



## ADMINISTRATION FOR **CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

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# Kentucky LASER TLC Site Journey

The Office of Family Assistance initiative, “Leveraging America’s Social and Economic Resilience TANF Learning Community” (LASER TLC), joins 10 TANF programs across the country to address the challenges of human service delivery following the COVID-19 pandemic. The collaboration focused on improved and responsive services to their TANF families.

## Goals & Objectives

The Kentucky Department for Community Based Services (DCBS) is working on several initiatives to modernize the Kentucky Temporary Assistance Program (KTAP) and Kentucky Works Program (KWP). The goal is to break the cycle of poverty through four principles:

- Respect the dignity and worth of individuals.
- Provide personalized services focused on connectedness.
- Integrate services into the daily lives of Kentuckians.
- Incorporate policies and practices that are equitable.

Through the LASER TLC, DCBS expanded its modernization efforts. This was achieved by developing and testing an Integrated Case Management (ICM) approach. ICM includes (1) participant-led goal setting at KWP intake and (2) a team plan co-created by the participant, KWP case manager, and service contractor to support goal achievement throughout KWP engagement.

## Change Strategies

Change strategies to support ICM implementation focused on case manager and supervisor development. The strategies also included DCBS administrative support.

- **Staff training:** New training focused on human-centered design principles. It also included understanding the causes and impact of poverty, empathy for families, and backwards planning and participant-led goal setting in ICM.
- **Case management delivery:** Dedicated case managers assigned to work with a specific caseload. This is instead of working with participants across the region on a rotating basis.
- **State-county partnership:** Held biweekly meetings and focus groups to get input from staff and supervisors. This helped to address barriers to ICM implementation.
- **Process improvements:** Temporarily adjusted KWP case manager duties. This supported a focus on case management instead of call services and county office tasks.

## Kentucky’s Journey

DCBS oversees KTAP and KWP to support low-income adults and families with children to obtain employment and educational training. In fiscal year 2022, KTAP served 40,293 adults and 206,274 children. KTAP recipients participating in KWP are eligible for supportive services. Examples include transportation assistance, vehicle repair, and an educational bonus.



## Supports & Challenges

### Challenges:

- The end of COVID-19 participation exemptions during the ICM pilot created barriers to participation and also placed new demands on case managers.
- The existing regionwide approach to managing call and in-person services across multiple programs interferes with time to focus on ICM.
- More experienced and knowledgeable case managers are needed to advance ICM implementation.
- Existing staff are assigned additional duties compared with newly hired staff, and this placed an extra burden on them.

### Supports:

- Involvement of multiple DCBS programs supports leadership buy-in at all levels of the agency.
- Collaboration with select counties on pilot testing the participant-led goal setting component of ICM.
- The willingness of county staff and supervisors to pilot ICM and provide constructive feedback to improve it.

## Journey Lessons Learned

- Backwards planning helps participants breakdown their goals into manageable steps and helps case managers identify resources to support participant success.
- Staff, supervisors, and leadership are willing to adapt and make changes to improve the lives of families.
- Getting regular input from local offices strengthens DCBS's relationships with them and helps DCBS identify and remove administrative barriers that hinder their work with families.
- Working across departments helps DCBS to learn from others. It also helps apply approaches that have already been successful.



## Journey Insights

*"Seeing how excited case managers are about being case managers and doing their job [has been the best part of our work during the pilot]. Being able to get back to taking care of their home county [participants] and building those relationships." -DCBS Staff*

*"We're so excited that case managers are so excited because for so long it seemed like case managers didn't like their job. Now we see it through the lens of them never having the time to do their case management duties due to other obligations...We have people in the field that want to help other people." -DCBS Staff*

*"TLC helped us gather our thoughts and make a good argument for the changes we wanted to make through the [ICM] pilot...We want so many things, but we need to be able to organize it into problems and solutions." -DCBS Staff*



*—Leveraging—  
America's Social &  
Economic Resilience*

## Focus on Results

### Early results from the ICM pilot suggest:

- Participants prefer talking to someone in their own county. They also enjoy having more one-on-one time with their case manager. Participants seem more likely to ask for help because they know who to go to.
- Case managers report more satisfaction with their work, more time to follow-up with individuals to get them needed resources, and an increase in communication with contractors.
- Supervisors report that case managers have more time to review caseloads, address challenging situations, and conduct outreach and follow-ups. They also report more satisfaction with their work and more communication with contractors.
- Staff report anecdotal increases in participation rates (without the threat of sanction), including among two-parent participation which is typically challenging.

## What's Next...

- Partner with county offices to inform the full implementation of ICM.
- Updating procedures for call services and in-office activities. This ensures adequate time for ICM.
- Work with contractors to develop and test the ongoing engagement component of ICM—co-created team plans to support goal achievement.

