

Executive Summary

The Intersection of Welfare and Disability

Early Findings from the TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project

OPRE Report 2013-06

May 2013

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Overview

Policymakers and program operators have long worked to understand how state and federal programs can best serve low-income families in which one parent or more has a disability. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, administered by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), serves low-income families, some of whom include individuals who have disabilities or other work limitations. The Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA), serves low-income individuals who are aged, blind, or disabled. Though these two programs have overlapping goals of supporting low-income people with disabilities, while encouraging self-sufficiency and employment, they have key differences in approach, structure, and definitions that pose challenges to coordination.

In order to understand how best to serve TANF recipients with disabilities, ACF contracted with MDRC and its partners, MEF Associates and TransCen, to conduct the TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project (TSDTP). This first report of the TSDTP describes how TANF agencies work with participants who have a disability and how they interact with local SSA offices. It is based on field assessments in California, Florida, Michigan, and Minnesota. The report also presents findings from analyses of merged TANF and SSI data, documenting the extent to which adult TANF recipients are connected with the SSI system and how they contribute to the overall dynamics of caseload changes in SSI. Data from these separate programs have not been analyzed together before now, so the report offers unique and important analytical insight.

Key Findings

- The overlap between the TANF and SSI populations is not large. In the research sample, less than 10 percent of TANF recipients had an open SSI application, and just 6 percent of adults applying for SSI received TANF benefits within a year of the application.
- Most TANF recipients who apply for SSI do so long before nearing their federal benefit time limit.
- After accounting for differences in basic eligibility characteristics between the two groups (differences driven by TANF eligibility rules), TANF recipients who applied for SSI were slightly less likely to be found disabled, especially at the initial level, than other SSI applicants.
- TANF recipients who are exempt from requirements to participate in work activities due to a disability generally have access to few targeted services designed to increase their self-sufficiency.
- There is little coordination between the TANF programs and the SSA field office or the Disability Determination Services (DDS) — the state agency that makes the initial disability determination for SSA — during TANF recipients' SSI application period. TANF employment counselors have expressed strong interest in knowing more about the SSI application process.

The TSDTP is in its second phase. This phase is assessing three pilot programs — developed using the knowledge gained during the first phase — that take varied approaches to improving services for TANF recipients with disabilities. Subsequent project reports will present pilot findings and further data analysis.

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Executive Summary

Policymakers and program operators have long sought to understand how state and federal programs can best serve low-income families who are headed by disabled parents. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, administered at the federal level by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA), are both designed to provide income support to individuals and families. The TANF program serves low-income families, some of whom include individuals who have work limitations or disabilities, while the SSI program serves low-income individuals who are aged, blind, or disabled. Though the TANF agencies and the federal disability system share the common goals of supporting people with disabilities while encouraging their self-sufficiency and employment, the two programs have key differences.

In order to understand how best to help TANF recipients with disabilities and to identify opportunities for improved coordination between the TANF and SSI programs, ACF contracted with MDRC and its partners, MEF Associates and TransCen, to assist ACF and SSA in managing the TANF/SSI Disability Transition Project (TSDTP). By working closely with both federal agencies and with participating state and county TANF agencies, the project analyzed program data and developed and implemented pilot tests of program interventions targeted to low-income families with disabled parents who are receiving TANF assistance. Families, states, TANF agencies, and SSA can all benefit when this population efficiently receives appropriate services. The goals of the TSDTP are to move individuals toward employment when possible, facilitate informed decisions about applying for SSI, help those who are eligible to receive SSI as quickly as possible, and reduce administrative costs.

This first report of the TSDTP describes the ways in which the TANF program and the SSI program currently operate, based on analysis of TANF and SSI administrative data and field assessments in seven sites in four states: Los Angeles and Riverside Counties, California; the Ocala region in Florida; Genesee, Mason, and Oceana Counties, Michigan;¹ and Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, Minnesota. It describes how TANF agencies work with participants who have been identified as having a work limitation due to a disability and how they interact with local SSA offices. It also presents findings from analyses of merged TANF and SSI data, documenting the extent to which adult TANF recipients are connected with the SSI system and how they contribute to the overall dynamics of caseload changes in SSI.

¹Because they are contiguous and shared a management structure, Mason and Oceana Counties are considered a single site.

Following are summaries of the key questions addressed by this report and of the findings from the field assessments and the data analysis. These are discussed in more detail below. (Box ES.1 presents key terms as defined in the Glossary at the end of the full report.)

