

## **102 - SHORT-TERM SERVICES AND BENEFITS**

### **I. SHORT-TERM SERVICES AND BENEFITS**

The Work First Program provides short-term services and benefits to assist families who may experience a non-recurring crisis or episode of need. The purpose of these services and benefits is to help families resolve the family's situation and to prevent their dependence on ongoing cash assistance. Short-term services and benefits must not meet the federal definition of assistance and must be preventative or transitional in nature.

#### **A. Definition of Assistance**

Services that have cash value (are cash-like) and are intended to meet basic, ongoing needs are defined as "assistance." Services such as transportation, childcare and other supportive services provided to families who are not employed are considered assistance.

Families who are not employed and receive cash-like services are included in the Federal Work Participation Rates. Do not provide short-term services and benefits that meet the federal definition of assistance.

Services are not considered assistance if they are:

- Nonrecurring, short-term benefits designed to deal with a specific episode of need;
- Not intended to meet recurring or ongoing needs; and
- Not extending beyond four months.

Services also are not considered assistance when provided to participants who are employed.

For purposes of the definition of assistance, a participant is considered employed if they are experiencing a temporary period of unemployment between jobs. For example, the case manager may continue to provide services to support a parent's job search activities while the family is between jobs without it being "assistance." These services may continue for up to three months of unemployment.

There may be some circumstances where transportation, generally an ongoing need, may be provided and it does not count as assistance. For example, if the person's car breaks down, transportation assistance while the car is being repaired

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would be “non-recurrent, short-term benefits designed to deal with a specific episode of need” and, therefore, not assistance.

Or, if the participant is riding with someone to a class and the driver’s car breaks down or the driver drops out of class, the case manager may authorize transportation for the participant until the participant arranges another ride. Then if it does not exceed four months, it is not “assistance,” because it deals with a specific episode of need.

Services that are not cash-like do not meet the definition of assistance. These may include, but are not limited to, counseling, case management, peer support, providing information, and referral.

## **II. BENEFIT DIVERSION**

Benefit Diversion is a cash payment alternative to traditional Work First Cash Assistance. Benefit Diversion **must be offered annually and made available** in all county departments of social services. Benefit Diversion eligibility is determined according to Work First Cash Assistance eligibility requirements. See Work First Manual Section 114 **and Work First Section 102.II.D.1** for further Cash Assistance eligibility guidance.

At application, the Work First case manager may offer Benefit Diversion to some families in lieu of Work First Cash Assistance. The Benefit Diversion package of benefits may include:

- A one-time payment of up to a maximum of three months of cash assistance; and Referrals to Medicaid, Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), child support, childcare assistance, and other community and agency resources.

Case managers, based on their assessment of the family’s needs, will determine which families are most suitable for Benefit Diversion with an intent to aid the family with a nonrecurring crisis. A family must choose whether Benefit Diversion is appropriate for them. If the family decides not to accept Benefit Diversion, continue with the interview. Consider other services or benefits as described in Work First Manual Section **117**.

Families receiving Benefit Diversion are not precluded from receiving other services such as emergency and energy assistance or one-time work-related expenses. Ongoing cash assistance cases cannot be changed to Benefit Diversion.

While families may apply for Work First Cash Assistance at any time, they cannot receive cash assistance until the Benefit Diversion coverage period has expired.

**A. The Purpose of Benefit Diversion**

Benefit Diversion is defined as nonrecurring short-term benefits that must meet **all** the following criteria to be excluded as assistance.

- Are designed to deal with a specific crisis or episode of need;
- Are not intended to meet recurrent or ongoing needs; and
- Will not extend beyond 3 months.

If the benefit does not meet all three of the criteria, the benefit meets the definition of assistance, and the applicant is not eligible for Benefit Diversion and will be subject to all the requirements associated with ongoing Work First Cash Assistance, including work participation requirements.

Benefit Diversion provides an opportunity for families to receive immediate help *and* preserve their independence from public assistance. Benefit Diversion helps to ensure that:

- Families have an opportunity to avoid long-term public assistance dependency;
- Resources are quickly made available to resolve the family situation; and
- Adult family members can keep or accept jobs or access other income sources.

