

Together,
we're making
our families
stronger.



Temporary Assistance For Needy Families
Arkansas Division of Workforce Services

TANF eNews

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An Electronic Newsletter from the Arkansas Division of Workforce Services

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Back to TANF Edition

Assistant Director Phil Harris, DWS-TANF

As we work our way back to TANF from our pandemic emergency responsibilities, the first thing many of you may have noticed is fewer TANF clients walking into our offices. I would advise against a hasty conclusion that child poverty and low-income families no longer exist in Arkansas and doubt our relevancy! More than 15% of Arkansans are still experiencing poverty and are struggling to become self-sufficient and TANF is designed to help make a difference in their lives.



We are also noticing the TANF families who are still enrolled with us are receiving fewer supportive services, and are increasingly classified as either deferred, exempt, or sanctioned. With the average caseload per worker hovering around 10 per worker, it offers us an opportunity to upsurge client engagement and figure out ways to help our most disadvantaged families. I would ask you to revisit each of our non-participating families and see if there are supportive services that could help them either come back to compliance or meet their employment plan goals.

I am working closely with Director Childers and Deputy Courtney Traylor to look at strategic program administration actions to help us maximize the reach of TANF services and help more low-income families become self-sufficient. I will be sharing more on these strategies in the coming weeks and months.

I have also been working closely with Deputy Jay Bassett and his chain of command to address field staffing and training issues. Central Office is ramping up its training unit so that we can offer more training sessions to staff. We have also recently started conducting regular policy and technical assistance virtual sessions with the TANF program supervisors.

In line with the theme of this back to TANF edition, I wanted to bring our TANF newsletter out of its hiatus. I want to share our successes, discuss our challenges, introduce our partners, programs, and initiatives, and get your feedback on how we can help each other, and in turn help our customers.

As we get back to full-time TANF, I am confident that together, we can serve our customers better, make the program better, and continued be a valued section of DWS – during and beyond the pandemic!





LOCAL OFFICE SPOTLIGHT **Little Rock Workforce Center**

Serving Two-Parent Families

Beginning November 2021, the Little Rock Office experienced a steady stream of atypical two-parent families enrolling in the TEA program. These new families were from Afghanistan and unveiled unique barriers. As one of the larger offices serving a large urban area and surrounding smaller towns, LRWFC staff are accustomed to working with diverse families that experience severe barriers.

These new families cultural background and severe English language barrier presented unique challenges and compounded typical barriers generally associated among TEA participants – job-ready skills than can easily translate to local employer needs. Unlike many of our participants, this group did not perceive childcare as a barrier. The men typically assumed the role of jobseekers and the wives stayed home to take care of the children.

To help with employment and self-sufficiency plans, the LWRFC leveraged this group of participants military training, which included some who had worked as interpreters, and manual laborers. This background aligned with occupations mostly available in Job Zone 1 category, i.e., carpenters, construction workers, and bakers. To help overcome the language and communication barrier, the office provided a hybrid of in-person and virtual ESL programing.

The office collaborated with local charities including the Catholic Charities of Arkansas to help arrange other supportive services like housing, food, clothing, and orientation services for living in a new country. The TANF staff worked tirelessly and facilitated networking between the participants, employment fairs, local employers, and other units within DWS.

The hard work did not go to waste. The Little Rock office has started witnessing these families transitioning from TEA to securing unsubsidized employment and enrolling in the WorkPays program. Through working with these families, the Little Rock office observed how this program coupled with flexibility and a real desire to serve can help low-income families become self-sufficient, whether transplants from other countries and cultures or locals entrapped in multi-generational cycles of poverty.

Feel free to contact Ms. Suzie Stoneman and/or Mrs. Lathrell Rump to learn more about how they adapted their case management practices to serve the unique needs of these families. We appreciate Mr. Earnest Merritt for his leadership and guidance to his staff on this project.



Little Rock TANF Office Two-Parent Workforce Specialist
Ms. Suzie Stoneman and Mrs. Lathrell Rumph

Successful Public Private Partnerships

In States and communities throughout the country, public-private partnerships are flourishing. These partnerships focus on shared goals that bring together the public sector (federal, state, local, and tribal officials or agencies) with the private sector (families, employers, philanthropies, media, civic groups, faith-based and community-based service providers). Successful social innovation at scale requires partners from the public, private, and social sectors to work together through flexible models that evolve to meet shifting requirements and address changing risks.

In the world of TANF, traditionally the services offered by faith-based and community-based organizations (FBCOs) have helped to bridge the gaps that may leave families facing food insecurity, housing instability, and difficult choices between competing needs. Recognizing that multiple issues often challenge low-income working families and individuals, FBCOs have expanded their services to include education and training, childcare, transportation, case management, mentoring programs, life-skills training, and victims' services.

