

INSIGHTS AND SUGGESTIONS FROM WORKFIRST STAFF

July to August 2010

| Program Design | | |
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| | WorkFirst of Today | WorkFirst of Tomorrow |
| Goal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The general perception is that the main goal of the program is about federal participation compliance, measuring process and budget constraints. The impact to families and successful outcomes are not seen as part of the main goal. • The program has conflicting goals. The current program design focuses case management on participation criteria. Meeting the goal of participation requirements does not allow workers to adequately address barriers that keep clients from being successful. • Current policies seem to put a “middle class” context and set of assumptions on the TANF population. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institute clearly defined goals and uniform performance measurements for this program. • Define success to include the clients' needs. • Provide additional resources for hard-to-serve clients. • Be aware of and receptive to cultural differences among clients. • Establish a WorkFirst Partnership with common vision, outcomes, goals, principles and values. • Evaluate program results based on results, not just budget balance. • The program should be temporary and seen as an opportunity. |
| Child Only Cases | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program does not address the issues and needs of the children in child only cases. • We only look at eligibility instead of child well-being. It has become “cut rate” foster care. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen our relationship and communication with CPS and other child welfare advocates. • Non-needy grants should be based on relative need. |
| Community Jobs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The consensus is that Community Jobs is a good program but it is not being used to its fullest potential. • Clients have difficulty meeting the skill enhancement or barrier resolution portion of their CJ requirements. • When TANF closes, the parent is no longer eligible for CJ, even though they may be doing well at their work site. • Community Jobs is normally offered one time only. • Uniformity of CJ services varies within Regions, and from region to region. • Creativity within the CJ program is reliant upon the contractors. • There is limited flexibility with hours and re-entry in the Community Jobs program. • The distance some families must travel is a barrier to CJ participation. • The program works well for LEP clients, but there are limited work sites for this population. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community Jobs needs to be looked at differently. What jobs are we developing and are they truly creating opportunities for job experience? • Community Service and Supported Works need to be reexamined. Are we truly getting value out of the current approach? • Need to work with employers differently to create job experiences with mentoring, similar to DVR. • Need to provide more CJ positions by expanding the provider base to include the private sector. • Need pre-employment classes that help prepare clients for sustainable employment. • Need additional placements with job potential after completion of the program. • Open CJ programs to clients who do not have barriers but need job experience. • More opportunities are needed for LEP clients. • Co-locate educational sites closer to the CJ work site. |

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| <p>Cultural Change</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program has become process oriented versus family oriented. • The program’s current case management model is not comprehensive or relational based. • Staff case management skills are not being utilized. Staff are managing the “process” and financial eligibility which is leading to a disconnect with the client. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct a Social Services Family Assessment before participation starts versus reacting when an issue arises. • Need Strength Based assessments as opposed to Barrier Focused assessments. • Create learning opportunities to gain case management skills by reducing the time spent measuring processes. • Allow the time needed for case managers to connect with families. • Have a greater emphasis on “engagement”. • Need to recognize that reduction in transit services and lack of transportation overall is a huge issue. |
| <p>Education</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Currently 38% of participants do not have a high school diploma. • Adults with a high school degree (or equivalent) or beyond are the most likely to find jobs and leave TANF. • Higher education gives the client better opportunities in a competitive job market. • The 12 months education time limit hinders parents’ qualifications for better paying jobs. • High Wage High Demand programs are beneficial in finding better paying jobs. • There are limited educational activities in the area of job skills enhancement. • There is little or no flexibility for part-time participation needs. • There is a barrier with student loan repayment requirements when wanting to enter school. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time limits for higher education are too rigid. • Allow higher education beyond 12 months as an acceptable participation activity. • Reinstate requirement for teens to participate by staying in school. • Clients are more likely to find sustainable employment when education programs integrate schooling with work experience. • Job search services should be linked to educational program completion. • Colleges need to offer course s that are pertinent to the local job market. • Need more options for High Wage High Demand programs. |
| <p>Employment</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is “value” in low wage jobs for people with no job experience. • Employment creates other issues for the clients, i.e. increase in childcare costs, loss of low-income housing eligibility and limited support services. • Felons face additional barriers in finding employment and are not easily placed at job sites. There are limited resources to help this population find employment. • There is no penalty in the TANF program for quitting a job without “good cause”. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage clients to accept part-time or low-wage employment as a step towards full-time employment. • Instead of taking any job, look at which one would be better for the family. • Use internships as a bridge between education and unsubsidized employment. • Need more transition time once employed so that people are more likely to remain employed and less likely to remain on TANF. • Transitional benefits are needed for clients to maintain employment. • Soft skills are essential to obtain and keep long-term employment. |

