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FAX 98-125

Field Operations Memo 98-34
August 24, 1998

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff
From: Joyce Sampson, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
Re: Introduction to The Structured Job Search Program

Background

In December of 1996, the Department of Transitional Assistance instituted Time-Limited Benefits for all able-bodied TAFDC recipients who were employable. The Department has met with great success in assisting recipients to transition into the work force. However, there remains a segment of the TAFDC caseload that continues to need assistance in getting work. The Structured Job Search Program has been developed to meet the needs of this population.

As recipients reach the 21st month of time-limited benefits, they will receive a letter from the Commissioner introducing them to the Structured Job Search Program. This letter will stress the importance of using the Structured Job Search Program to find employment before their time-limited benefits end. This mailing will occur monthly to those recipients who reach their 21st month.

While enrollment in the program is voluntary, any recipient in the final three months of time-limited benefits must be informed that failure to participate in the Structured Job Search program or a program which can reasonably be expected to lead to employment before a recipient's time-limited benefits end, may be viewed as a refusal to cooperate with the Department's work-related activities. Programs which *may* be substituted for the Structured Job Search Program include those funded under the Welfare to Work block grant or the ESP program.

A recipient's choosing a training program or Community Service instead of Structured Job Search may also be viewed as a refusal to cooperate with work-related activities. These refusals will be an important factor in reviewing a request for an extension of benefits beyond the 24-month period and may result in the denial of this request.

**Structured Job
Search Program**

The Structured Job Search Program is an intensive eight-week program designed to help recipients secure employment. The program is available to **any** recipient who has six months remaining of time-limited benefits, including the recipient who does not have a Work Program Requirement. **Recipients in their final three months of time-limited benefits should be strongly encouraged to participate in the Structured Job Search Program.**

Recipients in the final three months of time-limited benefits may enroll in either Structured Job Search or Community Service to meet the Work Program Requirement. Transitional Assistance Workers must inform the recipient that participation in a Community Service program, instead of the Structured Job Search Program, will be an important factor in reviewing a request for an extension. Recipients in the final three months of time-limited benefits and working part time should be encouraged to participate in the Structured Job Search Program in addition to their part-time work hours.

**Worker
Responsibilities**

Transitional Assistance Workers are responsible for:

- discussing barriers to the recipient finding employment;
- explaining the Structured Job Search Program, emphasizing that the goal of the program is acceptance of an offer of an appropriate job as defined by the Structured Job Search Provider;
- informing the recipient that participation in or refusal to participate in the Structured Job Search Program (or in another program which can reasonably be expected to lead to employment before the end of the recipient's time-limited benefits) will be an important factor in reviewing a request for an extension of benefits beyond the 24-month period and may result in the denial of this request;
- documenting on the Transition Plan form (TAFDC-TP) whether or not a recipient agrees to participate in the Structured Job Search Program or that the recipient has selected another program, the name of the program and the beginning and ending dates of the program. Progress and level of participation in the Structured Job Search Program should also be discussed and documented on the Transition Plan.

**Worker
Responsibilities
(continued)**

REMINDER: Documenting a recipient's progress and participation in the Structured Job Search Program is important if the recipient reaches the end of time-limited benefits and requests an extension of benefits beyond the 24-month period.

- completing an Employment Development Plan (EDP) for a recipient who agrees to participate in the Structured Job Search Program. The support services of transportation and child care requested by the recipient, if needed must be noted on the EDP. Failure to meet the EDP will begin the sanction process. See 106 CMR 207.200.
- referring recipients to the Structured Job Search Provider using the Employment Services Program (ESP) Referral and Response form (ESP-16);

NOTE: Referrals to Structured Job Search Providers for recipients in their final six months of time-limited benefits should include the following:

- ▶ those with three months or fewer remaining of time-limited benefits;
 - ▶ those not enrolled in ESP and not working;
 - ▶ those in Community Service unable to find employment; and
 - ▶ those working part time (Structured Job Search participation hours are *in addition to* their part-time work hours).
- providing the recipient with an ESP-7 which will be used to document the recipient's level of participation;
 - accessing the ESP-MIS system to document the recipient's participation efforts in the Structured Job Search Program with the returned ESP-7;
 - beginning the sanction process if the recipient fails to meet the participation requirements of the Structured Job Search Program; and
 - conferring with the Structured Job Search Provider and the recipient to monitor the recipient's progress, as needed.

