



El Diario Sin Nombre

The Newsletter Without A Name

NM Human Services Department
Santa Fe, New Mexico

Volume Two / Issue 6
June 2002

442 TANF Time Limit Notices Mailed



The Income Support Division mailed special notices to 442 recipients of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance program who are nearing their 60-month lifetime limit warning them that

their benefits are about to expire. Only those clients who have been receiving cash assistance every month since July 1997 received the notice; however, the department will continue to send notices every month to other clients as they reach their 60-month time limit for TANF.

There are 17,998 families receiving TANF, down from 22,535 when welfare reform began in New Mexico. Fortunately, most recipients need benefits for a less than a year, then leave the program because they find work, marry or begin receiving regular child support and no longer qualify for cash assistance. Each year over 30,000 families are on the program for some time.

"I feel comfortable that we have not only taken all appropriate steps to ensure that clients were made aware of the approaching time limits, but also made extra services and case management available as we got closer to June 1," said Marise McFadden, ISD director. Among the actions taken were home visits and more intensive case management, holding community meetings, coordinating case management with child support enforcement, and notifying other agencies, like community action agencies, that demand for their services may increase.

County Outreach Events

The Santa Fe county ISD office held afternoon and evening community meetings on May 15 for the 24 TANF clients in their office nearing their time limit. After a head count, only three TANF clients participated in the event. Besides receiving special briefings from the department and its sister agencies, there were dozens of different blank job applications available

from local grocery stores, Indian casinos, and health care organizations and small businesses. "Even though we only had three clients attend our Santa Fe community meeting, I consider it a success," said Agnes Ortiz, Santa Fe county director. "Staff did a terrific job informing clients of the meeting, putting useful information together, and setting up the room."

Two weeks later, the Española ISD office held a similar job fair with somewhat better results. "We had 37 clients participate in our fair," said Eloya Archuleta, Rio Arriba county director. "Of these, five completed job applications with employers that were at the fair." Archuleta also congratulates her staff for making the Española job fair a success.



Other Help Available

The good news is that some TANF recipients nearing their time limit may be able to receive extended cash assistance benefits after June for hardship reasons, such as a physical or mental disability. Recipients living on some pueblos or reservations where very few jobs exist are also exempt from the 60-month time limit.

"We expect that 208 of the 442 clients sent letters will continue to qualify for cash benefits for hardship reasons," said Sharon Regensberg, ISD policy bureau chief. "Also, most of those notified may continue to receive benefits from our other programs, like food stamps and Medicaid."✦

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Region IV CSED Office Leads the Way in Arresting Delinquent Parents

The Child Support Enforcement Division's (CSED) Las Vegas-based office has had tremendous success in collecting delinquent child support obligations through the use of court-issued bench warrants. Region IV is responsible for nine, mostly rural, northeastern New Mexico counties: San Miguel, Mora, Guadalupe, Taos, Colfax, Union, Quay, Harding and De Baca. Over the past year, the courts in San Miguel and Mora counties issued 30 bench warrants for the arrest of delinquent non-custodial parents. "Of these," says Reina Gallegos, Region IV child support manager, "fifteen were executed by law enforcement officials, netting \$28,777 in delinquent payments passed on to custodial parents.

These outstanding results were made possible by hard work and a cooperative effort between the state police, county sheriffs, local city police and the courts. I would like to thank the law enforcement agencies and the judges for helping us with this aspect of our work," said Gallegos.

COLLECTIONS TOOLBOX

The use of bench warrants is just one tool available to CSED to collect child support obligations on behalf of custodial parents, though it is often a last resort. Other tools include direct wage withholdings from employers, federal and state tax intercepts and suspension of driver's, commercial (truck drivers), occu-

pational (nurses, contractors, teachers, barbers) and even hunting and fishing licenses.

Region IV collected a total of \$1,333,772 in delinquent child support over the past 12 months. "Even with all of our successes, there is still a lot of work to do in the world of child support enforcement," said Gallegos. "Establishing, enforcing and modifying child support obligations is a never-ending process. For example, Department of Health data show that 70 percent of births in Mora County and 55 percent in San Miguel County are to single mothers — much higher than the state average

of 45 percent."

Establishing paternity so that fathers can be held financially responsible for the support of their children is one of CSED's tasks. The Paternity Establishment Program has won nationwide attention for its high success rate.

