



Chippewa Cree Tribal TANF Program LASER TLC Site Journey

The Office of Family Assistance initiative, “Leveraging America’s Social and Economic Resilience TANF Learning Community” (LASER TLC), joined ten TANF Programs across the country as they worked to address the challenges of human service delivery in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, and focused on improved and responsive services to their TANF families.

Goals & Objectives

At the start of their TLC work, Chippewa Cree TANF program staff crafted a vision for their TANF program: to “create a safe, thriving community where people are able to connect with each other, with themselves, and with their culture.” The program team also wanted to build a culture of respect and dignity for clients. From this overarching vision, staff identified existing challenges to reaching this goal, which included:

- Stressors associated with day-to-day office operations.
- Breakdowns and lack of clarity in internal communications.
- Struggling to sustain changes long-term.

Change Strategies

After identifying these challenges, Chippewa Cree program staff collectively designed and implemented strategies to improve their internal processes:

Shifting Office Policies

- Staff adjusted their appointment schedules to decrease staff stress and improve client services.
- After testing options, the staff decided to close the office to client appointments once a month, allowing more time for case managers to complete paperwork and submit to the records clerk to create a compiled report of documentation.

Improving Internal Communication

- Staff created communication standards to improve communication.
- Staff agreed to hold weekly all-staff meetings using the communication standards, including:
 - Setting and sharing meeting agendas.
 - Keeping meeting minutes and reviewing them weekly.
 - Creating a task tracking table that documents staff responsibilities, timelines, and expectations.

Creating “Goals Ladder” Change Process Model

- Staff developed the “Goals Ladder” change process model.
 - This staff-driven model is rooted in Chippewa Cree’s program experiences and language.
 - The model can be adapted to manage changes, big and small.

Chippewa Cree Journey

The Chippewa Cree Tribe of the Rocky Boy’s reservation is in remote north-central Montana. The Tribal TANF program has three offices; the central office and one satellite office are on the reservation, and a third office is in Havre, 30 miles north of the reservation. The Tribe has an enrollment of over 7,000 members, with about half of the enrolled members residing on the reservation. The unemployment rate for Rocky Boy residents ranges between 60-80% seasonally.



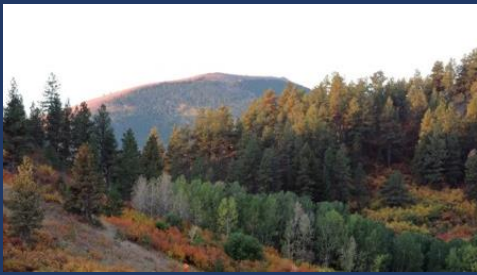
Challenges & Supports

Challenges:

- Unclear internal communication, including communication about staff roles in the TLC.
- Many competing program priorities made prioritizing one focus area and sustaining efforts difficult.
- Difficulty engaging clients in participating in activities and using supports like childcare; it is exacerbated by transportation, employment, and the weather.

Supports:

- Strong collaboration practices among case managers.
- Staff members have a deep understanding of the program and community, making them well-suited to support their clients and colleagues and partner with other agencies and programs.



Lessons Learned from Our Journey

- Communication and working collectively are at the core of successful change initiatives
- Improving internal processes to reduce stress for staff can lead to better service delivery for clients
- It is valuable to collect feedback from clients to align program activities with their interests and motivation
- When making changes to our program, it is essential to communicate the changes and their purpose to all staff and clients.
- Following a change process will allow our team to make and sustain changes in a more intentional way.
- Having strong relationships built on trust and understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities is key for colleagues and coaches working together in effective ways.

What's Next...

- Using the Goals Ladder to determine program activities for clients and refine communication practices within the team and with clients
- Consider strategies for how to tap into clients' motivation to achieve their goals and meet the program requirements
- Consider and implement strategies for engaging clients in a welcoming and dignified way through actively listening to their experiences and practicing empathy



Focus on Results

Over the course of this 18-month initiative, the Chippewa Cree team achieved progress in several areas:

- Increased staff ability to complete required paperwork and distribute check vouchers on schedule.
- Better system for tracking and storing documentation.
- Creation of communication standards and work expectations for all staff.
- Creation and use of a new change process model to help guide and sustain changes long-term.
- Increased knowledge of how other TANF programs operate and address similar challenges.

Ultimately, the team hopes this progress will lead to:

- Less stress for staff and an improved ability to complete required tasks to better serve clients.
- Strengthened staff communication and collaboration to coordinate services for clients.
- Meaningful changes to program processes in an intentional and sustained way that includes staff and client perspectives.
- Adapting and implementing strategies from other programs to fit the context of the Chippewa Cree Tribal TANF program.

Journey Insights from Our Team

"People are willing to change if the change and the purpose of the change is explained clearly."

"All other TANF programs have mostly the same problems, but by using better communication practices, goals are met and other objectives are achieved."

