



Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network

Sponsored by the Administration for Children and Families

Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Short Summary San Juan, Puerto Rico

Requesting Agency:	Puerto Rico Department of the Family
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TA Event Tracking #:	144
TA Requested:	The Puerto Rico Department of the Family requested the assistance of the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network in planning and conducting a 1½ day roundtable to better prepare case managers to screen clients for learning disabilities.
TA Goal:	There were three primary goals of the meeting: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. increase the understanding of learning disabilities and how they impact TANF recipients2. increase the understanding of the tools and protocols used to evaluate their clients' strengths and weaknesses and the extent to which they may require additional resources3. increase collaboration with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to better meet the needs of TANF recipients with learning disabilities.
TA Format:	Roundtable
Sample Evaluations:	<p>Examination of the event evaluations suggest that participants were extremely grateful for the Roundtable and thought that it was successful and helpful in providing information about learning disabilities, how they affect the TANF population and how to begin thinking about screening, assessing and partnering with other agencies in order to accommodate them. There was considerable concern about how to translate many of the tools and practices into the cultural reality of Puerto Rico, given its significant bureaucratic challenges and limited resources.</p> <p>Selected highlights from the evaluations include:</p> <p>“Knowing that TANF recognizes that there are participants with real limitations that impact their socio-economic development. Being part of a proactive movement to improve the program’s services.”</p> <p>“I have always believed that we should be more compassionate with clients and this workshop has helped us to understand them better.”</p> <p>“Although it will be a long process, I hope there will be a relationship between case management and vocational rehabilitation as we both hope to resolve, in part, the difficulties faced by participants with learning disabilities.”</p>

Analysis:

Approximately twenty-eight million Americans are living with a learning disability. Poverty increases the likelihood of learning disabilities by thirty percent. The prevalence of learning disabilities is significantly higher among individuals participating in programs, such as TANF, where eligibility is based on financial need. An understanding of the impact of learning disabilities offers an explanation for these realities. The manifestations of learning disabilities can affect a broad range of skills and functions, including: reading, writing, mathematics, attention, reasoning and processing, memory, oral communication, social competencies and executive functioning skills such as organizing, problem solving, prioritizing and self-management. Individuals with learning disabilities are likely to experience high unemployment or underemployment. Without appropriate accommodations and modifications to education, training and work environments, these individuals are presented with innumerable barriers to success and self-sufficiency.

The Roundtable event in Puerto Rico was attended by leaders in the learning disabilities field, Federal agency staff, and representatives from the Puerto Rico Department of the Family and Vocational Rehabilitation. Overall, the Roundtable was designed to highlight the importance of screening for learning disabilities and accommodating them when serving TANF clients. This was done through education, inter-agency learning and the sharing of promising practices. Helpful tools were provided to participants for screening, assessing and interviewing clients, and to facilitate the development of local and regional action plans for immediate implementation.

The Roundtable included comprehensive information sharing, as participants were offered presentations on understanding and screening for learning disabilities. Basic information describing learning disabilities and how they impact the WorkFirst Environment was provided, as well as outreach and skill-building techniques for caseworkers regarding screenings and referrals. In addition, the Puerto Rico Department of Vocational Services presented information on their referral process and the services they provide to TANF and other clients.

Overall, participants, speakers and facilitators agreed that the Roundtable was a success in assisting TANF service providers in understanding and supporting participants with learning disabilities. There was also significant discussion about needs for further training in this area and capacity building among caseworkers.

Watch for a full report in the coming weeks.

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