



# Advancing a Whole-Family Approach to Economic Well-being and Stability in Iowa

The Iowa Department of Human Rights (Iowa DHR) has helped shape the national landscape on economic self-sufficiency through its Family Development and Self-Sufficiency (FaDSS) program. In 2018, FaDSS services improved the quality of life of over 2,800 families at risk of long-term welfare dependency or family instability by creating opportunities for economic well-being and stability.

The program has historically focused on short-term support aimed at helping families graduate from cash assistance within the complex web of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs. Despite significant overlap in individuals and families served between various TANF programs, there were barriers to collaboration and data sharing across agencies. Programs often focused on short-term outcomes instead of the whole-family supports needed to realize longer-term outcomes that lead to economic well-being and family stability.

“Third Sector’s help with focus groups was just so crucial, everything we [Iowa DHR] did from there on tied back to family or provider feedback and has really helped us push for systems change.”

— Kelly Davydov, Program Manager, Iowa DHR

## RESULTS

Iowa DHR is fundamentally shifting how it ‘partners with’ providers and families to advance whole-family approach to development and self-sufficiency. It began with five FaDSS providers co-designing whole-family enhancements to their programs. This includes:

- Harmonize program components and expand eligibility requirements to provide critical support to the growing number of TANF disconnected families.
- Pursue data sharing agreements between agencies and providers to make navigating the system easier for families while enabling providers to develop a system-wide, whole-family view.
- Enhance the focus on long-term outcomes through redesigned program provider contracts that promote innovation in service delivery. This includes three-year family outcomes achievable by addressing the intersecting needs of parents and children.

- Test strategies to counter potential adverse effects, such as when a family becomes ineligible for a service because of a marginal increase in their income. This includes leveraging policy flexibility and deploying engagement strategies to extend program engagement and reduce TANF reentry rates.
- Ongoing engagement with providers and families on policies and programs in order to bring families to the center of decision-making.

## ACTION

Iowa DHR set out to “shift the culture within Iowa’s TANF system from ‘service for’ to ‘partners with’ working parents [and service providers] as assets and partners” (as per Iowa Family Leadership in Policy and Practice Change). Critical activities in the development of this transformative vision and pilot were:

- **Provider and Family Feedback** was captured through a series of focus groups and surveys to better understand a family’s experience and the interface between policies and families. This included direct input to identifying the strengths of current programs and developing recommendations for policy and program enhancement.
- **Agency Stakeholder Feedback** was consolidated and leveraged to address the barriers to progress (e.g., policy and data capacity) in an outcomes-focused action plan—which, once drafted, was taken back to stakeholders for review and prioritization of actions steps.

- **A Pilot Co-Designed with Providers**

that uses the whole-family approach. This was achieved through a series of workshops to build a shared understanding of two-generational principles, and by empowering providers to create solutions to program barriers.



“We saw the Empowering Families Initiative as a perfect opportunity to build systems to support a whole-family approach.”

– Kelly Davydov, Program Manager, Iowa DHR

## ABOUT

**Iowa Department of Human Rights (Iowa DHR)** advocates for underrepresented Iowans and fosters hope within our communities by educating individuals, businesses and government entities about the needs, rights and responsibilities of all Iowans.

**Empowering Families** was a national cohort of government agencies that received technical assistance from Third Sector to support improved outcomes for children and families through the use of outcomes-oriented contracting. The initiative was funded by a Social Innovation Fund grant from the Corporation for National and Community Service.

**Third Sector** is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization that is transforming the way communities connect people with human services. We partner with governments, providers, and their partners to generate positive, measurable outcomes for the people they serve.