

# Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency

Administration for Children and Families | Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation



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November 2012

OPRE Report # 2012-60

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Administration for Children and Families  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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Suggested citation: *Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency*,  
OPRE Report # 2012-60, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and  
Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of  
Health and Human Services.

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ADMINISTRATION FOR  
**CHILDREN & FAMILIES**

**OPRE**

## Administration for Children and Families

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/>

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF), within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), is responsible for Federal programs that promote the economic and social well-being of families, children, individuals and communities. ACF programs aim to achieve the following:

- Families and individuals empowered to increase their own economic independence and productivity;
- Strong, healthy, supportive communities that have a positive impact on the quality of life and the development of children;
- Partnerships with individuals, front-line service providers, communities, American Indian tribes, Native communities, States and Congress that enable solutions which transcend traditional agency boundaries;
- Services planned, reformed and integrated to improve needed access; and
- A strong commitment to working with people with developmental disabilities, refugees and migrants to address their needs, strengths and abilities.

## Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation

<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre>

The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE) within ACF serves as principal advisor to the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of programs designed to improve the economic and social well-being of children and families. In collaboration with ACF program offices and others, OPRE is responsible for ACF performance management, conducting research and policy analyses and developing and overseeing research and evaluation projects to assess program performance and inform policy and practice. OPRE also provides guidance, analysis, technical assistance and oversight to ACF programs on strategic planning; performance measurement; research and evaluation methods; statistical, policy and program analysis and synthesis and dissemination of research and demonstration findings.

A central focus of OPRE's research and evaluation is developing reliable knowledge of the effectiveness of different programmatic strategies in order to inform programmatic and policy choices, with a particular focus on testing innovative approaches used by States, Tribes, communities and service organizations in major program areas, such as Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Head Start, child care and child welfare. Moving more families from welfare to work, persistence and progression in employment, marriage and family formation and the well-being and development of children are major focal areas. OPRE includes the Division of Economic Independence, the Division of Child and Family Development and the Division of Family Strengthening. A cross-cutting Performance Management Team leads ACF-wide efforts to plan, monitor and improve program performance.

OPRE's research and evaluation projects are conducted primarily through grants and contracts, and include collaboration with ACF program offices; HHS's Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE); other Federal entities and State, Tribal and community partners.

# Portfolio of Research in Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency



Within ACF, the Division of Economic Independence within OPRE has primary responsibility for welfare and family self-sufficiency research.

OPRE's research in the area of family self-sufficiency is designed to expand knowledge about effective programs to promote self-sufficiency and economic well-being among low-income families. Research focuses on four major areas:

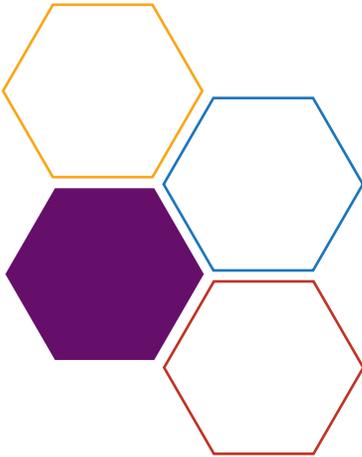
- TANF and the Safety Net
- Employment and the Labor Market
- Education and Training
- Other and Cross-Cutting Research

Within these areas, OPRE funds experimental impact evaluations, implementation evaluations and descriptive research projects aimed at informing the design and implementation of programs.

OPRE also invests in activities to disseminate rigorous research on welfare and family self-sufficiency topics.

The following pages describe major research projects sponsored by OPRE in Fiscal Year 2012.

# TANF and the Safety Net



**A** major focus of OPRE's welfare and family self-sufficiency research is the TANF program, the primary program for the Federal Government to provide temporary cash assistance to poor families. TANF, created in 1996 by the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA), took the place of the previous Federal cash welfare program, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). OPRE's support for research and evaluation efforts in TANF aims to provide a better understanding of the nature and consequences of TANF policy choices, especially as they relate to the well-being of children and families.

Past projects include: a study of local implementation of TANF, an examination of State and local efforts to divert TANF applicants from applying for cash assistance, an examination of the implementation of sanction policies and the relationship of these policies to Federal work participation requirements, a study of what is known about the effects of time limit policies and a synthesis of knowledge about the TANF caseload and TANF leavers. OPRE more recently commissioned a series of research briefs synthesizing knowledge on important TANF topics. OPRE is currently funding several descriptive studies to further our knowledge of State TANF and related safety net programs. In addition to the studies described below, OPRE conducts experimental research on welfare-to-work strategies; these efforts are described in the following sections on education, training and the labor market.

## Understanding the Dynamics of Disconnection from Employment and Assistance

Since the creation of TANF in 1996, there has been concern about TANF recipients who leave TANF without finding work, as well as low-income individuals who may be eligible for TANF but are neither receiving TANF nor working. Low-income individuals and families who are not employed or receiving public assistance are often referred to as “disconnected.” According to recent estimates, 20 to 25 percent of low-income single mothers are disconnected from work and TANF for some period of time over the course of a year.

In recent years, HHS has invested in better understanding the dynamics, characteristics and circumstances of disconnected families. These efforts include a research brief on disconnected families and TANF, grants to the National and Regional Poverty Centers to fund research on local disconnected populations and an analysis of the dynamics and characteristic of low-income single mothers disconnected from work and public assistance. This research has sought to address questions such as the size of the disconnected population, the characteristics of disconnected families, the extent of economic hardship faced by disconnected families and dynamics of disconnection.

