

SITE VISIT TO PUERTO RICO: ADDRESSING TANF TIME LIMITS

San Juan, PR – September 27-28, 2001

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SITE VISIT SUMMARY

Event: Site Visit to Puerto Rico: Addressing TANF Time Limits

Date: September 27-28, 2001

Location: San Juan, Puerto Rico

1. OVERVIEW

The Welfare Peer Technical Assistance (TA) Network, funded by the Administration for Children and Families (ACF), Office of Family Assistance (OFA), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) coordinated this site visit for staff members from the Virgin Islands' Department of Human Services and Department of Labor to collaborate on TANF time limit preparedness strategies and post time limit strategies. Work participation rate issues for the Virgin Islands' TANF Program were addressed throughout the workshop as both territories compared and contrasted strategies for job development, placement, and retention for TANF recipients. In addition, staff members from the Virgin Islands were able to visit service providers and inter-agency partners such as case management contractors, one-stop centers, microenterprise programs, and non-profit centers.

2. BACKGROUND

On July 1, 2002, nearly 300 families will have reached their sixty-month TANF time limit in the Virgin Islands in accordance with the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act (PRWORA). This means that all heads of households who have reached their time limit will no longer be eligible to receive assistance. Commensurately, any household whose head of household is ineligible by virtue of the expiration of time limits will no longer receive financial assistance. The expiration of these time limits will have a critical impact upon the lives of numerous Virgin Islanders now on TANF.

The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services was interested in learning how other states and territories are approaching the issue of TANF time limits. After a TANF participant's time limit has expired, he or she must be employed or in work activities. The Virgin Island's approach is that the client must be in work activities in order to receive any further assistance. Although the Department of Labor will provide transitional assistance to qualified individuals who surpass their time limits, that assistance is also limited. This makes meeting work participation rates a critical issue for the Virgin Islands. They approached the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network seeking technical assistance related to time limits, and specifically around issues related to job creation, retention, and advancement.

In order to address the issue of time limits and their challenges related to work participation rates, the Virgin Islands has taken many preliminary steps. Since the passage of welfare reform

legislation in 1996, DHS has provided a broad range of services to ensure that everyone on TANF is given the opportunity to attain self-sufficiency through work. Through these efforts, the Territory has experienced approximately 43% reduction in its TANF population since 1996.

In support of the Department of Human Services office job creation efforts, the government has been proactive in offering jobs to qualified TANF recipients when they become available. The governor's office has been communicating with the Department of Human Services in order to promote collaboration and assist in getting the word out to TANF recipients about time limits. In support of this effort, they have been developing public service advertisements that are targeted to different audiences such as low-income workers, those who are unemployed, and other advertisements for potential collaborative partners.

The Virgin Islands Department of Human Services is currently putting together a time limits preparedness plan. The plan is still formulating and is tentatively called the *State Needy Family Transition Program*. The plan's goal is to provide limited and temporary grant assistance, temporary transitional assistance (non-financial support services), and one-time (non-financial) assistance to families whose time limits have expired. This program does not include persons who fall under the 20% federal hardship statute. Such persons will continue to receive assistance under the Federal TANF program. The territory will utilize input from Puerto Rico gained during the site visit to further develop its plan.

The TANF agency in the Virgin Islands is also in the process of reorganizing its services into an improved one-stop employment and training operation. Part of the site visit included a visit to one of Puerto Rico's larger One Stop Centers in the territory. Staff members from the Virgin Islands were interested in learning more about how that center operates its employer outreach/job development functions, as well as how it delivers services such as education, training, case management, and life skills training to clients.

The Virgin Islands is facing unique challenges to meeting its work participation rates because of their rural nature, political make-up, and serious economic decline. The territory is also dealing with challenges related to interagency partnerships as well as partnerships with employers and service providers. Puerto Rico was chosen as the site to visit due to its similarities to the Virgin Islands. They both have similar economies, political climates, and client bases. They are also both facing similar issues related to time limits, but are having different results. Puerto Rico has made substantive advances in job creation and advancement, microenterprise development, contracting with service providers, and implementing effective interagency partnerships. Puerto Rico welcomed the staff from the Virgin Islands to discuss their challenges and to offer solutions based on their own experiences.

3. SITE VISIT SUMMARIES

The following two summaries were provided by two members of the site visit team. They provide general observations and reactions to the visit in general as well as lessons learned during the visit. The first summary is from the technical assistance requester from the Virgin

Islands who originally requested TA from the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network. The second summary provides a combined Federal perspective from two representatives of the Region II Administration for Children and Families office.

3.1 Lennox Zamore, Director, Virgin Islands Department of Human Services

A. General Observations Summary

Day 1

Our first day comprised of a site visit to the Sister Isolina Ferre Center. The entire center was accommodating, professional, and cordial, as could be said for all the facilities we attended. At the Sister Isolina Ferre Center, we had a riveting presentation on the *Ray of Light Project*. The presentation began with an orientation to the vision of this Puerto Rican "Mother Theresa", Sister Insolina Ferre and proceeded to an interactive presentation/discussion on their paradigm of micro-enterprise development. A former TANF recipient who was professional and resourceful chaired the entire session.

