Improving Employment Outcomes: Healthy Relationship Skills Matter

Webinar Question and Answer (Q&A)

June 9, 2016

Question: Will the information from the interagency meeting in Atlanta be made available?

Answer: *LaMonica Shelton, Regional TANF Program Manager, Office of Family Assistance, Region IV:*

There are two things. If you are interested in the materials that were actually presented and shared at the meeting, we can certainly make that available to you. You can get in contact with me directly, or in contact with someone in your state who attended that meeting. For me, my email address is my first name dot last name -- LaMonica dot Shelton at ACF -- F as in Frank -- dot H-H-S dot gov. That's LaMonica.Shelton@acf.hhs.gov. Then we are also working on some follow-up materials to share with you all, so that will be coming in the future. Those are materials that were not presented at the meeting, but certainly take off from the discussions that we had at the meeting.

Question: What resources do you have that states could access immediately, specifically with regards to partnerships and domestic violence?

Answer: *Robyn Cenizal, Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:*

Well, a couple of things. If you visit the Resource Center website and you look under Strategies for Integration, we have an entire section on partnerships. In the section on partnerships we have all kinds of cool stuff, including sample MOUs and clarification around when you might want to use a Memorandum of Understanding, versus when you might want to use a pay for performance-type agreement. We have a lot of resources there on partnerships.

We also have a tremendous number of resources as it relates to domestic violence. We have a Family Violence Prevention Toolkit, which you will see in the File Download box to the right of the screen. That is an amazing resource. What it really does is it is speaking to specifically organizations like yours, who are not responsible for addressing domestic violence or child maltreatment, but are working with families who have been possibly impacted by those issues. I think it's a great resource. You can download it immediately from the box. You can also go to our website and you'll find that information.

We also at the Resource Center have a Family Violence Prevention advisory panel, which is made up of a group of fabulous folks from around the country who work on these issues from varying perspectives -- from the research perspective to the men against violence perspective, to the LGBT community perspective. We have lots of those resources there.

Question: Are the materials available in different languages?

Answer: *Robyn Cenizal, Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families*

We do have some materials that are available in Spanish. We are, this year actually, moving in the direction of creating more resources that are available in Spanish. Previously, we were focused on -- since our primary targets are governmental agencies, and in most of those agencies, English is the spoken language, on the government side, I should say -- so we are moving in the direction of increasing our Spanish-speaking materials, but we haven't gotten a bunch of them yet.

Question: What tools are available for TANF case managers?

Answer: *Robyn Cenizal, Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:*

Again, in the File Download box, there is a resource that says "NRCHMF Resource List." In that list, you will see some resources. That list gives you information on our most popular research-based resources. It will highlight whether they are research-to-practice brief, a tip sheet, a fact sheet, a toolkit or a guide, and you will see in there, for example, [a] research-to-practice brief on relationship education and TANF, and working with TANF agencies. For example, the one that you also see to the right there, Integrating Healthy Marriage Education Into TANF Programs, is one that is specific to TANF, but there are lots of others out there too.

Question: What are some good next steps following this webinar? What other resources do you recommend we access that align with today's discussion and might not have already been mentioned?

Answer: *LaMonica Shelton, Regional TANF Program Manager, Office of Family Assistance, Region IV:*

I can start off with the next steps and Jackie can feel free to chime in, and then maybe you, Robyn, can add some more information. Next steps related to the partnership, as I mentioned earlier, we'll have some materials that we'll be able to share in the future. Certainly, if you have some suggestions -- because we've been partnering for a little bit of time, and we've been trying to build on that and grow that partnership more -- it certainly, if anyone has any suggestions about things they would like to see happen -- whether that's in regards to a future in-person meeting, whether it's related to a webinar or conference call -- any other things that you would suggest that would be most helpful to you and to case managers in their work, we would definitely love to hear some of those ideas.

Jacqueline Mull, Regional Program Manager, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Region IV:

Something else that, it's a prime opportunity because of the requirement of the WOIA requirement that it is really pushing the partnership, so if you are not aware of whether or not your agency is included in -- because each state had to submit a plan on how they were going to work with their program, and efforts to implement the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act. It's a good time for you to reach out to maybe your other state agency partners and see if you were included in that plan, and if you were not -- because child support is not a required partner, but in some of our states, child support has been invited to the table.

