Voices of Recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families

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Executive Summary

The Department of Human Services (DHS) contracted with Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (PHFO) to conduct eight focus groups with recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in Portland and greater Oregon between October and December 2014. The purpose of this study was to understand the types of services and supports families need to feel financially stable and healthy. Sixty-two individuals participated in the focus groups. Focus groups were recorded and transcribed or transcribed on-site. A team of community researchers conducted thematic analysis of the transcripts.

During analysis, five themes were identified: 1) issues related to financial stability; 2) useful services; 3) views of TANF; 4) experiences with TANF workers; and 5) desired services and improvements. Although themes are overlapping, each theme produced a unique insight into the study question. The findings of each theme will be briefly summarized.

With regards to the first theme, participants described financial stability as having needs met and money saved, working at a living wage job, and not living on public assistance. Barriers to stability included lack of childcare, lack of a living wage job, lack of education, lack of citizenship, past incarceration, addiction, domestic violence, and mental/physical health issues. Participants described job training programs that led to living wage jobs as particularly helpful in obtaining stability.

Second, focus group participants reported that a range of services is necessary in order to attain stability from healthcare to transportation to childcare. Housing was described as essential to stability as were personally tailored employment and job training programs. Nutrition programs, such as food stamps and Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), were important for meeting everyday needs.

Third, focus groups revealed that participants are extremely grateful for TANF. Connections to other services that TANF workers provide to clients were depicted as essential. However, focus group participants described a lack of transparency with DHS policies and a social service system that is difficult to navigate. Participants related that the amount of cash assistance is not enough to meet daily expenses. Participants also expressed frustration with finding a job, making minimal income, and having TANF immediately cut off; in fact, participants stated that for this reason, it is difficult to get off TANF. Fourth, while some participants had productive relationships with their TANF workers, other participants conveyed that their TANF workers seemed overworked, frequently lost paperwork, and treated their clients with disrespect.

Fifth, participants described a need for more responsive, personally tailored wraparound support for their families. Some desired services included: improved transitional cash assistance support after TANF recipients receive jobs; mentors to assist with social service navigation; intensive trainings for TANF workers to create more positive relationships with clients and to improve transparency of policies; increased childcare support; and improved, personally tailored employment services that connect clients with job training programs, school, and living wage jobs.

These voices of TANF recipients reveal gratitude for services received and specific suggestions for how services can be improved. We hope that this information provides insight into how funding can be productively reinvested into the TANF program.
Recommendations from Focus Group Participants

Focus group participants expressed the desire for more responsive, personally tailored, wraparound support for their families. These suggestions operate at the systemic and service levels.

I. Systemic Level

A. Improve the transparency of DHS policies: train TANF staff to communicate clearly with clients about DHS policies, including providing the reasons for policies and how recipient obligations should be met. Provide an introductory packet of information to new clients including key information on services offered, recipient obligations, required paperwork, and important due dates.

B. Re-evaluate specific policies:

1. Amount of cash assistance received: re-calculate the amount of cash assistance families need to stabilize given current, and regional, economic conditions and implement those adjustments. Ensure that families are receiving the correct allotted amount of assistance, particularly among individuals with on-call jobs and married couples living separately.

2. Transitional support: implement more robust, transitional support for clients after they start working, such as a sliding scale of decreasing cash assistance.

3. Cash assistance for clients in school: allow unlimited participation in adult basic education, General Education Development (GED) coursework, English as a Second Language (ESL), and post-secondary training and education (including 4-year programs).

C. TANF workers: provide intensive trainings that focus on building rapport with clients, improving cultural competency, and communicating clearly with clients about DHS policies. Conduct ongoing evaluations of TANF workers, including monitoring caseworker workloads.

D. Support for system navigation: provide each TANF recipient with a mentor/liaison who has past experience navigating the social service system. Organize incentive-based TANF recipient support groups. Ensure that translation services are readily available.

II. Service Level

A. Employment services: provide improved, personally tailored services that focus on job training and entry into living wage jobs. Match clients with jobs that suit their interests and past work experiences.

B. Financial services: provide assistance with developing budgets, creating bank accounts, and establishing good credit.

C. Childcare services: provide increased childcare services, especially for children with special needs, for children of TANF recipients who are in school or looking for work, for infants under six months, and for children whose parents are married.

D. Connections to other services: continue to connect TANF recipients to other services – including housing, mental health services, and addiction services – that support financial stability.
Introduction

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a program housed within Oregon’s Department of Human Services (DHS) that provides cash assistance and connections to community resources to low-income families with children. In 2014, a budget forecast for the coming biennium showed that with the improved economy fewer families would access TANF, resulting in a reduction in expenditures of $30 million. In recognition that the state had to cut more than $90 million from TANF during the recession, DHS requested that the Governor use this money to reinvest in important services for families to help them move into jobs and off of TANF. DHS contracted with Partners for a Hunger-Free Oregon (PHFO) to conduct eight focus groups with clients to solicit input on this question: what services and supports would help your family feel financially stable and healthy? PHFO subcontracted with Central City Concern (CCC) to conduct four of the focus groups.

This report will present the voices of individuals who are current or past recipients of TANF. It is our hope that these voices will provide insight into how funding can be wisely reinvested into the TANF Program.

Methodology

PHFO and CCC conducted eight focus groups in October and November 2014 according to methodology discussed in Krueger and Casey (2000). Each group was composed of 4 – 11 current or past recipients of TANF for a total of 62 participants. Four focus groups were conducted among diverse communities in Portland including a group each of African Americans, Asian immigrants, Native Americans, and White Americans. Culturally appropriate, community moderators guided discussion at these focus groups. The remaining four groups were conducted in four locations in greater Oregon: Newport, Ontario, Redmond, and Roseburg. An individual employed at PHFO guided discussion at the Ontario and Newport groups; experienced moderators employed at local agencies guided discussion at the Redmond and Roseburg groups. All moderators, except for the two experienced moderators, attended one of two moderator trainings in October 2014. An individual experienced in focus group methodology trained the moderators based on principles discussed in Krueger and Casey (2000).

Moderators asked eleven questions to solicit the following information: 1) reflections on financial stability and past work experiences; 2) experiences with TANF and other social services that have promoted financial stability; and 3) suggestions on how to improve the TANF program (See Appendix I for focus group questions). Questions were developed based on input from individuals at DHS, CCC, other nonprofit organizations that serve populations on TANF, and researchers well versed in focus group methodology. The same questioning format was utilized during all focus groups except for one question that was added after the first group. During the Portland focus groups, a professional transcriptionist was present to transcribe focus group dialogue, and at the greater Oregon groups, focus groups were recorded and later transcribed.

