

Tacoma Community House WorkFirst Forum—July 14th, 2010

TANF Clients for Focus Groups

- 18 students in attendance from 4 separate ABE classes 3:00 – 4:00pm
- The original plan was to film and audio record the session, but a malfunction kept the filming from happening.
- All students took part in discussion in a single room with a facilitator and a response recorder.

The following WorkFirst Forum notes are divided into 2 parts:

Part I: Group discussion recorded on the board

Part II: Individual written responses from question sheet (in clients' own words)

Part I

WorkFirst Forum (Group Client Oral Responses as Recorded on Board):

1. **How easy is it for you to access your case manager at DSHS?**
 - Depends on who you have as a case manager
 - Can't (ask Lee what this means)
 - Case manager doesn't like me—bad attitude
 - Had a good one and then got switched
 - DSHS won't switch a case manager if you have a problem with them
 - Client likes case manager; asked for a voucher and had one in a few minutes
 - Case manager never calls back
 - Client doesn't get to talk to case manager on the phone or in the office...frustrating and hard to comply
2. **How easy is it to access your employment or education case workers?**
 - Education case worker at TCH: great; no problem—always available
 - Employment at TCH; Tracey Williams- very helpful; personal with client and case worker at Lakewood – very good. Tried to keep all services in close proximity to each other or residence. Both have worked to help with schedule- all areas; communication is key

- Liked having all pieces (components and support services) close in one place or at least close to one another (daycare, bus route, education, employment, etc)
- Employment at WWEE: 1) can't get a hold of case worker directly; can only talk to secretary and have to wait for a message to get relayed, 2) caseworker was very helpful and responsive

3. How helpful are your employment or education caseworkers?

- Work placement- it is tough to get from one place to another (day care, work, school) when relying on bus for transportation (e.g., NE Tacoma to daycare in town to WWEE, TCH, etc takes 6-8 buses; leave at 8am and don't get home until 9pm; no time for child/doctors and provide proof)
- Client likes having employment and school case worker at the same place; very convenient to have community service at own apt. complex

4. How easy is it to get the support services you need through DSHS for things like child care, transportation, GED vouchers, etc.?

- Case manager at DSHS doesn't update demographic information so bus pass didn't come after client updates info with DSHS and Pierce Transit; client finally talked to Pierce Transit supervisor to get issue resolved
- Client stated that support services were good
- Client stated that when she was patient and calm, it seemed to work out; child care worker was very helpful
- Couldn't get child care because it took so long to get pieces together (call center/case manager all said different things and held up placement)
- Another client was placed in sanction because of above situation
- Call Center has you going in circles—puts you on hold and routes you back to the beginning; have been on hold for up to two hours
- IRP not updated correctly
- Client does what they ask but I don't know how it gets resolved
- Grant is always enough to pay rent and utilities

5. How easy is it to access other resources in the community (once you know who to contact) besides TCH and DSHS (food banks, utilities, housing, emergency shelters, etc.)?

- Resources run out of funding, but most of the time it gets done efficiently
- Resource phone numbers need to be updated

- Many housing lists are full

6. What challenges do you face in finding a job and meeting the DSHS requirements for WorkFirst?

- Sometimes client loses grant due to DSHS screw up and ended up in sanction for a long time
- In LA, California “nobody helped with nothing”; here in WA it’s great
- Miscommunication between client and case manager—there was a housing problem that was documented in ejas notes but not in the right way all support services were dropped. Client had to miss school to fix problem

7. How helpful are your job search counselors at Employment Security department?

- Comprehensive Eval to IRP
- One person said that they do help at ESD
- ESD—give you a disk and don’t tell you how to do it (resume/cover letter, etc.)
- Another client went to WWEE where she got a lot of help compared to ESD for job readiness

8. Do you think that WorkFirst offers the type of activities that families need to become and stay self-sufficient?

- School
- Child care
- Transportation
- WEX: yes and no, depends
- ESD: yes
- Volunteer—you don’t get money for nothing. Work harder than you need to live on

9. What the main purpose of WorkFirst?

- To get off welfare and work

Part II

WorkFirst Forum Questions (Written Client Responses):