Benefit Diversion is intended to be a one-time service for families. Benefit Diversion can only be provided once within a twelve-month period. Therefore, the case manager must provide referrals to agency and community resources that will help the family avoid the need for further cash assistance in the future. Benefit Diversion does not have to be repaid.

In most situations, Benefit Diversion can be authorized the same day as the initial interview. In any case, the Cash Assistance application should be approved as quickly as possible. Refer to the Job Aid: “Processing a Benefit Diversion” for guidance.

**B. What Type of Situations Can Benefit Diversion Help Resolve?**

Benefit Diversion is designed to meet a specific family crisis or episode of need through the use of nonrecurring short-term benefits. Benefit Diversion may be used for families who are employed, soon-to-be-employed, or experiencing different types of work-related circumstances. Families may need help with rent, utility payments or a combination of needs.

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Benefit Diversion is for families with a bona fide specific family crisis or family episode of need, rather than a chronic or continuing situation. The crisis or episode of need, as well as supportive services that can be provided to address such situations may:

- Be related to maintaining or accepting employment.
- Have occurred during a short break between jobs (this doesn't include individuals who may have employment contracts for less than twelve (12) months, i.e. public school employees); or
- Be related to receipt of other income that will meet the family's needs (such as SSI, child support, insurance settlement, etc.).
- Employment, school, or training related needs: purchasing appropriate work or school attire, uniforms, or tools; moving expenses to accept a job offer or to be closer to work; automotive repair integral to accepting or maintaining employment or to attending work or training activities related to employment.
- The threat of possible or persistent homelessness, eviction and/or utility disconnection: paying overdue rental and/or utility arrearages and utility payments to prevent evictions/cutoffs; payment of security deposits; payment of first month's rent; budget and/or other counseling.
- In the case of disaster victims: furniture and clothing replacement; help with securing new or temporary housing (payment of security deposit, first month's rent, moving expenses).

Benefit Diversion cannot be used to temporarily divert a family for three months and then move the family into ongoing Work First Cash Assistance.

**C. Assessing Families for Benefit Diversion**

During the application screening process, the case manager will determine the families to whom Benefit Diversion should be offered. Assess the family's stated needs, existing resources, and income prospects. This assessment must identify a specific family crisis or family episode of need and provide a reasonable assurance that Benefit Diversion will:

- Accomplish the immediate goal of sustaining the family until other readily identifiable income becomes available, and

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- Prevent the family from needing Work First Cash Assistance in the foreseeable future.

A family must meet the eligibility criteria for Work First Cash Assistance to receive Benefit Diversion. Benefit Diversion is a program option under Work First Cash Assistance.

However, not every family is a candidate for Benefit Diversion. Some families may be better served by ongoing Work First Cash Assistance. If the screening indicates the family's needs may extend beyond the Benefit Diversion period, an application should be taken for Work First Cash Assistance. Benefit Diversion should not be offered as an option to the family. Examples of unlikely candidates include families who require extensive assistance and services such as caretakers who are temporarily incapacitated with no new income source forthcoming for four months, or caretakers who have serious barriers to employment. Families can receive Benefit Diversion in lieu of Work First Cash Assistance only if the family's need meets the criteria for the short-term benefit.

The use of Benefit Diversion to "divert" families from public assistance rolls by providing short term benefits that can resolve family problems is only allowable if it is based on all three criteria as outlined in II. B above. Examples of families that are likely candidates for Benefit Diversion include, but are not limited to:

- A family with a caretaker on sick or maternity leave who is receiving little or no pay. The caretaker is expected to return to work within a 1–3-month time period and needs help with household expenses to prevent homelessness. Homelessness as defined by HUD is (1) Individual or family who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate, nighttime residence, meaning: (i) Has a primary nighttime residence that is a public or. private place not meant for human habitation; (ii) Is living in a publicly or privately operated shelter.
- A family with a caretaker who accepted a job offer that will begin in three months or less. The caretaker needs financial assistance with work related expenses, rent, or car insurance until employment begins to prevent a crisis.
- A family with a caretaker who is recently employed. The caretaker will not receive their initial pay in time to cover rent, utilities, and childcare costs.

