



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
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Field Operations Memo 2000-7
March 1, 2000

To: Transitional Assistance Office Staff
From: Joyce Sampson, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations
Re: TAFDC Casework Activity and Expanded ESP Participation

Background

Field Operations Memo 98-17, Transitional Assistance Casework Activities:

- established procedures for contacting recipients to discuss the 24-month Time Limit;
- introduced the Transition Plan which documents the plans and efforts of applicants and recipients to become independent; and
- developed a schedule for meeting with those recipients subject to the time limit and a Transition Plan to be used during this process, to better enable them to achieve their goals and workers to assist them.

Several issues were raised regarding the use of the Transition Plan and many suggestions were made to improve the questions stated on the Transition Plan. In response to these comments, Field Operations Memo 98-17 A revised the Transition Plan.

Introduction

All recipients must receive information about resources and have access to the opportunities enabling them to become independent. We must continue to focus on moving recipients into employment and/or preparing them for employment with skills training and educational opportunities.

While the primary focus is on those recipients currently subject to the Work Program and the 24-month time limit, we must direct and concentrate our efforts to work with those recipients ***who have a time limit but are not work program-required.*** This time should be used to inform them of the opportunities available to them and to ensure they understand the impact of time-limited benefits.

**Purpose of
Memo**

This Field Operations Memo:

- Revises how casework activity for recipients subject to the 24-month time limit should be managed.
- Explains that all contacts with a recipient do not require an actual eligibility review. However, when contact is made with a recipient, especially **any** recipient subject to the 24 Months of Time-Limited Benefits, Transitional Assistance Workers should market employment, Structured Job Search, FEP, Supported Work and skills training opportunities in addition to emphasizing the effects of time-limited benefits.
- Identifies a group of recipients for whom ESP activities *may* be mandated.

Obsolete Material

This Field Operations Memo obsoletes Field Operations Memo 98-17. Field Operations Memo 98-17 A remains in effect with the exception of references to 98-17. Field Operations Memo 98-17 A provides current information about and instructions for completing the Transition Plan.

**Transitional
Assistance
Worker
Responsibilities**

For All Cases:

- **continue to conduct full eligibility reviews at least twice a year.** The Transitional Status Report form (Rev. 5/97) and the Transition Plan must be used at all eligibility reviews;
- complete a Transition Plan at application, at each eligibility review and whenever a case which has been exempt becomes nonexempt;
- actively monitor and support job search efforts, market Employment Assistance Services (EAS), FEP, Supported Work and skills training opportunities in addition to emphasizing the effects of the 24-month time limit;
- inform the recipient of the Transitional Services available upon case closing. Stress the importance of Food Stamp benefits, MassHealth benefits, Child Care Services and Post-Employment Services available when their cases close;
- at each eligibility review or other appropriate time, ensure child support information is current and accurate and that the benefits of child support cooperation are understood by recipients (see page 11 for specific Child Support Responsibilities); and
- ask recipients if their rent is paid up to date to determine if referrals for additional support services to prevent homelessness are appropriate.

For Nonexempt Cases:

- complete a Transition Plan, either monthly or quarterly, according to the schedule in Attachment A;

**Transitional
Assistance
Worker
Responsibilities
(continued)**

For Nonexempt Cases (continued):

- complete eligibility reviews for nonexempt teen parent cases at least four times per year; and
- assess the ESP program and child care availability and mandate participation in the available ESP program for nonexempt recipients not subject to the Work Program who are in the last 12 months of time-limited benefits.

For Exempt Cases:

- complete eligibility reviews for exempt teen parent cases at least four times per year. When the teen parent turns 20, PRISM II will generate an alert. Once the alert is generated, the case must be reviewed and, if appropriate, have additional contacts made in accordance with Attachment A,
- complete eligibility reviews for exempt cases with the youngest child under two at least twice a year. PRISM II generates an alert to identify these cases. When the child turns two, review the case and schedule additional contacts in accordance with Attachment A; and
- complete eligibility reviews for cases exempt due to a medical disability at least once a year. When the disability duration expires and no new Disability Supplement has been submitted, review the case and, if appropriate, schedule additional contacts in accordance with Attachment A.

Other Transitional Assistance Worker responsibilities include, but are not limited to:

- Accessing BEACON or contacting service providers to determine program and child care slot availability for non-work program-required recipients and referring these recipients to the appropriate program.
 - Monitoring all monthly reports, PRISM Alerts and BEACON Views, and completing the necessary actions.
 - Processing of child care and transportation requests timely.
 - Reviewing PACES and BEACON whenever a case action is required on either of these systems.
 - Monitoring of sanctioned cases monthly.
 - Reviewing cases listed on **PA/FS Cases with Type "FS" Income on File - No Sanctioned Member** (see Field Operations Memo 97-40) and taking the appropriate action.
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**Transitional
Assistance
Worker
Responsibilities
(continued)**

- Updating the Learnfare Tracking System by adding and deleting dependents or changing school codes whenever appropriate.

