

WORDS FROM THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

Keeping You Informed

The challenges that low-income families face today are as great as they have ever been in recent history. It is impossible for one group of people to know all there is to know about what it will take to help strengthen families today and in the years ahead. I believe one way to serve them is to learn from the expertise and experience of all of our TANF workers and programs throughout the state and the nation.

The TANF E-newsletter continues to provide a forum for our TANF team in Arkansas to share that expertise and experience. I hope the stories that you read in this issue focuses on five TANF participants from each local AOC area, their relationships with their case managers, and how they were able to receive assistance in achieving their personal and professional goals.

I invite you to share your client success stories, innovative activities, and the many creative ways we can serve and improve our organization for our clients, our state, and one another.

By the way, in case you were not aware we are Change Agents! For this reason, we have coined the theme of our upcoming TANF Staff Training Conference "Champions of Change: Empowering Arkansas Families for the 21st Century Workforce." The training conference will focus on the following **TANF Core Competencies: screening and assessment, employability training, brokering for resources, documentation and narration, & performance excellence.** Please mark your calendars for this educational, informative, and inspiring event! The conference is scheduled for August 10-11, 2011, and will be held at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Little Rock. More information will be forthcoming regarding registration, hotel reservations, and how to prepare your local office to attend the conference.

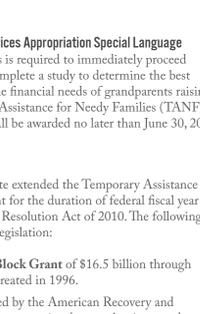
I thank each of you for your dedication and hard work, and I look forward to seeing you at the conference in August.



TANF CASE REVIEW TRAINING COMPLETED!

On February 24, 2011, the TANF Quality Assurance Unit conducted the final TANF Case Review Training in DWS Central Office. Since Fall 2010, Derrick Black and Don Childers have provided this training to DWS Local Office Managers and TANF Program Supervisors.

The TANF Case Reviews are a federally-mandated requirement prescribed in Arkansas' TANF Work Verification Plan. TANF Case Reviews are important to the verification of program participation in allowable work activities.



TANF PROGRAM SUPERVISORS MEETINGS

On March 8 and March 10, 2011, the Central Office TANF staff conducted two (2) one-day meetings with the TANF Program Supervisors at the Holiday Inn - Airport. These meetings were designed to share information and share best practices.

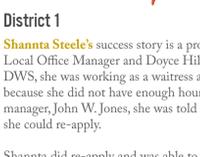
Topics included: Program performance, the TANF Budget, Assigning Work Activities, the TANF Customer Support, TANF Vehicle usage, and Transportation Provider Agreements. In addition to the TANF Program Supervisors, the DWS Area Operations Chiefs (AOCs) were in attendance as well. We hope to implement regular quarterly meetings with this group.

REMINDER

Have you reviewed your TEA or Work Pays clients' Work Participation Status (WPS) Code lately? If not, why not do it today!

LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

The 88th General Assembly's Regular Session convened on Monday, January 10, 2011. While DWS did not envision the introduction of legislation that will have a serious impact upon the TANF Program, there have been some bills filed that could potentially impact the program in some fashion.



Act 937 - Department of Workforce Services Appropriation Special Language
The Department of Workforce Services is required to immediately proceed with procuring a qualified vendor to complete a study to determine the best and most appropriate way to address the financial needs of grandparents raising grandchildren through the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant Program. The contract shall be awarded no later than June 30, 2011.

