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CREATING SELF-SUFFICIENCY AMONG ILLINOIS TANF RECIPIENTS

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CREATING SELF-SUFFICIENCY AMONG ILLINOIS TANF RECIPIENTS

A Master Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty

of

American Public University

by

Shelby Samaniego

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Public Administration

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Charles Town, WV
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DEDICATION

I dedicate this paper to my husband, David, who has always believed in me more than I believed in myself and to my amazing children, Amelia, Emma, and Nicolas, for their patience, understanding, and encouragement throughout this long process. I love you all so very much. I cannot forget my wonderful friends who provided unending support and much needed laughter during the many challenges and stressors that come with juggling work, school, family, and life in general. Thank you She-Warriors!
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I wish to thank my professors and classmates at American Public University who pushed me further and challenged me to work harder with each and every assignment. To my professors, thank you for your insight, knowledge, and feedback. To my classmates, thank you for your humor, enthusiasm, and encouragement. The experiences you shared in your chosen fields greatly inspired me and further developed my understanding of both public administration and disaster management.
ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

CREATING SELF-SUFFICIENCY AMONG ILLINOIS TANF RECIPIENTS

by

Shelby Samaniego

American Public University System

Charles Town, West Virginia

Dr. Stephen Schwalbe, Thesis Advisor

This study offers an assessment of the Illinois Department of Human Services’ (IDHS) Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and the correlation of service delivery to recipient outcomes and self-sufficiency. The Welfare-to-Work movement underwent dramatic changes with the 1996 passage of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families by attaching a work requirement for families to receive public assistance. Initially appearing successful, shortcomings soon overshadowed the program’s achievements. Given the present deficiencies with TANF, this study considers both quantitative and qualitative analysis of data and surveys from state and federal resources to demonstrate how Illinois compares nationally and to neighboring states, suggesting that the State’s TANF program is not successful in its current format. Furthermore, a review of organizational philosophy and self-sufficiency models demonstrates the positive impact alternative models are having for low-income families and identifies the opportunity for programmatic change within the IDHS TANF program. This paper concludes with a recommendation for implementing the Family Independence Initiative (FII) model into the Illinois TANF program as the most effective means for improving TANF recipient outcomes and self-sufficiency.
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Introduction

The purpose of this research is to evaluate the impact on self-sufficiency outcomes for low-income families through the integration of the Family Independence Initiative (FII) model into the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in Illinois. The TANF program is administered by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) and has served as a safety net for Illinois’ low-income families since 1996. This study establishes the impact that IDHS’s administration of TANF has had on the outcomes of Illinois families. This is measured by quantitative data that identify underlying issues within Illinois’ TANF program and demonstrate the State’s strengths and weakness compared across the nation.

The research is intended to provide State administrators of the Illinois TANF program with a framework to incorporate a new component within the TANF format to improve self-sufficiency outcomes for Illinois’ low-income families. The literature review provides an overview of current policy, federal funding of TANF, and national comparison of policy implementation of TANF, thus revealing the ineffectiveness of the TANF program to facilitate sustainable outcomes for Illinois recipients.

Next, the theoretical framework and methodology section discusses how behaviorism theory and the New Public Service concepts should be applied by IDHS administrators in their efforts to improve outcomes for TANF families. The research findings illustrate the inability of IDHS in understanding and applying these theoretical approaches to service delivery to increase self-sufficiency for low-income families and improve program effectiveness. The finding and analysis sections provide a mixed methodology approach of both quantitative data including statistical information relative to program outcomes, qualitative data from observation of other self-sufficiency programs, and surveys from programs targeting positive behavior reinforcements. Analysis of TANF data and surveys, state poverty rates, and employment data,
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both nationally and for Illinois, will identify program deficiencies and help put the current situation of Illinois’ TANF program in perspective.

Lastly, the researcher will provide recommendations and introduce the proposal of a new component into the Illinois TANF program in the hopes of creating a more effective service delivery resulting in improved long-term, self-sufficiency outcomes for Illinois recipients. The new component, the Family Independence Initiative (FII), encourages low-income families to steer their own lives while increasing independence, creating support systems, and building their community.

To improve the success of TANF clients in becoming financially stable and independent of government assistance, the TANF program needs to do more than provide financial assistance and employment approaches (Wang, 2015). Introduction of a new self-sufficiency component, the FII model, into the Illinois TANF program will create greater self-sufficiency in the form of self-reliance and financial independence.

Background

Although the United States government spent decades attempting to move welfare mothers off of public assistance and into employment, the Welfare-to-Work (WTW) movement really took hold in 1996 with the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). The Act ushered in a new form of welfare in the United States. Proposed as the “end of welfare as we knew it,” PRWORA was a national effort to reform welfare aimed at transitioning low-income individuals with children, usually women, from welfare to work. Gone was the previous program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). The passing of PRWORA replaced the 60-year-old AFDC with the new Temporary Assistance for Needy Family program, or TANF. Unlike AFDC, TANF promised a
new WTW model directed at helping families through cash assistance but attached new work requirements and a strict cap on benefits of no more than 60 months total (Thaden & Robinson, 2012). Subsequent passage of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 imposed further restrictions by specifically outlining the fundamental work activities allowed in order to receive benefits (Kim, 2010). Thus, TANF became less viable for low income individuals as benefits were tied to strict work requirements and mandated that only very specific activities, which were extremely detailed, would qualify to meet the work requirement standard.

Because the previous program, AFDC, was an entitlement program, states were legally required to provide benefits for families who met the eligibility requirements and standards (Meni & Wiseman, 2017). AFDC operated through a matching grant with the federal government and each state was required to submit a plan to the Department of Health and Human Services for approval. If state plans were approved, then the federal government funded for half of the administrative costs and a smaller portion of the actual benefit costs. Federal grant dollars depended on state per capita income, but was never less than 50 percent (Meni & Wiseman, 2017). The grant required that all matched funds be used for cash assistance only.

With the passing of PRWORA, TANF introduced an entirely different way of doing things. First and foremost, federal funding transitioned from a matching grant to a block grant. Matching grants provide federal funds to states which are tied to many rules and allotted for a specific purpose. On the other hand, block grants are larger amounts of funds given to states with very little discretion as to how they spend the grant money. In the case of the TANF block grant, states were required to match 80% of the grant with their own funds (Monnat & Bunyan, 2008). According to a 2011 TANF Report, Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) received $585,056,960 in TANF funds and was required to match 80% of that amount with State
dollars known as Maintenance of Effort (MOE) dollars (IDHS, 2011). The combined total of TANF and MOE spending for Illinois in 2015 was $1,374,816,777 (OFA, 2015).

Additionally, TANF introduced the work participation requirement for those receiving benefits. Recipients were now required to pursue work or other suitable activities to receive benefits which could be temporarily reduced, known as “sanctioning”, if non-compliant (Bitler & Karoly, 2015). States were required to adhere to strict time limits and work participation requirements that mandated that 50 percent of recipients in one parent households and 90 percent in two parent households needed to be working or in a work activity (Meni & Wiseman, 2017). However, a state could receive a caseload reduction credit that decreased its work participation requirement by one percent for every percent the state’s TANF caseload declined. Another drastic change from AFDC was the ability of states to use the block grant to fund projects and services other than cash assistance, as long as it was a justified expense related to TANF, as specified by PRWORA (Meni & Wiseman, 2017). Likewise, the block grant increased the minimal cost a state incurred for additional TANF recipients and therefore also reduced the state’s costs if caseloads decreased. This, as well as the removal of cash assistance as an entitlement program, created incentives for states to restrict TANF approvals and promote case closures.

Initially, TANF appeared very successful. While proponents cited initial decreases in welfare rolls as evidence of the program’s success believing increased employment to be the cause (Haveman, Blank, Moffitt, Smeeding, & Wallace, 2015), opponents argued that numbers declined because less families were eligible or were avoiding the program altogether due to the newly-enforced strict work requirements and time limits (CRS, 2016). Even after the 2008 Great Recession, states continued to show stagnant or decreased TANF rolls (Sheely, 2012). Since its
inception, TANF’s initial successes have declined. The current cash value to families is so low that in just over 60% of the states, a family of three with no other income other than TANF, is below 30% of the federal poverty level (Edin & Shaefer, 2015). According to conservative think tank, the Heritage Foundation, 89% of Americans want to see welfare system reform through increased work requirements and payment incentives to encourage better outcomes (Fender, 2017). However, authors Edin and Shaefer (2015) of the liberal Brookings Institution, believe that states need to return allotted TANF dollars back to needy families and away from programs for which the money was not intended. Because of the flexibility states gained with devolution, some have redirected TANF funds to supplement or expand other programs, such as pre-K education and the Earned Income Tax Credits (EITCs), while others have used TANF funding to pay for the increasing costs of existing services, such as child welfare or swap with existing state funds in order to free up those funds and use for purposes which do not provide any safety net or pertain to employment for the poor (Floyd, Pavetti, & Schott, 2017).