We then visited the Center for Diagnose and Treatment at Playa de Ponce (job readiness and placement site) followed by a site visit to the Tabaiba Arts and Crafts Center (job placement site) and the Young Mother's Job Placement facility. We had an opportunity to discuss and view artisan and upholstery projects that allowed TANF participants to become self-employed with little or no capital in a short turn-around time. After lunch we discussed strategies for job development for hard-to-place clients whose TANF time limit is approaching. Given our similar economies and workforce profiles, our issues were very similar.

Day 2

Day two focused on case management and inter-agency visits. Our first site visit to the American Management and Administration Corporation (case management private contractor) resulted in an interactive session on effective caseload management followed by a discussion on difficult issues for welfare reform and TANF reauthorization. The issues of insufficient funding, penalty calculations, and economic parity surfaced effortlessly. We then visited the Department of Labor's One-Stop Center, the Administration for the Right to Work in Caguas, Puerto Rico, where we attended a presentation on job placement strategies.

B. Compare and Contrast Between Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands

It must be noted from the start that Puerto Rico provides services primarily through contractors, while the Virgin Islands provides services primarily directly through state employees. This presented considerable difference in program implications. Since the Virgin Islands staff provides direct services from intake to discharge, it is easier to consolidate and integrate services. It is also easier to use observation and subjective

controls. The Puerto Rico system requires much more collaboration and coordination between agency and provider. The sheer size of the constituency necessitates objective methods of control in order to ensure standard implementation of program design.

Our highly similar political communities make it difficult for us to negotiate freely between the public and private sectors. We both concur that serious time limits preparedness must be a high-level political priority as its negative consequences have far reaching political ramifications in our communities.

The language barrier presented a major difference. However, we were able to observe that the cultural milieu allowed for an emphasis on the person more than the program. For example, participants were treated much like family. This cultural milieu is valuable since an increasingly large sector of our TANF population in one of our districts, St. Croix, comprises Hispanic residents. Most of these residents are from Vieques, Puerto Rico.

C. Implementation of lessons learned

The lessons we learned were numerous. Some of the lessons that have direct program implications are as follows:

1. Micro enterprise is a viable employment options for time limited recipients as long as it is implemented by a provider who has a “tried and tested” model. Key elements of such a model are as follows:
 - i. Emulation of a craft business operation
 - ii. Peer mentorship
 - iii. Focus on human development as well as economic development
 - iv. Networks with similar businesses internationally
 - v. Requires little or no start-up capital
2. Cultural art is a viable method of self-employment
3. Puerto Rico’s upholstery program can be implemented in the Virgin Islands. However, we would negotiate with the government to allow our participants to do the reupholstering of public facilities.
4. Puerto Rico district representatives will be invited to participate in our time limit preparedness workshop in November 2001 so as to maintain partnership and solidarity on the subject.

**3.2 Petra I. Arroyo, TANF Program Specialist and
Myrna Quintana, Program Assistant
Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services**

Participants

Thursday, September 27, 2001 (Site Visit to the City of Ponce, PR)

A. Visit to the Center for Diagnose and Treatment at Playa de Ponce
(Sor Isolina Ferré Center)

1. DISCUSSION MATTERS:

- a. Job Readiness – Marilyn Morales, TANF Program
- b. Job Placement – Alan Cintron, Tabaiba Arts and Crafts and HUD Program
- c. Micro-enterprise – Olga Busquets, Upholstery Professor
- d. Young Mother’s Job Placement – Rosalia Torres, Community Service Director

2. Sor Isolina Ferré Center Participants:

- Haydee Torres, Director TANF Program
- José Luis Diaz Cotto, Chief Executive Officer

3. U.S. Virgin Islands Participants:

- Lennox Zamore, Director TANF Program
Department of Human Services, USVI
- Natalie Bailey, JOBS Program Social Worker
Department of Human Services, USVI
- Andrea M. Francis, JOBS Program Employment Training
Officer, Department of Human Services, USVI
- Michelle Ronelli Lindsey, District Manager
Department of Human Services, USVI

4. Puerto Rico Participants

- Carmen Sacarello, Executive Director I (TANF Program)
Administration for the Socioeconomic Development
- Eunice Pabon, Executive Director I (TANF Program)
Administration for the Socioeconomic Development
- Petra I. Arroyo, Program Specialist (TANF Program)
Administration for Children and Families
- Myrna Quintana – Program Assistant
Administration for Children and Families

Friday, September 28, 2001 (Visit to the City of Caguas and Humacao)

A. Site visit to American Management and Administration Corporation (AMAC)

1. Facilitators:

- a. Carmen Navedo – TANF Program Director, AMAC
- b. Brenda Rivera – TANF Program Administrator, AMAC