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- A family with a caretaker who will begin working in three months or less. The caretaker needs help with (for example) rent and car insurance until employment begins to prevent a crisis.
- A family who is anticipating the verifiable receipt of income, whether related to employment or not, that will help meet their needs. This income may include child support, an inheritance, insurance settlement, etc. The case manager can accept the family's statements as verification of their situation. If the family's statements are questionable, the case manager should request appropriate third-party verification.

**D. Completing an Application for Benefit Diversion**

1. Eligibility

- a. To be eligible for Benefit Diversion, families must meet the following Work First eligibility requirements as described in other Work First Manual sections:
  - (1) Who may apply and be included in the family unit (Section 104);
  - (2) Income guidelines (Section 114);
  - (3) Resource limits (Section 115);
  - (4) Minor parent rules (Section 107);
  - (5) State/county residence (Section 108);
  - (6) Age rule for children (Section 109);
  - (7) Rule to have or apply for a Social Security Number (Section 110);
  - (8) Citizenship and/or Identity (Section 111);
  - (9) Qualified Immigration status (Section 111);
  - (10) Kinship/living with rule (Section 112);
  - (11) Individual Criminal Violations (Section 104A); and
  - (12) No Intentional Program Violation.

**No other Work First Cash Assistance eligibility requirements apply to Benefit Diversion cases.**

- b. Time limits do not apply to Benefit Diversion. The case manager may provide Benefit Diversion, if appropriate, to applicants whose time limit(s) have expired.
- c. Benefit Diversion may be provided once per twelve-month period. This means twelve months from the first month of the Benefit Diversion

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coverage period. For example, if the Benefit Diversion period is June through August, another Benefit Diversion period could not begin earlier than June of the next year.

The certification periods for Benefit Diversion and ongoing cash assistance cannot overlap. For example, the Benefit Diversion certification period is June through August, the family is not eligible to receive cash assistance prior to September.

- d. To process the Cash Assistance application for Benefit Diversion and authorize a Benefit Diversion case, refer to NC FAST Job Aid, "Processing a Benefit Diversion".
- e. Document the family's eligibility in the same way eligibility is documented for Work First Cash Assistance applicants.

Case managers must offer the DSS-5327, Learning Needs Screening Tool, to families who accept Benefit Diversion. The utilization of the Learning Needs Screening Tool (LNSST) has been recommended by the Office of Civil Rights to assist in identifying potential disabilities or other barriers to self-sufficiency.

Case managers must explain and have the individual(s) sign the DSS-5330, Learning Needs Screening Tool Waiver/Consent Agreement, if the individual agrees or declines to complete the LNST. All individuals have the right to decline to complete the LNST. **The DSS-5330 must be completed and uploaded to NC FAST to support the acceptance or decline of the assessment. The LNST must be keyed into NC FAST for Benefit Diversion cases. Please refer to the job aid: Completing Case Assistance/Work First Assessments.**

**Note:** All documentation for Benefit Diversion applications must be uploaded to NC FAST on the associated Income Support case.

## 2. The Benefit Diversion Agreement

To ensure the applicant understands the Benefit Diversion package, the case manager must explain the Benefit Diversion Agreement (DSS-8657). The adult caretaker signs and is given the original copy of this agreement, which contains the following information.

- a. Acknowledgment that Benefit Diversion is the benefit package offered and accepted by the applicant.

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- b. The payment amount and duration of the Benefit Diversion period.
- c. A statement documenting the specific family crisis or episode of need that is to be met by the Benefit Diversion payment.
- d. North Carolina Rights and Responsibilities for Public Assistance, Form NC 20009 hearing and appeal rights.

This Benefit Diversion Agreement (DSS-8657) is the family's legal notice of benefits.

