



*Joint Newark & Essex County
Welfare to Work Committee Meeting
Tuesday, August 11, 2015 at 10:00 a.m.
50 S. Clinton Street, Room 2070
East Orange, New Jersey 07018*

AGENDA

1. Opening Remarks
2. Introductions
3. Approval of Minutes
4. Welcoming Remarks, Sam Okparaeke
5. Presentation of Management Staff Duties and Responsibilities
6. Presentation of Case Manager's Duties and Responsibilities
7. Flow Chart Illustrating a Clients' path within Welfare to Work
8. Questions Submitted before the Meeting
9. Tour
10. Meeting Adjourned



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Tuesday, August 11, 2015

50 S. Clinton Street, East Orange, NJ

Meeting Minutes

Attendees:

Alexandra Adameczyk, Mary Alexander, Kelli Bell-Taylor, Amina Bey, Adriana Crawford, Joe Epps, Jr., Vesta Godwin Clark, Danny Denise Gonzalez, Lori Hill, Davetta Lane, Tolu Lanrewaju, Elena Martinez, Julius Montford, Dawn Morris, Curtia Orr, Miriam Rodriguez, Janine Schaeffer, Safanya Searcy, Lynn Sternstein, David Weiner

Meeting Called to Order: Co-Chairperson David Weiner

Mr. Weiner greeted the committee members and initiated a round table roll call. He then called a motion for the minutes to be approved; minutes were approved and accepted. Julius Montford welcomed meeting attendees and extended an apology on behalf of Sam Okparaeké, who was called to another meeting at the last minute. Mr. Montford began to address questions that were pre-submitted by the committee.

Question 1: Are there sufficient personnel for accomplishing the mission of the organization? If not, what are the constraints on acquiring necessary employees?

Mr. Montford advised that the budget was cut \$3.5 million. As a result of this cut, the agency has been unable to hire adequate staff. There are currently one hundred seventy-six employees at the Division of Training and Employment. The division receives funding from the Dept. of Human Services for case management, transportation and Transportation Block Grants. He explained that case management money is restricted to staffing that deals with Welfare to Work clients. The Dept. of Labor also provides funding for case management for employment directed activity. He mentioned that the agency has been flat line budgeted for the last four years, despite increases in cost of living, union contracts and indirect costs. He relayed that he and Mr. Okparaeké are in the process of assessing staff to see if it is feasible to shift a few employees around in their effort to increase and improve the agency's quality of service.

Question 2: Is there a client service ratio from intake to placement?

Mr. Montford asked Mary Alexander to address this question. Ms. Alexander explained that participants are identified through a state list provided by a case worker. The client then meets with four different staff members for a complete social assessment followed by a determination

on activity engagement. If the client is already engaged in an activity, the agency usually continues to support it through the system, which is currently under review. If not, the client is put into an individual job search.

Question 3: What training do servicers receive? Are there required certifications? Is there continuing education?

Mr. Epps clarified that the question was directed towards staff training. Mr. Montford replied that the County was in the process of developing a Staff Development Training Module with Essex County College, consisting of WIOA and Welfare to Work Training and mentioned the possibility of Prudential facilitating additional internal staff training. He stressed that staff training is ongoing and that Operations Meetings are held monthly to address any issues and to present any new programs or initiatives. Mr. Epps compared Newark and Essex County's RFP process and expressed that Newark's process seemed to be more rigorous. He requested a copy of the County's RFP process. Mr. Montford advised that the City of Newark has multiple funding sources, while Essex County's RFP is strictly funded through grants. As a result of this, Newark attempts to capture the criteria for their RFP's in one shot. Mr. Montford advised that Essex County has shared RFP's with the City of Newark and they will continue to work closely. He ensured that the WIB will be provided with a copy of the Essex County's RFP process.

Question 4: Are client processing procedures mandated by statute? How often are they reviewed for compliance?

