



Assisting Special Populations to Improve Readiness and Engagement (ASPIRE)

Office of Family Assistance
Administration for Children and Families

February 26, 2019



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Welcome

- ❑ Lisa Washington-Thomas, Branch Chief, Office of Family Assistance (OFA), Administration for Children and Families (ACF)
- ❑ Scott Cody, Vice President, Insight Policy Research



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OFA webinar objectives

- ❑ Explore barriers to engaging two-parent families in TANF
- ❑ Hear from State and local TANF programs about their experiences with engaging this population
- ❑ Identify promising approaches



Presenters

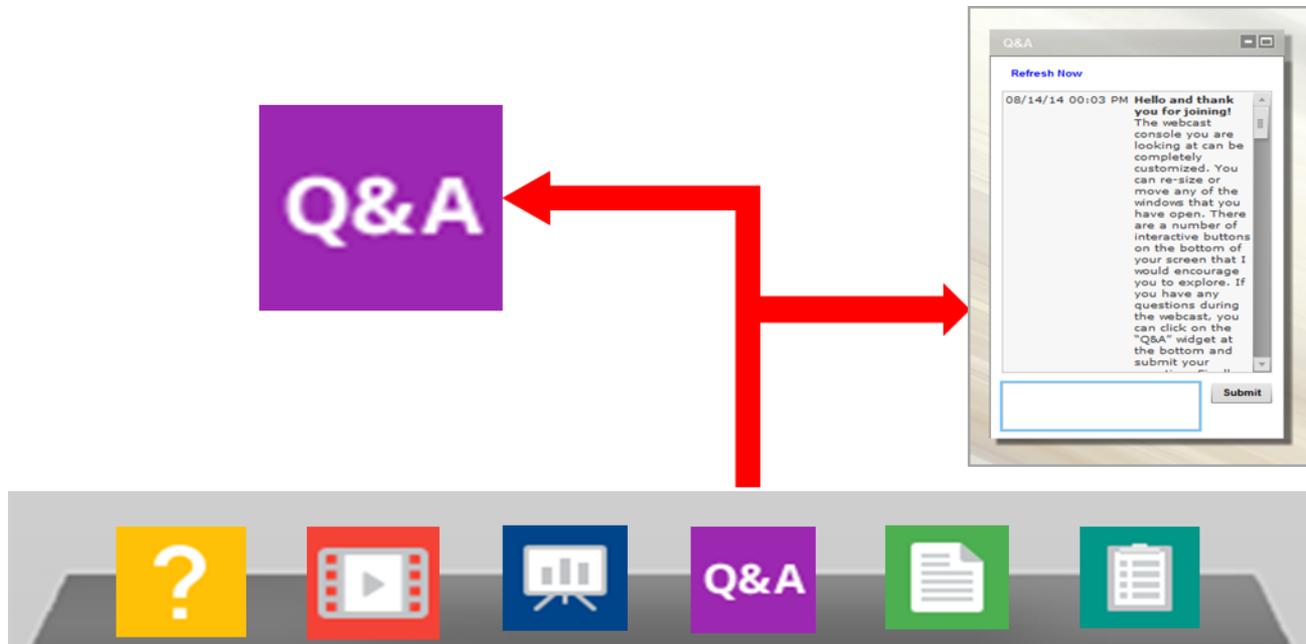
- ❑ Meg Tucker, Insight Policy Research
- ❑ Heather Hahn, Urban Institute
- ❑ Paulette Kendrick, Oklahoma Department of Human Services
- ❑ Kendy Cox, Public Strategies
- ❑ Chabria Easter, Public Strategies



Webinar Logistics

- ❑ To pose a question to the presenters or the group at any time, click on the question-and-answer (Q&A) widget at the bottom and submit your question.

Please note: only our presentation team can see your questions; they are not viewable by other attendees.



Aspire Data Collection



- ❑ Conducted semi-structured interviews with State and county personnel in 9 States
 - Effort was made to include a diversity of locations, populations, and policies

- ❑ Topics included:
 - Needs of two-parent family caseloads
 - Services provided
 - Challenges faced when serving these families



Two-Parent Families

Cases consisting of two parents who are both members of the TANF assistance unit



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Two-Parent Families: Consistent Themes

- ❑ Two-parent families tend to seek assistance only after exhausting all other resources and thus have significant immediate needs when applying for assistance; however, the needs themselves are similar to single-parent family cases
- ❑ Generally, two-parent families have access to the same services as single-parent families, but family dynamics create significant and unique challenges for serving these families



Two-Parent Families: Needs

- ❑ Two-parent families may need:
 - Immediate support before addressing long-term needs like skill development and job training
 - Greater support to achieve self-sufficiency



Two-Parent Families: Challenges to Serving

- ❑ Engaging two interdependent clients with varying skills and abilities – and potentially different preferences – can be difficult
- ❑ Many of the individuals in these families:
 - Are unable to comply with work requirements
 - Face barriers working collaboratively to meet work requirements



Poll Question #1

- Does your TANF program provide unique services for two-parent families?