- a. If the case manager approves the Benefit Diversion while the applicant is still in the agency, complete the Benefit Diversion Agreement, including the Notice of Benefits portion. Enter the 60<sup>th</sup> calendar day following the date the notice is given to the applicant in the space provided on the back of the Agreement. Applicants have 60 days from the date of notification that Benefit Diversion is approved or denied to request a hearing. Have the caretaker sign the Agreement and give it to the caretaker. Maintain a copy of the Agreement in the case record. **Face to face interviews are not required. Telephonic Signatures may be accepted for the Benefit Diversion agreement. All applicants have the option to provide a telephonic signature by phone. All Work First forms may be signed via telephonic signature. An applicant must speak directly with a case manager to complete a telephonic application. The case manager will summarize the information to which the household attests and allows a verbal signature. The documentation must be included in a case note in NC FAST to demonstrate that the applicant has signed the application. Document "Telephone Signature" in the Income Support Application Case Details Notes. The documentation in NC FAST must include the applicant's name, date, time of the telephone interview and the applicant's response to indicating agreement to this verbal attestation of signature over the phone.**
- b. If the case manager does not complete the Benefit Diversion case while the applicant is still in the agency **or the case manager is unable to obtain a telephonic signature**, complete the Benefit Diversion Agreement through the Caretaker's Signature line. Do not complete the Notice of Benefits portion of the Agreement. The caretaker must sign the Benefit Diversion Agreement. Upon approval of Benefit Diversion, complete the Notice of Benefits, and enter the 60<sup>th</sup> calendar day following the date the notice is mailed to the family in the space provided on the back of the Agreement. Mail the Benefit Diversion Agreement to the family. Also maintain a copy of the Agreement in the case file.

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- c. If Benefit Diversion is denied, complete the Notice of Denial section of the Benefit Diversion Agreement. Write on the notice that Benefit Diversion is denied and the reason for the denial. Enter the 60th calendar day following the date the notice is mailed to the family in the space provided on the back of the Agreement. Mail the Benefit Diversion Agreement to the family. Document the denial of Benefit Diversion and the reason in the case record. Also maintain a copy of the Agreement in the case file.
- d. Most Benefit Diversion cases should be completed the same day. If the case cannot be completed that day, complete the case as soon as possible but no later than 45 days. Remember the purpose of Benefit Diversion is to relieve an immediate need.

**E. Determining the Benefit Diversion Amount**

The amount of the Benefit Diversion payment is not determined using the family's income as with Work First Cash Assistance. The Benefit Diversion payment will vary according to the needs and circumstances of each family.

When determining the payment amount, consider the family's current and anticipated income and financial needs. Financial needs can include, for example, past due rent, utilities, car insurance, and other overdue or anticipated debts related to the specific episode of need or family crisis.

Based on the assessment of the family's situation, determine the length (one to three months) of the Benefit Diversion period. The Benefit Diversion payment amount is the maximum payment allowed for a Work First Cash Assistance case of comparable size for a period of one to three months. The Benefit Diversion payment should enable the family to resolve the current crisis or episode of need and prevent a future need for Work First Cash Assistance. Document in the case record how the case manager and the family determined the Benefit Diversion period. **To release the Benefit Diversion payment, refer to the job-aid "Issuing or Releasing Work First Payment".**

The chart below shows the maximum monthly amount based on family size for Benefit Diversion.

**NOTE:** Family Cap policy does not apply to Benefit Diversion cases. A child who is subject to the family cap for Work First Cash Assistance should be included in the family size for the purpose of setting the limit for a Benefit Diversion payment.

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<b>Number in Family</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Payment Standard</b>	\$181	\$236	\$272	\$297	\$324	\$349
<b>Maximum Benefit Diversion Payment:</b>	\$543	\$708	\$816	\$891	\$972	\$1047

<b>Number in Family</b>	7	8	9	10	11	12
<b>Payment Standard</b>	\$373	\$386	\$406	\$430	\$448	\$473
<b>Maximum Benefit Diversion Payment:</b>	\$1119	\$1158	\$1218	\$1290	\$1344	\$1419

**NOTE: If an overpayment occurs due to **participant** error or fraud, repayment will be the responsibility of the participant. Refer to Section 263, Financial Responsibility.**