Participants were recruited through nonprofit organizations that serve families in the TANF program. Caseworkers selected a convenience sample of current or past TANF recipients and invited them to the groups, or focus group incentives were broadly advertised and participants attended based on their motivation and desire. The exception to this recruitment strategy was in Newport where a focus group was held during a mandatory meeting at a shelter. At the Portland focus groups, families were provided with dinner, childcare, transportation costs, and a $20 Fred Meyer gift card to incentivize focus group participation. In Roseburg, Ontario, and Newport, attendees received a meal, childcare, a
$20 gift card to a local grocery store or pharmacy, and a $15 gas card for travel reimbursement. In Redmond, attendees received a meal, childcare, and a $35 gift card to Fred Meyer because it was anticipated that attendees would have to travel farther than a $15 gas card would allow.

A team of five community researchers – two who have expertise in focus groups and qualitative data collection and analysis – conducted thematic analysis of the focus group transcripts. All researchers read the Portland transcripts and identified emergent themes and subthemes. Researchers then coded two Portland transcripts with the identified themes and compared coding strategy. Subtle differences in coding were identified and agreement was easily reached. Due to time constraints, two individuals coded the remaining six transcripts and extracted key quotations for each theme.

Results

During analysis, five themes were identified: 1) issues related to financial stability; 2) useful services; 3) views of TANF; 4) experiences with TANF workers; and 5) desired services and improvements. Although themes are overlapping, each theme produced a unique insight into the study question. Each theme will be discussed in turn.

1. Issues related to financial stability

Three subthemes emerged within the theme of financial stability: opinions on financial stability, barriers to stability, and employment opportunities. Several participants described financial stability as having needs met, money saved, and not living paycheck to paycheck:

“…financial stability to me would be like I was able to afford, you know, paying the bills, the rent, the car, insurance, not really having to live payday to payday, and being able to have an emergency fund…So for me it would be just to be able to not have to live paycheck to paycheck and have respectful amount of money in the bank in case I needed it.”

For many focus group participants, financial stability also meant getting off of social services and finding a living wage job:

“We use a lot of services, and being stable…would be not having any services so we can do it on our own. We want that pride back again. We all know we can, and it sucks that we're not able to right now. None of us like that, I'm pretty sure. It comes down to having the ability and to have a job with a living wage that we could provide and pay for all those bills ourselves.”

Barriers to stability most importantly included lack of access to dependable childcare. One immigrant from Southeast Asia described the difficulties associated with working and not having childcare:

“I try to work but the problem is my child care. Now there are not enough people stay at my place to watch. Because the place is housing, public housing. So it's hard…wake up early morning, get him ready…from now on I try to look for swing shift so I can [work].”

Parents of children with special needs expressed a particular concern about not having safe and adequate childcare. In one participant’s words:

“In home ones [daycares], my son with autism, he was abused in a few of them. So I will not send my child to an in-home daycare ever again; as long as I’m alive, he’s not going. I would
rather lose all my TANF if I had to, to send him back and take that chance that he was going to get abused again.”

Although many focus participants have had jobs and stable incomes, some participants discussed the lack of living wage jobs as a barrier to stability. One participant described her struggles with maintaining stability even while having a job:

“…I was on TANF for eight years, and I tried to get a job. And it was hard, but I got a job. And now me and my husband both have a job, and the way I still look at it, no matter what, if you're on TANF or you're not, you're still ending up living month-to-month. You get two paychecks in one month, but you still are living month-to-month…”

One participant identified her inability to find a living wage job as related to a lack of education:

“For me, because I don’t have my high school diploma or my GED, I’m limited to certain jobs…and if they could put schooling in my case plan, that would be wonderful. Because I’m not gonna be stable with a part-time job and three kids…I just think schooling is a huge thing because without a high school diploma or GED all I’m gonna be able to apply for is all these part-time jobs… it’s something but not enough to keep being stable.”

Participants described losing work and difficulty with finding work as due to physical or mental health issues. Other participants described difficulties with finding work due to past incarceration or addiction. In one participant’s words:

“Twenty-three years ago when I went to school, the schooling that I went to I can't do now because of my background because of my addiction. I can work in hospitals like at the front desk, but I can't work with patients because of the way things happened. And so it makes it really difficult finding jobs…”

Recent immigrants to the United States have a unique set of circumstances that prevent them from obtaining financial stability. Many recent immigrants from Southeast Asia conveyed their frustration with their inability to work due to lack of citizenship or work visa:

“Right now I’m not allowed to work because I am not citizen yet. I’m coming here for student visa, so I’m not allowed to work right now. So I just can get like TANF only… If I can get a Green Card and I can work here so I don’t have to receive the TANF or anything else from the Government… right now I am not allowed to work so that’s the problem.”

Several Southeast Asian immigrants married U.S. citizens, got a divorce due to domestic violence issues, were left in the U.S. without the ability to work (no citizenship or permanent residency), and had the responsibility of supporting children. This has left many of these immigrants in vulnerable and unstable situations.

With regards to employment opportunities, focus group participants discussed jobs they had in the past and why they kept jobs. Participants described an array of jobs that they have held including roofer, fisherman, cashier, Certified Nursing Assistant, and chef. Individuals found and kept jobs for a variety of reasons. This individual described how she enjoyed and kept her job because she felt valued and learned new skills:
“I got a good job in dialysis. I was a dialysis tech in Vancouver for three years, and I liked working in the medical field and taking care of people. I felt important, you know. I liked the responsibility of what I had to do every day, and my duties and stuff. It was the best job I ever had, and it paid well…. the skills that I learned on my job I'm able to carry on, you know, what I mean? That was most important to me is the skills that I gained as far as professional, customer service, being able to talk to different people, and doctors, and correspond and stuff like that.”

Some focus group participants described jobs that they enjoyed and kept because of a positive working environment. One focus group participant described how her co-workers and customers respected her and cared for her:

“Well my favorite job, honestly, that I’ve ever had is probably that restaurant job that just closed. I loved my customers, they respected me… the owner treated us like family. He walked me to my car every single night because he knew I had some PTSD safety issues. They just were good to us. They treated us like family…”

Other participants talked about the comfort of having a living wage job. In one participant’s words:

“I had a job where I made salary, and I knew exactly how much money I was going to bring every month…I was making like $3000 a month take-home, and I had everything budgeted out. And I had plenty of money leftover at the end of the month. I had money in savings. I had money to do whatever I wanted…to be able to do things with my kids. And I didn't really need anything. We had everything we needed, and most of the things we wanted.”

Unsurprisingly, many participants stated that the reason they kept their job was to provide for their children. Participants also described finding and keeping jobs because the working hours allowed them to care for their children or to find adequate childcare.

2. Useful services

Several questions prompted participants to identify useful services and why those services were helpful in finding stability. Useful services discussed ran the gamut from transportation to healthcare to legal services to childcare. Only a few useful services that particularly stood out in terms of assisting individuals with financial stability will be discussed here (a complete list of useful services with example quotations is located in Appendix II).