The number of contracts and/or grants between TANF and FBCOs has increased significantly since the implementation of the Community Investment Initiative in 2005. Act 1705 of 2005 created the Community Investment Initiative (CII). The legislation authorizes the Division of Workforce Services and TANF program to use federal TANF funds to contract with private or community organizations, including faith-based organizations, to offer services and support to parents, children, and youth in their communities. **According to Act 514 of 2007, the CII instructs DWS to spend TANF federal funds for the following purposes:**

- 1. Improving outcomes for youth**
- 2. Improving parenting and family functioning through services and support to parents, children, and to families;**
- 3. Improving marriage and relationship skills among youth, engaged, and married couples (at least);**
- 4. Improving the financial and emotional connections of noncustodial parents to their children through fatherhood programs;**
- 5. Improving the employment skills and family connections of parents who leave state jails and prisons; and**
- 6. Providing supportive services to child-only cases in the Transitional Employment Assistance Program;**



In the coming months, TANF will use a section of our newsletter to highlight and profile many of our successful and innovative partnerships with FBCOs. The goal will be to highlight some of the extensive work accomplished by our program partnerships in youth development, services to ex-offenders, job and life skill training, and much more!

This month we will begin by profiling two of our most valued partners – Our House and the Arkansas Food Bank. We certainly hope you enjoy learning more about these organizations and the awesome work they are doing to help TANF clients.

TANF Partnership Profile – Our House

The Division of Workforce Services and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program have a long history of working collaboratively with Our House to support the success of homeless and near-homeless adults find success in work and in life, in addition to the support provided to the children of these adults. For the past three years, ADWS has provided Our House with funding to cultivate employer partnerships and build a **Pipeline to Employment**, and the results have been impressive. Our House has established new employer partnerships, helped people find full-time jobs, and helped them find higher-paying jobs--and all these jobs have been “competitive employment” with local companies.

TANF has also partnered with the Little Rock Workforce Development Board in collaboration with Our House to create Work-Based Learning opportunities through its retail and warehouse operations. Also, we know that Our House’s relationship-based Case Management model, combined with comprehensive mental health services, housing, and other support services, can be incredibly effective in facilitating the successful reintegration of individuals returning from incarceration. Therefore, we are excited that Our House, through their Community-Based Reentry Program, is doing important work to reduce recidivism and combat violence in our community. The following page provides a snapshot of the Our House 2021 Impact, followed by some wonderful TANF-eligible client success stories!



Last year, Our House served **2,614** individuals, providing coordinated services from housing to job training to healthcare to help our clients exit homelessness permanently.

WE PROVIDED

-  safe housing to **743** individuals
-  mental health services to **408** people
-  reentry services to **149** adult clients
-  comprehensive after school care to **109** youth
-  quality childcare to **137** children and infants
-  case management to **243** families

OUR IMPACT



of families kept or obtained stable housing



of Housing clients exited the program with savings



of school-age youth met developmental milestones

152% increase in average family income

We helped **399** clients find meaningful employment at **287** different businesses in the community, while **108** clients participated in job training programs on campus and in our resale stores. **66%** of our clients earned above minimum wage, at an average of **\$12.96** an hour.



Our community stepped up more than ever this year, with **1,413** individuals volunteering **14,433** hours in our programs—serving hundreds of meals, working in our store, teaching Career Center classes, tutoring our youth, and more!



Dottie & Gary

Dottie, her husband Gary, and Jack came to Our House in December after Dottie finished her stay at a recovery center and needed a safe place to refocus her life with her family. After checking into the Shelter, they were able to immediately move into our Family House program where they can live more independently in their own room. Jack was able to enjoy his Christmas through our Adopt-A-Family program and is stably enrolled in school for the first time in over a year. After school, Jack attends our out-of-school time program, Our Club, where he is overcoming his social anxiety through routines like working weekly with a literacy tutor. Dottie and Gary both work on campus in our guardshack and on our maintenance team, so they are able to remain close to Jack and easily access their case manager on campus, recovery meetings held in our Career Center, and primary healthcare through our weekly ARcare health clinic. After some tumultuous years, Dottie's family is feeling stronger and more connected than ever!

Titus

For a family with three children, surviving on a minimum wage salary is nearly impossible. Titus was struggling to find work outside of the restaurant industry that would be more conducive to both his mental health and finances, so a friend recommended that he come to Our House's Career Center. As a parent, Titus qualified for our 9-month job training program, and he was placed in our Resale Store where he never missed a day of work! During his time at the store, Titus worked almost every position to help him build a strong resume and make many connections with customers that led to multiple job offers. Titus ultimately interviewed with Caterpillar and was offered the job that same day! Titus now sees himself in a career position with great benefits that allow him to build his savings and better support his family. Titus' main goal in life is to put his children through college, which he now has the foundation to do. The team at the Resale store is still family to Titus, and he often comes back to volunteer!



