



## OFA State and Tribal Technical Assistance and Resources

### *The Whole Family Approach: How TANF Programs Can Engage Families in Mental Health Services, Part II Webinar*

### Speaker Responses to Unanswered Audience Questions

The Office of Family Assistance (OFA) hosted a webinar on March 21, 2023 — the second of a two-part webinar series entitled, *The Whole Family Approach: How TANF Programs Can Engage Customers in Mental Health Services*. In [Part I](#) of the webinar series on January 26, 2023, State and Tribal TANF programs discussed the intersection between poverty, trauma, and mental health and highlighted how their programs have helped improve long-term mental health outcomes for families with low incomes.

Part 2 built on these concepts, and the same speakers from Part I shared the details of their programs' whole family design and implementation processes, including how they identify services to include in their TANF programs, how they select and coordinate with supportive partnerships, what types of assessments they use when meeting with clients, and funding streams they utilize. They also highlighted successes and challenges they have experienced throughout the process. Participants received insights into the options TANF programs can explore in expanding and improving the mental health care for their TANF customers.

Webinar speakers included:

- Antoinette Kitchen, Family Assistance Program Specialist, Division of State TANF Policy, Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, Department of Health and Human Services;
- Liz Carver, Director, Workforce Development Division, Utah Department of Workforce Services;
- Mary Beth Vogel-Ferguson, Research Associate Professor, Social Research Institute, University of Utah;
- Lisa Guetzkow, Integrated Programs Manager, Ramsey County, Minnesota;
- Katie Wagoner, Workforce Development Manager, Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota;
- Arnold Ontiveros, Staff Manager, New Mexico Human Services Department; and
- Maria Aguirre-Mendoza, Executive Director, Soboba Tribal TANF Program.

Mary Roberto, Project Director, Workforce Innovation and Poverty Solutions, ICF, facilitated the webinar. Following the moderated discussion, presenters engaged in a Q&A session with the audience. This document provides the speakers' responses to unanswered questions.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

**Question: Are there family counselors/advocates available if clients just want to discuss being able to manage all of it? (kids, DV, looking for work)**

**FAST, Ramsey County, Minnesota:** In FAST, participants have a primary counselor that assists with managing all aspects of stabilization and TANF requirements.



**New Mexico TANF:** The Career Development Specialists provide case management services. That consists of ensuring that the participant complies with their TANF case plan. The CDS provides referrals to partners for mental health services. We believe in bridging the gap in services, where another partner's expertise can be of benefit, and the program is not a one-shoe-fits-all model.

**Utah TANF:** Yes, our employment counselors and clinicians are available.

**Soboba Tribal TANF:** Yes, we employ a multi-level assessment approach to helping our families that includes: one-on-one meetings with their assigned caseworker; a career and educational assessment that also helps to identify specific barriers a participant may be dealing with; a mental health counseling session that assesses whether a participant and their family needs additional sessions; and a drug assessment counseling session if needed to verify if future sessions are necessary.

**Question: Do participants reach out to your programs on their own, or are they referred? Or are participants automatically part of these services due to their open TANF status?**

**FAST, Ramsey County, Minnesota:** In FAST, if participants are a part of the Family Stabilization Services portion of TANF, their primary counselor reviews the FAST program option with them and makes a referral.

**New Mexico TANF:** Participants are referred to our program, and it is a requirement of their TANF benefits. Yes, they are automatically part of these services and are offered additional resources to help create a pathway for self-sufficiency.

**Utah TANF:** Participants are part of the services due to open cash assistance case and an expressed desire to work with a clinician.

**Soboba Tribal TANF:** All program participants are automatically qualified for services. Generally, families are referred for services.

**Question: What screening tools or questionnaires would you recommend using for identifying participants' mental health needs?**

**FAST, Ramsey County, Minnesota:** In FAST, we use formal and informal tools. We have a Family Questionnaire that reviews comprehensive family needs. We also use a tool created locally called Stepping Stones that explores readiness or interest in what to work on in stabilization services, including household needs, children, relationships, legal needs, and physical and mental health.

**New Mexico TANF:** Here in New Mexico, we have created a Mental and Physical Screen tool that every staff person reviews with the participant to ensure they are effectively managing their case. The Screen tool has been approved by New Mexico's Policy and Program Bureau. As mentioned before, the CDS's primary focus is to create a pathway for self-sufficiency so New Mexico leverages partners whose specialty is mental health needs to help the participant navigate mental health providers. The screening tool is designed to gather information and create a self-sufficiency plan that the participant is comfortable with. Below are a few questions that the questionnaire includes:

- Have you or do you currently work with a mental health care provider?
- Do you have a documented mental health diagnosis?
- Do you have struggles with disruptive behavior?



- Are you aware of your and others' personal space?
- Are you or have you ever been prescribed medication to address a mental health diagnosis?

**Utah TANF:** We have a home-grown assessment for staff to use. It asks about work history, goals, education, family, support systems, and any health or treatment concerns.

**Soboba Tribal TANF:** When a new case is approved, the caseworker will refer the client for at least one mental health counseling session and include it on the participant's work plan. This session will serve as an assessment as to whether future sessions are needed.

**Question: Can the speakers share whether their TANF programs are state or locally administered and how that supports or hinders the service delivery methods they've discussed here today?**

**FAST, Ramsey County, Minnesota:** FAST is locally administered by Ramsey County and monitored by the State in Minnesota. This supports the ability to meet local needs in the most responsive and customized way.

