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# Employment Services Program Report

**May 2019**



# **DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM REPORT**

*MAY 2019*

## **REPORT OVERVIEW**

Pursuant to line item 4401-1000 of the FY2019 General Appropriations Act (GAA), the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is required to submit the following report on the status of its Employment Services Program.

## **DEPARTMENT OF TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION**

DTA's mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports.

DTA serves one out of every eight people in the Commonwealth including working families, children, elders, and people with disabilities.

## **EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM**

Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) is a state and federally-funded program that provides cash assistance and employment supports to families with children, and pregnant women, with little or no income or assets. TAFDC is operated under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant.

## **PROGRAM OUTCOMES**

The goal of TAFDC is to support families as they transition from economic crisis to economic stability. The Employment Services Program (ESP) is an integral part of the DTA's efforts to help families set and achieve meaningful goals on their path to economic self-sufficiency. Each year, the Legislature allocates funding for employment services for TAFDC clients through the ESP line item. The primary goal of ESP is to assist TAFDC clients in finding jobs, resolving barriers to employment, and providing a means to gain a pathway to self-sufficiency. Case managers and Full Engagement Workers (FEWs) assist TAFDC clients to meet their work program requirements primarily by referring them to appropriate employment related activities for their skill level and goals.

ESP is comprised of a number of outcome driven (pay-for-performance) programs funded through line-item 4001-1000 in the FY19 GAA, which includes:

- Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES);
- Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI);

- Secure Jobs Program;
- DTA Works Program;
- Work Participant Program;
- Young Parents Program (YPP); and
- Empower to Employ.

Additionally, funding was included in the FY19 GAA for DTA to initiate pilot programs aimed at supporting transportation for clients to employment activities in two areas of Massachusetts. The pilots are being performed in Framingham and Worcester, and, depending upon the outcome of these efforts and availability of funding, may be expanded.

### **COMPETITIVE INTEGRATED EMPLOYMENT SERVICES PROGRAM**

In FY10, DTA converted much of its funded employment services programs to the Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES) program. Under the CIES procurement, overseen by Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS), new proposals for services were solicited from potential providers. Existing contracts are set to expire on June 30, 2019 and DTA is in the re-procurement process with the goal of having new contracts in place by July 1, 2019. DTA is procuring for these services directly.

Under the current CIES contracts, employment service providers are reimbursed as clients pass through a defined combination of milestones with the goal of successfully obtaining and maintaining employment. The current CIES model organized these milestones into a service continuum marked by outcome benchmarks such as obtaining a job or achieving 90 days of employment as the client moves along the path to work.

Under the current procurement, four levels of CIES service models were defined:

- Model I:** Employment Ready
- Model II:** Employment Training and Education
- Model III:** Employment Supports
- Model IV:** Enhanced Employment Supports

The CIES program is offered statewide. Under the current RFR, DTA is only offering Models II and III. **Table 1** and **Table 2** display CIES enrollments and performance for FY2017 and FY2018.

TABLE 1 CIES FY17 ENROLLMENTS & OUTCOMES					
CIES Model	Enrollments	Placements	Performance Rate	90-Day Retention	Retention Rate
Model II	1,396	879	63.0%	794	90.3%
Model III	1,050	624	59.4%	575	92.2%
Total	2,446	1,503	61.4%	1,396	92.9%

TABLE 2 CIES FY18 ENROLLMENTS & OUTCOMES					
CIES Model	Enrollments	Placements	Performance Rate	90-Day Retention	Retention Rate
Model II	1,483	894	60.2%	746	83.5%
Model III	887	538	60.7%	477	88.7%
Total	2,370	1,432	60.4%	1,223	85.4%

Under the new procurement, DTA is maintaining outcome-oriented contracts, and will be making several key changes, including expanding the focus to a “two-generation” (2Gen) approach<sup>1</sup> to services, opening employment supports to non-custodial parents and becoming more client centered by targeting services to meet individualized client skills, needs and goals.

DTA believes that individual, family, and community success are interconnected, and that employment is the best path out of poverty for most families. DTA’s 2Gen approach is focused on increasing economic security for families by creating opportunities for and addressing the needs of both parents and children. The 2Gen approach recognizes that outcomes for parents and their children are intertwined and cannot develop independently of one another.

Research has documented the impact of a parent’s education, economic stability, and overall health on a child’s trajectory. Similarly, children’s education and healthy development are powerful catalysts for parents. Through the CIES program, parents can begin their career path by receiving training and employment supports to fill high demand positions in key industries. CIES programs provide workforce development, contextual learning and empower participants to build family stability. As parents contribute to the economic success of their community and increase their own income, they provide the support and examples that their children need to be successful, both in school and later in life. The success of these working parents and their children will increase the economic and social health of the entire community.