The Understanding the Dynamics of Disconnection from Employment and Assistance project is intended to lay the groundwork for the next stage of research on disconnection. Launched in 2011 and conducted by the Urban Institute, the project began by convening a meeting of experts who discussed existing research on disconnection and offered input on the most important knowledge gaps and areas for future research. The next phase of the project will be an exploratory qualitative study of disconnected individuals and their circumstances. Interviews will be conducted in 2013 and a final report is expected in early 2014. It is hoped that the project will shed new light on this hard to reach population and offer new hypotheses for further study.

## TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project (TSDTP)

Numerous studies have identified the substantial potential for overlap in families and individuals served by TANF and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. The TSDTP is an effort to examine the extent of the overlap between the TANF and the SSI program and populations and to develop innovative pilot programs that can improve a variety of outcomes for individuals with disabilities and barriers to employment. TSDTP is a collaborative effort between ACF and the Social Security Administration through a contract to MDRC.

The first stage of the Project was to understand the existing environment. Federal TANF and SSI data have been merged to determine the national overlap between TANF and SSI application and participation. Analysis of this merged data revealed a number of interesting findings. While these data are limited to the subset of States that submit the universe of their data to HHS, they did reveal that, while there is some overlap among individuals who apply for TANF and also apply for SSI, the extent of this overlap is not nearly as significant as often reported in population-based surveys. Additionally, although there does appear to be a slight increase in applications for SSI around the time of an application for TANF, the increase is minimal, especially in the context of the total caseload and applicants for each program. A knowledge development summary describing this analysis thematically is expected in late 2012.

In the second stage of the Project, which is currently underway, the team is working with three sites—Ramsey County, MN; Los Angeles County, CA; and Muskegon County, MI—to implement pilot tests of innovative approaches to serving individuals with disabilities either through the provision of services to TANF clients with barriers to employment, streamlining the SSI application process or improving coordination between the two systems.

Over the coming year, a number of reports and briefs will be published across a variety of topics covered by the Project. A final report will be published in 2013.

# What Do We Know About TANF?

## The TANF Research Synthesis Briefs

The existing body of knowledge on the TANF (and the AFDC program) is substantial. However, the field lacked a recent synthesis of relevant research. To fill this gap, OPRE contracted with the Urban Institute to produce a series of research briefs on important topics related to TANF. Completed in 2012, these briefs summarize the most recent, rigorous and relevant research related to TANF in a format that is designed to be useful for both researchers and policymakers.

Topics covered in the briefs include:

- Improving employment and earnings for TANF recipients,
- TANF recipients with barriers to employment,
- Changes in the TANF caseload over time,
- Disconnected families and TANF,
- TANF child-only cases,
- TANF work requirements and state strategies to fulfill them,
- TANF and the broader safety net and
- Facilitating post-secondary education and training for TANF recipients.

## Descriptive Analysis of TANF Work Participation

The Claims Resolution Act of 2010, which extended the authorization of the TANF program, contains a section regarding State reporting of participation in allowable TANF work activities. The Act requires that States report, for a specified period, whether individuals engage in activities directed toward attaining self-sufficiency and activities among those that do not qualify as work activities but are otherwise reasonably calculated to help the family move toward self-sufficiency. The Secretary of HHS may provide any additional information that he or she determines appropriate, including information about individuals who have no hours of participation and the principal reasons for such nonparticipation.

The purpose of this study is to provide information relevant to this requirement and study goals include closely examining and documenting work participation levels among TANF recipients, reasons for nonparticipation and selected States' use of Federal TANF funds.

The study will culminate in a final report documenting selected State and local TANF program policies, administrative infrastructure, service delivery processes and the monitoring and reporting of client program participation, among other parameters.

Mathematica Policy Research and its partners—the Urban Institute and Don Winstead—are conducting this study.

## Descriptive Analysis of TANF/WIA Coordination

The TANF program imposed time limits on receipt of cash assistance and broadened and strengthened mandates for clients to work or engage in work-related activities. These changes increased the need for employment-related services for welfare recipients, applicants and potential applicants. In 1998, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) consolidated multiple employment-related public programs into a unified system through which comprehensive labor market information, job training and job search assistance could be provided in One-Stop Career Centers.

Delivering services more efficiently is a critical objective for Federal and State officials who administer TANF and provisions of WIA. Both programs seek a more cost-effective, coordinated way to serve their clients and ultimately, to improve client outcomes. However, ongoing research on TANF/WIA coordination and integration has revealed wide variation in management structures, administrative designs and implementation experiences.

Previous studies have focused on the degree to which various factors may influence cross-program coordination and the degree to which WIA program services are provided to TANF clients.

This project, being conducted by Mathematica Policy Research and its partners—the Urban Institute and Don Winstead, will gather information from States to identify, analyze and describe promising practices that have emerged from State and local efforts to coordinate TANF and WIA services.

### **Understanding the Child-Only TANF Caseload**

While adult TANF recipients have been the subject of most research on TANF, child-only cases—cases where no adult is included in the benefit calculation and only the children are aided—comprised almost half of the total TANF caseload in FY 2009. Lack of research on this subject meant that much was unknown about a large segment of the TANF caseload and some of the Nation’s most vulnerable children and their families. In response to the need for research on this subject, OPRE and ASPE gave a grant to Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago to document differences in State policies that affect child-only TANF cases, describe characteristics and dynamics of such cases and address the programmatic and policy context in which these cases exist. The study is using a mixed-methods approach, combining secondary administrative data analysis; informant interviews at the Federal, State and County levels and a national survey of TANF administrators. It will provide a broad overview of policies, demographic trends and program challenges both nationwide and in four focal jurisdictions—California, Florida, Illinois and New York. Grant funding for the project is complete and a final report is expected in late fall 2012.