Ample research shows that the number of families receiving TANF drastically declined as did poverty among children during the first several years of the program’s implementation (Cheng, 2010; Dworsky & Courtney, 2007; Wu, Cancian, & Meyer, 2008). States also saw increases in work for single mothers, but beginning in the early 2000s, many of these advances were lost or reversed (CRS, 2016). Significant decreases in the number of families receiving TANF can be seen since its implementation in July of 1997 (Hahn, Golden, & Edelman, 2012). In 2016, only 23 of every 100 families in poverty actually received TANF cash assistance, falling from 68 families in 1997 when TANF was first enacted (Floyd et al., 2017). Additionally, high rates of recidivism reveal program deficiencies where TANF recipients are in
and out of jobs and on and off TANF rolls, unable to maintain sustainable employment or earn a living wage (Gilbert, 2009).

TANF aimed to decrease long-term dependency on government subsidy programs by encouraging work and decreasing poverty (Gilbert, 2009). The program hoped to develop self-reliance and independence among recipients which comes from steady employment and financial stability, ideals not accomplished through AFDC. While TANF has undoubtedly provided much needed resources for low-income families, the system’s failure to help recipients maintain self-sufficiency is problematic, to say the least. The TANF resources problem has highlighted the need for government to be creative and consider program alternatives, but as of yet, very little discussion revolves around innovative solutions.

**Literature Review**

A review of the literature regarding TANF’s success and failures through a comparison of states, and specifically Illinois, is imperative when contextualized with poverty rates in the United States. In the 2016 report by Congressional Research Services entitled, “Work Requirements, Time Limits, and Work Incentives in TANF, SNAP, and Housing Assistance,” the TANF program, although perceived as successful initially, has subsequently been unable to produce substantial results as it pertains to self-sufficiency among Illinois TANF recipients. In his article, “US Welfare Reform: Rewriting the Social Contract,” Gilbert (2009) revealed that high rates of recidivism uncover program deficiencies where TANF recipients are in and out of jobs and on and off TANF rolls, maxing out their allotted 60 months of benefits, and unable to maintain sustainable employment or earn a living wage. Gilbert (2009) continued by stating that work disincentives to leave TANF, the devolution of authority over welfare programs from
federal to state, and organizational cultures which emphasize numbers rather than self-sufficiency contribute to the ongoing dilemma of TANF recipients.

**Welfare to Work**

The premise of welfare-to-work (WTW) policies required that TANF recipients be employed or in work activities in order to receive assistance. Broughton noted in his 2010 article, “Bringing the Organization Back in: The Role of Bureaucratic Churning in Early TANF Caseload Declines in Illinois,” that the aggressive policy outlined the goal to reduce caseloads and implemented strict work participation requirements (WPR) that have witnessed dramatic changes since TANF first rolled out. The WPR in 1997 mandated that 25% of the TANF caseload be in work activities (Broughton, 2010). However, current participation rates imposed on states required at least 50% of TANF caseloads overall had a recipient participating in work activities and for two-parent households, the requirement increased to 90% of households (Hildebrandt & Stevens, 2009).

A report from the Congressional Research Service (2016), entitled “Work Requirements, Time Limits, and Work Incentives in TANF, SNAP and Housing Assistance,” acknowledged that WTW policies stress short-term gains, like rapid job placement and community service to maintain benefits over long-term goals, like education and training. In her research, “Getting Welfare to Work When Times Get Tough,” Melkote (2010) observed that while connecting assistance with employment makes sense, she also noted that it is difficult for participants to meet employment requirements when opportunities are limited. Additionally, she recognized that external factors over which recipients have no control can conversely affect employment opportunities and retention rates such as a poor job market (Melkote, 2010).
Parolin and Wiseman (2017) questioned the relevance of the work participation requirement to the stated goals of TANF. As they and other researchers pointed out, states are able to reduce their work participation rates by decreasing their caseloads, which incentivizes states to terminate cases or place individuals in jobs to get them off the rolls, regardless of their wages (Broughton, 2010, Parolin & Wiseman, 2017). In his article, “Bringing the Organization Back in: The Role of Bureaucratic Churning in Early TANF Caseload Declines in Illinois,” Broughton (2010) argued that administrators are therefore presented a clear-cut choice to either spend money for arduous and expensive job training and placement, or impose and enforce strict eligibility requirements that ultimately lead to case cancellations.

As Monnat and Bunyan (2008) noted in their article, “Capitalism and Welfare Reform: Who Really Benefits from Welfare-to-Work Policies?” sanctioning recipients, either temporarily or permanently, can result in a reduction or termination of benefits. The authors argued that recipients must accept any job, regardless of the wage, or they will lose their benefits. Cheng’s 2010 publication “Financial Self Sufficiency or Return to Welfare? A Longitudinal Study of Mothers among the Working Poor,” reported that states with restrictive policies in the form of sanctions had a higher rate of individuals falling off the TANF rolls only to become part of the working poor. Likewise, further research by Kim in his 2011 article, “The Effects of Welfare-To-Work Programs on Welfare Recipients' Employment Outcomes,” suggested that TANF recipients suffer after leaving the program, enduring job loss, financial hardship, and eventually returning to TANF until they maximize their 60 months of benefits.

Caseload Reductions

While Kim’s (2010) article, “Welfare-to-Work Programs and the Dynamics of TANF Use,” acknowledged economic-related factors involved in caseload declines, an abundance of
literature largely attributes the increased caseload decline seen in the late 1990s as a direct result of policy changes rather than economic factors (Broughton, 2010; Cheng, 2010; CRS, 2016; Kim, 2011, Loprest, 2012; Underwood, Axelsen & Friesner, 2010). Loprest (2012) maintained the flexibility states are given to sanction clients and impose time limits are causal factors for recipients coming on and off the rolls, as well as the caseload decline overall. Her research, entitled, “How Has the TANF Caseload Changed Over Time?” showed that while some states have only seen a caseload reduction of less than 25%, others, including Illinois, have seen reductions of over 80% (Loprest, 2012), indicating inconsistency in policy across states and may not be indicative of any measure of success among TANF recipients.

Hildebrandt and Stevens’ 2009 research, “Impoverished Women with Children and No Welfare Benefits: The Urgency of Researching Failures of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program,” as well as the Underwood et al. (2010) article entitled, “Cultural Filtering, Employment and Wages Under Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF),” claimed that states have a financial incentive to reduce caseloads as they are penalized if they do not reach work requirement numbers as well as incentivized to decrease cash assistance recipients so they can use those funds for other services, as previously discussed. In addition, every percentage point that a state reduces its cash assistance caseload, it receives a percentage point reduction in work participation rate requirements as well (Broughton, 2010).

IDHS experienced significant caseload reduction after TANF was implemented as illustrated through the program’s history of cancellations and reinstatements. In the first year of TANF alone, Illinois approved 133,238 cases, of which 91,000 were reinstatements, but cancelled 162,459, culminating in a total reduction of 29,221 caseloads. Over the next two years, IDHS would further reduce caseloads by another 68,337 cases (Broughton, 2010).
Consequently, within the first three years of the TANF program, Illinois managed to cut its caseload in half due to the continuous practice of closing cases and subsequently reinstating them.

Fortino (2016) referenced Liz Schott, a senior fellow at the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, in her article, “National Anti-Poverty Group 'Alarmed' by Caseload Decline in Illinois Welfare Program.” Schott ventured that Illinois’ caseload decline is due to the current administration and subsequent policy changes (Fortino, 2016). Data shows that from the end of 2014 until the middle of 2016, average monthly caseloads decreased from 49,028 to 34,658, a significant drop of 29%, whereas from 2009 to 2013, caseloads continually increased (Fortino, 2016). She noted the increase was most likely due to the Great Recession and as the economy improved, caseloads began to decrease. However, Fortino (2016) acknowledged that with an improving economy, it is expected for caseloads to decline but not at such an alarming rate, attributing the dramatic decrease to new policies or organizational culture changes.

As Jeounghee Kim (2011) noted in his article, “The Effects of Welfare-To-Work Programs on Welfare Recipients' Employment Outcomes,” WTW efforts have increasingly focused on the Labor Force Attachment (LFA) strategy which believes that non-working poor should seek and obtain any initial job, even if low-paying or unstable, in order to build up work history and skills. He suggested that previous attempts which focused on Human Capital Development (HCD) by developing an individual’s skills, knowledge, and experience have declined and since been replaced by LFA (Kim, 2011). LFA is a strategy that operates in the short-term, is less expensive, and more concerned about outcomes as it pertains to number of people working over the more expensive HCD strategy, which emphasizes long-term, sustainable outcomes with relatively expensive educational and job training components (Kim,
Kim’s (2011) study revealed that neither of these strategies produced any significant relationship to the number of individuals leaving TANF, however, there was evidence that recipients of HCD were more likely to retain employment than those in LFA (Kim, 2011). Wu et al. (2008), found that TANF recipients with greater human capital generally obtained higher paying jobs which were more stable. According to Underwood et al. (2010), TANF workforce participation requirements force recipients to immediately obtain employment rather than focusing on developing a recipient’s skills, knowledge and experience to obtain a higher-paying job. Furthermore, the authors stated that these demands, coupled with the State’s ability to sanction recipients if noncompliant, are problematic for TANF recipients, further pushing them into low wage, unstable jobs.

**Recidivism**

In his review, “Financial Self Sufficiency or Return to Welfare? A Longitudinal Study of Mothers Among the Working Poor,” Cheng (2010) identified that many welfare recipients leave government assistance only to return to the welfare rolls. This phenomenon, known as recidivism, refers to the incidence of welfare recipients leaving and returning to cash assistance within a short period of exiting the program. Acknowledging that initial caseloads decreased significantly in the early years of TANF, Cheng reported that there were also a large number of families returning to TANF, up to 33% (Cheng, 2010). According to Cheng (2010), these return rates are much the same as those seen prior to TANF, and suggest that factors outside the recipients control might be reasons for returning.