TANF DEADLINE HURTS

Another incentive for child support enforcement workers to do more is the looming expiration of time limits for receiving welfare in the form of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). This month, about 20 families in San Miguel and Mora coun-

ties may lose their cash assistance because they will have been on the program for 60 consecutive months. "It is more imperative now than ever that we step up our efforts to make sure that non-custodial parents take care of their children financially," said Gallegos.

"Fortunately, we have a well-trained staff of 17 dedicated child support enforcement legal assistants and three attorneys who do whatever it takes — including putting people in jail — to insure that the children get whatever financial support they are entitled to," said Gallegos.✦

HSD Employee Wins Disability Award



Falling off a roof can sure change your life. And that's exactly what happened to Guy Surdi of the Santa Fe county ISD office. Years ago, Surdi was an established New York City businessman specializing in office cleaning. Later, he went west to Denver where he opened a roofing business. Then, in March 1996, while inspecting a roof, he fell 18 feet, landing on his back and breaking it.

After receiving medical care, Surdi moved to Las Vegas, NM for a period of recu-

peration. Soon, however, he was ready to return to work. "I am not 100 percent by any means," said Surdi. "But nobody would ever know what happened to me by looking at me."

Unfortunately, when Surdi first applied for a caseworker position he was turned away. Then, last November he finally got the job through an on-the-job training program with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. "From the first day, Guy has been a positive influence, a mentor to other employees and a wonderful person to be around," said Agnes Ortiz, Santa Fe county ISD director. "In February we hired him as a permanent caseworker."

In April, Surdi and Ortiz were surprised to find out they

had been chosen to receive an award from Life Link: Surdi for demonstrating outstanding employee qualities while being disabled and Ortiz for being an employer who helps persons with disabilities to return to work. Both received their awards at the fourth Annual Life Link Conference held in Albuquerque, last April.

Larry Tapia, the department's Employee Equal Opportunity officer, who is also disabled, said, "There are about 25 employees working for the department with varying disabilities, including mobility, visual and hearing impairments." Tapia congratulated Surdi and said, "I hope others in HSD with disabilities will be nominated for future awards."✦

Otten Speaks Out

Earlier this week, I had one of those experiences that makes working here the best job I've ever had. I accompanied Congresswoman Heather Wilson to the downtown Albuquerque office of Career Works, the Region V contractor for our Works program in TANF. They had assembled ten or 12 current and former TANF recipients to tell their stories to Heather. As always at these kinds of events, the stories were very emotional. But they were also lovingly told, as they had been courageously lived. I am not convinced I could have ever overcome the obstacles those women (and a few men) have faced and are meeting. Some had finished professional training. Others are working on GEDs. One is married to a man addicted to drugs who spends much of his time in jail for parole violations. All have children—as many as five and as few as one. But the inspiration I received from listening to them is that every one of them is hopeful. Everyone has a can-do attitude. I know these women were chosen to be there because they have compelling stories and they tell them well, but I believe any randomly selected group of our clients would be very similar. They made me proud to work with all of you who serve them everyday and who urge them on to see their own worth and potential. I repeat my appreciation for the hard job you have and the dedication with which you continue to do it, day in and day out. You bring honor to all of us who share a vision of public service.

Now I'd like to turn to our current financial situation. The budget passed in the extraordinary legislative session adequately funds programs in ISD and CSED, taking into account expanded BAR authority to move money around to protect critical needs. But funding for Medicaid is sadly inadequate. One reason this is so is that in "shaving" the amount of State General Fund dollars budgeted for Medicaid, the Legislature did not account for the amount of federal matching dollars that would be lost, understating the total reduction in the Medicaid program budget by about 300 percent. The loss of federal matching funds was either not included or included at an incorrect percentage in the budgets of other HSD programs that rely on federal funding, but they expect to be able to make adjustments to continue to operate.

Compounding our difficulties is the fact that this is an election year, and by law we are really working on two six-month budgets — state statute requires that agencies spend no more than 50 percent of their budgets until the new Governor and Legislature take office in January and the other half between January and the end of June. While the Legislature's budget resolution contained language encouraging us to spend more between now and January, that language is in conflict with existing law, so I believe we must plan carefully now.

Last fall, HSD began pointing out options to reduce the rate at which the cost of Medicaid grows. I am deeply disappointed that no action has been taken by the Legislature so that now we face the immediate need to fit Medicaid within the 2003 budget without having time to deliberate and discuss ideas with those who are involved with the Medicaid program. None of our options is palatable, but we will address these important dilemmas in the few weeks ahead.

