find that refugees come with a great degree of diversity in their background, so you could be working with an Iraqi engineer who came over as a refugee, and your next client could be a Rohingya speaking pre-literate farmer, let's say from Burma.

Katie Greigo: To expand a little bit on the challenges faced by counties, it was really trying to make sure individuals and families were receiving the right services at the right time. So for our county frontline workers that Kit alluded to, a lot of times we were hearing that some of the challenges that they were facing were getting the right interpretive services and making sure that that was available, providing culturally appropriate services, and often it was difficult for them to develop relationships with customers to best understand their needs and ensure the right services, again, at the right time.

From a county systematic standpoint, we were challenged with the right workforce activities to create successful linkages to employment for our refugee population as well as county, state and federal reporting requirements. And Kit will certainly expand on these through our model that we embark on.

Kit Taintor: And what we ended up developing was an overlapping program between Colorado Works, the state's TANF program, and the state's refugee resettlement program. And we found that it's a partnership that serves all, so it serves refugees, it serves frontline workers, it serves the county, and it serves the state.

Some of the ways that we began to create the model were around a couple of core principles. The first core principle was that refugees are best assisted through a network of providers dedicated to assisting them in cultural affluent and language appropriate manner. The refugee resettlement system is already set up in this way in which there are a network of providers providing a full spectrum of services to make refugees successful in our country. And so knowing this we were able to work with the four largest counties here in Colorado who gave or ceded the authority to the state for the state to administer the TANF Workforce Development services for refugees. So we took funding from the top of that block grant, that was approved by the counties. And it comes straight to the Refugee Resettlement Office. So that we can mobilize, through our existing contract refugee resettlement agencies, to do the workforce development piece for the Colorado Works population.

Refugee resettlement is already set up as a public-private partnership, so we were able to just dive into that and make that work for this piece of the support that we wanted to provide our Colorado residents. And a key thing that we've been able to develop over the years is that counties all have point persons for the resettlement agency stuff, and it's helped to foster that collaborative approach and extend the myriad of support that's there to support the refugees as they move through their immigration process.

The other thing that we looked at was that the most efficient use of resources and effective achievement of outcomes will be achieved through frequent reassessment of progress towards negotiated goals with clients and agencies and adaption of case plans to support their success.

Resettlement agencies are sometimes the best connected, too, on the refugee populations. They are already required to do employment plans and follow up with the refugee clients, which

means that we were able to utilize those ongoing relationships but ensure that they were able to have activities that worked them towards employment and immigration.

And we were able to blend our funding, so funding from both TANF and my office, which comes from the Office of Refugee Resettlement, which is at HHS as well, we were able to leverage those to support the outcomes that were most meaningful for our clients. And this worked very well because both programs have similar outcomes which include employment and the cessation of benefits.

On the next slide we'll look over some of our progress in working this. We pushed this model in 2009. You'll see data here from 2011 to 2015. But I just want to point out, kind of the growth in the TANF portion of this. You'll see that in your blue column. So the blue columns represent the number of refugees receiving TANF who were off any sort of public benefit at eight months and at 12 months. And so you will see that we are at 73% at the end of 12 months, up over where we were in federal Fiscal Year 2011. So we see that we are beginning to close the gap and have actually seen that a lot of times our refugee population is outperforming or becoming self-sufficient quicker than some of our other TANF populations. And we feel like that's a direct result of utilizing the resources that we've got within the community to support the specific needs and the challenges that refugees face.

A few key takeaways and then we are expecting questions from all of you. Is that when we're looking at disparities, we might want to look into the communities to see if there are other nonprofits or existing programs or agencies that are working in those communities who are experiencing the disparities. A lot of times they'll have strengths that we can utilize to work us altogether towards a common goal. We feel like our model has been successful because it's a collaborative process and it serves everybody. It serves our clients, it serves our resettlement agencies and the resettlement program, it serves the county, and it certainly serves the state.

Katie Greigo: We also, again, to speak to the earlier slide, found a lot of our success through our participation and, again, our collaboration in that partnership. So the best way for us to continue to work through any challenges is to have frequent meetings and discussions and then open dialogue with those who are providing the direct services so that we know that they are the right services. And ultimately when the client is successful, we believe that everybody wins.

Kit Taintor: Thanks so much.

Damon Waters: Thank you very much to Kit and Katie. And also Colorado is participating in OFA's National Policy Academy, and we're excited about some of the activities that are going on in Colorado, as well as Ramsey County.

We have one more polling question before we go on to the Q&A, and some questions have already – well, a lot of questions have already come in through our Q&A session, and some of our speakers did answer them, but I'm going to ask them out for the rest to answer also.