TANF recipients must adhere to strict rules that require they work a specific number of hours in order to receive their benefits and can be sanctioned if they fail to do so (Melkote, 2010). Work participation policy reflects an organizational belief that employment in and of
itself will end dependency on government assistance and create self-sufficiency (Monnat and Bunyan, 2008). However, Loprest (2012) noted that high rates of recidivism continue to occur among TANF clients. She also noted that high recidivism rates could indicate that families who leave TANF to subsequently return, do so because they were unable to find adequate work to reach self-sufficiency, having taken the first job available regardless of stability or wage rate. Alternately, she commented that lower return rates to TANF might suggest that clients also experienced challenges accessing TANF (Loprest, 2012).

Both Melkote (2010) and Kim (2011) both faulted the uncompromising focus on employment, regardless of low earnings, as the reason for frequent job loss among TANF recipients. Recipients commonly obtain employment in low-wage and low-skill jobs, which can be unstable. In the 2008 study, “Standing Still or Moving Up? Evidence from Wisconsin on the Long-Term Employment and Earnings of TANF Participants,” job stability for TANF recipients was recorded over a six year time frame (Wu et al., 2008). The study reported that 54% of participants had unstable or inconsistent employment while 58% reported unstable and inconsistent earnings as well (Wu et al., 2008). Melkote (2010) reported in “Getting Welfare to Work When Times Get Tough,” that TANF recipients frequently return to government assistance because they are forced to take low-wage, unstable jobs, thus continually returning to the TANF rolls until they have reached their time limit.

Autor (2014) recognized in his publication, “Skills, Education, and the Rise of Earnings Inequality Among the Other 99 Percent,” that a contributing factor for recipients continually returning to TANF is the disparity of wage and income that has increased over the past 30 years. While uneducated individuals could still earn a decent living and survive in the 1970s, inadequate wage growth since this era has made this goal nearly impossible for this population
CREATING SELF-SUFFICIENCY AMONG ILLINOIS TANF RECIPIENTS

(Bitler & Karoly, 2015). Goldin and Katz (2008) stated that possible factors contributing to this disparity include technological advancements, an increase of low-skill immigrants, and changes to minimum wage, to name a few.

Federal Devolution

The passage of PRWORA significantly shifted responsibility for administering TANF from federal oversight to the state level for the four program goals: cash assistance, work readiness, facilitating two-parent families, and out-of-wedlock pregnancy prevention (Parolin & Wiseman, 2017). King, Ayotte, Brown, and Capito (2016) claimed that the existing law allowed states to use block grant funds for a wide range of services and benefits, while proponents of the policy believe the newly state-run program resulted in significant caseload reduction and capitalized on the ability of states to better serve their communities (Sheely, 2012). Alternately, in Lawlor’s 2015 article, “Lawmakers Look to Cut Disincentives for Working” and Loprest’s 2012 article, “How Has the TANF Caseload Changed Over Time?” both argued that welfare reform gave too much discretion to states who mismanage TANF funds, using them for unintended services and benefits. A 2015 U.S. Government Accountability Office report by K. E. Brown, entitled “Temporary Assistance for Needy Families: An Overview of Spending, Federal Oversight, and Program Incentives,” stated that in 1997, only 23% of TANF funds were spent on other services than cash assistance, compared to 66% in 2013. Loprest (2012) reported that in 2009, other support services outside of cash assistance, such as child care, transportation, and emergency assistance, consumed 70% of TANF funds, but those who receive these supports are not counted as part of TANF caseload numbers. Meni and Wiseman (2017), in their publication “The TANF Resources Problem” cited in their 2014 study, that a mere 26% of allotted federal funds were used for TANF cash assistance.
The aforementioned report by Congressional Research Services (2016) pointed out that because TANF funds are capped, it benefits states to reduce their cash assistance caseloads because it looks good on paper. Additionally, since the TANF block grant is a set amount, states which reduce their caseload numbers can keep unspent federal funds for other state projects (Monnat & Bunyan, 2008) causing some to call the TANF block grant a slush fund which states use instead of their own funds (Skidmore, 2016). Meni and Wiseman (2017) claimed states look for ways to limit access to cash assistance in order to reduce caseloads because of financial gain and the ability to use the funds elsewhere, such as supports for working families rather than the poorest of the poor. Meni and Wiseman (2017) argued that states are failing those without income by creating barriers to receiving TANF resources.

Hahn et al. (2012), claimed flexibility given to states has resulted in inconsistency pertaining to the distribution of TANF benefits, further stating that determination of whether a family receives benefits, and if so how much, vary significantly from state to state. Hahn and her colleagues argued that TANF rules set by states directly reflect the attitude of the state toward assistance for those in poverty (2012). For example, in 2014, California spent 46% of funds on basic assistance, resulting in 65 of every 100 poor families receiving cash assistance. Compare this to Texas which used 7% of allotted funds for basic assistance, providing financial help for only five out of every 100 poor families (Schott, Pavetti, & Floyd et al., 2015). Schott et al. (2015), refer to a study by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities entitled “How States Use Federal and State Funds under the TANF Block Grant,” that supports this argument observing that in 2014, Illinois was one of 10 states which spent less than 10% of their TANF funds on cash assistance. They compared this to California that utilized 30% for cash assistance, and South Dakota that spent 62% of its TANF funds for the same purpose (Schott et al., 2015). A
subsequent study entitled, “State Fact Sheets: How States Have Spent Funds Under the TANF Block Grant,” by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (2017) revealed that Illinois only provided cash assistance to 18 of every 100 families in 2015 compared to 33 families in 2001. Furthermore, 63% of its TANF funds went to child care, compared to the national average of 17% (CBPP, 2017).

Hahn et al. (2012), reported that appropriated TANF funds continue to decrease with less than 33% used toward cash assistance and under 8% spent on work-related activities. According to the authors, over 16% is targeted for child care assistance and other social service programs. While they acknowledged the importance of other programs, their intent is to identify the fact that the poorest families are not receiving much needed assistance (Hahn et al., 2012).

Organizational Culture

Discussion of the role organizational culture plays in the delivery of public services to produce successful outcomes has become pervasive. Organizational change stresses the role culture plays if agencies are to realize transformational changes (Thaden & Robinson, 2012). However, Thaden and Robinson’s research, in their article “Staff Narratives: Promising to Change ‘Welfare as We know It’,” revealed that welfare organizations, while embracing policy-based goals to comply with PRWORA policies, have yet to embrace deeper changes which reflect value-based goals (2012). The authors stressed that agencies must focus on both qualitative and quantitative outcomes, striving to effectively and efficiently provide services that produce positive and lasting outcomes for their customers. However, they also claimed the majority of state welfare agencies are not emphasizing both outcomes to better serve individuals and facilitate a goal of client well-being (2012). Further research supports the belief that administrators which espouse a specific culture of philosophies, values, and expectations and
carry that culture throughout the organization will help to create a transformative change among staff (Taylor, Samblanet & Seale, 2011; Thaden & Robinson, 2012). In his article, “Contingent Government Workers and Labor Solidarity: The Case of Contract Welfare-To-Work Staff and Their Clients,” Ridzi (2007) also agreed that organizational culture which supports quantitative outcomes based on policy-based goals while promoting client self-sufficiency through advocacy and adoption of value-based goals needs to be internalized by all staff.

Thaden and Robinson’s (2012) research revealed that welfare organizations emphasize the importance of meeting an agency’s policy-based goals with little-to-no promotion of value-based goals, such as self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Their study concluded that staff’s perceptions of clients, whether they believed in the possibility of self-sufficiency or thought clients to be lazy or dishonest, were directly related to the type of service clients received (Thaden & Robinson, 2012). Another study identified that stereotypes about TANF recipients contributed to the failure of clients to achieve self-sufficiency (Taylor et al., 2011). In other words, one case worker might stress policy compliance while another emphasized self-sufficiency. Seale, Buck, and Parrota (2012) also found that state workers are apt to blame clients when program numbers are low, believing this to prove the program is failing. Rather than focus on long-term goals of client self-sufficiency and success, with programming in place to support these, staff continue to emphasize policy compliance to achieve quantitative outcomes.

Thaden and Robinson (2012) believed the work participation requirement, the unit of measure for an agency’s success, plays a large factor in this inability to create a cultural shift within an organization to focus on the well-being of the customer. According to Sheely (2012), states went overboard with the work first model by creating office environments which
emphasized work requirements and receipt of benefits based on those requirements.
Additionally, even in an environment where administrators promoted customer self-sufficiency, case workers continued to stress eligibility, timeliness, and accuracy, believing TANF reform to be no different than its predecessor, AFDC, in promoting self-sufficiency (Thaden & Robinson, 2012). In all of these cases, the agency had not successfully shifted the organizational culture to reflect that of value-based over policy-based goals.