Important Reminder: As a result of Welfare Reform and Time-limited Benefits, it is extremely important for cases to be coded correctly on PACES so the information is bridged to BEACON. When completing a case action, pay special attention to the **coding** reflected on PACES (action reasons, group codes, option codes and program codes). Proper coding is important because the selection of cases and plans for recipient contact are determined by the information on PACES and BEACON.

**Frequency of
Contacts for
Recipients
Subject to the
24-Month Time
Limit**

The Schedule of Contacts with Recipients Subject to the 24-Month Time Limit (Attachment A) shows the number of contacts to be made monthly or quarterly for each recipient within the 24-month time-limit period. Due to Transitional Assistance Office suggestions, frequency of contact has been modified to focus attention on cases that are not participating in an ESP component or are not working a minimum of 20 hours per week at or above minimum wage.

Recipients must be contacted, either by phone or by face-to-face review, depending upon their activities in accordance with Attachment A. Each of these contacts must be documented on a Transition Plan to monitor progress and to offer access to appropriate services.

*If contact is made by phone, the Transitional Assistance Worker will document the recipient's responses on the Transition Plan and check off **Yes** for phone contact on the bottom of the plan. Mail the recipient a copy of the completed plan. If several phone attempts are made and the recipient *cannot* be reached, send the recipient an appointment letter for a face-to-face contact.*

If contact is face to face, the recipient will fill out and sign the front side of the Transition Plan and the Transitional Assistance Worker will complete the reverse side. Give the recipient a copy of the completed plan.

All other recipient contacts that occur throughout the 24 months (i.e., group activities) should be documented in the case record but do not warrant the use of a Transition Plan.

**Nonexempt
Recipients
Neither Subject to
the Work
Program Nor
Participating in
Any Component**

Face-to-face contact is required quarterly for the first 15 months of the 24-month time limit and monthly for the remaining nine months.

Transitional Assistance Workers must:

- stress the ramifications of the 24-month time limit to each recipient;
- review the recipient's needs, abilities, barriers to employment and interests;
- inform the recipient of the availability of and benefits of participating in an ESP component activity;
- encourage ESP component activity participation as soon as possible;
- confer with ESP service providers on component availability;
- conduct an ESP assessment and create an Employment Development Plan (EDP), if necessary; and
- mandate participation in the final 12 months of time-limited benefits, depending on component and child care availability.

**Mandating
Nonexempt
Recipients
Neither Subject to
the Work
Program Nor
Participating in
Any Component**

The Transitional Assistance Worker must inform the recipient that participation in an ESP component will be *mandated* during the last 12 months of time-limited benefits subject to both ESP component and child care availability. ESP participation can be mandated in the following components: Basic Educational Services, Skills Training or Supported Work. Participation in Basic Job Search, Structured Job Search or Full Employment Program **cannot** be mandated. The recipient's ESP assessment and the number of months of time-limited benefits remaining must be considered part of the ESP component mandating process. Mandated ESP component participation must be documented on the Transition Plan(s).

Before mandated participation in a designated ESP component, the recipient must be advised of all ESP options and afforded the opportunity to volunteer to participate in the ESP component of his or her choice. The recipient may volunteer to participate in Basic Job Search, Structured Job Search or the Full Employment Program instead of the component being considered for mandated participation. The recipient's selection of an ESP component is subject to the approval of an EDP.

**Mandating
Nonexempt
Recipients
Neither Subject to
the Work
Program Nor
Participating in
Any Component
(continued)**

If after enrolling in an ESP component, either as a volunteer or mandated recipient, he or she subsequently fails to meet the participation guidelines, explore good cause and reassess the EDP. If good cause does not exist, the sanction process will be initiated.

To enroll these recipients on BEACON in any component, conduct an ESP assessment. Ensure that the component and child care slots are available by verifying this information on BEACON or contacting service providers before making the referral. Once the assessment is completed, the recipient is enrolled and an EDP completed, BEACON will monitor participation and automatically sanction an individual who does not meet participation levels for the component. The recipient will then be mandated to perform TEMP Community Service.

