

Together,
we're making
our families
stronger.



Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
Arkansas Department of Workforce Services

TANF eNews

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An Electronic Newsletter from the Arkansas Department of Workforce Services

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From the Assistant Director

By Phil Harris, Assistant Director, DWS-TANF

Embracing change and celebrating you! You are making a difference!

I wanted to personally let you know how proud I am of you as I watch so many of you grasp our recent changes—and to see the positive attitude that you have as you plan and embrace what your job looks like in the new and expanding world of TEA.

I wanted to take a moment to also thank all of you for the work you do every day. Your creativity, service, commitment, patience, and caring approach positively impact Arkansas's most vulnerable families. Your job is one that often goes unnoticed. On the front line, you don't get the opportunity for many accolades or much recognition. You do the work you do simply because you want to help. I am humbled by the work you do every day and that you can truly make a difference in the lives of thousands of families. I sincerely thank you for your service, and I look forward to continuing to serve TEA and Work Pays families with you in the years to come.

One More Thing . . . Don't Forget Why

When we are used to comfort or abundance, we can easily forget that others are hungry and suffering. If the economy is showing signs of recovery, and it is, we're seeing very little indication of that at the hundreds of food pantries and shelters across Arkansas. Across the state, record numbers of men, women, and children are in need of assistance, many for the first time.

A few weeks ago, David, a single father of two, in his 30s, walked into a community center in Pulaski County. He needed food to feed his young children because his work hours had recently been cut. He'd seen a flyer about an assistance program, but he didn't know what to expect. From an outreach worker at the center, David learned of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Transitional Employment Program (TEA), and that he might be eligible for help. For David, the safety net worked beautifully, as it should.

The most vulnerable in our communities—children, the elderly, the working poor—should be our priority. It is true that the sheer numbers can be overwhelming. And, that's why it's so important to remember David with his two young daughters and the challenges they face. Don't forget why we are here!



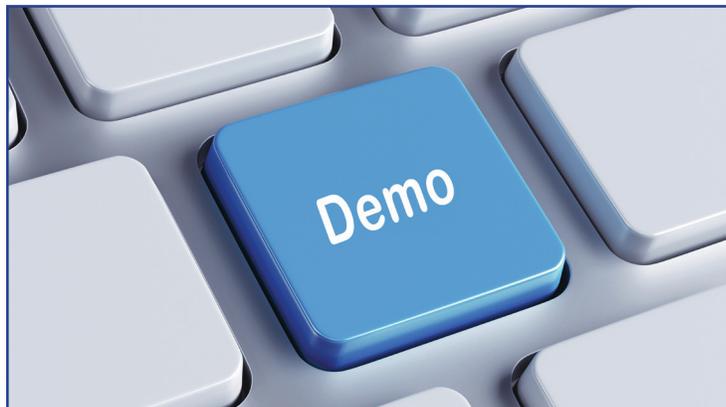
ARWINS Project Update—Demo, Review

Meet You at the Top!

The project team has been really busy with many and varied activities since our last update. A couple of them are noted below, including a request for your ideas on an identified issue.

Demo for DHS-DCO Management

On Friday, the first day of May, the ARWINS team proudly demonstrated your new IT system to a group of DHS-DCO managers. Our impression is that they enjoyed the demo and admire the simplicity and straight-forward aspects of the system. Discussions with these managers continue in an effort to resolve remaining issues related to the transition.



Continued Help Document Reviews

A group of LOMs, with some assistance from supervisors and workers, reviewed the Help document policy and procedure. We have received their feedback, and we are encouraged by what we're seeing.