But our next polling question, before we go into the Q&A, have you developed partnerships with organizations within your state or county or community to serve a diverse range of TANF participants? Again, have you developed partnerships with organizations within your state,

county or community to serve a diverse range of TANF participants? Yes, no, or we're beginning to examine this issue.

Have you developed partnerships with organizations within your locality to serve a diverse range of TANF participant? I'll give that a couple of seconds to load in.

And just like the other two polls, it looks like there are some places that are starting some activities, so this is a great opportunity or a great jump-off point to really start looking at this topic. And we've heard from two great locations about that.

Questions and Answers

Damon Waters: Now we will actually jump into our Q&A session. We have some questions that loaded in. Again, for the Q&A session, on the lower left corner of your screen, you can submit a question in writing. And if it's for a particular presenter, please note that. And I am going to jump into the Q&A now, and there were some great questions in there that I actually wanted everyone to give an opportunity to answer for everyone on the line.

Ramsey County and also Colorado. Do you have rural communities? How are they pretty much defined? It is almost completely landlocked urban and suburban at this point, so how are you both working with your rural communities and the diverse populations in those? Ramsey or Colorado.

Larry Timmerman: That may be a better question for Colorado since then – that was my answer for Ramsey County, and Ramsey County is the most urban county in the state of Minnesota. And so if you consider a former munitions plant is really the only place that looks rural and that's about to be developed. There isn't much in the way of rural left. So partners around the state, but not here in Ramsey County.

Katie Greigo: This is Katie from Colorado, and certainly, yes, we work with all 64 counties. The model we support is we have regional representatives within the Division who work one-on-one with counties on the topics that they need most with. We also have what we call our Memorandum of Understanding where we certainly drive different outcomes. And then also through the Policy Academy as Damon has mentioned, we're engaging with each of our counties to determine what is the best support that they need in order to be successful and delivering services that are culturally competent and individualized based upon each customer's needs.

Damon Waters: Great. Thanks to both of you. Ramsey County and Colorado, you can chime in if you want to. Could you talk more specifically about how culturally appropriate services provided by your service partners may be helping clients achieve greater stability in their employment.

Leigh Ann Ahmad: Hi there. Yeah, I would say that what I was trying to demonstrate is that we have offered support, monies and latitude, within an old kind of loosening up a little bit, a redefining the black and white into a gray area that say, how can we change the way that we provide services and measure the outcomes, including both qualitative and quantitative data assessment. But because we're allowing participants to participate in spaces like the NdCAD

Parent Power Program or within Talking Circles of Powers, pow-wows within American Family Centers, etc., and we're taking the time to really work on family wellness and cultural wellness, and so we're allowing for a slow down pace as long as we're seeing progress. So we are all about making progress-based measures important rather than immediate outcomes because what we've seen is that African-Americans, for example, actually do obtain jobs at much higher rates than any other racial categories in Ramsey County, but unfortunately we don't see the longstanding withstanding results which it shows up in the negative with our self-support index. So we said okay, let's back up and add some more time at the front end on cultural and family wellness and alternative ways of providing services and measuring those services, and now what we're seeing, as Larry pointed out, is an increase in the self-support index, which seems to show a correlation between investing in family time up front and getting long-term results, which means longer time off of MFIP or TANF and higher wages.

Damon Waters: Colorado, do you want to add?

Katie Griego: In Colorado we would concur with Minnesota that it is important to be culturally responsive. We feel like it starts with the individualized plan at the very beginning that both acknowledges and respects the cultural background, and that can be any sort of employment that might have happened overseas, that might include any sort of skill sets that someone is bringing into the U.S. that might not be so easily defined by our American terms but certainly deserves respect. By building the individualized plan, we're really able to get commitment from the refugee and their employment plan and then work them towards that are going to support them, knowing that it's going to look different than somebody who was essentially born and raised in Denver County.

Damon Waters: Great. Thank you. Another question that came in, and I'll ask it of both, do you work with undocumented workers or individuals or illegal citizens? If so, how do you deal with immigrant and/or migrant populations who are reluctant to take government aid? I know that's probably directly for Colorado since you're the refugee-serving program.

Katie Greigo: Well, all refugees are eligible to receive public benefits including TANF, and so we don't run into the issue so much about undocumented folks. We do potentially see migration within the refugee population as they tend to move for employment, and so one of the ways that we work with them to make sure that they are hooked up, not only with the Refugee Resettlement Program that can provide them with benefits, but also the county-run programs is by doing a lot of outreach, making sure that we're listening to the communities in which refugees might be moving towards and making sure that they have the tools that they need to be successful with their clients.

Damon Waters: Anything from Ramsey? No.

Larry Timmerman: Well –

Damon Waters: Oh, go ahead.

