



ZERO TO THREE
Early connections last a lifetime

Cross-System Collaboration to Better Support Babies in Washington: Strengthening Partnerships Between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Home Visiting Systems

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Commitment to Integrating Brain Science into Policy and Practice Leads to Collaboration between Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Home Visiting Programs

Washington's cross-agency leadership group, which brought together high-level staff from state agencies serving children and families, was inspired to take action by research showing the importance of the early years on brain development and lifelong well-being. They wanted to integrate what they were learning from science into state systems to better serve young children and families. In 2013, the group requested examination of data from the state's WorkFirst program—the employment and training portion of TANF—to determine how many recipients had children under age three and whether they were connecting to early childhood and parenting support programs. At the time, parents receiving TANF assistance could be exempted from WorkFirst requirements to participate in work, work-like, or work preparation activities for up to 12 months after a baby was born, limited to 12 months in the parent's lifetime. (In 2018, this exemption from WorkFirst requirements was increased to a 24-month lifetime limit for parents with a child under two years.) The data showed that while staff conducted

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"We can track everything back to the state agency leaders who had a vision to do something innovative and different."

— Judy King, Director of Family Support, Department of Children, Youth, and Families

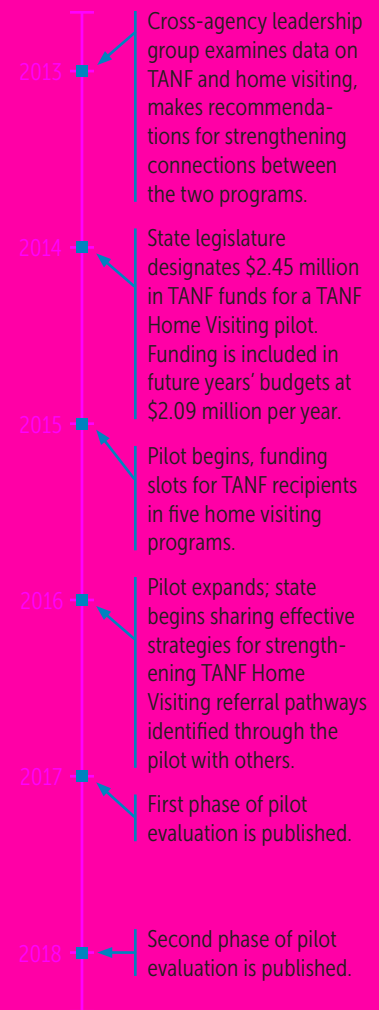
an assessment with the parent once the baby was born, new parents who were exempt from work requirements often had minimal contact with their WorkFirst worker after that, so referrals to supportive services were limited. State leaders recognized this as a missed opportunity to support families during a critical period of development and sought to shift

the culture of WorkFirst and other public assistance programs to encompass a stronger two-generation approach.

One of the key recommendations from this analysis was to strengthen ties between public assistance programs and programs that serve young children and families. The group identified evidence-based home visiting as a priority because of its focus on strengthening parent-child relationships and enhancing parents' abilities to promote their babies' healthy development. Home visiting was also recognized as a support that could encourage parents to plan and take advantage of WorkFirst education, training, and support services to build a better future for themselves and their children. The cross-agency leadership group worked closely with others in the Department of Social and Health Services Community Services Division (DSHS), Department of Early Learning (DEL, now the Department of Children, Youth, and Families), Thrive Washington, and home visiting partners across the state to develop a pilot to expand access to evidence-based home visiting for TANF recipients. They also actively engaged with state legislators, sharing the brain science research and TANF data to raise awareness about the importance of investing early. This led the 2014 state legislature to support the proposal by designating \$2.45 million of TANF funds to be used for home visiting. Those funds became part of the base budget for TANF, providing ongoing funding at \$2.09 million per year for the program, subject to biennial appropriation by the legislature.

The TANF Home Visiting pilot began in 2015, providing TANF funding to five home visiting providers (three county public health departments and two nonprofit organizations) to add 168 slots to their Nurse Family Partnership and Parents as Teachers programs. In 2016, the pilot expanded to additional programs and home visiting models, including Early Head Start and a locally developed home-based doula and early learning home visiting program. As of spring 2018, there are twelve home visiting providers receiving TANF funding, with a total of 341 slots created. In total, the funding has enabled Washington to expand home visiting capacity in service areas of 22 of the 53 community services offices responsible for TANF. Increasing capacity in home visiting was an important state policy win, but even more significant for statewide change was working to educate the two distinct public sector systems about each other, developing shared language, and strengthening referral pathways. As a result, WorkFirst staff across the state are learning more about and making more referrals to home visiting, parenting education, and other whole-family services in their communities, however funded.

Turning Points



"This partnership exemplifies the whole family approach we want to take to promote intergenerational success."

