



## Evaluation of **Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations**



# Using Coaching to Address Economic Stability for People with Low Incomes: The Design and Implementation of Four Employment Coaching Programs

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## Glossary

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**Coaching.** This is when trained staff members work with participants to set individualized goals and then provide support and feedback as participants work toward their goals. Although there are varying definitions of coaching, this study defines it as an approach to program staff-participant interactions that incorporates six elements: (1) participants set goals and develop action steps for meeting the goals; (2) the coach is not directive—the coach does not specify goals for participants, develop plans to achieve those goals, or tell them what to do next but instead works collaboratively with the participant; (3) the coaching is individualized and depends on the participants’ needs and preferences; (4) the coaching helps participants learn the skills to set goals on their own and work toward meeting those goals; (5) the coach attempts to reinforce participants’ motivation to meet goals; and (6) the coach holds participants accountable by regularly discussing with the participants their progress toward reaching goals.

**Employment coaching.** This evaluation defines employment coaching as coaching in which goals are related directly or indirectly to employment.

**Mandatory.** In this report, coaching is mandatory when the receipt of TANF is conditional on meeting with a coach.

**Nondirective.** Being nondirective is a key difference between coaching and traditional case management. When coaches are nondirective, the coach does not specify goals for participants, develop plans to achieve those goals, or tell them what to do next. Rather, coaches guide participants in a collaborative process in which the participants determine their goals and develop plans to achieve them.

**Self-regulation skills.** Self-regulation skills are the skills used to finish tasks, stay organized, and control emotions. Other terms used to refer to these or related skills include soft skills, social and emotional skills, executive skills, and executive functioning skills. These skills are critical in finding, maintaining, and advancing in a job. Examples of self-regulation skills relevant to employment include goal-directed persistence and self-efficacy needed to continue at a task despite setbacks, time management necessary to show up to work on time, and emotional understanding and regulation needed to deal with difficult coworkers or supervisors.

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## Overview

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Employment coaching involves trained staff working collaboratively with participants to help them set individualized goals directly or indirectly related to employment and providing motivation, support, and feedback as participants work toward those goals. Unlike most traditional case managers, coaches work in partnership with participants and do not tell the participants what goals they should pursue or what action steps to take in pursuing them. Recently, there has been growing interest among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in using employment coaching to assist Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other adults with low incomes become self-sufficient.

The Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations, which is sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families, was designed to assess the implementation and effectiveness of four employment coaching programs that aim to help participants identify and attain goals related to self-sufficiency:

- **Family Development and Self-Sufficiency (FaDSS)** serves TANF recipients and their family members in Iowa. Participation in FaDSS is voluntary and most coaching occurs in the participant's home.
- **Goal4 It!**<sup>™</sup> provides employment coaching to TANF recipients in Jefferson County, Colorado in lieu of traditional case-management. Participation in Goal4 It! is required while receiving TANF benefits.
- **LIFT** is a voluntary coaching program operated in four U.S. cities. Most coaching is conducted by unpaid student interns from Master of Social Work programs.
- **MyGoals for Employment Success (MyGoals)** serves recipients of housing assistance in Baltimore, Maryland, and Houston, Texas. Participation is voluntary.

This report describes the design and implementation of these four programs.

### PRIMARY RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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The report focuses on three key research questions:

1. In what contexts were programs implemented?
2. How did the designs of the programs vary and differ?
3. How was coaching implemented across programs?



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## **PURPOSE**

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This report synthesizes the findings from studies of the implementation of the four coaching programs. It describes the key differences and similarities of the programs' context and design and discusses the key findings about the implementation of coaching that will be informative for policymakers and practitioners considering introducing or expanding the use of coaching.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

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The four programs were implemented in different contexts. The programs operated in big cities, suburban areas, and rural areas. Goal4 It! was operated by a TANF agency, while the others were operated by either other local government agencies or a non-profit organization. Two programs—FaDSS and Goal4 It!—served TANF recipients. Additionally, programs differed in terms of maturity— at the time of data collection, FaDSS had been operating for more than three decades while the other programs had been operating for less than five years.

In all four programs, coaching focused on setting and attaining goals and coaches were nondirective—participants, not coaches, set goals and decided how to pursue them in collaboration with coaches. However, the programs' designs varied along several dimensions: the scope of coaching; the frequency and maximum duration of the coaching; whether coaching occurred in the home, a program office, or a community location; the extent to which coaching sessions were structured and tools were used; whether there was an explicit focus on self-regulation skills; whether the coaches were paid; the coaches' caseload; the amount of training and supervision for coaches; and whether the program offered financial incentives.

Despite the differences in program design and the contexts in which they were implemented, staff in all four programs generally implemented coaching as planned. Most participants focused on setting goals and working to attain them during their time in the program. Coaches were generally nondirective. The two programs that served TANF recipients implemented coaching within the context of mandatory work requirements. This suggests that different employment coaching models can be implemented successfully in diverse contexts.

Other implementation lessons included:

- While coaches generally succeeded in being nondirective, many coaches reported that being nondirective was challenging and took skill to master.
- Coaches and participants reported strong and trusting relationships, but that frequent turnover of coaches as well as program compliance monitoring can threaten these relationships.
- Most coaches and participants viewed financial incentives positively but felt that they did not make a large difference in participants' behavior.
- The average coaching dosage during the first 12 months of the study varied between programs from 3 to 8 hours.

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- Coaching in the home offered advantages and disadvantages over coaching in the program office or a community location.
  - Nearly all coaches had a Bachelors' degree, and in three programs they had some experience with coaching or case management. Some coaches had similar life experiences to participants, and this was viewed as beneficial.
  - Programs offered additional services and coaches made referrals for other services; however, participants requested more.

## **METHODS**

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The report is based on data primarily collected between 2018 and 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. The data sources included:

- Baseline data of study participant characteristics, educational attainment, and work experience;
- A survey of program managers and staff;
- In-person semi-structured discussions with program management and staff;
- Observations and video recordings of coaching sessions;
- In-depth, in-person interviews with participants;
- Service receipt data for 12 months after study enrollment as reported by program staff and recorded in the study's data tracking system or the program's management information system;
- Review of program documents such as training materials or tools to support coaching; and
- Telephone discussions with program staff and leaders (and for some programs, program developers and technical assistance providers) that took place before and during study enrollment.

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## Executive Summary

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Self-regulation skills—the skills needed to finish tasks, stay organized, and control emotions—are important for success at finding, keeping, and advancing at a job. For example, time management is necessary to show up to work on time and emotional understanding and regulation is necessary to deal with difficult coworkers or supervisors. Recent research suggests that the stresses and uncertainty of poverty can be overwhelming, leaving less mental bandwidth among adults with low incomes for effective development and use of self-regulation skills.

Coaching—in which trained staff members work with participants to set individualized goals and then provide support and feedback as participants work toward their goals—has been shown to be an effective method for changing the behavior and improving the self-regulation skills of teachers, students, medical patients, and corporate managers (Fletcher and Mullen 2012; Bettinger and Baker 2011; Pirbaglou et al. 2018; Jones et al. 2015). Recently, there has been growing interest among policymakers, employment program operators, and researchers in how insights from research on coaching might be used to improve employment and self-sufficiency outcomes for participants in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other programs designed for adults with low incomes.

To explore the potential of employment coaching for improving the self-sufficiency of adults with low incomes, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, funded the Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations. The evaluation assesses the impacts and implementation of four employment coaching programs:

- **Family Development and Self-Sufficiency (FaDSS)** serves TANF recipients and their family members in Iowa. Participation in FaDSS is voluntary and most coaching sessions occur in the participant’s home.
- **Goal4 It!**<sup>TM</sup> provides employment coaching to TANF recipients in Jefferson County, Colorado in lieu of traditional case-management. Participation in Goal4 It! is required while receiving TANF benefits.
- **LIFT** is a voluntary coaching program operated in four U.S. cities. Most coaching is conducted by unpaid student interns from Master of Social Work programs.
- **MyGoals for Employment Success (MyGoals)** serves recipients of housing assistance in Baltimore, Maryland, and Houston, Texas. Participation is voluntary.

This report synthesizes the findings from studies of the implementation of the four coaching programs. It describes the key differences and similarities of the programs’ context and design and discusses the key findings about the implementation of coaching that will be informative for policymakers and practitioners considering introducing or expanding the use of coaching.

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## EMPLOYMENT COACHING DEFINED

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Although there are varying definitions of coaching, this study defines it as an approach to program staff–participant interactions that incorporates six elements: (1) participants set goals and develop action steps for meeting the goals; (2) the coach is not directive—the coach does not specify goals for participants, develop plans to achieve those goals, or tell them what to do next but instead works corroboratively with the participant; (3) the coaching is individualized and depends on the participants’ needs and preferences; (4) the coaching helps participants learn the skills to set goals on their own and work toward meeting those goals; (5) the coach attempts to reinforce participants’ motivation to meet goals; and (6) the coach holds participants accountable by regularly discussing with the participants their progress toward reaching goals. Employment coaching, for purposes of this study, is coaching in which goals are related directly or indirectly to employment.

## DATA SOURCES

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The data used in this report was collected primarily between 2018 and 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. It was collected from: a survey or form administered at study enrollment; a survey of program managers and staff; in-person semi-structured discussions and other conversations with program managers, staff, and participants; in-depth in-person interviews with participants; observations and video recordings of coaching sessions; service receipt data collected in the study’s tracking system or the program’s management information system; and review of program documents such as training materials or tools to support coaching.

## VARIATION IN THE IMPLEMENTATION CONTEXT

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The four programs were implemented in different contexts. The programs operated in big cities, suburban areas, and rural areas. A TANF agency operated Goal4 It!, a nonprofit organization operated LIFT, and other local government agencies operated Goal4 It! and MyGoals. Two programs—FaDSS and Goal4 It!—served TANF recipients and participants in these programs had to engage in specific employment-related activities (such as job search or training) for a set number of hours each week as a condition of receiving their benefits. Additionally, programs differed in terms of maturity—at the time of data collection, FaDSS had been implemented for more than three decades while the other programs had been implemented for less than five years.

## VARIATION IN PROGRAM DESIGN

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While the designs of the four programs included in this study all met the study definition of employment coaching, they varied in the following ways:

- **Scope of coaching.** Although all four programs offered coaching related to employment, coaches and participants could discuss a broader set of goals, with some variation across programs in emphasis. FaDSS coaches focused on the well-being of the whole family. LIFT and MyGoals coaches placed more emphasis on financial education and education and training than did FaDSS and Goal4 It!.

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- **Frequency and maximum duration of coaching.** In all four programs coaches and participants aimed to meet at least once per month, but FaDSS and LIFT built in additional sessions early in the program to increase coach-participant engagement. Maximum program duration varied from time in the TANF program (Goal4 It!), to up to 7 months after TANF exit (FaDSS), to two years (LIFT), and three years (MyGoals).
  - **Coaching locations.** Coaching occurred in the participants' homes in FaDSS. In the other programs, coaching occurred in the program office or at community locations. Even before the pandemic, some coaching occurred by telephone and email.
  - **Session structure and use of coaching tools.** Goal4 It! and MyGoals coaching sessions were more structured and included more tools than did FaDSS and LIFT. Goal4 It! coaches used a four-step goal-setting process and associated tools. MyGoals coaches used a 12-step process to guide participants through a hierarchy of goal types. LIFT and FaDSS were less specific about the format of sessions.
  - **Focus on self-regulation skills.** By focusing on setting goals and working to attain them and being nondirective, coaching in all four programs helped participants practice self-regulation skills. However, programs differed in the extent to which they explicitly incorporated self-regulation skills. FaDSS and LIFT had little or no explicit focus on self-regulation skills. The design of Goal4 It! incorporated principles of self-regulation skills development. MyGoals was unique among the four programs in that coaches assessed participants for strengths and weaknesses in self-regulation skills and discussed the skills explicitly with participants, using scientific terms.
  - **Coach employment status.** While FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and MyGoals coaches were full-time, paid employees, LIFT coaches were unpaid students from Master of Social Work (MSW) programs fulfilling a nine-month field placement for their programs.
  - **Caseload.** FaDSS coaches had an average caseload of about 18 participants, reflecting the time-intensive nature of in-home coaching. LIFT coaches worked part-time and had average caseloads of 16 participants. Goal4 It! coaches and MyGoals coaches had average caseloads of 40 participants.
  - **Training and supervision.** The programs provided varying amounts of initial and ongoing training for coaches. The most training and supervision was offered to MyGoals coaches, the most complex program, and to LIFT, which used MSW students as coaches.
  - **Financial incentives.** Two programs offered financial incentives. LIFT offered participants incentives linked to their program engagement, and MyGoals provided incentives related to engagement and employment.

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## IMPLEMENTATION LESSONS

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**Despite the differences in program design as well as the contexts in which they were implemented, staff in all four programs generally implemented coaching as planned.** Most participants focused on goal setting and pursuit during their time in the program and coaches were generally nondirective. The two programs that served TANF recipients implemented coaching within the context of mandatory work requirements. This suggests that different employment coaching models can be implemented successfully in diverse contexts.

While coaches generally succeeded in being nondirective, many coaches reported that being nondirective was challenging and took skill to master. The challenges coaches reported included having prior jobs in which they were expected to be directive, working with participants who expected to be directed, and working with participants who were in crisis or not making progress.

**Coaches and participants reported strong and trusting relationships, but that frequent turnover of coaches as well as program compliance monitoring can threaten these relationships.** In all programs, coaches and participants reported strong relationships, with some participants likening their coaches to a close friend or relative and noting they did not have another source of this type of support. It is possible that the collaborative nature of coaching facilitates these relationships in a way that standard case management, which is more directive, does not. Coach turnover disrupts these relationships. Because LIFT coaches were MSW students, LIFT participants experienced a change in coach at least once every 9 months. Although most Goal4 It! participants had positive or neutral comments about their Goal4 It! coach, a few described the relationship with their coach—who monitored their compliance with the TANF work requirements—as transactional.