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| <p>Employment Security Department</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current ESD program is developed for people on unemployment; the TANF population is uniquely different. • Job search is not a good fit for some of our clients. • There is little or no flexibility for part-time job search. • Job search is viewed by some as simply rotating clients in and out. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clients need soft skills and training to be successful at Job Search. • Job development for the TANF population is unique and needs approaches that are more creative. For instance, work in partnership with the SEIU to develop health care jobs. • Increase the use of the ESD Data Warehouse (Go2WorkSource.com). This is an excellent tool for people who are more motivated and could help reduce the need for additional staff. |
| <p>Family Centered versus Adult Centered</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program is not focused on the family. Each adult is managed as a separate unit, without taking the family as a whole into consideration. • The program does not address the needs of minor parents or teens. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address the needs of the children (infant/youth/teen). • Develop contracts with providers who offer family centered services and make it a requirement for parents with infant children. • Utilize early intervention programs with DEL and other agencies for resource leverage. • Build collaboration with drug courts, JRA, school and community programs with mental health components. • Identify additional providers to provide parenting classes. |
| <p>Generational Welfare</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 20% of TANF, adults are likely to have been TANF recipients as children. • Families view welfare as a safety net. • Clients do not see moving out of poverty as achievable. • Low self-esteem contributes to generational welfare. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to identify generational poverty at the CE so can educate parents and help break the cycle. • Create opportunities for group learning and support within the TANF population with mentoring by former successful participants. • Program should focus on workforce attachment and development, with children of WorkFirst families as the next generation workforce. • Provide parents with opportunities to learn skills and practice self-advocacy and decision-making. They have typically had limited opportunities in their life to do so, but these skills are critical to success in life. • Create opportunities to change attitudes, beliefs and low self-esteem. • Build partnerships with the schools to develop mentoring and training to increase self-esteem. • Allow parents the opportunity to participate in school activities with their children to instill the value of education in the child. |
| <p>Housing</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are subsidized housing programs in all Regions. • Homelessness is not an allowable barrier to participation. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing needs to be better aligned with TANF sanctions. Currently, grant reduction means that housing authorities reduce the rent amount -- making sanctions less of a motivator for participation. • Need a focus on collaborating with housing authorities. |

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| <p>Local Planning Areas</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The partners have conflicting performance measures. • Creative coding allows partners to get around the 12-month education limit. • LEP clients receive more one-on-one case management with LEP providers. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Planning Areas (LPA) needs a redesign. • Need to build programs that bridge the gap between job ready clients and those who require more training. • Develop uniform performance measures across the partnerships. • Look at other programs that serve hard-to-serve populations. • Must recognize mental health needs of participants. • Need a time limit on how long clients can stay in the LEP pathway. • Allow all TANF clients to use the colleges' job placement resources. |
| <p>60-Month Time Limit</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The program currently has a 60-month time limit but it has not been enforced • Data indicates that clients move to Washington State once they have exhausted their TANF benefit months in other states, due to the non-enforcement of time limits in our state. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 60-month time limit needs to be enforced, but the program needs to clearly define who is eligible for time-limit extensions. • A disability assessment should be required to determine eligibility for a time-limit extension, just as it is for the Disability Lifeline program. • A child medical statement should be required if the extension is based on the care of a disabled child. • Assign a protective payee for all clients in an extension. • Monitor clients receiving a time-limit extension to ensure the situation exempting them from termination does not change. • Sanction and terminate any case receiving a time-limit extension if they have participation requirements and are not following through with these requirements. • Create a panel to review and approve all time-limit extensions. • Clients need to know that time limits will actually be enforced. If time limits are actually going to happen, the state needs to follow through with what they have told the public. |
| <p>Policy</p> | | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The general perception is that current policy is based solely on budget targets and frequently changing measures. • Are we using all of the flexibility federal law allows for? For instance, the federal government allows you to count Voc Ed as participation but we do not. The federal requirements for two-parent households are also different, and allow one parent to stay home until age 5 but we do not. • Congress's original intent with TANF was to improve the odds that children will be healthy, have stability in their lives, and be ready to learn. Are we focusing our policies on children? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We need to be careful that parents don't stay out of the workforce too long; it is hard to get back in. • Need policy that stops the cycle of generational welfare. • Need clear and real consequences for non-participation. • Expand TFA to all parents. • Consider how we pace the reduction in benefits as wages go up. Clients need to be able to transition from assistance to full self-sufficiency gradually. • Reconsider what is viewed as assets -- for example, a person currently cannot have resources over \$3,000. A car is critical to getting a job, yet |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are we using the research that demonstrated the “tipping point”? | <p>you are ineligible if it is worth more than \$3,000.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When a client is in non-participation status, they continue to receive benefits. Sometimes months go by before the benefits are reduced via sanction. Can the benefits be held via EBT and can we require the client to come into the office so they stay in contact with us? • Parent should not be able to use Quest cards at Horse Tracks and Casinos. • We need to be able to see our definition of “supports” more broadly, in terms of how we can use service dollars. Today we can only use service dollars for work activity by the adult. |
| Budget | | |
| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To make the changes being envisioned we would need a capped program, and we would have to use time limits and more effective incentives and sanctions. • Utilize early intervention programs with DEL and other agencies for resource leverage. • Give clients benefits instead of cash. • Prorate TANF grant based on participation, i.e. clients who participate 50 % of the time receive a grant that is %50 of the payment standard. • Non-needy grants should be based on relative need. |