Participants stated that assistance with finding employment and attaining job skills were essential. Programs mentioned included: Worksource Oregon, Jobs Plus Program, GOALS Program, Self Enhancement, Inc., and the Straightaway Program. One young focus group participant described why her experiences with the Straightaway Program were important for envisioning a new future for herself:

“…it showed me something different because I decided to grow up on the streets because that's how my family was. So I just thought that since my family and my cousins are gang bangers and they're on the streets, then why can't I do the same thing they're doing? So the program kind of helped me see that I don't have to be that because my family is. And it showed me new opportunities and put me to new programs and internships, and that is what made me realize that I want to own my own business, and I want to do hair and make-up. But I also want to be
a chef and I want to cook. So I want to, like, be a big, I want to be a big business owner and have two different businesses. I think if I never went through the program I would never learn that, and I would have just stayed on the streets.”

Participants felt that Worksource Oregon classes that provide assistance with resume creation and job search tools are helpful. The GOALs Program paid for one participant quoted earlier to receive her phlebotomy certification and attain a stable job at a hospital. Another participant expressed her appreciation for job training programs affiliated with DHS:

“A few years ago I did a couple classes in a row. First I did a business office and got a certificate. That helped me refresh my skills for the business admin part. Then after that I got to take a medical office/medical assistant class. And that was all through DHS TANF program. So I got those certificates under my belt and put them on my resume so when I do apply for a job I do have those skills…I got to meet a lot of new people and build little friendships and business friendships.”

Participants also described housing programs as essential to finding stability. Many participants conveyed how TANF simply does not cover the cost of rent, which makes housing assistance a necessity. One participant described her experiences with Home Forward:

“With TANF it’s not a lot and it gets hard to be able to pay the rent and the bills. Having the extra bit of help to be able to budget and save and be able to go to school or work. And so getting that help with rent or utilities for the time being to kind of get a – you know, be able to walk by ourselves.”

Another individual who participated conveyed the importance of housing she found with NeighborImpact:

“High school economics, they teach us that your rent should be no more than 1/3 of your monthly income. How many of us can honestly say that? I can right now because I’m on a housing program but that’s the only reason my kids and I haven’t ended up back in a shelter. It’s because I’ve had a housing program through NeighborImpact.”

Nutrition programs were mentioned frequently as useful services. In some groups, participants described that the combination of TANF and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) was essential for meeting everyday needs. In one participant’s words:

“Without food stamps and TANF, combined together, we just really -- none of us probably would make it. And one without the other is really helpful, but really it takes both when you have a family, and you're trying to pay for housing, and you have no other income, and you have to have food, you know.”

Other useful nutrition programs included Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), free lunches at schools, and food shelves.

Lastly, an empowerment program offered through the Healthy Birth Initiative (HBI) appeared to be particularly helpful to one focus group participant. Although the program was only mentioned once during all eight focus groups, the impact that it had on this participant is noteworthy:
“A lot of different classes and stuff like that for us, you know, black women, black men, a lot of empowerment courses. It's a lot of support. Like I've never had so much support from African Americans as I have in HBI before. Like the work they do in the community...I feel so good about it because I never got that before like from black women and black men that are really trying to help us...I'm really gaining my self-esteem and my confidence and all of that...and you have good conversation and you're able to participate. Be a leader and not just a follower. You have opportunities to also be a leader, and have an opinion and make changes.”

Participants also identified informal supports such as friends, family, and community as important to finding stability. Younger participants described their parents as critical supports, especially after having children. In almost every focus group, participants described friends and family as a means of finding work. Some focus group participants also valued friends and family to assist with childcare, especially because friends and family are deemed trustworthy. One participant described how a personal contact both gave her work and helped her with caring for her children:

“I got a chance to work with just the neighbors. I mean, she’s a caregiver I worked as her caregiver for four years and I quit because I came down here...the lady she helped me with my kids. When they have birthday and whenever they have holidays she helped me out. I felt like she’s my mom or my grandma and she helped me with my kids.”

3. Views of TANF

When participants discussed their views of TANF, two subthemes emerged: the importance of TANF and difficulties with the TANF program. With regards to the importance of TANF, in every focus group, participants expressed how thankful they were for the TANF program. Participants mostly use TANF to pay for necessities including utilities, rent, and children’s needs. One participant described the importance of TANF in paying for necessities:

“For me it's important because now that I have two kids, you know, it helps with diapers, underwear for my daughter, and paying bills, and just, it helps, like it's not a lot, but it helps. My girl's father is around, and he doesn't work, but he gets social security, but that is never enough. So TANF is a big help. Especially when he wasn't there when I had my first baby it was everything to me. When I had my first daughter I was 21. So out of my mom's house and no source of income, none. And that helped because where was I going to get diapers or wipes or formula?”

Participants also remarked that TANF helped them learn how to budget their money. In one participant’s words:

“I have learned how to survive within those parameters and be able to do what I need to do for my kids within what I receive. Grocery shopping is a whole different ballgame now but I learn so much. And I can do so much more for so less.”

Most importantly, focus group participants felt that their TANF worker connecting them to secondary services was pivotal:

“A big part of it is we have been using the services of TANF, but I think their connections to secondary services, as well, of things they don't have are necessary. None of us would make it alone on just TANF. It is sad to say, but none of us would...there are secondary services for
diapers, for lunches, utilities, just you end up running around and spending a lot of time trying to find those services if you don't have a TANF worker to tell you how to get those services.”

Focus group participants described a variety of difficulties with the TANF program. Five key issues will be discussed. It should be noted that many of these issues are inter-related. However, we have attempted to unpack these issues into clear categories for ease of understanding.

First, participants conveyed various concerns about benefit processes. Participants described packed offices and overloaded caseworkers. Several participants described seeing a different worker each visit, which caused a discontinuity in their case:

“…the system kind of frustrates me…not every persons on the same page, or as educated – especially the caseworkers down at the TANF office. I have had my case switched to 100 different caseworkers in the five years that I’ve been there. I call and say, “Can you transfer me to this person?” They’re like, “No, that’s not your caseworker anymore. Hold on the line.” So it’s totally something new. And every time that I’ve transferred my case to a new caseworker, I’ve learned something different from that individual.”

This quotation also speaks to the issue that clients’ quality of services they receive depends on their caseworker. This will be discussed further later in this report.

Participants also expressed concern with a system that is difficult and confusing to navigate. Many participants were confused about certain DHS policies. For example, participants were perplexed about questions that TANF workers asked about the fathers of their children:

“What kills me on the application I just filled out the other day, how many hours a week does the father see the kid? Why is that your business? How many hours a week does your kids see their daddy? When is the last time he's seen the kids? Why? Why? It's like, you really want to know how many hours? Was it at your home? This is way too much for me.”

This quotation about a specific policy reveals a more general desire among focus group participants for transparency and clarity in DHS’s policies and dealings with their clients.