Federal Legislation

In late November, the House and Senate extended the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant for the duration of federal fiscal year 2011, as part of H.R. 4783, the Claims Resolution Act of 2010. The following summarizes the changes made by this legislation:

- The bill extends the basic **TANF Block Grant** of \$16.5 billion through September 30, 2011. This level has not been changed since TANF was created in 1996.
- The bill does not extend the **TANF Emergency Fund**, which was created by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, and expired on September 30, 2010. This program assisted states that increased spending on subsidized jobs, basic assistance and short-term benefits during fiscal years 2009 and 2010.
- The **TANF Contingency Fund**, which had been funded at \$2 billion in 1996, ran out of funds early in FY 2010.
- The Continuing Appropriations Act of 2011 (P.L. 111-242, the continuing resolution), enacted earlier in this year, had provided up to \$506 million for the Contingency Fund for FY 2011 and up to \$612 million for FY 2012. The Claims Resolution Act withdraws any unobligated FY 2011 money from the Contingency Fund and uses it to fund the Supplemental Grants. Health and Human Services (HHS) had already awarded \$334 million from the Contingency Fund for the first three months of FY 2011.
- Each year since TANF was created, the **TANF Supplemental Grants** have provided an additional increment of funding to 17 states with historically low federal grants per poor person or growing population. Full funding for these grants is \$319 million per year. The Supplemental Grants were reduced through June 30, 2011, and are not available for the final quarter of FY2011 unless Congress acts to extend them. With no additional funding, states will only receive 66% of previous funding that they have received in previous years. Arkansas has been one of those 17 states and stands to lose \$2.1 million if this funding is not restored.

Reporting Requirements

- **Work Participation** – States must report on whether work-eligible individuals in families receiving assistance are participating in activities aimed at achieving self-sufficiency, even if these activities do not fall into one of the categories counting toward the work participation rate, or if the individual has exceeded the limits on job search/job readiness or vocational education.
- **Spending** – States must also report in more detail on how TANF and Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds, now reported as "other" and "authorized under prior law," are being used.
- Reports due by May 31 (for March data) and August 31 (for April-June data). Congress expects to use the findings from these reports as it considers TANF reauthorization.

REMINDER

Did You Know?

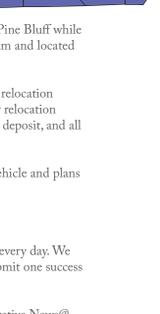
The Monthly Work Participation Status Reports can have a tremendous impact on our State's Work Participation Rates. Please make every effort to ensure that all cases contained on this report are reviewed and changes are made timely in order that we may benefit from the potential increases in participants' work activity hours of participation.

The applicable code definitions are: Code 14 = Required to participate, but not participating; and not subject to sanction for the reporting month. Code 18 = Required to participate and participating, but not meeting minimum participation requirements.

TANF Participant Success Stories!

District 1

Shanna Steele's success story is a product of the Fayetteville Local Office, where Terry Jaggars is the Local Office Manager and Doyce Hill is the Area Operations Chief. When Shanna first encountered DWS, she was working as a waitress at Denny's. She applied for the Work Pays program, but was denied because she did not have enough hours of participation to meet eligibility. After meeting with her case manager, John W. Jones, she was told what would be required of her to meet the Work Requirements so she could re-apply.



Shanna did re-apply and was able to meet initial eligibility. Shanna stated that she had recently completed the GED. She also noted that she was now employed with work that was more in-line with her career goals. In fact, Shanna was working two jobs—one with Arkansas Support Network and the other at St. John's Child Center.

Shanna is currently in her eighteenth month of the Work Pays Program. She has continually remained in full status of the work participation requirement, and has received two bonuses for continued employment.

District 2

Suzette Roberts became a participant of the Work Pays program through the Mena Local Office under Area Operations Chief Doyce Hill, and with the leadership of (Suzette) Local Office Manager Michael Caldwell. (Tom Bonkofsky is the current LOM for this office.) Suzette came to the program as a single parent without childcare and a lack of reliable transportation; these served as barriers to maintaining stable employment. She was employed at McDonald's but was unable to make it to work at times due to unreliable transportation.

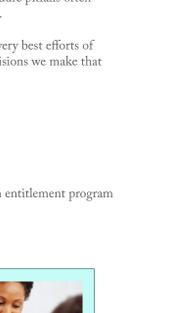


Suzette had the knowledge and ability to excel, but needed a little guidance and encouragement. Her Work Pays case manager, Jeannie Meadows, served as a mentor and encouraged her to set attainable goals. Within six months of employment at McDonald's, Suzette was promoted to Shift Trainer.

