

IMPACT FINDINGS FROM AN EVALUATION OF COACHING AND USE OF TECHNOLOGY FOR IMPROVING ENGAGEMENT AND GOAL ACHIEVEMENT

This report is based on an evaluation of Family Centered Coaching at GST Michigan Works! and the impact of using TuaPath, a technology platform to engage participants on their path to realizing their goals.

The Prosperity Agenda was contracted by GST Michigan Works! to conduct the evaluation on their behalf and put forth a comprehensive report, excerpts from which make up this report.

GST Michigan Works! is one of sixteen (16) Michigan Works! agencies across the State of Michigan operating workforce development programs designed to assist job seekers in preparing for, finding and retaining employment and employers in hiring skilled workers.

GST Michigan Works! represents Genesee (City of Flint), Huron, Lapeer, Sanilac, Shiawassee and Tuscola counties.



Contents

Introduction	3
Evaluation Methodology.....	4
Impact of Family Centered Coaching – Coach and Client Perspectives	4
The Role of TuaPath to Engage and Achieve Client Goals	9
Impact of COVID-19 on coaching.....	12
Conclusion.....	14

Introduction

This report contains a subset of the findings uncovered by The Prosperity Agenda in their evaluation of Family Centered Coaching conducted for GST Michigan Works! To bring an authentic voice to the findings, transcribed verbatim quotes from coaches and clients were incorporated as much as possible.

The primary focus and reason for the evaluation was to understand if coaches were integrating Family Centered Coaching skills, tools and coaching mindset as they worked with clients to better their experience and sustain progress towards their goals.

Family Centered Coaching is a coaching strategy or methodology focused on reinventing how staff engages with families experiencing poverty, with the client taking the lead, to improve the client experience in order to sustain progress towards their goals.

GST Michigan Works! has been utilizing Family Centered Coaching for a number of years. Between October 2019 and August 2020, The Prosperity Agenda led a series of trainings and practice sessions to enhance the skills, knowledge, and mindset of staff.

The evaluation was conducted in September of 2020, eight (8) months into the COVID-19 pandemic, and only three (3) months after implementing TuaPath.

As GST Michigan Works! had just a few months prior to the evaluation implemented TuaPath, an unintended consequence of all evaluation was an overwhelming amount of feedback shared on the use of TuaPath and its value for increasing engagement, retention, goal setting, and accountability. TuaPath is a technology solution that provides a comprehensive set of client-centered tools accessible via a browser that engages clients in actualizing their goals for success. It has additional functionality that allows for clients to watch orientation videos, fill out and electronically sign forms, upload and access documentation as well as track work participation compliance.

While the evaluation was conducted during an unprecedented time as a result of COVID-19, The Prosperity Agenda's findings are no less relevant as GST Michigan Works! looks to leverage lessons learned from working virtually to define the new "normal" for the delivery of services in the years ahead, which may include a hybrid of in-person and virtual services.

The report is divided into four sections:

Evaluation Methodology

Outlines the evaluation methods involving both case managers (known at GST Michigan Works! as coaches) and clients.

Impact of Family Centered Coaching – Coach and Client Perspectives

Discusses the impact of using a coaching methodology, Family Centered Coaching, on building trust and relationships both from the coach and the client perspective.

The Role of TuaPath to Engage and Achieve Client Goals

Presents a holistic assessment of the value of integrating a technology platform hand-in-glove with a coaching strategy implemented at GST Michigan Works!. The report includes insights from both the coach and client perspectives.

Impact of COVID-19 on Coaching

As the evaluation was performed during COVID-19, evaluators asked about the challenges and positive outcomes of working virtually. Four specific themes emerged and are shared.

Evaluation Methodology

The Prosperity Agenda’s evaluation of Family Centered Coaching at GST Michigan Works! involved conducting focus group and in-depth interviews with coaches (term used for case managers) as well as individual clients.

A total of twenty-four (24) coaches participated in four (4) focus group discussions where they were interviewed to gain a deep understanding of how they utilized Family Centered Coaching and TuaPath in working with clients.