Yes. Processing procedures are mandated by the Department of Labor and Mr. Montford asked Ms. Adamczyk to elaborate. She stated that clients are processed by employment specialists who strive to make the best assessment of client needs and determine the current availability of programs. Every aspect is randomly reviewed for quality assurance. She mentioned that there are reports that enable the agency to determine when a client is inactive, share data with employment specialists so that they are aware of their case loads and quarterly reports that check the client to worker ratio. Mr. Weiner asked, "How does the quality assurance factor into the ultimate participation rate?" Ms. Adamczyk replied that in order to ensure the agency gets full credit, clients must be enrolled in core activities and any services attached to those activities (i.e. transportation, childcare) are carefully monitored. Mr. Montford added that state reports are often antiquated, two to three months behind and are a hindrance to Welfare to Work. He added that for quality assurance purposes, the agency gets the opportunity to do checks and balances internally and with the information in the State of New Jersey's system. Mr. Weiner raised a question concerning why the County of Essex would wait for the State of New Jersey to provide information that the Division of Welfare already has. Mr. Montford replied that they don't have the access to view or make changes and the systems between agencies don't communicate. Mr. Weiner asked for clarity on why qualified vendors are not responding to the RFP's. Mr. Montford advised that Welfare to Work is no longer a lucrative business and added that the State of New Jersey no longer allows a vendor to put in e-time. Ms. Bey spoke about fifteen years ago when twenty two vendors were awarded million dollar contracts. She expressed how as time passed, money began to dry up from the state and local areas. These funds that kept local agencies alive, are barely a supplement today. She added that if an agency is certified to do training, they often do better with Individual Training Accounts (ITA's) through WIOA. Ms.

Gonzalez asked for an estimate of the average cost per participant. Mr. Montford replied that the cost is about \$2200 for remedial training; \$3200 for vocational; \$400 for job search. He advised that the agency had to restructure how they do contracts to maximize full service by getting clients into programs and allow businesses with the opportunity to serve the client.

Question 5: What is the average length of time that it takes for a client to be fully entered in the system?

This question is two-fold. Once a client goes through intake and begins to receive services, it takes three months before clients attend orientation. Mr. Montford advised that clients are made aware of activities that are available for them. He admitted that one of the challenges is finding placement for clients who might fall into the category of being remedial. These particular clients do not have the necessary skills to complete the vocational training. He further explained that there were very few vendors who target adult basic education and that every program has pre-program requirements. Mr. Montford also mentioned that McGraw Hill recently sold their Tabe system to another company and suggested this change has resulted in major glitches in the system. There are even talks about the test being administered electronically through computer.

Question 6: Is the client file readily available across departments for processing? What privacy controls are there to protect client information? Do databases have the capacity to interface for efficient tracking of clients?

Mr. Montford explained that client files are entered into Omega and the files stay in his department. Welfare enters into another system, but the workers have the ability to view Omega. The biggest problem is that his department does not have the ability to change anything (i.e. addresses, coding issues or change client status to active). For example, if a client's addresses changes and it is not updated in welfare's system, any communications that are mailed out will be sent to the old address on file. Mr. Montford expressed that DEDTE is in the process of meeting with the Division of Welfare in attempts to rectify these issues through cross-agency training. He hopes that this initiative will connect bridges. Mr. Weiner expressed that Welfare used to be DEDTE equivalent back in the 90's and stated that the current issue between the two agencies has more to do with case banking. He said that welfare workers are inundated with more applications than they can process and they simply don't have enough time to focus on everything that they need to be focused on. He admitted that there are matters that must be addressed and he wished the agency luck with Director Janet Page Hawkins.

Question 7: How does the department hold clients responsible for meeting qualifications to receive any level of assistance/training? Is the sanction process effective?

Mr. Montford asked Lori Hill to elaborate on this process. She advised that clients are required to participate in a program once they begin to receive cash assistance. This program could be employment based, assigned or an approved activity. The employment specialist monitors them through reports. Once it is noticed that a client is in non-compliance, the sanction process begins. The employment specialist must make two phone calls to the client. If the specialist is successful at reaching the client, the client must come in and reengage the client, reschedule them for an activity and make a determination of the problem. If the specialist fails to make contact, she/he