In addition, while traditional indicators of job readiness, such as education and work history are clearly predictive of employability, other life challenges such as behavioral health issues, housing stability, or lack of stable child care can indirectly but substantially impact a client’s ability to secure or maintain employment. Developing a holistic understanding of a family’s

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<sup>1</sup> Two Generation Playbook, “Ascend, The Aspen Institute ([ascend.aspendinstitute.org](http://ascend.aspendinstitute.org))

circumstances is vital to delivering customized and effective services. DTA recognizes that for a participant to be successful in setting and achieving their career goals, stability is needed across other life domains and the new contracts will require that CIES providers assess participant's strengths and needs across the following key domains: employment and career, education and training, financial management, well-being, and family stability.

### **MASSACHUSETTS OFFICE FOR REFUGEES AND IMMIGRANTS (MORI)'S ESP PROGRAM**

The Office for Refugees and Immigrants (MORI) offers services to employment-authorized noncitizens who are also TAFDC clients. Noncitizen TAFDC clients in need of assistance to overcome cultural and linguistic barriers, which hinder them from obtaining and maintaining employment, are served through the MORI model. The services MORI provides include a comprehensive assessment of client needs, job search skills, and ongoing follow-up services once the client is employed. Services are provided in the client's primary language as clients work to build English skills, which makes it possible for DTA to serve recent immigrants that have a wide range of cultural and linguistic barriers to employment. Currently, MORI services are offered in the Boston, Lynn, Worcester and West Springfield areas.

In FY18, two hundred fourteen (214) clients were placed through the ORI program. MORI met 75.6% of their job placement goal. MORI spent \$792,996 which was 79.3% of their FY18 funding.

### **SECURE JOBS PROGRAM**

Secure Jobs was created in 2013 through a partnership between the Fireman Foundation and the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness with the intention of addressing both homelessness and joblessness by bringing together employment and housing agencies from across the state to help homeless families increase their level of economic self-sufficiency. Five partnerships were funded across the Commonwealth that brought together state agencies, homelessness providers, and workforce development agencies. The demonstration targeted families participating in the HomeBASE Rental Assistance program. By connecting housing and workforce development services, Secure Jobs offered the comprehensive support that families needed to obtain employment.

The theory of change for Secure Jobs is that a focus on employment can shorten the length of stay in shelter and expedite the attainment of permanent housing, contributing to upward economic mobility and family stability.

Between FY15 and FY17, the Legislature appropriated funding for the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to execute contracts with provider agencies to deliver essential services for individuals and families receiving support from DHCD's Emergency Assistance (EA) program, the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP), the HomeBASE program, or Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT). In the FY17 budget, administration of the program was subsequently assigned to DTA. Working collaboratively with

DHCD, the Secure Jobs program continues to serve individuals and families that are also served by DHCD.

In 2018, DTA completed a re-procurement of services for the program, during which DTA sought qualified partnerships to provide a comprehensive and integrated array of employment supports, job training, and related services to homeless or previously homeless families receiving housing assistance from DHCD. DTA sought proposals from providers who could demonstrate a willingness and ability to:

- act in partnership with participants to help them set and achieve personally meaningful goals on their path to economic stability;
- meet each family “where they are”;
- identify and meet the needs of the entire family; and,
- be flexible and build in margins for error so participants can be supported in their individual path toward achieving their economic and family goal.

In addition to the state funds appropriated for the Secure Jobs Program, DHCD was able to make federal Move to Work (MTW) funds available to DTA to expand the program to new providers and services. DTA extended retention services provided to Secure Jobs clients from 12 months to 24 months, provided additional funds for client-centered services and expanded programming to new sites in Boston and on the Cape. In June 2018, DTA hired a Secure Jobs Program Coordinator, who will provide administrative support to the program and its providers, as well as serving as a coordinator of homeless services for all DTA clients.

In Fiscal Year 2018, the Department’s first full year administering the program, 634 clients enrolled in Secure Jobs, of which 265 clients secured employment through their participation in the program.

The partnership with DHCD affords a truly unique and impactful opportunity. DHCD committed to providing 50 Mobile Section 8 Vouchers over a three-year period (FY19-FY21) to Secure Jobs participants who have obtained and maintained employment for six or more months, creating a strong incentive for program participants. Participants who have achieved the employment retention goals are entered into a lottery performed by DHCD. 20 vouchers will be issued in FY19, and 15 vouchers will be issued in FY20 and FY21, respectively.

For more information, see report on the status of the Secure Jobs program submitted pursuant to line-item 4400-1020 of the FY2019 General Appropriations Act.