**Most coaches and participants viewed financial incentives positively but felt that they did not make a large difference.** While coaches and participants in MyGoals and LIFT appreciated incentives, there was not a consensus about whether they affected behaviors. None viewed the role of incentives as a main driver of behaviors.

**Programs differed in the average coaching dosage during the first 12 months of the study.** In all programs, coaches tended to have multiple contacts with the participants in the first month and then the frequency of sessions declined. In the first year after study enrollment, Goal4 It! participants received only a little over 3 hours of coaching on average, in large part because they either left TANF or had their case closed and thus became ineligible for coaching. In the first year after study enrollment, FaDSS and LIFT participants received about 8 hours of coaching (MyGoals did not collect data on the number of hours of coaching). A larger share of LIFT (46 percent) and MyGoals (56 percent) participants were still in contact with a coach 12 months after study enrollment than in either of the other programs.



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**Coaching in the home offered advantages and disadvantages over coaching in the program office or a community location.** Home visits help engage the whole family and can provide coaches additional information about the participant's family and home life. However, travel to participants' homes is time consuming, particularly in rural areas. FaDSS coaches also reported that sometimes they lacked privacy in the home for discussing sensitive topics and were concerned about safety and hygiene issues. Participants can easily access community locations, but these locations can lack privacy. Meeting in central office locations can involve more travel for the participants.

**Coaches had similar education levels but different experiences with coaching and other life experiences.** Nearly all coaches reported having a college degree or higher. Most coaches had prior experience in coaching or case management, except in LIFT, which used MSW students as coaches. Using unpaid graduate student interns as coaches reduces program costs but has implications for continuity of the coaching relationship. Coaches reported that sharing some characteristics and lived experiences with participants helped build rapport; the extent to which characteristics were shared differed across the programs.

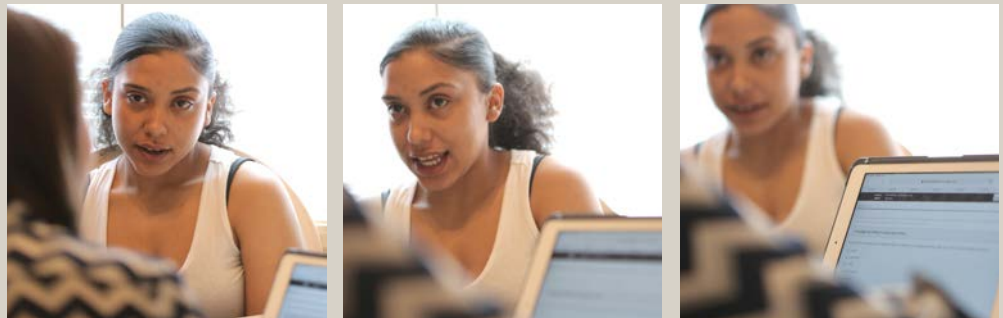
**Programs offered additional services and coaches made referrals for other services; however, participants requested more.** LIFT and MyGoals offered additional resources for participants such as workshops on topics of interest and social events (such as holiday parties). MyGoals coaches distributed current, local labor market information to participants to help them make employment and career decisions. Most participants reported receiving referrals to other services. In interviews, some participants reported wanting more services than they received.

## **FINDINGS ON THE PROGRAMS' EFFECTIVENESS**

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Other reports from the evaluation will present findings on the effectiveness of each of the four coaching programs. These and other reports from the evaluation of these coaching programs will be posted on the OPRE website: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/evaluation-of-coaching-focused-interventions-for-hard-to-employ-tanf-clients-and-other-low-income-populations>.

**A FaDSS participant talks with her specialist at home.**



(Photo: Rich Clement, Mathematica)

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## I. Introduction

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Self-regulation skills are those skills needed to finish tasks, stay organized, and control emotions (Nyhus and Pons 2005; Hogan and Holland 2003; Störmer and Fahr 2013; Caliendo et al. 2015). Other terms used to refer to these or related skills include soft skills, social and emotional skills, executive skills, and executive functioning skills. Examples of self-regulation skills relevant to employment include goal-directed persistence and self-efficacy needed to continue at a task despite setbacks, time management necessary to show up to work on time, and emotional understanding and regulation needed to deal with difficult coworkers or supervisors. Recent research suggests that the stresses and uncertainty of poverty can be overwhelming, leaving less mental bandwidth for effective development and use of self-regulation skills (Mullainathan and Shafir 2013). Research finds that in many different contexts, setting goals and developing action steps to meet the goals can help develop self-regulation skills (Locke and Latham 1990; Zimmerman et al. 1992).

Coaching—in which trained staff members work with participants to set individualized goals and then provide support and feedback as participants work toward their goals—has been shown to be an effective method for changing the behavior and improving the self-regulation skills of corporate managers and teachers (Jones et al. 2015; Fletcher and Mullen 2012). Coaching has been applied successfully in financial management (Collins and Murrell 2010; Theodos et al. 2015), higher education (Bettinger and Baker 2011), and health (Pirbaglou et al. 2018) settings.

Recently, there has been growing interest among policymakers, employment program operators, and researchers in how insights from research on coaching might be used to improve employment and self-sufficiency outcomes for participants in Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and other programs designed for adults with low incomes. Despite interest in coaching as a strategy, there are few rigorous tests of its effectiveness in this setting (Martinson et al. 2020).

To explore the potential of employment coaching for improving the self-sufficiency of adults with low incomes, the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) within the Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, funded the Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations. The evaluation was designed to build the research base by testing four employment coaching programs designed specifically for adults with low incomes. The evaluation used an experimental design—eligible consenting program applicants were randomly assigned to either coaching or a control group that did not receive coaching—to assess the impacts of the four programs on study participants’ self-regulation skills, employment, earnings, self-sufficiency, and other measures of personal and family well-being.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Publications produced as part of this study to date describe the programs, document the study design and analysis plans, and provide findings on how the programs were implemented. These publications, and future publications, are available at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/project/evaluation-employment-coaching-tanf-and-related-populations-2016-2021>.



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This report synthesizes the findings from studies of the implementation of the four programs. Drawing on multiple data sources, it describes the key differences and similarities of the programs' contexts and designs and discusses the key findings about the implementation of coaching that will be informative for policymakers and practitioners considering introducing or expanding the use of coaching. More details of the implementation of each program are provided in individual, program-specific reports—Schwartz et al. (2020, FaDSS), Gardiner et al. (2022, Goal4 It!), Gardiner et al. (2021, LIFT), and Saunders et al. (2022, MyGoals).

The data used in this report was collected primarily between 2018 and 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic. Kharsa and Joyce (2022) describe how the design and implementation of each of those four coaching programs changed in response to COVID-19 restrictions.

## **EMPLOYMENT COACHING DEFINED**

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Although there are varying definitions of coaching, this study defines it as an approach to program staff-participant interactions that incorporates six elements: (1) participants set goals and develop action steps for meeting the goals; (2) the coach is not directive—the coach does not specify goals for participants, develop plans to achieve those goals, or tell them what to do next but instead works collaboratively with the participant; (3) the coaching is individualized and depends on the participants' needs and preferences; (4) the coaching helps participants learn the skills to set goals on their own and work toward meeting those goals; (5) the coach attempts to reinforce participants' motivation to meet goals; and (6) the coach holds participants accountable by regularly discussing with the participants their progress toward reaching goals. Employment coaching, for purposes of this study, is coaching in which goals are related directly or indirectly to employment. The designs of the four programs included in this study all met this definition of employment coaching.

Coaches help participants set goals, determine action steps, and assess their progress toward those goals.

Employment coaching as defined above is fundamentally different from case management, the traditional method for helping participants in TANF and other programs find and maintain employment. The main difference is that, unlike case managers, coaches are not directive. Coaches help participants set goals, determine action steps, and assess their progress toward those goals, instead of guiding them to certain goals and directing how they will attain them (Joyce and McConnell, 2019). In this way, coaches help participants practice self-regulation skills needed to find, keep, and advance in a job, and use them after leaving the program.

## **THE FOUR COACHING PROGRAMS IN THE EVALUATION**

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The study team selected programs based on the following criteria: (1) the approach used met the study's definition of employment coaching described above; (2) it offered strong, well-implemented employment coaching that aimed to improve employment outcomes for TANF recipients or other adults with low incomes; and (3) staff had the capacity and willingness to participate in an experimental evaluation.

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The four programs selected for the evaluation were:

- **Family Development and Self-Sufficiency (FaDSS)**, which provided employment coaching to TANF recipients and their family members. First implemented in 1988, the Iowa Department of Human Rights operated FaDSS through contracts with 17 local human services agencies across the state, 7 of which participated in the evaluation. Participation in FaDSS was voluntary—it was not required for receipt of TANF. Most coaching sessions occurred in the participant’s home. Through assessments, coaches identified participant and family service needs and made referrals when possible. Coaches and participants aimed to meet twice during each of the first 3 months of the program and monthly thereafter. Participants could remain in FaDSS during their time on TANF and up to 7 months after leaving.
- **Goal4 It!™**, which provided employment coaching to Jefferson County, Colorado, TANF recipients who were subject to work requirements. The coaching model was developed by Mathematica and partners. The Jefferson County Department of Human Services implemented Goal4 It! in 2018 as an alternative to standard case management services. Study participants were assigned at random to receive Goal4 It! coaching or receive standard case management services. Participating in Goal4 It! coaching or standard case management, depending on the group they were assigned, was mandatory for Jefferson County TANF recipients—they needed to meet with a coach or a case manager to continue to receive TANF benefits. Through structured interactions with Goal4 It! coaches, participants set goals, broke down goals into manageable steps, developed specific plans to make the steps, and regularly reviewed goal progress. Goal4 It! coaches and participants aimed to meet at least once per month if the participant was not working and bimonthly if the participant was employed. Participants can receive Goal4 It! only during their time on TANF.
- **LIFT**, which is a nonprofit organization that operated a coaching program of the same name in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York City, and Washington, DC. (All offices except Washington, DC, participated in the evaluation.)<sup>2</sup> Participants were parents or other caregivers of children under age 8 or expectant parents. LIFT applicants must have also demonstrated a level of stability in housing and work or education that the organization believed was critical to being able to focus on goal setting. Most coaches were unpaid student interns from local Master of Social Work (MSW) programs. Coaches worked with participants to create a plan to attain short- and long-term goals related to financial security, educational achievement, and career advancement. Participants received financial incentives if they attended sessions regularly. Other services, such as workshops and social gatherings, aimed to strengthen participants’ skills and networks. Participants and their coaches aimed to meet twice in the first month and monthly thereafter, for up to 2 years, even if they became employed.

<sup>2</sup> The evaluation excluded the Washington, DC office due to its small size and participation in another study.

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- **MyGoals for Employment Success (MyGoals)**, which was a demonstration program—designed to be implemented on a temporary basis for a study—developed by MDRC and its partners and operated by the Baltimore, Maryland and Houston, Texas public housing authorities between 2017 and 2022. It aimed to help participants set and achieve goals in four interrelated domains: (1) employment and career development, (2) education and training, (3) financial management, and (4) personal and family well-being. Coaches helped participants assess their self-regulation skills, and they explored self-regulation skills in discussions with participants. To be eligible, MyGoals applicants needed to be an adult member of a household receiving federal housing assistance, through either a housing choice voucher or living in public housing, and be either unemployed or working fewer than 20 hours per month. MyGoals offered participants financial incentives linked to coaching engagement and employment. The program also offered budgeting and financial management education and regularly updated local labor market information. Coaches aimed to meet participants at least monthly for up to 3 years even if they became employed.

Further details of each of the programs are summarized in Appendix A.

## DATA SOURCES

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This report draws on the following data:

- **Baseline data** of study participant characteristics, educational attainment, and work experience captured through a survey administered at study enrollment (Goal4 It!, FaDSS, and LIFT), or public housing records and a baseline information form (MyGoals)<sup>3</sup> (the timing of baseline data collection varied by program, between February 2017 and November 2019);
- A **survey of program managers and staff** conducted between January and March 2019;
- **In-person semi-structured discussions** with program management and staff and observations of coaching sessions during site visits in spring 2019;
- **Video recordings** of coaching sessions conducted in spring 2019;
- **In-depth, in-person interviews** with coaching participants conducted in spring 2019;
- **Service receipt data** for 12 months after study enrollment as reported by program staff and recorded in the study’s data tracking system or the program’s management information system;
- **Document reviews**, such as policy and procedure manuals, training manuals, curricula, participant enrollment forms, assessment forms, and forms used to document coaching sessions and other activities; and
- **Telephone discussions** with program staff and leaders (and for some programs, program developers and technical assistance providers) that took place before and during study enrollment.

<sup>3</sup> The evaluation of MyGoals began before it joined the Evaluation of Employment Coaching for TANF and Related Populations and hence had a different approach to collecting baseline data.