— Babs Roberts, Director, Department of Social and Health Services, Community Services Division

Transforming the Culture of a Compliance-Based Program

WorkFirst must meet federal TANF block grant requirements, so DSHS case-management staff must ensure parents participating in WorkFirst adhere to detailed requirements and timelines. Getting bandwidth and buy-in to strengthen coordination with home visiting—which is generally voluntary for clients and does not count toward federal work participation requirements—is essential to the success of the partnership and requires ongoing commitment. WorkFirst staff partner with home visiting providers and have come to see linking parents to home visiting as part of a two-generation approach to case management for families with young children. Recent training in motivational interviewing has strengthened WorkFirst staff's ability to engage parents in supportive services such as home visiting.

An essential first step was building relationships at the community level among the two programs. Local home visiting staff met—and continue to meet regularly—with WorkFirst staff in community services offices to describe their work with families, explain who is eligible for the programs they offer, and discuss how home visiting could help families meet their goals. At these visits, home visiting staff also learn about public assistance programs and how community services offices operate. These face-to-face meetings have been important to establishing and maintaining relationships. They are repeated when there is significant staff turnover at either program. WorkFirst field staff have also been invited to state home visiting conferences hosted by DEL, now the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF). Regional WorkFirst coordinators communicate frequently with state staff at both DCYF and DSHS to talk through challenges and identify strategies for improvement. Though these practices were initiated among participants in the pilot, home visiting programs not receiving TANF funding now also employ them to strengthen relationships with community services office staff in their areas.

Attention was paid early on to making the referral process as simple and straightforward as possible. Home visiting programs participating in the pilot are given access to the electronic case management system utilized by WorkFirst staff, the Electronic Jobs Automated System (eJAS), so that referrals can be made electronically, and home visitors enter information about families' engagement directly into the system. State headquarters staff provide detailed training to local home visiting and WorkFirst staff to facilitate referrals flowing in both directions.

There are several opportunities for WorkFirst staff to introduce clients to the possibility of enrolling in home visiting, and each office determines their own processes.

- Orientation — All new recipients of TANF cash assistance who are subject to work requirements are required to attend a WorkFirst orientation. WorkFirst staff often plant the seed about supportive services such as home visiting during this meeting.
- Initial Evaluation — WorkFirst case managers conduct a comprehensive evaluation for all individuals subject to WorkFirst requirements to identify needs and barriers to employment and explore the participant's goals. Results of the assessment are used to determine WorkFirst participation



requirements and develop a plan for resolving issues. Plans can include referrals to a variety of services such as housing, mental health treatment, family violence services, home visiting, or early childhood services. They may also lead to a referral to WorkFirst social service staff for a more thorough assessment.

- Additional Assessments — WorkFirst social service staff conduct a Pregnancy to Employment assessment for all pregnant individuals. Parents with a child under one year are also seen for an individual assessment. These visits can also be an opportunity to offer home visiting support.

Some offices have additional processes; for example, in King County new WorkFirst participants are asked to complete a self-assessment when they first come to the office. As part of that form, they indicate if they are interested in participating in different services. Approximately 38% of the 300 individuals who completed an assessment in 2017 indicated they were interested in participating in some form of parent support. This has been helpful in estimating the demand for home visiting services.

Once a WorkFirst client is referred to home visiting, home visiting staff enter notes in eJAS about the family's participation. Some offices also hold monthly case consultation meetings to check on families involved in both programs. DSHS headquarters staff send data to community services offices on a quarterly basis detailing the number of referrals made to home visiting programs compared to the number of families who meet home visiting program eligibility criteria. This keeps the opportunity to refer to home visiting top of mind for busy WorkFirst staff.

Exploring the Impact of the TANF Home Visiting Project with a Two-Phase Evaluation

In addition to regularly reviewing data on referrals and engagement in home visiting, Washington conducted a two-phase study of the first year of the pilot. The first phase was a descriptive analysis of the families who were initially involved, released in March 2017: [*Home Visiting Services for TANF Families with Young Children: Baseline Characteristics and Early Experiences*](#). The report describes the characteristics and early experiences of the 121 families who participated in the first year. Enrollees in the pilot were about evenly split between pregnant women and parents of infants and toddlers. Participants were facing multiple challenges when they enrolled in home visiting. For example, 62% had a mental health treatment need, 55% had been homeless in the last two years, and 37% had a substance abuse issue. At the three-month follow-up, a fraction of these individuals had engaged in services to address these needs (23% mental health services, 5% resolution of homelessness, 15% substance use disorder treatment).