Suzette utilized childcare vouchers provided by the TANF program—which allowed her to place her son in daycare while she worked. She became eligible for the Vehicle Down Payment Assistance Program and also received assistance to obtain automobile insurance. Upon meeting some of her goals, she realized that the ability to obtain a career, and not just a job, was well within her reach. With that in mind, Suzette was able to become employed with the Tyson Company, and has since received an increase in her income. She no longer relies on childcare assistance and is now meeting this expense on her own. Ultimately, she would like to become a Supervisor at Tyson.

District 3

Brian Gray became a participant of the TEA program through the Paragould Local Office under Area Operations Chief Judy Duncan, and with the leadership of Local Office Manager Mike Glegghorn. Brian applied to go to school through Arkansas Rehabilitation and was majoring in Mortuary Science. He was able to receive mileage reimbursement when he had to travel to class at Arkansas State University-Mountain Home. Brian was also able to attend some of his classes via teleconference.



After completing his first year of Mortuary School, Brian learned that he would have to conduct an internship at a funeral home. It was difficult to find an internship site because most of the funeral homes in Paragould are family owned and operated. Brian did not let that stop him. With the help of his case manager, Tammy Smith, he was finally able to obtain an internship. Initially, he was given the task of picking up deceased bodies. As Brian's knowledge base increased, he was able to learn the art of properly preparing a body for burial.

Brian graduated from Mortuary School and is now gainfully employed at two funeral homes. He has also decided to enroll in college again to further his education.

District 4

Tari Wooten's journey to success began in the Searcy Local Office where Kay Price is the Local Office Manager and Jeanette Williams is the Area Operations Chief. Upon her arrival, Tari was able to identify the following barriers to employment: a lack of childcare, a felony record, past experiences of domestic abuse, and little work experience. However, Tari was determined not to let her past negatively affect her future.



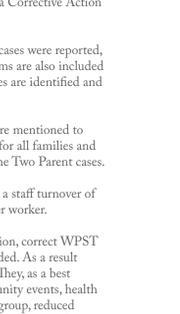
Tari shared that she had already completed 79 hours towards her degree in Early Childhood Development at Arkansas State University. She also told her TEA case manager, Linda Rockwell, that she had maintained a 4.0 grade point average.

It was the death of Tari's grandmother that inspired her to enroll in CNA classes at White County Medical Hospital. The Career Pathways program helped Tari with transportation and childcare for her two children while she was in school. TANF funds were utilized for the following supportive services: tuition assistance, uniforms for her CNA classes, and transportation reimbursements.

After graduating from her CNA classes, Tari gained full-time employment at Five Springs Nursing and Retirement Home. Tari was able to transition into the work pays program. Her Work Pays case manager, Tara Perez, shared information about TANF's Vehicle Down Payment Assistance Program. Tari was eligible to utilize this program to obtain a new vehicle when her old vehicle stopped working—which helped her maintain her employment. Tari has moved beyond her abusive relationship, continues to work towards a college degree, and works full-time—all while raising her two children and helping her parents, who are both disabled.

District 5

Ryan Ashley's success story began in the Pine Bluff Local Office, where William Campbell is the Local Office Manager and Wilma Gill is the Area Operations Chief. Ryan, who was initially living in Grady, Arkansas, is the mother of two small children. She was unemployed and living in low-income apartments.



During her initial assessment, with TEA Workforce Specialist Tamara Watts, Ryan expressed an interest in the field of nursing. The barriers that were identified included: a lack of childcare, no transportation, and lack of job skills. Ryan was assigned to vocational training at Olympia Healthcare in Pine Bluff while she completed her CNA training. With the help of supportive services, Ryan completed her CNA program and located employment with Davis Life Care center within three weeks of her graduation.