## Ongoing and Recent Descriptive Research On The TANF Program

OPRE has supported a number of descriptive studies of various aspects of TANF programs. Current and previous topics of study include:

- Differences in administration between County- and State-administered TANF programs,
- Understanding the TANF child-only caseload,
- State and local diversion programs for TANF applicants from cash assistance,
- Sanction policies and their implementation,
- Strategies and implementation of policies and programs to fulfill work participation requirements,
- The extent and effects of time limit policies and
- The State TANF Policies Database.

Briefs, reports and material from these projects can be found on the OPRE website.

## A Descriptive Study of State Tribal TANF Programs

PWRORA authorized the allocation of funding to American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages for the administration of Tribal TANF programs. Currently, there are 64 approved Tribal TANF programs serving 298 American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native Villages and the non-reservation American Indian and Alaska Native populations of over 121 counties (including several major metropolitan areas, designated near-reservation towns and six Alaska Native Regional Corporation areas). Little is known about the characteristics, implementation and promising practices of these programs. This project, being conducted for OPRE by the Urban Institute, will provide a descriptive study of the implementation of four Tribal TANF programs. The project will involve gathering information from the four selected Tribal TANF programs and ACF's Office of Family Assistance (OFA). The objective is to provide documentation and lessons about diverse programmatic approaches to the implementation of Tribal TANF programs. The study will also identify and recommend potential approaches for further study. The final report is due September 2013.



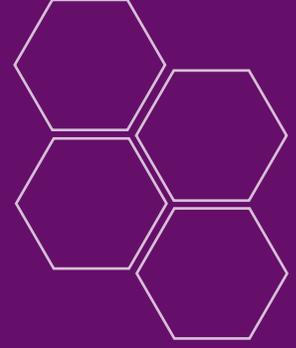
## Descriptive Study of County vs. State TANF Administration

While the majority of States centrally administer their TANF programs, nine States (California, Colorado, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Ohio and Wisconsin) play a supervisory role and delegate the administration of the TANF program to their Counties. The main objective of this study, being conducted for OPRE by the Urban Institute, is to provide a descriptive study of the dynamics of County- versus State-administered TANF programs and document lessons about different programmatic implementations and experiences. The study will address a key policy research question: How are TANF programs administered by Counties and supervised by the States differing from programs administered by the States? This project will involve gathering information from a sample of County- and State-administered TANF programs. The study will also identify and

recommend potential approaches for technical assistance specific to State-supervised, County-administered TANF programs.

## State TANF Policies: Welfare Rules Database

With the shift from AFDC to TANF, States gained considerable authority to design the parameters of their cash assistance programs and set their own rules. In order to document what was happening in States, the Urban Institute, in 1997, began developing the State TANF Policies Database, also known as the Welfare Rules Database. The database is meant to be a single location where information on program rules can be researched across States and/or years. ACF, with contributions from ASPE, has funded updates to the database, as well as publication of tables summarizing State TANF policies for each year since 1997.



# SPOTLIGHT

## ON EMERGING RESEARCH:

NEW

## The Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium

Much attention has been paid to the changes in policy, structure and program operations caused by PRWORA, but relatively little attention has been paid to the significant effect that PRWORA had on data, research and program evaluation. Since the emergence of TANF there have been substantial changes in how Federal and State Governments develop, execute and fund research and evaluation activities, as well as significant cut-backs in the collection, analysis and reporting of administrative data.

To fill gaps in Federal and State research and data activities and to complement its ongoing research, evaluation and data analysis and reporting, OPRE is developing a multi-faceted *Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Consortium*.

The first component of the Research Consortium is the *Advancing Welfare and Family Self-Sufficiency Research Project*. Led by Mathematica Policy Research, this contract will provide research support and a flexible research and evaluation mechanism for responding to rapidly-emerging policy priorities and research opportunities. These activities will be accomplished using a combination of Mathematica's expertise and the expertise and engagement of relevant consultants and experts.

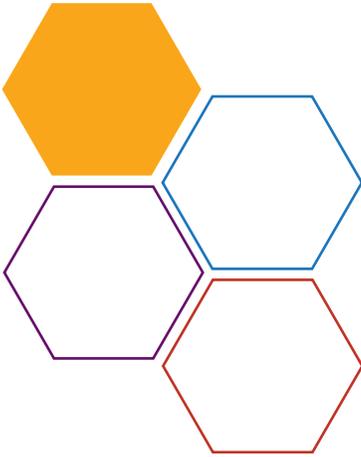
The second component of the Consortium is the *Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Network*. OPRE plans to invite applications for Principal Investigators to join a network of scholars who will investigate critical issues in family self-sufficiency and stability research. The Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Network (the Network) will

be a collaborative enterprise of scholars who undertake research in family self-sufficiency and stability that is both scientifically rigorous and highly relevant to family self-sufficiency programs and research. This project would support cooperative agreements with scholars who will work independently and collectively to undertake a systematic, multi-disciplinary examination of the current gaps in family self-sufficiency and stability policies, programs and existing research; execute research and program evaluation activities in collaboration with state and local human services agencies and community-based organizations; and participate in a multi-disciplinary learning community by collaborating with other members of the Network and affiliated scholars.