Second, participants described a variety of issues related to going to work or attending school. Participants expressed dismay with finding a job, having only minimal income, and getting cut off of TANF immediately. Many participants felt that they could not support themselves on only the income they were making, especially if they had to pay for childcare. One participant reported the consequences of starting to work and getting cut off of TANF and food stamps:

“…We lost TANF and food stamps all in one day….and it was like, what happened? And not knowing that was going to happen, that was part of our budget. And then – boom – there we are… I went from buying good, healthy things to couponing and buying macaroni and dollar crap for my kid because I couldn’t afford whatever. And hitting food banks, and food banks gives you nothing but rice and oatmeal, beans – crap. Crap just to fill your stomach. And so the hunger pains aren’t there but it’s not really doing anything for you. And so it’s just a huge flaw in the system. It’s a huge flaw.”

Participants conveyed that immediately getting cut off TANF after starting to work ultimately made it more difficult to get off TANF:
“…If I work for a couple of days, and make $100, you know that doesn't really get me anywhere. I know that turns a lot of people off from trying to get work. It's like, why work for a couple of days, and try to work my way out of this system, when all I do is get penalized over here, and I'm not making any more money; I'm not getting anywhere.”

In addition, most participants seemed unaware that the TANF program offers a grace period that allows individuals to stay on the program after they find work or were unclear about how or when to fill out necessary paperwork. This is related to the need for improved transparency in DHS policies described earlier.

Other issues related to going to work and school included participants’ frustration with getting cut off of TANF after deciding to go to school. One participant described her feelings succinctly:

“I don't understand why DHS doesn't promote you to go to school. A degree will get you further than just having a job. I can make minimum wage, but still can't live. But if I get a degree…so many more possibilities are open when you have a college degree.”

Closely related to issues of work and school is childcare. Participants described having inadequate access to childcare when looking for a job or going to work. One participant – who had obtained a position at a nonprofit through the Jobs Plus Program – conveyed that DHS could not pay for childcare because her child was an infant. As a result, she could not go to work.

Third, participants described that services lack a personally tailored approach. One participant clearly described this perspective:

“It’s not just you’re on TANF, you get money and that’s it. It’s a family that you’re dealing with. It’s not just all about the money. You know, something happened in that family for that family to be in this situation. I’m grateful for the money because I have a roof over my head; still, there’s a family there that is in need. And if you’re not gonna look at the whole picture then that picture’s not gonna move forward because it’s not been looked at.”

Some participants specifically mentioned the Jobs Plus program as needing to be personally tailored to individuals’ needs. For example, while some focus group participants felt that resume assistance provided during the Jobs Plus Program was useful, another participant knew how to form a resume and felt frustrated when the Jobs Plus Program required her to sit through a class about resume creation. Other participants who have addiction and mental health issues described a need for TANF to take their individual circumstances into account. One participant stated that it took him 18 months to go through treatment and after care, which was nearly one-third of his time on TANF. He described that it would have been helpful if he could have more time on the program.

Fourth, focus group participants conveyed that the amount of cash assistance received through TANF is insufficient for covering expenses and contributing to stability. Participants stated that food and housing costs have increased, but TANF benefits have stayed the same. One participant described her frustration with this situation:

“If they can go back and recalculate and bring it to this day and age as far as expenses, standard basic expenses, for every person that's on TANF compared to what a comfortable person would be able to get daily…if you really break it down, $700 for a family of five, we must be the best
Fifth, focus group participants described concerns about policies related to child support. As described previously, some participants do not understand the reasons for questions about parents of their children. Participants also, however, communicated that when DHS pursues parents for child support, families are driven apart. In one participant’s words:

“But when I went in to do it [receive TANF] they asked me questions and I was giving them honest answers like who is the baby's father, and I didn't know what their goal was when they asked me...is he involved? And I said he's around. He knows that I'm pregnant. Well, are you guys in a relationship? If you are, you have to come back in with him to get on together unless you put him on child support. And you have to do it. There is no choice. No way around it. Are you serious? And then...I had to say I was scared to put him on child support. That sets it up for him to never get a job. It messes up not just your life, but my daughter because they take anything the wrong way.”

4. Experiences with TANF workers

Through the focus groups, participants revealed that the quality of services received through TANF depends on a client’s TANF worker. Due to the importance of this issue, we created a unique theme regarding participants’ experiences with their caseworkers. Two subthemes emerged within the TANF worker theme: positive experiences with workers and negative experiences with workers. Many focus group participants described their workers as helpful, supportive, and resourceful:

“My TANF worker is awesome. She sends me a bus pass each month and she's like, she just comes over once in a while just to check in. She'll bring the boys clothes or if I need anything for the baby and things like that. When I was having my son through DHS they gave him a bed and things I needed that I couldn't get at the time for the baby.”

In contrast, other focus group participants had negative experiences with their TANF worker including feeling that workers disrespect and stereotype clients. One focus group participant felt her worker had no sympathy for her or her circumstances:

“When my son passed away I was pretty much pushed to still go to Jobs Plus program. And I kept telling them, I'm depressed. I mean I've been depressed for four years since he's passed and I still -- And instead of going to counseling they said I had to go to Jobs Plus, and I was three months pregnant at the time. So it is like I didn't have [time] to grieve, and I'm pregnant, and you're forcing me to go to these classes. No sympathy, no nothing. And recently I just lost my brother-in-law, not my brother-in-law yet, but he would have been, and I just lost him in a car accident...he passed away and I wasn't able to go to his funeral because I had to go to the Jobs Plus program.”

Participants reported their workers did not return phone calls for months or frequently lost their paperwork. Some participants thought this was due to their workers’ overly heavy caseloads. One recent immigrant from Vietnam described how she could not acquire translation services to communicate with her TANF worker.
5. Desired services and improvements

This section will describe focus group participants’ specific suggestions for how to improve the TANF program so that clients can feel financially stable and healthy (in contrast, the previous two sections discussed difficulties with the TANF program and TANF workers). Two sub-themes emerged with regards to desired services and improvements to the TANF program: systemic improvements and service improvements.

Focus group participants described multiple systemic improvements that the program could make. First, focus group participants described several policies that prevent individuals from finding stability.

One participant, quoted earlier in this report, suggested recalculating the cash assistance received so that it reflects current economic conditions. Other participants described the need for a grace period for addicts who relapse. In one participant’s words:

“…some people do relapse and they make mistakes and get kids taken away. I don't think they should shut the TANF off for the parent…When they shut me off, I went right back because that's what I know. And that is how you get money. Just give it 6 months or something. Let the parent make a choice of if they want to be clean or not.”

Several focus group participants described that TANF should have more robust transitional assistance for clients who find jobs:

“I’m just saying you have this anxiety of okay, you know that you’re gonna get this job and then all of a sudden everything’s just – bam – just gone. And there’s just no transition and I think that’s where people get in trouble. And if there was just something that they could… like I said, just a sliding scale. It’s not like you’re asking for all of it, just a little bit of time to get settled and situated into your new job.”

