With welfare reform, the Adult and Family Services (AFS) of the Oregon Department of Human Resources has undergone a “cultural shift.” What was once viewed as a process-driven, welfare maintenance system is now a mission-driven, self-sufficiency focused welfare-to-work program model.

Oregon’s Experience with Welfare-to-Work

Oregon AFS has extensive experience with welfare-to-work programs. Oregon’s Job Opportunities and Basic Skills program (JOBS) and self-sufficiency focused strategies and successes pre-date federal welfare reform implementation.

The federal welfare reform effort, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), has profoundly changed the federal-state welfare-to-work relationship. Instead of federal entitlements, there are now block grants to states. TANF has not significantly changed Oregon’s welfare-to-work program and focus. Combined with Oregon’s successful JOBS program, TANF has, instead, enhanced welfare-to-work efforts by allowing greater freedom in the design of programs and components and has enabled AFS to expand welfare-to-work services to the entire caseload.

Oregon’s Welfare-to-Work Model

Oregon AFS has a three-tiered approach concerning welfare-to-work:

- Holistic and strategic services are offered which address the entire spectrum of client family circumstances—from the “immediate” job-ready to the “soon-to-be” and “eventual” job-ready individuals. Our philosophy is “everyone is capable.”
- Local community program design is offered. This means it is the state’s role to facilitate local community partner efforts to reach locally defined and mutually agreed-upon outcomes.
- An integrated individual case management approach is used which is needed to connect families with appropriate services.

The Results

- More than 44,000 clients in Oregon were placed in employment at an average starting wage of $6.27 to $7.06 per hour. Of these clients, 90 percent are off welfare 18 months after TANF closure due to employment.
- Approximately 40 percent of the people found employment before going on welfare. This is the result of strong “up-front” assessment, support, and job-search services.

1 JOBS is an employment training program. Oregon AFS requires clients who meet program eligibility requirements to participate in self-sufficiency activities such as JOBS.
Since 1993, Oregon's welfare caseload has declined by over 60 percent.

**Keys to Success**

Oregon AFS sees five keys for future success:

- *Experimentation* must be continued to encourage creativity and cultivate new ideas.

- There must be continued *flexibility* in state and federal policy to implement new ideas.

- Continued and expanding *collaboration* with other local organizations is necessary to meet future welfare-to-work challenges.

- *Employee development* must be continued to keep agency staff prepared to meet the present and future challenges of welfare-to-work.

- Further *structural realignment* must be done within Oregon AFS to meet our goal of being a "learning organization." This strategy encourages continued creativity, outcome management and program improvement.

**The Future of Oregon's Welfare Reform**

Our vision of responding to the present and future challenges of helping families achieve self-sufficiency includes the following goals:

- Helping more people move toward self-sufficiency by designing and expanding services to address the more significant barriers to employment.

- Helping former clients maintain financial independence by designing and expanding services for the newly employed families.

- Supporting employed clients as they improve their employment situation and personal life by designing and expanding services to help families increase their wages.

- Helping children in families we serve to develop in a positive way by designing and expanding services to address generational dependence, (e.g. teen pregnancy, juvenile crime, etc.).