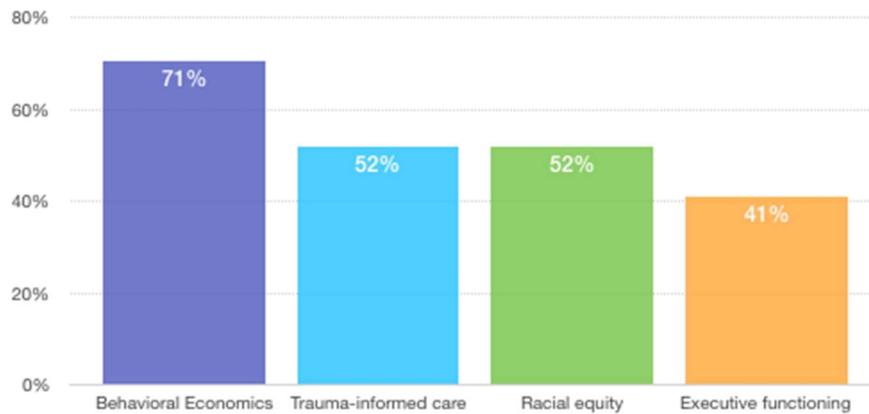
In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with nine (9) clients to examine themes related to their assessment of the coaches, their own goal achievement, and feeling of empowerment.

The focus group discussions were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim to ensure systematic analysis of the discussion. All focus group discussions were held virtually and ran for approximately 60 minutes. A semi structured format was utilized in the focus group to ensure that clients had opportunities to build on the questions and responses of other group members.

Impact of Family Centered Coaching – Coach and Client Perspectives

Family Centered Coaching uses a set of guiding principles related to a strength-based perspective and a focus on family and self-awareness amongst others. Principles that the coaches considered while working with their clients are presented in Figure 1 (following page) and the percentage of usage.

Figure 1: Family Centered Coaching Principles



Coaches reported that Family Centered Coaching helps to strengthen their ability to provide family-centered and trauma informed coaching to their clients

“The using of family centered focus on my clients, I’m really seeing a lot of impact of it. And actually, even though we’ve gone virtual I really liked the fact that it’s interactive now. And so, planning these goals are, I think, are getting bigger impact because they are actually having a say in it.” - Coach

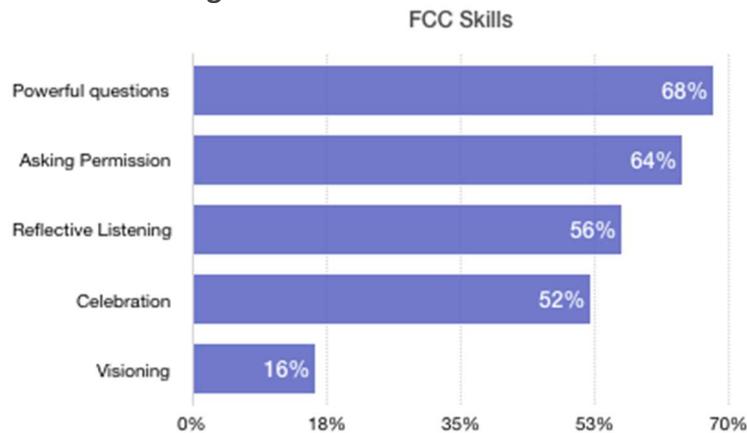
“I think with the different approaches that we’ve learned or that I’ve learned from the FCC it’s been very beneficial to apply that when coaching because they have not, everybody is on the same level when they come to us. But if we can make them believe that they’re capable of overcoming those barriers on that they can be successful, that they can become self-sufficient.”- Coach

In particular, coaching techniques for building empathy, checking unconscious bias, and the implementation and use of TuaPath helped to enhance the coaches’ ability to respond to the sudden shift to online coaching.

During the focus group discussions with coaches, a majority of them emphasized the importance of using skills of “Asking Permission” and “Reflective Listening”. In Figure 2, on the following page, the frequency distribution of Family Centered Coaching skills used by the coaches is presented.

The coaches in all of the focus group discussions expressed how Family Centered Coaching helped them in (i) building trusting relationships, (ii) active listening, and (iii) client empowerment.

Figure 2: Family Centered Coaching Skills



Building Trusting Relationships and Active Listening

With regard to building a trusting relationship, a majority of the coaches felt that Family Centered Coaching provides them with skills that helped them change their ‘top-down’ approach to be more collaborative. One of the most significant ways of doing this was to question their own biases prior to meeting clients. Coaches felt that this was at times difficult, particularly when meeting in-person because of the deep-rooted unconscious biases that they carried and were unaware of. Many felt that with online coaching, checking biases were easier when working with the client remotely.