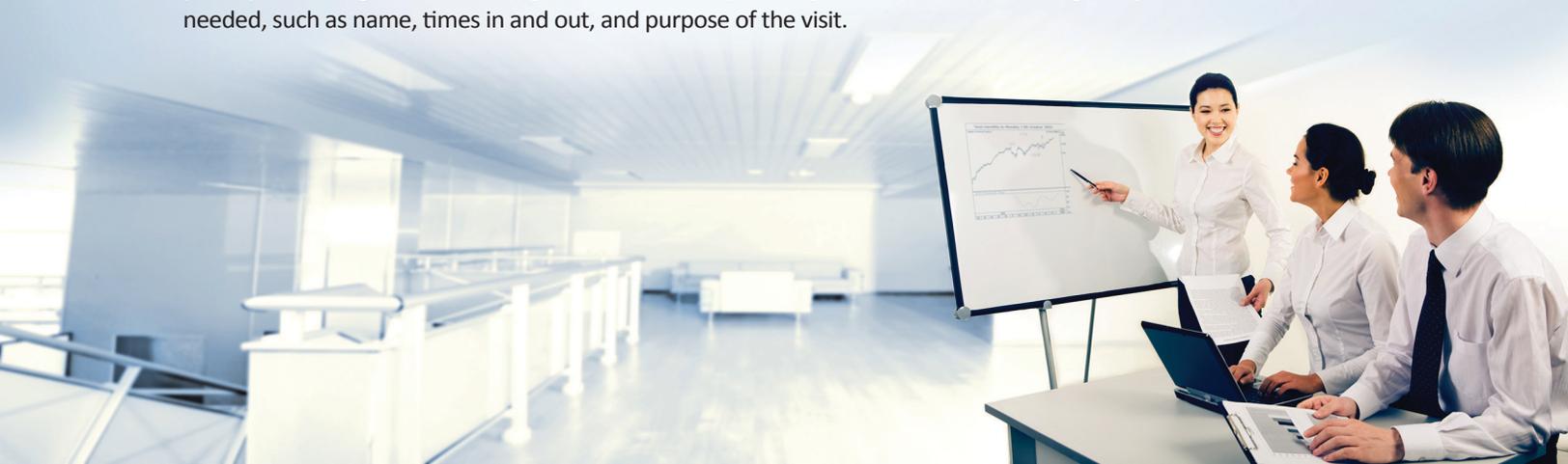
The Help Document review groups have raised an issue that has been around for a while, but for which no concentrated effort has been expended toward a resolution, as far as we know. So, we thought this may be a good time to describe the issue and ask you for your thoughts about ways we may be able to resolve it that serve our purposes, meet our policy requirements, and are feasible for providers. The issue we'll discuss in this article relates to verifications of participant attendance and participation in education and training activities.

Distance Learning

The first issue is how to track participation and attendance for distance learning activities. Our policy allows participants to use this training method to complete needed training, but only as long as the provider can and will verify attendance and participation. Most providers do not have that capability or do not do that. So, in these cases, distance learning for our participants is not actually an option. Distance learning is especially useful and needed in rural areas, where there may not be other options to complete needed training.

To help you get started to think about how to solve this issue, consider some of the ways some other organizations handle such requirements:

- Establish areas in community organizations, such as a public library, where participants can receive distance learning training (many use a facilitator, creating a potential blended learning delivery method), and establish a way to track attendance and participation.
- Set up a dedicated computer in their office with an administrative assistant working from that area who can also assist participants to log into the training as needed. Participants sign in on an attendance log and provide whatever information is needed, such as name, times in and out, and purpose of the visit.



Classes

The second issue involves the same problem, but as it occurs in classroom situations at, for example, community colleges, universities, vocational institutions, and so on. Often these organizations are not prepared to track attendance and participation at the level needed for the TANF program. So the question here is how to determine whether participants have attended and participated in the class.

Home-Schooling

Home-schooling is a growing practice, as some families prefer to manage their children's education, rather than send them to classes in local schools. One of the legal requirements that is assumed by TANF policy is for the family to place on file with the local school district their home-schooling plan, and to do this every year at the start of the local school session. We're told that most home-schoolers do not prepare a plan (even though it is required by law), and most school districts have no facility for tracking such a plan. This requirement was likely established to allow local school districts to verify participation of students in the district who are being home-schooled. If this requirement were to be enforced, it would eliminate the problem for TANF participants, but this has not yet occurred, and that appears to be the case throughout the state of Arkansas.

The problem in each of these issues is the same; only the setting is different. If you have an idea that you would like to suggest, please send it to TANF leadership at the project email box, which is ADWS.attopinfo@arkansas.gov.

We'll bring you more updates next month. Meanwhile, do what you can to get involved in the ARWINS project. If you haven't yet, it is moving along without you, but we need your input, and you need to be a part of it. Thanks for all you do!

Documentation: How Well Do Your Narratives Read?

