

Welfare to Work Field Office/Regional Workshop Final Report HUD Oregon and Washington Field Offices

Addresses: HUD/Oregon: 400 S.W. Sixth Avenue, Suite 700, Portland, OR 97204

Phone: HUD/Oregon Office: (503) 326-3903

Contacts/Titles: HUD/Oregon Office: Elizabeth Santone
HUD/Oregon Office: Joy McCray

Date of Visit: June 12, 2003

TA Providers: Katherine Dahlem, Abt Associates – AK and WA Welfare to Work Sites
Kristin Winkel, Abt Associates – OR Welfare to Work Sites

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: WtW Workshop Agenda

Attachment B: WtW Workshop Participant List

Attachment C: Evaluation Tabulations

Attachment D: List of WtW sites in Alaska, Oregon, and Washington with number of vouchers awarded

SUMMARY OF WORKSHOP ACTIVITIES

A. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Welcome from Elizabeth Santone and Joy McCray

Ms. Santone and Ms. McCray from the HUD Oregon Field Office welcomed the participants to the second annual Pacific Northwest Welfare to Work (WtW) Workshop. Ms. McCray reviewed the agenda, which is attached to this report as Attachment A.

Introductions

Participants introduced themselves and their agencies. In addition to the WtW and FSS staff from 14 housing agencies in Alaska, Oregon, and Washington, representatives from local TANF agencies were also in attendance. A copy of the workshop participant list is attached to this report as Attachment B.

Comments from Robert Woodard, OIG

Robert Woodard, Deputy Regional Director, and Rose Capalungan, Senior Auditor, from the Seattle HUD Office of Inspector General (OIG) introduced themselves and spoke briefly about their recently completed audit of the Seattle Housing Authority's (SHA) WtW program, and the upcoming internal audit of the Welfare to Work program. A copy of the SHA audit is available on the HUD OIG's website, www.hudoig.gov. Mr. Woodard said the internal WtW audit is scheduled to begin in approximately two weeks. He urged the sites to read their original WtW applications and the corresponding NOFA to ensure that they are continuing to meet the program requirements, and they are operating their programs as described in their applications. If sites want to change the way they operate their programs, it is possible to amend their original applications – as long as they are still in compliance with the NOFA, and update their administrative plan if changes are warranted.

B. HUD CONFERENCE CALLS

Conference Call with Kathryn Greenspan, HUD Headquarters

Kathryn Greenspan participated via telephone. She welcomed all the participants and expressed her thanks for their efforts on the Welfare to Work program. She reminded everyone of the next national teleconference on June 26th on the subject of partnering with community colleges. She also asked the workshop participants to suggest possible topics of interest for future teleconferences. In addition, Ms. Greenspan mentioned that HUD is currently reviewing the PIC system and the information collected, and she was pleased to see that a PIC coach would also be addressing the group.

Conference Call with Suzanne Manville, HUD Seattle Field Office

Suzanne Olmstead Manville, PIC coach from the Seattle office, participated via telephone and spoke to the group about the internal HUD task force that is looking at how to streamline the 50058 form in order to alleviate the reporting burden. Currently, three options are being considered to reduce the number of lines on the form. She encouraged participants to e-mail her at Suzanne_Manville@hud.gov with comments and suggestions for streamlining the 50058.

Participants were then invited to ask her questions regarding the PIC system or the 50058. The items discussed were:

- Indicator #12 on the 50058 becomes effective for PHAs with fiscal year-ends of June 30th at the end of this month (June 2003).
- When late HQS reviews do not appear on the 50058 report list, sites should be sure to document this on their SEMAP reports.
- The standard cut-off date for data extract submission for 50058 and SEMAP is the PHA's fiscal year-end. For example, if the last day of the fiscal year is June 30th, then the cutoff for submission is June 30th.

C. PANEL ON TANF

Representatives from the TANF agencies in Oregon, Alaska, and Washington participated in a panel about upcoming changes in their TANF programs.

Jeff Stell, TANF Program Analyst, Oregon Department of Human Services, addressed the group with information about Oregon's welfare program. The State of Oregon's TANF program is somewhat unique because it received a waiver from the federal government in March 1996 to implement its own version of TANF. When Oregon's welfare waiver program began, the caseload initially dropped 60 percent, but has now

leveled off. Under Oregon's waiver program, several unique options that differ from the national TANF program are in effect:

- Households can only be on continual assistance for 24 months out of a 48-month period.
- Teenagers are required to live at home, or in foster care or other appropriate setting, and attend school.
- Client needs are stated as the focus of the program.