## **DTA WORKS**

The DTA Works Internship Program is a work-ready program funded through the ESP line-item. Since the program’s inception in 2009, DTA Works has provided TAFDC recipients with the opportunity to acquire or develop skills necessary to re-enter the workforce. DTA Works Interns are placed at a variety of locations including DTA offices, partner state agencies and non-profit community- based organizations where they will receive on the job clerical training

and mentor support. Interns also work with a mentor and program coordinator to identify barriers that may be interfering with their economic mobility. Once these barriers have been identified, the intern and their mentor create employment goals and an action plan to identify any supports needed to support the intern on his/her path to economic mobility.

Interns may participate for up to 24 weeks and receive a monthly education and training stipend to support their participation. This monthly stipend is in addition to current DTA benefits received and does not negatively impact their current TAFDC or SNAP benefit. During 2018, DTA hired a dedicated DTA Works Program Coordinator and hopes to continue to expand and grow the program for DTA clients, especially in the central and western parts of the state.

TABLE 4 DTA WORKS OUTCOMES			
Fiscal Year	# Enrolled	# Attained Post-Internship Employment	% Performance
2017	97	76	78%
2018	74	46	62%

### YOUNG PARENTS PROGRAM

The Young Parent Program (YPP) is a year-round, full-time ESP program to support education and ultimately career pathways for Young Parents, ages 14 through 24, by supporting outcomes across three domains:

- Education and Career;
- Life and Personal; and
- Parenting and Family.

In FY18, the Department re-procured YPP for the first time in 10 years. Prior to the re-procurement the program primarily focused on HiSET (high school equivalency) attainment and/or entry level job placements. **Table 5** includes enrollment and outcome data from FY17 and FY18.

TABLE 5 YOUNG PARENTS PROGRAM (YPP)								
Fiscal Year	Enrollments	Outcomes	HiSET/HS Diploma	% HiSET Outcomes	Added Training	% Added Training	Employed	% Employed
2017	528	448	173	38.6%	97	21.7%	88	19.6%
2018	426	387	137	35.4%	85	25.1%	63	16.3%

Through the new procurement DTA has also embraced the 2Gen approach; while the outcomes are still focused on the parents, the goal of the program is to empower parents to be able to

lead their family to a place of social and economic stability. The theory of change for the YPP is that a 2Gen approach helps both generations make progress together and provides interventions that can break the cycle of multi-generation poverty.

The YPP program now serves both parents, which means intact families, as well as non-custodial parents of TAFDC recipients, have access to employment programming to help engage with and support their family. DTA has expanded the reach of the program beyond the goal of attaining a high school diploma or equivalency to include post-secondary education. DTA is also hoping to reach exempt clients with children under the age of two who have already achieved a high school diploma or equivalency by supporting them as they pursue their post-secondary education.

Recognizing that no one agency can meet all the needs of a young family, YPP contracts also require providers to find and nurture partnerships with other community resources to meet the needs of the whole parent, child and family. DTA is committed to partnering with providers in a continuous improvement process. We look forward to reporting on enrollment and outcomes under the new contracts in next year’s report.

**THE WORK PARTICIPANT PROGRAM**

As a part of DTA’s commitment and obligation to the implementation of the Commonwealth’s combined Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) plan, DTA worked with the Department of Career Services (DCS) to develop and execute an Interagency Service Agreement (ISA) to satisfy WIOA funding requirements and lay out expectations for increased state level and local partnerships between DTA and DCS on behalf of TANF and SNAP clients. In FY17, DTA committed \$500,000 to invest in career center services for our clients. In FY18 and FY19 this amount was increased to \$1,000,000, respectively, to reflect full year services.

Since the execution of the preliminary ISA in March of 2017, this partnership has resulted in significant new collaborative relationships across the state and positive employment outcomes for DTA clients. Enhancements have been made in each agency’s respective information technology systems; DTA Full Engagement Workers (FEWs) are co-located on site at the MassHire Career Centers each week to promote a co-case management model; and joint guidance was developed and issued to define the core elements of the program and expectations for clients and both partners.

TABLE 6 WORK PARTICIPANT PROGRAM OUTCOMES			
Fiscal Year	# Enrolled	# Entered Training	# Obtained Employment
2017	539	79	70
2018	1942	219	309



Recently, a team from the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) conducted a site visit to Massachusetts to develop a case study of WPP to share with other states still struggling with how to bring their TANF and SNAP programs into partnership with their workforce system.

### **EMPOWERING TO EMPLOY**

During 2018, DTA launched an innovative partnership with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) to provide enhanced opportunities for rather than exemptions from workforce engagement for TAFDC families, especially clients with disabilities. The initiative, **Empowering to Employ**, is designed to promote and engage DTA clients in meaningful workforce services and appropriate vocational supports that lead to increased skill development, competitive employment, and economic independence and stability.