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Findings from an Examination of Two-Parent Families on TANF

Heather Hahn, The Urban Institute



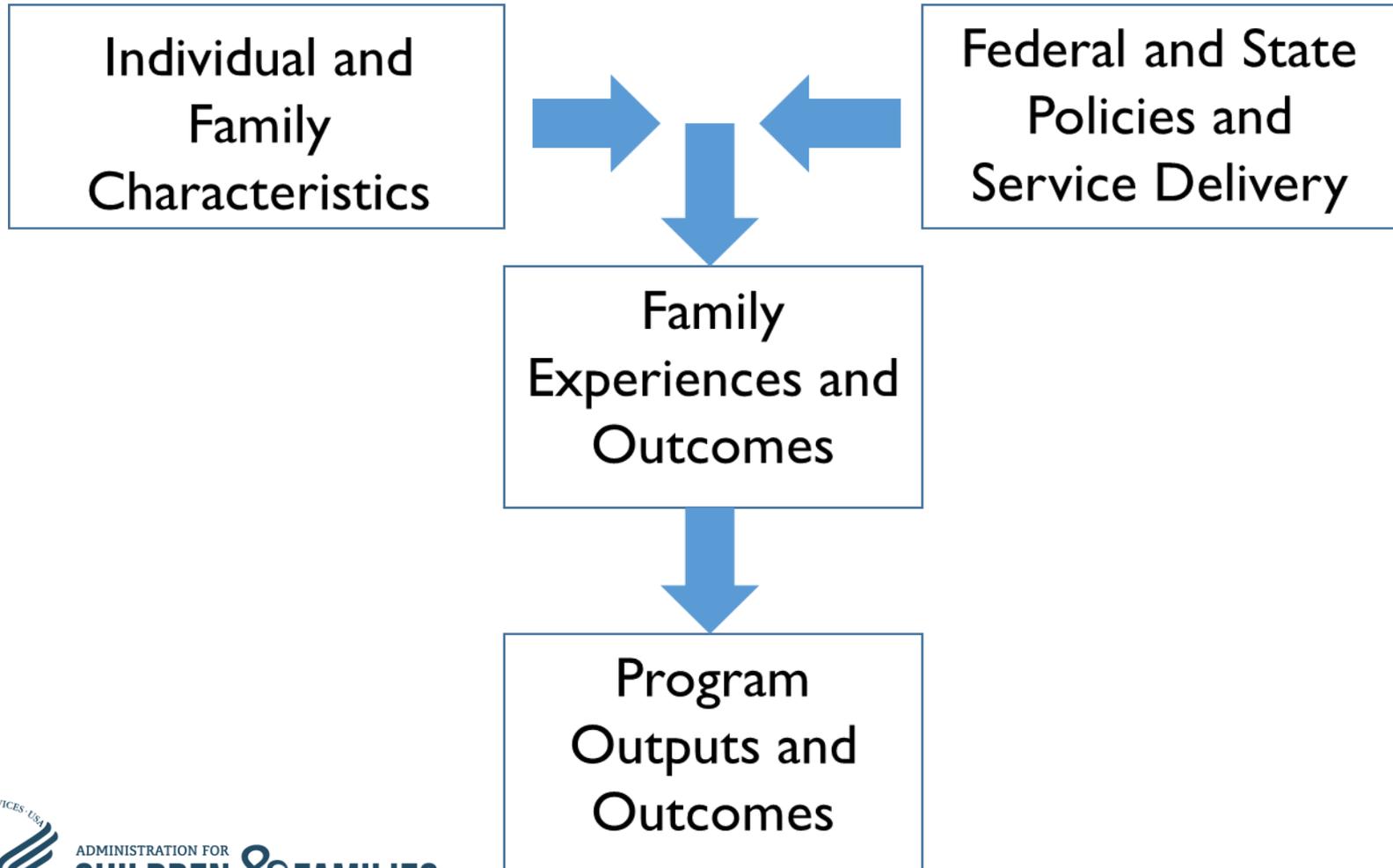
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Study Overview