The second phase of the evaluation was a more detailed study comparing outcomes for families participating in the pilot (after one year of enrollment in home visiting) to those of a similarly situated group of parents: [*Home Visiting Services for TANF Families with Young Children – First Year Outcomes*](#). The DSHS Research and Data Analysis Division utilized the state's Integrated Client Database, which includes data from most state services, to conduct the study. The evaluation found that parents enrolled in the pilot were more likely than comparison TANF families to engage in WorkFirst activities that prepared them for work, including education and training. They were also more likely to have used child care subsidies than parents in the comparison group. The evaluators suggested this difference may be due to parents' increased participation in education and training activities and home visitors' assistance and encouragement to access child-focused benefits. Some of the other



outcomes examined in the study did not show statistically significant differences between the participant and comparison groups; however, evaluators noted that may have been due to the short study period. The report mentions that all of the home visiting models involved in the pilot have intervention periods of at least two years, so the 12-month evaluation period for this study likely was not capturing all the outcomes families will experience. The evaluators suggested that the state conduct additional outcome studies in the future to assess longer-term impacts of the program.

A Broader Agenda for Addressing Intergenerational Poverty Increases Focus on Cross-System Collaboration

Support for the TANF Home Visiting pilot was reinforced when analysis of TANF data revealed that a concerning proportion of adults on TANF grew up in households receiving TANF when they were children. Tackling this chronic poverty and promoting intergenerational success has become a key priority for DSHS. There are several initiatives underway in addition to the home visiting pilot that seek to address this challenge:

- TANF is funding a ‘coordinated intake’ approach in the northwest part of the state that enables 17 community services offices to use Help Me Grow to connect clients to supportive services for parents, strengthening their partnerships with community programs offering early learning, parenting education, home visiting, and other services.
- TANF is conducting a pilot in five communities that offers a range of group-based parenting education and support opportunities to all families. It is jointly funded with money from TANF and Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention dollars.
- DSHS is exploring how to better support all families receiving public assistance with a particular focus on TANF child-only cases, which represent almost half of the state’s caseload. Child-only

Washington’s Keys to Success

- **Learn about the other system.** State systems often weren’t built to be aligned. Washington intentionally focused on creating opportunities for the two systems involved in this collaboration—early learning and anti-poverty—to learn about each other. This takes an ongoing investment of time and intention, as systems are constantly evolving.
- **Agree on shared language and assumptions.** Systems do not come to the table with the same assumptions. It was important to come to an agreement on shared language. This took time and intentional effort at the state and local levels.
- **Encourage adaptive leadership.** This initiative required people to change how they were thinking and acting. It was essential that leaders at the state and community levels were supportive of change and willing to enact new processes.
- **Proactively address staff turnover.** The success of TANF Home Visiting partnerships relies on local relationships as much as systems. Staff turnover can be challenging and disruptive. Having plans in place to train new people and support them with implementation has been essential.
- **Develop shared data and data systems.** It has been extremely helpful to have a client management system that both programs can use for referrals and tracking families’ engagement with services.
- **Cultivate strong local leadership.** Strong local leadership has been very important in building the referral pathway. It is essential to include front-line staff in decision-making to make sure processes meet their needs and that they are committed to the project.
- **Hire staff dedicated to the program.** Collaboration can be difficult when it is no one’s job to manage it. Washington has staff at both DSHS and DCYF dedicated to the TANF Home Visiting partnership who are available to meet with community members, answer questions, think through processes, and review data. This support has been critical to community services offices and home visiting programs.

cases are made up of kinship caregivers, guardians, or parents who are not eligible for TANF, who apply on behalf of the child. In these instances, there are currently no case management or other supportive services provided.

- DSHS is training front-line and field supervisory staff on topics such as motivational interviewing, dynamics of poverty, increasing social capital, adverse childhood experiences, and trauma-informed care.

The Washington state legislature and governor are also focused on eliminating intergenerational poverty from a strategic policy perspective. Governor Jay Inslee created a [Poverty Reduction Work Group](#) in November 2017 to develop a strategic plan to reduce poverty, improve communities, and make progress related to health integration, employment and education, and housing. The group is charged with taking a proactive approach to advancing intergenerational prosperity by researching best practices on poverty reduction, bringing partner agencies together to collaborate, listening to the voices of communities disproportionately impacted by poverty, and recommending specific policy actions to the governor and legislature. All of these entities are collaborating to put forward the best ideas for supporting Washington families.



Resources

- For more information about the evaluation, visit the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services Research and Data Analysis website at: www.dshs.wa.gov/ffa/research-and-data-analysis
- For more information about WorkFirst, visit: www.workfirst.wa.gov
- For more information about home visiting in Washington, visit: www.dcyf.wa.gov/services/child-development-supports/home-visiting
- For more information about the intergenerational poverty bill, visit: <http://lawfilesexternal.wa.gov/biennium/2017-18/Pdf/Bills/Session%20Laws/House/1482-S3.SL.pdf#page=1>
- For more information about the Governor's Poverty Reduction Workgroup, visit: www.governor.wa.gov/issues/health-care-human-services/poverty-reduction-work-group

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For more information about the *Building Strong Foundations* project, and to see other case studies in this series, please visit www.zerotothree.org/resources/series/building-strong-foundations.

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