



TANF & Child Welfare Partnering for Prevention: ARIZONA'S SITE JOURNEY

The Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance convened the Families Are Stronger Together Learning Community (FAST-LC) in partnership with the Children's Bureau to support eight States and two Tribes in forming partnerships between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and child welfare programs focused on preventing families' involvement in the child welfare system. The FAST-LC took place between September 2023 and September 2024.

Motivation for Change

The Arizona FAST-LC project supported TANF's provision of concrete supports to families and prevent child welfare system involvement. The original motivation stemmed from a need to shift from reactive child welfare services toward proactive prevention strategies and to change the way families interact with the Department of Child Safety (DCS). Key objectives included safely reducing hotline calls to DCS, improving DCS's reputation within communities, and ensuring that prevention services were a central function of the Department of Economic Security (DES) by redirecting TANF funds toward preventive measures. Overall, the project aimed to minimize family disruptions and foster long-term stability.

Partnership Innovations

The FAST-LC initiative focused on strengthening the partnership between DES and DCS. This collaboration evolved to include various community partners, such as faith-based organizations and parents with lived experience. Innovations included the partnering with a community hub, which served as a focal point for resource distribution and upstream prevention. Arizona's team sought to leverage the community hub—an existing resource center that provides rental assistance, utility resources, counseling, parenting, and counseling programs and other concrete and supportive resources to employ upstream prevention strategies that can support at-risk families before crises escalate. Through the FAST-LC, this existing partnership between DCS and the community hub became a key part of the agency's prevention strategy.

The project also established a regular meeting cadence between partners to ensure open communication and the alignment of goals between agencies and to each of the departments' strategic plans. By fostering these relationships, the initiative created future opportunities for alternative funding streams, reduced redundancy in service provision, and maximized resource allocation across agencies.

About Arizona

The Arizona FAST-LC project is a collaboration between the Department of Child Safety and the Department of Economic Security aimed at transforming child welfare services by preventing family crises through innovative partnerships, resource provision, and community engagement.

According to U.S. Census Bureau data, Arizona's estimated population in 2020 was 7,151,502, of which 12.5% lived below the poverty level. In 2022, Arizona spent 78% of its TANF funds on child welfare, compared with a national average of 10% ([Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, 2022](#)).



The Arizona team and community partners discuss plans at the initial onsite workshop at the launch of the FAST-LC.



Prevention Innovations

Through the FAST-LC, the Arizona team explored and expanded its proactive outreach strategy to utilize an existing trusted community resource to contact families identified in screened-out DCS hotline calls. Key prevention strategies included offering and providing concrete support resources to families from screened-out DCS hotline calls.

The hub enabled quick response times, direct community engagement, and the ability to pilot and scale a new approach to concrete resource provision. Community hubs can also use existing resources to create a pathway to DES benefits and services for families before they become involved with child welfare services. An essential aspect of Arizona's innovation under the FAST-LC involved gathering input from people with lived experience to ensure that services were culturally relevant and practical. Additionally, the project sought to align DES prevention services with broader state targets, providing a model for future data collection and resource allocation efforts.

Lessons Learned

Throughout the FAST-LC project, several important lessons emerged:

- Flexibility proved crucial, particularly when the team had to adapt quickly to identify a funding source alternative to TANF.
- Collaborative communication, maintained through regular meetings and open dialogue between DES, DCS, and community partners, helped align goals and prevent operational silos.
- By using the FAST-LC LI² framework (Learn, Innovate, and Improve) for systems change and conducting road tests, the Arizona team learned that their project has the potential for scalability across the state's Family Resource Centers.

The Arizona team recognizes the importance of sustainability planning and is therefore engaged in several strategic efforts to maintain momentum beyond the FAST-LC:

- Maintaining a monthly meeting cadence is crucial for ongoing communication, alignment, and adapting strategies.
- The project team is developing a comprehensive plan to extend prevention services beyond the current scope of the FAST-LC. The initiative will seek new funding sources to support long-term objectives, including grants and partnerships with private entities.
- Building on the successful implementation of the prevention program at the community hub partner selected for the FAST-LC project, DCS and DES aim to scale the model to other areas, leveraging community engagement to reduce reliance on traditional child welfare interventions.
- The project will continue to engage voices of lived experience, ensuring that the insights of those directly affected by the services remain central to planning and decision-making processes.

By focusing on these sustainability measures, the Arizona FAST-LC project aimed to create long-lasting change in the state's approach to child welfare, positioning prevention and community engagement as foundational elements of its strategy.