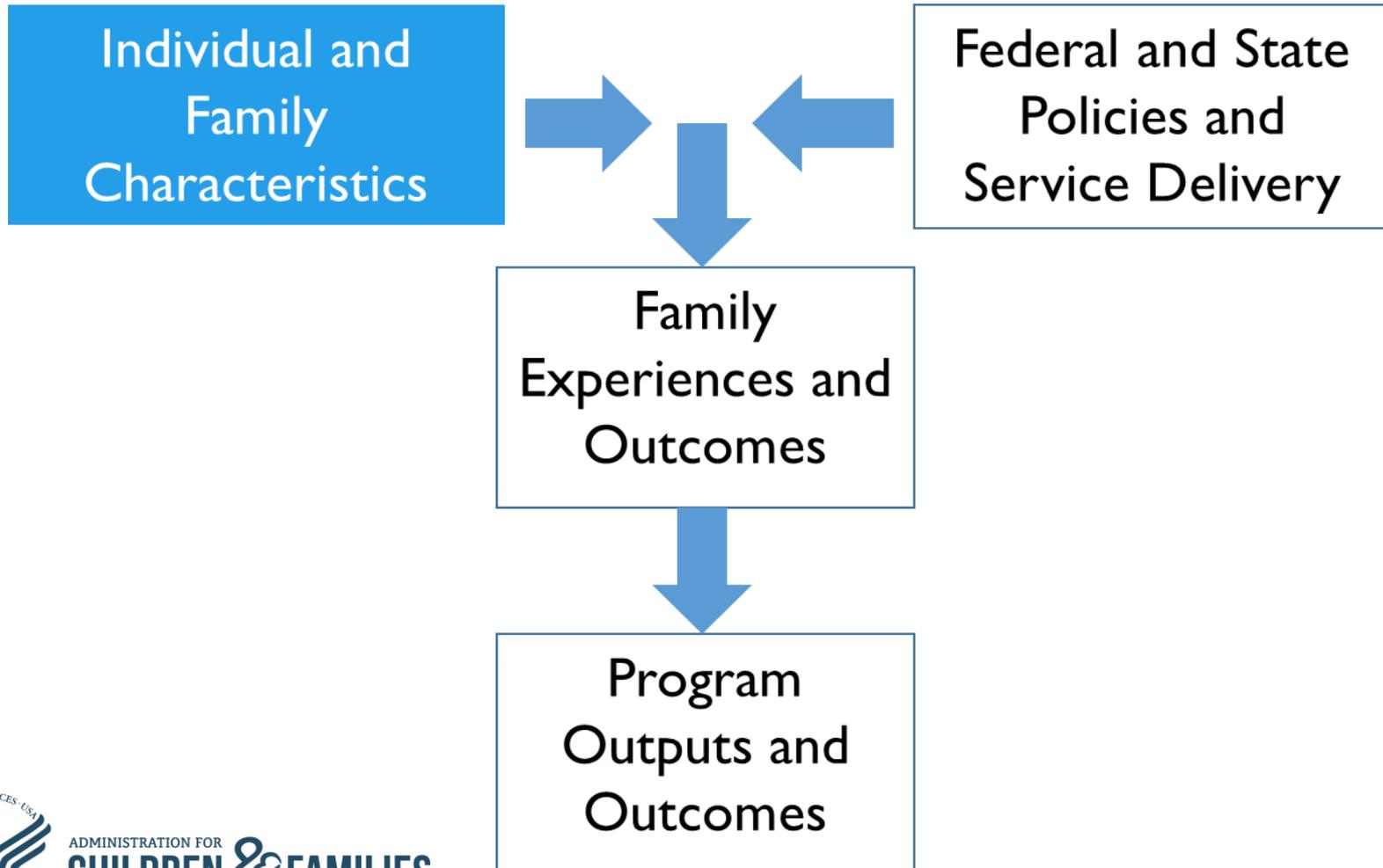
- ❑ OPRE-funded study 2015-16
- ❑ National data analysis
 - Census surveys and microsimulation
- ❑ 10 state TANF director phone interviews
- ❑ 5 site visits (CA, CO, MI, OR, PA)
 - Local TANF director & staff interviews
 - Community organization interviews
 - Low-income family interviews and focus groups
- ❑ Co-authors: Linda Giannarelli, David Kassabian, and Eleanor Pratt, Tyler Woods