Key Questions and Findings

How do TANF programs identify disabilities among the adult TANF recipient caseload? In the seven sites, TANF agencies rely largely on medical professionals to determine a recipient's ability to participate in work activities. The field study reveals that few of the TANF programs were conducting vocational assessments.

How do TANF and SSA currently interact and collaborate to serve low-income individuals with disabilities? In most of the sites, during the SSI application period, there is little coordination between the TANF program and the SSA field office or Disability Determination Services (DDS), the state agency that makes the initial disability determination for SSA. Coordination between TANF and SSA staff typically occurs after an SSI award has been made. Additionally, most TANF employment counselors know little about the SSI application process and rely on the recipient to guide their understanding of disability benefits, although some of the sites contract with SSI advocacy services to assist the recipients.

Are adult TANF recipients with disabilities required to participate in work activities? Are there promising strategies and partnerships to help them achieve employment? In the seven sites, TANF recipients who are identified as having a disability are generally not mandated to participate in work activities and are often overlooked. They rarely receive the same level of attention as recipients who are required to seek work, though they may be asked to participate in limited activities or to comply with treatment plans. Few TANF programs have employment services that target TANF recipients with disabilities; exempt TANF recipients with disabilities who are interested in employment are generally referred to the same services that nondisabled recipients receive.

Is there a large overlap between the TANF and SSI populations? Given the incentives that TANF programs have to move TANF recipients to SSI (discussed in the report), one might expect the overlap to be large. However, among adult TANF recipients from full-reporting states in Fiscal Year (FY) 2007, just 10 percent were engaged in the SSI application process during that year.² The proportion of SSI applicants who were associated with TANF is

²“Full-reporting states” are those that report their universe of TANF data, rather than a sample, to the ACF's Office of Family Assistance (OFA). Box 1.1 in Chapter 1 of the report lists the 26 full-reporting states in the study.

Box ES.1

Glossary

AFDC: Aid to Families with Dependent Children. Established by the Social Security Act of 1935, a grant program to enable states to provide cash welfare payments for needy families. State expenditures were matched by the federal government on an open-ended basis. States defined “need,” set their own benefit levels, established (within federal limitations) income and resource limits, and administered the program or supervised its administration. This program was replaced in 1996 by Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Also see “TANF.”

DDS: Disability Determination Services. The state agency responsible for developing medical evidence and rendering the initial determination and reconsideration on whether a claimant is disabled.

exemption from the time limit. A circumstance under which a month of TANF assistance does not count toward a family’s time limit on benefits. Also see “extension of the time limit.”

exemption from the work requirements. A circumstance in which the individual will not be penalized for failure to engage in work; however, the TANF family may be included in the calculation of the work participation rate.

extension of the time limit. A circumstance under which TANF assistance may be continued even though a family has reached their time limit on benefits. Also see “exemption from the time limit.”

federally countable TANF work activities. One of twelve activities that federal law allows to satisfy a state’s obligation to ensure that a minimum percentage of TANF families with a work-eligible individual participate in employment-related activities. These activities include unsubsidized employment, subsidized private sector employment, subsidized public sector employment, work experience, on-the-job training, job search and job readiness assistance, community service, vocational educational training, providing child care to a participant in a community service program, job skills training, education related to employment, and completion of high school or a General Educational Development (GED) program. This report refers to federally countable work activities simply as “work activities.”

sanctions for noncompliance with work activities. The financial penalties imposed on families who do not comply with work requirements, without good cause. State sanctioning policies vary and range from partial sanctions, which reduce the grant amount, to full-family sanctions, which terminate cash assistance to the entire family.

SSF program: solely state-funded program. A program using state funds to provide non-TANF assistance that is not reported as MOE. States began implementing SSF programs after changes were made to the TANF program in the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005 that began counting families receiving assistance through an SSP in the work participation calculation. Also see “SSP.”

(continued)

Box ES.1 (continued)

SSI: Supplemental Security Income. A federal supplemental income program funded by general tax revenues that helps aged, blind, and disabled people who have limited income and resources by providing monthly cash payments to meet basic needs for food, clothing, and shelter.

SSP: separate state program. A program using MOE funds without any TANF funds. Expenditures on SSPs can help states meet the MOE requirement. Prior to passage of the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005, families who received assistance from an SSP were excluded from the work participation rate calculation. Also see “SSF program.”