Oregon has requested an extension of its waiver set to expire on June 30, 2003, but had not received one as of June 12th. If an extension is not granted, the standard TANF program five-year time limits will be put into effect for the state. Mr. Stell also briefly mentioned that nationally Congress has not yet reauthorized TANF and is expected to debate the topic this summer. If no decision is made to change TANF regulations, the program will likely be reauthorized with no changes until after the 2004 election.

Erin Tolles, Social Worker III, State of Alaska Division of Public Assistance (DPA), participated via telephone. Since TANF was implemented in 1997, many Alaskan households have started hitting the five-year time limit and a number of extensions have been granted. Ms. Tolles highlighted some of the unique circumstances of the TANF population in Alaska. About 33 percent of the TANF households live in rural areas where transportation to employment opportunities is extremely limited. In many Alaskan native villages, unemployment is over 50 percent, and the native corporations and schools are the only local employers. Native corporations may need to spend millions of dollars to create work programs for TANF recipients if proposed federal work requirements are enacted. Although Alaska is a Work First state, many people on the remaining TANF caseloads have multiple obstacles to employment, making them a much harder to serve population.

Ms. Tolles talked about her work with the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation (AHFC, the Alaska WtW site) to develop a partnership to expand the FSS program to more WtW participants throughout the state. Due to existing AHFC staff resources and the limited number of WtW voucher holders in smaller Alaskan communities, AHFC's FSS program is currently only available to WtW participants in Anchorage and Juneau. AHFC and DPA have executed a MOU to have DPA staff provide FSS case management services for AHFC WtW participants who are also DPA clients (TANF recipients). The AHFC board approved the implementation plan for this partnership at its June meeting.

Ms. Tolles also discussed Alaska's pilot Diversion Program. If a potential TANF recipient is eligible and job ready, a lump sum payment of up to three months of welfare benefits (up to \$2900) can be given as an alternative to receiving monthly TANF benefits. This allows participants to pay for expenses related to starting a new job, and lowers the number of people on the TANF caseload. She said the pilot program in Anchorage and Juneau is proving to be very successful, and the State plans to expand the Diversion Program to other locales throughout Alaska.

Alaska's DPA has produced year-end reports on its TANF program for the past four years. The current report for Year Four is included in the workshop packet.

Christy Frederickson, Washington State Department of Social and Health Services, Work First Program, also participated by telephone. Since TANF was implemented in 1997, Washington State has seen a 40 percent reduction in caseload. In August of 2002, the first group of households hit their five-year time limits. The State has created three extension categories for this group: disability, single parent with large family, and child-only welfare recipient. Currently, the State is reviewing the services provided upfront. Ms. Frederickson described Washington's version of a diversion program. In lieu of a monthly TANF benefit payment, eligible applicants with a job offer can receive an upfront cash grant of \$1500 for initial job-related expenses.

Ms. Frederickson discussed the impact of potential new work requirements, which include a higher requirement for weekly hours of participation and a reduction in eligible work-related activities. Should these requirements

be enacted, Washington State will need to reorient its program to pay for additional activities to provide participants with work experience.

D. ROUNDTABLES

All workshop participants had the opportunity to rotate among three different roundtable discussions to discuss topics related to the WtW program.

Family Self-Sufficiency (Joy McCray, facilitator):

Highlights of this roundtable included:

- At many of the larger WtW sites, the FSS programs are already fully enrolled and there are long waiting lists for FSS slots. The sites said many non-WtW people have been on their FSS waiting lists for nearly three years, and there would be very negative feedback if WtW participants were allowed to move to the head of the list. This would further delay the time when the FSS program would be available to non-WtW Section 8 voucher holders.
- At many of the smaller WtW sites, the PHAs are having difficulty encouraging WtW participants to enroll in the FSS program. Some PHA staff indicated that many of these participants are first-time renters and working for the first time, and it is difficult to convince them about the benefits of enrolling in the FSS program.
- There was also brainstorming on how staff can encourage more WtW participants to enroll in FSS. Sites indicated that they continue to include information about FSS in their initial WtW briefings; however, they need to look for new ways to reach existing WtW participants to encourage their participation.
- Terry Anani of the Housing Authority of Island County (WA) talked about her strategies for achieving 100 percent enrollment of WtW participants in the FSS program. She and her staff made one-on-one contacts to encourage enrollment, and followed-up closely with each participant after they enrolled. Ms. Anani said their WtW program was small (35 vouchers), so it was easier to achieve 100 percent FSS enrollment than it would be for housing authorities with hundreds of WtW participants.
- Peggy Martini, the Housing Authority of Portland (OR) FSS Coordinator, talked about the importance of cultural competency in linking FSS coordinators with participants. She said HAP has FSS coordinators who are fluent in Spanish, Russian, and other languages and can better understand the family dynamics in multi-cultural populations.

TANF (Kristin Winkel, facilitator):

Highlights of this roundtable included:

- The Oregon Adult and Family Services Division's case history software program known as TRACS (Transition Referral and Client Self-Sufficiency) provides useful client-level data for tracking the progress of WtW participants who receive TANF in meeting their goals; however, PHA access to this data varies greatly among the Oregon WtW sites. Some PHAs can get narrative data on individuals regarding services and employment status, yet others receive only basic household data. The barrier appears to be confidentiality concerns at local TANF offices, rather than technological glitches. Some Washington WtW sites also reported difficulties accessing data from their local TANF offices.
- It was noted that occasionally a TANF case manager will certify that a person is eligible for a WtW voucher in order to get a family housed, even when the head of household is in the process of applying for or receiving SSI. Staff mentioned that they have also received domestic violence referrals; however,

many of these referrals needed to address a multitude of issues before they would be able to return to work, and were unable to meet WtW work requirements.

- Jeff Stell of the OR TANF program encouraged workshop participants to start a dialogue with the operations or district manager at their local TANF office. Staff turnover is generally lower in these positions, and these staff may be able to provide client data more readily. Once a relationship is established, he recommended that WtW staff attend TANF staff meetings on a regular basis to share updated program information.
- A PHA staff person from WA State suggested sending batches of e-mail verification requests to the TANF office to expedite the WtW application process, as opposed to sending verification requests one at a time.
- Staff from three WtW sites, Bellingham (WA), Washington County (OR), and Salem (OR), are part of eligibility teams at their local TANF offices, and regularly meet with TANF applicants to explain the WtW program. This involvement greatly reduces the time required to certify someone for WtW, and generally ensures that eligibility certifications are accurate.
- The impact of HIPAA, the new federal regulations regarding confidentiality of medical information, was discussed. Mr. Stell explained that for many states, including Oregon, HIPAA is not relevant because the State's own confidentiality requirements are stricter than the federal standards. In states with similar strict requirements, HIPAA should not be a factor in limiting access to TANF recipient data.
- Everett Housing Authority (WA) staff described a grant they received from the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services to provide supplemental services to WtW households. These additional services were designed to provide further support for WtW participants to achieve and maintain their self-sufficiency. This was a competitive grant, and the Snohomish County and Bellingham housing authorities also received funding for supplemental services to assist WtW participants.
- The Confederated Tribes of Siletz mentioned that they are one of only two tribes in Oregon to run a TANF program, and these programs are not governed by state regulations.

Next Steps (Kathi Dahlem, facilitator):

Highlights of this roundtable included:

- There was overwhelming frustration that the WtW program has very "little teeth", and it is up to individual housing authorities to set up programmatic requirements. The workshop participants indicated it is very frustrating to work with WtW participants who do not want to go to work, or who are unable to work because of physical or mental conditions. Some sites with work requirements indicated they are anticipating increasing difficulties enforcing these requirements since more people are experiencing problems finding and/or keeping jobs with the economic downturn. All three states are experiencing significantly higher unemployment rates now compared to when WtW program began.
- PHAs from larger WtW sites (King County (WA), Portland (OR), Seattle (WA)) indicated that they have been contacted by local Legal Service agencies with objections to PHAs establishing work requirements for WtW participants. Their argument is that since work requirements were not included in the WtW NOFA, then housing authorities should not be able to force these requirements on WtW participants.

