



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
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Field Operations Memo 2007-60
November 27, 2007

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff

From:  John Augeri, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations

Re: TAFDC – Family Self Sufficiency Program

Overview

In partnership with DHCD, HUD and the Regional Non-Profit housing agencies (RNPs), DTA will market the Family Self Sufficiency (FSS) program. The goal of this interagency initiative is to give nonexempt clients with Housing Choice (Section 8) vouchers and who are not participating in a work program activity, an additional resource to meet the requirement and become self-sufficient.

There are currently a limited number of slots available for our clients. However, no client will be turned away due to an RNP exceeding its slot allocation.

The program is voluntary for our clients; but once enrolled, the client is committed to completing the FSS program. The duration of the program is five years.

Purpose of Memo

The purpose of this Field Operations Memo is to:

- inform TAO Staff about the FSS program;
 - explain the benefits of the FSS program; and
 - advise AU Managers and Full Engagement Workers of their roles.
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FSS Program

The purpose of the FSS program is to coordinate the use of Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) rental assistance with public and private resources to assist eligible families achieve greater economic independence and self-sufficiency. The DTA/FSS collaboration will foster a partnership between TAO's and the RNPs that expand the number of clients building assets and making progress towards self-sufficiency. DTA's work program participation rate could increase as well.

The program will be marketed in a joint DTA/RNP informational session to nonexempt TAFDC clients who hold a Section 8 voucher and who are not meeting the work program requirement. Initially, the program will be marketed to approximately 120 pre-selected clients statewide who meet the above criteria. The list of pre-selected clients will be e-mailed with this memo.

Those attending the informational sessions will:

- be introduced to the FSS program;
- become aware of how to build assets as part of the program; and
- once enrolled, be provided case management services by the RNP's FSS case manager to:
 - ✓ identify and set realistic career goals,
 - ✓ address barriers,
 - ✓ maintain employment, and
 - ✓ locate resources and services necessary for success by developing an action plan and agreement specific to the family's goal and objectives.

Once referred to the FSS program, the client will go through an intake process with the RNP's FSS case manager that will take approximately two hours to complete. The intake process is generally conducted in person, but may be done telephonically or by mail, depending upon the RNP. A final face-to-face interview will be required to complete the FSS Program Individual Training and Services Plan, and the Program Contract of Participation.

**FSS Program
(continued)**

*FSS Program
Individual Training
and Services Plan*

Each client will work with an FSS case manager to establish a five year plan to achieve his or her goal of self-sufficiency. The plan will ensure that clients get a job or get employment-based opportunities prior to the termination of TAFDC benefits (either time-limited or extension).

The program is tailored to a client's specific needs as they relate to:

- job training and networking to get work;
- skills education and post-secondary education;
- child care;
- resource planning; and
- credit repair.

The five year plan (the FSS Program Individual Training and Services Plan) will become part of a contract (the Program Contract of Participation) that the client will sign once accepted in the FSS program. The contract includes the responsibilities required of both the client and the RNP to ensure the client achieves employment and self-sufficiency through the FSS program. The RNP will send a copy of the FSS Program Individual Training and Services Plan and the Program Contract of Participation to the AU Manager and Full Engagement Worker for the case record.

IMPORTANT: DTA has a 12-month limit on Education and Training activities meeting the work program requirement. Some clients may have already used 12 months of an education and training program prior to enrolling in FSS. The amount of time the client has used in the 12-month limit (found on the TAFDC tab of the Work Requirements window on BEACON) and the client's work program hourly requirement (20, 24 or 30) must be used when developing the FSS Program Individual Training and Services Plan. The first activity listed on this plan must be an activity that meets the client's work program requirement. The RNP will work with the client and the AU Manager/Full Engagement Worker to ensure that the client successfully meets DTA's work program participation rules while enrolled in FSS.

Escrow Account As part of the Program Contract of Participation, clients accrue money in an escrow account. This begins once a client becomes employed and his or her Section 8 rent increases. That increase (the greater amount minus the lesser amount of rent) is the amount that is deposited by the FSS program into an escrow account. The escrow account has limited access by the client during participation (only 25% of the total of the account may be withdrawn once a year for a specific purpose). For purposes of TAFDC financial eligibility, the escrow account is a noncountable asset (see 106 CMR 204.140 (W)).

At the end of the five-year period of successful participation in FSS, if the client is employed, has been off of TAFDC for 12 months and has no one in the household receiving TAFDC, he or she will receive the total amount in the escrow account plus interest. The money is nontaxable income. The FSS program case manager will explain the rules of the escrow account to the client.

AU Manager/ Full Engagement Worker Responsibilities The AU Manager/Full Engagement Worker will, after reviewing the list of pre-selected clients who meet the criteria of the program, invite their clients on the list to an informational session being held at the TAO using the paper Appointment Letter (*AL-1*).

At the session, FSS staff will describe the FSS program and its benefits to the clients. DTA staff will advise clients about the work program requirement. If a client chooses to participate in FSS, DTA staff will tell the client how he or she can meet their work program requirement while participating in the FSS program.

Note: Once the client agrees to enroll in the FSS program (after an intake process with the RNP's FSS case manager that will take approximately two hours to complete), the client will return to the TAO with the FSS Program Individual Training and Services Plan. The AU Manager/Full Engagement Worker will enroll the client in the first activity listed on the plan by going to BEACON and enrolling the client following established procedures. That activity will meet the client's work program requirement.

Once the client is enrolled, the AU Manager or Full Engagement Worker will meet with the FSS case manager and client, as needed, to answer questions that may arise. He or she will also monitor the client's progress and participation monthly (following established procedures) to ensure that the client is meeting the work program requirement and the rules of the FSS program. The AU Manager or Full Engagement Worker will also case conference on a monthly basis (or more frequently, if needed) with the FSS case manager about the client's progress.

**DTA Case
Closes**

Prior to the client's DTA case closing due to employment, the AU Manager/Full Engagement Worker must inform the client that:

- even though the TAFDC case will close, he or she must successfully complete the FSS program to receive the escrow account; and
- if eligible, transitional services (such as child care and transportation) are available to the client from the RNP to supplement the Department's support services.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.