B. Site visit to One Stop Center, Administration for the Right to Work

Department of Labor (Caguas, Puerto Rico)

1. Combined efforts of job placement oriented government programs
 - a. Facilitators: Migdalia Torres, Program Coordinator (Welfare to Work)
Administration for the Right to Work
Luis Franciso Lopez – Regional Office Manager
Administration for the Right to Work
Department of Labor and Human Resources

Site Visit Summary

The first day, we traveled to the city of Ponce, that is located at the south part of the island to the Sor Isolina Ferré Center (Center for Diagnose and Treatment-job readiness and placement site), which covers a distance over 2 ½ hours from San Juan, metropolitan area. Petra Arroyo had the opportunity on behalf of Mary Ann Higgins, HUB Director and Louis H. Katz, Assistant Regional Administrator, to welcome and thank the Sor Isolina Ferré staff and the Puerto Rico TANF staff for coordinating this activity for the benefit of the TANF VI (Virgin Islands) staff.

The VI staff had the opportunity to participate and make a contribution to the different topics in areas of the TANF program covered by the staff of Sor Isolina Ferre Center including:

- Job Readiness – Job skills, life skills training, and other job preparation activities were discussed.
- Job Placement – They discussed very thoroughly the Micro-Enterprise development strategy, and a tour was given to the attendees to the Tabaiba Arts and Crafts Center. In this workshop, the participants are trained in various arts and crafts to develop themselves and start their own shops in order to move toward economic self-sufficiency. Another example of the Micro-enterprise that was brought to the audience was in upholstery. The staff reported it has been a great success in assisting the participants to develop their skills and eventually to have their own businesses. Their upholstery professor, Olga Busquets, indicated that they have graduated many TANF participants who are doing very well in their own businesses.
- Young Mother Job Placement -- At this center orientation and counseling was stressed to young mothers under the age of 18.

The VI staff showed enthusiasm and interest in these activities, and they were able to ask questions regarding these resources to be in better position to consider and implement their own programs in the Virgin Islands.

In the group discussion, several strategies for job development, job placement, and retention were discussed in great detail. Staff at this center regularly conduct a 3 month, 6 month and 1 year follow-up at clients' job sites.

The VI staff was impressed with the follow-up job placement services conducted, which are considered vital for the participation rate requirement that is a crucial issue in the Virgin Islands.

The second day we visited the American Management and Administration Corporation (AMAC) which is a private contractor that administers the case management activity. This includes the job placement of TANF participants.

At this time, the case management activity was discussed at length with emphasis on the assessment of the participants to determine their job readiness. Typically at this site, participants are assessed and exposed to job offers furnished by the local Department of Labor office. In addition, it was also discussed that regional and local consortium are involved, including WTW (Welfare to Work) and WIA (Workforce Investment Act), and participants are referred to these resources for training and job opportunities.

The American Management and Administration conducts follow-up contacts by phone or visits to the job site on a weekly or monthly basis. Case managers and job placement officers keep in close contact to ensure job retention. Case managers from AMAC make a cross-match employment opportunity with the participant's profile. They also stressed that along with the employment services some supportive services are offered as needed such as: transportation, child care, lunch, uniform, and equipment.

At mid afternoon we visited the One-Stop Center sponsored by the Administration for the Right to Work within the Department of Labor in the city of Caguas. Following an overview presentation, several strategies were discussed to ensure appropriate employment and training services are provided to the participants. These services include participant assessment, orientation in the labor force, job search, exposure to the labor market, and cross-match with the job offers provided by the Department of Labor, Employment Services Division that are received daily by the case managers. They also mentioned that they make other job referrals through WTW and WIA. When the need arises, other supportive services are provided to the participants to assure job retention.

It is our impression that despite the short duration of the VI staff visit to Puerto Rico, they were still able to be exposed to some significant activities implemented by the Puerto Rico TANF Program. The lessons learned should enable the VI staff to be more equipped to create, design, and develop other strategies/resources to better serve their TANF population and enable them to comply with their work requirements.

4. FINAL REMARKS

Representatives from the Virgin Islands found this site visit to be extremely helpful in gaining new insights into strategies for job development and placement in light of the Territory's plan to address its TANF time limit preparedness. Both territories have committed to continue collaboration and support each other throughout the coming year. The Virgin Islands plans to hold an interagency strategy meeting that will involve several key human service Territory agencies, the Governor's office, and Federal representatives to address the current challenge of

time limit preparedness. As a continuation of the technical assistance provided during this site visit, representatives from Puerto Rico will be invited to participate in the meeting.

For questions concerning the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network, contact John Horejsi (ACF Federal Project Officer) at (202) 401-5031 , or e-mail jhorejsi@acf.dhhs.gov; or Blake Austensen (AFYA, Inc.- contractor) at (301) 270-0841, ext 215, or e-mail baustensen@afyainc.com. More welfare related information is available on the Welfare Peer Technical Assistance Network web site at www.calib.com/peerta.

REFERENCES

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