- As previously mentioned, WtW sites said one of their biggest obstacles has been referrals from TANF offices and service providers of people who do not really meet the intent of the WtW program. Many of these referrals are unable or unwilling to work because of a multiple of problems. Agencies are so desperate to find housing for these individuals that they will provide incomplete or inaccurate information to the housing authority. Sites were encouraged to meet with their TANF agency and other service providers to remind them of the goals and intent of the WtW program, including HUD's program requirements and expectations. It is also important to enlist the support of TANF case managers to assist WtW participants on their paths to self-sufficiency.
- Some PHAs indicated that many of their WtW participants are first-time renters, and are younger than their average Section 8 voucher holders. With these younger participants, there have been more problems with evictions, tensions with landlords and neighbors, and late rental payments. Sites were encouraged to find local programs that offer tenant workshops or materials for first-time renters, including information on how rental history can impact a person's credit history.
- A couple of WtW sites that previously had achieved 100 percent lease-up are now seeing their lease-up rates decline, and they are having to do more outreach to keep their WtW slots filled. Some housing authorities indicated that it has been difficult to ask the local TANF agency or other services providers to maintain their momentum in referring eligible WtW participants, since these agencies are experiencing financial and staffing cutbacks and increasing workloads. The sites said that the WtW program is more labor intensive and expensive to administer than their regular Section 8 programs. Sites also said that the tremendous push to quickly lease-up all the WtW vouchers at the start of the program, meant they did not have the opportunity to work more closely with WtW on services and employment issues at the onset of the program. Many of original WtW participants are still unclear about the program's intent and how it differs from the regular Section 8 program.
- Another frustration expressed is that the WtW program has no "graduation" requirements, so it is difficult to transition people off WtW vouchers as long as they remain income-eligible. Sites discussed how enrollment in the FSS program was one of the only avenues available to help transition people off WtW vouchers because FSS has time limits. Sites discussed opportunities to link WtW participants to new homeownership programs. Pete Grodt from Snohomish County talked about how his housing authority programmatically "graduates" people from the WtW program after a two-year program of services; yet, these graduates continue to hold WtW vouchers. Sites discussed strategies for developing WtW graduation ceremonies, similar to the ones they have for FSS graduates, to promote individual success stories.
- Pete Grodt from Snohomish County discussed phase two of the internal evaluation of the Everett and Snohomish County's WtW programs. A copy of the evaluation report is included in the workshop packet. Other sites said they are still in discussion stages about how to best address data collection for a programmatic evaluation. Mr. Woodard from the OIG reminded sites that they described how they would track and monitor their programs in their WtW applications, and it is important for sites to confirm that this is how they are doing their monitoring.

E. WRAP-UP QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS

- Sites mentioned that there is a difference in how local TANF offices define TANF benefits, which could generate some WtW eligibility questions. Sites requested that HUD clarify what types of TANF benefits (e.g., cash benefits, child care subsidies) meet the eligibility requirements for WtW participants.

- Jeff Stell encouraged WtW sites in Oregon who are having difficulties accessing TANF TRACS data because of confidentiality issues to contact Susan Columbus at (503) 945-5600. He said she may also be able to help the TANF agency in Washington State understand how Oregon was able to overcome confidentiality concerns in providing this data to housing agencies.
- FDIC's Money Smart software program was highlighted as an effective educational tool for WtW and FSS participants to improve their money management skills. A few sites have recently obtained the software and several others were interested in getting more information. Kathi Dahlem spoke with Ron Ashford at HUD's HOPE VI office to follow up on HOPE VI sites that have started using this software. Information will be forthcoming from the St. Petersburg Housing Authority in Florida about their successful implementation of this program. TA Providers will arrange a teleconference for Alaska, Oregon, and Washington sites that expressed an interest in the program. (If there is additional interest, a discussion of Money Smart could also be incorporated into a future national WtW teleconference.) HUD's Office of Public and Indian Housing has signed an MOU with the FDIC to encourage the use of the Money Smart Program. The MOU includes specific references to the WtW and FSS programs. See www.hud.gov/offices/pih/publications/letter_fdic_mou.cfm for additional information about Money Smart.
- AHFC said it would provide a copy of the self-certification form it uses for households that no longer receive TANF cash assistance, but are still eligible for WtW vouchers. This form will be distributed to the other Pacific Northwest WtW sites.