In his study “Bringing the Organization Back In: The Role of Bureaucratic Churning in Early TANF Caseload Declines in Illinois,” Broughton (2010) attributed Illinois’ failure to a narrow-minded view of work participation rates rather than self-sufficiency. He claimed the State has chosen to take the less expensive, short-term route of restrictive policies and cancelling cases over more costly, long-term programs incorporating education and training. Previous strategies in place consisted of call-ins by case workers to recipients for redetermination follow-up. Case workers would cancel cases due to noncompliance if clients refused to answer the required questions, missed the scheduled call, or could not attend their assigned work program (Broughton, 2010).

In 2014, IDHS moved from traditional case management to a task-based structure in an effort to streamline offices. This new system was implemented to help clients access benefits and relieve some of the staff workload in order to provide better service delivery (Hahn, Golden & Compton, 2013). However, in the article “At Illinois DHS, New and Improved is ‘Inhumane’,” Black (2014) criticized the State’s move noting that instead of receiving personalized case management, cases are now handled by multiple case workers, each addressing a different step in the process. No accountability for client case management and an emphasis on
processing cases quickly results in inefficient and ineffective services based on policy-based goals (Black, 2014).

Patterson’s (2012) writing “Mission Dissonance in The TANF Program: Of Work, Self-Sufficiency, Reciprocity, and the Work Participation Rate,” claimed the implementation of the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 (DRA) further redirected the focus of TANF from self-sufficiency to caseload reduction, forcing states to reduce activities which developed the individual’s ability to be self-reliant and no longer dependent on government assistance. Other critics agreed the DRA was problematic for states that had to focus on meeting work participation requirements at the expense of helping families to move toward self-sufficiency through improved employment outcomes (Schott, Parrot, and Sweeney, 2007). States were decreasing caseloads regardless of how TANF recipients were progressing toward economic independence and self-sufficiency (Broughton, 2010).

The Office of Family Assistance’s 2012 report, “High Performance Measures-Work Related Measures,” ranked the performance of the 50 states relative to job entry, job retention, and earnings gain for moving TANF recipients into private sector employment. The report showed Illinois ranked last out of the 50 states in job entry with a 10% rate for recipients. Compare this to Indiana and Wisconsin that ranked 25th and 7th at a 29% and 34% rate, respectively. Illinois fared better with job retention rates, ranking it at 14 with 69%, Indiana at 10 with 70%, and Wisconsin at 39 with 62%. However, relative to earnings gains, Illinois once again ranked low at 39 (29%), Indiana at 29 (36%), and Wisconsin at number 7 (56%) (OFA, 2012). As Brodkin (2011) noted, quantitative measures, while necessary, do not adequately capture the qualities and care indicative of public service. Outcomes as an indicator of program success or failure cannot always be measured by numbers, scales, and tables.
Self-Sufficiency Models

Some states have realized this and are redesigning their TANF programs. In 2011, the District of Columbia Department of Human Services (DCDHS) introduced a new person-centric approach which emphasized both employment training and job retention. The program aimed to balance state resources while addressing client needs by empowering them to lead their own path to reaching self-sufficiency through skills and resource development, thus reducing their need for public assistance (Bern & Long, 2011). The DCDHS created a program designed to empower families, giving them the lead to create their future and success.

According to reporting from OFA under the Office of Administration for Children and Families, Illinois has yet to embrace this type of design (2015). Statistics show Illinois spent only 5% of TANF and MOE funds for cash assistance, 1.5% for Work, Education, and Training Activities, .7% for Work Supports and Supportive Services, and 63.1% for childcare assistance, compared to the District of Columbia, which spent 26.3% toward cash assistance, 14% for Work, Education, and Training Activities, .5% for Work Supports and Supportive Services and 22.3% for childcare assistance (OFA, 2015). These numbers demonstrate the DCDHS’ efforts to invest in a program design that is working toward employment, job retention, and self-sufficiency rather than work participation rates and reduced caseloads. Kathryn Edin (2017) from John Hopkins University further noted in her article, “Living on Less Than $2.00 a Day,” that self-sufficiency requires that individuals are integrated back into society, giving them dignity, rather than characterizing them as a statistic.

Family Independence Initiative

The Family Independence Initiative (FII) program has created a successful self-sufficiency model investing in low-income families (FII, 2018). Esra Burak (2011) observed in
“Spotlight on Family Independence Initiative,” that the FII philosophy is radically different than other approaches to working with low-income populations, asking families to take the initiative rather than telling them what to do as common in traditional case management. According to FII statistics, the model is working. FII reported that across the 10 states currently implementing it, the program boasts a 23% increase in monthly income and 60% drop in subsidies for participating families after two years in the program (FII, 2018). In David Bornstein’s 2017 article entitled “When Families Lead Themselves out of Poverty,” the author acknowledged the program’s unique approach which challenges the prevailing social services model of regular assistance, motivation, and advice from professionals. He further reported that the FII model cultivates an encouraging environment for participants while offering no service provision, and yet families are still able to improve their outcomes and change their lives (Bornstein, 2017). Greenlight Fund in Boston, an agency committed to innovative, entrepreneurial programs to help low-income individuals, supported this by noting that of the FII families who were previously living below the federal poverty line, 50% of them are now earning incomes above it (Greenlightfund.org, 2018). There is a demonstrated need for TANF to engage different strategies to meet the needs of TANF recipients if they are to successfully move off TANF and government assistance for good (Hildebrandt & Stevens, 2009).

Summary

Although previous research and literature have examined the successes and failures of TANF since its inception in 1996, problematic issues with the program prevail. Work participation rates and financial incentives for states to decrease caseloads have contributed to a system focusing on outcomes tied to numbers rather than quality of services. Work requirements and strict time limits push recipients into low paying, unstable jobs, creating a cycle of perpetual
government assistance for individuals who repeatedly return to the TANF rolls until their benefits expire. Most notably, the TANF program continues to have little success at helping families achieve long-term financial independence and self-reliance, thus no longer needing government assistance.

Researchers have offered a plethora of solutions to fix TANF. Some of the more prevalent options include: Requiring a larger percentage of state TANF resources be used for cash assistance; revising performance measures to create balance in work, child well-being, and family; creating incentives for states that demonstrate long-term job retention and higher wage earnings; decreasing states’ abilities to enact restrictive eligibility policies; increasing educational opportunities for recipients; and, expanding job training and skills development (Berns & Long, 2011; Floyd et al., 2017; Hahn et al., 2012). Although these may be viable solutions, none proposed a structure whereby welfare recipients learn to rely on themselves and their own support system in an effort to become self-reliant and self-sufficient, no longer relying on government support to assist them.

Current literature reveals gaps in the efficacy of the Illinois TANF program as it pertains to participants’ long-term self-sufficiency. While the literature notes the need for change, it does little to address the need for behavioral change within the agency that administers TANF. Research primarily focuses on two different perspectives; that of how states implement TANF, and that of TANF recipient outcomes. Overwhelmingly, the conversation emphasizes the quantitative side of service delivery and whether TANF dollars are distributed as efficiently as possible. However, this should not be the only measured outcome for administration of public services.
This thesis provides analysis of current TANF outcomes compared to those of other self-sufficiency models, a subject not researched. The research will provide a better understanding of self-sufficiency models and the importance of incorporating them into Illinois’ TANF program. Additionally, the research will expand discussion of organizational culture and the role it plays in providing quality service delivery to TANF recipients.

**Theoretical Approach and Methodology**

**Theoretical Approach**

Understanding both organizational and individual behavior has commonly been the focus of scholars of psychology, including Watson, Tolman, and Skinner (Krapfl, 2016). Behaviorism theory is predicated upon the idea that, initially, individuals begin with a clean slate, and behavior is shaped through both positive and negative reinforcement (Krapfl, 2016). Behaviorism theory is relevant to this study in that it provides a foundation for the way in which the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) delivers service as well as the manner in which Illinois TANF recipients respond to IDHS’ organizational culture and related programming. The success of the organization’s ability to provide efficient, and more importantly, effective services, as well as help to produce successful recipient outcomes, largely depends on the behavior of both sides of public assistance.

Statistics are often used in the evaluation of a program’s success. Public administrators focus on quantitative performance measures over qualitative because they are a measurable outcome providing a snapshot of program success that is closely tied to receipt of funding for many programs. However, continually hitting targeted numbers in the most cost-effective way is reminiscent of both Old Public Administration and New Public Management where alliance to the wishes of political leaders and special interest groups takes precedence over those of the
public to be served (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). The numbers do not capture the quality of services being provided, such as self-sufficiency and quality of life outcomes. Few researchers address the need for collaboration and community building around the needs of TANF recipients to better serve individuals to move toward self-sufficiency and financial independence, a perspective more aligned with New Public Service (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). A primary method of the New Public Service to achieve policy objectives is through building partnerships among public, non-profit, and private agencies to meet the needs of citizens (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2015). Nor is there abundant information addressing behavioral changes required to shift organizational culture from negative reinforcements into one of positive reinforcements.

For a public organization to adopt the New Public Service model, the change can only be accomplished through behavioral change. Understanding organizational functions through the relationships between agency and clients, as well as public servants and clients, is imperative to changing behavior. An organization that truly recognizes its role in providing effective public services also knows how staff behavior affects the behavior of those it serves. The causal relationship between qualitative variables relative to the effectiveness of services and quantitative variables more indicative of efficiency measurements is directly related, and significantly impacted by, organizational behavior. If applied to IDHS, internal behavior modification through positive reinforcement would help to shape positive behavior of both staff and clients, thus changing the organizational culture as well as the behavior of TANF recipients. Additionally, understanding the ability to influence behavior through positive reinforcements suggests that IDHS programs should thus focus on this narrative as well.