Second, focus group participants offered several ideas for how to provide support for navigating a complex social service system. Participants described the need for liaisons or mentors who have navigated social services in the past to offer assistance with system navigation:

“…dealing with so many different services, there’s a disconnect. It’s like there’s no communication between each of them. So I think some kind of liaisons that kind of, you know, connect it all and make things a little more continuous…I’ve dealt with it on a big level between child welfare and social services, and they’re all in the same building but nobody knows what anybody’s doing. So I think if there was some kind of liaison, some kind of middle man…somebody who makes sure that they’re all working in unison…It takes a lot of time because there isn’t that…there is no hub.”

Other participants described the need for parent support groups for TANF recipients. One participant described that it was very helpful to talk during the focus group about issues related to finding stability. In the participant’s words:

“When you get on TANF they should maybe have a parent support group so that you can discuss, like right here we're sitting and discussing and we all have different things, but we're all doing the same thing, and it helps. And knowing I'm not in this alone has been beneficial for the last two hours.”
Third, participants suggested a variety of ideas about how to improve TANF workers’ relationships with their clients. Focus group participants suggested that TANF workers be required to participate in vigorous sensitivity trainings to learn how to effectively work with clients. Participants also suggested that TANF continually evaluate workers to monitor their progress. This evaluation could include identifying if a worker’s caseloads are manageable. In one participant’s words:

“…maybe if there’s some way to…have some type of relief where they are able to add extra employees. I know everything’s tight because of funding and because of money stuff but maybe where they could have extra employees or some way to ease the caseload, or ease the burden…which, then, would benefit all of the recipients.”

Some participants related that TANF workers need to improve their communication with their clients. One participant conveyed the need for workers to check-in with clients at least every six months even after clients start working:

“I think what happened was after about a year everything just kind of drops off and that’s kind of where I found myself. And then after a couple years it just became so overwhelming, trying to manage the job, and the girls, and all of it, that everything just kind of fell out from under me. And so I think maybe adding something in like that, where if people transition into jobs and then having a six-month check-in period, and then a 12-month check-in. You know, just to reassess and make sure that there isn’t any other services that can help support them.”

Focus group participants also described specific services that would be helpful in attaining financial stability. First, participants depicted housing as essential. As described earlier in this report, cash assistance that TANF provides does not cover the cost of housing. Therefore, connections to affordable or transitional housing prevent TANF recipients from becoming (or staying) homeless. Second, participants conveyed that there is a need for more comprehensive employment services. Multiple participants described the need for more emphasis on schooling and skills training. Some participants expressed an appreciation for the Parents as Scholars Program and requested that the state reinstitute it. One participant described her experiences in Arizona with the state paying for her Certified Nursing Assistant training:

“…I think it would be awesome – like in Arizona, I had help paying for my CNA. I didn’t have to pay for it myself, you know what I mean? Because going to school, even my financial aid won’t help me pay for my CNA so that I can get it converted here in Oregon; that’s gotta come straight out of my pocket, and that’s not something I can afford…if you look in the papers, there’s so many jobs hiring just for CNAs. And if they did something to help people get that, and it’s only a six-week long program. I know it costs a lot of money but in six weeks that person can be self-sufficient in a few months because the pay is decent, and it comes with benefits, and paid time off, and vacation.”

Other suggestions included providing clients with exploratory opportunities such as volunteer experiences, internships, and opportunities to shadow professionals in a field of interest. This is especially important for individuals who have not worked in a while. One participant described how s/he felt about re-entering the workforce after a period of unemployment:

“It's easy just to give us a check every month for so long, but I mean really, we need to get on our feet...a lot of us not being in work for so long, there's a lot of anxiety, and it's scary to get back in there. We need a lot more support I think in getting out there. I know there are some
programs that TANF has, but I think there needs to be a lot more of that. Everybody needs to do some kind of work placement, or work experience, get us back into that mode. Because it's -- we get on this program, like we get set in a certain way, and it's so hard to get out there. It's scary.”

One last suggestion related to employment was the need for assistance with addressing criminal histories so that individuals can find employment. Participants with criminal histories said this is imperative.

Third, participants expressed a need for more and improved childcare services. In particular, participants described a desire for childcare for children with special needs (including older children), for children of TANF recipients who are in school or looking for work, for infants under six months, and for children whose parents are married. Fourth, many participants described a need for financial services. This includes assistance with developing budgets, creating bank accounts, and establishing a positive credit history.

Lastly, participants described a need for a variety of other services that would help TANF recipients feel financially stable and healthy. Focus group participants discussed a need for parenting skills classes for fathers who are having difficulty supporting their children. Participants conveyed that mentors should be culturally specific, older men who younger men respect. One woman described the need for this service while talking about the father of her children:

“…maybe if he had somebody that went through it before we were born, a man, he could talk to him and show him it is not that hard. Like my grandfather is in his 70's and he raised four kids by himself working full time. So maybe if there was a program out there that would teach these men, you can do it. You cannot be an absent father. You can sit there and help out. Something that will just give them some kind of knowledge to where okay, you know what, be a man.”

Other participants related that more services for individuals struggling with mental health conditions and addiction are required. One participant described her perspective on this:

“The thing I was gonna suggest also is really, really good screening and really good open communication between yourself and your TANF worker as far as any mental health stuff that might be going on… It’s been my experience that I’ve always been able to go out and grasp a job but if I don’t have that emotional stuff where it’s supposed to be, or that mental stuff, then over the long course I won’t get to maintain it. It’ll fall right out from under me. And not because I want it to; not because I don’t want to be self-sufficient and don’t want to function and contribute to society and all that, but because I didn’t prepare myself for all the things that can happen in life.”

Other suggestions included a service to help clients with buying healthy groceries on a budget and teaching clients how to cook. One participant also described the need for an emergency fund available to current or recent TANF recipients for one-time dire situations (e.g. car accidents, health issues). Another participant suggested that the TANF program provide a packet of information to clients that includes information on available services.
Discussion and conclusions

These focus groups conducted with TANF recipients shed light on the realities of living on TANF and ways in which the TANF program can promote the financial stability of its clients. This study revealed TANF recipients’ struggles and dreams. It also identified how TANF recipients are at once incredibly appreciative yet exceedingly frustrated with the support received through the TANF program. This section will reflect upon issues raised within each theme.

The first theme, “issues related to financial stability,” was intended, in part, to paint a picture of the realities of individuals living on TANF. Focus group participants strive to pay bills, own a house, have a car, and not receive public assistance. Many participants talked about desiring the pride of providing for their family. However, barriers to financial stability are many, including: lack of childcare, lack of a living wage job, mental health issues, and past incarceration. When reinvesting funding into the TANF program, it is important to carefully consider these barriers to financial stability – how can programs be tailored to address these barriers?