Prior to adopting the Family Centered Coaching strategy, some coaches reported being very task oriented and did not prioritize creating relationships with the client. By focusing on the client’s familial and social context, coaches were able to better understand the realities of the clients, thus developing a sense of empathy.

“I do a bio sketch of the client before I talk to them. So, I ask who is in your household...you have two children. Then I ask for permission to ask questions about them. He kind of see’s that I am seeing what’s going on with him and then we build trust little by little.” - Coach

With regard to active listening, majority of the coaches reported that Family Centered Coaching emphasizes the importance of being active and engaged listeners. This meant that coaches had to practice having an open mindset and ask clarifying questions. Coaches suggested that asking questions related to client progress helped develop a collaborative discussion on the complex needs of clients, feelings about their success and failures, and an indication of growth patterns.

Both, trustworthy relationships and active listening contributed to client empowerment. One of the main aspects of client empowerment within Family Centered Coaching is the ability for

clients to take the lead in coaching conversations and be accountable for their decisions. Family Centered Coaching helps to focus on building a collaborative relationship, whereby the client and coach work together to set goals. It entails creating a power dynamic whereby the client would be taking responsibility for their actions, rather than be dependent on the coach to identify solutions but knowing that the coach is there as a support structure to help navigate complex situation, if needed.

Balancing the Role of Case Manager and Coach

Coaches also highlighted the importance of balancing the role of a case manager and a coach while interacting with clients.

“When we need to get paperwork done the case management side of me kicks in. But being able to stay in a coaching mindset is where you can kind of flow the questions better to double check answers.... get rapport built quicker.” - Coach

They expressed that the clients might have varying needs based on the situation in which they are. While the role of a coach is to help navigate complex situations, creating a support system and guiding clients to set and achieve clear goals; the case manager can direct them towards specific tasks and immediate resources to provide stability in their life. Coaches indicated that rather than always cautioning and restricting the clients, it was important to celebrate the progress, navigate failures and move them forward towards success.

Empowering Clients

An important aspect of Family Centered Coaching is the investment in empowering clients and their families to achieve their goals. Coaches collectively expressed that the ultimate goal of their service was to make clients feel independent and successful. They expressed the hope that clients would be able to achieve their short- term goals, as well as long term stability and self-sufficiency.

“I think success in the program overall is a client reaching self-sufficiency. I think once they’re self-sufficient and self-reliant everything else kind of falls into place because they already set their goals.” - Coach

“It would be just my ultimate goal would be for me, helping the clients reach their goal. So whatever their ultimate goal is in the program is to help them reach that goal and to maybe help them use those tools that they received to help others around them, because sometimes you might have people in their household that's you know, just as in the worst situation as they are in, and then them stepping up to the plate, knocking out those goals ... might help others in their household” - Coach

In addition to individual goals, the coaches also expressed the importance of helping clients establish and achieve goals that not only impacted their lives but also improved the well-being of their families.

Client Feedback on Coaching

In the focus group discussions, clients overwhelmingly highlighted the ability to have open conversations with their coaches. They expressed the capacity of the coaches to create a comfortable and safe space for them to share their goals and challenges as well as ask for support.

Many clients felt comfortable sharing their personal stories due to the trust that was built between themselves and the coach. The personalized approach of the coaches where they regularly checked in, were responsive via email, constantly reassured their availability, and helped navigate and provide resources based on unique needs helped clients feel supported.

Quotes from two clients summarize the overall feeling of trust towards the coaches and support towards reaching their goals.

“It was really good. She saw how serious I was about succeeding in life. So, she was like there for me every step of the way, pointing me to the right direction or everything I was trying to do. It was a really good experience.” - Client

“I feel safe. I feel like I could trust her with anything that I tell her whether it is pertaining to the program or something personal. She never makes me feel uneasy...”. - Client