The third component of the Consortium is the *Family Self-Sufficiency Data Center*. OPRE plans to invite applications to support the development, implementation and ongoing operations of a Data Center to support family self-sufficiency research and activities (Center). This Center would serve as a hub to support the development of state and institutional capacity for data collection, linkage and, where necessary, storage in order to provide access to high-quality data to practitioners and policymakers in family self-sufficiency programs and research. The center would work independently, but would also collaborate with an affiliated Family Self-Sufficiency and Stability Research Network.

The Forecast Announcements and alerts about these funding opportunities are available on the HHS grants forecast website at: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/hhsgrantsforecast/index.cfm>.

# Employment and the Labor Market



**F**or most families and individuals, employment is the foundation of self-sufficiency. Households headed by employed workers who work full-time all year have a poverty rate that is nearly one-eighth of those households headed by individuals not employed full-time for the full year.

A major focus of OPRE's welfare and family self-sufficiency research is strategies for helping TANF recipients and other low-income individuals find jobs, maintain employment and advance in the labor market. Signature efforts in this area include the recently completed Employment, Retention and Advancement Project (ERA), which tested strategies for helping employed individuals keep their jobs and advance in the workforce. Currently, OPRE is sponsoring a project on Design Options of the Search for Employment (DOSE), which is focused specifically on job search strategies.

OPRE's employment research focuses particularly on strategies for helping "hard to employ" individuals with serious obstacles to steady work. The Enhanced Services for the Hard-to-Employ Demonstration and Evaluation (HTE), another recently completed, multi-site random assignment evaluation, tested several strategies for helping hard-to-employ parents find and sustain employment.

OPRE is further examining strategies to use wage subsidies and transitional employment programs in the Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project (STED), which was launched in 2010 and is testing the next generation of subsidized employment models for critical low-income populations.

## **Subsidized and Transitional Employment Demonstration Project (STED)**

ACF launched the STED Project in 2010 to demonstrate and evaluate the next generation of subsidized employment models for critical low-income populations (i.e., non-custodial fathers, low-income youth at risk of unsuccessful transition to the labor force, TANF clients and low-income individuals with disabilities). The Project, led by MDRC, will examine strategies aimed at providing counter-cyclical employment and strategies for successfully transitioning individuals from short-term subsidized employment to unsubsidized employment in the labor market. These strategies will build upon approaches that have demonstrated empirical effectiveness in previous studies, test new and innovative interventions designed to demonstrate promising program components and adapt to current policy environments at the Federal, State and local levels. The evaluation will include a random assignment impact evaluation in up to seven sites, an implementation evaluation at each Project site and an analysis of the costs and benefits (both financial and non-financial) of the subsidized employment programs included in the evaluation. Of particular note is STED's six-month, in-program survey, which will attempt to measure some of the potential non-economic benefits of subsidized employment, including emotional and social well-being.

The STED Project is being conducted in close coordination with the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Enhanced Transitional Jobs Demonstration (ETJD). Implemented by the Employment and Training Administration (ETA), ETJD provides grant funds to provide temporary, paid work experiences to non-custodial parents and ex-offenders to improve their employability, earnings and opportunities for advancement. Seven grantees received four-year grants, which require participation in a rigorous, experimental evaluation and partnerships with child support enforcement and criminal justice agencies, as appropriate. Given the complementary nature of these evaluations, OPRE and the ETA have entered into a memorandum of agreement to coordinate the STED and ETJD studies. This coordination includes shared data collection

instruments, shared evaluation sites (see discussion below) and coordinated reporting efforts.

STED began with a short-term analysis of what is known about existing or previous approaches to subsidized employment, including transitional jobs, especially within the context of current TANF policies and requirements, as well as efforts under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. A report, *Subsidizing Employment Opportunities for Low-Income Families: A Review of State Employment Programs Created through the TANF Emergency Fund*, is available on the OPRE website.

Over the past year, the Project team has explored potential sites to include in the evaluation, including those that serve primarily TANF clients, as well as those that are grantees of the DOL ETJD. Two ETJD grantees have been selected to participate in STED. Random assignment in these sites began in early 2012. The STED team is in discussions with five other potential sites to participate in the Project. Random assignment in these remaining programs will likely begin in late 2012 or early 2013. The selected STED sites will feature a variety of approaches to subsidized employment ranging from paid work experience to on-the-job training to placements in private sector positions. The sites will also vary in their target populations and will likely target TANF recipients, timed-out TANF individuals, low-income UI exhaustees and disconnected youth.

## **Design Options of the Search for Employment (DOSE)**

Nationally, job search activities are a significant area of program attention and prior research. Both TANF and workforce development agencies incorporate job search activities into their programs. However, while job search activities are often included as an essential component of programs that have been the subject of OPRE-sponsored evaluations, they have not independently been the focus of rigorous examination.

In the fall of 2011, OPRE launched the DOSE project to address these gaps in the literature. DOSE will explore the potential to develop rigorous

impact evaluations of alternative job search strategies. The project will scan the current state of knowledge of job search strategies and develop ideas to test job search strategies and approaches. The project's knowledge development report, which will be completed in fall 2012, will feature a foundational conceptual framework to guide the other components of the project, as well as an extensive review of the literature around job search strategies in the TANF and Unemployment Insurance programs and other salient research. Among the issues being explored in this design contract are key research questions, appropriate research methods (i.e., random assignment of individuals or offices), data collection methods, exploration of general equilibrium effects and other evaluation components (i.e., implementation and cost-benefit analysis). This project is being conducted by Abt Associates and will conclude with a final evaluation design options report in March 2013.

OPRE has contributed funding for the collection of follow-up data on employees in the industry who leave their jobs over the course of the study. This funding will contribute to a fuller understanding of the effects of the intervention on all workers, especially lower-income workers, including how family-friendly and/or work-life policies might contribute to employment retention for low-wage workers. Several papers on this project are forthcoming, with publications expected beginning in summer 2013.

