



Michigan Works! Southwest’s Remote Coaching for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Recipients

Summary

Michigan Works! Southwest operates the American Jobs Center in southwest Michigan and is contracted by Michigan’s TANF agency to provide employment services to people who receive TANF benefits and must participate in TANF work activities. In 2020, Michigan Works! Southwest established a goal-focused coaching model for working with TANF recipients and chose to deliver coaching remotely using a web-based coaching platform called TuaPath. TuaPath facilitates collaboration between participants and coaches in defining meaningful employment-related goals; streamlines administrative tasks and compliance paperwork; and helps participants keep track of their goals and work participation requirements. The platform includes an online orientation to integrate participants remotely into the Michigan Works! program and an online resource database to remove barriers to accessing information and resources for families with low incomes.

Funding source



Michigan Works! Southwest pays for TuaPath and the software licenses for coaches through the state’s TANF block grant.

Intervention description



To shift TANF employment services from a compliance-oriented approach to a goal-attainment approach, Michigan Works! Southwest established a coaching model for working with TANF recipients required to participate in work activities. The model is based on Goal4 It!™, a science-informed approach to the development and pursuit of goals developed by the organization Mathematica. Rather than focusing on compliance, coaches work with participants to explore their motivations, customizing the approach to help participants create and achieve employment goals that are important to them.

Services provided



Case management;
Supportive services;
Work readiness activities
(*Employment coaching; Job search assistance*)

Populations served

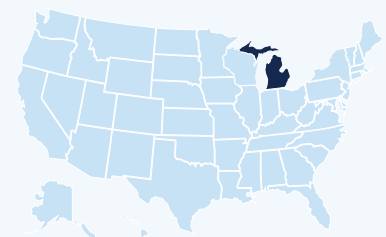


The program offers remote coaching to people receiving TANF cash assistance who are required to participate in employment activities and who live in Michigan Works! Southwest’s service area.

Setting



Michigan Works! Southwest operates in Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph Counties in Michigan.



Year first implemented

2020 (ongoing at the time of data collection)

What are case studies?

Case studies provide practitioners with information about innovative interventions that states, counties, community-based organizations, or other entities are undertaking to improve employment outcomes for TANF participants and other individuals with low incomes, especially public assistance recipients. **Case studies cover interventions not included elsewhere in the Clearinghouse because they have not yet been rigorously evaluated.**

Michigan Works! Southwest chose to deliver the coaching remotely using the TuaPath online-coaching software. Implementation of the coaching model through the TuaPath platform constitutes Michigan Works! Southwest's remote-coaching intervention. Michigan Works! Southwest based its remote coaching on an earlier intervention by the Larimer County Works Program in Colorado that also used TuaPath to deliver a goal-focused coaching model, based on Goal4 It!, remotely.

Remote coaching begins as soon as participants are referred to Michigan Works! Southwest employment services. In TuaPath, participants take a remote assessment and, at their own pace, complete an orientation consisting of online videos and activities. After completing the orientation, participants identify and define goals and action steps with their coach, record them in the platform, and then work with coaches toward meeting the goals. The most common goal participants have entered is obtaining full-time employment, followed by goals aimed at removing barriers to employment such as arranging adequate housing and transportation.

TuaPath provides the following capabilities to help coaches and participants work together toward reaching employment goals and to facilitate participants' compliance with TANF requirements:

- An online assessment and orientation that interactively engage participants and facilitate the coaches' evaluation of participants' needs
- A user interface that enables coaches and participants to collaborate when developing short- and long-term goals and action steps
- Functionality enabling coaches to monitor participants' progress and track outcomes
- A communication tool enabling coaches and participants to message each other on the platform
- An online database of Michigan Works! Southwest's partners and resources in the community, which enables participants to find and access resources to make progress toward their goals

TuaPath also has features that reduce the administrative burden on coaches and participants:

- A built-in web-based calendar in which participants

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can monitor their work participation hours, activities, and appointments and receive automated reminders for upcoming deadlines. Before incorporating TuaPath, coaches followed up with participants through phone calls and manually tracked work participation hours, activities, and appointments in Outlook Calendar and Excel spreadsheets.