Conceptual Framework

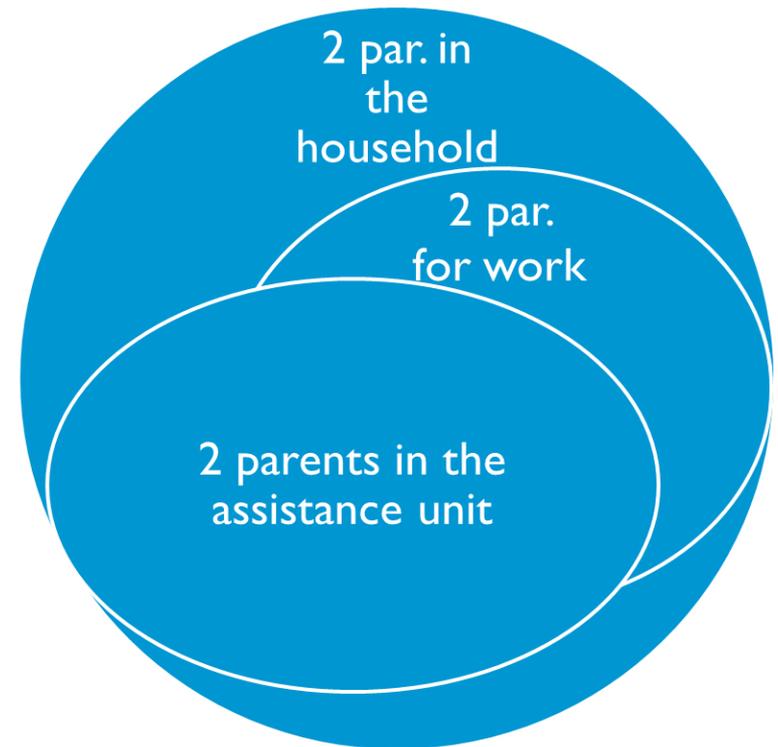


Conceptual Framework Continued



Who Are Two-Parent TANF Families?

- ❑ Two adults who are married and/or share a biological or adopted child
- ❑ Dynamic family structure
- ❑ Diverse



Who Are Two-Parent TANF Families?

Continued

- Expect self-sufficiency
- Share child care
- Lean on each other
- Twice the family and social networks



Who Are Two-Parent TANF Families?