TANF: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families. A federal block grant created by the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) to be used by states to meet any of the four purposes set out in federal law: (1) to provide assistance to needy families with children so that children can be cared for in their own homes or in the homes of relatives; (2) to end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage; (3) to prevent and reduce out-of-wedlock pregnancies; and (4) to encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families. Also see “AFDC.”

TANF assistance. Cash payments, vouchers, and other forms of benefits paid for with TANF funds and designed to meet a family’s ongoing basic needs (that is, for food, clothing, shelter, utilities, household goods, personal care items, and general incidental expenses), including such supportive services as transportation and child care provided to families who are not employed.

TANF federal time limit. A lifetime limit of 60 cumulative months of federal TANF assistance for most families with an adult recipient. Months of assistance receipt accrue when assistance is provided to families using federal TANF funds, in whole or in part. States may elect to impose shorter time limits.

work activities. See “federally countable TANF work activities.”

work participation rate. The percentage of TANF/SSP families with a work-eligible individual who are subject to a work requirement and who participate in a countable work activity for the required amount of time.

work-participation requirement. The requirement that at least 50 percent of families receiving TANF/SSP assistance with a work-eligible individual participate in employment-related activities (see “federally countable TANF work activities”) for a minimum average of 30 hours per week in a month (20 hours per week for a single parent with a child under age 6). For families with two work-eligible parents receiving TANF assistance, states must have at least 90 percent of families in work activities for at least an average of 35 hours per week in a month (55 hours per week for a family receiving federally subsidized child care). In most states, certain categories of recipients — for example, recipients with medical problems or those with very young children — are temporarily excused from these requirements. See “exemption from work requirements.”

also not large. In FY 2007, just under 6 percent had received TANF at some point in the year preceding or following their initial application to SSI.

Are there differences in award rates between TANF recipients who apply for SSI and non-TANF recipients? Overall, SSI award rates were similar for TANF recipients who applied for SSI and for SSI applicants who were not TANF recipients. However, TANF eligibility rules that shape the makeup of the pool of TANF recipients led to differences in characteristics of these two groups, which, in turn, affected award rates. The award rate for initial SSI applicants in 2007 was about one-third, regardless of their TANF affiliation. Underlying these similar award rates were some notable differences. Considering all adult SSI applicants, TANF recipients who applied for SSI were much less likely to be denied on technical grounds than other SSI applicants. After accounting for this difference in rates of technical denials (that is, when comparing SSI outcomes only among those who met basic SSI nonmedical eligibility requirements), it was found that SSI applicants who were associated with TANF/SSP were less likely to be awarded than other SSI applicants, especially at the initial adjudicative level. However, further controlling for basic differences in sample characteristics, such as age and gender, driven by TANF eligibility rules resulted in more similar outcomes between the two groups.

Background: TANF and SSI

The TANF program is intended to provide *temporary* cash assistance to low-income families with children, while preparing parents for employment. The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), substantially strengthened the requirement to seek work, and placed time limits on cash assistance. In addition, the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA) of 2005, which reauthorized the TANF program, made it more difficult for states to exempt families headed by people with disabilities from work participation requirements and still engage the required percentage of recipients in work activities. Since states face financial penalties if they do not meet minimum work participation standards, they may have an incentive to move individuals who are not able to participate in work activities onto SSI.

Under the SSI program, SSA provides income to individuals who have limited income and resources and who are aged, blind, or disabled. While SSA imposes no work requirements on SSI recipients, it operates programs designed to encourage employment. However, few recipients take up voluntary employment services and leave SSI for employment. Additionally, recent years have brought an increase in applications for SSI disability benefits; this increased workload presents an ongoing challenge for SSA staff.

These programmatic and financial rules and incentives related to work make it challenging for the TANF and SSI programs to work together. TANF programs can encourage TANF recipients with disabilities to apply for SSI, which may be the appropriate step for individuals who are eligible. TANF recipients who move to SSI will have a more permanent source of income, as long as they meet the disability criteria, and they will generally see an increase in income. However, if recipients are not eligible for SSI, they will have endured a fairly complex and lengthy SSI application process and will have used up months (or years) of their TANF federal time limit, while not pursuing other avenues to self-sufficiency. Moreover, increasing referrals of TANF recipients to the SSI program increases the number of applications for SSA to process and administrative costs.