Tarzetta Thrower, TANF Training

TEA Policy 3000 states, "Documentation and complete and accurate case records are vital to the success of good case management." Case narrations serve multiple purposes within case management. The documentation for our participants is essential to their progress on their path toward self-sufficiency, so we should document all contacts with our participants. Good documentation helps the agency monitor our participants' growth as well as develop great case management skills. Six important elements of good documentation to consider when recording a narrative are as follows:

1. Use concrete, descriptive language.
2. Use words with clear meanings and avoid subjective terms.
3. Fully identify persons, places, direct quotations, and sources of information.
4. Record facts, not an evaluation of the facts. Avoid biased statements.
5. Clearly label your impressions and base them on observable information, not personal opinion.

The TEA Policy Manual reminds us that "...accuracy and timeliness of narration and computer entry are necessary to help us maintain federal and state funding. In addition, good documentation enables other staff who may conduct reviews or who may later work with this participant to understand what has occurred in the case." While working diligently with your participants, keep in mind that awesome narrations are YOUR time to SHINE!



The Power of Questions

By Dr. Beverly Ford, ASM Associates



Q Why are questions important?

A Remember, you want a partnership between you and participants that actively engages them in working with you to achieve outcomes. Good questions are a valuable tool in building the partnership.

Questions can influence how participants think—their **attitudes**. Good questions can affect how they see their motivators, strengths, barriers, and successes—who they **are now** and who **they can become**.

Good questions can influence what participants do—their **behaviors**. They can influence participants to become **actively engaged** in developing plans, finding resources, and solving problems. Good questions can move people from being passive receivers of your help to active agents of change in their own lives.

Q What kinds of questions should I ask?

A There are two ways you can ask questions: **Closed** and **Open**.

Closed questions generally produce yes/no answers. They should be used only when you want a simple yes/no response. Closed questions are easy to recognize. They begin with *Are you? Do you? Have you? Can you? Will you?* Closed questions do not encourage people to think or become actively engaged.

Open questions provide more complete information. They begin with: *Who? What? When? Where? How?*

Examples

Closed question: *Do you have reliable childcare?*
Open question: *Who could help you with reliable childcare?*

Q How do I use questions to get participants involved?

A You want active participants, not passive ones. To encourage participants' active involvement, you need to ask **open thinking questions**. Non-thinking questions simply ask participants to respond with information they already know.

Examples (non-thinking questions)

Where do you live? How many children do you have? What was your last job?

Thinking questions provide you with new information and insight about your participants. They can also **influence** how participants think about their lives.

Examples (thinking questions)

How do you feel about where you live? What do you want to do for your children that you can't do now?

Who could you ask for help with childcare? What is your plan for beginning job search? How do you think you could get started with school?

Thinking questions can move participants to take action.

Q What if my open questions don't work?

A You ask a good open thinking question. The participant gives no response or responds with, "I don't know."

Participants may have difficulty responding to some of your open questions. They may not have thought much about the issue or may not be accustomed to having "social workers" ask them what they think. When participants say nothing or "I don't know," perhaps they are also saying, "Help me think."

- Give participants time to think and respond. Bite your lip and count to 10 before you say anything.
- Use a reflecting feeling statement to convey your understanding.

Example

You seem overwhelmed with all the decisions you have to make.

Pause and see if you need to ask a direct question. The reflecting feeling statement may prompt a response.

- Ask more specific follow-up questions. Sometimes the initial open question was too broad to prompt the person to think about how to respond.

- Prompt the participant with one of your own ideas. This approach often leads to the "Yes, but that won't work" response. Be prepared. You can use the "It won't work" response to help participants eliminate options they don't like. Perhaps then, they can move to considering better ones.

Q What can I do to make changes in how I use questions?

A Plan your questions before you meet with participants. Think about the outcome you want for this session and the questions you need to ask to engage participants to change the way they think and what they do.

- Identify the closed questions on the forms you use now. They most often begin with: Do you... Are you... Have you... Will you... Can you... Develop a list of open questions to ask instead.
- Listen for yes/no responses to your questions. Those responses let you know you asked a closed question. You can then go back and open it up.
- Before you ask a question, pause and think about how to make the question an open thinking one. Think: Who, What, When, Where, How
- Review Chapter 6 of the Making Case Management Work handbook and use the practice exercises to enhance your skills.

Policy Corner

TANF Policy Unit, Central Office

Questions and answers for June

Question:

Are minor parent transportation reimbursements keyed in the case head's name?

Answer:

No. Key the reimbursement to the minor parent.

Question:

Should hours of participation be keyed for minor parents?