**III. EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE**

Emergency Assistance is designed to assist with families' sporadic emergency needs, such as a utility cut-off or an eviction notice. All counties are required to operate Emergency Assistance Programs. The procedures for determining eligibility for and providing Emergency Assistance for Standard and Electing counties are described in Work First Manual Section 003. Counties must designate each state fiscal year the federal poverty limit (150% or 200%) they will use to determine eligibility; no other limits are allowable. **The Work First Emergency Assistance Application (DSS-8169) is the application for Emergency Assistance and can be found on the form's website. Applicants who contact the agency by phone wanting to apply should be interviewed at that time and complete the application with a telephonic signature. Document "Telephone Signature" with the name, date, time, and client's attestation of telephonic signature in the family's case record or document in a separate emergency assistance file. All documentation must be located consistently in county case files.**

To be eligible for Emergency Assistance:

1. The family must have a child who lives with a relative as defined for Work First Cash Assistance and who meets the age limit for Work First Cash Assistance. Total gross family income must be at or below 150% or 200% of federal poverty, as specified in the **County local protocols**. **A family is entitled to disregard 27.5% of their earned income. This deduction is subtracted from a family's gross income. The case manager must calculate this deduction manually.**

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Example:

Total Gross Earned Income for a family of (3)	\$5,000
27.5% disregard deduction	<u>- \$1,375</u>
Total Countable earned income	\$3,625

Please note: There is not a disregard for unearned income.

2. The case manager may accept the family's statement regarding U.S. citizenship, unless it is questionable. If **there is any uncertainty**, request appropriate verification from the individuals applying for benefits. **See Work First Section 111 for more guidance.**
3. Families' resources must meet the resource limits as defined for Work First Cash Assistance. Accept the family's statement unless the statement is questionable.
4. The applicant(s) for benefits must meet all other eligibility requirements for Emergency Assistance that are included in the county Work First Plan.
5. **Case managers must offer the DSS-5327 Learning Needs Screening Tool (LNST), to families who apply for Emergency Assistance.**

**Case managers must explain and have the individual(s) sign the DSS-5330, Learning Needs Screening Tool Waiver/Consent Agreement, regardless of whether the individual agrees or declines to complete the LNST. All individuals have the right to decline to complete the LNST. The DSS-5330 must be completed and included in case documentation to support the acceptance or decline of the assessment.**

Benefits provided through Emergency Assistance must not meet the TANF definition of assistance. Emergency Assistance is limited to:

- Nonrecurring, short-term benefits designed to deal with a specific episode of need;
- Not intended to meet recurring or ongoing needs; and
- Not extending beyond four months.

Document eligibility for emergency assistance in the family's case record or document in a separate emergency assistance file. **Counties must use the Work First Emergency Assistance Application (DSS-8169) as their standard application.** All documentation must be located consistently in county case files.

#### **IV. WORK FIRST SERVICES FOR LOW-INCOME FAMILIES AT OR BELOW 200% OF POVERTY**

All counties (Standard and Electing) are required to provide Work First Services for families at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) threshold. Counties must designate each state fiscal year the federal poverty limit (150% or 200%) the county will use to determine eligibility; no other limits are allowable.

##### **A. Introduction**

Work First services described in this section may be provided to any family that currently does not receive a Work First Cash Assistance payment with income at 150% or 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), provided there is a child in the household who meets the age, kinship, and citizenship and immigrant rules.

For counties to assist families with income at or below 200%, local resources must be prioritized to ensure that all Work First Cash Assistance **participants** who are subject to the work requirements are receiving intensive employment services.

To provide services to low-income families, counties must develop local procedures and collaboration efforts. Counties are strongly urged to use the following strategies when working with these families:

1. Assess the family members' skills, abilities, and needs, including the children's needs, as with Work First Cash Assistance **participants**. Using the tools and the staff skills available, identify the barriers and challenges including physical, mental and learning disabilities which may prevent the family from maintaining self-sufficiency. To be entitled to reasonable accommodation for a disability, a caretaker need not be receiving or be eligible for SSI or other disability benefits.
2. Develop jointly with the family members a plan for how the adults will stay employed. The DSS-6936-C, Mutual Responsibility Agreement Plan of Action Requirements or Work First Services, is a useful tool for this purpose. The case manager cannot apply sanctions for non-compliance as with Work First Cash Assistance **participants**. Keep in mind that the processes and standards set for families to receive services should be applied equitably to every family served. Decisions not to serve certain families should be made equitably and consistently.

