

TANF/JOBS Program Re-Engagement Review – March 2009

Background

The Department of Human Services conducts re-engagement reviews every six months in accordance with ORS 412.009 (6). The current re-engagement process was implemented in October 2007 to help ensure consistent, appropriate, and strength based services are provided across the state.

The “re-engagement” process is performed to ensure the following:

- Individual case plans were created in partnership with clients
- Activities on the case plan were appropriate
- Clients are aware of their rights and responsibilities
- Screenings and possible evaluations for barriers have been offered/completed and documented
- A team review of the family’s situation before potential sanction – which includes a discussion of child safety issues – was conducted.

The goal of these efforts is to identify early potential barriers to client success in the program and ensure necessary steps are taken to address those barriers.

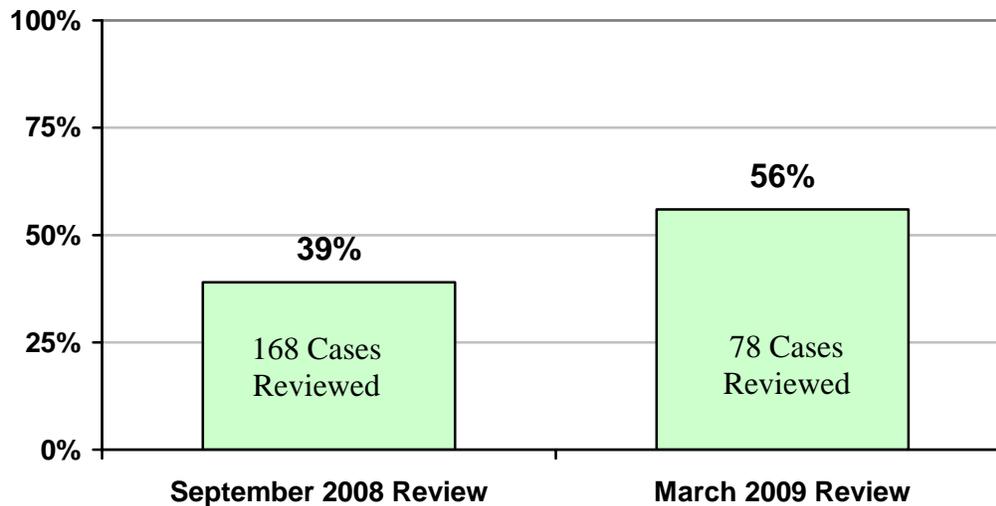
March 2009 Review Results

A statewide review of all cases with an active disqualification was conducted in March 2009 by the department’s central office staff. The number of cases with an active disqualification has decreased from 168 in September 2008 to 78 clients in March 2009.

The graph below displays the percentage of cases where a disqualification was appropriately applied. This includes documenting the re-engagement process. There were approximately 56 percent (44 out of 78) of the cases during the March 2009 review where the process was used correctly. This is an improvement over

the past review where 39 percent (102 out of 168) of the cases had disqualifications applied correctly.

Percent of cases with Correct Process



There were a number of reasons why disqualifications were removed. The table below displays the reasons for removal. The table displays September 2008, and March 2009 review results.

Reason for Removal ¹	September 2008		March 2009	
	102 Cases	Percent	34 Cases	Percent
Accommodations (No record of a needed accommodation being offered)	5	5%	4	12%
Assessment/Evaluation (No record of required assessment/evaluation being offered)	36	36%	4	12%
Child Safety review (no record of child safety review with Child Welfare)	31	30%	17	50%

¹ The percentages represent the percent of cases with a disqualification removed in which this particular reason for the removal was discovered. A single case may have had multiple reasons for removal and any single reason would have resulted in the disqualification being removed.

Reason for Removal ¹	September 2008		March 2009	
	102 Cases	Percent	34 Cases	Percent
Client re-engaged (client re-engaged and was cooperating with plan)	3	3%	3	9%
Disabilities (No record of disability issues being considered)	17	17%	7	21%
Domestic Violence (No record of domestic violence being considered)	7	7%	1	3%
DQ4² Requirements (No record of DQ4 requirement being met)	3	3%	7	21%
New DQ instance Local Team Staffing (No record of review team staffing)	21	21%	10	29%
Continuing DQ Local Team Staffing (No record of review team staffing on continuing non-cooperation)	21	21%	16	47%
Required notices (No record of required notices being sent)	2	2%	3	9%
Rights and Responsibilities form (DHS 7819 not located)	4	5%	0	0%
Screening (No record of required screenings being offered or re-offered)	29	28%	2	6%
TANF Closed (TANF case closed prior to disqualification)	3	3%	6	18%

New Instance vs. Rolling disqualification (sanction)

A **new instance** of non-cooperation takes place when a client is not cooperating with their case plan or requirements of the program and is not currently serving an active disqualification.

² DQ4 constitutes full-family sanction. The additional requirements before full-family sanction are that the department attempt a home visit and discuss with the client alternative resources should the TANF grant end.