Answer:

- If the minor parent is head of household, yes.
- If the minor parent is not head of household, it is not necessary to key school attendance hours.
- When minor parents find employment on their own while engaged in education, they should be assigned to dual activities per policy 3500.6. Although the employment is not a required activity, local offices may key the hours to show the minor parent's progress.

Question:

How many hours should a household complete if the father is an adult and the mother is still a minor parent?

Answer:

This household will be treated as a single parent household. The father will complete single parent hours based on the age of the youngest child. He will continue to do so until the mother turns 18. (The mother should be treated as a minor parent and coded as 3M).

Question:

Does the TABE test have to be administered each time a case re-opens?

Answer:

It should be administered only if there was not one administered within the last 6 months. Policy at 3100 will be clarified at next revision.

Question:

What should be included in reimbursement paperwork to TANF Accounting?

Answer:

(Paperwork should be in this order.)

- WISE Reimbursement Detail screen shot
- TEA-1430 or TEA-187 (original signatures required)
- Log or Invoice
- Supporting documentation (MapQuest quotes, etc.)

Question:

When the youngest minor child turns 6 years old, when do the single participant's hours change from 20 to 30, or in Work Pays, 24 to 30?

Answer:

The week after the youngest child turns 6 is when the parent's participation requirement should change. In order to accomplish this, the TEA-1 notice should be sent early enough that it expires before the new hours go into effect.

Question:

When looking up the vehicle value for Vehicle Repair Assistance, the vehicle is too old on Kelly Blue Book. Is there another resource?

Answer:

You can use www.nadaguides.com. The website shows classic car values starting with 1926. Please remember that if a vehicle is being repaired, it is not in excellent condition. Depending on the type of work needing to be completed, it may not be in good condition.



Spotlight

Good to Great - Pine Bluff Workforce Center

By Laura Foster, QA Manager

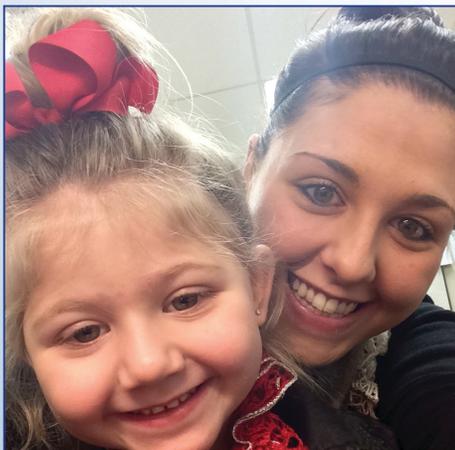
The Pine Bluff Local Office has been awarded the Assessments-Sanctions-Keying (A.S.K.) Award. This award is based upon the cumulative results from the on-site Quality Assurance reviews and Work Participation Rates during the period of September 2014 – February 2015. The initial A.S.K. awards were announced during the 2012 TANF Conference and recognize the local offices with exemplary performance in Assessments–Sanctions–Keying.



Jeanette McDaniels, Lavatia Wooten, Roberta Spears, Valerie Price, William Campbell, Nancy Spriggs, Gail Walker, Laura Cummings, Carla Harrison, Danietta Nelson, Tonya Hill, Marilyn Maloney

Success Stories

Krystal Cannon Searcy (Heber Springs) Workforce Center Cleburne County TEA -WEX-UNE- Work Pays



Krystal Cannon is a survivor who became a mother at 17, finished high school, and attended college. Ms. Cannon stated that it was still tough trying to figure out how to be a parent, let alone a single mother, at such a young age. She learned of the TEA Program, enrolled, and that helped financially while she was attending school.

Ms. Cannon explained that she began in the WEX program, which gave her job experience and taught her a lot. She said that TEA reimbursements for gas helped her get back and forth from school. She had tremendous support from her case managers who pushed her to set goals, stick to them, and succeed. Krystal said, "I always had them to lean on."

Krystal obtained employment with Wal-Mart and has been working there for a year and a half (UNE – Gain Employment). She has been promoted twice. Ms. Cannon entered into the Work Pays program, and she has exceeded the FPL due to her rate of pay at \$16.17 after being promoted to the distribution center in Searcy. She received a second promotion and now is earning more than \$17 hourly. She credits the TANF program and staff for her success. Krystal commented, "I can't say enough how much these programs have changed my life." Ms. Cannon continued with, "If the resources are out there to help you succeed in life, take full advantage. It's one of the best choices I ever made. I have learned and grown so much. You have each shaped me in some way to be the woman I am today."