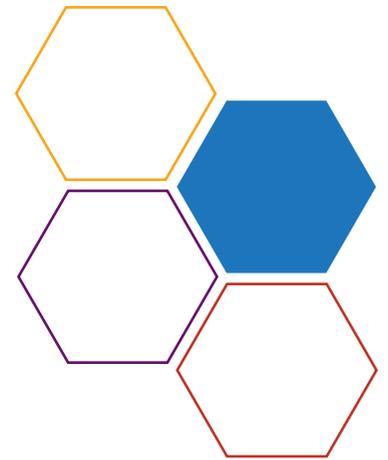
### **Work, Family and Health Network (WFHN)**

“Family-friendly” or “work-life” policies have become increasingly prevalent in the United States, but few longitudinal studies using experimental design have been implemented. Moreover, knowledge about work-life policies aimed at low-wage workers is scant. To address this gap, OPRE is supporting a study being conducted by the WFHN (<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/research/supported/workhealthinit.cfm>) of the National Institute for Child Health and Development (NICHD).

WFHN is implementing a workplace intervention designed to reduce work-family conflict by working with supervisors and employees to redesign work activities to better meet employee needs and achieve employer goals. Implemented with two large employers, the intervention includes training supervisors on ways to support work-family balance and to increase employees' control over their work time. Within each employer, worksites are randomly assigned to participate in the intervention. The two businesses represent different industries—one is more “white collar,” while the other employs low-wage workers with less regular hours.

# Education and Training

OPRE has a strong history of sponsoring rigorous research on the effectiveness of education and training strategies for improving employment and earnings for TANF recipients and other low-income individuals, dating back most notably to the National Evaluation of Welfare to Work Strategies (NEWWS). Currently, OPRE's research portfolio in this area is focused on career pathways programs. Career pathways consist of a series of connected education and training steps paired with related supports. Steps along the pathway lead to employment in a specific sector or occupation, but can also lead to further training. OPRE is evaluating nine career pathways programs as part of the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS) project, and is also conducting a set of studies focused on the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG), a set of health care career pathways demonstration projects funded by OFA.



## **Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS)**

In 2007, ACF initiated the ISIS project, a multi-site, random assignment evaluation of promising strategies for increasing employment and self-sufficiency among low-income families. At the beginning of the project period, the ISIS team consulted with over 250 stakeholders in order to identify promising intervention strategies for evaluation. From these discussions, consensus emerged that the evaluation should focus on a relatively wide population of low-income parents (not limited to TANF recipients) and that ISIS should study interventions with potential for substantial effects on earnings and income rather than just modest effects and prioritize strategies focused on skills development, as well as related financial and other supports.

Based on stakeholder input, and taking into account the presence of programs suitable for evaluation, the ISIS team has come to focus on career pathways as the main intervention framework to study. Career pathways consist of a series of connected education and training steps paired with related supports. Steps along the pathway lead to employment in a specific sector or occupation but can also lead to further training. Examples include basic and sectoral bridge programs, short-term certificate programs and longer-term certificate and Associate's Degree programs. The pathway allows individuals to achieve employment and progressively advance over time. ISIS is especially focused on career pathways models that include innovative instructional strategies, promising support services strategies and connections to employment.

The ISIS team is working on evaluation designs in nine innovative sites operating career pathways programs around the country. These ISIS partners include Des Moines Area Community College (Prepared Learner Program), the I-BEST Program in select colleges in Washington State, Instituto del Progreso Latino (Carreras en Salud), Madison Area Technical College (Center for Adult Learning), Pima Community College (Pathways to Healthcare), San Diego Workforce Partnership (Bridge to Employment), Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement, Workforce Development

Council of Seattle-King County (Health Careers for All) and Year Up.

Some programs began randomly assigning participants on a pilot basis in late 2011; eventually, all nine partner sites will conduct full-scale random assignment experiments and Abt will conduct implementation and impact evaluation studies. More information on the ISIS project is available at <http://www.projectisis.org/>.

## **Evaluation Portfolio for the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Program**

Authorized by the Affordable Care Act, the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program provides funds for demonstration projects to provide TANF recipients and other low-income individuals with opportunities for education, training and advancement that lead to jobs that pay well and address the healthcare professions' workforce needs. In FY 2010, OFA awarded \$67M in HPOG grants to 32 entities located across 23 States, including five Tribal organizations. These demonstration projects are intended to address two pervasive and growing problems: the increasing shortfall in supply of healthcare professionals in the face of expanding demand and the increasing requirement for a post-secondary education to secure a job with a living wage for families. Grant funds may be used for training and education as well as supportive services such as case management, child care and transportation.

OPRE is utilizing a multi-pronged evaluation strategy to assess the HPOG demonstration projects. This strategy includes the following components: (1) the HPOG Implementation, Systems and Outcome Project; (2) Evaluation of Tribal HPOG; (3) HPOG Impact Study; (4) additional impact studies of a subset of HPOG grantees through the Innovative Strategies for Increasing Self-Sufficiency (ISIS) project; (5) National Implementation Evaluation of HPOG; and (6) University Partnership Research Grants for HPOG. These research and evaluation activities aim to provide information on program implementation, systems change, outcomes and impact. The various components are closely

coordinated to avoid duplicative efforts, maximize the reuse of data and information that is collected, reduce burden on grantees in terms of participating in the Federal evaluation activities and meeting performance management requirements and promote cross-project learning.