Given the broad policy interest in serving TANF recipients who have disabilities, both the Government Accountability Office (GAO) and the Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB) recommended that SSA and ACF jointly develop demonstrations to test new initiatives for recipients with disabilities.

Key Findings from Field Assessments

The first phase of the TSDTP included field visits to TANF, SSA, and DDS offices in seven different sites. Sites and methodology are discussed in detail in the full report. The field assessments in the seven sites yielded the following findings.

- **There is little coordination between the TANF program and the SSA field office or DDS during TANF recipients' SSI application period; coordination typically occurs after an award has been made.**

Although TANF recipients apply for SSI at the SSA field office and are determined to be medically eligible or ineligible for SSI by DDS, the coordination with TANF often occurs only with the field office and only after an award has been made, to determine the TANF grant amount and the expected TANF termination date. The SSI benefits due are reduced by the individual's countable portion of the TANF grant in the months that TANF was received. During the application process, the SSI advocates, who may be funded by the TANF agencies, are helpful to SSA field offices in ensuring that applications are complete and in helping recipients navigate a complex process.

- **The TANF employment counselors know little about the SSI application process and rely on SSI advocacy services or the recipient to help them understand disability benefits.**

State and local TANF staff, and especially senior management, have substantial interest in learning more about the SSI application process and how to identify people who might be

eligible for SSI benefits. Yet some TANF staff questioned whether recipients benefit from transitioning to SSI, inasmuch as they lose case management and employment supports that could help them become self-sufficient. TANF staff know little about the employment services that are available to SSI recipients. To help individuals navigate the SSI application process, several of the TANF programs in the study refer recipients to SSI advocates that have contracts with the state or county.

- **In most sites, TANF agencies rely largely on medical professionals to determine a recipient's ability to participate in work activities.**

When recipients self-report a disability, staff provide them with a form for their doctor to complete. Case managers rarely challenge the doctor's recommendation (and, in some sites, are not allowed to challenge the recommendation). While most of the sites have an assessment process that is designed to uncover barriers to employment — which might lead to the staff's determining that the recipient might be eligible for an exemption from the work requirements due to disability — medical professionals typically make the final determination. Few of the sites that are part of this study conducted vocational assessments, which are often used to match a person's abilities with appropriate employment opportunities. Michigan is unique in determining exemptions through a process that is designed to mimic the SSI disability determination process.

- **TANF recipients who are exempt from requirements to participate in work activities due to a disability are often overlooked and rarely receive the same level of employment and services to promote self-sufficiency as work-required recipients. They may be required to participate in limited activities or to comply with treatment plans, although they are rarely sanctioned for noncompliance.**

While this is true in all the sites, the degree to which it occurs differs. In the California counties, exempt TANF recipients are not required to participate in any activities, although they must periodically provide verification of their disability and can volunteer for employment services. The other sites may state that they require participation among recipients with disabilities, but they do not pursue or enforce the same levels of participation.

- **Few TANF programs have employment services that target TANF recipients with disabilities.**

Exempt individuals with disabilities who express interest in employment are generally referred to the same services that work-required clients receive. There are two exceptions: one site contracts with a community-based organization to operate a small subsidized employment program for individuals with barriers, and another provides one-on-one counseling by a contrac-

tor who used to be a vocational counselor. Two other sites — Los Angeles County and Ramsey County — implemented new supported employment programs for individuals with disabilities. The Los Angeles program, which had not been implemented when the field research for this report was conducted, focuses on recipients with mental health issues. Ramsey County’s program (discussed below) has targeted a broader group of recipients with disabilities.

- **Mental health services are available in most of the sites, and typically they are paid for with Medicaid funds.**

Most TANF programs make referrals to mental health services for individuals who need these services. In Los Angeles, recipients are referred to providers under contract with the county’s Department of Mental Health. Minnesota provides coverage for adult rehabilitative mental health services through mental health providers that have been certified by the state. In Michigan, recipients who have mental health issues are referred to a local community health center. Though there are active referrals from TANF to mental health services, the two programs may communicate little because of concerns about the recipient’s privacy. This limits the amount of collaboration that can take place between TANF workers and non-TANF-affiliated mental health counselors.

Key Findings from the Data Analysis

In addition to field assessments, the TSDTP is also the first time that federal TANF/separate state program (SSP) data had been merged with SSI data.³ The analysis of merged TANF/SSP and SSI data produced the following key findings.