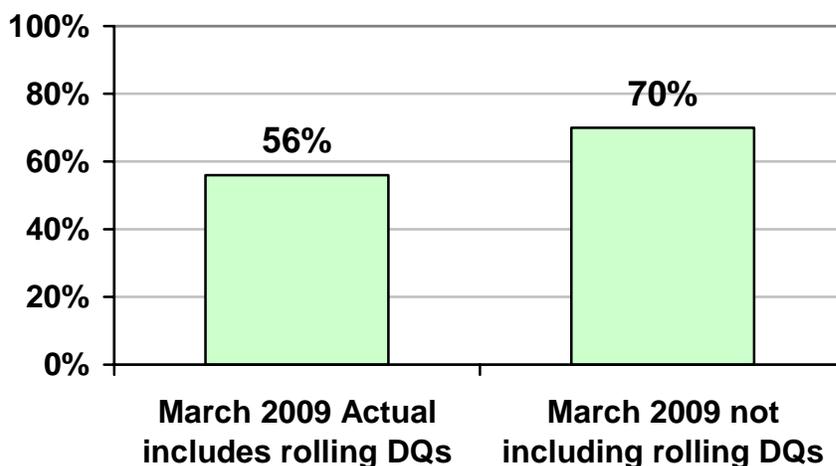
A **rolling** disqualification takes place when a client has already been determined “willfully non-compliant” and is serving an active disqualification. The first of the following and subsequent months, an additional level of disqualification (up to DQ4) will be applied as long as the necessary steps to continue the disqualification have been completed.

Once an active disqualification has been coded on an individual, the computer system will automatically “roll” the disqualification to the next level regardless of action taken or not taken in regards to a team staffing. This feature was a holdover (pre October 1, 2007) from the previous disqualification process.

Of the 34 cases where a disqualification was removed or moved back to a previous level, 19 involved “rolling” disqualifications. If the computer system required case manager input, as many as 15 of the 19 cases may not have been removed due to an error. In fact, it is likely most of the 15 cases would not have had an active disqualification and would not have been included as part of this review.

The chart below shows the actual percent of cases with correct process compared to the percent with the correct process had the 15 cases been removed. By removing the 15 cases there are now 44 of 63 cases with the correct process.

Percent with Correct Process



The computer system which allows a disqualification to automatically progress is being updated to require an appropriate DHS staff person to manually set the

disqualification to advance at the first of the month. A workgroup will draft the policies and procedures and will have recommendations within future months.

The ultimate goal of re-engagement efforts is to help families become engaged in the TANF/JOBS program.

Improvements

There have been improvements in several important areas. They include:

- **Screening:** Before imposing a disqualification, DHS must ensure all screenings for barriers have been offered. These include alcohol and drug, learning needs, mental health, physical health, and domestic violence. The review in September found 28 percent (29 of 102 cases) of the cases had issues relating to screenings. This number has dropped to 6 percent (2 of 34 cases) during the March 2009 review.
- **Assessments/Evaluations:** When a screening, or other indicator, identifies a need for additional assessment or evaluation, the program must offer the assessment or evaluation to the client. The September 2008 review found 36 percent (36 of 102 cases) of the removals had issues where an identified assessment was not offered. This review found the percentage dropping to 11 percent (4 of 34 cases).
- **Domestic Violence:** Domestic violence (DV) significantly impacts an individual's ability to participate. The September review found 7 percent (7 of 102 cases) of the cases, with disqualifications removed, where DV was not considered. The March review found one case or 3 percent (1 of 34 cases) where DV had not been considered.
- **Rights and Responsibilities:** The DHS 7819 is the client's rights and responsibilities form. This form explains to the individual about their rights and responsibilities relating to the TANF/JOBS program. The percentage of cases where the DHS 7819 was an issue dropped to zero in this review.

Difficulties

While there have been improvements, other areas saw increases in the number of occurrences, which caused a disqualification to be removed. Four of the five reasons below are directly affected by the computer system automatically rolling a disqualification to the next level.

- **Accommodations:** DHS must provide any reasonable accommodation in order for an individual to participate in program requirements. In order to apply a disqualification staff must determine whether or not accommodations are needed. If there are needed accommodations, staff must determine if they were provided and if provided whether they were appropriate.

The percentage of occurrences in this category increased from 5 percent (5 of 102 cases) to 12 percent (4 of 34 cases) from the last review.

- **Child Safety:** Child safety reviews are required prior to each level of disqualification. When a disqualification automatically rolls to the next level there usually hasn't been a staffing or child safety review. Because of this issue, an error relating to no child safety review would be found.

During this review, the percentage of occurrences increased from 30 percent (31 of 102 cases) in the last review to 50 percent (17 of 34 cases) in this review. In 15 of the 17 cases the disqualification automatically rolled to the next level. If the system was not automatic most of these cases would not have been part of the review, thus would not have been errors.