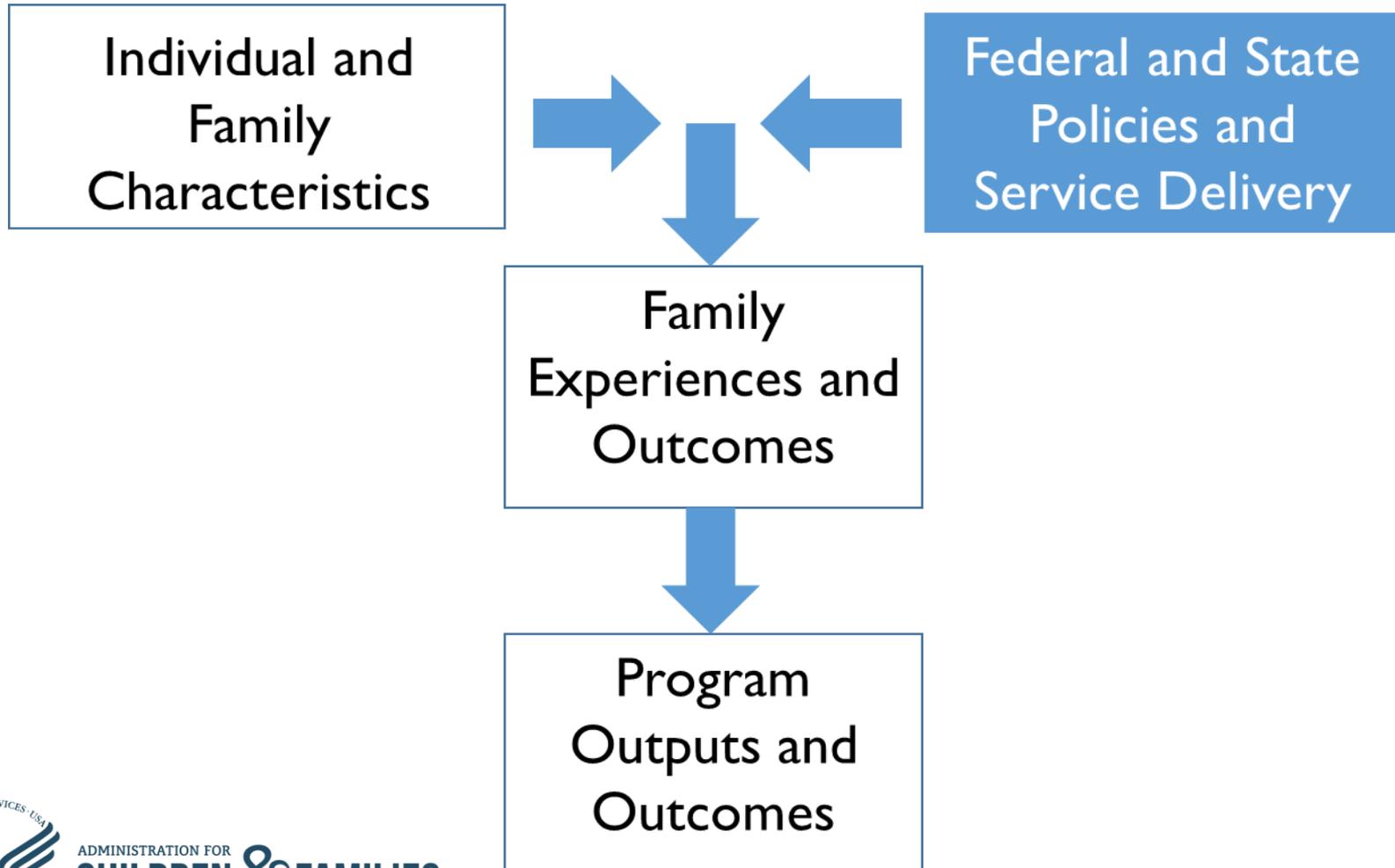
Continued

- ❑ Challenges common to TANF or poor families
 - Limited education; medical issues; transportation; housing...

- ❑ Challenges unique or heightened for two parents
 - Two parents = twice the challenges
 - Only the most disadvantaged qualify for TANF
 - Two parents = two viewpoints