- **The proportion of TANF/SSP recipients who were applying for SSI does not seem large, given that both programs serve low-income populations, and it was fairly steady from FY 2005 through FY 2009.**

From October 2004 through September 2009, the proportion of TANF/SSP recipients from full-reporting states in any given month who had an active SSI application ranged from 7 percent to 8 percent. Among the cohort of 556,673 adults who ever received TANF/SSP in the full-reporting states in FY 2007, about 10 percent were engaged in the SSI application process during that year. That is, these recipients had either submitted an SSI application prior to that time, which was still in process, or submitted an application in FY 2007.

³In an effort to develop strategies to meet federal participation requirements, some states created separate state programs (SSPs). Though counted separately, states were required to include SSP participants in their data submissions to the Office of Family Assistance at ACF.

- **Similarly, the proportion of SSI applicants who were associated with TANF/SSP is not large.**

Of the 415,300 initial SSI applications submitted by adults in full-reporting states in FY 2007, only about 6 percent had received TANF/SSP at some point in the year preceding or following that SSI application.

- **Moreover, an analysis of the timing of SSI applications relative to TANF/SSP receipt shows that the relationship can go in either direction.**

Although 6 percent of individuals who submitted an initial SSI application in a full-reporting state in FY 2007 received TANF/SSP within one year of that SSI application, about half of this group with overlap had not received TANF/SSP in the prior year or had received TANF/SSP for only a few months before their SSI application. The remaining portion of the group began receiving TANF after submitting their initial SSI application.

- **Differences in the characteristics of individuals who were associated with both the TANF/SSP and the SSI program and of SSI applicants who did not receive TANF/SSP are tied to differences in eligibility requirements for the two programs, which are shaped by their respective eligibility requirements.**

Compared with adult SSI applicants who were not receiving TANF/SSP, those who were receiving TANF/SSP were younger, were more likely to be female, and were more likely to meet the SSI program's nonmedical requirements (mostly, limits on income and other financial resources).

- **Considering SSI applicants who met the basic nonmedical eligibility requirements, those who were associated with TANF/SSP were less likely to be found disabled, especially at the initial level; differences in underlying characteristics appear to account for some of this difference.**

Of SSI applicants who were TANF/SSP recipients, 38 percent were awarded SSI, compared with 49 percent for other SSI applicants. Among TANF/SSP recipients who were found disabled, decisions were about evenly split between those who received this decision at the initial level and those who were found disabled after appeal. For the comparison group, nearly two-thirds were awarded at the initial level, and one-third were awarded following appeal. However, a matched analysis using such basic characteristics as gender, age, race/ethnicity, and state reduced differences between the two groups, though small differences remain. Among the matched sample of SSI applicants who were not associated with TANF/SSP, 43 percent were awarded, compared with 38 percent among TANF/SSP recipients.

Questions for Pilots and Further Research

The incentive that exists for states to encourage SSI applications among their TANF recipients increased after welfare reform legislation replaced the AFDC program with a TANF block grant to states, and subsequent regulations made it more costly for states to exempt families with disabilities from work participation requirements. Policymakers have expressed concerns that these changes would increase the number of welfare recipients applying for SSI and, thus, would increase the burden on SSA to process the applications. There were also concerns that a disproportionately large number of those applying would not qualify for SSI and, subsequently, that their applications would be denied.

However, analysis of merged TANF benefit and SSI application data found that a relatively small proportion — about 10 percent — of TANF recipients were engaged in the SSI application process in FY 2007. The analysis also found that, among all SSI applications in FY 2007, just 5 percent were submitted by individuals who received TANF in that year. Moreover, many who applied for SSI were not applying after lengthy periods on TANF; more than half of recipients had used up fewer than 12 months toward the TANF time limit. Additionally, many applied around the same time that they were applying for SSI, and some applied for TANF after their SSI application was denied. Finally, after accounting for differences in basic eligibility characteristics, the analysis found that TANF recipients who applied for SSI were only slightly less likely to be found disabled than other SSI applicants.

Taken together, this analysis counters the expectation that TANF programs would inappropriately refer a higher than usual proportion of recipients to SSI. In fact, the field assessments revealed that TANF agencies needed guidance regarding which recipients to refer to SSI, how to help referred recipients with the SSI process, and how to encourage employment among TANF recipients who had disabilities but were not eligible for SSI.