But if you have not been, this is a good opportunity to share how and why you should be. We started building that bridge during our meeting in May. Actually, we've been building that bridge for several years. We've had some states come together and put together action plans -- action plans that help them work across their program, identify where they are, where they can potentially share resources, make a referral to each other, or how they can work together. I think it's a prime opportunity for everyone to ask the question of, who are we currently partnering with? Are we a part of this plan, and if we are not, figuring out how to come to the table and explaining how you are a valued partner and should be included.

Robyn Cenizal, Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:

I think all of that sounds great, and we can support any of that that would be helpful. I would also suggest that as a next step, folks visit the website. The weblinks are in the box to the upper right of the screen as well. Check out the Virtual Training Center, and encourage colleagues to maybe go through Module 1 in the Virtual Training Center so that they get this information. Today's webinar will be archived on our website once it's 508-ed and everything is well, so I would encourage others to do that. Sometimes it takes getting the buy-in of all the right people in order to move forward on these things, but I am happy to support any next steps anyone would like to make, and brainstorm on ideas as well.

Question: Once the TANF case has been closed and the customer put into transitional phase and no longer receiving cash benefits, are they required to cooperate with child support requirements?

Answer: *Jacqueline Mull, Regional Program Manager, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Region IV:*

Required? No, but I think it's important to understand the necessity of the child support services. When you say "required" to a partner when they are receiving TANF, there is a requirement that if paternity hasn't been established, that paternity should be established. But a family should want to establish paternity regardless of whether or not there is a TANF case involved, because that's essential to the child, and that child being connected to both of their parents. The requirement in order to receive your TANF benefits do go away when you close that case, but I would suggest to our TANF partners that when those TANF cases do close, they continue to encourage those participants, those families, to secure those needed services of having paternity established. [They] may be able to get parenting time access, visitation, as well as establishing a support order. The requirement goes away, but the need to keep those families connected to the child support program does not go away.

Question: Do you have any resources that can help staff assist their clients as they navigate the referral process?

Answer: *Jacqueline Mull, Regional Program Manager, Office of Child Support Enforcement, Region IV:*

This is something we continue to try to improve on, and where and why the referral from TANF to child support is required while that family is receiving TANF. There are so many other referral processes in here about, how do we make referrals to an employment and training program? How do we make referrals related to if you see there is a substance abuse issue? When we talk about referrals, the referral from TANF to child support is required when that person is receiving benefits, but there is a large number of other referral processes within here that we are really looking to improve and streamline. Again, I think this is a great opportunity with the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act for us to improve how we can make those referrals to each other where the person actually gets the service – not [that] we make the referral, and then we don't know what happens after.

I think that's a big part that we're continuing to try to address and to improve, and we're always looking to get best practices on how to do that. Sometimes it seems like the family might fall between the cracks if they have to take that referral and walk across town. They might not make it across town, or a walk across town might be too far, and they don't have money for bus fare, train or whatever. It's not just making the referral. It's making sure that that participant actually gets the services that you are referring them to as well. This is the tricky part. This is the part that we really need to come together and figure out how best to do it. If you're doing it well, please share it.

LaMonica Shelton, Regional TANF Program Manager, Office of Family Assistance, Region IV:

I think that was very well said, Jackie. What I was going to say is I can't, at this particular point in time, point to specific resources that exist. Maybe Robyn is aware of something. We can certainly look into that further, but what I was going to suggest, one of the things Jackie touched upon is a lot of times -- and you all already know this, but when you make referrals, sometimes that person may not follow through, or they may start the process and you don't know what's happening with them. I know resources are limited, especially the resource of time -- but one suggestion really is to figure out what's in your own system. What can you proactively do to follow up, to continue to reach out to that person to ensure that they are either doing what you suggested, or understanding why they're not? A lot of times they just need either additional communication, additional motivation -- kind of like what Robyn was saying, they need to know someone cares maybe to keep that line of communication open.