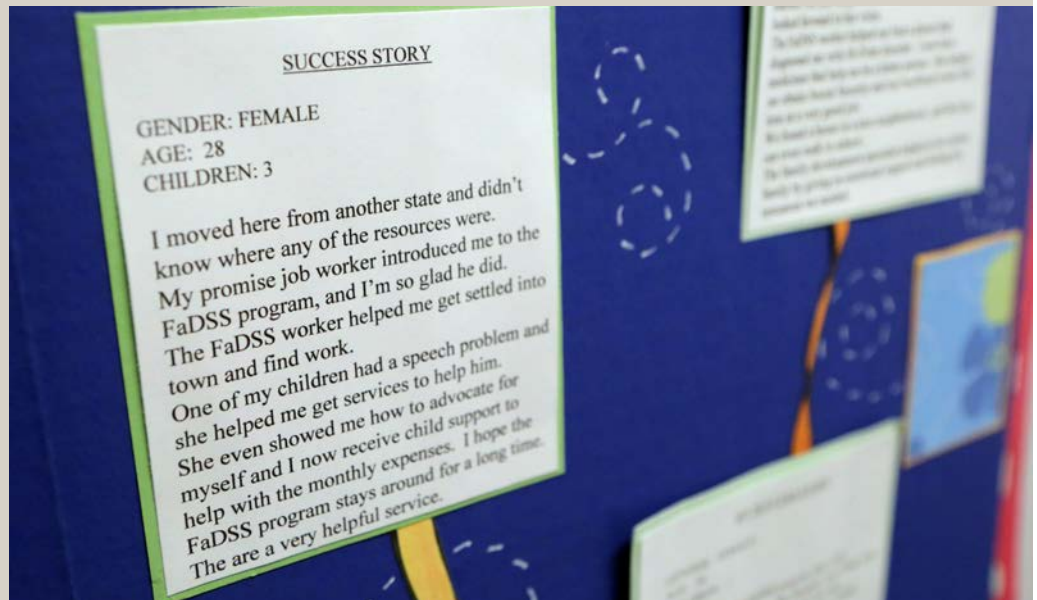
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## ORGANIZATION OF REPORT

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The remainder of the report is organized as follows. Chapter II presents the context in which the programs operated. Chapter III describes the similarities and differences in the design of the coaching in each program. Chapter IV describes some key observations of the implementation of coaching across the four programs. The report concludes with Chapter V with a discussion of the findings.

**A community action  
agency bulletin  
board displays FaDSS  
success stories.**



(Photo: Rich Clement, Mathematica)

## II. Variation in the Implementation Context

The programs operated in different contexts, with implications for implementation. Contextual factors included the program’s organizational “home,” its location, the characteristics of the participants (which are influenced by the program’s home and location), and the maturity of the programs.

### IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATION

The organizational home of coaching programs provides useful context for understanding the design and implementation of the services (Table 1). One notable contextual factor is whether the coaching program was embedded in a larger agency, one which might provide participants with access to other, complementary services (such as child care or transportation assistance ), or whether the coaching program relied on referrals outside of the program for non-coaching supports.

Two of the four programs in the study served TANF recipients. Goal4 It! was operated by the Jefferson County Department of Human Services (DHS), the TANF agency, in place of traditional case management. FaDSS was operated by the Iowa Department of Human Rights, which is a different department from the one that operates the TANF program (the Iowa Department of Human Services). Attending coaching sessions was mandatory to receive TANF benefits in Goal4 It! but was voluntary in FaDSS. FaDSS participants also received TANF case management.

**Table 1.**  
**Implementing organization and its characteristics**

<b>Organization characteristic</b>	<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
Implementing organization	Local social service agencies under contract to the Iowa Department of Human Rights	Jefferson County Department of Human Services	LIFT (nonprofit organization)	Baltimore and Houston public housing authorities
Public assistance linkage	Yes, TANF participation required for eligibility	Yes, TANF participation required for eligibility	No	Yes, must be living in public housing or have a housing choice voucher
Non-coaching services provided as part of program	Access to TANF employment services and have a TANF case manager; some FaDSS local agencies offer additional resources	Access to TANF employment services	Access to social events and workshops on topics such as banking and savings, financial and credit counseling, and holiday parties	Local labor market information handouts specific to employment sectors

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Because the Goal4 It! and FaDSS coaching participants were TANF recipients, they were required by TANF to engage in specific “countable” employment-related activities, such as job search, subsidized or unsubsidized employment, community service, or vocational training, for a set number of hours each week as a condition of receiving their benefits. Because Jefferson County DHS guidelines prioritized participation in activities that supported self-sufficiency even if they were not countable toward the federal Work Participation Rate, Goal4 It! participants had more flexibility than FaDSS participants in the types of activities they could count toward their mandatory hour and activity requirements.<sup>4</sup> Through their TANF programs, these coaching participants could access a variety of services and supports to facilitate employment, including resume and job search workshops, child care, and transportation assistance. Some FaDSS local agencies also provided other supports such as pantry items, access to washing machines, and financial assistance for participants in crisis.

Public housing authorities in Baltimore and Houston operated MyGoals. The housing authorities hired the coaches and provided space for coach-participant meetings but were otherwise not involved in day-to-day operations of the program. Although participants were receiving housing assistance either as voucher holders or residents of public housing, they did not have other commitments related to their receipt of assistance. MDRC designed MyGoals in collaboration with a neuropsychologist, Dr. Richard Guare, and provided oversight of coaches and their supervisors. The housing authorities operated other programs, but MyGoals participants were barred from participating in the two most employment-focused ones as a condition of MyGoals eligibility.<sup>5</sup>

A nonprofit organization of the same name operated LIFT. Unlike the other study programs, LIFT was not embedded in a larger organization. LIFT provided some non-coaching services on site, such as workshops and social events but unlike the other implementing organizations did not provide other services and resources.

Unlike FaDSS and Goal4 It!, most LIFT and MyGoals participants were not TANF recipients and hence did not have access to employment services associated with TANF. Coaches in both programs referred participants to other providers for additional employment assistance (such as American Job Centers) and other services as needed. Additionally, MyGoals coaches provided two-page handouts that listed local employers and websites intended to support participants’ online job search efforts in a particular job sector. The handouts also summarized prerequisites—skills, education, and prior experience—that job applicants should highlight in their job application.

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<sup>4</sup> Per federal work requirements, one-parent families with children under age six must spend at least 20 hours per week in activities that count toward the federal work participation rate, such as working, volunteering, job search, or vocational educational training. One-parent families with children over age six must participate in work activities for at least 30 hours per week.

<sup>5</sup> These programs, funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, offer job placement assistance, financial incentives, and coaching to public housing residents and housing choice voucher participants. As the evaluation was designed to compare MyGoals to other services in the community and not to similar services provided by the housing authorities, people in households receiving these other housing authority services could not participate in MyGoals.



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## PROGRAM LOCATION

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The programs in the evaluation operated in big cities, suburban areas, and rural areas. The seven FaDSS locations included rural, suburban, and urban locations. Goal4 It! operated in Jefferson County, Colorado, a largely suburban county adjacent to Denver. The three LIFT offices in the evaluation were in large cities (Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City), as were the MyGoals offices (Baltimore and Houston). The location can affect the number and types of jobs available, transportation needs, and the availability of other employment services. The need to have access to a car is greatest in rural areas (such as parts of Iowa where FaDSS is offered) and suburban areas (such as Jefferson County where Goal4 It! is offered).

## PARTICIPANT CHARACTERISTICS

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Although participants across the four programs all had low incomes, other characteristics varied in ways that reflect differences in program eligibility criteria, program location, and implementation context.

Although participants across the four programs all had low incomes, other characteristics such as their number of children, work experience, and race and ethnicity, varied in ways that reflect differences in program eligibility criteria, program location, and implementation context. For instance, FaDSS and Goal4 It! served TANF recipients; LIFT worked with parents of young children who demonstrated housing stability and were either employed (or had someone in the household who was employed) or was in an education program; and MyGoals participants were receiving housing assistance and were unemployed or working less than 20 hours per month.

Most coaching participants were women (85 to 95 percent), and in their late 20s or 30s, with MyGoals participants slightly older, on average, than others (Table 2). FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and LIFT participants had, on average, two children at study enrollment. The proportion of participants married at study enrollment ranged from 8 percent (FaDSS) to 31 percent (LIFT). Data for children and marital status were not available for MyGoals participants.

Participants were racially and ethnically diverse (Table 2). The largest share of FaDSS participants (48 percent) were White, non-Hispanic; the next largest share were Black, non-Hispanic (36 percent). The largest share of Goal4 It! participants were White, non-Hispanic (48 percent), followed by Hispanic (40 percent). Most LIFT participants were Hispanic (70 percent); slightly more than one-quarter (28 percent) were Black, non-Hispanic, although demographics varied by city. A large majority (95 percent) of MyGoals participants were Black, non-Hispanic.

Participants had generally low socioeconomic status (Table 2). The proportion of participants who neither completed high school nor obtained a General Educational Development (GED) diploma was similar for FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and MyGoals (between 22 and 24 percent), but considerably higher for LIFT (38 percent). Receipt of income from public assistance programs (including TANF, Supplemental Security Income [SSI], and housing assistance) and social insurance programs (such as unemployment insurance) was common at the time of study enrollment. Per program design, almost all FaDSS and Goal4 It! participants were receiving income from TANF at study enrollment. (Some Goal4 It! participants had applied for but were not yet receiving benefits at study enrollment.) All MyGoals participants received housing assistance

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per the program's eligibility criteria. Although not a criterion for eligibility, 85 percent of LIFT participants were receiving public assistance or unemployment insurance benefits when they enrolled in the study.

Recent work experience prior to study enrollment varied by program (Table 2). Work experience in the 30 days prior to study enrollment was lowest for FaDSS and Goal4 It! participants (32 and 27 percent, respectively) and highest for LIFT participants (53 percent), reflecting that LIFT eligibility required participants to be working or residing with someone who worked (or was in an educational program). Although data on employment status in the 30 days prior to study enrollment is not available for MyGoals study participants, data on current employment was collected at study enrollment and show that only about 2 percent of MyGoals participants were employed at the time of study enrollment. This is consistent with the MyGoals eligibility criterion that participants were unemployed or working less than 20 hours a month at study enrollment. Among those who worked, average earnings in the 30 days prior to study enrollment were highest among LIFT participants (\$1,197) and lowest for FaDSS participants (\$452). These data were not available for MyGoals participants.

Participants from FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and LIFT reported a range of challenges to employment when they entered the study (similar data are not available for MyGoals participants). The first panel of Table 3 shows challenges that participants reported made it “very hard” or “extremely hard” to find or keep a job. A larger share of Goal4 It! participants than FaDSS or LIFT participants reported that lack of transportation and lack of child care made it very or extremely hard to find or keep work (Table 3). About one in five Goal4 It! and LIFT participants reported a criminal record as a challenge. Relatively more LIFT participants reported that a health condition impeded finding or keeping a job. Other employment challenges reported by participants included lack of a valid driver's license (ranging from 36 percent to 58 percent of participants) and unstable housing (ranging from 11 percent to 33 percent of participants).

**A Goal4 It! CFC meets  
with a participant.**



(Photo: Rich Clement, Mathematica)



**Table 2.**  
**Characteristics of program participants at study enrollment**

<b>Characteristics at study enrollment</b>	<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
<b>Demographics</b>				
Average age (in years)	29	32	33	37
Female (%)	85	92	95	88
Currently married (%)	8	10	31	NA
Number of children with whom respondent lives	2	2	2	NA
<b>Race and ethnicity (%)</b>				
Hispanic	13	40	70	3
Black, non-Hispanic	36	9	28	95
White, non-Hispanic	48	48	1	2
Other	3	3	1	1
<b>Socioeconomic status</b>				
Did not complete high school or GED (%)	24	22	38	24
Receiving any income from public assistance/ social insurance program (%)	100	93	85	100
<b>Employment status and history</b>				
Worked for pay in 30 days prior to study enrollment (%)	32	27	53	NA
Earnings in 30 days prior to study enrollment among those who worked (\$)	452	870	1,197	NA
Currently employed (%)	NA	NA	NA	2
Sample size	430	401	405	900

Source: Baseline survey for FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and LIFT program group participants. Baseline survey and public housing authorities' data collected at the last recertification for housing benefits before enrolling in the study for MyGoals program group participants.  
Note: NA = not available.

**Table 3.**  
**Employment challenges reported at study enrollment**

<b>Challenge</b>	<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>
Challenges that study participants reported made it very or extremely hard to find or keep a job (%)			
Lack of transportation	31	43	19
Lack of child care	36	51	40
Criminal record	12	20	19
Health condition	18	23	40
No valid driver's license (%)	44	36	58
Unstable housing (%)	28	33	11
Sample size	430	401	404

Source: Baseline surveys for program group members.  
Note: Similar data is not available for MyGoals participants.

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## PROGRAM MATURITY AND SUPPORT

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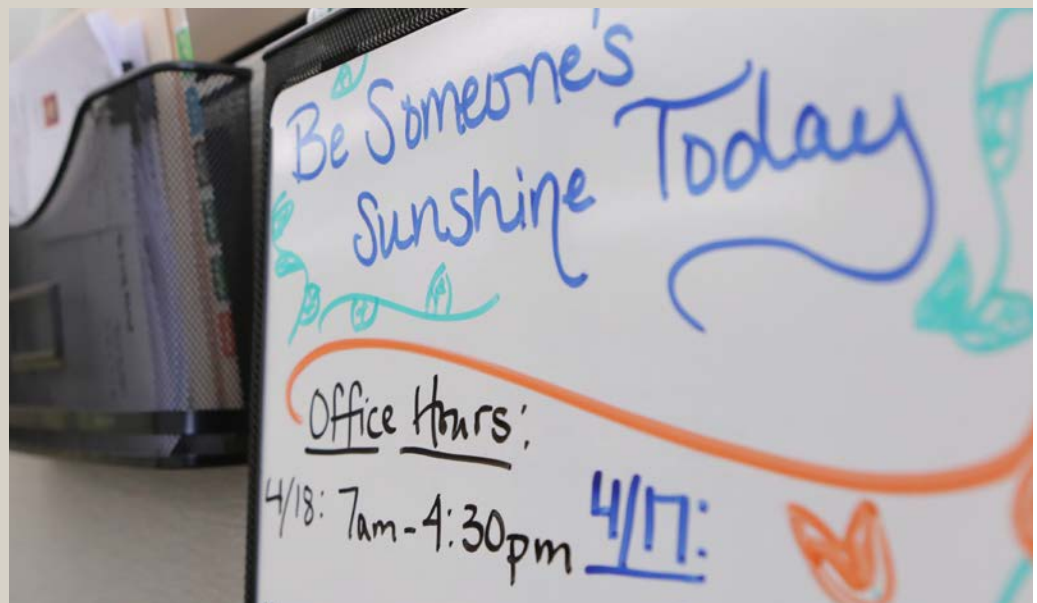
How long each program had operated when the study began is another potentially important contextual factor.