The following questions emerged from this first phase of the TSDTP:

- Are the overlap rates between TANF/SSP and SSI in participating sites similar to those found for the full-reporting sites?
- In sites with solely state-funded (SSF) programs, what effects do those have on the overlap rate?
- Are there effective assessments for identifying disabilities among TANF recipients?
- How can SSA and DDS staff coordinate with TANF staff to ensure that TANF staff refer potentially eligible recipients to SSA, assist with the SSI application process, and facilitate a smooth transition from TANF to SSI?

- For TANF recipients with disabilities who may not be eligible for SSI or who may not be interested in applying for it, are there promising strategies to help them become self-sufficient? Are there vocational assessments that can be used to develop appropriate employment goals?
- Should alternative policies or program designs be considered to ensure that people with disabilities are better served and — if they are placed in exempted status — that they receive appropriate services?

The Second Phase of the TSDTP

This project has examined the current connections between TANF and SSI to better understand how the two programs' agencies work together and, from the data analysis, the extent to which TANF recipients are applying for and receiving SSI benefits. In addition to conducting an analysis of SSI data merged with state-level TANF data, the second phase of the project used the knowledge attained during the first phase to develop pilot programs that served TANF participants with disabilities. To study three different approaches to serving them, three pilot programs were selected for the second phase of the project and have been implemented in Ramsey County, Minnesota; Los Angeles, California; and Muskegon County, Michigan.⁴ The pilot programs included:

- **Ramsey County's Families Achieving Success Today (FAST).** Ramsey County tested the efficacy of an integrated, colocated service design that used evidence-based practices — the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) supported employment model and motivational interviewing — to increase employment and self-sufficiency among TANF recipients with disabilities. The IPS supported employment design has been shown to help people who have serious mental illness. FAST was a partnership of several agencies that provided mental health, vocational rehabilitation, community health care, and TANF employment services — colocated to increase access for families and streamline the delivery of services. The program followed the core principles of the supported employment model, which include finding competitive jobs in the community that fit participants' needs and interests; fully integrating

⁴While not a part of first phase of the TSDTP, Muskegon County was recommended as a pilot site by local SSA staff and Michigan's Department of Human Services (DHS). After a brief assessment of Muskegon County, the research team determined that it was suitable for a pilot site, primarily due to its strong management structure and existing employment providers in the area. Staff structure and procedures were similar to those in Genesee, Mason, and Oceana Counties, allowing the project team to draw on the knowledge gained from these counties during the project's first phase to inform the pilot test.

mental health services with employment services; using a rapid job search approach to help participants find jobs directly, rather than providing lengthy assessments, training, and counseling; and setting goals and designing plans that are based on individuals' preferences, strengths, experiences, and abilities. FAST was pilot-tested using a random assignment research design with a group of TANF recipients with disabilities.

- **Los Angeles County's TSDTP Pilot.** Los Angeles sought to improve the quality of SSI applications submitted by TANF recipients and, by doing so, to improve the timeliness of SSI decisions, increase the approval rate, and improve families' economic well-being. In order to strengthen the quality of SSI applications, local SSA and/or DDS staff provided training to the county's SSI advocates in one of the county TANF offices. In addition, DDS provided ongoing feedback on the quality of applications received from the SSI advocates for that office. This feedback reinforced effective practices as well as strengthened areas that needed improvement. Finally, the county, SSA, and DDS established local liaisons to develop effective workflows, facilitate ongoing coordination and communication regarding the SSI application process, and troubleshoot specific cases, as appropriate. The research team documented the process changes that were implemented and tracked the flow of participants through the SSI advocacy process.
- **Muskegon County's TSDTP Pilot.** Muskegon County's pilot sought to improve the identification of disabilities among the TANF caseload and to provide motivational interviewing and employment services to recipients who were identified as having a disability. The pilot also presented an opportunity to test the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) model — which has been used to help the homeless obtain SSI benefits — with some TANF recipients. The pilot's goals were to increase activity levels, improve employment outcomes, and improve decisions around disability assessments — all of which were tracked by the research team. This pilot also provided an opportunity to explore employment supports for TANF recipients with disabilities as well as ways to motivate them to engage in activity and work.

The implementation of the three pilots was assessed through ongoing formative feedback, and technical assistance was provided to ensure the implementation of strong program models. Subsequent reports will document the pilots' performance, outcomes, and experiences in implementing the models and will also include analyses of TANF administrative data, provided by the participating sites, merged with SSI data.