### **HPOG Implementation, Systems and Outcome Project**

The purpose of this project, led by Abt Associates and the Urban Institute, is to provide recommendations for the design of an evaluation intended to be universal to the 27 Health Profession Opportunity Grant (HPOG) sites focused on TANF recipients and other low-income individuals and to assess implementation, system change, and outcomes. For the design of this evaluation, questions of primary interest are:

1. How are health professions training programs being implemented across the grantee sites?
2. What changes to the service delivery system are associated with program implementation?
3. What individual-level outputs and outcomes occur (i.e., recruitment, enrollment, retention, completion (accreditation or certification), job entry, employment retention and advancement and earnings)?
4. What can be learned about how best to implement these programs for this population (what implementation and/or systems components are related to programs outputs and outcomes)?
5. What key components appear necessary or contribute to the success of these programs?

Additionally, under this contract, Abt Associates and The Urban Institute designed and are providing ongoing support for the HPOG Performance Reporting System (PRS), a web-based management information system. This system supports the collection of data that will be used by ACF and its designated evaluation teams for both performance management and evaluation efforts across all 32 grantees. The system was operational on September 30, 2011.

The HPOG PRS includes all data needed to track and manage grantee performance. The system includes data necessary for future evaluations of HPOG, enabling a range of analyses at the participant, program and grantee levels. Further, the individual-level data that grantees enter into the HPOG PRS will allow ACF's designated evaluation teams to link data from the system to other administrative data sources (including the National Directory of New Hires) to assess HPOG program outcomes.

### **Evaluation of Tribal HPOG**

A separate, comprehensive process and outcome evaluation is being conducted of the Tribal HPOG grantees. The evaluation is being led by NORC at the University of Chicago, in partnership with Red Star Innovations and the National Indian Health Board. The goal of this evaluation is to provide documentation and lessons about diverse programmatic approaches to health professions training serving the tribal population. Interview and program operations data will be collected to provide an indepth, systematic analysis of program implementation, operations and outputs and outcomes in all tribal sites. Additionally, data will be compared within and across sites to examine correlations and patterns and generate hypotheses about the effectiveness of different program approaches for tribal populations. The evaluation will be closely coordinated with the evaluation of the 27 HPOG sites focused on TANF recipients and other low-income individuals. *An Introduction to the Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) and Evaluation*, the first in a series of practice briefs being developed by the Tribal HPOG evaluation team to disseminate lessons learned and findings, was released in December 2011.

### **HPOG Impact Study**

The HPOG Impact Study is being led by Abt Associates, in partnership with the Urban Institute. The Study is currently being designed to demonstrate how variations in program services affect program impacts. The literature on promising and innovative career pathway programs, especially in health care, is quite limited. As such, the HPOG Impact Study will fill a void in the sectoral training and career pathways literature, both about overall

program effectiveness and types of programs or program components that are most effective. Key evaluation questions that will be addressed in the Study include:

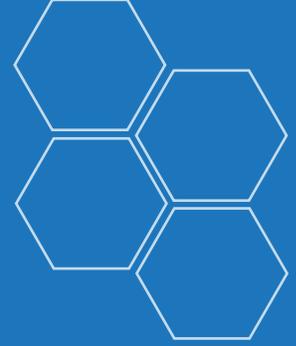
1. What impacts do HPOG programs have on outcomes of interest?
2. To what extent to these impacts vary by subgroups of interest?
3. To what extent does HPOG program participation (in particular components, with particular dosage) have an impact on outcomes of interest?
4. To what extent do HPOG program models or components have varying impacts?
5. To what extent do specific program enhancements have impacts, relative to the “standard” HPOG program?
6. How does parental participation in various HPOG program models and components affect outcomes for children?

### **National Implementation Evaluation of HPOG**

The purpose of this project is to conduct a National Implementation Evaluation of the HPOG program focused on TANF recipients and other low-income individuals. Led by Abt Associates in partnership with the Urban Institute, the evaluation will involve multiple tasks that will assess implementation, systems change and outcomes and provide valuable information about the operations of these federally-funded programs in improving education and employment opportunities for low-income individuals. This project is also designed to yield information and lessons about operating such programs and the challenges faced and addressed during implementation and throughout the operation of the program.

### **University Partnership Research Grants for HPOG**

In FY 2011, ACF awarded five grantees funding through the University Partnership Research Grants for HPOG to support research and evaluation that will inform and improve HPOG program performance and complement ACF’s multi-pronged evaluation of the HPOG programs. Applicants were required to demonstrate a partnership with an HPOG program(s) as an integral part of the research plan development and execution. The five grantees will work closely and coordinate with ACF’s multi-pronged evaluation and the Federal Project Officer in order to promote cross-project learning and avoid duplicative efforts. Grants were awarded to Brandeis University, Loyola University of Chicago, North Dakota State University, Northwestern University and Temple University.



# SPOTLIGHT

## ON SELF-SUFFICIENCY RESEARCH FOR AMERICAN INDIAN AND ALASKA NATIVES

Across OPRE, there is a growing portfolio of research on ACF programs and their effectiveness in serving American Indians and Alaska Natives. From Head Start and Home Visitation to Child Welfare and TANF, OPRE's research reflects ACF's commitment to developing and undertaking research in a manner that reflects the strengths, needs and cultural identities of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

In the area of family self-sufficiency, when the TANF program was created, PWRORA authorized the allocation of funding to American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native villages for the administration of Tribal TANF programs. Currently, there are 64 approved Tribal TANF programs serving 298 American Indian Tribes and Alaska Native villages and the non-reservation American Indian and Alaska Native populations of over 121 counties (including several major metropolitan areas, designated near-reservation towns and six Alaska Native Regional Corporation areas). Despite this substantial reach, very little is known about the characteristics, implementation and promising practices of Tribal TANF programs.