- A feature for participants to submit monthly timesheets and supporting documents through the online platform to help streamline compliance requirements. Before incorporating TuaPath, coaches contacted participants via phone, text, or email to collect monthly work and participation hours and maintained all timesheets and supporting documents in file folders.

In addition, Michigan Works! Southwest is engaging state administrators to connect TuaPath and the state management information system used for employment services. This would allow the state system to directly refer TANF recipients to coaching services through the TuaPath system. Currently, participants are referred to Michigan Works! Southwest from the state management information system and manually entered into TuaPath.

The launch of remote coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic affected its implementation. Initially, Michigan Works! Southwest planned to implement remote coaching in March 2020 but delayed implementation until July 2020 because of the pandemic. Michigan Works! Southwest also shifted to delivering all job search, coaching services, and job-readiness training remotely, beginning in March 2020. As part of that shift, Michigan Works! Southwest worked with TuaPath developers to add an online orientation, which was typically offered in person. Because of the pandemic, Michigan Works! Southwest provides additional support for participants to facilitate remote service delivery, such as laptops and subsidized Internet service for up to three months. Before the pandemic, Michigan Works! Southwest offered one-on-one, in-person vocational training, but

now the organization is planning to develop a training for remote delivery. Michigan Works! Southwest was tracking work participation hours at the time of this case study's drafting, but Michigan had waived TANF work participation requirements and did not impose sanctions during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Michigan Works! Southwest did not have an adequate amount of time to prepare and execute the remote coaching model due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As mentioned above, the organization had to transition all of its services to be delivered remotely, while also implementing the remote coaching service, which left the organization with less time to devote to the preparation and launch of the coaching program. As a result, not all coaches received full training on TuaPath. Program administrators believe this led to some coaches having less enthusiasm for using TuaPath when delivering services. To address this, leadership encouraged coaches to become "TuaPath champions," who see the platform as a beneficial tool and support others as they learn how to use it. To build internal capacity and save on future costs, one staff person at MichiganWorks! Southwest received training on how to create, manage, and modify content on the TuaPath platform. Michigan Works! Southwest managers judged that at least six months would have been a more appropriate amount of time to roll out the remote coaching model.

The approximate total cost of the TuaPath platform is \$30,000, which includes start-up costs and the licensing user fees for 12 coaches. This equates to about \$38 per participant.

More information



More information on this intervention is available from the following resources:

Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance (2018). *Technology initiatives that support employment outcomes—Colorado: Web-based technology for coaching TANF participants*, Emerging Practice Series #2018-02, Washington, DC: Office of Family Assistance, Administration for Children and Families, U.S.

MichiganWorks! Southwest plans to implement remote coaching with SNAP recipients and noncustodial parents upon guidance and approval from the state. It also plans to offer an online vocational training to help participants transition into the workforce.

Research on intervention to date



This intervention has not been rigorously evaluated for effectiveness. There are no

evaluations of Michigan Works! Southwest's remote coaching to date. In collaboration with

Mathematica, Michigan Works! Southwest is planning to survey participants on experiences with TuaPath and the coaching model. Michigan Works! Southwest also plans to track outcome data in the future using the TuaPath platform. Michigan Works! Southwest, other American Job Centers in Michigan, and TuaPath developers created a workgroup to incorporate tracking of goals, employment, wages, and job retention into the platform.

Case study information sources

From fall 2020 to summer 2021, the Pathways Clearinghouse collected information for this case study from telephone interviews and email communication with leaders at Michigan Works! Southwest. The Pathways Clearinghouse shared a near-finalized draft of the case study with Michigan Works! Southwest and incorporated revisions for accuracy and completeness. For more information about the methods for selecting and developing the case studies, please see the [Protocol for Pathways Clearinghouse Case Studies on the Pathways Clearinghouse project page](#).

Department of Health and Humans Services. Available at https://peerta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/uploaded_files/IIIESS%20Emerging%20Practice_Colorado_Final_508_updated.pdf.

Mathematica (2019). *Goal4 It!*. Available at <https://www.mathematica.org/features/goal4-it>.

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