Participants described job training programs that led to living wage jobs as particularly helpful in obtaining stability. In addition, jobs that provide respectful work environments were also depicted as helpful to keeping a job. Therefore, it is likely that individuals who find stable, well-paying positions in a respectful work environment will be more likely to keep jobs and get off of TANF. Employment programs should seek to match TANF recipients with these types of opportunities as well as employment that matches their jobs interests and past work experiences.

With regards to the second theme, a plethora of useful services were discussed during these focus groups. It is difficult to prioritize which services are most useful. The authors advise the reader to review Appendix II to see the range of services that are required for stability to be obtained. Although housing, employment, and nutrition services were described as highly important, these services do not prove as useful if a person has no money for transportation to get to work or is struggling with a mental health condition.

The third, fourth, and fifth themes (views of TANF, experiences with TANF workers, and desired services and improvements) address closely related issues and will therefore be discussed simultaneously. There is no doubt that focus group participants are grateful for the services they have received through TANF, nonprofit organizations, and other programs. TANF providing connections to other services is pivotal. As one participant stated, surviving on TANF alone is impossible; it is the referrals to other services that are integral to survival.

While thankful for the help received, focus group participants described a variety of needed improvements to the TANF program. In general, focus group participants desired more responsive, personally tailored, wraparound support for their families. Suggested services operate at the systemic and service level.

On the systemic level, focus group participants had a variety of suggestions that they felt would help them find financial stability. First, participants expressed that the TANF program should improve the transparency of its policies and dealings with its clients. One focus group participant suggested offering each new TANF recipient with a packet of information describing a list of services offered and how to access those services. This introductory packet could include obligations of TANF recipients and key paperwork due dates. TANF workers could also be trained to ask sensitive
questions in a productive manner (e.g. questions related to child support), and to describe the reasons for policies and questions asked.

Second, participants described a desire for a meaningful and productive relationship with one consistent worker during the duration of their time on TANF. It was revealed in multiple focus groups that the quality of assistance a person receives depends on their TANF worker. While some participants reported positive relationships with their worker, many participants felt that their worker treated them with disrespect, and perhaps, contempt. Other participants did not have a consistent relationship with one worker, resulting in a discontinuity in their case. Many participants reported caseworkers not returning phone calls for months and misplacing paperwork. In order to improve TANF workers’ relationships with their clients, participants suggested that workers undergo intensive trainings and continued evaluations. In addition, worker caseloads should be monitored to ensure their work is manageable. Translation services should unconditionally be available to all TANF recipients.

Third, participants conveyed that they desired assistance with navigation of a complex and disaggregated social service system. Participants suggested that each TANF recipient be assigned a mentor or liaison who has successfully navigated social services in the past. This mentor could assist participants in navigating within and between social service agencies. As one participant stated, there is no hub to the services that DHS offers. A mentor could fill that gap while also taking pressure off of the overloaded TANF caseworker. Another useful service – that focus group participants suggested – to help with system navigation could include organizing parent support groups.

Fourth, participants expressed difficulties with a variety of DHS policies. In multiple focus groups, participants described current levels of cash assistance as insufficient for meeting everyday expenses. In addition, how income is calculated should be re-evaluated for certain circumstances such as: in situations where child support is ordered, but not received; for married couples who live in separate residences; and for individuals who have on-call jobs and do not have consistent income. Participants related that immediately getting cut off of cash assistance after starting employment actually perpetuates dependency on TANF. To remedy this issue, participants described a need for more robust, transitional support for clients after they start working, such as a sliding scale of decreasing cash assistance. Focus group participants also mentioned a desire for TANF support for clients who are in school or job training programs. Some participants suggested that certain individuals may require more time to find financial stability and may need a longer time in the TANF program. Such individuals include single parents, individuals with mental illness, and individuals who spend a significant amount of their time on TANF recovering from addiction. Lastly, participants described how pursuing parents for child support drives families apart; the TANF program might consider amending this policy to prevent this from occurring.

Participants also described a need for improvements at the service level. As mentioned previously, participants described a host of services as useful to meeting daily needs. Clients should have easy access to available services and know where to find information about these services. Improvements to some of these services can be made. For example, as previously described, employment and job training programs should focus on getting participants into living wage jobs in work environments that are respectful and present opportunities for growth. Other employment services could include: providing opportunities for clients to investigate possible career paths (e.g. internships, shadowing); providing assistance with addressing criminal histories; offering enhanced support to individuals who have been out of work for long periods; and reinstating the Parents as Scholars Program.
Most participants have experienced intergenerational poverty. To break the cycle, clients need budgeting, financial management, and self-sufficiency education and support. Dependable, safe, childcare services for individuals looking for work, working, or attending school are necessary, as is childcare for certain types of children (children with special needs, infants). Participants also described a need for increased referrals to mental health services and access to culturally specific mentors for young fathers. Other suggestions included teaching clients how to cook on a budget as well as creation of an emergency fund for one time dire situations (e.g. car accidents, health issues).

The reinvestment of funding into the TANF program provides an opportunity to restructure and improve services so that clients have the opportunity to attain financial stability. For certain, clients are thankful for the help they already receive. However, given the numerous barriers that must be overcome, we hope that these voices of TANF recipients shed light on how DHS can improve the TANF program and effectively invest funding.
References


Appendices

*Appendix I: Focus group questions*

**I. Welcome – 5 minutes**

Hello everyone, and welcome. Thank you for joining our discussion today. My name is ____________ and I will be guiding today’s discussion. This is ____________. He/she will be taking notes.

We’d like to spend some time today to understand the types of services and supports families need to feel financially stable and healthy. By financially stable we mean when you earn enough money to pay for the things you and your family need to live. We would like to know how you have become financially stable in the past, and how TANF and other programs have or have not helped you achieve this stability.

The reason that we’re doing this is so that we can learn how to provide better services to people using TANF. So, there are no right or wrong answers, just different points of view.

The purpose of a focus group is to create a space where a researcher or evaluator can listen to and learn from people who have had particular experiences. It’s about exploration and discovery. So, we really don’t want just yes/no answers. We really want to know about your experiences and ideas.

I know that everyone has lots of information and ideas to share. So if you’re kind of quiet, and I call on you, it’s not to put you on the spot, but because I want to know your ideas, everyone’s ideas. And if someone is sharing a lot, I may ask you to let others talk.

Before we begin, let me suggest some things that will make our discussion most productive. Please take a moment to silence and put away your cell phones. Please speak up---only one person should talk at a time. We’re recording the session because we don’t want to miss any of your comments. When we include the information you share in any reports or other written things, there won’t be any names attached to comments. All information provided in this focus group is confidential, and what you say will not affect your TANF benefits.

My role here is to ask questions and listen. I’ll be asking about ten questions, and I’ll be moving the discussion from one question to the next. It’s really important that we hear from each of you, because you have different experiences.

**II. Opening question – 5 minutes**

Let’s start by finding out a little more about each other by going one-by-one around the table.
1. Please tell the group your first name, how many children you are raising, and if you are a current or past TANF recipient.