Currently, OPRE has three major ongoing research efforts specifically focused on the self-sufficiency needs of American Indians and Alaska Natives.

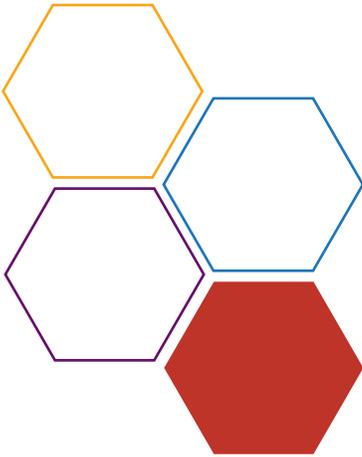
The *Descriptive Study of State Tribal TANF Programs* will provide a descriptive study on the implementation of four Tribal TANF programs. This project, conducted by the Urban Institute, is gathering information from four selected Tribal TANF programs to provide documentation and lessons about diverse programmatic approaches to the

implementation of Tribal TANF programs. A report is expected by September 2013.

As part of ACF's research portfolio of the Health Professions Opportunity Grants, OPRE supporting the *Evaluation of Tribal HPOG Programs*. This evaluation is a separate, comprehensive process and outcome evaluation of the Tribal HPOG grantees. The evaluation is being led by NORC at the University of Chicago, in partnership with Red Star Innovations and the National Indian Health Board. The goal of this evaluation is to provide documentation and lessons about diverse programmatic approaches to health professions training serving the tribal population. The practice brief, *An Introduction to the Tribal Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) and Evaluation*, was released in December 2011. This brief, available on the OPRE website, is the first in a series of practice briefs being developed by the Tribal HPOG evaluation team to disseminate lessons learned and findings from the evaluation.

Finally, the *Understanding Urban Indians' Interactions with ACF Programs and Services Project*, being led by Westat, is conducting an exploratory research study to better understand the challenges and context for barriers to accessing ACF services among low-income American Indians and Alaska Natives in urban areas. The primary aims of this study include developing a better understanding for how Urban Indian Centers are working to meet the needs of this population, assessing the unmet service needs among low-income urban American Indians and Alaska Natives, and exploring how ACF services might be able to better meet these needs.

# Other and Cross-Cutting Research



In addition to research that falls clearly within the substantive areas of TANF and the Safety Net, Employment and the Labor Market and Education and Training, OPRE's welfare and family self-sufficiency research portfolio includes several projects that span these issues in a cross-cutting way.

## Behavioral Interventions to Advance Self-Sufficiency (BIAS)

Why do some European countries have organ donation rates above 90 percent while others languish in the 20s and 30s? Why do shoppers in a supermarket sample more jams when more are offered but buy more jams when fewer choices are offered? The answers to these questions lie in the emerging science of behavioral economics, a blend of psychology and economics. Behavioral economics has the potential to offer new insights to a variety of seemingly intractable social policy problems.

The BIAS project, launched by OPRE in 2010, is the first systematic attempt to apply a behavioral economics lens to programs that serve poor families in the United States. The purpose of the project is to apply behavioral insights to issues related to operations, implementation, structure and efficacy of social service programs and policies—that is, to explore how behavioral nudges and cues such as defaults, choice overloads and identity alter the ability of ACF programs, staff and clients to achieve their desired outcomes. Ultimately, BIAS will provide new insights as to how tools from behavioral science can be used to improve the well-being of low-income children, adults and families. The BIAS project is being conducted by MDRC in partnership with ideas42.

After an intensive process of engaging with stakeholders across four primary ACF program areas—TANF; child care; child support and programs for children, youth and families—the team is currently applying a diagnostic framework called “behavioral mapping” to identify which behavioral issues to address. The goal is to produce behavioral maps that show where psychological barriers or bottlenecks may be obstructing program goals, and suggest where behavioral interventions may make a difference.

The BIAS project will begin building evidence about the effectiveness of specific behaviorally-informed interventions through a series of pilot tests that will begin in 2013. The final phase of the project will involve scaling up and evaluating, using random assignment, those interventions that show the most promise during the pilot phase.

## Youth Demonstration Development Project (YDD)

OPRE embarked on YDD in 2009 in order to systematically explore conceptual frameworks for youth development and successful transition to adulthood. The primary objective of YDD, which is being conducted for OPRE by Mathematica Policy Research and its partner, Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, is to identify, modify or develop conceptual frameworks that could be applied to existing or new ACF programs to improve the well-being of at-risk youth and increase their ability to become self-sufficient adults and avoid long-term reliance on public assistance. The frameworks will inform decisions by ACF about possible demonstrations and evaluations of innovative approaches to improving outcomes among youth at risk of not achieving self-sufficiency.

The project is exploring the development of a single conceptual framework that can be modified for subgroups of youth, such as homeless youth or young parents. This framework could include an initial assessment by an intermediary organization to identify the youth’s needs and then help the youth make connections to needed resources. This idea emanated from the project’s recently released report, *Synthesis of Research and Resources to Support At-Risk Youth*, as well as discussion at the first meeting of the project’s Technical Working Group, held in October 2010.

In the past year, the project team has conducted site visits to youth-serving programs around the United States to gather feedback on and reactions to the framework that the team has developed and how it might effectively be implemented by the field. This information will be used to refine the conceptual framework in advance of the second meeting of the Technical Working Group, to be held in October 2012. The project is currently scheduled to conclude in December 2012 with a final conceptual framework report.