Because she was employed full-time in Pine Bluff and wanted to continue her education, Ryan requested relocation assistance from Lincoln County to Jefferson County. Ryan's TEA case closed due to employment and her relocation request was approved. With the relocation assistance, Ryan was able to pay her first month's rent, security deposit, and all utility deposits on a three bedroom home.

Ryan is still employed and recently passed the State Board Certification Exam. She purchased her own vehicle and plans to enter the LPN program at Southeast Arkansas College in July.

We Want to Hear From You!

We know there are great things happening in your local offices to help TEA and Work Pays participants every day. We will be accepting participant success stories on an ongoing basis. Each month, the newsletter staff will submit one success story per area to be showcased in the TANF E-Newsletter.

Want to brag on a participant from your local office? Send an e-mail request to ADWS.TANF.Administrative.News@arkansas.gov to receive a success story template and a participant release form. (Please note that both of these items must be completed in order for your story to be considered for publication.)

We look forward to hearing from you!

AREA OPERATION CHIEF (AOC) DISTRICTS



TABE TESTING TRAINING ACCOMPLISHED! (TESTS OF ADULT BASIC EDUCATION)

The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Program completed training for the Local Office program supervisors and recommended staff members across the State of Arkansas to administer the Tests of Adult Basic Education (TABE). The TABE Administrators Training provided staff with a practical overview of how to plan and administer TABE, how to score and report test results, and how to interpret, communicate, and use the test results. The training was designed to enhance the Local Offices' ability to provide services to program participants. Dr. Charlotte Robertson, TABE Consultant and Trainer for the State of Arkansas, conducted five (5) TABE Administrators Training classes for approximately eighty-seven (87) staff members across the State. The training of the staff increases the number of qualified proctors that are available to administer the test—in turn boosting the staff's ability to provide timely services to participants.

SOUND ADVICE FOR CONQUERING TEA

By Patrick Strickland • Camden Local Office Manager

The overall goal of TANF is to secure self-sufficiency for Arkansas families by achieving or exceeding federal and state performance indicator requirements. The only way to accomplish this task is for Managers, TEA Supervisors and Case Managers to make a greater commitment towards program improvement. It is incumbent upon us all to acquire the knowledge necessary to interpret, and apply TANF Policy. The best advice that I could provide to those that are trying to conquer TANF is to be thorough, compassionate, timely, informative, policy driven, knowledgeable, trainable, and retentive.

There are five fundamental stages that a case could go through during the state 24 month time limit; assessment, employment plan, exempt of deferment, sanction status, and case closure. During these stages, procedure pitfalls often occur that diminishes our opportunity to achieve excellence.

I challenge everyone on the TANF forefront to provide the program participants we serve with the very best efforts of professionalism, consistency, and effective case management. I often remind my staff, "The good decisions we make that impact the lives of the participants and their families are simply profound."

Pitfalls

Assessment Pitfalls:

- Assessments not completed within twenty days from the date of application approval.
- Failure to explain to participants that TEA is a work participation program as opposed to an entitlement program with consequences for non-compliance

The Employment Plan Pitfalls:

- Not assigning participants to the correct number of participation hours (20 hours if child is under six, 30 hours if child is six or older, 35 hours for two-parent household not receiving federally funded child care and 55 hours for a two-parent household receiving federally funded child care.)
- Assigning participants to a work activity site already established rather than one in a field of interest identified during the assessment. We should always broker for work activity sites.
- Not assigning participants to core activities
- Assigning participants to non-core activity without additional hours in a core activity needed to meet participation requirements
- Assigning a participant to AJS or job readiness for more than 4 weeks consecutively or exceeding six weeks in the preceding 12-month period
- Inadequate hours of participation keyed in ANSWER

Exempt/Deferment Pitfalls:

- Approval of exemptions and deferrals for illness without documentation from a physician stating the participant's inability to work
- Failure to request DHS to change the TEPC Code accordingly

Sanction Pitfalls:

- Failure to mail TEA-1 for non-compliance
- Sending multiple TEA-1's
- Failure to mail 1421's
- Failure to enforce the two-week participation requirement within the 15 business day period indicated on the 1421
- Inadequate number of work activity site agreements

Case Closure Pitfalls:

- Allowing a participant to reach the time limit without providing the resources and solutions necessary for them to become self-sufficient
- Allowing participants to reach the time limit without participating in an assigned work activity
- Allowing a participant's case to close with the participant being in the same predicament they were in before they entered the program with little to no growth

I applaud the staff of each Local Office for their diligence in providing quality service to our TANF participants. We must continue to operate in the "spirit of excellence" so that the TANF Program can continue to thrive.