The programs in the study varied in maturity from fewer than five years to over three decades.

How long each program had operated when the study began is another potentially important contextual factor. Generally, programs implemented for a longer time are more likely to be operating at a steady state than programs that are newly implemented. Newer programs might continue to evolve as program operators identify implementation challenges and make programmatic changes to address them.

The programs in the study varied in maturity from fewer than five years to over three decades. FaDSS is by far the most mature program, implemented in 1988, about 30 years prior to the start of the study. Goal4 It! was first implemented in 2015 in a TANF program in Minnesota. Jefferson County DHS began piloting Goal4 It! in 2017 and enrollment into the study began in October 2018. LIFT began operations in 1998 and introduced employment coaching in 2016. When study intake began, the program had been operating for one or two years, depending on the location. MyGoals was launched as a demonstration program in 2017, one year prior to study intake. MyGoals also differed from the other programs in the extent to which the program was refined during its implementation and the support provided to coaches and other program staff. MyGoals developers continued providing training and technical assistance to coaches and supervisors after study launch. Some adaptations were made to the program based on coaches' experiences.

**A white board displays a motivational message.**



(Photo: Rich Clement, Mathematica)

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## III. Variation in Coaching Program Design

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To be eligible for selection into the study, the program designs needed to meet the study's definition of employment coaching described in the Introduction. Specifically, the coaches needed to work collaboratively with the participants to set individualized goals and action steps; to be nondirective; and to ask participants whether they have made progress toward their goals and celebrate successes. In all four programs, the coach and participant met one-on-one, most often in person.

While the four study programs had many design similarities, they also had design variations discussed below and summarized in Appendix A.

### SCOPE OF COACHING

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Although all four programs offered coaching related to employment, coaches and participants could discuss a broader set of goals, with some variation across programs in emphasis (Box 1). FaDSS, for example, explicitly focused on the well-being of the whole family. LIFT and MyGoals placed more emphasis on financial management and education and training than did FaDSS and Goal4 It!, which served only TANF recipients.

#### Box 1. Goal areas emphasized by program

<b>FaDSS</b>	Economic issues; family stability.
<b>Goal4 It!</b>	Any area of life that relates to and supports employment and parenting (such as housing, dependent care, transportation, family well-being, education and training).
<b>LIFT</b>	Education; finances; employment.
<b>MyGoals</b>	Employment and career development; education and training; financial management; personal and family well-being.

The discussion of goals often incorporated information gathered from an initial assessment or other exercise. For example, FaDSS coaches administered an assessment about family and individual strengths and circumstances; Goal4 It! and LIFT coaches asked participants to complete an assessment of their satisfaction in various areas of life. MyGoals participants completed a questionnaire about their interests and a questionnaire that assessed 12 self-regulation skills.

### PLANNED FREQUENCY AND MAXIMUM DURATION OF COACHING

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In all four programs, coaches and participants aimed to meet at least once per month. FaDSS and LIFT scheduled more frequent meetings in the participant's initial month(s) in the program.

The potential duration of coaching varied (Box 2). Coaching in FaDSS and Goal4 It! was tied to the length of time the participant received TANF benefits. Goal4 It! participants could receive coaching only while they were receiving TANF benefits, whereas FaDSS participants could receive coaching for up to 7 months after they left

TANF. The amount of time participants were on TANF in both FaDSS and Goal4 It! averaged just over 4 months. FaDSS and Goal4 It! participants could return to the coaching program if they started using TANF benefits again. There is no upper limit on the number of months participants can remain in the coaching program, although Federal law limits the amount of time a participant can receive TANF benefits in a lifetime to 60 months. LIFT participants could receive coaching for up to two years, and MyGoals participants could receive coaching for up to three years.

**Box 2. Duration of eligibility to receive coaching**

<b>FaDSS</b>	While receiving TANF (up to 60 months in a lifetime) plus 7 months. On average, participants are on TANF for 4 months.
<b>Goal4 It!</b>	While receiving TANF (up to 60 months in a lifetime). On average, participants are on TANF for 4 months.
<b>LIFT</b>	Two years.
<b>MyGoals</b>	Three years.

**COACHING LOCATION**

Reflecting program design, coaching session location varied (Table 4). FaDSS coaching sessions occurred primarily in the participant’s home. Other programs provided coaching in locations in the community that were accessible to participants. LIFT offices are in the neighborhoods where participants reside: Bronzeville (Chicago), Pico-Union (Los Angeles), and the South Bronx (New York City). LIFT coaches also sometimes met with participants at community partner sites (such as early childhood education centers). Similarly, MyGoals coaches in Baltimore met with participants at offices adjacent to two public housing developments where many participants resided. Goal4 It! and MyGoals Houston coaching sessions occurred at central agency offices (Jefferson County DHS and the Houston housing authority, respectively). Some coaching occurred over the phone even before the COVID-19 pandemic. All four programs switched to virtual coaching, mostly by phone, during the pandemic (Kharsa and Joyce 2022).

**Table 4.**  
**Location of coaching sessions**

<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
Participant’s home	Central TANF office	LIFT office or other setting in the communities where participants reside	MyGoals offices adjacent to two housing developments (Baltimore) or at the main housing authority office (Houston)

## EXTENT TO WHICH THE CONTENT OF COACHING SESSIONS IS STRUCTURED AND AIDED BY TOOLS

Coaches in all four programs worked with participants to set goals, develop action steps, and review progress toward reaching goals. However, the extent to which coaches had autonomy over how the coaching session unfolded rather than being guided by structured processes and tools varied by program (Table 5).

**Table 5.**  
**Degree of structure in coaching**

<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
Generally, no prescribed session format. Some tools	Structured four-step process. Many tools	Generally, no prescribed session format. Some tools	Structured 12-step process. Many tools.

The Goal4 It! and MyGoals coaching sessions were more structured and included more tools than the FaDSS and LIFT coaching sessions did. Details of the tools used by each program are described in Boxes 3 and 4 and in Appendix A.

Under Goal4 It!, coaches used a four-step process for goal setting: (1) “Goal”—setting a meaningful goal; (2) “Plan”—creating a plan to achieve the goal; (3) “Do”—putting the plan into action; and (4) “Review/Revise”—reviewing progress and revising the goal or the plan accordingly. The steps, however, did not need to occur in order; for example, if a participant already had selected a goal, the coach and participant could start at Step 2. Coaches shared tools with participants to facilitate each step in the process (Box 3).

### Box 3. Key Goal4 It! coaching tools

- Stepping Stones to Success obtains participant’s perception about challenges in various aspects of life.
- Goal Storming helps participants identify potential goals, steps to achieve them, and resource needs.
- My Goal Plan incorporates the four steps – Goal, Plan, Do, Review/Revise.
- My Pathway facilitates planning long-term goals by breaking them into short-term goals and action steps.
- Potholes and Detours helps participants identify what could get in the way of success, and possible actions to prevent or address them.

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MyGoals coaches used a 12-step process to guide participants through a hierarchy of goal types, from broad ideas to specific supporting activities: long-term goals, milestones, SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound) goals, and action steps. As with Goal4 It!, the MyGoals process did not have to be linear. Coaches and participants had flexibility to reorder the steps depending on the participant's circumstances. For example, if a participant was not ready to identify a long-term goal early in the coaching relationship, they might identify a milestone, SMART goal, or action step instead. MyGoals participants completed two questionnaires during their first session that help frame the discussions about goal setting: Getting to Know You and Executive Skills Questionnaire. Coaches had other tools that they could use with participants as needed to support goal setting (Box 4).

#### Box 4. Key MyGoals coaching tools

*Getting to Know You* questionnaire asks about the participant's interests, education and employment backgrounds, strengths, and qualifications.

*Executive Skills Questionnaire* assesses participants' strengths and weaknesses on 12 self-regulation skills (referred to as executive skills in MyGoals).

*Prerequisites Checklist* lists prerequisites (such as stable housing) that need to be in place for participants to set goals.

*Goodness of Fit Profiles* document discussions with participants about the fit of their long-term goals.

*Goal Setting Forms* document prerequisites, goals, and action steps.

*Strategies Form* provides a checklist of potential strategies participants can use to improve goal achievement.

LIFT participants used a tool called “The Wheel of Life” to assess their satisfaction with the following areas of their lives: finances; employment and career; education; basic needs; child well-being and parenting; health and well-being; family, friends, and relationships; and an “other” area that the participant could name. Participants used the information to begin thinking about a goal, and the coach reviewed the completed tool prior to the first session to understand the participant's circumstances. Although LIFT did not prescribe a session format, observed sessions typically began with the coach summarizing what action steps the participant planned to take following the last meeting. The coach then discussed with the participant progress toward those steps, celebrated successes, discussed any challenges, and connected the participant with resources as needed. Finally, the coach worked with the participant to revise goals if needed, and discussed the next action steps, including scheduling the next meeting.

Coaching under FaDSS was less structured than in the other three programs—coaches had more autonomy in deciding what to discuss and had fewer tools. FaDSS coaches used information from three required assessments to learn about the family's strengths and challenges: (1) a general family functioning screening, (2) a domestic violence screening, and (3) a child development questionnaire. The information from these

assessments informed guiding questions that coaches asked to help participants set goals. Coaches used a goal planning form to record planned action steps for each family goal. Each session revisited the steps identified in the previous session.

### FOCUS ON SELF-REGULATION SKILLS

All coaching as defined above is expected to facilitate employment and other positive outcomes via helping participants use and strengthen self-regulation skills. By working collaboratively with participants in setting goals and developing action steps, coaches help participants practice self-regulation skills. In addition, coaches can provide guidance on how to address self-regulation skill challenges and may suggest participants choose services and jobs that are consistent with their self-regulation skill strengths and challenges. The strong relationship that develops between coach and participant and referrals to resources that can address participants' needs can also reduce participants' stress, which in turn makes it easier for participants to use their self-regulation skills. The programs differed, however, in the degree to which the concept of self-regulation skills played an explicit role in the program (Table 6). Programs differed in (1) whether the program explicitly incorporated approaches to strengthen self-regulation skills; (2) whether coaches were trained on the role self-regulation skills can play in employment; (3) whether the coaches used an assessment to shed light on participants' strengths and weaknesses in self-regulation skills; and (4) whether coaches discussed self-regulation skills explicitly with participants using formal terms for different skills.

**Table 6.**  
**Extent of focus**  
**on self-regulation**  
**skills**

Challenge	FaDSS	Goal4 It!	LIFT	MyGoals
The program explicitly incorporated approaches to strengthen self-regulation skills	No	Yes	No	Yes
Coaches were trained on the importance of self-regulation skills	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participants are assessed for strengths and weaknesses in self-regulation skills	No	No	No	Yes
Self-regulation skills were discussed explicitly with participants	No	No	No	Yes

MyGoals was unique among the four programs in that coaches assessed participants for strengths and weaknesses in self-regulation skills (referred to as “executive skills” by the coaches) and then discussed them with the participants using the formal terms such as response inhibition, working memory, and time management. (Box 5 provides examples of coaching conversations that explicitly discussed self-regulation skills.) Coaches received training on the importance of self-regulation skills and how to address strengths and weaknesses. Coaches asked participants to complete the *Executive Skills Questionnaire*, which identifies their strengths and challenges in 12 areas, and then used the responses to begin discussing self-regulation skills.



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### Box 5. Examples of coaching conversations that discussed self-regulation skills

To support Susan [not her real name] in keeping her new job, Susan's coach brought up some of the self-regulation skills Susan had previously identified as challenges, including task initiation and flexibility. Susan shared that for the past few months she has been timing herself on a stopwatch as she completed tasks; Susan knows she has been procrastinating if she hasn't finished a task before the clock stops. Susan emphasized how hard she has been working to improve these skills and reported that most of the time she is able to remain focused and complete tasks before the time is up.

After another participant talked about her progress on her goals, the coach said,

*We've been working together for the past two years to get to this point, it has been hard...but you've been really persistent about your goal, and when I review your record...you are very determined. Goal-directed persistence was one of your executive function skills that I told you, you were very strong in. Because you told me that you wanted to be a phlebotomist and that in your current role you're actually working as a phlebotomist...this is your long-term goal. So I want to make sure you can maintain this. Let's talk about some of your executive skills weaknesses that you identified initially. Let's talk about how they are coming into play.*

Source: MyGoals video observations.

Coaches supported participants by sharing strategies to manage self-regulation skills challenges that impeded goal attainment. Examples of these strategies included environment modifications (changing the environment or the task to accommodate a particular self-regulation skill challenge), cognitive rehearsals (visualizing the completion of a task and mentally walking through potential obstacles), and situational incentives (rewards that participants decide they will give themselves once they complete a task). In the study, coaches reported that referring to specific self-regulation skills during coaching sessions helped participants identify and practice “workarounds” for challenging areas.

