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Fiscal Year 2016 Employment Services Program Report

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Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance



Report on the Employment Services Program – Fiscal Year 2016

DTA's MISSION

The mission of the Department of Transitional Assistance is to assist low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, increase their incomes, and improve their quality of life. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, including food and nutritional assistance, cash assistance, and employment supports.

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

Executive Summary

The Department of Transitional Assistance (the Department) submits this report as required through the Employment Services Program line item 4401-1000ⁱ in the Massachusetts Fiscal Year 2016 budget. The Employment Services Program (ESP) is an integral part of the Department's efforts to move clients to work and self-sufficiency. Each year, the Legislature allocates funding for employment services for Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (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 self-sufficiency. Case managers assist TAFDC clients to meet their work program requirements primarily by referring them to appropriate activities for their skill level and goals.

Overview of Department Funded Programs

The Department funds a number of outcome driven (pay-for-performance) programs. These include:

- Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES);
- Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI); and
- Young Parents Program (YPP).

In FY10, the Department was required to convert much of its funded employment services programs to the CIES program with the exception of YPP and ORI. Under the CIES procurement, overseen by EOHHS, new proposals for services are solicited from all potential providers. Additionally, the Department operates the DTA Works program. This program provides TAFDC clients internship opportunities within the Department and with sister agencies to learn practical office skills, receive on the job mentoring and earn a small monthly stipend.

Competitive Integrated Employment Services Program

The Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES) program is focused upon achieving positive client outcomes. Service providers are reimbursed as clients pass through a recognized combination of milestones with the goal of successfully obtaining and maintaining employment. The CIES model organizes 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 permanent employment. Moving forward, providers will be required to track clients for one year after receiving a job.

There are four levels of CIES Models, which are Employment Ready (Model I, currently not funded), Employment Training and Education (CIES Model II), Employment Supports (CIES Model III), and Enhanced Employment Supports (Model IV, in process on onboarding providers). The CIES program is offered statewide. With current funding, the Department is only able to offer Model II and Model III which provide the following employment related services:

Employment Training and Education (CIES Model II)

Model II is designed to best serve clients with minimal barriers to employment. The range of services may include initial training or certificate programs which are predominantly short-term (average 4-12 weeks in duration) and are targeted for specified sectors of labor markets with growth in their service area. Examples include training for business skills, Certified Nurse's Aides (CNA), child care, clerical employment, computer/data entry clerks, customer service, dental assistants, electronics assembly, food services, home health aides, legal secretaries and medical office skills. These trainings are then followed by a job search component. Clients may then be placed in work sites where they can earn wages. Clients also receive post-employment support services.

Employment Supports (CIES Model III)

Model III is designed to best serve clients with moderate barriers to employment. The range of services provided may include initial training and certificate programs which are short-term (average 4-12 weeks in duration) and are targeted for specified sectors of labor markets with growth in their service area. Depending on the vendor, clients may be placed in highly supportive work sites where they can earn wages in addition to receiving a reduced TAFDC grant while transitioning into an unsubsidized job. Clients receive support to apply for, obtain, and maintain employment.

CIES Outcomes

The primary goal of the CIES provider is to assist clients in obtaining and retaining employment. These outcome-based programs have improved steadily in performance since 2010. In FY15, the Department was able to fund 908 Model II slots and 843 Model III slots. In FY15, 50.0% of Department clients who participated in a CIES program obtained and retained employment for at least 90 days as a result of the program. In FY15, 480 clients who had participated in a Model II CIES program entered employment which was retained for at least 30 days. Three hundred and sixty-four (364) of these clients remained employed for at least 90 days. In FY15, 394 clients who had participated in a Model III CIES program entered employment which was retained for at least 30 days. Two hundred and sixty-nine (269) of these clients remained employed for at least 90 days.

Massachusetts Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI)

The Office for Refugees and Immigrants (ORI) 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 ORI model. Services 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 and make it possible for the Department to serve recent immigrants that have a wide range of cultural and linguistic barriers to employment. Currently, ORI services are offered in the Boston, Lynn, Worcester and West Springfield areas.

ORI Outcomes

The primary goal of the ORI program is to assist noncitizen clients in developing skills to obtain and retain employment. This program was expanded in 2015 to serve clients whose primary language is Spanish. In FY15, three hundred and twenty-five (325) clients were placed through the ORI program. ORI met 100% of their job placement goals. The ORI contract in FY15 did not require tracking beyond 30 days of employment placement.

DTA Works

The DTA Works program is designed to help TAFDC clients, statewide, in need of current work experience and mentorship by providing placement in the Department's Transitional Assistance Offices (TAOs) and partner agencies. Under this initiative, clients not only gain professional skills and work experience, but are given "on the job" support to develop the soft skills necessary to obtain and maintain employment. Clients enrolled in the DTA Works program are eligible to participate for up to six months and receive a small stipend. Additionally, clients at the end of their six-month internship are evaluated for skills matching current job openings at the Department and with other state agencies. Clients are required to conduct independent job search during their enrollment in DTA Works. Participating clients are overseen by a program manager who meets with each intern one-on-one on a bi-weekly basis to evaluate the placement and provide job development services.

DTA Works Outcomes

The primary goal of the DTA Works program is to provide real life work experience and to mentor clients to become better equipped for the workforce. The internship opportunity may provide up to date professional references and increase their marketable skills for employment opportunities. In FY15, funding for this program was greatly increased to afford more clients the opportunity to participate. Since 2010, the Department has afforded 329 clients the opportunity to participate in the DTA Works program. Approximate 68% of these clients have since obtained employment. Thirty (30) DTA Works Interns entered employment in FY15. The DTA Works program does not track the duration of employment entered post-internship.