REMINDER

It is vitally important that DWS TANF Staff ensure that all existing TEA clients who are eligible to transition into Work Pays are encouraged to do so! Please distribute Work Pays applications and explain this great program to your TEA clients!

IMPROVING PERFORMANCE THROUGH CORRECTIVE ACTION PLANS

By Judy Clayton • Jonesboro Local Office Manager

The quality assurance review is designed to appraise service provisions within the Transitional Employment Assistance and Work Pays programs for the State of Arkansas through the review of individual case records and performance outcomes, in order to evaluate and report on the extent of compliance with state and federal requirements. Our local office reviews focus on assuring compliance with procedural requirements and the feedback was developed after the quality assurance review process. This feedback was used to identify any immediately needed improvements, both immediate and long-term. Utilizing that feedback, we developed and adopted those improvement processes as a Corrective Action Plan, which was integrated into our daily operations.

The findings of reviews of local office TEA and Work Pays cases were reported, monthly, to the DWS TANF Management staff. Action items are also included in this report to Central Office. Remedies for the deficiencies are identified and implemented.

Here are a few statistical highlights that were provided for the period of CY2009 vs. CY2010. They are mentioned to show that corrective action plans work. In 2010, TEA work participation improvement was up 4.8% for all families and 122% for Two Parent cases. Work Pays participation improved by 14% for all families and 103% for the Two Parent cases.

During 2010's year of improvement our TEA case load increased by 21%, from 330 to 399. There was a staff turnover of over 90 percent in TEA and, currently, the Jonesboro Local Office has one of the highest caseloads per worker.

After the quality assurance review, highlighted concerns were: timely assessments, proper documentation, correct WPST codes, deferrals, updated information in the cases, staffings, and the outlining when sanctions were needed. As a result of the corrective action plan, the Jonesboro TANF staff has taken "personal ownership" of their cases. They, as a best practice, do home visits twice a week. Participants are mailed flyers about career fairs, job fairs, community events, health screenings, community dinners at Thanksgiving and Christmas, toys for children from Good Fellows group, reduced newspapers for reviewing help want ads, JETs – bus system, schedule, etc. The staff is trying to pique the interest of participants by keeping them active and interested in maintaining an updated employment plan, as well as good customer service.

TEA and Work Pays case managers organize their cases so that anyone can follow behind them when working the file. Participants are advised of the appropriate supportive services when they are assessed and the Case Managers help them track by: local office, complaint type (i.e. cash assistance, vendor inquiry, general inquiry), complaint description, actions taken and date resolved. A memorandum to the Local Office Manager and Area Operations Chief is also sent along with the Complaint form. This memo gives response instructions to the Manager/Supervisor.

In addition to receiving incoming calls and e-mails, the Unit also conducts customer satisfaction surveys. Those surveys can be for participants and also general agency/department surveys.

The "How Are We Doing" flyer is posted in every DWS office for all participants to see. We are also in the process of printing wallet sized flyers.

Let us know "How Are We Doing?" by calling 888-414-1589 or e-mailing us at TANF.helpdesk@arkansas.gov.

WORK PARTICIPATION RATES

We are pleased to announce that Arkansas successfully met both its overall and two-parent work participation rates for fiscal year (FY) 2009 under the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. After applying the caseload reduction, Arkansas achieved an overall participation rate of 37.1 percent for all families and a rate of 21.7 percent for two parent families. Congratulations to everyone on this huge success!

