

Responding to Barriers to Employment

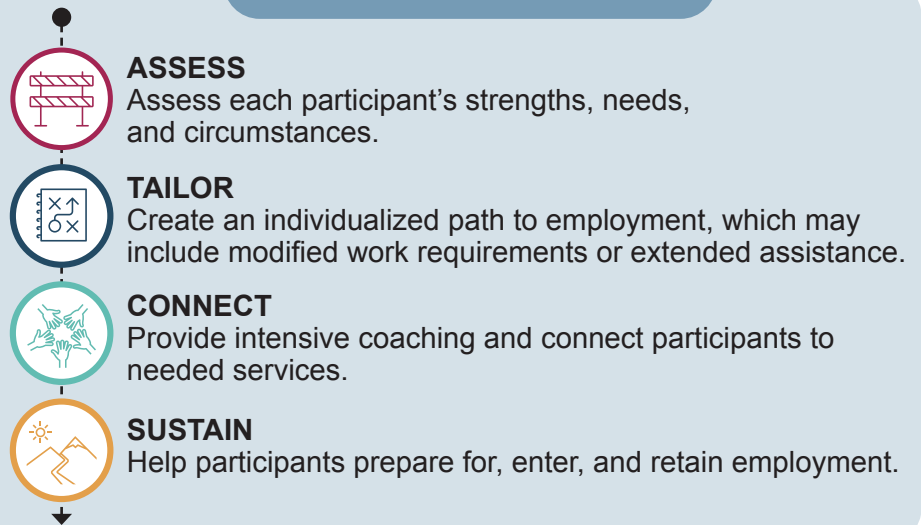
Employment Strategies Used in TANF's 30-year History

As caseloads declined in the early years of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), agencies increasingly recognized that many participants who remained faced multiple, overlapping barriers to employment.¹ Programs placed greater emphasis on employment strategies for people sometimes described as “hard to employ.” These strategies are designed for participants who face complex barriers that make it difficult to obtain, retain, or advance in employment through traditional job search or work programs. Such barriers might include physical or mental health challenges, substance use disorders, or limited education.

WHY TANF TRIED THIS

- TANF participants sometimes face multiple and overlapping barriers to employment and remain unemployed or in low-paying, unstable jobs.
- Although traditional welfare-to-work programs produced some gains for participants facing serious barriers, many still had very low employment and earnings, prompting programs to test more specialized and intensive approaches.²

HOW IT WORKS



WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Programs designed for the “hard to employ” can improve employment and other outcomes for some participants facing serious barriers, particularly when services combine employment assistance with case management and supports. However, impacts are mixed and often modest, and even successful programs leave many participants without work.³

Employment Gains for Specific Groups

Some programs produced employment gains for participants with health-related barriers, while others improved employment or earnings for parents with very young children.⁴

Greater Service Use

Programs can increase participation in treatment and supportive services, although greater service use does not always translate into employment gains.³

Other Benefits

Some programs produced benefits beyond employment, such as reduced benefit receipt and increased use of quality childcare.⁴

To learn more about what works to help job seekers with low incomes find and keep employment, see the Administration for Children & Families' Pathways to Work Evidence Clearinghouse: <https://pathwaystowork.acf.gov/>.



EXAMPLES IN ACTION



Breaking Barriers San Diego

- Provided employment services to individuals with low incomes and disabilities using the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Model.⁵
- An independent evaluation found that Breaking Barriers increased earnings by almost \$4,000 over a two-year period.⁶



Minnesota Integrated Services Project

- Served long-term TANF participants with significant employment barriers through coordinated, comprehensive family services.
- An independent study found that employment and earnings generally increased after enrollment, but results were statistically significant at only one site.⁷

MOVING FORWARD

- **Intensive, individualized, and sustained support** can help participants facing multiple barriers make progress toward employment.
- **No single intervention is a magic bullet**; many participants with barriers still struggle to secure and maintain stable work.
- **TANF programs can continue to innovate** to connect barrier-reduction services to employment opportunities and career pathways.

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Sources

- ¹ Thompson, Terri, Asheley Van Ness, and Carolyn T. O'Brien. Screening and assessment in TANF/welfare-to-work: Local answers to difficult questions. Urban Institute, 2001. [Link](#)
- ² Brown, Amy. "Beyond Work First: How To Help Hard-To-Employ Individuals Get Jobs and Succeed in the Workforce. A How-To Guide. ReWORKing Welfare: Technical Assistance for States and Localities." (2001). [Link](#)
- ³ Bloom, Dan, Pamela J. Loprest, and Sheila R. Zedlewski. TANF recipients with barriers to employment. Urban Institute, 2011. [Link](#)
- ⁴ Butler, David, et al. "Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation Project: Final Results." (2012). [Link](#)
- ⁵ Learn more about IPS here: <https://ipsworks.org/index.php/what-is-ips/>
- ⁶ Freedman, Lily, and Megan Millenky. Two-Year Findings from the Evaluation of Breaking Barriers: An Individual Placement and Support (IPS) Program. OPRE Report 2022-35, Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022. [Link](#)
- ⁷ Martinson, Karin, et al. The Minnesota Integrated Services Project: Final Report on an Initiative to Improve Outcomes for Hard-to-Employ Welfare Recipients. Urban Institute, 2009. [Link](#)

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