Government’s role in doling out taxpayer’s money requires that administrators deliver services in the most efficient and effective manner possible. Relative to TANF, this would
indicate that those in need are receiving quality service in the form of appropriate government assistance in order to attain self-sufficiency within the allotted timeframe. Quantitatively, government is to accomplish this utilizing tax dollars as efficiently as possible.

Federally-mandated work participation rates, strict time limits, and financial incentives for those states which meet targeted numbers all factor into the manner in which each state delivers TANF services and allocates benefits. Alternately, the research shows that fewer TANF-eligible individuals are receiving benefits, and direct cash assistance has decreased to the states. However, very little research addresses the need for a cultural shift in thinking at the organizational level. Research has failed to consider other options outside of increasing TANF funding, reducing the work participation rates, or improving training programs. While these solutions might be viable, there still exists a need for a long-term solution toward self-reliance which the current “work activity” mandate does not address. Additionally, the research shows, that among states, Illinois fares very poorly. Unlike other states, it has not even begun to consider other means for assisting TANF recipients toward self-sufficiency.

**Methodology**

This study provides a broad overview of the critical elements deficient in the current TANF model for low-income families in Illinois. Based on analysis of data and case studies from current literature, the researcher intends to identify deficiencies in the current system and Illinois’ failure to successfully assist TANF recipients with self-sufficiency. The author proposes a recommendation for a new component to be introduced into the TANF program that was guided by research of other organizations who are currently implementing self-sufficiency models.
The main concepts examined in this paper are the relationship between the current outcomes of the Illinois TANF program relative to service delivery and organizational culture, and what steps the State can take to achieve a more self-sustaining model for TANF recipients. The conjoint aim of government is to provide effective service delivery under the umbrella of efficient policy and procedures. However, these theories are not always compatible nor do they always align in government. Thus, this researcher decided upon a mixed methodology approach using both qualitative and quantitative measurements in this study.

Quantitative measurement tools such as state poverty rates, job retention rates, and participant wage earnings are significant because they illustrate the continual failure of the TANF program to assist in lifting people out of poverty. Likewise, statistical information regarding federal mandates for states and TANF recipients illustrate the status of Illinois’ current TANF program and how the State compares to the rest of the nation. Areas of analysis include:

1. TANF and MOE spending
2. State work participation rates
3. Caseload reductions
4. State poverty rates relative to TANF-to-Poverty ratios
5. TANF recipient work related measures
6. “High Counter” numbers - recipients who have been on TANF for at least 48 months.

Although the researcher acknowledges the importance of quantitative measurements and their role in public assistance programming, qualitative measurements were the primary factor relative to the theoretical framework of this study. Qualitative measurement is valuable for investigating complicated issues through human experience and testing a variety of variables. Within this research, self-sufficiency models such as the Family Independence Initiative, are the
independent variable. Dependent variables such as improved job retention and decreased recidivism among TANF recipients are direct results of the successful implementation of the independent variable. Program success was determined by the following:

1. Measurable increase/decrease in participant monthly earnings.
2. Measurable increase in social capital among program participants (i.e. assisting others in their community to enhance quality of life) (FII, 2016).
3. Measurable reduction of participant subsidies in TANF.

Analyzing and measuring the effectiveness of self-sufficiency models compared to the current TANF model is imperative in understanding the need for policy and procedural change. In order to narrow the scope of the study, the researcher focused on qualitative measurements of existing programs as well as studies related to individual empowerment that included the following:

1. The value of participant empowerment through enhanced self-efficacy and skill development (Maton, 2008).
2. District of Columbia Department of Human Services TANF program
3. The Family Independence Initiative
4. Multnomah County Department of County Human Services

Statistical data used for the quantitative analysis was collected from several sources, including the Illinois Department of Human Services database, the Center on Budget Policy and Priorities, Congressional Research Services reports, the U.S. Census Bureau, U. S. Government Accountability Office, and the Office of Family Assistance, a federal administering agency of grant programs. This provided an overall statistical comparison of the current TANF model among various states, including Illinois, relative to federal mandates and program performance.
Additionally, a review of the scholarly literature provided further quantitative data that was selected for use as important variables of the study. Illinois’ statistical data was compared to neighboring states to identify notable differences and discrepancies. Data was collected over the entire duration of the TANF program (from 1996 to the present) in order to demonstrate program effectiveness over time.

Qualitative measurements offer different perspectives on TANF policy and its future thus impacting the way in which administrators provide service delivery and define program and participant success. Observation of the Illinois TANF program, the Family Independence Initiative, the Multnomah Stability Initiative, and the District of Columbia’s Department of Human Services TANF program provided a comparison of TANF’s current outcomes measures and how they differ from programs which are focusing on self-sufficiency outcomes for participants. Scholarly articles were reviewed to understand the relationship between successful outcomes and the empowerment of individuals through “individual development, community betterment, and positive social change” (Maton, 2008, pg. 5) in order to establish relevance to the self-sufficiency model.

Limitations

Limited studies have been done relative to organizational culture within state TANF programs and among administrators and staff. While generalization of these concepts is widely discussed in literature, minimal research was found of individual states who had undertaken and provided analysis of their organizational culture and group-based beliefs. The researcher was unable to find any such information about Illinois and TANF and therefore, utilized studies from other states.
Findings

Analysis of the TANF program for Illinois as it compares to other states determined the effectiveness of TANF as a safety net for poorer citizens of the State. Evaluation of the effectiveness and efficiency of Illinois’ TANF program is based upon the State’s ability to meet the needs of low-income families with current funding streams. Further analysis of self-sufficiency programs revealed alternative methods of service delivery for low-income populations to assist them in reaching self-sufficiency.

TANF and MOE Spending

Although the TANF block grant is purposed for cash assistance to low-income individuals with children, increasingly, states are using it as a flexible funding stream to support a variety of other supportive services. Since TANF was enacted in July of 1997, spending patterns reflect a decrease in cash assistance caseloads and an increase in spending on supportive services, such as child welfare, child care, and tax credits.

Figure 1: TANF and MOE Spending by Category: Illinois Selected Years FY 1997 - FY 2016

Figure 1 compares Illinois’ spending of both federal TANF and State MOE funds over the years. In 1997, over 86% of TANF and MOE funds went to basic assistance, which is cash assistance for families with children. However, by FY 2016, that number decreased to less than
CREATING SELF-SUFFICIENCY AMONG ILLINOIS TANF RECIPIENTS

5% (Administration of Children and Families, 2017). Additionally, while percentages of funds allotted for work and training activities has historically been low, they continue to decrease as well.

TANF recipients may receive benefits for no more than a combined total of 60 months. Further analysis of the state’s ‘high counters’ reveals the percentage of TANF recipients who remain on TANF rolls for over 48 months. Reports taken from 2011 and 2016 demonstrate an increase in the percentage of individuals remaining on the rolls for longer periods of time over the years (Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Temporary Assistance for Needy Families - Active Cases</th>
<th>Percent Distribution of Head of Household Who Received Assistance</th>
<th>By Number of Months Countable Toward the Federal Time Limit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NUMBERS OF MONTHS COUNTABLE TOWARD THE FEDERAL TIME LIMIT</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STATE</td>
<td>Head of Household</td>
<td>01-12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY2011</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>14,270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY2016</td>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>5,456</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Percentage Distribution (Source: Office of Family Assistance, 2017)

In 2011, 47.7% of individuals were receiving benefits between one and twelve months compared to only 23.7% in 2016 (OFA, 2017). However, in 2011, there was a steady decline in the percentage of individuals receiving assistance over the various timeframes. Unlike 2011, 2016 shows that more and more individuals are staying on TANF for longer periods. Whereas only 11.8% were still on the rolls for 37 months or more in 2011, 32% of recipients were still on TANF at the same monthly timeframes in 2016 (OFA, 2017). This indicates that recipients are remaining on TANF longer due to a variety of reasons, including inability to find or maintain a job, insufficient wages, or other barriers that inhibit permanent employment.
Work Participation Rate

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services stipulates a work participation requirement (WPR) that is the only measurable outcome for which states are accountable. The WPR gauges how successful states are in involving TANF recipients in specific work activities and stipulates that a specific share of TANF recipients are required to participate in those activities for at least 30 hours a week and 20 hours for households with children between one and six years old (Lower-Basch, 2018). States are required to have 50 percent of all households and 90 percent of two-parent households engaged in designated activities. Table 2 refers to the change in work participation rates from 2015 to 2016 for Illinois, neighboring states, and a sampling of other states around the country. Relative to work participation rates, Illinois not only met, but exceeded the requirements, increasing rates by 6.5% from 2015 to 2016 at the All Families Rate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STATE</th>
<th>ALL-FAMILIES RATE</th>
<th>TWO-PARENT FAMILIES RATE</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FY 2015 Rate</td>
<td>FY 2016 Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>60.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
<td>20.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>65.9%</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>29.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>36.4%</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Massachusetts</td>
<td>59.8%</td>
<td>64.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>65.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
<td>50.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhode Island</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
<td>42.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>72.4%</td>
<td>71.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Changes in Combined Work Participation Rate
(Source:https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ofa/wpr2016table01c.pdf)
Previous rankings show that in 2010, Illinois only reached a participation rate of 49.1% (OFA, 2017). Subsequent years show higher and lower rates resulting in somewhat of a consistent rise in Illinois’ work participation rates, unlike other states such as Colorado, Missouri, and Rhode Island that are well below the required rates.

