

Program Snapshot: Families Achieving Success Today

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Families Achieving Success Today (FAST)

provides coordinated case management, employment services, and mental health services to people in Ramsey County, Minnesota. FAST serves Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients who are at least 18 years old and have a self-disclosed mental health or physical disability, have a child with a disability, or are needed at home to care for someone with a disability. In Minnesota, employment plans for these TANF participants are modified to accommodate the health needs of participants or their family members. These accommodations might result in lowered expectations for work activities for them than for other MFIP participants.

FAST has been updated and adapted over the years since it started in 2011. It is funded by TANF and implemented through a partnership between Ramsey County's Workforce Solutions and Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota. FAST is one of several programs participating in the Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) Project (see box).



Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) Project

The goal of the NextGen Project is to identify and study innovative employment programs for people facing complex employment challenges. The study explores how the programs are designed and operated, their cost, and how effective they are at improving participants' employment, health, and other outcomes related to economic self-sufficiency and well-being. The NextGen Project is part of the Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation's [Innovative Strategies for Addressing Employment Barriers Portfolio](#), which seeks to rigorously evaluate the "next generation" of employment strategies for individuals with low income, and is partnering with the Social Security Administration on select evaluations.

Five key features of FAST

1. Coordinated case management services to help participants meet their needs and goals.

Participants in FAST meet at least monthly with a Family Stabilization Services (FSS) coordinator, who coordinates services from several other FAST providers: a career navigator who uses principles of Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) to help participants find and stay in employment (see number 3); mental health therapists for participants and mental health case managers for participants' children; and a health navigator, who helps participants apply for Medicaid. FAST participants can receive IPS and adult mental health services for an unlimited amount of time, even if they become ineligible for TANF. FSS coordinators, career navigators, mental health therapists, and case managers hold weekly case coordination meetings to discuss the services that specific participants are engaging in and any changes that might benefit those participants.

2. Individualized services intended to help participants make progress toward their goals.

FAST staff help participants set and make progress toward goals, whether personal, health-related, or employment-related, and match participants with services relevant to those goals. For instance, some FAST participants might choose not to work with a career navigator because they want to focus on engaging in mental health services for themselves or their children, or because they do not want the intensive job development and retention services that career navigators offer. As participants' goals and needs change, staff respond by connecting them with different services.

3. IPS for those interested in employment. FSS coordinators refer any FAST participants who are interested in employment to career navigators, who use the [IPS model](#) to help them find and keep a job. The career navigators work one-on-one with participants to understand what types of jobs they are interested in; help them find, apply to, and interview for jobs; and then check in to support participants once they have jobs. Career navigators can help participants develop resumes and complete job applications, conduct mock interviews with them, drive them to interviews, accompany them to job fairs and facilitate conversations with employers, and visit them at their job sites. They also visit employers in the community to develop relationships and jobs for participants, focusing on those employers or industries that participants express interest in. With participants' permission, career navigators may speak with employers on behalf of participants, disclose participants' specific needs, and even attend job interviews with participants.

4. Mental health services for adult participants and their children. Mental health treatment for adults and case management services for children are integrated into the FAST program. When appropriate, FSS coordinators work with a contracted provider to link participants or their children to mental health services. Mental health service providers typically deliver services at the Goodwill-Easter Seals Minnesota offices or in participants' homes. Integrating mental health services is a principle of IPS, and coordination of these and other FAST services takes place during case coordination meetings.

5. Help for participants seeking health insurance. When needed, FSS coordinators link participants to a health navigator, who helps participants apply for Medicaid (called Medical Assistance in Minnesota) and troubleshoots any problems participants have with their insurance benefits.

The NextGen Project will release findings about FAST over the next few years.

The project team will collect and analyze information about how FAST operates, its successes and challenges, its cost, and its effectiveness compared with other employment services available for TANF participants in Ramsey County. The IPS Employment Center will provide technical assistance, program manuals, and fidelity reviews to support implementation of the IPS component. For more information, visit the NextGen Project's web page at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/opre/research/project/next-generation-of-enhanced-employment-strategies-project> or email us at NextGenProject@mathematica-mpr.com to receive regular updates on the project.

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