- **Local Staffing on continuing non-cooperation:** After a disqualification has been determined appropriate and applied, if there are no changes and the client continues not to cooperate, the disqualification will automatically advance to the next level. Prior to the disqualification advancing, there must be a local staffing to determine if the disqualification is still appropriate.

The percentage of occurrences in this category increased from 21 percent (21 of 102 cases) in September 2008 to 47 percent (16 of 34 cases) of the cases in March 2009. Most of this can be attributed to the disqualification automatically progressing to the next level without a local staffing.

- **DQ4 Requirements (Attempted home visit and discussion of alternate resources):** Prior to applying a DQ4 the staffing must include a discussion of alternate resources in the event of full family sanction. The local team must also attempt a home visit. When a case progresses from a DQ3 to a DQ4 without a review there would be no discussion of alternate resources. In many cases there was no attempted home visit conducted either.

Because there were a lot of cases progressing automatically without review the number of cases where the DQ4 requirements were not met appears to have had a substantial increase. This is somewhat misleading. On the cases where a review did occur, all of them included a discussion of alternate resources and an attempted home visit.

If the system did not automatically roll forward there was a potential of only 4 cases, which would have dropped the percentage of cases with no DQ4 requirements from 21 percent (7 of 34 cases) to 0 percent.

Follow-Up

This review demonstrates improvements in these areas: offering screenings, offering assessment/evaluations, ensuring domestic violence issues are considered, and ensuring clients understand their rights and responsibilities.

Overall the number of active disqualifications has declined from the previous review. This is attributed in large part to the challenges DHS-CAF has experienced with respect to rising caseloads in all Self-Sufficiency programs, limited program funding, and staffing levels which have remained unchanged.

As a result of the review the following actions are being implemented to help ensure disqualification actions taken are appropriate.

Prevent the computer system from automatically rolling a disqualification

A system change will be implemented in the next months to prevent the disqualification from advancing to the next level, unless the case manager or authorized staff person initiates it.

Review Guidance to Staff and Create skill challenges

The department will review and update guidance to staff in the Family Services Manual. A set of skill challenges will help managers and staff with processes in regards to re-engagement. Skill challenges will be sent to staff during the monthly transmittal process.

Summary

The re-engagement process is a complicated multi-step process. Staff must also determine whether or not an individual is “willfully non-compliant”. In making this determination, staff must determine whether a barrier the client is experiencing is a factor in their participation. This is not often apparent and may take several steps before making that determination – see attachment in the next page for an example that illustrates this challenge. The department will continue to look for ways to improve the process of working with families who have participation challenges with their case plan requirements.

Attachment - Re-engagement Process Challenges

Below is an example of a client, whose case was included in this review, which illustrates some of the challenges with the current re-engagement process. This client was not participating in the Job Opportunity and Basic Skills (JOBS) program. The department and community partners worked with her to discover if there were barriers standing in her way. The department offered screenings for learning needs, mental health, alcohol and drug, physical health and domestic violence and was successful in getting the client to agree to undergo the screenings. A few screenings needed follow-up however the offers of further evaluations were declined by the client. Clients have a right to decline screenings or evaluations for issues such as learning disabilities and mental health³.

After continued non-cooperation, the branch staffed the situation with a team - which included an Intensive Case Consultant (ICC). After reviewing the history and current information the branch team decided to apply the first level of disqualification. The disqualification subsequently advanced to the second and third levels. Before each disqualification advanced to the next level, the department continued to encourage participation and offer evaluations. The evaluation offers were declined.

The client was now facing a potential full family sanction, which would have ended the cash assistance portion of the TANF benefits. The case manager worked with the Intensive Case Consultant (ICC) to discuss options for the client and her family. The ICC was able to meet with the client about attending a mental health evaluation and explained what would take place. The ICC was able to help the client overcome her fears and decide to attend a psychological evaluation. When asked why she did not agree to an evaluation earlier the client said she did not want her [ICC] and other department staff to think she was “crazy”.

The ICC, working with the case manager, was able to help the client make a decision to follow up with psychological testing. The testing was completed and the evaluation received. The evaluation results were staffed and a decision was made to remove all previous disqualifications. The case manager is referring the client to the State Family Pre SSI/SSDI program for consideration.

³ Title II Subpart B of the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 requires people with disabilities are afforded the same opportunities. The Department of Health and Human Services’ guidance to states administering TANF programs states disclosure of a disability is voluntary.

In the example above, the re-engagement process was used correctly. While eventually the client agreed to an evaluation which resulted in more appropriate case plan activities, it took a few months and reductions to her TANF grant. The re-engagement process relies on time and availability of appropriate and qualified staff. With current staffing problems, this is becoming a bigger challenge. In this example, the client was not able to obtain the help she needed until she almost lost her cash assistance.

While this case and how it proceeded is not intended to be representative of all cases where the re-engagement process was used correctly, it does illustrate the challenges faced by staff using the process as well as challenges clients face in ultimately deciding to disclose to the department any barriers they are experiencing.