then submits paperwork to have the client sanctioned. Once the sanction is processed, it takes anywhere between thirty and sixty days to hit. She admitted that there were numerous problems stemming from coding issues. She added that some of these issues occur because the Rector Street office is responsible for processing sanction reports. She further explained that while sanctioning is not a priority for the Division of Welfare, it greatly affects DTE's participation rates, jeopardizing funding. There is a ninety day window if a client falls out of compliance again after being non-compliant and sanctioned; if this happens, they are suspended. Welfare can't engage a client in a closed suspension (OS). In this instance, the client must reapply and go through the process again. Mr. Montford spoke about how broken the system is when only about thirty sanctions hit out of the 400 clients that were processed to be sanctioned. He explained how the clients understand the system and once sanctioned, a large portion of them do what is required of them so that they don't lose benefits. Mr. Weiner added that sanctions are not prioritized by the Div. of Welfare because they are not as imperative to welfare funding. Welfare's priority is getting Medicaid and food stamps done in a timely fashion. One of the committee members suggested that coding should be reviewed by supervisors because improper coding issues present a spinning wheel of problems. Ms. Bey expressed that both agencies (Division of Welfare and DTE) are two halves of a whole and the reason why many of the issues exist is because there has been a culture of separatism. Ms. Bey commended Sam and Julius for sitting down and having conversations to work through these issues with directors because it has not happened in the past. She relayed that this committee is attempting to find out how this system works and is making strides to improve it. She further stated that while people are not prioritizing and playing the blame game, there are clients who depend on this money that are suffering in the meantime. The Division of Welfare is income maintenance for these people who require this money to survive; they are then referred to the Division of Training and Employment so that they can receive the education and employment training so that they can become self-sufficient and no longer need the income maintenance from welfare. Ms. Bey stressed that we need not make excuses, nor play the blame game. Mr. Montford urged that the process to improve the system is ongoing and will not happen overnight, but we will keep hammering at it until we get it right. He suggested that shifting Welfare Staff that works directly with the DTE would help make things easier.

Question 8: What venues are used to inform residents about the Department, its purpose, how it functions and what benefits exist for assistance and employment opportunities?

Clients know that once they receive income maintenance, they know that they must participate in Welfare to Work. He relayed that clients receive an orange and white handbook which serves as a marketing tool to inform them of everything that they should be involved in, what they are entitled to and advising them of their weekly responsibilities. Mr. Montford advised that three information televisions are being installed so that clients can be well informed of what is going on. Danny Denise Gonzalez suggested that perhaps the television could also be used for vendors or partnering agencies to inform clients of opportunities or events of interest.

Question 9: Is the Department meeting its goals as mandated by county, state and federal sources?

The federal mandate is for TANF to have a fifty percent participation rate, while the agency is currently at twenty-three percent. Mr. Montford advised that there are coding and in-house issues that affect the current rate; these issues have been discussed at the Operations Meetings. He also mentioned that it was still unclear how things are going to play out with WIOA which requires that performance standards to be met. He further suggested that performance standards must include how to reach participation rates. For example, next year TANF is supposed to come under performance standards and how would one judge one participant from another. Mr. Montford also advised that funding will be determined based on information entered into AOSOS on TANF clients. Essex County has the largest TANF population (5200 clients) that meet the requirements for Welfare to Work. About 3200 are required to participate in an activity, yet sometimes the number is inaccurate because there might be child only cases included in those numbers. Some of the cases are sitting in Trenton, awaiting closure because someone must sign off in order for them to be closed. If there are two hundred cases that are pending closure, this hurts DTE because the numbers count against them. At the last GSETA Meeting, there was talk about doing away with the federal disregard which means that the agency will never get to fifty percent participation.

Question 11: What impediments exist to accomplishing the mandated goals? How are the impediments being addressed to improve performance and meet mandated goals? When was the last department review? Results?

This year with RFP's, the County of Essex asked for specific vocational training skills based upon what the WIB and labor requirements. Everything was tailored to be in line with WIOA and to work through the process of choosing a vendor. The job development unit is currently being restructured so that there is increased communication with employment specialists. There are several positive recruitments going on with companies such as Stop and Shop, Amazon and Tiffany and Co. Mr. Montford expressed that they are attempting to help guide clients into self-sufficiency.

Mr. Epps asked whether there was any feedback during the breakout session from PCG. Ms. Bey advised that a full report of each committee was recently completed and will be made available to each WIB member after Mr. Okparaeke reviews it.

Mr. Weiner advised that the Essex County Freeholder Board recently put out a list of all recent RFP's, awarded projects and to whom. He suggested that if anyone was interested in seeing the particulars,

Danny Denise Gonzalez asked if a tour of the facility was still possible. Mr. Montford agreed to take the group on a tour and thanked his staff and meeting attendees for their participation. This concluded committee business. Meeting was adjourned. **The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, October 20, 2015 at CWA Local 1081, 60 Park Place- Suite 501 in Newark, New Jersey 07102 at 10 a.m.**