

Work First New Jersey (WFNJ) Emergency Assistance (EA)

Purpose of the training:

- Highlight WFNJ eligibility regarding administration of the EA program
- Develop a process to serve mutual clients/consumers
- Cross training

What is EA?

Emergency Assistance (EA) is a supportive service to meet the emergent needs of WFNJ and SSI recipients so they can comply with the work requirement by preventing disruptions caused by homelessness and related emergencies.



How EA Helps

Temporary housing and shelter-related assistance for people who are eligible for TANF, GA or SSI.

It helps to prevent homelessness by:

- Paying for back rent, mortgage and utilities.
- Providing temporary support for ongoing housing costs, such as rent, mortgage or emergency shelter (motel or shelter).
- Providing transportation to look for housing.

How EA Helps (continued)

- Set up a household by paying for:
 - moving expenses
 - security deposits for rent and utilities
 - essential house furnishings including one-time purchase of a medically necessary air conditioner
- Provide storage for personal possessions (where warranted).
- Cover eviction-related costs such as late fees.
- Court costs and attorney fees requires Division of Family Development (DFD) approval.
- Finders fees are permitted in extraordinary situations, with DFD approval.
- Provide food, until receipt of Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), and clothing.

EA Quality Assurance (QA)

- EA Quality Assurance is currently in 6 County Welfare Agencies (CWAs) and corresponding Municipal Welfare Agencies (MWAs):
 - Mercer
 - Hunterdon
 - Ocean
 - Burlington
 - Monmouth
 - Cape May
- The goal of the EA QA is to:
 - Ensure uniform implementation and administration of the EA program, based on Work First New Jersey Regulations
 - Work in conjunction with the CWAs and MWAs, to effectively and efficiently service clients.

Self-Sufficiency / Permanency

What is the goal?

- Affordable
- Permanent
- Sustainable by the resident

Homeless?

- What it means to be homeless:
 - No place to sleep tonight
 - Being evicted from an apartment
 - Eviction notice
 - Warrant of removal
 - Foreclosure and no utilities
 - “Couch surfing”

Failure to Plan

A client has failed to plan if he/she:

- Abandoned permanent housing for a non-permanent housing situation.
- Violated lease (i.e. subletting, too many people).
- Took actions that resulted in eviction (i.e. non-payment, drug abuse on property).



Failure to Plan continued

Failure to plan includes:

- Time – landlord is selling house
- Resources – you didn't pay rent, but are getting unemployment benefits
- Capacity to plan

Homelessness

Circumstances out of client's control

Good cause exists when homelessness is the result of circumstances beyond the recipients control, and **may include but is not limited to:**

- Death of partner (primary bread winner);
- Car breaks down, lost job, can't pay rent because of other documentable competing legal obligations that you paid;
- Housing no longer affordable, or eviction due to no fault of the recipient (being sold or is in foreclosure);
- Severe Drug abuse/Mental Illness; or
- Domestic violence

Homelessness

Circumstances out of client's control

Despite the client's best efforts to avert the situation such as paying partial rent, attempting to locate affordable housing, seeking a roommate, etc., homelessness prevails.

Voluntary Cessation

EA shall **NOT** be provided to a WFNJ applicant when an actual or imminent state of homelessness exists as a direct result of the voluntary cessation of employment by the adult household member, without good cause.

EA Six-Month Penalty

When applying for EA or when receiving benefits, EA shall not be provided for six months when an adult EA applicant or recipient has caused his/her own homelessness, without good cause.

Six-Month Penalty - Examples

- Refusing Section 8 housing or subsidized housing, if offered;
- Failure to comply with the mandatory activities in the EA service plan; or,
- Eviction from public and/or subsidized housing.

What is Immediate Need?

Not automatically eligible for Emergency Assistance.

- Applicants **who appear eligible for WFNJ** and have no place to stay tonight or lacks minimal clothing to protect his/her health and safety.
- All applicants for WFNJ shall be evaluated at the time of application.
- If there is immediate need, the client's need should be met that day and the application should be processed that day, if possible.
- Is limited to 30 days, within a 12 month timeframe.

Must complete an application

- The agency will determine eligibility for Emergency Assistance.
 - The client is not applying for TRA, but EA
 - CWA/MWA has discretion on all placements. Disability, lack of independent living skills, goals for dependence, etc. are considered.
 - Shelter
 - TRA
 - Hotel/Motel



EA Service Plans & IRPs

- EA Service Plan and a Responsibility Plan (IRP) are required.
 - Clients are referred for various assessments:
 - Behavioral Health Institute
 - Substance Abuse Initiatives
 - Educational Assessments
 - Work/skill assessments

Failure to develop an EA Service Plan would result in denial of EA benefits.