The four-step Goal4 It! design was based on principles of self-regulation skills development, but coaches did not assess participants' self-regulation skills nor did they refer explicitly to self-regulation skills. However, each of the four Goal4 It! phases (Goal, Plan, Do, Review/Revise) was designed to work on specific self-regulation skills. For example, when participants set goals, they work on prioritization, working memory, and metacognition (understanding their own thought processes). Coaches were trained on the importance of these skills. In an early iteration of Goal4 It!, coaches named self-regulation skills in discussions with participants. The program developer decided against continuing with naming the skills because the coaches found it too difficult.

LIFT coaches received general training on the role of self-regulation skills in goal attainment. Although coaches may have discussed specific skills with participants during sessions, they did not label them as self-regulation skills or name specific skills. They also did not assess participants for strengths and weaknesses in self-regulation skills.

The designers of FaDSS did not consider self-regulation skills. Coaches did not use the term “self-regulation skills” or another term with a similar meaning. Training did not address the concept, and coaches did not formally assess participants' self-regulation skills strengths and weaknesses. However, coach-participant conversations might have covered self-regulation skills (such as time management or emotional regulation) without identifying them as such.



## COACH EMPLOYMENT STATUS

While FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and MyGoals coaches were full-time, paid employees, LIFT coaches were primarily unpaid MSW students who worked part time fulfilling a field placement for their programs (Table 7). LIFT develops relationships with schools of social work at local universities or colleges to identify coaches. LIFT leaders cited three reasons for relying on unpaid MSW students: (1) it reduced program costs; (2) most MSW students were not previously case managers and thus did not need to “unlearn” ways of interacting with participants; and (3) as MSW students, they were highly educated and came to LIFT with basic skills in empathy and active listening. As described below, the part-time, unpaid status of LIFT coaches has implications for training, supervision, caseload size, and coach turnover.

**Table 7.**  
**Coach employment status**

FaDSS	Goal4 It!	LIFT	MyGoals
Paid	Paid	Unpaid MSW student	Paid

## COACH TRAINING AND SUPERVISION

All four programs provided varying amounts of supervision to coaching and initial and ongoing training for coaches. Factors contributing to this variation included baseline coaching experience, program complexity, and available resources. The training and supervision was greatest for LIFT and MyGoals. This was likely because LIFT coaches, because they were MSW students, had the least experience. MyGoals was the most complex program to implement and was part of a demonstration program.

Each program required a one- to three-day initial training, with some programs requiring pre-training study. Specifically:

- FaDSS coaches participated in an initial two-day training. They also learned how to do home visits by shadowing more experienced coaches and conducting their first few home visits with supervision and feedback.
- Goal4 It! coaches participated in a one-day training conducted by the program designer that covered the Goal4 It! framework and the four-step Goal4 It! coaching process (Goal, Plan, Do, Review/Revise). Coaches then practiced using Goal4 It! for four weeks, providing feedback to the program designers during regular calls. All Goal4 It! coaches were previously traditional case managers. In this role, they had some exposure to goal setting, which is part of standard case management. All Goal4 It! coaches had training on TANF policies and procedures.

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- LIFT coaches completed pre-training work, including watching a video that reviewed concepts of self-regulation skills and adult skill building, then attended a three-day in-person training that covered goal setting and coaching techniques (such as not telling the participant what to do, using powerful questions, reflective listening). LIFT coaches received additional training prior to working with participants, which could include shadowing a coach.
  - Before the in-person training, MyGoals coaches completed extensive reading on coaching concepts and MyGoals procedures, interactive exercises, and a 15-hour online motivational interviewing training class. Program designers led a two-day in-person training session.

All four programs also provided ongoing training:

- Within one year of their initial training, FaDSS coaches completed a family development certification and training, which emphasized family-centered practice for frontline workers and covered family development theory, family assessment, interviewing skills, and goal setting. Coaches also completed 12 additional hours of training per year on a topic relevant to their work (such as trauma-informed care, domestic violence, motivational interviewing, setting SMART goals).
- The Goal4 It! developer conducted additional refresher trainings. Jefferson County DHS also offered training on motivational interviewing and trauma-informed coaching.
- LIFT did not provide refresher trainings but did provide additional trainings that focused on common participant service topics (such as financial debt) to aid in coaching discussions. LIFT coaches explored specific topics further as needed, such as banking, debt, or career education, through an online site that houses resource packets on hundreds of topics.
- MyGoals coaches attended two additional in-person trainings during the first year of MyGoals, and one additional in-person training during its second year. Coaches also participated in four two-hour case conference sessions to work through a particular real-life case, a two-day cross-site learning exchange event in the third year, weekly conference calls with program designers, and ad hoc topical trainings on issues and resources relevant to MyGoals participants.

As with training, coach supervision varied across programs.

- FaDSS supervisors observed each coach during at least two home visits per year. They also conducted monthly file reviews of all cases. Supervisors met individually with coaches each month to review each of their cases. Regular group meetings (weekly or monthly, depending on the site) covered difficult cases and how to handle them, with other coaches providing input.
- Goal4 It! coaches and supervisors met one-on-one monthly to discuss their cases. They also met as a group monthly.
- LIFT provided the most intensive supervision, likely because the coaches were MSW students. LIFT required supervisors to have an MSW degree and two or

more years of supervisory experience. Supervisors facilitated biweekly group meetings; monthly one-on-one check-ins with coaches; and monthly group consultations that focused on a specific issue. Supervisors also completed written records of interactions between coaches and participants, which are required for MSW program trainees. As part of their MSW programs, all LIFT coaches also received faculty supervision of their field placements.

- MyGoals supervisors observed coaching sessions and provided feedback. They discussed anything that needed to be addressed one-on-one with the coach. Supervisors also reviewed coaches' case notes monthly and provided feedback on the content of the notes and documentation.

### CASELOAD SIZE

The caseload each coach holds varied by program (Table 8). Each FaDSS coach had a caseload of about 18 participants, on average, less than half the average caseload for a full-time equivalent staff person in the other programs. This reflected the time-inten-

<b>Table 8. Coach's average caseload size</b>	<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
	18	40	16 (a full-time equivalent staff person caseload was 40)	40

sive nature of in-home coaching, including travel time to and from the session, that needed to be factored into the coach's schedule. Because they were graduate students, LIFT coaches worked part-time, an average of 16 hours per week, which capped the number of coaching sessions they could schedule in any given week. As such, LIFT coaches had average caseloads of 16 participants, which would be an equivalent of about 40 on a full-time basis.

Goal4 It! coaches carried the same size caseload as the TANF traditional case managers did. Goal4 It! coaches reported an average caseload of 40 participants, with the active caseload ranging between 20 and 50 participants.

MyGoals set caseload caps that vary depending on a coach's circumstances. Coaches have a maximum caseload of approximately 60 participants, with coaches who are involved in participant recruitment carrying smaller caseloads. MyGoals coaches reported that even when assigned the maximum number of participants, their active caseloads were closer to 40 participants and, at any given time, they were trying to contact and re-engage the others.

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## OFFER OF FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

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Two of the study programs—LIFT and MyGoals—offered participants financial incentives linked to their program engagement, employment, or both.

Two of the study programs—LIFT and MyGoals—offered participants financial incentives linked to their program engagement, employment, or both. The programs' rationale for offering incentives was to address participants' financial needs, encourage ongoing participation in coaching sessions, and ,for MyGoals, to improve motivation by providing a reward for desired outcomes. FaDSS and Goal4 It! did not offer incentives associated with the coaching.

LIFT participants received \$150 every 3 months if they attended at least two coaching sessions during that time and could receive up to \$1,000 during their time in the program. LIFT set incentive amounts at a level that would not affect a participant's eligibility for public assistance (such as TANF or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program [SNAP] benefits) but would be substantial enough to provide relief for some unexpected expenses.

MyGoals financial incentives were tied to the participant's initial engagement in the program (\$50), continued engagement (\$30 per month for attending coaching sessions), obtaining or increasing employment (\$70 to \$150), and employment retention (\$450). Participants could earn a maximum incentive of \$5,000 during their time in the program, which was capped at three years.

**A LIFT staff member works at the front desk.**



(Photo: Rich Clement, Mathematica)

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## IV. Observations on Implementation

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All four programs were generally implemented as planned and reflected the differences in design, context, and target population of each program. Participants in all four programs who were interviewed as part of the study were generally positive about their experiences in the coaching program. However, some participants suggested that the programs provide additional employment services. This section describes the similarities and differences in how the programs implemented coaching as observed in the study's data collection.

### THE COACHING APPROACH

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**As intended by the program's design, most participants focused on goal setting and pursuit during their time in the program, but coaches across programs had flexibility in whether and how they approached goal discussions.**

A key component of coaching is setting goals and breaking the goals into shorter-term goals and action steps. Staff in all the programs reported that goal setting and development of action steps occurred for most participants in most sessions. In the video observations of the coaching sessions, most sessions in all four programs involved the coaches and participants discussing goals.

However, some coaches in all programs reported that not all participants were ready or able to discuss goals at each session. For example, MyGoals coaches noted that some participants needed to address an immediate crisis (such as a health issue or domestic violence) or explore their interests and skills before identifying a long-term goal. In these situations, participants preferred to focus on short-term goals and action steps first. Additionally, though LIFT coaches generally focused on long-term goal setting and action steps during sessions, they pivoted if the participant had more pressing concerns and did not discuss goals (Box 6).

#### Box 6. Example of a coach demonstrating flexibility during session

The coach asked the participant how her day was going; the participant described several crises that emerged since the last session. Rather than steer the conversation to goal setting and action steps, the coach gave the participant time to talk through co-occurring issues related to family members and housing. Toward the end of the session, the coach and participant discussed potential steps to resolve the crises, but they did not then discuss progress toward the participant's long-term goal. Following the session, the coach said that trying to adhere to the general session format would have been unproductive because the participant was distracted by pressing concerns.

Source: Onsite observation of a coaching session at LIFT.

**A LIFT coach and a participant engage in a coaching session.**



(Photo: Rich Clement, Mathematica)

The COVID-19 pandemic affected goal discussions. In the early months of the pandemic, participants in all four programs switched from setting longer-term goals to setting short-term goals or stopped setting goals completely (Kharsa and Joyce 2022). Program staff reported that some participants were unable to set goals because they were in crisis. Other participants focused on setting goals related to meeting their physical and mental health needs or their basic needs such as housing and food. One LIFT coach said that it was helpful for a participant to have a goal, even if the goal was going for a walk without their children.

Most participants set goals specific to obtaining or retaining employment (Table 9). A larger proportion of FaDSS and Goal4 It! participants discussed at least one goal related to employment (90 percent and 85 percent, respectively) than did LIFT and MyGoals participants (60 percent and 66 percent, respectively). The percentage of participants who discussed employment goals could have been particularly high in FaDSS and Goal4 It! because they served TANF recipients who were subject to work requirements.

Although employment was a common topic of goals in all programs, many participants also set goals related to education, training, or financial management. Setting goals related to education or training were particularly common for LIFT participants (71 percent), perhaps because LIFT participants were less educated than the participants of the other programs when they enrolled in the study. Goals related to health, family relationships, child development, and basic needs such as housing were also common and often were short-term goals to help participants meet longer-term employment goals.

**Table 9.**  
**Topics of goals discussed by participants in first 12 months after study enrollment**

<b>Topics of goals discussed</b>	<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
Employment or career management (%)	90	85	60	66
Education or training (%)	62	55	71	54
Finances, financial management, or public benefits (%)	63	36	70	31
Other (%)	93	81	55	44
Sample size	430	401	404	900

Source: Staff records from the study or program management information systems.



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**Coaches generally succeeded in being nondirective, although many coaches reported that being nondirective was challenging and took skill to master.**

Coaches guide participants in a collaborative process in which the participants determine their goals and develop plans to achieve them.

Being nondirective is a key difference between coaching and more typical interactions between program staff and participants. When coaches are nondirective, the coach does not specify goals for participants, develop plans to achieve those goals, or tell them what to do next. Rather, coaches guide participants in a collaborative process in which the participants determine their goals and develop plans to achieve them.

*The absolute best thing about MyGoals is they don't force you to do anything that you don't want to do. They allowed you to make your own decisions and they don't, they—it's not strict. It's not strict. It's not rigid. To me, the main thing is they allow you to go at your own pace. Never mind you're in the program for three years, so at some point you need to pick up your pace. —MyGoals participant*

In all the programs, both coaches and participants typically liked this aspect of coaching. During an onsite interview, one LIFT coach said that her favorite aspect of the program was the nondirective nature of the interactions:

*We focus on the empowerment of the participant; giving them the resources, but also letting them take steps independently so that they can replicate those skills in the future. The philosophy includes treating participants with dignity and respect; they are CEOs of their families, so they know what is best for them. Coaches' purpose is to provide support rather than telling [participants] what is best for their families and future. —LIFT coach*

Participants also described the nondirective nature of their coaching sessions positively:

*Before, they want you to go to [a local service provider], like they don't really give you an option. Here they're asking you, "What do you want to do in life?" Not just, "You're going to do this, and this is what's going to happen." I guess the whole part of making good choices and making good goals is very helpful... I would say they're more helpful than other counties because when I did live in [another county], it wasn't as helpful. I think you were more just like pushed along. Here, you're more a person and you've got opinions and thoughts. —Goal4 It! participant*

Analysis of video recordings of coaching sessions indicates that most coaches were collaborative and nondirective during most of the observed sessions. (Box 7 provides examples of interactions that were nondirective.)