**III. Introductory/Transition question** – 5-10 minutes

2. Let’s talk about financial stability for a moment. By financial stability we mean when you earn enough money to pay for the things you and your family need to live. Think of yourself as financially stable – what does your life look like?

**IV. Key questions** – 40-45 minutes

Now I will ask you a few questions about your past experiences.

3. I want to ask you to step back for a moment: think back to a time in your life when things were going well – what contributed to your financial stability and your family’s wellbeing?

4. I’d like you to think back again: think of a time when you had a job that you liked.
   - a. What did you like about the job?
   - b. How did you find the job?
   - c. How long did you keep the job?
   - d. If you kept the job for a while, what helped you keep the job?

Now, let’s talk about TANF and other social services.

5. How important is TANF to your daily life? Can anyone provide an example?

6. Have any services and supports from TANF helped you become more financially stable? What was helpful about these services?

7. Have any other social services, besides TANF, helped you become more financially stable? What was helpful about these services?

8. The TANF program provides a number of services. What other services do you wish the TANF program offered to help your family become more financially stable?

9. What has been your experience when accessing TANF services? By accessing TANF services we mean when you interact with a TANF worker to receive benefits. Do you have an example?

10. [If have time, ask the following question] What other suggestions do you have to improve the TANF program that would help your family become more financially stable?

**V. Ending question** – 5-10 minutes

As I said at the beginning of the session, the purpose of this focus group is to understand the types of services and supports families need to feel financially stable and healthy.

11. Is there anything else you would like to discuss?
VI. Conclusion – 1-2 minutes

Thank you very much for your time – your opinions and perspectives are very important and will help improve the TANF program. We will look at your responses and type up a report in January. If you would like to see the report, please let us know.

If you have any further questions about this focus group, we will be around for a while to answer them.

Appendix II: Complete list of useful supports

1. Transportation

“What’s helped me is my work is helping me with getting clothes for work and gas to get to work, to and from.”

“Bus passes monthly. That’s big.”

2. Housing

a. Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization

“A couple months ago, IRCO did help me pay for the rent for a couple months and it did help.”

b. Section 8

“When my time was going well, was when actually, when me and my husband had our own house. Yea, we were on Section 8, but it still was ours. We still could do what we wanted to do. We could get our daughter what she needed, and/or what she wanted. And he had a job, and we were off TANF, and he was making -- really bringing in good money. Since I've had my daughter, that was the good time. But right now, we're -- everybody hits rock bottom again, and they go back up. You could be the richest person in the world and hit rock bottom.”

c. Home Forward

“Home forward because it gives us a chance. With TANF it’s not a lot and it gets hard to be able to pay the rent and the bills. Having the extra bit of help to be able to budget and save and be able to go to school or work. And so getting that help with rent or utilities for the time being to kind of get a – you know, be able to walk by ourselves.

d. Women’s Housing Collaborative

“Before participating, every month, it was oh, God, rent…That took a big weight off of my shoulders, getting that housing assistance. I never ever had it in my life and it’s just the greatest thing in the world.”
e. Community in Action

“Through the program I learned about low-income housing. I’ve never heard of it before. And that was a big issue with me staying with my ex, you know what I mean? I knew I couldn’t make it on my own with four children so I stayed in the relationship for 12 years, thinking I’d never make it by myself. And then through a jobs orientation I heard about Community in Action, so…which taught me all about low-income housing and I was able to get my own home.”

f. NeighborImpact

“High school economics, they teach us that your rent should be no more than 1/3 of your monthly income. How many of us can honestly say that? I can right now because I’m on a housing program but that’s the only reason my kids and I haven’t ended up back in a shelter. It’s because I’ve had a housing program through NeighborImpact.”

3. Employment/Job training

a/b. GOALS Program, Workforce Center

“And they also have programs, like I said, they helped me through the Workforce Center go and get phlebotomy certification. They paid for me to get my training through GOALS Program. They have CNA. They have a lot of different programs. Whatever you choose, they have you go Workforce and do I-match and stuff like that, and they pay for you to get these trainings so you can get employment in these fields, CNA or whatever, medical.”

c. Self Enhancement, Inc.

“…I was 16 and I worked for SEI and they had us doing different internships like we got to work at the bank, and we got to work at like different locations, and I just, like, it was exciting because we were so young and learning how to do this stuff that you think older people would only do. So it helped me get a lot of experience and it helped me on my resume, too, to say that I did that.”

d. Straightaway Program

“Mine was when I was working with the service called Straightway and they did internships at different places. It was fun because every week I was somewhere different and I got to learn something new, and I got to, like, keep my eyes open on what do I want to do when I get older and try new things. I like doing that.”

e. Black Parent Initiative

f. Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization

g. JOBS Plus Program

“This opportunity that I’ve had here at NAYA has opened a lot of doors…The Jobs program because it’s hard when I was going out a[nd] applying and I has poor job skills or I didn’t have a lot of employment before. So being able to build that through the Jobs Plus program through volunteering or getting those references and then having that there for an employer to have that spot free to be hired.”
“For me it’s been the same in the past, it’s having the job readiness classes has been able to help me write a really good resume, to work on interviewing skills, to … to be able to emphasize everything positive and not look at negative when you’re job hunting, and that type of thing. And those were really good. I think also assisting with gas money to job search and things like that were really important. Assisting with interview clothing because most people don’t have really nice, fancy clothes to throw on for an interview; so assistance with interview clothing helped a lot...and I think all that did come through the TANF program, jobs readiness. It wasn’t all through voc rehab. Because everybody kind of partnered up where the voc rehab and Department of Human Services, and the employer, and I all kind of got together and grouped up, and I think that was really productive.”

h. Work Experience Program

“…I was able to start with the Work Experience program… and eventually landed a permanent position here at NAYA with a little bit of a raise, which helps, which is nice. The Work Experience was through Siltez Tribe.”

i. Worksource Oregon

“Worksource Oregon. I know now they’re having an issue with identity. But it was very resourceful and helpful for like taking classes to get job skills helping with the resume. That was a big thing. I was stuck. I didn’t know how to make it or even them helping me recognize like my skills that I wouldn’t know to put on there. Oh, Yeah, that’s true, you know.”

j. Job training through work

“…I moved to the city and was leaving an abusive relationship. So me and my kids moved to Phoenix where I found in the newspaper a nursing home that provided the schooling to become a CNA. So I would work full-time and I went to school right after work…”

k. Vocational Rehabilitation Services

4. Healthcare

a. Oregon Health Plan/Fast Track Program

“…my son, for the first time as an adult, qualified for OHP, and he recently had some very expensive medical care, last week. And thousands, and thousands, and thousands that last year, he'd be kind of messed up. He'd be kind of screwed for, maybe, ever. Because of the cost of his medical care last week. But now OHP covers it, so on one hand, I'm a little frustrated with it, on the other hand, I'm certainly grateful for certain aspects of it, because you know, I don't know what he would've done without the medical care that he has right now.”