If a mandated recipient *refuses* to enroll in a component after availability has been confirmed, the Transitional Assistance Worker:

- creates an EDP referring the recipient to a TEMP Community Service site;
- gives the recipient 10 days to comply (enroll in the component);
- if the recipient has not responded after 10 days (monitored by checking the View "Pending ESP Referral"), checks off the box "Refusal to Cooperate" on the EDP window. This will generate a Warning Notice from BEACON;
- refers the recipient to a TEMP Community Service site giving 10 more days to comply;
- if the recipient has not responded after that 10-day period (monitored by checking the View "Pending ESP Referral"), checks off the box "Refusal to Cooperate" on the EDP window. This will sanction the recipient and mandate TEMP Community Service, again giving 10 more days to comply; and
- if the recipient has not responded after that 10-day period (monitored by checking the View "Pending ESP Referral"), checks off the box "Refusal to Cooperate" on the EDP window. This will close the case for failure to comply with the EDP requirement.

The recipient who enrolls in TEMP Community Service must return the *Community Service Participation Form* monthly and must meet the 75 per cent attendance requirement. Failure to do so will cause BEACON to **automatically** increase the sanction level. Transitional Assistance Workers are reminded to check their Views and the AU's Sanction History to ensure the recipient is receiving correct notices.

**Community
Service/ Work
Program
Alternative/
Earning Less
than Minimum
Wage/
Combination of
Community
Service and 20
Hours of Work**

Face-to-face contact is required quarterly for the first 15 months of the 24-month time limit and monthly for the remaining nine months.

Work Program Alternatives include foster parenting, babysitting a grandchild, the first 120 days of housing search, internship or work study or admittance to a substance abuse shelter.

Individuals employed but paid less than minimum wage will be reviewed on the same schedule as those doing community service.

Transitional Assistance Workers must:

- focus on the recipient's efforts to find employment;
 - provide additional referrals to ESP activities, as appropriate;
 - review the skills the recipient has acquired through his or her current activities;
 - promote EAS and/or Supported Work;
 - if the recipient is participating in community service, ask about the possibility of a paid job at the site;
 - recommend to the Transitional Assistance Supervisor that a recipient be moved to a new community service site when the current site appears to be unproductive or after one year's placement, whichever comes first; and
 - complete an EDP, if necessary.
- Note:** Recipients must submit their *Community Service Participation Form* at these scheduled meetings.
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**20 Hours
Employment at
Minimum Wage or
Greater/
Participation in
Skills Training/
Educational
Programs**

Either phone or face-to-face contact is required quarterly for the first 18 months of the 24-month time limit and for the remaining six months either monthly phone or face-to-face contacts (face-to-face contact is required for the six-, two- and one-month remaining contacts).

The Transitional Assistance Worker must:

- explain the importance of the recipient's seeking full-time employment;
- explore the possibility of the recipient's increasing hours at work;
- review the skills and abilities the recipient acquired through part-time employment or knowledge gained while participating in the component;
- promote EAS participation;
- if the recipient is not working, identify skills and abilities that would make the recipient marketable to prospective employers;
- case-conference with the service provider to ensure the recipient is taking appropriate steps to get and keep employment;
- encourage the recipient to actively participate in the job search activities provided by the skills training provider;
- make the recipient aware of other employment-related services currently available (including Post-Employment Services); and
- complete an EDP, if necessary.

**Supported Work/
Full-Time
Employment
Earning Minimum
Wage or Greater**

Either phone or face-to-face contact is required on a semiannual basis for the first 12 months of the 24-month time limit. Quarterly meetings are required for the ensuing nine months (either phone or face to face contacts with phone contact an option for the nine-, six-, three-months remaining contacts). During the final two months, contact is required monthly. Phone or face-to-face contact is required during the two-month remaining contact, face-to-face contact is required for the one-month remaining contact).

The Transitional Assistance Worker must:

- if the recipient is enrolled in Supported Work, review the skills the recipient gained through this component;
 - if the recipient is enrolled in Supported Work, case-conference with the Supported Work contractor to ensure the recipient and the Supported Work contractor are taking appropriate steps to have the recipient get and keep gainful employment;
 - if the recipient is working full time, concentrate on the recipient's efforts to find a job with better pay or a second job;
 - encourage enrollment in Post-Employment Services; and
 - complete an EDP, if necessary.
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**Identifying
Recipient
Barriers to
Employment**

During recipient contacts, the Transitional Assistance Worker must discuss possible employment barriers with the recipient. Employment barriers may include but are not limited to lack of child care or transportation, noncitizen status, domestic violence, homelessness, language literacy, medical impairment(s) and substance abuse. The Transitional Assistance Worker must:

- assist the recipient as much as possible in overcoming any barriers or problems which may prevent reaching self-sufficiency; and
- be familiar with Department programs as well as resources and supports available through community-based organizations in the area.