Despite mostly being nondirective, coaches sometimes directed the participant. Analyses of the recorded coaching sessions indicate that coaches sometimes directed the participant at some point during the session. For example, in a video recording, a Goal4 It! coach provided direction when listing action steps (such as instructing a participant to call financial aid) and offered next steps without asking the participant whether it would be something she wanted to do ("We can have you do an initial meeting with a

## Box 7. Examples of nondirective interactions

Using open-ended questions, a Goal4 It! coach helped a participant identify her long-term goal. The coach asked, "Thinking about going to school, what type of job would be appealing to you?" The participant responded that she wanted to be a substance abuse counselor. The coach then asked, "Would you say that is your long-term goal at this time?" The participant agreed, and the coach told the participant where to write down her long-term goal on the My Pathway form. The coach then asked, "In order to get to that long-term goal, what are some areas that you would like to focus on?"

A LIFT coach spoke to a participant about setting goals. She said, "Your first goal is to save \$2,500 for an emergency fund.... You said you started a budget and it's in progress... Do you want to add anything else to your goal?" And the participant replied, "I want to figure out exactly how I can save \$2,500 by December. What do I need to make, what do I need to set aside on a monthly basis starting August 1?" The coach then asked, "Do you want me to add that to your goal?"

Source: Video recorded coaching sessions.

Social Security Disability person"). In another example, when a LIFT participant mentioned she signed up for an online course, the coach, without the participant asking for assistance or being offered options, replied:

*Online classes, they are easier because you can do the online courses as you can and want, but I think it takes more accountability and self-discipline...to make sure you are keeping up with that.... So let's touch base on that, or we can look for some cool apps that can...help hold you accountable, or maybe we can set a schedule for you to work at the library. –LIFT coach*

Coaches in all four programs reported that it was difficult to always be nondirective. Some believed that it was not appropriate during a crisis, such as homelessness, health problems, and domestic violence. During the first months of the pandemic, some coaches purposively shifted toward being more directive with participants, focusing on ensuring the participant's basic needs were met. Other coaches felt that even when the participant is in crisis it is important to ensure that the participant was a full partner in deciding what they needed to do. Some coaches would ask participants if they would like some advice.

Coaches in all four programs reported that it was difficult to always be nondirective, particularly when participants were facing a crisis, such as homelessness, health problems, and domestic violence.

Some coaches reported that they lapsed into being directive if participants were not making progress. In these instances, the coaches stated they were tempted to just tell the participant what to do next. However, both Goal4 It! and MyGoals offered other approaches coaches could take, sometimes facilitated by tools, when participants were not making progress. Goal4 It! coaches could ask participants to describe the challenges to progress (the "potholes") and how they could address those challenges (the "detours"). MyGoals coaches could use a process called "cognitive rehearsals," in which participants talk about the challenges they faced in executing next steps and rehearse their response.

Some coaches with a background in case management had previously learned to provide directive guidance and found it difficult to change their approach. LIFT managers noted that one advantage of using MSW students as coaches was they did not have years of experience of being directive in interactions with participants.



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Coaches also described how coaching could be challenging when participants had previously worked with traditional case managers in TANF or other programs. Those participants might not understand their autonomy in a coaching program. For example, a MyGoals coach said:

*A lot of our clients have been part of [the] system and [are] used to not doing something until someone tells them to do something. They have a mindset that the coach will tell them when to come in and what the consequence will be. We don't dictate what we're going to talk about, what you're gonna bring, and what you're gonna do. Not having that structure—me saying “Can you come in this week? What day is good for you?” And they say, “I don't know. Can you tell me what day is good for me?” – MyGoals coach*

### **Coaching in a compliance environment potentially presents challenges, but FaDSS and Goal4 It! implemented coaching successfully for TANF recipients.**

TANF recipients subject to work requirements must participate in work activities as defined by federal statute. Failure to do so can result in loss of benefits. That participants must meet these work requirements potentially could affect which goals they set, the speed in which they make progress, and their relationships with their coaches. FaDSS and Goal4 It! were implemented successfully within that context.

Iowa's FaDSS coaches were mindful that participants must comply with TANF work requirements to retain benefits; however, they were not case managers responsible for sanctioning participants who do not comply. Coaches helped participants comply with work requirements by reminding them to follow up on required paperwork or encouraging them to set action steps related to work requirements, such as completing timesheets to document their participation in required activities. FaDSS coaches also collaborated with participants' TANF case managers by, for example, advocating for excused absences from required work activities during times of crisis or illness.

In Colorado, Goal4 It! coaches were the official TANF case managers, responsible for sanctioning participants if their work requirements were not met, yet they implemented Goal4 It! as designed. One potential facilitator to implementing Goal4 It! is that in 2016 the Colorado Department of Human Services initiated a person-centered approach to working with TANF recipients. The new approach included emphasizing engagement in activities that promoted self-sufficiency, rather than focusing only on activities countable toward the federal work participation rate. For example, Goal4 It! participants could participate in a GED preparation course, which was not countable federally but did maintain eligibility for Colorado's TANF benefit.

Goal4 It! coaches had different viewpoints on whether this flexibility made Goal4 It! implementation possible. Some coaches believed that the de-emphasis on “core” work activities that count toward the federal work participation rate was crucial for a participant-led program. For example, one Goal4 It! coach said:

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*If we were more focused on [the work participation rate], I don't think Goal4 It! would work. – Goal4 It! coach*

Other coaches reported that participants often selected a goal on their own that did count toward the work participation rate (such as enrollment in a short-term training program for an in-demand occupation):

*Most of the time participants set their own goal, and it is often employment-focused. Most of the participants who believe they can work want to work. – Goal4 It! coach*

Neither Goal4 It! participants nor traditional case management participants (those individuals who consented to participate in the study and were randomly assigned to the control group) were limited to setting goals related to employment or other activities that count toward the work participation rate. However, traditional case managers more often discussed the work participation requirements and activities to support meeting them, while the Goal4 It! coaches encouraged participants to choose a goal that was meaningful to them. Yet, in the first year after study enrollment, significantly more Goal4 It! participants discussed goals related to employment than did Jefferson County's traditional case management participants (85 percent versus 76 percent), and fewer Goal4 It! participants discussed a goal related to basic needs such as food or housing (63 percent versus 75 percent).

As discussed in the next section, the role of the Goal4 It! coaches as monitors of compliance to the TANF rules might have affected their relationships with participants.

## **THE COACH-PARTICIPANT RELATIONSHIP**

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**Coaches and participants reported strong and trusting relationships, but that frequent turnover of coaches and program compliance monitoring can threaten these relationships.**

Across all four programs, coaches and participants spoke about the importance of strong and trusting coach-participant relationships to the effectiveness of the coaching. A LIFT coach said,

*The biggest strength is the relationships—building a trusting relationship between coaches and participants. –LIFT coach*

Coaches noted the importance of developing rapport from the first meeting to help participants feel comfortable enough to discuss their goals and share challenges that might keep them from reaching their goals. One MyGoals coach reported that some participants do not discuss personal issues (such as personal safety, substance use disorder, and mental health conditions) that might affect their ability to pursue employment and other goals until they establish trust with their coach.

In interviews, most participants across the programs spoke positively about their relationships with their coaches.

In interviews, most participants across the programs spoke positively about their relationships with their coaches. Several participants reported that their coaches knew them well, and a few described their relationship as a friendship. Participants used words such as nice, pleasant, compassionate, positive, and helpful to describe their coaches. Said two Goal4 It! participants:

*I was going through leaving domestic violence, leaving substance abuse behind.... I feel like I have been on my own.... If I could make [my Goal4 It! coach] my personal friend, I would. –Goal4 It! participant*

*You don't always feel like caseworkers are even on your team. And that's definitely the opposite of how I feel with [my Goal4 It! coach]. –Goal4 It! participant*

Several MyGoals participants described their coach's relationship to them as akin to a "mother," "aunt," "big sister," "like a friendship, or a "spotter at a gym." One Goal4 It! participant reported, "I can talk to her without feeling like this is someone I don't know. She feels very...like I've been knowing her for years." One FaDSS participant reported she considered her relationship with her coach as a friendship: "It's amazing. It's like the government [saying], here, have a friend.... And that's what's great about it."

According to coaches, supervisors, and participants, coach turnover disrupts the coach-participant relationship, and it takes time for participants to build a relationship with their new coach. All programs inevitably have coach turnover, but it is especially an issue in LIFT because coaches are MSW students who are fulfilling a nine-month field placement requirement, discussed below.

In addition, discussions about compliance to TANF rules may affect the coach-participant relationship. Although most Goal4 It! participants had positive or neutral comments about their Goal4 It! coach, a few described the relationship as transactional:

*It's almost like if she didn't see me in person, I would've just been a number on a paper, not even a name or anything. –Goal4 It! participant*

## FREQUENCY AND DURATION OF COACHING

**Coaches had multiple contacts with participants in the first month and then contact declined over time.**

In the first month after enrollment, coaches and participants on average had between 1.7 and 4.5 contacts—which could have been a coaching session or a conversation by phone, text, or email (Table 10). FaDSS coaches, who were supposed to meet with the participants at least twice in each of the first 3 months, on average were in contact 4.5 times in the first month, 2.0 times in the second month, and 1.6 times in the third month. LIFT coaches were supposed to meet with the participants at least twice in the first month; on average they were in contact 2.3 times. Even in Goal4 It! and MyGoals, programs that did not specify multiple sessions in the first month, coaches were in contact 1.7 and 2.1 times, respectively.

The contact between coaches and participants declined over time. To some extent this was because the average taken over all members of the program group across the four programs decreased as study participants became ineligible or disengaged from the program (as described below). As shown in Box 2 earlier in the report, the maximum duration that participants could receive coaching varied from the time they were on TANF (Goal4 It!) to three years (MyGoals).

Even though some participants were not meeting with a coach at all, the average number of monthly contacts was still 0.7 in FaDSS and 0.8 in MyGoals a year after study enrollment (Table 10). The average number of monthly contacts after a year were much smaller in Goal4 It! and LIFT (0.1 and 0.4, respectively).

**Coaches and participants had substantially less contact in Goal4 It! than in the other programs, reflecting the shorter period of eligibility.**

The average number of contacts between the coach and participants was highest in FaDSS and MyGoals and lowest in Goal4 It! (Table 10). On average, the coach and participant had 18 contacts in FaDSS, 12 contacts in MyGoals, 8 contacts in LIFT, and only 4 contacts in Goal4 It!.

**Table 10.  
Number and duration of contacts with coaches in first 12 months after study enrollment**

<b>Number and duration of contacts</b>	<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
Average number of contacts in month after study enrollment				
Month 1	4.5	1.7	2.3	2.2
Month 2	2.0	0.5	0.6	1.1
Month 3	1.6	0.4	0.6	1.0
Month 4	1.5	0.2	0.6	1.0
Month 5	1.4	0.2	0.5	1.0
Month 6	1.3	0.2	0.5	0.9
Month 7	1.2	0.1	0.5	0.9
Month 8	1.1	0.2	0.5	0.9
Month 9	0.9	0.1	0.6	0.9
Month 10	0.8	0.1	0.5	0.9
Month 11	0.7	0.1	0.5	0.8
Month 12	0.7	0.1	0.4	0.8
Average total number of contacts in months 1-12 after study enrollment	17.6	4.0	7.9	12.4
Average duration of a contact (minutes)	28.9	48.2	57.6	NA
Average total contact time in months 1-12 after study enrollment (hours)	8.4	3.2	7.6	NA
Sample size	430	401	404	900

Source: Staff records from the study or program management information systems.  
Note: NA=not available from the program's management information system.

Adding up all the contact time reported by coaches and participants in the first 12 months after study enrollment, coaches spent about 8.4 hours on average with participants in FaDSS and 7.6 hours on average with participants in LIFT (Table 10). In contrast, coaches spent only 3.2 hours on average with participants in Goal4 It!. MyGoals did not collect data on the duration of contacts but based on the expectation that sessions were about an hour and on average participants had 12.4 contacts with participants in the first year, we estimated that the total time spent between coaches and participants in MyGoals was more like that in FaDSS and LIFT than in Goal4 It!.

The differences across programs in the amount of contact between participants and coaches can be explained at least in part by the differences in the eligibility conditions.

The differences across programs in the amount of contact between participants and coaches can be explained at least in part by the differences in the eligibility conditions. Goal4 It! participants could only receive coaching while they were receiving TANF. On average, Goal4 It! participants spent only 4 months on TANF in the first year after study enrollment. FaDSS participants spent about the same amount of time as Goal4 It! participants on TANF but could receive coaching for 7 additional months after leaving TANF. Participants could receive coaching from LIFT for two years and from MyGoals for three years.

**LIFT and MyGoals participants remained in contact with their coach longer than did FaDSS and Goal4 It! participants.**

Participation was longest in the programs that offered two and three years of eligibility. LIFT was offered for two years, and 46 percent of participants remained in contact with the program 12 months after they enrolled in the study (Table 11). On average, participants spent about 8 months in the LIFT program in the first 12 months after study enrollment. MyGoals was the longest of the four programs—it was offered for three years. About 56 percent of MyGoals participants actively participated in the program for at least one year (Table 11). On average, a participant spent nearly 10 months in the program in the first 12 months.

About one-quarter of FaDSS participants (27 percent) were still in contact with the coaches after 12 months, and participants spent an average of 6.6 months in the program (Table 11). Participants in Goal4 It! spent the least amount of time in coaching. Only 9 percent were still in coaching after 12 months, and on average participants spent less than 4 months in the program (Table 11). As noted above, this was probably because participants could only participate in Goal4 It! while they were receiving TANF benefits.

**Table 11.**  
**Participant engagement with program in first 12 months after study enrollment**

	FaDSS	Goal4 It!	LIFT	MyGoals
Average number of months	6.6	3.7	8.0	9.8
Participants still in contact after 12 months (%)	26.5	9.0	46.0	56.2
Sample size	430	401	404	900

Source: Staff records from the study or program management information systems.