**Caseload Reductions**

However, these numbers may not truly reflect Illinois’ success with WPR’s. The original TANF law included a caseload reduction credit (CRC), which decreases the target rates that states are required to reach by a percentage point for every one percent of caseload declines (Lower-Basch, 2018). Each state has an individual target rate which consists of the mandated rates minus the credit for reducing caseloads. Statistics from IDHS reveal significant caseload declines for Illinois, falling from a monthly high in January of 2013 of 51,464 cases to 25,791 as of September, 2017. Illinois reduced caseloads by more than 50%, thus receiving credit of 50%, which means the State also reduced its target work participation requirement. Therefore, although Illinois is meeting the requirements, the State’s WPR’s are considerably lower than the 50% requirement. A 2010 study by the Urban Institute further illustrates the decline noting that from 1997 to 2010, Illinois experienced a decrease in caseloads of 88.8%, the highest in the nation (Loprest, 2012).

Furthermore, the federal funding also came with a Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirement which mandated that states spend 80 percent of what they spent in 1994 on TANF components including cash assistance, emergency assistance, childcare expenses, and job training. However, TANF policy allows states to count almost any state expenses that meet TANF purposes, enabling them to easily meet their MOE requirements by counting activities that often do not correlate to welfare reform activities. This frees up state funds previously
allotted for TANF/MOE, giving states the ability to implement programs solely funded by the state that are not tied to the federal work requirements. Therefore, the state can omit the share of cases which are supported with these excess funds, further reducing their caseload numbers.

According to author, Peter Germanis (2016), Illinois is adept at using this method. Known as “the swap”, the State has moved over more than 50% of cash assistance cases into programs that are solely state-funded. In 2015, the monthly averages of solely state-funded cases (21,611) outnumbered actual TANF cash assistance cases (18,643). Additionally, of the 1,461 cases closed in 2016, IDHS reported that 83.6% were closed for reasons listed as “other” rather than specified causes including employment, marriage, timing out, excess income, or failure to comply (OFA, 2017).

**Poverty Rates and Ratios**

Caseload declines seem a paradox given that the number of Illinois families living in extreme poverty has increased since 2012 as illustrated in Figure 2. Extreme poverty is characterized as individuals living at 50% below the federal poverty level. Per the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), the total population of Illinois for 2016 was 12,548,538 and in that same year, a little over 800,000 people were living in extreme poverty, up from 769,637 in 2012.

![Figure 2: Extreme Poverty in Illinois (Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates)](image-url)
Likewise, the temporary safety net that TANF is designed to provide is eroding. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) uses the TANF-to-poverty ratio (TPR) to understand changes in TANF’s role in helping low-income families meet their basic needs and is an indicator of the responsiveness of TANF (Floyd et al., 2017). A fall in the TPR ratio illustrates that fewer low-income individuals are receiving TANF for which they are eligible.

Table 3 illustrates the number of families who received cash assistance for every 100 families with children in poverty between 1995, the year before TANF began, and the change 10 years later in 2005, and into 2016 for various states. As evident, in 1995, of every 100 Illinois families, 88.3 were receiving cash assistance. However, 10 years after the implementation of TANF, only 17.1 families of every 100 received TANF assistance, and by the end of 2016, that fell again to 15.8. This reduction occurred while the poverty rate consistently remained between 12 and 15 percent over this same period (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). As demonstrated in Figure 3, Illinois is reaching fewer low-income families, ranking among 13 states who are, only

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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alaska</td>
<td>128.1</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>27.3</td>
<td>28.6</td>
<td>29.6</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>30.4</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>-5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>96.8</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>64.6</td>
<td>65.5</td>
<td>-0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>72.1</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>26.3</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>31.7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>7.1</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>17.1</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>17.7</td>
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reaching 10-20 families per every 100.
Work Related Measures

After the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, High Performance Bonuses were eliminated which previously rewarded states if they met targeted work participation rates. However, regardless of bonus compensation, the OFA continued to annually rank the ability of each state’s TANF program to move recipients into private sector employment as recorded by Work-Related Measures. The three areas evaluated are job entry, job retention, and earnings gain. A sampling of states throughout the country, for years 2012 and 2014, demonstrates the variance in performance and offers a comparison of Illinois against neighboring states as well as those ranking the highest and the lowest in these categories. As demonstrated in Table 4, Illinois continues to perform poorly in both job entry and earnings gain, producing better outcomes in the area of job retention for recipients.
Table 4. Work Related Measures (Source: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/resource-library/search?tag=5210)

The state poverty rates, job retention rates, and participant wage earnings are significant because they illustrate the ability of state TANF programs to assist in lifting people out of poverty. Likewise, statistical information regarding federal mandates for states and TANF recipients illustrate the status of Illinois’ current TANF model and how the State compares to the rest of the nation. As illustrated, Illinois ranks among one of the worst among the sample states in two of the three areas. Compared to neighboring states, highlighted in blue, Indiana, Iowa, and Wisconsin fare somewhat better than Illinois which continues to demonstrate difficulty in job entry for recipients as well as earnings gain. Although a higher percentage are able to maintain their jobs, earnings gain indicates they are making lower, and possibly unsustainable, wages than recipients in other states.
As the data suggests, increased poverty rates, decreased TANF resources for financial assistance, work and training, and fewer households receiving TANF assistance have left the safety net for low-income individuals in Illinois marginal at best. Because of this, there is a need to further examine different methods for meeting the needs of this population.

**Participant Empowerment**

As the research demonstrates, TANF has been ineffectual at moving families out of poverty in every state. Research completed during the findings phase of this thesis revealed much discussion around the value of community empowerment through enhanced self-efficacy and skill development and its effect on individual empowerment. As defined in the article, “Empowering Community Settings: Agents of Individual Development, Community Betterment, and Positive Social Change,” empowerment is defined as:

\[
\text{A group-based, participatory, developmental process through which marginalized or oppressed individuals and groups gain greater control over their lives and environment, acquire valued resources and basic rights, and achieve important life goals and reduced societal marginalization. (Maton, 2008, pg. 5)}
\]

Maton (2008) proposes that certain organizational characteristics are important in facilitating member empowerment with community settings (Table 5). His theme continually comes back to relationships, collaboration, and valuing each individual as a crucial member of the community. The group-based belief system defines expected behavioral patterns which are intended to create the desired outcomes (Maton, 2008). It inspires change, capitalizes on members’ strengths, and encourages members to focus beyond themselves, joining in a shared vision that is a larger purpose collectively (Maton, 2008).
The group-based belief is one researchers have studied relative to public administration of the TANF program as well. In their analysis of both structural and individual-level barriers to self-sufficiency, authors Taylor, Gross, & Towne-Roese (2016) found that public administrators varied greatly in which barriers prevented self-sufficiency. While some managers believed the structural challenges of an overbearing bureaucratic system created barriers to comprehensive, effective social work, other managers felt recipients needed to overcome their own individual barriers in order to become self-sufficient (Towne-Roese et al., 2016). Both approaches speak to the need for organizations to realign their priorities and effect policies that promote client performance measures, not solely based on numbers. Embracing the group-based belief system and valuing collaboration among administrators, staff, and recipients can improve both quantitative and qualitative measures and better address the structural and individual barriers preventing self-sufficiency. In their publication “The New ‘Lazy’- Structure and Agency in Managers' Discussions of Welfare Clients' Motivation,” Taylor, Samblanet, and Seale (2011) examined how program managers who direct TANF policy justify failures of the agency’s goal of self-sufficiency. In their study, they discovered that almost half of TANF managers blamed program failures on clients’ lack of motivation. Of those same managers, some also recognized
that structural barriers faced by clients factored in to client’s progress while others put blame solely on the client (Taylor et al., 2011).

**Self-Sufficiency Models**

One TANF program which has recognized the importance of participant involvement and collaboration is the District of Columbia Department of Human Services (DCDHS). In 2010, DCDHS rolled out the TANF Universal Service Delivery Model, a person-centric approach to service delivery, addressing each family’s individual needs, with the goal of moving to self-sufficiency (Berns & Long, 2011). The program asks for extensive input from the client to determine level of need and make appropriate referrals to services. DCDHS’ new approach puts families in control for reaching self-sufficiency by focusing on four areas:

- Job placement
- Work readiness
- Barrier removal and work support
- Barrier removal and financial support

In support of these four goals, the agency has recognized the need to allocate resources which address recipient barriers, facilitate cross-agency collaboration for comprehensive service planning, and engage community-based resources for supplemental supports, if needed. DCDHS recorded baseline data prior to piloting their new service delivery with promising initial results (Figure 4). Initial numbers showed significant increases in the percentage of families meeting at least some hours of the work participation rate, rising from 18% to 56%, somewhat higher than the program improvement goal of 50%. Likewise, 35% of participants were meeting the work participation requirement, up from 3% prior to program implementation, and 20% higher than the program improvement goal of 15% (Berns & Long, 2011).
Much like DCDHS, the Family Independence Initiative (FII) believes that families who actively participate in their own plan through input and decision-making, will experience better outcomes. Additionally, FII supports the group-based system as well, understanding the importance of community, and as an organization, is leading the way in changing the stereotype of low-income families. Through technology and investing in families, FII is capitalizing on the strength and potential of low-income communities. FII maintains that those who cycle in and out of poverty, such as those on and off the TANF rolls, do not do so because they are lazy and lack initiative. Rather, FII argues that these individuals lack the resources to permanently raise themselves out of poverty. Instead, they cycle through governmental systems which, although well-intentioned, are insufficient for reaching self-sufficiency (FII, 2018). According to FII, 75% of low-income families are able to move above the federal poverty line within four years, but within five years, 50% fall back under (FII, 2018). FII claims three crucial elements contribute to the plight of those in poverty: 1) Lack of information for creative ways to reach financial and social stability; 2) resource gaps which provide only limited access to affordable
capital; and, 3) focusing on individual achievement rather than the power of communities to lift people out of poverty (FII, 2018).