Conceptual Framework Continued

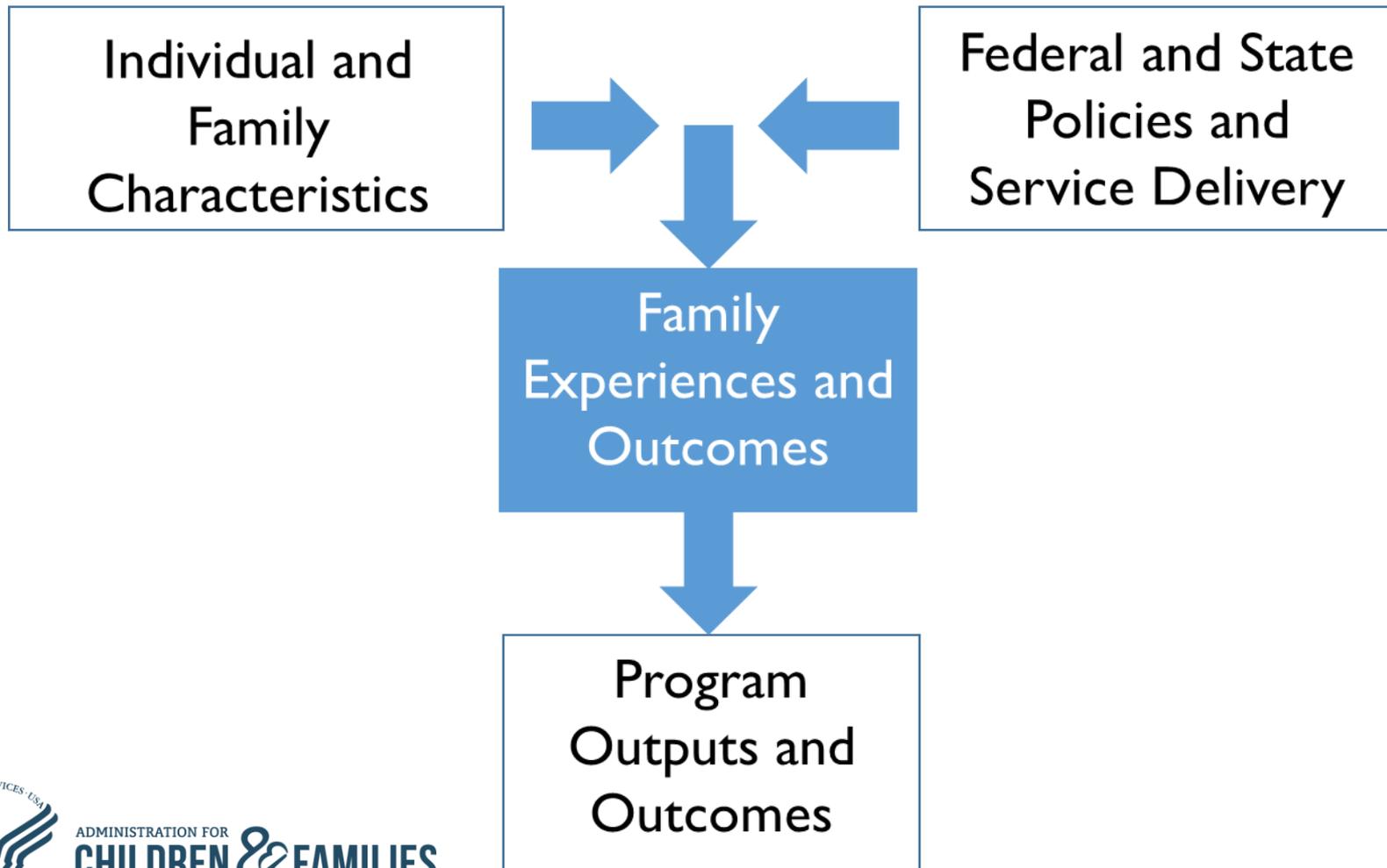


Staff Beliefs, Perceptions, Attitudes

- ❑ Staff shape families' experiences—helping or hindering their participation.
 - Assume couples do not need services
 - Sympathy for single parents



Conceptual Framework Continued

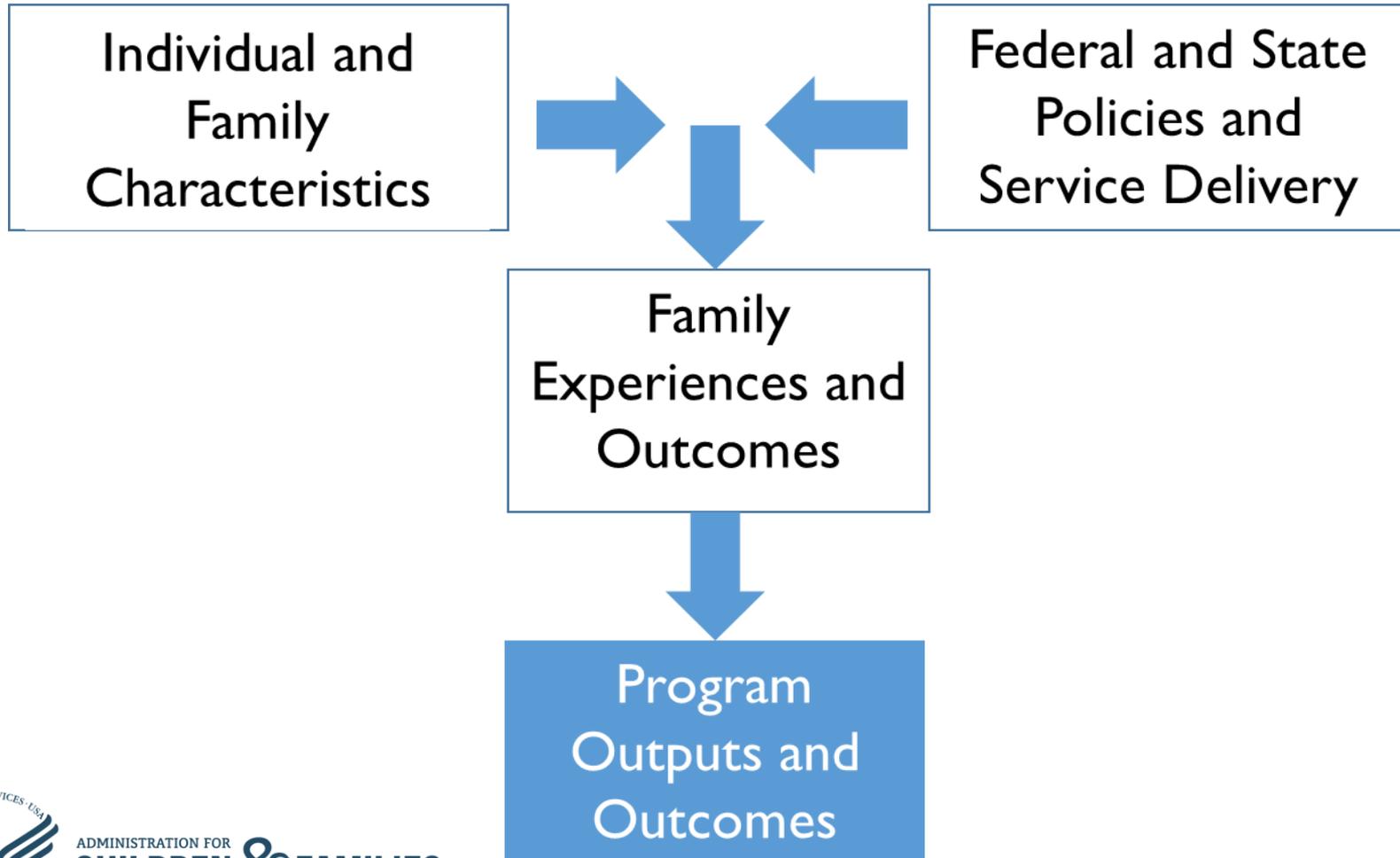


Do Services Meet Needs?