EA Service Plan (continued)

- The client searches for permanent housing, and must apply for:
 - Section 8
 - Housing Authorities
 - HUD affordable housing



Updates monthly, redeterminations every six months.

Documentation is required.

Copays – Recipient Contribution

- 30% of **total** assistance unit income (for example – SSI, unemployment, child support) is used as the recipient's contribution/co-pay.
- Earned income (net pay).
- Income not considered in eligibility requirements.
- All household members not part of assistance unit must pay their full share of their portion of the rent.

EA Time Limits

- Any Emergency Assistance granted shall be limited to 12 cumulative months during lifetime.
- If you get 12 months on TANF and then become a GA client, you don't get another 12 months.

What counts as a month of service?

- Each payment of retroactive rent or mortgage counts **month-for-month** toward the lifetime limit.
- Each payment of retroactive utilities shall be counted as one month for each **two full months paid**, or parts thereof.
- Paying for rent and utilities together counts as one month.



What happens after 12 months of EA?

If the WFNJ or SSI recipient has taken reasonable steps to resolve the emergency but it continues, or a new one occurs, which causes extreme hardship, then:

- Additional emergency assistance shall be granted beyond the 12-month maximum.
- For TANF cases – up to two six-month extensions.
- For GA cases – one six-month extension.
- For SSI cases – one six-month extension.

Extensions shall not exceed six months at a time.

EA Hardship Extensions *(continued)*

IF someone living in a non-permanent situation is on WFNJ and gets a job, CONTACT THE BOARD OF SOCIAL SERVICES IMMEDIATELY.

There is limited time to move them into an apartment.

BUT IT CAN BE DONE!

EA Expansion Program

- Summary of Bill S866
 - Amends the current law to expand the time limit for EA benefits for:
 - SSI Recipients;
 - WFNJ recipients who have a 12 month Med-1 and are permanently disabled;
 - WFNJ clients categorized as “chronically unemployable;”
 - WFNJ clients who are parents/relatives of a disabled child or dependent and must provide full-time care.
 - Effective December 18, 2018

EA Expansion Program

- What has changed?
 - EA time limit for the groups mentioned and the population of eligible individuals has been expanded until February 20, 2024.
- What has NOT changed?
 - EA rules and regulations
 - All other EA recipients are still limited to 12 months of EA, in addition to the hardship extensions, if eligible.

Tips to Navigate the System

- Every action or behavior causing an “adverse action” is to be assessed for “good cause”. – Don’t abuse it!
- Go with your client to the Board of Social Services
 - DFDI 19-07-01 – Release of Information
- The MED-1 form must be fully completed and logical.
- Must complete an application to get a denial.
 - Receiving a denial allows the person denied to file for a Fair Hearing.
 - Even if a denial is upheld, it documents homelessness.

Social Services for the Homeless – SSH

- A county and community administered, short-term safety net program offering five core services:
 - Food
 - Shelter
 - Homeless Prevention
 - Case Management
 - 24 hour Homeless Hotline
 - I&R (Hotline) phone numbers:
http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dfd/programs/ssh/2017_ssh_hotline.pdf

Social Services for the Homeless – SSH

- This is not a WFNJ program but an additional resource.
- For Individuals and families who are either homeless, at risk of homelessness or in need of food and are otherwise ineligible for WFNJ emergency assistance through no fault of their own.

SSH Eligibility

- New Jersey residents
- Working poor individuals and families ineligible for WNFJ/TANF or GA because of income
- Current WFNJ recipients who have exhausted their EA benefits
- Ineligible aliens or individuals with drug distribution convictions who cannot receive WFNJ cash assistance
 - Note: Only the SSH state-funded component may be used for these individuals.

SSH

- SSH may only provide:
 - Short term, non-recurring assistance to eligible **families**.
 - Benefits for up to **four months**. The four-month limit applies to assistance from **any and all SSH agencies**.
- A family may not receive more than four months of SSH assistance within a 12-month contract year, or more than four consecutive months.

Contact Information

Donna Rook

Donna.rook@dhs.state.nj.us

609 631-4524 (Direct)

609 588-2159 (Support Staff)