Starting as a three-pilot office effort, DTA's Brockton, Lawrence and Quincy offices formed interagency teams with fully dedicated MRC partners co-located in their offices. Each office team includes a designated Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor from MRC. An Employment Services Specialist from MRC is shared across the three offices. Working together, the teams collaborate on strategies to engage, sustain, and co-case manage clients with individually tailored pathways towards employment outcomes.

The goal is to identify promising and effective practices for improved employment-related outcomes for our clients who have traditionally been exempt from the work program requirement by providing coordinated access to the array of employment services and supports available from both agencies. While early on in implementation, the agencies have seen tremendous interest thus far with 99 clients enrolled to date.

### **ADDITIONAL ESP SUPPORTS & SERVICES**

In addition to working alongside DCS staff as a part of the Work Participant Program, DTA's **Full Engagement Workers** (FEW), who are located in each TAO, assist clients in workforce training, obtaining and maintaining employment, and helping mitigate issues that present barriers to employment. The FEWs conduct client orientations twice a week to provide an overview of the transitional nature of TAFDC benefits and ensure clients are aware of available local work-related opportunities and the supports available to them through DTA. FEWs also work to develop non-DTA funded work-related resources in their areas.

Eligible TAFDC clients who are participating in work-related activities have access to the following supports as needed: child care referrals, transportation benefits of up to \$80 per month, learning disability screening and assessments, Hi-SET vouchers and information about the benefits of employment and eligibility for tax credits via the **Earned Income Tax Credit** (EITC) and **Earned Income Credit** (EIC).

Eligible former TAFDC clients who have transitioned to employment receive the following supports for a limited time as needed: **Transitional Child Care** and information about the benefits of employment and eligibility for tax credits via EITC and EIC. Most also receive **Transitional Benefit Alternative** (TBA) SNAP benefits, which assists former clients to transition off the program after they have successfully gained employment.

In 2016, DTA implemented **Transitional Support Services** (TSS) to support the retention of employment and prevent the need to return to TAFDC for clients whose case closed due to earnings. TSS falls into two categories: Work Related Expense Stipends and Transportation Stipends. TSS stipends begin when a TAFDC case has been closed for 30 days. TSS stipends are available for a period of four months, in amounts that decrease each month. In FY17, 2,149 TAFDC households received these benefits. In FY18, 5,610 TAFDC households received TSS payments.

These small but meaningful supports help to mitigate the “cliff effect” many clients face when transitioning off TAFDC and provide critical supports as they transition to work.

### **TAFDC BUDGET INITIATIVES**

In FY19, DTA implemented important updates to TAFDC policy changes. These included doubling the TAFDC asset limit from \$2,500 to \$5,000, eliminating the bifurcated grant structure for exempt and non-exempt households, and disregarding 100% of a family’s earned income, up to 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, for six months. These three policy changes better position working parents for life after TAFDC by allowing them to gain work experience, take promotions and save money before transitioning off TAFDC. Much of these changes also constituted a simplification of TAFDC program rules, ensuring that families can understand their options, and better plan for life after TAFDC.

### **LEARN TO EARN**

In support of implementation of the WIOA state plan, the Governor launched and the legislature has supported the Learn to Earn Initiative (LTE). LTE is a coordinated, comprehensive approach to providing unemployed and underemployed individuals with the support and skills they need to obtain and sustain employment in industries where employers have the greatest needs.

The LTE initiative is a partnership formed by the governor among EOHHS and several of its agencies (DTA, MRC, MCB, Elder Affairs, etc.) with the Executive Offices of Labor and Workforce Development (EOLWD), Education (EOE) and Housing and Economic Development (HED). This initiative is serving populations with historically higher than average rates of unemployment, with a focus on reducing employment barriers for individuals and families in public housing, as well as those receiving TANF and SNAP.

While many public benefits recipients work, these are often part-time and low-wage jobs without career pathways and with little potential for wage growth and advancement. Because individuals who are working and receive public benefits (TAFDC, SNAP, child care, housing, MassHealth, etc.) can face significant consequences to their household resources if they accept a raise or promotion, agree to work more hours or seek a higher paying job, LTE aims to address both programmatic and systemic barriers to employment in an effort to better meet labor market demand.

## **CONCLUSION**

Over the past several years, DTA has pursued multiple strategies to better promote family stability and employment. These have included strengthening and better focusing our employment programs through new procurements; building new partnerships with sister agencies and the broader workforce system; and reforming outdated and unnecessary policies that have constrained DTA clients' ability to work and exit public benefits. With the current unemployment rate at historic lows, we have a unique opportunity to engage clients in employment supports that lead to meaningful career pathways and longer term economic stability for them and their families.

## ***Note on Report***

Because FY19 has not concluded before the submission of this report, DTA reported on the previous fiscal year's ESP activities.