- ❑ Families grateful and need more assistance
- ❑ Families want jobs/careers to support family
- ❑ Perspective depends on skills, background
- ❑ Office staff more often believe family needs met, but also see need for more services



Conceptual Framework Continued



Reasons for Non-Participation

- Believe financial situation will improve soon
- Volatile income/volatile eligibility
- Pride
- Unable/unwilling to meet work requirements
- Do not want government “in my business”
- Fear of deportation of family members
- Child support enforcement requirement
- Saving the clock
- Unaware of TANF at all or for couples



Program Outputs and Policy Implications

- ❑ Majority of two-parent families eligible for TANF do not participate
- ❑ Program participation rates for eligible two-parent families vary across states
- ❑ States with SSF programs for all families with two parents have somewhat higher average program participation rate



For More Information



<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/assisting-two-parent-families-through-tanf>

hhahn@urban.org



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A Proven Strategy for Building Interpersonal Skills among the TANF Population

The Oklahoma Department of Human Services



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A Commitment to Family Strengthening

- ❑ State of Oklahoma has been at the forefront of a national movement to provide relationship skills training and support
- ❑ The Oklahoma Department of Human Services commits annual dollars from TANF budget to family strengthening efforts
- ❑ A strong commitment has continued through change in governors/administrations
- ❑ This work supports agency goals of creating sustained employment and healthy families for financially vulnerable Oklahomans



A Focus on Relational Skills and Competency: Why Does DHS Care?

- ❑ Relationship skills can positively impact both work and family life
- ❑ The majority of annual expenditures are dedicated to the challenges caused by a lack of family supports to generate self-sufficiency and prevent childhood trauma
 - Foster Care
 - Child Abuse/Neglect
 - Adoption
 - Juvenile Delinquency



Keys to OKDHS Success

- ❑ Strong public-private partnership with lead agency to support innovation
- ❑ Evidence-informed strategy to include survey data, rigorous evaluations, research informed curricula, and alignment of strategies with emerging and best practices
- ❑ Integration of relationship concepts into service systems to leverage and improve existing capacity