The other thing we always hear about this as an issue is with regards to data sharing, information sharing. I would strongly encourage you, to those partners that you already have relationships that you're trying to refer people to their services, or those partners that you are currently reaching out to, hoping to develop a relationship -- having that communication about your processes for sharing information about a client with one another. I know that there are a lot of technology-related legal issues around that, but starting that discussion, I think, will be very helpful and will go a long way.

Robyn Cenizal, Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:

Just to follow up on that, I totally agree. It's not just the process -- it's the approach. Starting from that place of a strength-based approach is building a rapport with the client and coming at this conversation as you're a partner in their progress so that, even if you don't have time to stop and follow up with them, they want to stop and take time to follow up with you and let you know that either they've followed up on their appointment, or they're having difficulty following up on their appointment. At one point, I managed an 1115 child support waiver, which was one of your early healthy marriage initiatives. One of the things that we found particularly helpful in the case management component of all that was to give the families we were serving a calendar.

I know that sounds like a very simple thing, but many of these folks, especially if they are getting lengthy case plans, are getting multiple appointments on multiple slips of paper, and they don't have a central way to keep up with all of this stuff, so they wind up missing appointments or not following up because they didn't realize they were supposed to do something. But we found that the simple calendar -- it didn't have to be a fancy calendar, just a simple calendar where they could actually write those appointments on there made a huge difference, in terms of them actually making it to those appointments. Just throwing the idea out there in case it's helpful, but really building that rapport so that they feel like you are a partner with them in their progress, is key.

LaMonica Shelton, Regional TANF Program Manager, Office of Family Assistance, Region IV:

And I wanted to add something else. I would also suggest thinking about, if you're making a referral, connecting that individual with a person, as opposed to a system or an entity. If they have someone that they know they're going to, and you have someone that you can communicate with at the other organization that's receiving the referral, I think that would also be very helpful as well.

Question: Selecting the right partner and right curriculum can be tricky. You mentioned Healthy Relationship Skills curriculum, but what about soft skills curriculum generally? For example, sometimes when people have trouble in a relationship, they then may not even communicate with their supervisor about coming into work. They simply might not show up. The two issues are very linked. What insights can you offer here? What should we be looking for, and can you help us as we get through that process?

Answer: *Robyn Cenizal, Director, National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families:*

Well actually, in the Virtual Training Center, there is a tutorial on a curriculum guide that we created, that the curriculum guide highlights free and low-cost curriculum, and in the guide, you can see who the target audiences are, and what are the content areas. The tutorial will help you navigate through there to make sure you're picking out a free or low-cost curriculum that would be appropriate for addressing these things. I think the soft skills that you're referencing in terms of not communicating with an employer when they are not going to show up for work, I think the soft skills need to be built into all workplace training programs. I think all job training -- if you're a TANF agency and you're putting people into programs to prepare them for work of any kind, I think soft skills need to be a part of that.

We've got to change the culture to making these skills available to folks throughout the community, as opposed to the perception being that they only get these skills if there's a problem -- because that's part of the problem, is that people don't talk about the challenges, because there's some perception that they're magically supposed to know all the answers anyway. You know, children don't come with instructions, spouses don't come with instructions, but we're still supposed to manage. I think if we can look for opportunities to share information on how to effectively communicate -- whether it's "Ten Tips for Healthy Communication" on a handout in a waiting room, or it's a course that they can go to, or it's built into job training programs, I think we need to look for all those opportunities. We do have additional curriculum options that are available that are free and low-cost.

There are a number of curriculum that are out there in the world. We just typically focus on the free and low-cost. They're all research-based, but we focus on free and low-cost, because we do realize that most governmental agencies don't have a lot of extra money to spend on facilitators and curriculum.

Question: Where can I find the slides from this webinar?

Answer: Visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website at www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org/events-archive to download a copy of the slides, recording, transcript, and a Q&A document from this webinar.

Question: Who should I contact if I have more questions about this webinar?

Answer: Visit the National Resource Center for Healthy Marriage and Families website at www.HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org or email us at info@HealthyMarriageandFamilies.org.