Providing Work Opportunities and Support for TANF Recipients with Disabilities

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Disabilities Among TANF Recipients

- Disabilities prevalent among TANF recipients
- Disabilities create difficulties with work participation and employment
- DRA heightened interest in work-based strategies for individuals with disabilities to increase work participation rates
Study Purpose

- To explore complexity of clients’ service needs
- To describe efforts to identify and address disabilities and engage TANF clients in work activities
- To examine program experience of states and localities
Service Strategies

- Assessment, service triage, and follow up
  - Anoka County, MN
  - Ramsey County, MN
  - New York City

- Partnerships between TANF and state vocational rehabilitation programs
  - Iowa
  - Vermont

- Specialized employment programs
  - Utah
Utah’s Supported Employment Programs

- History of identifying and addressing mental health conditions in TANF recipients

- Regional initiatives focused on work-based programs for those with mental health conditions

- Use of various work-based service models familiar to the mental health community
  - Community inclusion
  - Clubhouse model
Target Population

- TANF clients with clinical mental health conditions
- People who have trouble keeping a job and meeting federal work requirements
- People willing to participate in work and mental health treatment
DEO: Structured Employment

- In-house, entry-level jobs starting at $6.50 per hour
- Clients can make mistakes without being fired
- Therapists recommend work hours and accommodations
- Incentives, raises, and promotions
Structured Employment (cont’d)

- Access to job opportunities otherwise not available
- Opportunity to learn from mistakes builds confidence
- Work accommodations encourage productivity
- Positive reinforcement instills the value of work
Connection Cottage: Community Service and Work-Focused Activities

- Clients begin with regularly scheduled work shifts in the cottage
- Clients participate in operating the cottage
- Gradually transition to outside internships and paid employment
Connection Cottage (cont’d)

- “Work ordered day” acclimates clients to a structured workplace
- Self-reflection activities encourage progress toward work
- Preparation for more structured work activities
Components of Work-Focused Program

- Ongoing assessments of work and mental health needs
- Frequent service coordination within and between agencies
- Extensive supports for work and mental health treatment
- Active monitoring and re-engagement efforts
Program Costs and Payment Structures

- TANF funds support programs
- Providers contracted to serve 20 clients each up to nine months
- Amount and structure of contracts vary
  - DEO: payment benchmarks
  - Connection Cottage: fee-for-service with performance outcomes
Program Successes

- Provides a specialized service option for TANF recipients with mental health disabilities.
- DEO promotes increased participation and employment.
- Clients report feeling better about themselves and about work.
- Connection Cottage still in early implementation.
Program Challenges

- Finding staff with the right skills and experience
- Engaging clients and sustaining participation
- Moving clients into permanent jobs in the community