Larry Timmerman: I was just going to – Leigh Ann, do we – I don't know that we'd have anything to add to that.

Leigh Ann Ahmad: No, I don't. Thank you.

Damon Waters: Okay. And another question for both. How are you able to get other key stakeholders invested in addressing ethnic and racial disparities? And that's for both, Ramsey and for Colorado.

Leigh Ann Ahmad: I would say in Ramsey we have involved our community partners and our community consultants at all levels. We had a major role in designing a task group called Everybody in, and that was where we contracted and hired some consultants to gather some local data about the how and why of disparities. And that task force was made up of government types as well as other think tank groups as well as university types as well as community folks and community organization representatives. And so I think we're always very cognizant about aligning and making sure consultants are involved at all levels and kind of asking the right questions all along the way. And that builds the stakeholder interest over time. And we, for example, have that new key partnership with American Indian Family Center very early on in the very early days, going back to 2007 or earlier, so some of these things for sure take a lot of time.

Larry Timmerman: And one thing I would add to what Leigh Ann said, that she mentioned in the presentation, is that almost monthly we engage our participants in a conversation around a topic of some kind. And right now we're in the midst of what we've called community conversations in the African-American and American Indian communities. So participants of the agencies that we talked about today are having conversations with elders in their community. So we're documenting that and reaction to the services they receive and how it relates to the family and others. So a very exciting piece there, too, where we – I think the commitment to talking to people and tying that back to the services being delivered is really key.

Damon Waters: And Colorado?

Kit Taintor: Well in Colorado I think that it all came to getting people around the table was because we held lots of shared goals and wanted the same shared outcomes. And so we recognized that it was an issue. There was no judgment placed on that recognition and that we knew we all wanted to work towards the same outcomes for our clients and for our services.

Damon Waters: Great. Thank you. The questions keep on coming. Do you have ICWA internal office procedures, protocols, trainings, statutes implemented to follow the law and keep the children and the family and tribal nation as a stakeholder for unification? Either of you aware of that and have any insights?

Leigh Ann Ahmad: I am, unfortunately, not aware of that in Ramsey.

Larry Timmerman: That's a question we could probably get an answer to. It would be best if we had that and we could go offline. I think we might be able to get it from our partner in the community.

Damon Waters: Okay. It's with regard to the Indian Child Welfare Act, and so we'll add that to the Q&A and we'll follow up with you in Ramsey.

Damon Waters: For Ramsey County, can you share some of the resources you used in your work to dispel the myth of self-made success?

Leigh Ann Ahmad: Yeah, this is predominantly coming from the NdCAD program, their Parent Power really focuses on that. And I will ask Giovanni Ford for some resources. I know he works closely with an organization in California called E3, and Juan Carlos is the Director there. And he has a website and would be happy to share resources there on cultural resiliency and helping people to identify that what they experience in their life is actually a strength and celebration of culture. And I'll ask Giovanni Ford from NdCAD if he has any other specific websites or resources to point towards and would be happy to answer that later.

Damon Waters: Great. Colorado, did you have any resources that you would be willing to share with our peers?

Katie Greigo: In terms of –

Damon Waters: Any documents or resources with regard how did you use and develop your approach?

Katie Greigo: Sure. Absolutely. We can get you some of, again, our guiding principles, the work that we did, the stakeholders that we brought together. Is that what you're looking for, Damon?

Damon Waters: Yeah.

Katie Greigo: Sure.

Damon Waters: Thanks, Kate.

Damon Waters: One more question just came in – actually two. What was the greatest challenge in establishing your approach to addressing ethnic and racial disparities? And I guess I'll put that to both. What was the greatest challenge in establishing your approach to addressing ethnic and racial disparities?

Leigh Ann Ahmad: I would say one of the greatest lessons learned for Ramsey County is sometimes you would see immediate results right after intensive program implementation, and then we'd see some of those results fall, which sort of correlates with what we see in that long-term success with the self-support index. And so what we've learned is that we actually have to invest – slow down and invest more time. That disparities are not going to be resolved or solved within one intervention or interaction, which is where I believe our evidence is going to lead us as we go forward in 2018 when we look at redesigning our programs again, we'll look at levels of intervention and noting that some groups of people or some individuals who represent those groups just need a lot more intervention than others just because of the historic trauma and the significant impact that it played out in others. So we see some early successes and then we see it fall, and that was disappointing, but the reality is that that mirrors the real life experience of the big, big challenge of disparities and that it's going to take a long time and a lot of interaction and intervention to actually move the needle.