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3. Case managers must offer the DSS-5327 Learning Needs Screening Tool (LNST), to families who apply for Work First Services.
4. Case managers must explain and have the individual(s) sign the DSS-5330, Learning Needs Screening Tool Waiver/Consent Agreement, regardless of whether the individual agrees or declines to complete the LNST. All individuals have the right to decline to complete the LNST. The DSS-5330 must be completed and uploaded to NC FAST to support the acceptance or decline of the assessment. The LNST must be keyed into NC FAST for Work First Services. Please refer to the job aid: Completing Case Assistance/Work First Assessments.
5. Some of the families served may receive Food and Nutrition Services and be mandatory Food and Nutrition Services **More Than a Job NC Program (MTAJ) participants**. Work First short term services may be a resource for support services to help families meet their **MTAJ** requirements while gaining the skills and work histories needed to stay employed or get a job. Coordination with the Food and Nutrition Services Unit staff is very important to ensure no duplication of services.

**B. Eligibility for Services**

To Determine Eligibility for Services:

Complete the Work First Services Integrated Eligibility Guide (IEG) application in NC FAST. The applicant's signature represents the applicant's statement for those elements for which the case manager may accept an applicant's statement. **Applicants who contact the agency by phone to apply must be interviewed at that time and the case manager will complete the application with a telephonic signature. Case managers must document the telephonic signature in the income support case details. All applicants have the option to provide a telephonic signature by phone. All Work First forms may be signed via telephonic signature. An applicant must speak directly with a case manager to complete a telephonic application. The case manager will summarize the information to which the household attests and allows a verbal signature. The documentation must be included in a case note in NC FAST to demonstrate that the applicant has signed the application. Document "Telephone Signature" in the Income Support Application Case Details Notes. The documentation in NC FAST must include the applicant's name, date, time of the telephone interview and the applicant's response to indicating agreement to this verbal attestation of signature over the phone. A voicemail message requesting assistance is not an application for Work First Services.**

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1. Determine whether the family's income is at the federal poverty level designated by the county. Use the family's total gross monthly income. Countable income is the same as for Work First Cash Assistance. Refer to Section 114, Income and Budgeting. **A family is entitled to disregard 27.5% of their earned income. This deduction is subtracted from a family's gross earned income. NC FAST automatically applies the 27.5% deduction for Work First Services. Please note that there is not a disregard for unearned income.**
2. Compare the gross total family income to the standard outlined in the current Federal Poverty Level income guidelines available at [the Poverty and Economic Mobility website](#).

The case manager may accept the family's statement of the family's income unless it is questionable. If in doubt, request appropriate verification. NC FAST will automatically update the annual Federal Poverty Limit (FPL) guidelines. The updated limits will be used by NC FAST to determine eligibility for Work First Services based on the FPL chosen by the county agency, 150% or 200%. NC FAST will use standard rounding methodology for calculating income eligibility for Work First Services.

3. Use the same criteria for determining who may apply as used for current Work First participants. Refer to Work First Manual Section 104.I, Who May Apply.
4. Determine that at least one child in the family meets the age, citizenship/immigrant, kinship, and living with rules for Work First. Refer to manual Sections 109, 111, and 112. You may accept the family's statement unless it is questionable. If in doubt, request appropriate verification from those who are applying for benefits.
5. Determine whether the families' resources meet the resource limits as defined for Work First Cash Assistance. Accept the family's statement unless the statement is questionable.
6. Exclude individuals from the need standard when:
  - a. The individual has an Intentional Program Violation (IPV),
  - b. Fleeing to avoid prosecution of a felony (or a high misdemeanor in New Jersey);

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- c. Fleeing to avoid custody either before or after conviction of a crime that is a felony (or a high misdemeanor in New Jersey);
- d. Violating a condition of probation or parole under federal or State law as determined by a court; or
- e. Convicted, under federal or State law of any offense committed on or after August 23, 1996, which is classified as a felony by the jurisdiction involved and has as an element the possession, use, or distribution of a controlled substance. This does not apply to individuals convicted of Class H or I controlled substance abuse felony offenses in North Carolina.