Political transition also often means traumatic upheavals in state government, but I firmly believe that HSD will have a much easier transition than at any time in the past. The reasons I believe this have everything to do with the wonderful people who work here and nothing to do with the politics of the situation, though the programs this department is responsible for are so fundamental to with the people we serve, that they must continue. And HSD is strong, and growing stronger all the time.

We have excellent leadership at all levels of management, from supervisors up, but what really makes HSD much better able to cope with change than other organizations is our very clear sense of mission. The fact is that this department has most effectively connected right and left brain, remaining driven by compassion while implementing the most advanced technologies to help us serve our clients better. We have nationally recognized reporting methodologies in place to help us track our performance so that we can continuously improve our level of service. It's an unbeatable combination that will carry the department through the transition, through the budget crisis and through the coming federal program changes. I am only sorry I will not be here to see all of it, but I will always be cheering you on from the sidelines as a loyal fan.✦

TANF Outreach



Above, Representative Heather Wilson (left) and Secretary-Designate Robin Dozier Otten meet with TANF clients at the UNM Career Works office in Albuquerque to learn more about barriers to employment. Career Works contracts with HSD to provide work readiness training to TANF clients in the area.

Top left, Agnes Ortiz speaks to clients at the Santa Fe county ISD office May 15.

Left, Child Support employees Minnie Chavez and Patsy Chumley speak to a client at the Española Job Fair on May 29.

Doña Ana County Open House

Capturing the spirit of Cinco de Mayo, all three Doña Ana county Income Support Division (ISD) agencies celebrated the opening of their new offices with a day of food and entertainment on May 3. Participants included members of the local community, ISD personnel from nearby towns and ISD Director Marise McFadden.

PROGRESSIVE FUN

It all started early in Anthony, the southern-most office in the department. After a speech by office manager James Sherk, Gadsden School children helped to liven things up with a variety of folk and humorous dance numbers. Then everyone enjoyed a buffet-style breakfast and toured the building, which features two interior courtyards that give natural lighting and outdoor views to every point in the building.

At the West Las Cruces office, a catered luncheon with strumming musicians greeted visitors. Employees decorated the facility, served-up lunch, and even provided some live music of their own. As a finalé, the East Las Cruces office, located on a mesa in a business park off I-25, offered dessert to the 40 or so visitors who participated in all the day's activities.

PROFESSIONAL OFFICES

"As with all new construction, all three buildings had some problems, from scratched paint to sticking doors and incorrectly located thermostats," said Anthony Pacheco, HSD property manager. "But each building owner worked to remedy all of the issues we noted, and we seem to be on the right track for complete comfort and security for our staff and clients."

Pacheco also noted that each building is tiled in high traffic areas, has carpet for each office, has large carriage files, water-conserving drought-resistant landscaping, and state-of-the-art security systems to protect the building, even after hours.

"The offices provide a real professional working environment and have been received very favorably by our customers, as well as employees," said David Devitt, regional operations manager. "We thank all those who traveled to the offices and made the observance memorable."✦

Online Training is Here!

Online computer software training delivered by ActiveEducation—free of charge! All you need to register is a valid HSD e-mail address. These Web-based courses develop practical skills valuable to all HSD computer users. **To register, go to [//www.activeed.com/hsd](http://www.activeed.com/hsd).**

Classes are offered in Outlook, Word, Excel, Access and PowerPoint, as well as an Introduction to Personal Computers with Windows 98 and Office 2000. Online courses take on average 8-10 hours to complete; mini-courses are also offered to address specific tasks like using the Outlook mailbox or drawing in PowerPoint.

- Bookmarking enables users to break 1-2 hour lessons into short time periods.
- Course material can be printed for reference
- Employees can continue to access courses for review for 12 months

Contact HSD Human Resources at 827-7784 if you need more information.



Above: Community spirit prevailed in Anthony as children from the Gadsden School provided dancing in the large conference room decorated with piñatas. Below: Employees at the East Las Cruces building stand outside their new building located in the fast-growing section of Las Cruces.



El Diario Sin Nombre
Post Office Box 2348
Santa Fe, NM 87504
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Sin Nombre is produced the first Friday of each month by the New Mexico Human Services Department for its employees statewide. Address contributions or comments to:
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