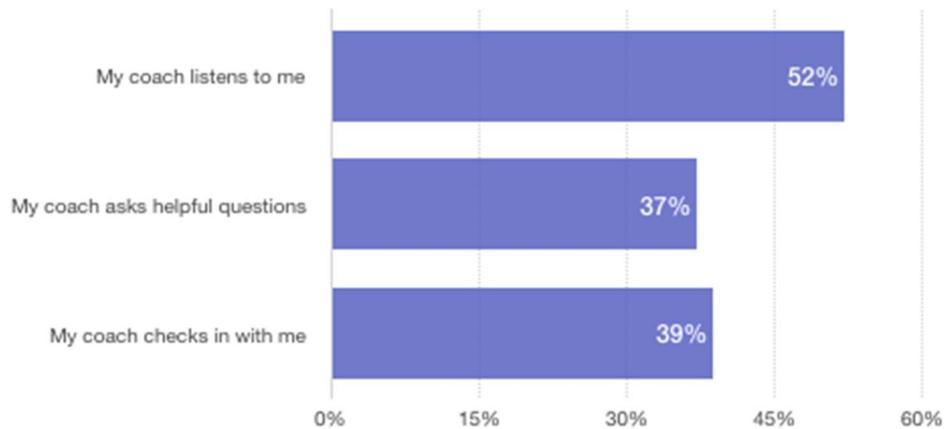
In contrast to the above clients who had a clear goal and were given support, another client who was unsure of their desired outcome also expressed feeling supported by the coaches.

“My coach was the very first one that I got in the first stage of work. She was awesome and friendly. And then I got transferred to another coach who was at first very stand offish. I didn’t think I would like her much because she wasn’t so friendly. She stayed with herself a lot...but we sort of connected and she’s actually been helping me quite a bit. I haven’t had any problems because she has been helping me.” - Client

Within the interviews, the clients also reported that they felt the coaches asked for their input and thoughts regarding their own goals and helped them navigate challenges. It is important to highlight that despite the focus of Family Centered Coaching mindset of letting clients lead the conversation, majority expressed that the coaches usually directed the dialogue.

None of the clients reported feeling shut down or unable to provide their input. They indicated that the coaches usually set priorities and goals for the meetings and helped the client think through questions and navigate resources. Figure 3, below, lists the three (3) coaching skills most reported by clients.

Figure 3: Top 3 Coaching Skills As Reported by Clients



Client's coaching readiness

Interviews with clients provided an important insight regarding the ability for them (clients) to successfully utilize coaching to meet their goals. Three (3) specific themes related to coaching readiness emerged in the interviews.

- Clients that had a very clear personal or professional goal felt more at ease to navigate resources and achieve their goals using a coaching format. These clients reported feeling supported, gained clarity about their goals, completed tasks that were assigned to them and received resources accordingly.
- Clients that had a clear goal but were deeply impacted by their personal and social contexts were unable to fully utilize the benefits of the coaching framework. They expressed feeling overwhelmed to set their own goals, complete assigned tasks and navigate their own personal challenges. These clients believed that a case management style would be more helpful in some cases to achieve short term immediate goals to reduce the burden of navigating resources and setting large goals.
- Some clients were unsure about their situation and felt overwhelmed when asked to set clear personal and professional goals for themselves. While these clients trusted the coach and were able to develop a good rapport with them, they were unprepared to set and achieve goals.

The Role of TuaPath to Engage and Achieve Client Goals

An important aspect of a coaching strategy is the development, progress and completion of the goals set by clients. The coaches worked collaboratively with the clients to set goals, monitor

and encourage process, and celebrate the completion tasks, whether it led to a goal achievement or not. TuaPath, as an online technology solution, facilitated this process as clients are able to identify their goals and breakdown the different steps to achievement and track their progress at any time.

“It (TuaPath) puts the client in the driver’s seat.” - Coach

“Yeah, love TuaPath because I really think it's helping them to see their success. And even though we're (coaches) working hand in hand and helping them to use it, how to submit hours and things like that, their goals and victories are right on the main screen. And they can see them every time they look at it. And so, they can see that they've accomplished those things. So that's the positive” - Coach

Across all the focus group discussions, coaches discussed the benefits, as well as a few of the challenges of using the platform to monitor goals and help clients achieve self-sufficiency. Overall, the impact was very positive.

Many coaches indicated that by using TuaPath as a tool to track goal progress, they were able to integrate the coaching mindset and Family Centered Coaching skills in a more tangible manner.

“Digital coaching helps coaches to stay in the coaching mindset. I'm not chasing them. They're chasing me, shooting me emails. They are wanting to call me and say, hey, I scheduled this time with you, but that time doesn't work with me. Can I reschedule for later on today or this evening, And that's because of the excitement of working virtually in TuaPath.” - Coach

As the clients were able to write in TuaPath their goals in their own words, and track their progress, coaches reported that clients were more accountable for their own progress. The act of writing goals down helped to identify ways to solve problems, evaluate appropriate actions and ultimately helped them to choose actions that will most likely lead to success. When clients wrote their goals, it was meaningful for them, and that drove motivation, it kept them engaged and committed to change their behavior.