Katie Greigo: So this is Katie. Similar to Ramsey County, we're seeing the same opportunities of how can we take what we've learned from the model that we have and insert what makes

sense across other communities in terms of service delivery of other populations as well. And so it's how do we ensure that we have the right tools and the right support of communities so that this is something that's not just prevalent in the Metro area and the counties that Kit alluded to early on in the presentation, but something that's available and we have all counties operating in a similar fashion to be more responsive to the populations they're serving.

Damon Waters: Great. And just one more question. How will the two sites or the two states, localities, measure the effectiveness of the approach and what timeframe do you have in place?

Larry Timmerman: Well I can speak at least to in Ramsey County there's a number of different ways we're measuring because we have multiple interventions. So we have our FAST2 program, which we talked a little bit about. And then our culturally specific services which are three providers in the community delivering the service. But I think where it all comes back together, it comes around to our self-support index and other measures of outcome. And we also are looking at progress measures along the way. And as Leigh Ann was saying, when we have success, to build on it so that we don't fall back. And we've had experiences like that, but we've also had experiences that have built on, and we're building on those now.

So I think the measures that we showed are some of how we're measuring it. But we're also looking at increases in education, which we didn't touch on too much. Some focus on engagement, which is – those are two of our four Es. But ultimately it's going to be employment and employment retention long term. Because as Leigh Ann said, at least in the African-American community in Ramsey County, just those on MFIP are working, it's now more than six percent – at a more than six percentage points higher rate than whites. And so they're getting jobs, but the jobs are paying less or they're not paying enough for the family to get off public assistance. And so we have measures that look really positive at first glance, and then if you look at it long term, not so good, and that's where the disparity is.

Katie Greigo: And in Colorado we measure this through our outcomes of employment entry and retention, both.

Damon Waters: Great. Thank you both. Every time I say last question, another one pops in. Have either of you spent any time addressing bias at the caseworker level?

Katie Greigo: This is Colorado. Yes, we have both in terms of those who are working directly with our refugee services, and I'll expand upon that, as well as those who are what we call TANF mainstream populations. We have created a new training for our line workers at the county to look at individuals with those individualized needs and develop plans based upon those individualized needs and so the training does give different specific steps around how to approach this.

Kit Taintor: In the Refugee Resettlement Program, we have a client-centered database that helps us look at all of those sorts of things that might affect either entry to employment, retention, or even wage. And so we're able to look at the different biases, where they might have existed within the system, as we investigate the themes that we're seeing for a particular population or a particular gender or potentially something else that may affect those biases by a caseworker.

Leigh Ann Ahmad: This is Ramsey. We haven't looked specifically, as far as I know, at individual caseworkers, but we do invest a lot of time and effort and resources in staff training, and we invite all of our staff to participate in both cultural competency, as well as anti-racism work. And so it is a strategic priority, staff development and particularly around that, too. And we also are starting up some talking circles and encouraging our staff to participate in these talking circles in a very safe space so that they can talk through some of their questions and concerns.

Damon Waters: Great. Thank you. And one just came in for Colorado. Are you addressing the issue of highly-qualified skilled professionals who cannot use their previous qualifications in the U.S.?

Kit Taintor: Well, Ah, I love this question. Thank you so much to whoever asked it. One of the things that we are doing is tracking that, so part of the information that goes into our client-centered database is their past profession, knowing that there's some limitations there as well. But we're certainly starting to investigate that. We're also really exploring it with our counties and with other programs that assist refugees to reattach, if you will. We're looking at programs through internships within state government. We are looking – we have our program that recertifies healthcare professionals, and so that's part of our database. It's quite new. But I'm so glad you brought that up because that's one of the most exciting things that we're going to be able to start to track, figure out things, and make sure we're serving those people to the best of our abilities to make sure that they can contribute back to our Colorado community.

Damon Waters: Great. Thank you very much. And I think I was honest this time, no more questions have come in, so I want to thank Ramsey County and Colorado for excellent presentations. Thank you all, and thank everyone on the line who participated in today's webinar. And thank you again to our expert presenters. Please remember to provide your feedback on this webinar using the survey that will pop up once you log out of the webinar.

A transcript and audio recording of this webinar will be available shortly on the PeerTA Network website, which is located at <https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov>. We would also like to hear from you about future webinar topics and technical assistance needs. Please send us your ideas and requests by email to peerta@icfi.com. Again that peer – P – E – E – R – T – A - @icfi.com. Please also help us expand our network and reach a greater number of people by directing interested colleagues from your local and state networks and agencies to our website, again at peerta.acf.hhs.gov. On behalf of Nisha Patel, our Director, and Lisa Washington Thomas, our Technical Assistance Branch Chief, we thank you again and we look forward to your participation on our future webinars. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you for joining us. This concludes today's webinar.