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## COACHING LOCATION AND MODE

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### Coaching in the home offered advantages and disadvantages over coaching in the program office or a community location.

FaDSS was unique among the four programs in offering coaching in participants' homes. In Goal4 It!, LIFT, and MyGoals, coaching typically occurred in person in the program office or another community location.

The FaDSS coaches reported that in-home coaching had several advantages (Box 8). First, being in the home helped put the participant and coach on the same footing—the interaction felt less institutional and less like the coach was an authority figure. Second, it was easier for coaches to learn more about the participant by observing the home environment. It was also easier for them to include the participant's family members in the coaching sessions. Participants also spoke positively about home visits (Box 8). They said it was like having a friend or relative visit, and it didn't require travelling to an office. In addition, by making it easier for participants to attend coaching sessions, home visiting may have increased the amount of coaching received by FaDSS participants.

The FaDSS coaches also reported some drawbacks of home visiting (Box 8). These included logistical challenges for coaches such as long driving times and participants not being home when they arrived, and lack of privacy from other family members if the participant wanted to raise sensitive topics (such as domestic violence). Coaches also raised some safety concerns about being alone in participants' homes as well as some hygiene concerns because of issues such as bed bugs.

Other programs aimed to make coaching sessions accessible by placing program offices in the communities where participants resided. For example, MyGoals in Baltimore located its offices adjacent to two housing authority developments. Participants and coaches reported that one drawback of sessions in offices or community-based locations was that they sometimes offered limited privacy.

#### Box 8. Participant perspectives on coaching locations

*I like her coming over and sitting down and, you know, it's almost me and one of my friends in Des Moines. She lived on the next block over from my house, and she would...come over almost every morning and sit down, have coffee with me, and we'd just talk about things that are going on. And that's kind of how [my coach] is to me. She's just like a friend. Somebody I can console in. –FaDSS participant.*

Source: FaDSS in-depth participant interviews.

*Sometimes when you're having meetings though, I prefer to be in a more private space when I'm talking about things.... So, when I'm there at LIFT, it's like everything is open...ever since I've been going, the coaches are in like...in those like cubicles, so, there's no real privacy to open up more or to say.... So I have to be, like, thinking, you know, not to say what I don't really wanna say. Stuff like that. –LIFT participant.*

Source: LIFT in-depth participant interviews.



**A MyGoals coach listens to a participant.**



(Photo: Rich Clement, Mathematica)

**Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, contacts between coaches and participants occurred by telephone, email, and text, as well as in person, in all four programs.**

Although all programs designed coaching sessions to be held in person, all programs also incorporated telephone contacts (Table 12). In FaDSS and MyGoals, nearly half of contacts were by telephone. When the COVID-19 pandemic began, all four programs switched to virtual contacts, which in most part were by telephone (Kharsa and Joyce 2022).

Participants said they enjoyed the increased flexibility that virtual coaching provided. But program leaders and coaches reported some concerns about whether virtual coaching was as effective as in-person coaching. Coaches said that participants were sometimes distracted, and they lost important contextual information about participants. Coaches also expressed concern about whether they could develop strong relationships with participants without in-person contact, especially early in the relationship when coaches and participants build trust. All programs planned to continue some virtual coaching after the pandemic as a supplement to in-person coaching.

**Table 12.**  
**Contacts with coach by mode in first 12 months after study enrollment**

	<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
Average number of contacts in months 1-12 after study enrollment	17.6	4.0	7.9	12.4
Average number of contacts in person	8.4 (48%)	2.8 (70%)	6.0 (76%)	5.2 (42%)
Average number of contacts by telephone	8.2 (47%)	0.9 (23%)	1.8 (23%)	5.6 (45%)
Average number of contacts by email, text, or postal mail <sup>a</sup>	0.9 (5%)	0.3 (7%)	NA	21.7 (14%)
Sample size	430	401	404	900

Source: Staff records from the study or program management information systems.

Note: NA=Not available.

<sup>a</sup> FaDSS and Goal4 It! did not record contacts by text or postal mail. LIFT did not record any contacts by email, text, or postal mail. MyGoals did not record contacts by email.



## COACH CHARACTERISTICS

### Across programs, coaches had similar education levels but different experiences with coaching.

Nearly all coaches (more than 86 percent in each program) reported having a college degree or higher credential (Table 13). Coaches differed, however, in their reported coaching experience. All Goal4 It! coaches, 91 percent of MyGoals coaches, and 81 percent of FaDSS coaches self-reported on the staff survey that they had three or more years of coaching experience, their present positions included. This included any experience they considered “coaching,” not necessarily coaching as defined by the study or as defined by the program’s coaching model. Goal4 It! coaches were previously traditional case managers, and traditional case managers in Jefferson County are referred to as “coaches.” In contrast, only 19 percent of LIFT coaches reported three or more years of coaching experience. This proportion reflects their status as MSW student interns with limited to no coaching experience prior to their LIFT field placement.

### Using unpaid graduate student interns as coaches reduces program costs but has implications for continuity of the coaching relationship.

By using unpaid MSW students as coaches, LIFT significantly reduces the cost of the program overall. LIFT staff also reported drawbacks associated with using students as coaches, including the effect on the coach-participant relationship when the coaches finished their field placement. On average, LIFT participants had 2.4 coaches during their first 12 months in the program. Participants reported difficulty transitioning to a new coach mid-program. One LIFT participant said:

*The coaches [have] a big turnover rate, so don't get too attached like I did. Don't get too attached. –LIFT participant*

LIFT staff reported that coach turnover could be more easily managed, because it was predictable, but they also acknowledged that transitions between coaches are difficult for participants, given the centrality of the coach-participant relationship to the program. To mitigate eventual transitions between coaches, LIFT leaders and coaches reported they emphasized the relationship between the participant and the organization in addition to the coach-participant relationship. As discussed below, other services and activities offered by LIFT were designed to build trust in the organization as well as with the coach.

**Table 13.**  
**Education and experience of coaches**

Education level	FaDSS	Goal4 It!	LIFT	MyGoals
Bachelor’s degree or higher (%)	86	100	97	100
3+ years coaching experience (%) <sup>a</sup>	81	100	19	91
Sample size	43	7	30	11

Source: Staff surveys.

<sup>a</sup> Includes current position. Coaching experience was self-reported, thus not limited to coaching as defined by the study or by the program’s coaching model.

**Coaches reported that sharing some characteristics and lived experiences with participants helped build rapport; the extent to which characteristics were shared differed.**

Coaches reported that having demographic characteristics and life experiences similar to the participants' promoted trust early in the coaching relationship.

Coaches reported that having demographic characteristics and life experiences similar to the participants' promoted trust early in the coaching relationship. Some MyGoals coaches in Baltimore and Houston reported that growing up in the same neighborhood as participants, and facing similar circumstances related to safety, lack of employment opportunities, and geographic isolation, was helpful in developing a relationship with a participant. Coaches added, though, that shared demographic characteristics was only one factor that could contribute to a trusting relationship. They also reported observing strong relationships between participants and coaches whose characteristics and lived experiences differed.

The extent to which the coaches and the participants matched on demographic characteristics differed by characteristic and program (Table 14). Nearly all the coaches in the study were women, as were the participants. Coaches in FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and MyGoals generally were older than participants. Whereas participants in those three programs ranged in age from late 20s to late 30s, their coaches, on average, were in their early- to mid-40s. Reflecting their status as graduate students, LIFT coaches, on average, were in their late 20s, whereas participants were in their early 30s on average.

In FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and LIFT, the coaches were more likely to be White, non-Hispanic and less likely to be Black, non-Hispanic or Hispanic than were the participants. In MyGoals, the coaches and participants were similar in their race/ethnicity—90 percent of the coaches and 95 percent of the participants were Black, non-Hispanic.

Supervisors generally did not take coach and participant characteristics or lived experiences into account when assigning a coach to a participant. Most often, coach assignments were made according to coach availability, with a few exceptions. For example, the LIFT New York City and Los Angeles offices tried to match Spanish-speaking participants and coaches.

**Table 14.**  
**Demographic characteristics of coaches and participants**

Demographic characteristic	FaDSS		Goal4 It!		LIFT		MyGoals	
	Coach	Participant	Coach	Participant	Coach	Participant	Coach	Participant
Women (%)	91	85	86	92	86	95	91	88
Average age (years)	44	29	40	32	29	33	43	37
<b>Race/ethnicity (%)</b>								
Hispanic	0	13	29	47	57	70	5	3
Black, non-Hispanic	0	36	0	9	9	28	90	95
White, non-Hispanic	83	47	57	40	29	1	5	2
Other, non-Hispanic	17	3	14	3	6	1	0	1
Sample size	43	430	7	401	35	405	11	900

Source: Staff survey (coaches), baseline survey (FaDSS, Goal4 It!, and LIFT participants), housing authority records (MyGoals).

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## PERCEPTIONS ABOUT FINANCIAL INCENTIVES

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### LIFT and MyGoals coaches and participants had mixed perceptions regarding the value of financial incentives.

As described earlier, LIFT tied financial incentives to participants attending monthly coaching sessions; the amount was the same every quarter and could not exceed \$1,000 over the two years participants could receive coaching. MyGoals incentive amounts differed by activity (such as coaching session engagement, obtaining part-time employment, obtaining full-time employment) and could not exceed \$5,000 over three years.

In the staff survey, most LIFT and MyGoals coaches reported positive perceptions of the incentives. Eighty-nine (89) percent of MyGoals coaches and 79 percent of LIFT coaches reported incentives were either “extremely valuable” or “somewhat valuable.” No MyGoals coaches reported incentives were “rarely valuable,” although 11 percent of LIFT coaches did so. One MyGoals coach in Houston described incentives as important to encouraging engagement because they helped cover some participants’ transportation costs for attending in-person meetings at the central housing office. Another MyGoals coach reported that participants depended on the monthly engagement incentive to cover household expenses (such as paying a phone bill). Other LIFT and MyGoals coaches reported that incentives were not the main reason participants engaged in sessions.

Participants in the two programs expressed similar opinions to coaches on the role of incentives. They described incentives as a motivator, financially helpful, and secondary to the support they got from coaches (Box 9).

Participants in the two programs expressed similar opinions to coaches on the role of incentives. They described incentives as a motivator, financially helpful, and secondary to the support they got from coaches

#### Box 9. Some perspectives on incentives

*But they were saying that to help you towards your savings goal we'll give you the \$150. I think it is a good incentive, but there are other benefits too of being in the program. – LIFT participant.*

*You know, sometimes in LIFT, they give you extra, get a little money here and there in between, you know, if you work hard for it, then you deserve it, you know, and maybe that'll motivate somebody as well to do something. –LIFT participant.*

Source: LIFT in-depth participant interviews.

*The incentive is not as important as the help that I get from the program. –MyGoals participant.*

*I want to reach that \$5,000...it does motivate you. And it helps you financially, too, especially when you need groceries. –MyGoals participant.*

Source: MyGoals in-depth participant interviews.

**Table 15.**  
**Incentives received**  
**in first 12 months**  
**after study**  
**enrollment**

<b>Percentage of participants and total value of incentives</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
Participants receiving an incentive (%)	63	89
Average total value of incentives received (among those who received an incentive) (\$)	\$365	\$390
Sample size	404	900

Source: LIFT management information system; MyGoals service tracking system.

As Table 15 shows, most LIFT and MyGoals participants received at least one incentive in the first year after study enrollment (63 percent and 89 percent, respectively). Most did not receive all the incentives that were available, however. Among LIFT participants, the average total value of incentives received among those who received an incentive was \$365 compared with a potential amount of \$600 available in the first year of program participation. MyGoals participants could potentially receive more than \$1,450 in incentives in the first year, but on average received only \$390.

## **ACCESS TO OTHER EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

### **Programs offered additional services; participants requested more.**

LIFT and MyGoals offered additional resources for participants. LIFT offices organized workshops and social events (such as holiday parties) for participants to promote their social networking. For example, LIFT workshops offered information to participants about banking and savings while their children decorated piggy banks to take home and start their own savings. MyGoals coaches distributed current, local labor market information to participants to help them make employment and career decisions. MyGoals offices also periodically hosted specialized workshops on topics of interest to participants and other community members; for example, workshops in nutrition and banking. FaDSS and Goal4 It! participants could access TANF program employment services.

In interviews, some participants reported wanting more services than they were offered (Box 10).

### **Box 10. Participant perspectives on additional services**

MyGoals participants most commonly suggested that the program offer more concrete job search resources, such as interviewing skills training, job fairs, and job placements; or that the program provide “warm” job leads, meaning the coach knew the hiring manager.

MyGoals participants also suggested making available resources more age appropriate for people with more career experience.

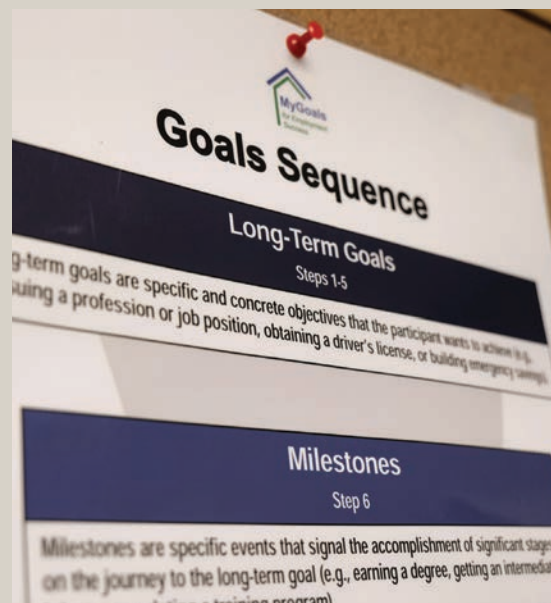
Some Goal4 It! participants suggested that the program make job placements and provide additional child care resources.