“You know how things can be overwhelming, they don't see how they can get to that goal before they write it down. Just the act, the action of writing it down, is helping them. And I think that tool (TuaPath) helps as before it was just another sheet of paper you gave them when we were in the office.” - Coach

Using TuaPath increased the feeling of independence amongst clients as they had control over setting, as well as meeting, their goals. Those that were technically savvy, appreciated being able to work more independently while those that weren't were able to get help and instructions from their coach. Coaches pitched using TuaPath as a safe place to develop and understand technology which help with adoption.

“Planning goals are, I think, are getting a bigger impact because they're actually having a say it. I mean, they had to say before, but now we're actually saying, ‘Hey, this will help you walk through it.’ And we're kind of figuring out what that's gonna look like, but this here is a starting point. So, because we are using this interactive platform, TuaPath, actually I'm seeing more results.” - Coach

Coaches reported that they felt that the work conducted in the platform was meaningful to the goal achievement process for the client and the coach, as it departs from other paperwork that can be considered as ‘busy work’.

In addition, TuaPath also helped create greater trust between the coach and client, as there was no irrelevant work that was being conducted in the platform and its transparent, in that clients have full access to their goals and all paperwork completed and uploaded to the system.

“Before clients would state their goal and it would go on a piece of paper and that paper would go in a file never to be seen again.” – Coach

The visual aspect of TuaPath also contributed towards helping clients and coaches clearly track their success and failures. This contributed to deeper conversations regarding their overall progress and the supports they needed and helped to increase retention.

“Having that visual has been helpful and being able for participants to see their progress has been immense.” - Coach

Clients liked that they could engage and interact with the online platform at anytime from anywhere, and they could visually see their path forward. They could tackle each step whether in orientation or working on their goals, one at a time, which kept them from being overwhelmed. They appreciated that they could reflect on what they had accomplished, despite how small an accomplishment it was.

“Since its visual, gets them thinking about “Okay, what’s next?”. It’s the practice of goal setting.” - Coach

“So you're actually approaching small goals and helping them achieve those smaller goals, as opposed to these long term goals. Like I want to be an RN, while that’s a wonderful thing, but what can you do right now?” - Coach

“Really like in TuaPath where it shows all their accomplishments, what they've completed, it's all right there. And I think that will really help the clients to bring that up because collectively you've got to celebrate all the accomplishments, all the achievements that's vitally important to keep that momentum going. So I think that's really cool too.” - Coach

“They're seeing their victories and that they're not giving up and that we just keep going on to the next step. We keep saying one step at a time, one thing at a time, let's see what we can do and keep going forward and helping them celebrate those victories.” – Coach

“I think that's, what's making this (family centered coaching) a success is because they're seeing it (in TuaPath). They are saying ‘Hey, I did it, I did it.’ And so, I'm really glad that they can see it and they want to keep it going too.”- Coach

The written and verbal communication in TuaPath provided substantial context relating to the progress towards set goals. Coaches liked that clients could work on segments of the orientation, and not the entire thing at once. Working at their own pace, clients were more thoughtful with their answers.

“So being able to check-in and take a few moments to talk with them and have them do them in segments for like assignments and then revisit them, their answers are so much better. Before we would get a lot of one-word answers on assessments and paperwork.” - Coach

“TuaPath affords clients the ability to easily go in and re-rework it (answers and information provided) based on our conversation and encourage them to go in and do some different things” - Coach

With regard to challenges, many coaches reported that TuaPath worked best from a computer and that it was difficult for clients that were not technologically skilled to navigate on their phone without the help and training of their coach. This was especially challenging during the pandemic for those clients only had their phones and did not have access to a friend's or family's computer or one at the public library, community or service center.

Coaches agreed, that using Tuapath is forcing those who were not technically savvy to become more so. This not only applied to clients, but admittedly, themselves as well.

Impact of COVID-19 on Coaching

With the onset of COVID-19, GST Michigan Works! had to move all their services online. Many of the coaches felt unprepared to make the sudden shift from in-person to virtual coaching and they highlighted the challenges such as lack of access to personal space, stable internet connection, comfort with technology, and competing commitments such as childcare impacted their and their client's ability to fully engage. On the other hand, they felt that online coaching was much

more accessible to their clients and was more flexible with regards to schedules. As a result, many clients were able to attend meetings more often or felt like the coach was more accessible than before. While expressing their views on the switch to online coaching and its benefits and challenges, four (4) specific themes emerged.

