



TANF & Child Welfare Partnering for Prevention: CHIPPEWA CREE'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

For the Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's Reservation, there are many great strengths and challenges in the community. There are serious issues, such as absenteeism, substance use, and mental health challenges that impact families and children. However, there is also a lot of great work and collaboration between departments to address these issues.

Through the FAST-LC, the Tribe sought to create a new approach through community collaboration to address these issues that affect the well-being of families over generations. This led to the creation of a wrap-around care model designed for the Tribal TANF and child welfare programs to partner with families before they reach a critical point where students are missing a lot of school and are at risk of suspension, expulsion, or Court or Social Services involvement (which oversee child welfare). This proactive approach is also designed to avoid sanctions or closures being imposed on families' Tribal TANF cases due to non-compliance.

Partnership Innovations

Although there has always been collaboration between the Chippewa Cree Tribal TANF and Social Services departments, the FAST-LC provided the opportunity to foster more regular communication between the departments by having more in-person and virtual meetings. The goal is to improve coordination so that TANF is the first department that Social Services contacts when they have a family in need.

The FAST-LC and wrap-around program also created the opportunity to bring together partners from schools, health centers, Tribal Court, and other departments. These partners met for an in-person meeting where they were able to introduce themselves and the mission and work of their departments. This helped to create greater collective understanding of how the partners can work together to get families the services and resources they need.

About Chippewa Cree

The Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy's reservation is in remote north-central Montana. The Tribal TANF program has three offices: the central office and one satellite office are on the reservation, and a third office is in Havre, 30 miles north of the reservation. The Tribe has an enrollment of over 7,000 members, with about half of the enrolled members residing on the reservation. The unemployment rate for Rocky Boy residents ranges between 60-80% seasonally.

Chippewa Cree Tribal TANF is one of the largest programs for the Tribe. They work closely with social services, which oversees child welfare work.



Description of picture

Prevention Innovations

A wrap-around session is a meeting where a family and the appropriate tribal departments come together to discuss issues the family is facing and develop a comprehensive case plan to help address their specific issues. There is also weekly contact and regular follow-up with the family after the wrap-around session to ensure they can make progress. More importantly, tribal leaders begin the sessions by smudging, saying a prayer, setting good intentions, and reminding everyone why they are there—this helps to calm the atmosphere and create a safe space. This role is performed by Peacemakers at the session, who are elders in the Tribe with the knowledge and experience to provide guidance to others.

Lessons Learned

Key takeaways and lessons learned from this journey include:

- **Planning, follow-up, and debriefing help to ensure meetings are effective.** The Tribe developed and implemented processes and procedure to better plan for wrap-around meetings and follow-up sessions, as well as how to use debriefs to reflect on ways to improve the meetings.
- **Active listening fosters strong communication.** The Tribe strengthened its communication practices between staff and departments, whether face to face, via email, or by phone. Tribal staff also improved their ability to listen to other sides without jumping to conclusions, process information, and develop solutions together.
- **Consistency is key.** It is good practice to conduct regular meetings within the department and with other Tribal department, while ensuring the meetings are scheduled and documented on a calendar in advance.
- **Self-reflection is necessary for leaders and staff alike.** Tribal leaders and staff must be willing to change, learn new things, and be open-minded, especially as the community changes over time. It is critical to remember that leaders and staff can always improve to better serve families.
- **Remember that our culture is a prevention strategy.** Culture is the way we live, work, and raise our families. The Chippewa Cree Tribe uses culture as a strength to better serve families in ways that are healing and that resonate with the community.