## Assets for Independence (AFI) Evaluation

For many low-income families, unstable employment and unpredictable earnings are common.

To cushion against potential income shocks, many have advocated for expanding the asset base of poor families.

In the fall of 2011, ACF launched the first-ever random assignment evaluation of the impact of participation in the AFI program. The AFI experiment will build on the previous quasi-experimental evaluation of the AFI program, as well other research on non-AFI-funded Individual Development Accounts (IDAs). While research suggests that IDAs help low-income families save, rigorous, experimental research is limited and the majority of research has not focused on AFI-funded IDAs. Thus, questions remain about the impact of the AFI program on participant outcomes, warranting further rigorous evaluation.

Over the past year, the research team—led by Urban Institute and its partners, MEF Associates and RTI—has conducted an extensive field assessment to identify potential evaluation sites. Two sites are tentatively planned to participate in the study. Site agreements will likely be finalized in fall 2012 and enrollment will begin in January 2013 and run through March 2014. A follow-up survey to be conducted 12 months after baseline data collection and additional follow-up surveys may be planned in the future.



### **ACF Research Development Project on the Human Service Needs of LGBT Populations**

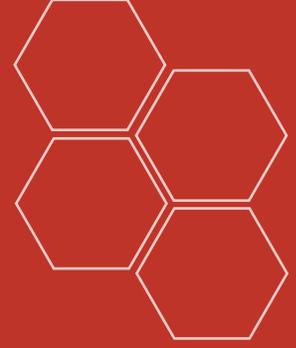
OPRE, in coordination with ASPE, is conducting a research needs assessment to identify data gaps to better understand the human service needs related to low-income and at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families, children, individuals and communities.

Goals of this Project include: conducting site visits to programs that serve homeless LGBT youth to examine how these programs collect data and target services to homeless LGBT youth; identifying the knowledge base related to low-income and at-risk LGBT individuals, families, populations and communities and disparities in well-being outcomes,

if any, in order to improve understanding of these populations' utilization of ACF-funded services and current ACF program policies and practices related to these populations; and creating research-focused recommendations related to any data gaps and human service needs identified in the other components that will inform an ACF research agenda around LGBT populations.

Before beginning this work, OPRE carried out discussions with ACF program offices and external LGBT experts.

The contract has been awarded to Mathematica Policy Research, with their subcontractor, the Williams Institute, an organization dedicated to conducting rigorous, independent research on sexual orientation and gender identity.



# SPOTLIGHT ON DISSEMINATION

OPRE is continually striving to not only produce high-quality rigorous research, but also to ensure that this research is available, accessible and relevant to policymakers and program operators. Program and policy research is not created in a vacuum, but as part of a cycle of communication between researchers, practitioners and policymakers. If research does not reach those who can implement it—if it is not responsive to key questions in the field and presented in accessible forms—then that research will not have maximum impact. In recent years, OPRE has devoted greater attention to the dissemination of its research and to the relationships that are crucial for that dissemination to be successful.

## OPRE Dissemination Project

The OPRE Dissemination Project, being conducted by Public Strategies Inc. and jointly-funded by ASPE, is intended to develop a highly effective, evidence-informed research dissemination strategy for OPRE. The Project has conducted a literature review on the current state of evidence on dissemination, and developed a detailed, user-focused dissemination framework based on that review. It continues to develop and implement an integrated, strategic marketing plan to communicate OPRE work to targeted audiences. The Project involves a series of tasks that build on one another and produce multiple deliverables along the way, all informed by a synthesis of the evidence about effective dissemination of research. This includes ongoing market research interviews with policymakers and intermediaries. The process is intended to lead to clear pathways for improving dissemination of OPRE's projects to various audiences and heightening communication and interoperability with other ACF offices.

## Self-Sufficiency Research Clearinghouse (SSRC)

The SSRC (<https://www.opressrc.org/>) was launched in the summer of 2012. The SSRC disseminates quality research and evaluation studies on TANF and low-income populations, focusing on self-sufficiency, employment and family and child well-being, not limited to ACF-sponsored research. The Clearinghouse is intended to be of use to researchers, policymakers and practitioners, assisting all three groups in accessing high-quality research. The Clearinghouse, being administered by ICF International under a Cooperative Agreement, continues to look at how to engage and serve the needs of these three user groups.

## Welfare Research and Evaluation Conference (WREC)

For more than fifteen years, the WREC (<http://www.wrconference.net/>) has been a leading forum for welfare and poverty researchers, State and local administrators, practitioners, program operators and Federal officials and policymakers to discuss cutting-edge research on welfare and related programs and policies. The WREC promotes conversations about the latest findings in evaluation of welfare programs and policies, ways to incorporate findings into the design and implementation of programs and policies and strategies for future evaluations. In addition, the conference also provides opportunities for emerging scholars, who are early in their research careers, to showcase their work. Conference topics include: TANF; education, training and success in the labor market; child and youth well-being; fatherhood, relationships and strengthening families; evaluating social programs; building and using evidence and approaches to alleviate poverty and strengthen the safety net. WREC 2013 is scheduled to take place May 29–31 in Washington, DC.

The logo for the Office of Planning and Research (OPRE) is located in the bottom-left corner. It consists of a stylized icon of three horizontal bars of varying lengths, followed by the letters "OPRE" in a bold, sans-serif font. The entire logo is white and is set against a dark blue background that features a pattern of white-outlined hexagons.

**OPRE**