**Case managers** must accept the family's statement that no family members meet any of the conditions listed above; except for verification of an individual's status as a Class H or I controlled substance felony. Follow the process outlined in Work First Manual Section 104A, Individual Criminal Violations. Document the family's statement on the IEG.

**C. Eligibility for Payees in Child Only Cases**

Children in Child Only Work First Cash Assistance cases are eligible for Work First services by being eligible for Work First Cash Assistance. If a Payee requests a service for a Work First Cash Assistance **participant** child, the service can be provided with no further eligibility determination. If a payee requests services for themselves, complete the process for Eligibility for Services, V. B. Include the Payee's income in the eligibility determination.

**Example 1:** Mr. Jones is the payee for his grandchildren. Mr. Jones uses his car to commute to work daily. He requests help with car repairs to support his employment. Mr. Jones' countable income must meet the required poverty limit defined by the county to be eligible for services. Use the eligibility determination process defined in **Work First Policy Section 102. IV. B.**

**Example 2:** Mr. Jones is the payee for his grandchildren. He requests help with a \$90.00 registration fee for the grandchildren to attend an after-school tutoring program. This service can be provided for the children because they are Work First Cash Assistance **participants**, without further eligibility determination.

**D. Application and Authorization**

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The eligibility determination process is completed in NC FAST via the Work First Services Application. Refer to the job-aid “Work First Services Application to Case”. After NC FAST determines eligibility for Work First Services, the case manager must complete the DSS-5027, Client Entry Form. This form opens a service participant information record in the Services Information System (SIS) for each family. The case manager must complete the appropriate sections within the DSS-5027 and provide the applicant with a copy. Instructions for completing the DSS-5027 are found in the Services Information System (SIS) Manual.

The DSS-5027 must be completed or updated each time a service is requested or terminated, when income eligibility is determined or redetermined, and where service policy requires notification to the participant when a service is reduced. It also serves as the mechanism for tracking the specified services provided during the eligibility period.

The application for Work First Services is Form DSS-5027. This form serves as the application and the notice of rights and services. Complete sections A, B, C, G, and H. Give the applicant the copy that serves as the notice. Instructions for completing Form DSS-5027 are in the Services Information System (SIS) Manual. A participant record will be opened when a DSS-5027 is keyed. The 5027 must be closed when the authorization period ends, and the case manager must close the Work First Services case in NC FAST. The case manager must also close the DSS-5027 if the participant is approved for on-going cash assistance.

**Note:** All documentation for Work First Services applications must be uploaded to NC FAST on the associated Income Support case.

The maximum authorization period is 12 months, but the case can be authorized for less than 12 months. The Work First Case Manager must communicate effectively with Food and Nutrition Services case workers as the certification for services will affect Food and Nutrition Services benefits.

**NOTE:** Do not complete the DSS-5027 or open a case in SIS for families who have an active Work First Cash Assistance case.

#### **E. Available Services**

Work First services are designed to:

- Support job retention and advancement;
- Strengthen the family;

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**Short-Term Services and Benefits**

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Change No. **04-2026**

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- Promote the healthy development of children and parents; and/or
- Encourage the formation and maintenance of two-parent families.

Services may be provided to enable families to participate in a wide range of activities that will prepare them to seek and retain employment or enrich the family's life, including, but not limited to:

- Short Term Housing;
- Education (ABE, HS, GED & ESL);
- Job Search;
- Skills Training;
- On-the-Job Training;
- Job Readiness;
- Child Enrichment Activities;
- Various Counseling Activities;
- Parenting Skills;
- Transportation;
- Child Care;
- Work-related Expenses;
- **Family** Violence Services (See F. below);
- Case Management; and
- Child and Family Enrichment.

**F. Family Violence Services**

Counties are expected to provide **family** violence services to families who meet the eligibility requirements of Work First Cash Assistance or Work First Services for low-income families with County Work First Block Grant funding. Each county must have a plan developed by the department of social services and a local domestic violence service provider. The plan must describe the services that will be provided. Refer to Work First Policy Manual Section **104D** for more information.

