



Promoting Long-Term Economic Mobility Through Family-Centered Service Delivery

When the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (MA DTA) analyzed the outcomes of individuals who had received Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)¹ in January 2018, they found that 45% of adults who were currently receiving TANF in Massachusetts had grown up in families that also depended on TANF. MA DTA's programs were not breaking the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

With this realization, MA DTA committed to making large-scale systems changes to become a public agency that invests in family-centered and customizable approaches to catalyze economic mobility that addresses the unique barriers and needs of the people they serve. The transition from a difficult to navigate and compliance-driven agency requires both cultural and structural shifts for the agency to ensure all policies, practices, programs, and staff are mutually supporting the same priority economic mobility goals.

RESULTS

As a result of MA DTA's partnership with Third Sector, the agency has now:

- 1 Shifted \$12M in annual funding, impacting 2,000+ families per year, to pay for long-term economic mobility outcomes** indicating that participants are better off such as job retention, certificate attainment, or increase in educational functioning level through the Young Parents Program (YPP) and the Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES).
- 2 Strengthened data-driven feedback loops** between providers and MA DTA staff by co-developing job descriptions to clarify roles, building implementation tools, and facilitating touchpoints where providers and MA DTA staff review outcome trends together and identify strategies to better support participants.

“We are shifting our system away from a compliance-driven model that focused on holding providers accountable for client attendance to a human-centered approach that focuses on meaningful engagement and goal attainment for the whole family.”

– Commissioner Amy Kershaw

¹ The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is designed to help needy families achieve self-sufficiency. States receive block grants to design and operate programs that accomplish one of the purposes of the TANF program. (Source: Administration for Children & Families)

RESULTS CONTINUED

- 3 Increased the flexibility for providers to meet the unique needs of participants**, such as young parents or individuals who are disconnected from work or education by paying for positive life outcomes rather than compliance measures like attendance or strict program models. This increased flexibility advances equity by enabling smaller, non-traditional providers to leverage their expertise working with populations with high barriers like young parents and justice-involved youth, to customize services in the way they see fit.

This new payment structure enables providers and MA DTA staff to support individuals and their families to achieve milestones that will set them up for a sustainable transition off of TANF and disrupt the cycle of intergenerational poverty.

ACTION

Third Sector supported MA DTA to change the way it contracts for its workforce training programs that serve more than 2000 participants annually across two programs, YPP and CIES. Contracts now ensure that all partners who work with TANF recipients are working towards priority long-term goals for participants instead of compliance requirements such as numbers served. In this model, MA DTA pays providers for the achievement of outcomes such as job retention beyond 90 days or the completion of college credits.

Third Sector supported MA DTA in changing its contracts in three ways:

- **Prioritizing Outcomes:** MA DTA participated in workshops facilitated by Third Sector enabling agency stakeholders to prioritize outcome goals that help move whole families towards economic mobility. For YPP, the outcomes prioritized were across three domains: 1) Education and Career, 2) Life and Personal, and 3) Parenting and Family. For CIES, the priority outcomes were employment focused: completion of job readiness training, job retention at 30, 90, and 180 days, and jobs paying a living wage (\geq \$16.25 an hour).

- **Cementing Systems Change:** Once the outcomes were prioritized, MA DTA worked with Third Sector to develop a contractual payment structure to pay for them. MA DTA outlined this new payment structure in its contracts, ensuring that providers are aligned with the agency's shift to invest in whole-family economic mobility and are working towards the same goals.
- **Building Capacity to Achieve Outcomes:** Third Sector and MA DTA worked with implementation staff such as contract managers, providers, and local office staff to facilitate workshops and develop tools that clarify processes, strengthen communication pathways and data-sharing, and ensure staff and providers are able to advance economic mobility outcomes in a customized, family-centered way.



“We don’t buy services. We buy outcomes.”

– Former Commissioner Jeff McCue

ABOUT

The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) assists and empowers low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long term economic self-sufficiency. DTA serves one in nine residents of the Commonwealth with direct economic assistance (cash benefits) and food assistance (SNAP benefits), as well as workforce training opportunities.

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

To learn more, please visit thirdsectorcap.org or send an email to info@thirdsectorcap.org.