FII’s program model is unique. Families are accountable for their own outcomes and are provided technology to record data providing FII with performance measures. Families, not case workers, create their own goals and entrust their community to help them through their journey toward self-sufficiency. Instead of professionals, agencies, and organizations directing families’ paths, families unite and empower themselves, and are entrusted to improve their situation as they deem appropriate. The more initiative a family takes, the more resources FII makes available to them. This is altogether different than the TANF model which reduces resources when recipients show initiative by obtaining employment. In FII, families continue to receive resources which aid them in accelerating their progress (FII, 2018). FII is an organization where participating families have enjoyed great success. The values of the agency align closely with those of Maton’s group-belief system understanding the importance of community, relationships, inspiring change, value of member knowledge, learning, and a shared vision.

Figure 5: Monthly Income (Source: https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/ofa/fy16_characteristics.pdf)
A comparison of measurable outcomes for Illinois TANF recipients to FII assists in understanding the success and failures of individual program models. Income data for Illinois TANF families reveals that from 2000 to 2016, recipients have seen very little change in monthly earned income, and in fact, earned income averages have decreased by just over 21% (Figure 5).

However, comparison of statistical data from FII reports that, on average, after the first two years engaged in the program, families increase their monthly income by 23%. Additionally, these families cite a 60% decrease in government subsidies, such as SNAP and TANF in the same timeframe (FII, 2018). In contrast, Monnat et al. (2008), revealed that strict TANF sanctioning policies require recipients to take any job, no matter the wage, in order to avoid a reduction of benefits or have their case closed. Therefore, this inhibits stable and quality employment which pays sustainable wages and allows individuals to stay off TANF (Monnat et al., 2008). Chi-Fang Wu’s 2011 study analyzed the earnings and employment trajectories for welfare recipients over a period of four years (Table 6). His studies report that although 39% of those surveyed experienced continuous employment, another 16% were continuously unemployed. Additionally, over half of the sample, 55%, had little change in their employment situation during the four years. Although 65% of the sample was experiencing some form of employment success, another 35% was not. On the other hand,
37% of recipients experienced continuous earnings, but almost 26% of them were earning low wages. Likewise, 41% of recipients experienced either decreased, unstable, or inconsistent earnings (Wu, 2011).

FII also measures outcomes in social capital among program participants, an element not accounted for within the TANF system. Social capital refers to a community building platform, which empowers FII families to be in control of their own lives (FII, 2018). Through the use of technology, families build connections and share their experiences with one another, creating a knowledgeable and supportive community. The technology platform allows participants to connect with networks of peers, set goals, enter monthly journaling, and access flexible dollars via a funding source called “UpTogether” (FII, 2018). FII reports that because of the social capital and access to these resources, participants were able to increase their annual income by $5,856 and their assets by $5,031.

FII reports that it operates sites in six different states across the country and partners with agencies in four other states. In sites where FII is the lead, the agency engages in community outreach to find five to eight households who are interested in working with FII. These initial families then begin to self-organize and recruit within their community to bring in other group members. Under the FII philosophy, families are left to take the initiative and create their own plans and goals. Once those goals are decided, FII provides encouragement and support with matching funds. Generally, funds are from $25 to $30 for each activity toward the goal. During monthly meetings with FII, families are required to report their plans and goals and earn more money for each activity while making progress (Burak, 2011).

For those sites where FII partners with another agency, the process is similar but the partnering agency is responsible for outreach to gain interest and bring families to the initial
meeting. Additionally, funding for the project is largely on the partnering agency rather than FII, which is the case when FII is the lead and opens up its own site.

Across the nation, FII participant outcomes are similar, experiencing upward economic mobility and moving themselves out of poverty, evident by the aggregate data outcomes taken from FII’s website. Multnomah County Department of County Human Services (DCHS) has witnessed initial successes through their partnership with FII and the Oregon Department of Human Services TANF program. Multnomah’s project goal was to create peer groups for families who were on TANF rolls for more than 36 months (Multnomah County, 2018) through implementation of FII’s project model to help families reach self-sufficiency. DCHS Program Director, Jana Stone, stated the agency’s goal was to engage 100 families in the program during the two year pilot program but within one year, they had already reached their goal (Jana Stone, 2018).

Analysis

The primary goals of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act were the reduction of welfare dependency and increased economic self-sufficiency among recipients. With the replacement of the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, TANF was implemented, stressing time limits for public assistance coupled with strict enforcement of employment requirements. Overwhelmingly, TANF’s outcomes are measured in terms of quantifiable data and ignore outcomes that evaluate quality of life. Avoiding the larger conversation around creating an organizational culture and program model which helps low-income families create self-sufficiency only continues to produce the same results.
By conducting a comparison of measurable outcomes for Illinois TANF with other states, the researcher examined statistical data from multiple sources. This provided information that allowed for the researcher to analyze the performance success of the State’s program relative to other states. Additional discussion of the need to align organizational culture to support and encourage self-sufficiency models and improve long-term outcomes for Illinois TANF recipients shed light on the importance this plays in service delivery. Policymakers must understand the importance both quantitative and qualitative information play as indicators of policy success. Choosing one and not the other ignores crucial information necessary for continued policy creation, decision-making, and service delivery. The conversation must incorporate both when measuring outcomes and the impact policies have on individuals.

**Quantitative Outcome Measures**

The findings of this study expose the deficiencies in Illinois’ TANF program and the inability of the State to effectively lift low-income families out of poverty. Research and data analysis of important performance measures reveal a system more concerned about reaching target numbers rather than improving lives.

Significant reductions in cash assistance indicate that fewer and fewer families in poverty are receiving the assistance they need in Illinois. Coupled with this, are findings that more families are staying on TANF for longer periods suggesting that recipients experience barriers to both obtaining and maintaining employment. The research recognizes that Illinois is outperforming many states relative to work participation rates (WPR), but the study also acknowledged that incentives, such as caseload reduction credits, give states the ability to decrease the work participation rate and therefore data reflected in this study might not accurately depict Illinois’ success relative to WPRs. The research further indicated that even
though poverty rates were increasing in Illinois, TANF dollars were reaching fewer low-income families. These statistics support Illinois’ continued practice of redirecting federal funds from cash assistance and using them for other services as previously specified. Lastly, analysis of work-related measures shows Illinois TANF recipients doing well relative to job retention, but weak in both job entry and earnings gain. However, even as job retention percentages increased, earnings gain percentages decreased at a higher rate. TANF recipients appear to endure economic uncertainty and household insecurity more frequently than those receiving services under AFDC (Pimpare, 2012). Even though low-income families earn more when employed, a welfare check is something they can count on, unlike employment, especially given the demands and barriers vulnerable populations face which make it difficult to maintain a job.

The data demonstrates Illinois’ ineffectiveness at helping clients create economic stability and independence, thus no longer needing government assistance. The research shows that reduced rolls are not an indicator of financial independence for recipients but rather a result of the State’s efforts to maintain funding and avoid penalties through reduced WPRs and decreased caseloads. The State continues to operate in a culture which places priority on performance outcomes that are capable of being measured or counted, but even those numbers do not favor Illinois.

The researcher has found negligible evidence of considerable and sizable impacts of TANF other than short-term employment, minimal earnings increases, and caseload declines (Pimpare, 2012). Although quantifiable data is the basis for policymaking and policy analysis, it ignores qualitative data such as improved quality of life that recipients gain due to services available to them (Pimpare, 2012). The “how” of policy implementation does not seem to matter as long as performance measures are met (Brodkin, 2011). However, organizations cannot solely
focus on meeting target numbers to ensure funding and ignore whether or not their work is positively impacting lives.

Due to the flexibility given states under PRWORA, significant differences exist among the state TANF programs. States can use “carrots” that consist of policies to reward work by increasing benefits or services and “sticks” that punish individuals for noncompliance with program policy (Sheely, 2012). The research in this study indicates that Illinois has chosen to use the stick much more often than the carrot when it comes to policy implementation. However, devolution enables states to be innovative with federal funding and provides an opportunity to create and implement new policies which better meet the needs of TANF clients. Thus, if Illinois was so inclined, the state could initiate a new model within the program to help recipients improve self-sufficiency outcomes.

