



Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) Program

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About JFES

- JFES provides employment services to time-limited recipients of TANF.
- Helps parents gain skills to obtain employment and become independent of cash assistance.
- The program is administered by the Department of Labor in partnership with the Department of Social Services and the five Workforce Development Boards.
- DSS refers TFA applicants to in-person group orientations held at the American Job Centers across Connecticut. Those that attend are approved benefits.

Pandemic Shut Down

- March 2020 – Executive order was issued to grant TFA benefits without standard eligibility requirements such as in person interviews at DSS.
- This EO suspended the JFES program.
- No new referrals into the program starting mid-March 2020, and all state staff and most contractors were ordered home to telework.
- Closure of all American Job Centers.



What now?

- *How do we support the families we are serving?*
- *How do we deliver services to these families?*
- Creation of **Virtual Services Work Group**.
 - Collaboration of state, workforce board & case management entities, with goals to:
 - 1) Make necessary changes in service delivery due to Covid.
 - 2) Finalize the new JFES approach: incorporating flexibility, family-centered coaching, and overall program changes.



Poll Question #1

“How would you rate your state’s or Tribe’s ability to respond to the need for new technology solutions in order to work remotely and meet the needs of clients?”

- A) We were well prepared to transition to virtual services in our state or Tribe
- B) We were somewhat prepared to transition to virtual services
- C) We were poorly prepared to deal with this new virtual world

What else can we do?

At the beginning of the shut down, we asked:

- *How do we support our staff with this transition?*



Staff Development

- **Virtual Case Management with Holistic Approach Webinar Series**
 - Mike Fazio, Workforce180
- **Certified Employment Interviewing Professional (CEIP)**
 - Professional Association of Résumé Writers and Career Coaches (PARW/CC)
- **Motivational Fridays**
 - Karen Hinds, Workplace Success Group
- **Racial Equity Training**
 - Soul Focused Group
- **Intimate Partner Violence**
 - Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence (CCADV)
- **Trauma Informed Care**
 - Coalition for Supportive Housing
- **Case Notes Management**
 - Dynamic Works

What can we do to increase client participation and reduce stress on our families?



- Virtual service delivery or hybrid approach where possible based on safety measures.



- Reduction in hours per week.



- Flexibility around Sanction Referrals / Increased importance of Barrier Intervention Referrals.



- Elimination of Job Logs, replaced by simpler emailed summaries.

Family Centered Coaching

- Pre-Covid, goal for 1:1 in-person appointments.
- Puts the client in the driver's seat.
- Focuses on the whole family instead of just one person.
- Recognizes that families need different things at different times.
- Strength-based approach.



Family Centered Coaching during Covid

- In-person appointments on pause.
- Concepts of service approach incorporated:
 - Surveying preferred method of contact.
 - Assessing & supporting needs (barriers to employment, technology, access to hardware/devices).
 - Voluntary participation = no disruption in benefits, one less thing stress in a stressful time.
 - Barrier Intervention Referrals.



Poll Question #2

“What types of adaptations did your state or Tribe employ during Covid in order to increase access to services for clients?”

Why Change the Program Now?

- Why Now?
 - Covid/JFES Program Shutdown
 - Childcare Scarcity
 - 0% Work Participation Rate (WPR)
- Combination Led to Flexibility
 - Supports 2-Gen Research
 - Low Risk (No WPR Goal)
 - Alignment with Federal Goals & Other States





Intro/Background

- We have been operating the JFES program for the past 20+ years with many of the same rules that we have in place today.
- However, much of the multi-generational poverty research that has been done since JFES began in the late 1990s suggests that a more flexible approach to serving families living in poverty and “meeting families where they’re at” may be more impactful and less stressful on the families we serve.

Primary Changes



Reduction in hours per week



Maximum flexibility on how activities can be combined in the employment plan



Flexibility around Sanction Referrals



Increased importance of Barrier Intervention Referrals



Elimination of Job Logs / Attendance Tracking for Job Search

Goal Hours

- The “Goal Hours” represent the number of hours of Employment activities that we expect the client to participate in each week.
- The IEP should consist of some combination of activities that enable the client to meet these Goal Hours each week.
- The Goal Hours are simply that -- a goal rather than a hard and fast rule.
- There is flexibility in determining whether a client is meeting the Goal Hours or not.

Goal Hours of Participation

- Last Year
 - 35 hours per week (REQUIRED)
- This Year (July 1, 2021 - June 30, 2022)
 - 30 or 20 goal hours (GOAL)
 - Based on youngest child in family
 - If the parent has a child under 6 = 20-hour goal
 - If the parent has a child age 6 or older = 30-hour goal



Acceptable Range of Hours

Acceptable Range of Hours

- Hours are now a Goal, not a requirement.
- With this change, we now have an Acceptable Range of Hours someone can participate in versus a hard and fast number to meet each week.
 - 20 Goal Hours per week? Participation at 10-20+ hours is acceptable.
 - 30 Goal Hours per week? Participation at 15-30+ hours is acceptable.
- If a client is participating within the acceptable range of hours, then they will never be sanctioned based on participation reasons.

A person in a blue shirt is holding a tablet. In the foreground, there is a laptop and a document with blue bar charts. The background is a bright, out-of-focus office setting.

Verifying Job Search

Replacing the Job Logs

New - Weekly Progress Summary Email

- Clients are accountable for the hours that clients spend in Job Search activities but without the burden of the job logs.
- Clients enrolled in any number of hours of job search per week should be instructed to email their Case Managers every Friday.
- Email should provide a summary of what they did each week, progress made, struggles, and estimated number of hours participated out of goal.
- If client is unable to send emails (lack of device or internet) then an alternative method (phone call/meeting) can be established.

New - Weekly Progress Summary Email

- Hopefully the client is more forthcoming about how things are going with their job search and in their lives by asking them to send us an email in their own words.
 - Approach also provides the JFES case managers an opportunity to utilize the Family Centered Coaching strategies.
 - Focus on what is working and offer suggestions to help with what is not working.
 - Information would not have been readily available on the Job Log.

Poll Question #3

“In what ways did Covid strengthen your state’s or Tribe’s ability to assist your clients?”



Other Program Innovations in CT

(Pre- and Post-Covid)



Success Stories



JFES Refugee Pilot

- Addressed historical issues with JFES clients connecting with JFES program
- Partnered with Workforce Alliance, Department of Social Services and Refugee Resettlement Agency (IRIS)
- Goal was to meet the refugees where they were comfortable
- Embedded a JFES case manager at IRIS
- **Key ingredients for success:** Respect, Honor, Flexibility & Patience, staff part of the team



Financial Literacy

- Partnered with Connecticut Association for Human Services (CAHS)
- Offered Financial Literacy workshops in person for our JFES clients at all AJCs
- As a result of Covid, workshops will now be offered virtually



Program Statistics (2019-2020)

- **Common Barriers**

- Transportation
- Childcare
- Food Insecurity
- Education, Employment

- **Gender**

- 84% Female; 16% Male

- **Age**

- 18-25: 25%
- 26-33: 42%
- 34+: 33%

- **Education**

- 24% less than HS education
- 56% HS Diploma/GED
- 17% some college or more

- **Race**

- White ~42%
- Black ~31%
- Asian ~2%
- Amer. Ind./Alaskan Native ~1%

- **Ethnicity**

- Hispanic 26%

Questions?
Comments?

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