



Career Scope: A new approach to WorkFirst employment services

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Background

Since launching in 1997, a core tenet of WorkFirst has been to help families achieve self-sufficiency through stable employment. As a partner in the WorkFirst program, the Employment Security Department (ESD) offers a structured set of activities aimed at helping parents find and keep jobs. ESD Employment Services provide a first step toward independence from TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) for most parents, and have traditionally consisted of employment preparation and job search.

Findings from last year's WorkFirst re-design revealed that a more individualized approach was needed to engage parents in valuable activities and increase their likelihood of success. As a result, a refocused effort called *Career Scope* was developed in ESD that moves parents beyond getting a job and on to a meaningful pathway toward self-sufficiency. On July 1, 2011, ESD launched *Career Scope* pilots in five WorkSource offices across the state – Port Angeles, Bremerton, Bellingham, Mt. Vernon, and Spokane.

Career Scope

As part of the WorkFirst redesign, *Career Scope* is ESD's new employment and career development model that is a four-phased, coached environment for WorkFirst job seekers:

- Phase I: Orientation & Assessment
- Phase II: Asset Development (employment readiness activities)
- Phase III: Employment tracks – Coach assisted, coach supported and coach supervised; and
- Phase IV: Workers and Careers (post TANF employment and retention)

The model shifts employment services away from a staff-directed, one-size-fits-all approach (transactional), to a focus on transformational change through active participation in activities geared at individual employment needs. *Career Scope* focuses on the value to the participant through meaningful engagement in activities that support their skills development and employment success.

In the WorkSource Spokane *Career Scope* pilot approximately 1634 with an average of 272 new enrollments to *Career Scope* per month. To date, over 220 participants have opted to stay engaged with WorkSource, post TANF, to remain connected with their employment coaches for ongoing career progression and retention support.

Pilot Outcomes

- Staff in the pilot offices has shifted to the engaging approach and have implemented strategies that focus on meeting participants where they are and developing employment plans based on individual seeker needs. This has been vital in setting the stage for a more individualized approach to employment services.
- Another major shift the pilot sites have been focused on is the move to peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities where WorkFirst participants engage activities such as workshops and Job Clubs and coach each other through the activities.
- Feedback from WorkFirst participants has been overwhelmingly favorable. Participants appreciate the more individualized approach and feel more engaged and in control of their employment

success.

Participant Testimonials (additional feedback is available by request)

The assistance I have received to target my resume and cover letter was very helpful. My employment coach is always available to help when I need it.

I feel I got more individualized assistance with things to help me to find employment. My individual situation was addressed on a realistic level this time.

Career *Scope* is more informative at addressing people's life and concerns. Seems the coaches are trying to help people find permanent jobs and improve our lifestyle.

My employment coach was very empathetic and understanding. She wasn't a slave driver, but still had clear expectations. I do feel she might have given more job leads, but at the same time there really are no jobs in the career I studied. I ended up with a retail job instead of a professional job, but I won't complain.

I have learned more in the last few weeks than I ever have. I never got this far in the program before I never cared to attend classes so I went out looking for job right after first class, but I am really enjoying Career *Scope* now.

Next steps

ESD's Labor Market and Economic Analysis Branch (LMEA) are currently conducting a WorkFirst Career *Scope* impact study to better understand outcomes. The study will focus on two pieces of the new model – the new model process flow (which is the underway now) and then employment outcomes. The first portion of the study should be complete the end of February.

Career *Scope* will continue to be piloted in all sites through the end of the program year. Though budget, policy and law changes are expected to continue to have impacts on WorkFirst, ESD remains committed to expanding the Career *Scope* model. In spring of 2012, ESD will deliver statewide staff training on Career *Scope*'s Phase I (orientation & assessment) to all WorkFirst staff and supervisors. The plan is for all WorkSource WorkFirst offices to implement Phase I by July 1, 2012. ESD will then regionally roll out the remaining three phases of the model throughout the fall.

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