Young Parents Program

The Young Parents Program (YPP) is an educational outcome-based program administered through community-based public/non-profit organizations statewide. YPP is designed to serve pregnant and/or parenting clients who do not have a high school diploma or its equivalent. Pregnant and parenting young adults, ages 14 through 23, are eligible to enroll in YPP services. They may participate up to age 24. Services include assessment, Adult Basic Education, high school/Hi-SET education, life and parenting skills, counseling, prevocational activities, job development, job placement, and follow-up services. YPP's primary goals are to increase the educational attainment

level of participants to help them obtain a high school diploma or equivalency and to assist them to take the appropriate next steps to self-sufficiency.

YPP Outcomes

The YPP program not only assists young pregnant and parenting clients in obtaining their high school diploma or equivalency certificate, but also encourages and supports them on the path to higher education while developing parenting and life skills so as to successfully ready them for employment in the future. YPP is mainly educational attainment focused, rather than employment focused. That being said, a number of YPP participants do transition to employment after attaining their high school diploma or equivalent. FY15 funding allowed the Department to provide four hundred and seventy-seven (477) YPP placements. Approximately 20.3% of these YPP participants ultimately entered employment. Another 19.4% went on to complete additional education and/or training.

It is important to note that Massachusetts has the lowest teen pregnancy and birth rate in the country. Further, Massachusetts sees fewer young parents leave traditional school settings, while a number of teen parents have already obtained their high school diploma/equivalency and are in need of a workforce training slot.

Additional ESP-Focused Supports

The Department provides a number of employment-related support services that have proven essential for TAFDC clients to successfully progress on a career pathway that will lead to economic independence, family stability, and self-sufficiency. These services include:

- TAFDC Orientations that are run statewide each Tuesday at 10am and Thursday at 1pm, where clients can learn about available programs, meet with vendors and enroll in the ESP activity that is right for them;
- ESP childcare referrals;
- Transitional child care (TCC) referrals;
- Transportation reimbursement;
- Learning Disability screening and assessments;
- Hi-SET vouchers;
- Marketing of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Earned Income Credit (EIC); and
- Transitional Benefit Alternative (SNAP) benefits.

Eligible TAFDC clients who are participating in most work-related activities receive the following supports as needed: ESP childcare referrals, transportation reimbursement 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 EITC and EIC.

Eligible former TAFDC clients who have transitioned to employment receive the following supports for a limited time as needed: TCC referrals, transportation reimbursement, and information about the benefits of employment and eligibility for tax credits via EITC and EIC. Most also

received Transitional Benefit Alternative (SNAP) benefits. These small but meaningful supports help to mitigate the “cliff effect” many clients face when transitioning off of TAFDC and reinforce the benefits of work.

An essential part of the Department’s employment efforts are its Full Engagement Workers (FEW) in each TAO who assist clients in workforce training, obtaining and maintaining employment, and other issues that present barriers to employment. The FEWs provide an overview to the clients of the transitional nature of TAFDC benefits, and ensure that they are aware of available local work-related opportunities, the advantages of employment, and transitional services. FEWs also work to develop non-Department funded work-related resources in their areas. The TAFDC Orientations are run by the FEW in each area office.

Moving Forward – Planned Enhancements

The Baker-Polito Administration is committed to refining DTA programs to help residents of the Commonwealth overcome barriers to economic self-sufficiency by gaining the skills and education needed to find and keep employment. To that end, DTA is committed to serving the working poor: helping them go from dependency on TAFDC and SNAP benefits to economic independence. To reach this goal, DTA will explore new ideas and program structures to allow a greater number of individuals and families to shed the safety net of government assistance and find a route out of poverty.

Expanding access to employment support services

The Governor’s FY17 budget proposal fully funds the Pathways to Self-Sufficiency program, allowing DTA to invest in the tools needed by clients to build the skills and experience required to secure meaningful employment and self-sufficiency. Pathways funding is increased from \$3 million to \$15.1 million to serve an estimated 3,200 clients in CIES Model II and Model III programs.

These funds will be used to support clients through education and training programs leading to industry recognized credentials and employment in areas of emerging job markets. DTA must engage clients in meaningful activities that will lead to long term economic self-sufficiency versus participation in work activities for the sake of maintaining eligibility.

Promoting Responsible Parenting and Multigenerational Economic Stability

Recognizing that every Massachusetts child deserves to be supported by both parents (including child support payments to help families as they move towards economic self-sufficiency), DTA proposes an Employment Service Program for noncustodial parents who are not in receipt of TAFDC, but who are legally liable for children who are receiving benefits with their custodial parent. This would be a pilot program to examine the potential outcomes for these individuals help move their child out of poverty and towards a better life.

New Transitional Benefit Alternative (TBA) for Newly Employed TAFDC Clients

While job training programs produce impressive results, it is important to consider the cliff effect that often exists for those transitioning off benefits. DTA is proposing to provide 12-months of additional phased out assistance in the form of transportation allowance and a transitional work expense stipend. These benefits would be small in scale, but impactful for those working to move their families out of poverty.

DTA is committed to assisting clients gain the skills and experience they need to transition from benefits to self-sufficiency, and the Employment Service Program is essential to these goals.

ⁱ Please note that the FY16 line item requires DTA to track the number of clients who remain employed after one year. DTA has amended our provider contracts to require this provision, however the FY16 budget has not yet been law for one year. DTA is committed to assisting clients obtain the skills and experience needed to transition to long-term self-sufficiency. The Employment Services Program is essential in providing these services.