**V. EMPLOYMENT SERVICES FOR NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS**

**A. Introduction**

Counties may provide Work-Related Services to the non-custodial parents of children in a Work First family. The non-custodial parent's gross monthly income must be at or below 200% of federal poverty. The non-custodial parent must be a U. S. citizen or qualified immigrant as defined in Work First Manual Section 111. This policy applies only to counties that have decided to provide these

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services and have submitted a local plan indicating the decision. The purpose of these services is to increase the non-custodial parent's ability to pay child support and assist the parent with obtaining and maintaining employment.

Counties must consider available resources when determining whether to provide employment-related services to non-custodial parents. For counties that choose to serve non-custodial parents, local resources must be prioritized to ensure that the county has the capacity to provide intensive employment services to all Work First Cash Assistance **participants** who are subject to the work requirements.

To provide employment-related services to non-custodial parents, county plans must include the development of local procedures and collaboration efforts. Counties are strongly encouraged to use the following strategies when working with non-custodial parents:

1. The child support office is the primary source for names of non-custodial parents and identifying information with which to locate them. In an effort to prioritize, the case manager should try to work with non-custodial parents who are behind in their child support payments.
2. Coordinate with the child support office to encourage the court system in the county to require participation in employment services with DSS as part of the support order. If another service provider is serving non-custodial parents, encourage them to do the same.

**B. Eligibility for Services**

To determine a non-custodial parent's eligibility for services:

1. Complete the Work First Services Integrated Eligibility Guide. Be sure to document that the non-custodial parent's child is a current **participant** of Work First Cash Assistance. Accept applicant's statement for Citizenship, identity, and qualified immigrant status **unless it is questionable. See Work First Section 111 for further guidance.**
2. Determine whether the non-custodial parent's family income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level. Use the family's total gross monthly income.

Countable income is the same as for Work First Cash Assistance. Count the income of the non-custodial parent's family members as with Work First Cash Assistance family members. See Work First Manual Section 114, Income and Budgeting, of the Work First Manual. Compare the gross total family income to the current FPL income guide. **A family is entitled to disregard 27.5% of their earned income. This deduction is subtracted from a family's gross earned income. NC Fast will automatically calculate the deduction. Please note there is not a disregard for unearned income.**

The case manager may accept the non-custodial parent's statement of the family's income unless it is questionable. If in doubt, request appropriate verification. Always verify the child's receipt of Work First Cash Assistance.

Maintain in a case file the completed eligibility worksheet to document the non-custodial parent's eligibility for employment-related services.

**C. Application and Authorization**

The eligibility determination process is completed in NC FAST via the Work First Services Application. After NC FAST determines eligibility for Work First Services, the **case manager** must complete the DSS-5027, Client Entry Form. This form opens a service **participant** information record in the Services Information System (SIS). The **case manager** must complete the appropriate sections within the notice and provide the applicant with a copy of the notice. Instructions for completing the DSS-5027 are found in the Services Information System (SIS) Manual.

The DSS-5027 must be completed or updated each time a service is requested or terminated, when income eligibility is determined or redetermined, and where service policy requires notification to the **participant** when a service is reduced. It also serves as the mechanism for tracking the specified services provided during the eligibility period.

A **participant** record will be opened when a DSS-5027 is keyed and must be closed when the **case manager** terminates Work First Services. The application for Work First Services is Form DSS-5027. This form serves as the application and the notice of rights and services. Complete sections A, B, C, G, and H. Give the applicant the copy that serves as the notice. Instructions for completing Form DSS-5027 are in the Services Information System (SIS) Manual.

**NOTE:** Information must be shared with Food and Nutrition Services case managers regarding the authorization of services and benefits. Send information transmittals to Food and Nutrition Services case manager when an individual is authorized for services and when services end.

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Do not provide services that meet the federal definition of assistance as stated previously in 102.1.

**D. Available Services**

Services may be provided to enable non-custodial parents to participate in a wide range of activities that will prepare them to seek and retain employment, including, but not limited to:

- Employment;
- Education (ABE, HS, GED, ESL);
- Job Search;
- Skills Training;
- On-the-Job Training;
- Job Readiness;
- Various Counseling Activities;
- Parenting Skills;
- Transportation;
- Child Care;
- Work-related Expenses; and
- Case Management.