**Structured
Job Search
Provider
Responsibilities**

In most instances, the Structured Job Search Provider will be located in the Transitional Assistance Office to provide prompt service. All referrals for Structured Job Search activities must be made with an ESP-16. Each provider will be responsible for:

- verifying accurate participation records for each Structured Job Search participant by reviewing and signing the ESP-7 form;

NOTE: The ESP-7 forms are manually given to the recipient by the Transitional Assistance Worker. The recipient is responsible for filling out the ESP-7, having the form signed by the Structured Job Search Provider and returning a copy of the form to the Transitional Assistance Worker.

- in weeks one and two of the Structured Job Search Program, providing a recipient with 12 hours of staff interactive activities (i.e., orientation, assessment, workshops) and eight hours of staff/self-directed activities (i.e., employer visits, employer interviews, responding to ads in the paper);
- in weeks three and four of the Structured Job Search Program, providing a recipient with 12 hours of staff/self-directed activities and eight hours of staff interactive activities;
- in the remaining four weeks, providing intensive case management with staff-directed job search; and
- being available for specific case conferences to discuss the recipient's participation levels and progress with the Transitional Assistance Worker, as needed.

**Rules Governing
Structured Job
Search Program**

Recipients in the Structured Job Search Program must meet participation guidelines. Recipients must:

- perform at least 20 hours of job search activity per week;
- be enrolled in the Structured Job Search Program no longer than eight weeks;
- provide verification of participation with the ESP-7, which has been signed by the Structured Job Search Provider (participation cannot fall below 75 percent of the scheduled activity time);
- make satisfactory progress toward the goal of employment as defined by the Structured Job Search Provider; and
- accept an offer of employment for an appropriate job as defined by the Structured Job Search Provider.

ESP/MIS Coding

By September 1, 1998 the following will have occurred on the ESP/MIS system:

- "011 - Career Center Activity" will be renamed "Structured Job Search Activity." All recipients *currently* coded with code "011" will be electronically transferred to code "012."
- Code "012 - Employment Assistance" will be renamed "Job Search Activity - Basic."
- Code "014 - DET Job Opportunity Activity" will be electronically cleared of all *current TAFDC* recipients by transferring them to code "012." Code "014" will remain "DET Job Opportunity Activity." ***This code will be limited to NPA Food Stamp recipients only.***

Effective September 1, 1998, when Transitional Assistance Workers are coding recipients on the Client Maintenance Activity Screen:

- **All recipients enrolled in the Structured Job Search Program must be coded "011."** This code will have a *minimum* standard weekly hour entry of 20 hours per week.

**ESP/MIS Coding
(continued)**

- **All recipients enrolled in the Job Search Activity-Basic Program must be coded "012."**
 - **All NPA Food Stamp recipients enrolled in the DET Job Opportunity Activity must be coded "014."**
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Support Services

To assist the recipient in the job search, support services (transportation, child care) shall be authorized, if needed. Support services requested must be listed on the completed EDP.

Child Care: Authorized by DTA. Recipients will be authorized to receive eight weeks of child care, if needed. **The child care authorization process for Structured Job Search is the same as the current authorization process.**

Transportation: Authorized by DET/Career Centers. Recipients will be authorized to receive \$12.00 per week. Recipients must provide verification of and must complete at least two trips weekly for job search-related activities and at least two trips weekly for appointments at the local Job Search Office to be eligible for this payment. The recipient will verify this information on a form provided by the Division of Employment and Training (DET). **DET/Career Centers and Job Search Providers will be responsible for issuing transportation payments.**

Extensions

This memo refers to extensions of benefits beyond the 24-month period. The Transitional Assistance Worker must stress the importance of participation in the Structured Job Search Program, or in another program which can reasonably be expected to lead to employment before the end of the recipient's time-limited benefits, as a factor to be considered for an extension if the recipient has not found employment. In the coming weeks, Transitional Assistance Workers will receive *more information on extensions and instructions on how to assist recipients who wish to apply for extensions. If a recipient requests an extension at this time, no action should be taken.*

Questions

If there are any Policy-related questions, have your Hotline Designee call (617) 348-8478. If there are any Systems-related questions, have your Designee call the Customer Service Center at (617) 348-5290.
