

Today, less than 1.9 percent of Washington's population receives welfare benefits. Since 1997 the number of families on welfare has dropped 46 percent, from nearly 96,000 to less under 56,000 in December 2008.

WorkFirst is a partnership of five state agencies, with oversight provided by the Office of Financial Management:

- Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)
- Employment Security Department (ESD)
- State Board for Community and Technical Colleges (SBCTC)
- Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development (CTED)
- Department of Early Learning (DEL)

WorkFirst also includes a network of 32 local partnerships that include state agencies, community organizations, community and technical colleges, tribes, workforce and economic development agencies, and individual citizens.

WorkFirst Caseload

The WorkFirst caseload began to increase in May 2008, after two and one-half years of steady decline. As of December 2008, 55,994 families were receiving WorkFirst, 12.2 percent more than received WorkFirst in December 2007. Of these, 34,315 were adult cases, subject to federal participation requirements. These cases contained 39,073 adults or older teens subject to participation requirements.

Federal WorkFirst Participation Requirements

Federal regulations require WorkFirst parents to participate in employment, job search, or training components 30 hours per week. In Federal Fiscal Year 2008, 18.4 percent of parents participated in such activities or participated in the state's Career Services program, helping us meet our Federal participation target of 18.2 percent. The two-parent household target was not met.

Employment

Employment data by program (each partner calculates entered employment in a manner unique to their programs):

- ESD: 11,192 of 16,940 WorkFirst parents (66%) were employed after receiving job search services during the year ending in March 2008.
- Colleges: 1,602 of 3,021 WorkFirst parents (53%) were employed after training during the year ending in September 2007.
- Community Jobs: 1,862 of 2,828 WorkFirst parents (66%) were employed after subsidized jobs arranged by CTED contractors during the year ending in June 2008.

Wage Information

The median hourly wage was \$9.82 per hour for WorkFirst participants who entered employment during the year ending in March 2008.

Training and Education

WorkFirst supports training and education for low-income parents working at least 20 hours per week, including those who have left the welfare rolls.

In state fiscal year 2007, 2,908 low-income parents enrolled in customized job skills trainings, which are specialized short-term (up to 22 weeks) programs geared to immediate employment and 1,419

enrolled in longer vocational training for up to one year in high demand fields. Another 2,994 low-wage workers received tuition aid at a community or technical college and 7,253 took advantage of literacy and other training services.

Sanctions

Parents who do not participate in employment, employability, or barrier reduction activities may be sanctioned. The number of adults in sanction status declined by over 80 percent between July 2005 and April 2007--a drop from 5,606 to 981. Since that time the count of adults in sanction status has increased to over 2,200. Families are given the opportunity to re-engage with WorkFirst activities, and only 28 percent of sanctions last longer than three months.

Caseload as of December 2008			
Location	Total WorkFirst Adults	Adults in Sanction Status	
		Number	Percent
Region 1	5,818	337	5.8%
Region 2	5,200	395	7.6%
Region 3	4,215	278	6.6%
Region 4	8,262	286	3.5%
Region 5	7,601	353	4.6%
Region 6	7,976	572	7.2%
Statewide	39,073	2,221	5.7%

Diversion Cash Assistance - Positive Prevention

In 2008, the WorkFirst program continued a diversion program for WorkFirst applicants who may not require ongoing public assistance benefits. When a family applies for WorkFirst, the department conducts a thorough screening process to determine if the family has potential income or other resources that would reduce or eliminate their need for ongoing assistance. The purpose is not to “prevent” families from receiving WorkFirst, but to provide support to families while they pursue alternatives. Some 7,168 families received Diversion Cash Assistance in 2008, and 75% to 80% of clients remain off welfare for twelve months or more.

Career Services

WorkFirst participants who leave with a job are eligible to receive support payments and follow-up services for up to six months through the Career Services program administered by the Department of Employment Security. Participants receive help with job advancement and retention. 7,923 parents have participated since July 2007 when the program began. The program is being expanded to working parents who receive Diversion Cash Assistance and food stamps.

Child Care

Many parents are using Working Connections Child Care, a subsidy program for parents earning up to 200 percent of the federal poverty level or earning a monthly income of \$2,933 for a single parent with two children. Parents contribute toward the cost of care based on a sliding scale with a monthly co-payment of at least \$15. Since July 2005, an average of 60,850 children received a child care subsidy per month.

Child Support

In the past year, almost \$277 million was collected statewide on behalf of custodial parents who are or have been receiving welfare. Today, less than 1.9 percent of Washington’s population receives welfare benefits. The proportion of people now on welfare in Washington is at or near its low point in the last 30 years. Since 1997 the number of families on welfare has dropped 46 percent, from nearly 96,000 to less than 52,000.

For questions, please contact Amber Gillum at 360-902-7657 or Carl Wolfhagen at 360-902-0920