Rating scale: 1 2 3 4 5

1= Very difficult 3= Average 5= Very easy

1. How easy is it for you to access your case manager at DSHS?

1- Very difficult	2	3- Average	4	5- Very easy
4	4	8	2	0

- Not very nice to me
- Never answers the phone or return calls
- Never tried, I don't know

2. How easy is it to access your employment or education caseworkers?

1- Very difficult	2	3- Average	4	5- Very easy
0	2	3	5	9

- Dianne is always around, or if you call she answers if you leave a message calls back that day
- I find that people at TCH are super helpful and understanding and willing to work with people through what's going on in their lives
- It's easy; I know they have a job to do. So it's not too bad
- Every time I call they either answer the phone or call back the same day you called
- Goodwill case worker doesn't answer phone or respond to messages but has always been in the office when I go in
- It hasn't been hard for me yet because I have only been in the program now for two weeks
- I would recommend WWEE to those taking this program seriously
- 2 for worksite and 5 for school

3. How helpful are your employment or education caseworkers?

1- Very difficult	2	3- Average	4	5- Very easy
0	0	1	9	8

- They are very understanding and work hard to make sure it will work. Don't want you to fail
- Love them, love coming to school here
- Very helpful, I had some issues and they have helped a lot
- Very helpful when I needed help they were there for me when I asked
- TCH staff is always helpful
- They have been helpful so far because I haven't been in the program long enough to know otherwise
- 4, close to Very Easy: When my schedule gives me time to access WWEE before they close

4. How easy is it to get the support services you need through DSHS for things like child care, transportation vouchers, etc.?

1- Very difficult	2	3- Average	4	5- Very easy
1	5	5	6	1

- Sometimes it takes time, but they are there
- I got put into a sanction about a month ago about the same time they stopped allowing the child support pass through payments of \$100. I really have been working my ass off jumping through the hoops they require for me to get out of sanction. Oh it's such a long story about my transportation issues being VERY NEW TO THE BUS SYSTEM but by the time I get back from riding the bus to drop my son off at day care it's just about time for school. Never mind, I'm just totally overwhelmed even though school here is just 12 hours a week I feel like I'm running ragged and still like I said long story, but it's going on the 3rd month of \$270 a month and until I do 28 STRAIGHT days of participation I got orientation for community service tomorrow by now my power may get shut off by that 28 days is accomplished. My \$100 of child support pass through payment should still be allowed because without power I'll be doomed to fail. I don't know, I think WorkFirst Sanction sucks! I couldn't get my GED voucher because they were out, I want to get this show on the road, I'd pay for my own test for the GED if I wasn't in stinking sanction, but where I stand now I can't do squat and I HAVE BEEN REALLY GIVING THIS SANCTION SHIT AN HONEST EFFORT!! I feel really doomed.
- Sometimes it's really confusing trying to do the right thing and what they want when things get so confused by them it causes stress on myself

- Can't always get a hold of someone. Child care is difficult. They don't respond like they should or say they will
- Client answered 'very difficult': Because when I went to take my test my voucher expired so I called my worker and still haven't heard nothing back in about 2 ½ to 3 weeks.
- Have always gotten passes for the bus without difficulty
- So far when I ask I receive services promptly, but I haven't been in the program for long

5. How easy is it to access other resources in the community (once you know who to contact) besides TCH and DSHS?

- N/A—MDC, food banks, emergency shelters
- When I was working and I had no resources left for utilities because I lived in city limits I actually was without power for a whole month because it took two who paychecks to the power company to get it back on
- Yes I've been help with transportation by my case worker at TCH
- Not yet, but I'm sure I will seek some help in the future
- It is pretty easy now because I have already figure out most of all other resources
- Fairly easy and no one from TCH has explained to me
- Someone has helped me and was an ok process I would give it a three
- Unknown and no not yet haven't need their services
- Have not used these services
- Yes very helpful
- TCH has been very helpful with those things
- I have never accessed
- The food bank is ok to find but housing sucks
- If I needed the help, yes
- If you need help

6. What challenges do you face in finding a job and/or meeting the DSHS requirements for WorkFirst?

- Sometimes it is hard to meet the DSHS requirements, because of family situations time management
- This sanction hole I'm in seems to be so hard to get out of
- Well I'm having a little challenge in finding a job. But it's coming along
- The only challenge I have finding a job is trying to get my GED so I can go on to doing diesel mechanic
- The only problems I have with finding a job is that I haven't completed my GED yet and I have a felony from 10 years ago
- My challenge is child care and being homeless because I can't get enough money to support me and my child in housing and I work 80 hours a month and 48 hours school for a little check \$453 in cash a month