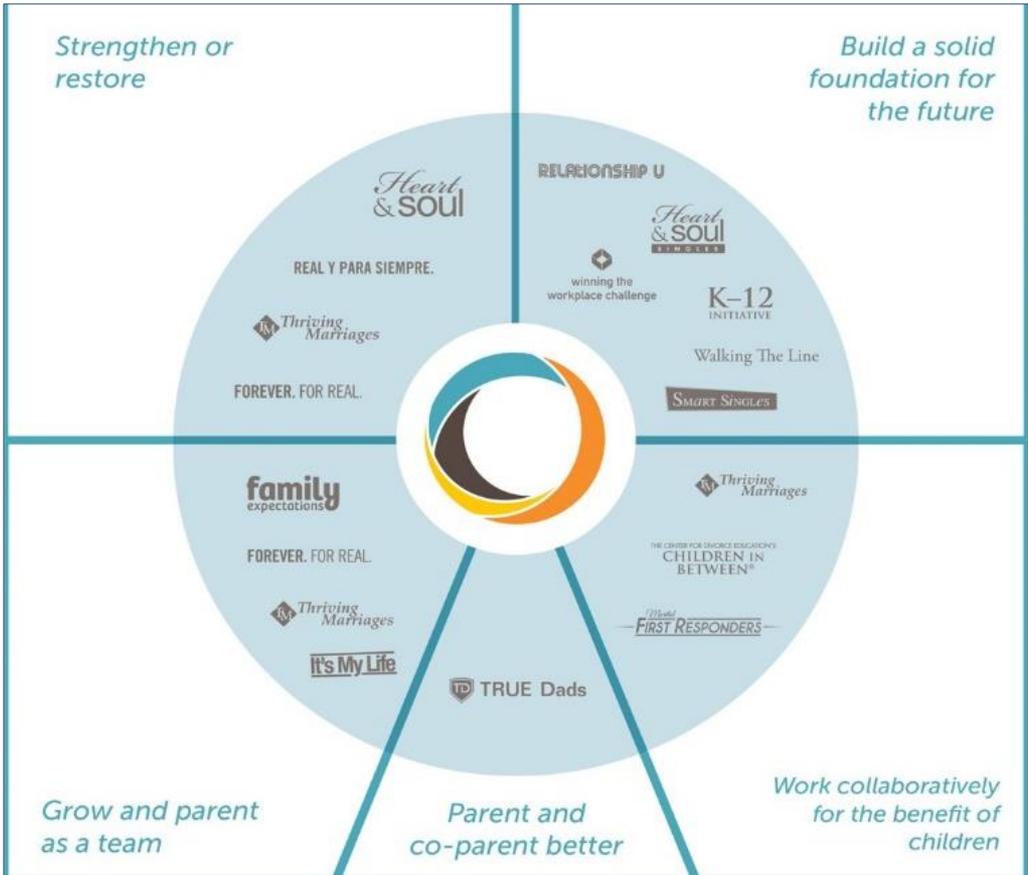


Oklahoma's Services for Vulnerable Families

- ❑ Relationship strengthening work began under Oklahoma Marriage Initiative umbrella
- ❑ Project Relate brand created to reflect the diversity of service strategies to create broad access to marriage and relationship education and embed healthy strategies and models at key points throughout the life cycle
- ❑ WorkForward focuses on improving both the employment outcomes and customer experience of TANF clients



Comprehensive Services



The Supporting Research

- ❑ Statewide Survey on Marriage and Divorce – interest in state-funded relationship education services was HIGH among those either currently or in the past have received government assistance
- ❑ TANF Recipients in Orientation – surveys among TANF recipients during the pilot development of a relationship education curriculum for individuals (Within My Reach) informed the first-of-its-kind curriculum
- ❑ National Poverty Center Study – found a variety of benefits to the interviewed TANF clients



Evolution of Programming

- ❑ Early HMRF resources were primarily focused on personal interactions between couples or improving capabilities of fathers
- ❑ Oklahoma DHS integrated relationship education directly into TANF programming by adding curriculum originally designed for couples to its TANF orientation (Within Our Reach)
- ❑ Oklahoma DHS worked with curriculum developers to adapt product for pilot followed by qualitative study (Within My Reach)
- ❑ Separate adaptation developed to apply same relationship education concepts to the workplace environment (Winning the Workplace Challenge)



Application in the Field

- ❑ Family and Workforce Centers of America (FWCA)
 - Integrated Within My Reach with its work readiness content; provided in two-week and 4-week options across programs
- ❑ The Parenting Center
 - The Empowering Families project combines relationship education, employment and training, financial education and parenting education in 8 week workshops
- ❑ People for People, Inc.
 - Project DAD serves non-custodial fathers through 60 hours of intensive employment services using Within My Reach bundled with other soft skills curriculum.



WorkForward: Addressing the TANF Challenge

- ❑ Employers want to hire individuals with good communication, problem-solving and collaboration skills
- ❑ Low-income individuals face many barriers to obtaining good jobs, including the lack of soft skill attainment through lifelong learning
- ❑ TANF programs often connect participants to job opportunities only to learn a short time later that the employment has ended
- ❑ Outside factors like relationship problems at home and lack of supportive social networks can affect job retention
- ❑ WorkForward is preparing TANF participants for employment by bridging relationship education and job training



WorkForward: The Innovative Solution



- ❑ In 2017 OKDHS launched WorkForward, a pilot project in Oklahoma County
- ❑ Pilot included an 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
- ❑ Orientation content includes integration of research-based Winning the Workplace Challenge with proprietary work readiness curriculum



WorkForward: The Program Model

- ❑ Integrated work readiness and HMRE concepts to equip participants with skills
- ❑ A targeted response to employer-driven demand
- ❑ A relationship driven culture to support employment goals
- ❑ High energy, all day sessions that build confidence and employment hope, improve job readiness, and launch TANF clients on a path to success



WorkForward: The Results

- ❑ Participants consistently report that the soft skills they learn have helped them gain a competitive advantage by improving their ability to navigate interactions at work and at home and to stay focused on their plans
- ❑ Participants report that learning relationship competency skills has helped them understand the impact that their personal lives can have on their job search and work-life success
- ❑ Some TANF participants are able to move directly into employment opportunities without the need for additional education and training or job search support



Feedback from the Field

“When we first launched relationship education into our TANF orientation years ago...the County Director reported a significant drop in complaints by clients against workers...”

“In addition to improved data...client interactions with TANF workers became more constructive. We realized then as an organization that the skills clients were learning would be transferable to their relationships with future employers”



Additional Information

- ❑ OFA PeerTA website (<https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov>)
- ❑ Webinar transcript and recording
- ❑ Future webinar topics (peerta@icf.com)



We welcome your feedback



- ❑ Please provide your feedback using the brief survey that will launch when the webinar ends
- ❑ Let us hear from you!

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