“Health insurance…I was put in a coma, in the hospital for 35 days and insurance covered it all, and also looked out for my daughter.”

b. Mosaic
5. Nutrition

a. Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

“We are getting some food stamp assistance now. So that kind of helps because I still have to make up my portion of the rent and pay my lights.”

b. Women, Infants, and Children (WIC)

c. Free and reduced school lunches

6. Cash assistance

a. Financial Aid

“For me when I was going to Mt. Hood I was getting help from my child's father, and I was getting financial aid, and I was doing stuff on the side, cooking and stuff. But, yeah, I was able to buy things and I didn't have to use food stamps or anything like that. So I guess, like, I would do parties and stuff like that, cooking and stuff. And the financial aid, the money I was making, yeah, it was better then.”

b/c. Disability, Social Security

“Now I have my one daughter, disability. And because then my daughter disability, we got the Social Security helping for my daughter.”

d. Utility assistance

e. Inter-Christian Outreach

“And what it is, all the churches, they donate the money that people have donated to churches, they donate it to them, and they help you. They actually helped me get my state ID last year. When I didn't have the money for it. But they also help you with your bills, if you don't have help for it. There's the energy assistance program that helps you a lot too, for your electricity, your gas bills, things like that.”

f. Domestic Violence Grant

g. Community Services Consortium

“When I was on TANF, when me and my husband were both still on TANF, they had the jobs program at CSC. They put you…with the CSC crew, like doing work crew, but it's the most funnest part. Where you go through the woods, you go chop trees down, you go do a lot of stuff. But you get $50 extra every week, on top of your TANF, with no taxes taken out, and they don't deduct your TANF.”

h. Community in Action

“Every month I go in there and I see how many of my goals I accomplished. And I get rewarded for my accomplishments, you know what I mean? So it’s got incentives so I want to keep striving forward
(instead) of just feeling like: OK, I have to go do this, I’ve gotta go do this appointment, (garbled) lady and to this, or whatever. They are very – I don't know, they help me. They help me for my schooling because I’m back at school this year, and they help me pay for my school books because I couldn’t afford it because I lost my financial aid, due to my ex. Hopefully I’ll get that back by the next term. But whenever I’ve seemed to have needed help with groceries or whatever, they’ve (helped) me a lot.”

i. Mother and Child

“I'm doing volunteer work at Mother and Child, which is a nonprofit agency, but they pay for my PO fees so I can go pick up my children. $270 so I can pick up my kids from Kansas, otherwise I couldn't leave the state.”

j. Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

7. Assistance with children

a. Christmas presents

“For Christmas that is important. That is something I utilize. Right now I don't have any income. It is just my husband, and it is rough for us because we have five kids total between the two of us, and I have my three boys all together, and being able to provide for them plus ourselves, and all the bills that we have, like sometimes we just don't know. We're like, we just live on hope and a prayer. So like this year, like we don't know. I was actually thinking about stopping celebrating Christmas because, just because it is so rough. That's something that we utilize as well, being adopted for Christmas through certain agencies and stuff like that.”

b. Childcare: DHS

“I’m going to say having help with child care is a lot of help. Because it wasn’t easy as a teen mom...So reliable child care with the grant DHS provides, like helping with those payments so we were able to work and provide for our families.”

c. Childcare: Head Start

d. Childcare: Boys and Girls Club

e. Child activity: Parks and Recreation in or near Redmond

f. Clothes, uniforms, and backpacks for children

“...New school clothes that we (can) always provide to go to school and feel like we don’t know. They need to have nice clothes and decent shoes, and feel confident when they leave, and not feel like there’s arrows pointing down at them saying, “hey, look at the poor kid.” That’s been a big deal. And my kids aren’t superficial. My kids aren’t high-tech, spoiled little brats; they’re good, good kids and they appreciate what they have. But I’ve seen that, you know, when they’re walking out the door more confidently…”

g. Grandma’s Place
9. Financial wellness

a. GOALs Program

“Well, the GOALS Program, I guess, I don't know exactly, it was a couple years ago, but they just, they do a lot for you. Like when you pay your rent in housing, like, it is $200, they put a percentage of that into an escrow account. And once you get so much they'll match it. So I know, for example, they told me one lady she had, I think it was like $20,000 or $30,000 or something like that, and they ended up matching it, and she was able to put a down payment on her house. And they let you to use it to get your car fixed or expenses, whatever. So you end up with a couple thousand depending on what your rent is and what you put into your escrow.”

b. Bradley Angle

“I utilized the Bradley Angle. I went to the financial wellness classes for eight weeks.”

10. Legal

a. Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization

“IRCO helped me because I am going through divorce with my husband.”

b. Legal Aid

10. Other

a. Healthy Birth Initiative

“HBI, I don't know, anyone in HBI? That that's a good program, too. After a lot of different classes and stuff like that for us, you know, black women, black men, a lot of empowerment courses. It's a lot of support. Like I've never had so much support from African Americans as I have in HBI before. Like the work they do in the community, I don't know, I feel so good about it because I never got that before like from black women and black men that are really trying to help us, help us. I'm really gaining my self-esteem and my confidence and all of that. And they help you with child care. And you have good conversation and you're able to participate. Be a leader and not just a follower. You have opportunities to also be a leader, and have an opinion and make changes. So that's another program or resource.”

b. Alcoholics Anonymous/Narcotics Anonymous

“…Resources for myself such as participating with AA and NA were a huge help because it kept me stable and (I need) that foundation for myself. And so I believe that helped a lot.”

c. Parenting with Intent

“…And then I also have the lady gives me a ride to doctor appointments and look for jobs, Parenting with Intent. She helps me out and gives me ride to doctors or wherever I have to go. She's really good.”
Other organizations mentioned, but not associated with a particular service:

Salvation Army
Catholic Charities
South Asian Women’s Empowerment and Resource Alliance
Human Solutions
Native American Youth and Family Center
Lincoln County Help Center
FAN Advocates

“The (FAN) advocates. It was almost two years ago to the day when the kids and I went to the shelter. When we went into the shelter we went in in our pajamas. I wasn’t in a very good place two years ago emotionally. I was pregnant, I had a new baby and then I had two other young kids. When I got into (the shelter) there was the advocates there at the shelter that just kind of help you navigate your way through those resources. It’s not like… they’re very nurturing (or anything) because they didn’t hold my hand and guide me through it. But once a week I met with my advocate and, “What are your goals for the week?” And then you met back in with them. And it helped keep me accountable.”

Central Oregon Veteran’s Impact

“Between COVO and Neighborhood Impact they saved our lives. Like, really. Before the VA ever stepped up like you think they would it was Neighborhood Impact and COVO.”

Child Welfare
Saving Grace
Central City Concern
Center for Family Success
VOA Family Center
Sunshine Division
Impact Northwest
Morrison Center
Lifeworks