Organizational Shift

However, before any program change can occur, a cultural shift must take place within the organization that values the abilities, strengths, and resourcefulness of low income families. Public administrators must recognize and utilize the influence managers have on changing and cultivating the dynamics of an organization such as communication of goals and implementation of policy. Rather than solely focusing on eligibility concerns, managers have the ability to realign priorities tied to policy by changing performance measures and ensuring front line workers are on board as well.

Within the organization’s cultural shift, the belief system must change as well. Programs and policies put in place for the poor are largely based on needs, discouraging initiative and further contributing to the stereotype that low income individuals are lazy and perceived as
liabilities. Consequently, services are designed which reinforce this belief and perception of those in poverty.

An organizational belief system that values TANF recipients as resourceful and motivated encourages initiative and progress. Findings during the research phase did not uncover any evidence that Illinois is adopting any such culture shift or belief system as evidenced by the State’s focus on caseload declines and lowering WPRs. However, if the State is to make any progress in raising TANF families out of poverty, then it must begin the hard work of changing the organization’s culture to one which promotes quality of life outcomes and not merely meeting target numbers. Believing in TANF families and their abilities to create a new future is the first step.

The organizational shift is what opens the door to try something different. If Illinois administrators can learn to trust the initiative of those in poverty and invest in their capabilities and resourcefulness, then the State can truly create a program model which empowers these families, enabling them to move themselves out of poverty (FII, 2018). The evidence confirms that substantial progress occurs for low-income families who are engaged in a different model.

**Qualitative Outcome Measures**

The Department of Human Services in both the District of Columbia and Oregon realized transforming their TANF programs was necessary to improve client outcomes. While D.C. chose to adopt and implement changes internally, Oregon partnered with Multnomah County and FII to incorporate a new model within the TANF program. Both models give low-income families a voice and greater participation and input relative to their own needs and goals. Furthermore, facilitating cross-agency collaboration engages a wide range of government agencies, community-based organizations, and the private sector to create a network of resources
and a foundation of community to address the complex issues and barriers which impact low-income families. Participant input and feedback coupled with network and resource building within a community is helping these two agencies, not only address the complex needs of TANF families, but break down the barriers they face by providing tools and resources for them to use and build on.

Among the programs that appear to be the most progressive is that of the Family Independence Initiative. The uniqueness of the FII project is not only the manner in which it engages and works with individuals but the overwhelming success of participants. Innovative technology and a philosophy which transfers responsibility and accountability of success back to those in need have produced significant results. Participants across the nation continue to see significant improvement in their financial situation and many are able to leave government assistance altogether (FII, 2018). This is not generally true of low-income families. Of the 75% who are able to move above the federal poverty line, 50% fall back beneath it within five years (FII, 2018). FII understands that families work hard to pull themselves out of poverty and increase assets. However, when confronted with a financial crisis, they are forced to deplete those resources, setting them back and sometimes placing them under the federal poverty line once again. Oftentimes, one financial crisis is not an isolated event. For a family in poverty, the inability to finance a car repair could lead to a job termination, loss of income, and eventually eviction for failure to pay the rent.

It is perplexing to see that even when the numbers indicate program deficiencies, TANF policy remains the same. Much of the current literature and government sponsored reports (GAO, 2015) have focused on weaknesses in current TANF policy. Consequently, gaps in policy creation and implementation are clearly found within the current TANF model and prove
useful in assessing weaknesses and determining a benchmark for future policymaking. The practice of linking fiscal incentives to performance measures has shifted priorities away from families and toward strategic ways in which states can maintain their funding.

Integrating a person-centric, participant-led model into a bureaucratic and cumbersome organization will undoubtedly take time and effort. The research did not uncover any advancement in this direction for the Illinois TANF program, such as witnessed in D.C. and Oregon. However, the State’s performance measures indicate that reorganization and prioritization of the program is overdue.

**Recommendations**

The ultimate goal in developing a successful TANF program is to create a supportive environment aimed at alleviating barriers and facilitating success through resources and community building. Change within an organization begins with a cultural shift in organizational philosophy and beliefs. For Illinois and the TANF program, this means trusting that TANF families are able to raise themselves out of poverty. By strengthening social networks, encouraging support systems, and providing access to resources, it is possible to change the narrative of low-income families.

The researcher proposes that IDHS conduct a survey of administrators and staff to assess their individual and group-based beliefs and to gain better understanding of organizational culture as it pertains to client barriers. As discovered in this research, no such study exists, and in order to move forward and create an organizational shift, it is imperative that assessment of the current environment take place in order to understand the current baseline within the organization.
The researcher further proposes the State of Illinois implement the Family Independence Initiative model into the current IDHS TANF program as a component of the work activity requirements for recipients. The following review supports recommendations for Illinois for adoption of the FII model. Key elements include, but are not exclusive to: 1) Partnerships, 2) Funding, and 3) Implementation.

**Partnerships**

The opportunity to partner with outside agencies and organizations serves as the foundation for implementing the FII model within the TANF program. Currently, FII partners with several community-based and government agencies but only one is specifically targeting TANF families. The project with Multnomah County Department of County Human Services (DCHS) allows for the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) to better serve TANF families through a collaborative model. FII provides support to the County via a liaison in order to assist with program implementation and follow through. The County is responsible for outcomes for ODHS TANF families, and works closely with the State during initial outreach and program creation.

As with any government agency, the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) is a bureaucratic institution. Partnerships and collaboration through outsourcing services relieves some of the responsibility and demands on the State and utilizes the resources and capabilities of other agencies to create, promote, and implement such a model. This researcher recommends that IDHS follow the example of Oregon and Multnomah County by partnering with both an outside agency and the Family Independence Initiative to implement the FII model within the IDHS TANF program.
**Funding**

The Multnomah project operates through a combination of funding from ODHS and grant funds awarded to the County. ODHS provided funding which the County was required to match through grants. Normally, FII works with families over a two-year timeframe. However, the Oregon grant was only for one year, therefore, the County was forced to accelerate its efforts to meet grant numbers. Under the grant, the County proposed to serve 100 families. The combined funding was used to pay for technology, a large component of the FII program, and client subsidies, another important aspect in assisting families to improve their outcomes.

As previously discussed, Illinois already redirects a large portion of federal funding to services other than cash assistance. The State’s ability to allot a portion of this funding to incorporate the FII model is a viable option for IDHS.

**Implementation**

The rollout of the FII program requires efforts from all participants. In the case of Multnomah County, ODHS staff was responsible for contacting TANF clients informing them of informational sessions regarding a new project. Case workers focused on families who had been on the TANF rolls for 36 months or more and who were newly employed. In this manner, the County could capture those individuals who were close to termination of their benefits and capitalize on the opportunity available for those working. County staff followed up with potential participants to encourage attendance.

The State of Illinois can choose to work with county government or community-based agencies when implementing this model. The first step requires the State to propose the project model and open it up to government and community-based agencies.
In Oregon, the initial meeting was an informational forum presented by staff from both State and County, as well as the FII liaison. The purpose was to engage families and thoroughly explain the process and goals. The philosophy of FII is based on a foundation of community and it was necessary to establish an understanding of the FII model and the important role community plays in participant success. Initial families are then encouraged to recruit and organize within their community. After initial orientation, participants meet monthly with Multnomah County staff to review progress and are expected to input family data on a monthly basis as well.

Over the grant cycle, the County contracted with FII to provide training and support the technology piece. This entails data collection and analysis of participant information as provided by FII families on a monthly basis and is vital to the process, making families accountable for their actions and subsequent progress. Provision for this component is highly recommended for IDHS implementation to support all the partners and facilitate participant outcomes.

It is recommended that IDHS closely follow the model implemented through ODHS and Multnomah County. The project’s success, as demonstrated in such a short timeframe, illustrates the ability of both county and state to successfully work together toward change that is effecting improved, more sustainable outcomes for TANF families.

**Conclusion**

Problems and deficiencies with the current TANF model are a common topic among researchers. A review of the literature revealed TANF’s inability to help families achieve sustainable outcomes as well as the need for behavioral and cultural shifts within state agencies to create organizational change from the top down. Both quantitative and qualitative variables
were evaluated to establish the relationship between service delivery of public assistance and measureable outcomes of Illinois TANF recipients.

An in-depth analysis of TANF program data and recipient outcomes, plus comparison against other states, provided an overview of the current situation in Illinois. This information revealed deficiencies and concerns about the Illinois TANF program and further confirmed the need for the State to reevaluate programming and reconsider best practices. Why is the model not working? Where is the State investing resources? Are those resources adequately assisting TANF families? Is the current model helping families to reach self-sufficiency? What innovative changes must be made to better serve TANF families? While administrators must answer these questions, policymakers must also be attentive to these concerns. Assessing not only quantitative outcomes, but qualitative as well, provides important indicators of the quality of life a family experiences due to TANF program service and delivery.

States have significant discretion to design and implement programs for TANF recipients to help them reach financial independence and self-sufficiency. Further exploration of self-sufficiency models which assist in meeting TANF recipient needs and improving outcomes is encouraged. However, this researcher recommends the Family Independence Initiative for Illinois TANF programming. The model shows great promise but the lack of information and data on successful implementation within TANF is minimal and limits understanding of the possibilities of incorporating FII into TANF programming. Much like the initial implementation of TANF, only through actual implementation of a self-sufficiency model within Illinois’ TANF model, can the effectiveness and success of such programming be determined.
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