The following are some examples of potential barriers to employment and recommendations for Transitional Assistance Workers' assisting recipients in overcoming them.

Example 1: Recipients may disclose during a review that they are victims of domestic violence. The Transitional Assistance Worker must discuss and make referrals to the Domestic Violence Specialist, who will refer the recipient to community-based domestic violence programs for support. Referrals should be made if there are any questions, concerns or needs for emergency safety planning as a result of domestic violence (these support services are listed in the brochure *You and Your Child Deserve to Be Safe*). The Transitional Assistance Worker should also explain applying for a waiver of time-limited benefits due to domestic violence.

Example 2: A recipient is participating in a job search activity but is concerned about paying child care when the case closes. The Transitional Assistance Worker must explain that working recipients can receive child care services subject to a sliding scale payment schedule for 12 consecutive months after the case closes.

Example 3: A recipient explains that he or she has been looking for work but is not getting hired. The Transitional Assistance Worker realizes that the recipient does not speak English very well and identifies this as a possible barrier to obtaining employment. The Transitional Assistance Worker should refer this recipient to an English as a Second Language (ESL) course. A referral should also be made to DET or a career center to identify appropriate employment opportunities.

**Transitional
Assistance
Supervisor
Responsibilities**

Transitional Assistance Supervisor responsibilities include:

- preplanning with the Transitional Assistance Worker for Transition Plan contact(s) on more complex cases;
 - reviewing and approving by signing all Transition Plans (the Transitional Assistance Supervisor's signature does not need to be on the form at the time it's given to the recipient);
 - reviewing alternative activities and making suggestions for the recipient to the Transitional Assistance Worker;
 - participating in case conferences with recipients and Transitional Assistance Workers or service providers when necessary;
 - reviewing recommendations made by the Transitional Assistance Worker for a change in a recipient's community service site and bringing the recommendation to the Transitional Assistance Office Director or designee;
 - reviewing recommendations by the Transitional Assistance Worker mandating ESP participation for a nonexempt, non-work program required recipient; and
 - assisting the Transitional Assistance Worker with identifying and verifying ESP component and child care slot availability.
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**Child Support
Information**

At each *eligibility review* the Transitional Assistance Worker must ensure the information on the absent parent is accurate and current and that a referral to DOR is made.

Be sure to ask questions such as “Is there anything different you can tell us about him or her?” or “Have you seen him or her lately?” Child support will be a valuable resource to the recipient at the end of the 24-month time limit.

If the absent parent information has changed, submit new T-A 34/36 and CA/CS forms to DOR with a current recipient signature and date unless good cause exists.

If the absent parent information has not changed, review the “old” CA/CS for completeness and accuracy and write on the form “**no new information.**” Sign, date and submit the form to DOR.

On each CA/CS show that the case has been reviewed by checking the change box and writing “review” after the word “change.” Keep a copy in the case record.

For cases in which a child is deprived of support by the death of a parent, be sure to attach to the CA/CS a copy of the verification of death. See 106 CMR 203.510. This action needs to be done only once.

**Cases Applying
for an Extension**

Any case discussed in this memo, except the case working full time at or above minimum wage, that reaches the end of the 24-month time limit and requests an extension must be seen *monthly and a Transition Plan completed* until the extension request decision is made. For detailed instructions for the extension process, including the Final Transition Plan review, see *The TAFDC Procedural Guide*, Chapter 19.

Questions

Policy-related questions should be referred by your Hotline Designee to the Policy Hotline at (617) 348-8478. Systems-related questions should be referred by your Hotline Designee to Systems Customer Support Services at (617) 348-5290.

Schedule of Contacts with Recipients Subject to the 24-Month Time Limit

Months Left	Application																							
	24	23	22	21	20	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Months Used	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23**

ESP COMPONENT

None																								
Community Service Work Program Alt.* Employed <Min. Wage Combo of C.S.& 20 Hrs. Wages	F		F			F			F			F			F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F	F
20 Hours Employment at Minimum Wage or Greater	F			P/F			P/F			P/F		F			P/F			F	P/F	P/F	P/F	F	F	F
Skills/Training Educational Programs																								
Supported Work	F						P/F					F			P/F			P/F				P/F	P/F	F
Full Time Employment Earning Minimum Wage or Greater																								

* foster parent, grandmother babysitting a grandchild, housing search person, recipient in an internship or work study or person in a substance abuse shelter

** If an extension is filed, recipients must be seen monthly until a decision is made

Key:
F = Face-to-Face Contact
P/F = Face-to-Face or Phone Contact
All initial contacts must be Face-to-Face