- Completing my GED and go to college
- It is very difficult as I have no time for anything else
- Well I am in sanction and so I am required to do both school and volunteering and as of right now I'm only doing one. That's coming to school. I really enjoy coming here and I want to follow through all the way and get my GED. I plan on starting volunteering as soon as I can get another referral but I still haven't. I will stay in sanction until I do both school and volunteering
- Very difficult
- There are no challenges
- There is not enough time in my week to take care of real life issues. Trying to seek a divorce, but my schedule is full
- Finding a job that's open, and do I meet the expectations
- Having to go to school in the middle of the day limit my job search
- Good I work at Goodwill
- If you're late they are rude
- Don't know

7. How helpful are your job search counselors at ESD?

1- Very difficult	2	3- Average	4	5- Very easy
0	5	3	2	1

- They don't always listen to your needs or barriers, they still expect you to fulfill what they ask
- When I was going they didn't help me or ask if I needed any help or nothing
- Have no such counselor
- Dareth is sometimes hard to get a hold of and I don't always understand what she's saying (ed. Note-Dareth is a TCH employee, not an ESD employee)

8. Do you think that WorkFirst offers the type of activities that families need to become and stay self-sufficient?

- Getting into a routine and seeing what is available in the future
- A couple of years ago when I was working and I got gas vouchers any time I needed and I was getting that \$600 bonus a \$100 for 6 months because I was working
- Yes they do such as my child care and getting around
- They build you up to be able to survive live
- I know right now being on TANF it's hard to make ends meet. My grant covers my rent and that's it. So getting my GED will help open better opportunities for me and my daughter

- I think it's helpful to help fill out applications because most application now are on-line access only
- Yes in a way but because of some money problems it doesn't always help the present it may help in the future
- Yes. Only when you apply yourself because you have to help yourself first
- Yes and no you can't support a family with the jobs you get
- No. I feel that going back to school is a blessing for all but all the other hoops they put you through don't work for me and my family
- You cannot live on what DSHS gives you the child care helps a lot. But all the things you have to do to keep me from finding a real job
- Yes I do. As long as you take advantage of all the opportunities they offer and you need to communicate with everyone
- Yes, it does for those who want to become self-sufficient
- Yes, to a certain extent
- Yes, to a certain extent
- Yes, they help a lot
- No, they push make you do it instead of helping you where you are
- Yes

9. What's the main purpose of WorkFirst? What is your case manager at DSHS trying to help you do?

- Get you in a place where you don't need state assistance, because your education and job opportunities are wider span
- To get an education and a great job so I won't need TANF
- To get you on your feet and get a career you like
- Try to help me be self-sufficient and stand on my own two feet
- To succeed and prosper to a career field that you are satisfied in and my case worker helps me with vouchers to finish getting my GED so that I could better my chances of employment
- She's trying to help me succeed in life with job and education. But at the same time tries to bring me down all the time sanctions me for crazy little things including their problems when they screw up
- Getting off of the system and getting a job and keeping it
- Get used to having a job and getting work experience
- To help you gain knowledge and skills to become self-sufficient and self-reliant family. The ultimate goal is to get off welfare and rely on self
- Nothing all they want is for me to work for free it is not helping me find a real job
- The purpose of WorkFirst is to help you get on your feet and to help you get off assistance. Become self-sufficient, for you to provide for you and your family without help

- I have never spoke to my case manager. I am using this program to get a job and become 'self-sufficient', but a job I want not a job I'm settling for
- Nothing, I don't even know who it is
- I think that they are try to help me help myself get on my feet
- Job training
- Stay get my GED
- Get my GED

10. Other

- I do not appreciate being filmed and recorded without my knowledge

Lessons Learned:

Limit size of discussion groups to 5-7 students.

The focus group consisted of 18 students. All participated in the discussion as a whole group. It was difficult to facilitate the discussion due to side bars. Not all got to share their feelings due to time.

If filming, get permission in writing from each participant.

Use a neutral facilitator who does not work for any of the WorkFirst partners or at least one who does not work for any agency that is part of the questions.