Elizabeth

Elizabeth and her two young daughters came to Our House after going through a divorce in 2017 that left her family without a clear path forward. Learning how to navigate her new life as a single mom, Elizabeth reached out to Our House for assistance with budgeting and financial matters. Through our Career Center, Elizabeth's family enrolled in CAFSI, our family stability program. For two years, Elizabeth worked with her CAFSI case manager to find resources, counseling, and earn her associates degree! After exiting the program, Elizabeth later re-engaged with Our House to seek out training opportunities to boost her job skills. Elizabeth attended a nursing assistant training at no cost to her—another stand out point on her resume! With the knowledge she gained from the Career Center, Elizabeth was a strong advocate for herself and found the scholarship money she needed to be able to attend LPN school, and she is more determined than ever to continue doing this hard work of growing in her field to make a great life for her family!



TANF Partnership Profile – Arkansas Foodbank

With Support from TANF, Food Banks in Arkansas Unite to Provide Additional Weekly Food Assistance to Low-income Families with Children

While long-term food assistance for low-income families is primarily provided through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), TANF can be used to provide additional funds to food banks and their partner agencies (pantries, shelters, soup kitchens, etc.) that assist low-income families. Providing additional funding to food banks increases their capacity to serve more families and assists families in meeting their basic needs.

The Division of Workforce Services and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program have consistently sought to leverage our resources to help partners reach more families. In 2020 during the beginning of pandemic, Arkansas Foodbank met with TANF Administration to discuss the implementation of an Emergency School Pantry Program in partnership with five other Feeding America foodbanks in Arkansas. The following sheds further light on an excellent program model that is helping many families with children throughout the state of Arkansas.

During the 2020 and 2021 fiscal years, TANF provided funding to the Arkansas Foodbank to establish the Emergency School Pantry Program in partnership with five other Feeding America foodbanks in Arkansas. The 36-week program provides emergency food boxes to low-income families with children enrolled in a USDA children's feeding program like Free and Reduced Lunch, Summer Feeding or Afterschool program.

“Nearly 25% of children in Arkansas belong to families struggling with food insecurity,” said Rhonda Sanders, Arkansas Foodbank CEO. “This funding provides a wonderful way to expand their access to nutritious food, especially during this time of extreme need. We’re grateful for this opportunity.”

Administered by Arkansas Foodbank, the Emergency School Pantry Program is being implemented in partnership with Food Bank of Northeast Arkansas, Food Bank of North Central Arkansas, Northwest Arkansas Foodbank, Harvest Regional Food Bank, and River Valley Regional Food Bank. The six Feeding America foodbanks will identify up to 50 school districts to implement the Food Box Program on a local level. Some school districts will also partner with local community organizations to operate their pantry. Partner organizations will receive portions of the TANF funding to pay for food, staff support, delivery transportation and supplies or equipment necessary for food storage and distribution.

Arkansas Foodbank serves 33 of the state's 75 counties and have already identified 42 school districts to actively participate and serve as local food box providers. Below are a few of the current statistics related to this project. Forty-two 42 districts across 30 counties are currently participating.

- 1,725 food distribution events
- 45,050 households comprising 144,358 individuals served
- 51,416 boxes of food distributed
- An average of 22 pounds per box. This amounts to about 1,131,152 pounds of food distributed

TANF Work Participation Rates

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Transitional Employment Assistance

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services requires each state's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program (TANF, known in Arkansas as Transitional Employment Assistance or TEA) to meet two work participation rates, which are measurements of how well the state succeeds in helping work eligible individuals find employment. The TEA program successfully met both its overall and two-parent work participation rates for fiscal years 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021 placing Arkansas among 21 other states in the nation to reach this important measurement.

Failure to meet participation in either of the required measures will result in fiscal sanctions for Arkansas. In accordance with federal regulations, continued failure will result in progressive fiscal sanctions, up to a maximum of 21% of the State's SFAG. These fiscal sanctions are expected to increase by 5% each year, until the maximum sanctions threshold is met.

TANF Talk

Are you a TANF Geek?

Whether you are a Mr. or a Ms. TANF, or on the journey to becoming one, the links below should help satisfy the TANF nerd in you!

We had a policy and technical assistance virtual session with the supervisors last month. The recording of the session can be accessed at **S:\TANF Program Supervisors\2022 TANF Program Supervisor Training\2022 March**. We suggest that you coordinate with your supervisor and team members and plan a productive learning session.

Around the Watercooler

Well, maybe not necessarily the watercooler. But we would love to hear a TANF success story or an innovative approach that helped your participant. We still highlight stories and best practices in a future newsletter.

We also want to know if there are suggested topics that you want us to cover in a newsletter or special technical assistance or training session that you want covered. Please drop us a line @ ADWS.TANF.Ideas@arkansas.gov and we will make every effort to listen and address it.

