



## TANF & Child Welfare Partnering for Prevention: KENTUCKY'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 Kentucky FAST-LC team set out to understand how the Division of Family Support (DFS) and the newly created Division of Prevention and Community Well-Being (DPCW) could collaborate to prevent families from getting involved with the child welfare system, especially due to poverty-related challenges. The team wanted to capitalize on the creation of DPCW to establish cross-division collaboration that prioritizes:

- Improving services for families.
- Using the Kentucky Temporary Assistance Program (KTAP) as a prevention measure.
- Reducing the stigma and fear of accessing services.
- Providing skills for frontline workers to help them better serve families.

### Partnership Innovations

The Kentucky FAST-LC team included staff from DFS, DPCW, and contracted providers. As DPCW grew the team and new members joined the FAST-LC work, the group worked hard to continue their efforts and learn from new perspectives. There is a positive outlook for the future as this partnership strives to create a culture of prevention in both divisions. The FAST-LC team identified common goals and beliefs throughout the process, such as the importance of hearing from staff and families. While the FAST-LC provided the structure and opportunity to begin the collaboration between DFS and DPCW, the shared culture, goals, and beliefs will help the two divisions continue to strengthen their relationship.

### About Kentucky

The Kentucky Cabinet for Health and Family Services' Department of Community Based Services (DCBS) administers the state's TANF and child welfare services. Within DCBS, the Division of Family Support administers TANF. The Kentucky Temporary Assistance Program and the Kentucky Works Program support low-income adults and families with children in obtaining employment and educational training.

During the 2022 legislative session, DCBS reorganized to create the Division of Prevention and Community Well-Being, within the Division of Protection and Permanency. This new division was created to bolster child welfare prevention efforts in the state. During the same legislative session, the Senate passed Senate Bill 8, which amended the state's definition of neglect to create a clearer distinction between poverty and neglect.

According to U.S. Census Bureau data, Kentucky's estimated population in 2020 was 4,505,835, of which 16.5% lived below the poverty level.



## Prevention Innovations

The Kentucky team found hearing from frontline staff and people with lived experience was key. To ensure their feedback was centered in the process, Kentucky's FAST-LC team held several different listening sessions with:

- Frontline family support staff (KTAP case managers).
- Frontline child welfare staff (Division of Protection and Permanency case managers).
- Contracted providers.
- People with lived experience.

Feedback collected during the listening sessions helped the team understand the necessary next steps for improving staff's experiences providing services to families. The team learned that staff in both departments didn't always understand what services the other department could provide for families. Even if they did know, they often did not feel they could collaborate.

To build and strengthen strategies that would create cultural shifts toward information sharing and collaboration in services to families, the Kentucky team decided on several innovations:

- **Creating educational materials for staff:** The team will create one-pagers with information about each division and the services they provide. These one-pagers will be provided to frontline DFS and DPCW staff to help them better understand what services are available to the families they serve.
- **Establishing regional points of contact:** Identified staff will support knowledge sharing between DFS and DPCW and establish regular leadership meetings between the two divisions to ensure ongoing information sharing and collaboration.
- **Studying success stories:** To better understand what makes for effective collaboration across divisions, the team will study counties in the state that are already showing exemplary collaboration.

The data from the listening sessions support these proposed innovations, allowing the Kentucky team to move forward with support from frontline staff, lived experts, and state leadership.

## Lessons Learned

The different perspectives from each focus group offered valuable lessons for the Kentucky FAST-LC team. Specifically, the team appreciated hearing from individuals who have accessed services from both divisions to learn more about how services are delivered and where there are barriers to accessing services.

The team also reiterated their belief that TANF is an essential tool for child welfare prevention. The team learned that breaking down silos between agencies was key to effectively using TANF programming as prevention. Many Kentucky families are accessing services from both DFS and DPCW, yet there are considerable barriers between divisions that hinder staff collaboration on strategies to ensure these families receive the services they need.