**New Mexico TANF:** New Mexico is state-funded, and it is the expectation that we implement the Whole Family Approach in our service delivery model. The Work and Family Support Bureau has a great relationship with the Department of Workforce Solutions, and the culture is, we are all "Team TANF" – we work hand-in-hand and meet regularly to ensure both parties are equally supportive of each other.

**Utah TANF:** TANF is state administered in Utah.

**Soboba Tribal TANF:** Soboba Tribal TANF program is administered by the Soboba Band of Luiseño Indians. Our program requires a Tribal TANF Plan that is approved by the Administration for Children and Families for a three-year period. Amendments to our Plan can be completed within the three-year window as needed. The TANF Plan outlines our program design and operations. We have been approved to provide mental health counseling (non-medical) as a Tribal Option in our TANF Plan.

**Question: What measures of participation and/or achievements do you have in place besides the employment outcome?**

**FAST, Ramsey County, Minnesota:** We look at engagement, referral, and enrollment in the partner services such as mental health, IPS, and physical health. Within the program, individual achievements of any kind are celebrated and tracked. We also track individual milestones on goal plans. We also track formal IPS Fidelity.

**New Mexico TANF:** When piloting this approach in Year One, the program monitored consistent engagement, which meant weekly contact. Each participant was contacted every week for a year. The contact was either: via phone, face-to-face interactions, and/or email. New Mexico has data that shows the level of engagement with participants. It was evident that participants preferred to be contacted at least once a month. New Mexico has adjusted its expectation to once a month and more frequent contact for participants that need more intensive case management.

**Utah TANF:** We also measure participation, although employment seems to be a better outcome to measure.



**Soboba Tribal TANF:** We recognize participant attendance in mental health counseling, and every year, our provider will award families who have overcome barriers and shown growth in achieving their self-sufficiency goals. In addition, we require adults who wish to marry to attend pre- and post-marital counseling to qualify for our marriage incentive. Likewise, our baby-exempt mothers with babies under one year old are required to attend a monthly Baby and Me Workshop for continued exemption eligibility from their work activity requirements. Monthly parenting workshops are also provided and can be credited toward court requirements to help keep parents and children together.

**Question: What was the process for designing your mental health service programs? Did you work with any outside organizations in the design process?**

**FAST, Ramsey County, Minnesota:** FAST used support from the state, OPRE, MDRC, local expertise and evaluation, and consultants and subject matter experts from IPS, mental health, and TANF locally.

**New Mexico TANF:** New Mexico has conducted community outreach throughout the state of New Mexico to ensure we have those resources available throughout New Mexico. The Work and Family Support Bureau does not offer mental health services, but advocates for participants and helps them navigate those resources.

**Utah TANF:** The services were based on research conducted by the University of Utah Social Research Institute.

**Soboba Tribal TANF:** Over the years, it has been trial and error. We initially tried to refer families to receive counseling from Indian Health Services, but families generally opted out of these services for fear of stigma and the fact that many participants have family who work there. Ultimately, time and surveys showed that families were more willing to attend mental health counseling sessions at our office, in their own homes, or at a private provider's location. This led to us contracting out this service to a licensed professional who helped us determine other needs that included parenting workshops, couples' workshops, Baby and Me workshops, and group therapy/bonding sessions for families to attend together.

**Question: Are funds braided or staff paid for out of different funding sources to serve TANF-eligible individuals? If so, what kind and how?**

**New Mexico TANF:** Mental health services are a billable service, so the participant would have to be enrolled in Medicaid.

**Utah TANF:** Our clinicians also serve WIOA customers, so funds are braided with WIOA.

**Soboba Tribal TANF:** No, our services are built into our program design and covered through the TANF grant.

**Question: Who should perform the TANF assessment and screening, and what credentials do they have? What level of information do they gather?**

**New Mexico TANF:** Every TANF participant is assessed by a Career Development Specialist. The staff are not diagnosing the participants, they are gathering information and then referring the participant to a resource. Many times, a participant has mental health services established, and everything is created to



align with what the participant is already doing. New Mexico believes in bridging the gap in services and not reinventing the wheel where the participant may feel they have to start all over again. The information that is gathered during the assessment is just a first layer and not too in-depth, but if it has been identified that there is a mental health need, the CDS will provide a referral to a mental health provider.

**Utah TANF:** There are two levels of assessment. One is non-clinical and is performed by employment counselors (case managers). One is a clinical assessment, and that is done by our licensed clinical therapists.

**Soboba Tribal TANF:** Our career and educational assessments are provided by a licensed career counselor. Drug assessments are referred out to our local county and provided at no cost by licensed professionals. Our mental health counselor is a licensed provider.

**Question: Arnold, is your team meeting with customers in-person, or are you mostly meeting virtually?**

**Arnold Ontiveros, New Mexico TANF:** We meet them whichever they prefer and what's convenient for the customer.

**Question: Liz, how are the in-house clinicians funded? Through TANF funds? Billable services?**

**Liz Carver, Utah TANF:** Our clinicians also serve WIOA customers, so funds are braided with TANF. The clinicians provide non-medical services.

**Question: Do non-prescription mental health treatments for a diagnosis (anxiety, depression) count as "medical"?**

**Antoinette Kitchen, OFA:** We would need more details on what you are referring to as non-prescription mental health treatment. In general, TANF funds can be used to pay for non-medical mental health services. Please send your proposed mental health services question to your TANF Regional Program Manager for a more specific answer.

**Question: It is my understanding that TANF cannot pay for mental health services, other than wraparound services, is that correct?**

**Antoinette Kitchen, OFA:** We would need more details on what you are referring to as mental health wraparound services. In general, TANF funds can be used to pay for non-medical mental health services. Please send your proposed mental health services question to your TANF Regional Program Manager for a more specific answer.