Source: MyGoals and Goal4 It! in-depth participant interviews.

**MyGoals materials describe the coaching program.**



(Photo: Rich Clement, Mathematica)



**Coaches report they made referrals to other services.**

Coaches in all programs referred participants to services offered by other programs in the community. According to administrative data, coaches made between 0.7 and 2.0 referrals on average per participant in the first 12 months after study enrollment (Table 16). The data also show that coaches in all programs made no referrals to a large share of participants (between 44 percent and 66 percent).

Participants reported that they received referrals to job search resources; training and education programs; entities that provided transportation benefits, child care, mental health services, housing, and domestic violence services; and other basic needs assistance.

Not all communities where participants reside have service providers, or providers with open slots, to address participant needs. Coaches reported that many communities lacked assistance with housing, transportation, mental health, and other services requested by participants.

**Table 16.**  
**Referrals made to participants in first 12 months after study enrollment**

<b>Number and percentage of referrals</b>	<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
Average number of referrals	2.0	1.2	1.5	0.7
<b>Participants who received (%):</b>				
0 referrals	57	65	44	66
1 referral	12	15	20	17
2 referrals	9	8	12	8
More than 2 referrals	21	13	24	8
Sample size	430	401	404	900

Source: Staff records from the study or program management information systems.

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## Discussion

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Employment coaching programs can have some commonalities yet also vary significantly. All four programs participating in the study met the study's definition of employment coaching, yet they varied in design in important ways. While all four focused on employment, some also focused on other areas, such as child and family issues, education and training, and financial literacy and management. The duration of the programs varied, as did the physical location of sessions. The design of the coaching sessions differed in the degree to which sessions followed a specific structure, the frequency by which coaches facilitated sessions with tools, and the extent to which coaches discussed self-regulation skills explicitly. Coaches differed in key ways as well: whether they were paid employees or unpaid MSW students, their training and supervision, and the size of their caseloads. Two of the four programs offered financial incentives for engagement in the program and/or attainment of specific employment outcomes.

Despite all the differences in design as well as the contexts in which they were implemented, staff in all four programs generally implemented coaching as planned. The two programs that served TANF recipients implemented coaching within the context of mandatory work requirements. Even when coaching is provided in place of TANF case management (as opposed to a voluntary add-on to case management), coaching was generally implemented as planned. This suggests that different employment coaching models can be implemented successfully in diverse contexts.

One challenge faced by coaches in all four programs was being nondirective. While coaches were generally successful in being nondirective in their interactions with participants, they reported that doing so was challenging and a skill that took time to master. The challenges coaches reported included having prior jobs, such as a case manager, in which they were expected to be directive, working with participants who expected to be directed, and working with participants who were in crisis or not making progress.

At the core of coaching is the relationship between the coach and the participant. In all programs, coaches and participants reported strong relationships, with some participants likening their coaches to a close friend or relative and noting they did not have another source of this type of support. It is possible that the collaborative nature of coaching facilitates these relationships in a way that standard case management, which is more directive, does not. Coach turnover, though, disrupts these relationships. Because LIFT coaches were MSW students completing a one academic year field placement, LIFT participants experienced a change in coach at least once every 9 months.

The importance of financial incentives is unclear. When asked about the role of incentives in influencing participant behavior, both the coaches and the participants thought they had a positive influence, but neither the coaches nor the participants reported that incentives made a large difference.

At the core of coaching is the relationship between the coach and the participant.

It is possible that the collaborative nature of coaching facilitates these relationships in a way that standard case management, which is more directive, does not.



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Although staff implemented the four programs largely as planned, and coaches and participants in each program reported strong and collaborative relationships, there was a large variation in average coaching dosage during the first 12 months after study enrollment. In the first year after study enrollment, Goal4 It! participants received only a little over 3 hours of coaching on average, in large part because they either left TANF or had their case closed and thus became ineligible for coaching. In the first year after study enrollment, FaDSS participants received about 8 hours of coaching. Like Goal4 It!, FaDSS participants are TANF recipients but unlike Goal4 It! participants, FaDSS participants could stay in the program for 7 months after leaving TANF, a difference that likely explains the difference in average time in the program. LIFT participants received over 7 hours of coaching over 12 months, slightly less than FaDSS. MyGoals did not collect this data. A larger share of LIFT (46 percent) and MyGoals (56 percent) participants were still in contact with a coach 12 months after study enrollment than either of the programs that served TANF recipients.

It is unclear whether coaching is better offered in person or virtually and whether it is more effective if it is provided in the home, a program office, or another location in the community. Each approach is feasible, and each has its advantages and disadvantages. Which approach is preferable may be determined by the context. Home visits help engage the whole family and can provide coaches additional information about the participant's family and home life. However, they are time consuming as indicated by the much smaller caseloads of FaDSS coaches compared with coaches in other programs. FaDSS coaches also reported that sometimes they lacked privacy for discussing sensitive topics. Community locations are easily accessed by participants but can also sometimes lack privacy. Meeting in central office locations can involve more travel for the participants. Telephone contacts between coaches and participants were common even before the pandemic and were the main mode of contact during the pandemic. Coaches identified several drawbacks to providing coaching via the telephone including that participants were sometimes distracted and they lost important contextual information about participants. Coaches also expressed concern about whether they could develop strong relationships with participants without in-person contact, especially early in the relationship when coaches and participants build trust.

Other reports from the evaluation will present findings on the effectiveness of each of the four programs in changing self-regulation skills, employment, and self-sufficiency outcomes. These and other reports from the evaluation will be posted on the OPRE website: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/evaluation-of-coaching-focused-interventions-for-hard-to-employ-tanf-clients-and-other-low-income-populations>.



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## Appendix A.

# Summary of the characteristics of four coaching programs

**Table A.1**  
**Summary of the**  
**characteristics of four**  
**coaching programs**

	FaDSS	Goal4 It!	LIFT	MyGoals
<b>Context for program</b>				
Implementing organization(s)	Local social service agencies under contract to the Iowa Department of Human Rights	Jefferson County Department of Human Services	LIFT (Nonprofit organization)	Baltimore and Houston public housing authorities
Designer of coaching model	FaDSS Council established by Iowa General Assembly	Mathematica	LIFT	MDRC and Dr. Richard Guare
Year implemented and whether ongoing or a demonstration	1988, Ongoing program	2018, Demonstration	2015, Ongoing program	2017, Demonstration
Service locations	Local offices across Iowa (17 total; 7 in study)	Jefferson County, Colorado	Chicago, Los Angeles, and New York City (in study) and Washington, DC (not in study)	Baltimore and Houston
Eligibility criteria	TANF recipients	TANF recipients subject to work participation requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents or caregivers of children under age 8 or expectant parents</li> <li>• Must demonstrate level of stability (stable housing for 6 months, be employed or have someone in the house employed or be in an educational program)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult member of household receiving housing assistance (housing choice voucher or public housing)</li> <li>• Unemployed or working fewer than 20 hours per month</li> <li>• Legally able to work in the US</li> <li>• Not participating in housing authority programs: Jobs Plus or Family Self-Sufficiency programs</li> </ul>

	<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
Voluntary or mandatory	Voluntary	Coaching or case management was mandatory for TANF receipt	Voluntary	Voluntary
Public assistance linkage	Yes, TANF participation required for eligibility	Yes, TANF participation required for eligibility	No	Yes, must be living in public housing or have a housing choice voucher
<b>Features of coaching program</b>				
Assessment	Three required: family functioning screening; domestic violence screening; child development questionnaire. Additional assessments optional	Participants rate how they feel they are doing in 11 areas of their life; used to prioritize areas of life in which to set a goal	Participants assess their satisfaction in eight areas of their life, ranking each on a scale of 1 (very unsatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied)	Getting to Know You Questionnaire; Executive Skills Questionnaire. The results of these assessments informed goals and action steps
Types of goals	Focus on long- and short-term (3 month) goals and action steps between visits	Long-term goals, short-term goals, and action steps	Long-term goals and action steps	Cascading hierarchy of goal types: long-term goals, milestones, SMART goals, action steps
Goal-setting areas	Related to economic issues and family stability issues; program identifies 14 domains of self-sufficiency	Any area of life that relates to and supports employment and parenting	Education, finances, employment	Employment and career development; education and training; financial management; personal and family well-being
Session format	Generally no prescribed session format	Four-step process	Generally no prescribed session format	12-step process
The program was designed with an understanding of self-regulation skills	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Coaches were trained on the importance of self-regulation skills	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Participants were assessed for strengths and weaknesses in self-regulation skills	No	No	No	Yes

	FaDSS	Goal4 It!	LIFT	MyGoals
Self-regulation skills were discussed explicitly with participants	No	No	No	Yes
Meeting format	One-on-one or with family members	One-on-one	One-on-one	One-on-one
Coaching location for in-person sessions	Participant's home	Central TANF office	LIFT office or other setting in the communities where participants reside	MyGoals offices adjacent to two housing developments (Baltimore) or at the main housing authority office (Houston)
Duration of time that a participant is eligible for program	While receiving TANF and up to 7 months after leaving TANF. On average, participants spent 4 months on TANF	Duration of TANF receipt. On average, participants spent 4 months on TANF	Two years	Three years
Intended coaching dosage	Twice per month in first 3 months, then monthly	Monthly unless participant is working (then once every 2 months)	Twice in first month, monthly thereafter	At least once per month
Main coaching tools	Coaches administer three assessments: a general family functioning screening, a domestic violence screening, and a child development questionnaire. The results of these assessments inform guiding questions that coaches ask to help participants set goals and identify action steps. Coaches record goals, action steps, and planned timelines for each goal on a sheet that is reviewed and updated as needed at each visit	The <i>Stepping Stones to Success</i> identifies strengths and needs; <i>Goal Storming</i> helps participants generate ideas for goals; <i>My Goal Plan</i> records goals and documents a plan for accomplishing them; <i>My Pathway</i> helps break down long-term goals into action steps; <i>Potholes and Detours</i> is used with <i>My Pathway</i> to identify potential obstacles and actions to address them	The <i>Wheel of Life</i> assessment helps participants identify their satisfaction in eight areas of their life and plan which area to set a goal in	The <i>Getting to Know You</i> questionnaire is a discussion guide for the initial coaching session; the <i>Executive Skills Questionnaire</i> assesses self-regulation strengths and needs; a <i>Prerequisites Checklist</i> documents participants' first steps; <i>Goodness of Fit</i> profile forms document discussions with participants about how their goal fits with their preferences, strengths, and potential obstacles; <i>Goal Setting and Strategies Forms</i> help participants document ongoing progress toward goals

	FaDSS	Goal4 It!	LIFT	MyGoals
Financial incentives	None	None	Incentives for engagement; \$150 every 3 months; up to a maximum of \$1,000	\$50 for attending first meeting; \$30 per month for attending subsequent coaching sessions; \$70 for obtaining part-time employment; \$150 for obtaining full-time employment; \$450 for staying employed three months in a row (available twice per person); \$900 for staying employed six months in a row (no limit on availability); up to a total maximum of \$5,000
<b>Coach background</b>				
Coaches' employment status	Paid	Paid	Unpaid MSW students	Paid
<b>Coach training and supervision</b>				
Coach training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Initial:</i> two-day FaDSS 101 Training, shadowing experienced coach</li> <li><i>Ongoing:</i> Completion of Family Development Certification at University of Iowa School of Social Work within the first year plus 12 hours per year of ongoing professional development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Initial:</i> two-day on-site training from Mathematica program designers. Training focused on Goal4 It! framework and the four-phase coaching process; self-regulation skills</li> <li><i>Ongoing:</i> Training opportunities offered through Jefferson County on relevant skills and topics (e.g., motivational interviewing, providing trauma-informed care.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Initial:</i> three-day in person Lifters in Training session</li> <li><i>Ongoing:</i> Varies by office but includes spotlight training opportunities on discrete issues, shared resource bank</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Initial:</i> two-day in-person training with program designers plus 15-hour Motivational Interviewing course and extensive reading/pre-work</li> <li><i>Ongoing:</i> Multi-day in-person training sessions, two-day cross-site learning exchange event, weekly TA and training through conference calls with program designers, four two-hour case conference sessions</li> </ul>



	<b>FaDSS</b>	<b>Goal4 It!</b>	<b>LIFT</b>	<b>MyGoals</b>
Coach supervision	Supervisors observe all coaches on at least two home visits per year; conduct monthly case file reviews; one-on-one meetings with coaches monthly	Monthly case file reviews; one-on-one meetings with coaches monthly; group meetings monthly	One-on-one meetings with coaches monthly; group meetings every other week; monthly group consultations to discuss challenging participants; supervision through MSW programs	Supervisors observe coaches during coaching sessions; conduct monthly case file reviews; one-on-one meetings with coaches monthly; group meetings weekly
Caseload size	18	40	16 (40 for a full-time equivalent coach)	40
<b>Other services</b>				
Non-coaching services provided as part of program	All participants have access to TANF employment services and have a TANF case manager; some FaDSS local agencies offer additional resources (e.g., pantry items, access to washing machines, financial assistance for participants in crisis)	All participants have access to TANF employment services	LIFT organizes social events and workshops on topics such as banking and savings, financial and credit counseling, and holiday parties.	Local labor market information handouts specific to employment sectors that participants express interest in. The handouts include key words, employers, and websites that participants might want to use for an online job search and a summary of prerequisites that participants should highlight in their job application
Other services provided through referral	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

