



## TANF & Child Welfare Partnering for Prevention:

### MICHIGAN'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

Michigan's Department of Health and Human Service (MDHHS) found that many families who came to its attention faced issues of neglect that were preventable and often related to poverty. In response, MDHHS developed a strategy focused on multiple prevention pathways to support families screened out at centralized intake and meaningfully connect them with the timely resources they need. Core to the team's motivation was learning that one in three families who were screened-out at centralized intake were screened-in for a subsequent Child Protective Services (CPS) investigation within one year.

With a focus on tertiary prevention — that is, preventing escalating involvement for families already being touched by CPS — MDHHS developed the Family Impact Teams (FIT) project to strengthen permanency rates of children in foster and congregate care, keep families together, and increase placement stability.

#### Partnership Innovations

Just prior to the start of the FAST-LC (in August 2023), MDHHS launched FIT. The purpose of FIT is to create an open door to safety net resources by embedding TANF staff called Family Resource Specialists (FRSs) within child welfare units. During the FAST-LC, MDHHS focused on strengthening collaboration between the department's Economic Stability Administration (ESA), which administers TANF and other economic security benefits, and the Children's Services Administration (CSA), which helps ensure the safety and well-being of children (including CPS) and equitable practices in child welfare. Supported by executive leadership within ESA and CSA, the FAST-LC team and local office FIT members identified best practices for strengthening local collaboration, which were incorporated into revised operational procedures.

FRSs are existing MDHHS staff that previously served as eligibility workers within ESA. The FRSs' knowledge and access to economic security benefits allows them to support families in applying for and retaining safety net program benefits for families engaged with FIT while providing economic and concrete supports needed to stabilize families and keep children with their caregivers.

#### About Michigan

Located in the Great Lakes region of the Upper Midwestern United States, Michigan supports a population of 10 million people. Its smallest town, Omer, has a population of 270 and its largest city, Detroit, known as the automotive hub of America, is home to over 630,000 Michiganders. About 13.4% of Michigan's population lives below the poverty line statewide, yet poverty concentration varies throughout its 83 counties.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) maintains state-administered TANF and child welfare programs serving urban, rural, tribal, and suburban areas. Michigan's 83 counties and TANF services are split among five service areas known as Business Service Centers with one bifurcated area offering both TANF and child welfare services.

In August 2023, MDHHS developed the Family Impact Teams project to strengthen permanency rates for children in foster and congregate care institutions, keep families together, and increase placement stability. This work is core to their director's [Keep Kids Safe Action Agenda](#) and has engaged over 2,500 families since its inception.

FRSs accomplish this through joint home visits with CPS workers during open investigations. There is ongoing communication and coordination to triage the support needs of families, and this collaboration also helps to streamline access to funding with standardized request forms and timely approvals.

## Prevention Innovations

FRSs provide immediate response capacity to poverty-related challenges identified during CPS investigations — typically completed within a 30-day window. This partnership also aims to reduce, shorten, or remove a family’s need for child welfare intervention.



The FIT project was rolled out by MDHHS using a phased approach and initially focused on serving families in 12 of the 83 counties across the state, beginning in August 2023. Phase I continued through April 2024, overlapping with MDHHS’s involvement in the FAST-LC. Michigan’s FAST-LC team met routinely with local office FIT members to better understand the successes and challenges of early implementation. The learnings from these conversations, site visits, and surveys were instrumental in revising programming, training, and procedures for Phase II. Additionally, ESA and CSA began to develop an electronic referral system shared between their units and to track FIT data to provide a real-time understanding of the needs of families and FRSs. Phase II, which launched in May 2024, added 25 new FRSs and scaled the pilot to 11 additional counties. Data from these phases indicated that FIT provided 1,350 economic and concrete supports to families, including beds, housing resources, childcare, and utility assistance. As the FAST-LC closed in September 2024, FIT continues its focus to refine programming and prioritize the fidelity and implementation of the program ahead of full scale-up planned for January 2025.

## Lessons Learned

The ESA and CSA teams learned that, to meet the overall mission of the department, collaboration between the two areas is critical when serving the same population of families. Through coaching in the FAST-LC, Michigan applied the LI<sup>2</sup> framework (Learn, Innovate, and Improve) to examine FIT’s programming and implementation. They also recognized that a robust list of community-based resources is helpful to guide the provision of economic and concrete supports.