Seeing clients in their context

One of the most important aspects of Family Centered Coaching, is to use a holistic framework to understand the client and their needs. Virtual coaching afforded coaches the opportunity to see the client in the context of their family life and in doing so, get a better sense of the reality of the client and develop deeper empathy. One coach stated:

"I think I've had a participant that has other issues with children that are in the home going on. And I think if the in person, I probably wouldn't have gotten all of that out of discussions but hearing the one child in the background and she started talking about it and she got a little emotional and kind of opened up to the other parts of what was going on, which helped me to assist her with keeping in participation and resources that she would need. And things like that, that she was probably wouldn't have requested. And I would have never known to give her, but that family comfort environment, I think helps them relax enough to maybe open up to you on things that they would normally open up to. So, I think that has been a benefit". - Coach

Relationship between client and coach

The coaches expressed that online coaching led to a balance in power dynamics between themselves and the clients. Majority of coaches indicated that in-person interactions were more formal and structured.

In using TuaPath for facilitating client meetings and collaborating with clients, the technology removed the "office environment" and created an equal playing field for both parties involved.

Others believed meeting virtually helped reduce the coach's bias against their clients since they did not have a visual image. Additionally, they were able to develop a trusting relationship since the coach and client were experiencing a similar challenge related to COVID-19.

The coaches also expressed an improvement in the communication between themselves and their clients. Majority of the coaches felt that their active listening skills were enhanced as they had to solely rely on the voice of the clients, rather than body language and other visual cues.

The coaches highlighted that by incorporating reflective listening, they were able to develop a deeper sense of empathy with the clients and create a more trusting relationship. Despite all the positive outcomes, the coaches did largely agree on the reduced sense of accountability of the clients with regard to the online meetings. Coaches reported that many clients canceled last minute or did not show-up for their meetings despite the automated notifications that were sent out via text and email.

Specific COVID-19 related support

As a result of COVID-19, clients experienced a myriad of challenges that impacted the successful progress towards their goals. The coaches felt that they had to adjust their content and techniques to respond to the unique circumstances of the client. For example, some coaches used the online coaching time to help clients fill forms and coach them simultaneously. This was especially true for those that were technologically challenged.

While coaches attempted to provide a variety of supports to the clients, they reported challenges in reaching out and successfully supporting those that did not have ready access to technology. Coaches also used visual tools, such as screen shots and shares to help clients complete their paperwork.

Additionally, the use of email for constant communication was highlighted. They also expressed frustrations regarding lack of commitment and accountability owing to the complex challenges arising from COVID-19.

Technical skills for online coaching

The shift to an online coaching platform created the need for coaches to develop specific skills to enable them to be more effective in a virtual format. The coaches expressed having access to steady internet as an essential factor to conduct their work in an optimal manner. Also, some coaches felt that they were more comfortable with in-person interactions and needed more support to make virtual meetings feel authentic and effective.

Coaches felt more distracted during virtual meetings as they and their clients were often multi-tasking.

Lastly, coaches highlighted that the lack of visual cues and body language made it difficult to discern what the clients were thinking, and they had to rely solely on the conversation. While there were some benefits of it, in terms of reduction in bias, it also led to challenges in terms of developing good insights to what the clients were experiencing or thinking.

Conclusion

The data gathered from coaches as well as clients provided sufficient evidence to indicate that the practice of Family Centered Coaching supported by the TuaPath technology platform provided a safe and empowering environment for GST Michigan Works! clients. Clients feel supported and engaged in the process of determining their own outcomes.

By using a coaching mindset, where coaches asked questions, practiced active listening, dismissed stereotypes, and took a family-centered approach, they were able to create deep trust between the clients and coaches to drive positive outcomes. This approach also reduced

the feeling of judgement, disempowerment, and loss of control for many clients.

In support of coaching, TuaPath acted as a cognitive orthotic to help clients make progress towards their goals in a systematic manner as it guided them through the goal-setting process. As a result of the client inputting their goals, they were more accountable for those set and completing the tasks to achievement. Overall coaches reported an increase in engagement and retention along with improved outcomes.