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**BIENNIAL REPORT  
TO THE  
GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE**

*December 2004*

**New Jersey Department of Human Services  
Division of Family Development**

**Richard J. Codey  
*Acting Governor***

**James M. Davy  
*Commissioner***

**Jeanette Page-Hawkins  
*Director***

**WORK FIRST NEW JERSEY (WFNJ)  
BIENNIAL REPORT  
TO THE  
GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE**

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**SECTION 1. PROGRAM OVERVIEW**

*This report provides an update on the major initiatives and activities of WFNJ, primarily during the timeframe between January 2003 and September 2004.*

Work First New Jersey (WFNJ), the state's welfare program, promotes personal responsibility, instills dignity and fosters self-sufficiency and pride through work. The program strongly reinforces parents' responsibility for their children, through strict enforcement of child support requirements.

WFNJ (PL 1997, c.13, c.14, c.37 and c.38) was implemented in 1997, following passage of the federal Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996, Public Law 104-193.

Through the federal *Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)* program, WFNJ provides temporary financial assistance and support services to children and families, including eligible caretakers. WFNJ also contains a *General Assistance (GA)* component, a state-funded program that provides temporary supports to individuals and couples without children to help them move from public assistance into work and self-reliance.

The Department of Human Services' Division of Family Development (DHS/DFD) is responsible for supervising the WFNJ TANF and GA programs at the state level. These programs are administered at the local level by the 21 County Welfare Agencies (CWAs) and Municipal Welfare Agencies (MWAs), under DFD supervision and through various contracts with service providers.

In addition to cash benefits, WFNJ provides a host of support services to keep families from entering or re-entering the welfare system. These include, but are not limited to, diversion from cash assistance through immediate reemployment and post-TANF transitional services, such as child care, health care and transportation assistance.

WFNJ recipients who fail to cooperate with the program or participate in work activities as required - without good cause - are penalized with sanctions, that is, cash assistance benefits are reduced or stopped for at least one month, while non-cash assistance (such as child care, for example) is continued. For each additional time a client fails to meet the program's requirements, the penalty becomes greater: cash assistance benefits are reduced for a longer period of time, and the entire household may lose them. Continued failure to comply will result in the loss of all benefits, and the client's case will be closed.

In pursuing the goals and objectives of WFNJ, DFD works with an extensive network of public and private service providers within the human services community. These include federal, state, county, and local agencies, including a large number of community and faith-based organizations that provide direct services to individuals and families that may not be adequately addressed by government efforts.

## **SECTION 2. STATISTICAL SUMMARY, PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS & TARGETED SERVICES**

### **A. WFNJ STATISTICAL SUMMARY**

- ◆ The number of families receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) in New Jersey totaled 45,900 as of September 2004.
- ◆ More than 88,000 former welfare families have become employed since WFNJ was implemented in April 1997.
- ◆ Approximately 30% of the WFNJ/TANF cases that close each month are closed due to employment.
- ◆ As of September 2004, former TANF recipients who were employed were earning an average wage of \$8.45 per hour.
- ◆ Approximately 36,800 single adults and couples without children were receiving General Assistance (GA) as of September 2004.
- ◆ For the first half of federal fiscal year 2004, the total amount of child support payments that were collected and distributed was about \$440 million.

### **B. PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS**

#### **1. Child Support**

The Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) within DFD administers the federal Title IV-D (Child Support) Program and currently provides services to families and children of 350,000 non-custodial parents.

For WFNJ participants with dependent children, cooperating with child support obligations is a fundamental requirement in order to be eligible to receive cash assistance under WFNJ. OCSS provides equal services to both public assistance and non-public assistance clients, including families who are receiving or who formerly received assistance under the TANF, Foster Care, and Medicaid Programs, as well as any other families who apply for services. This includes medical support owed by non-custodial parents to their children and spouse, or former spouse, with whom the children may reside.

Child support and paternity programs are state-supervised and state and county-administered. County Welfare Agencies are responsible for providing assistance in the location of non-custodial parents, establishing paternity, and obtaining orders for child and medical support. DFD also has cooperative agreements with several public agencies to assist in the administration of the program, including, for example, the Administrative Office of the Courts,

County Sheriff Departments, and the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development.

Since child support is a federally-mandated program, OCSS performance standards are measured by the Federal Office of Child Support Enforcement in five key program areas. Federal incentives, which are used to further enhance child support services to the public, are distributed based on OCSS performance. The following are the key program areas and New Jersey's FFY 2004 performance percentages: Paternity Establishment (80%); Support Order Establishment (80%); Current Collections (66%); Arrearage Collections (65%); and Cost Benefit Ratio (\$5.03).

***The major programs and initiatives under the OCSS include:***

➤ ***Financial Institution Data Match (FIDM)***

FIDM has proven to be a powerful enforcement tool in collecting past-due child support payments. Under this program, financial institutions are required to provide vital account information on non-custodial parents who maintain accounts at their institutions. In response to a notice of lien or levy, financial institutions are required to encumber and seize assets held on behalf of any non-custodial parent who is subject to a child support lien.

*As of September 30, 2004, collections received directly from bank and other financial institution accounts totaled over \$14 million. In addition, another \$14.7 million was collected after levies were issued and the delinquent parents voluntarily paid back child support.*

While serving as an effective source of collections, FIDM has other benefits. The bank match is an excellent resource for determining the address of non-custodial parents. The match will often bring to light cases that should have been closed or provide information to help clean up the arrears, so that a case may be closed. More importantly, bank levying sends the message that child support is mandatory, thereby strongly encouraging a parent to pay past-due support payments voluntarily and in a more timely fashion.

➤ ***Responsible Parenting Program***

There are over 26,000 people incarcerated in New Jersey's prisons; estimates indicate that over 75 percent of these inmates are parents. In order to provide supportive services to families with incarcerated parents, the Department of Human Services entered into a cooperative agreement with the Department of Corrections to establish the Responsible Parenting Initiative. The goals of this project are to help reduce recidivism and help reconnect parents with their families and society through the following services:

- ✓ parenting education and supportive counseling (including parenting curriculum, childhood development, and relationship services);
- ✓ child support enforcement;
- ✓ paternity establishment;
- ✓ employability training and job placement assistance;
- ✓ supportive services for community transitions (including visitation and access, family programs and mentoring).

The program began in September 2002 on a limited basis in five halfway houses: two in Camden, one in Cumberland and two in Essex County. At the end of 2004, 90 individuals were participating in the groups. At the conclusion of the program, the parents will transition to employment and receive further support from a community-based organization, to assist with ongoing community and family transition.

➤ ***Operation Fatherhood***

This program is an ongoing project through a DFD contract with the Union Industrial Home in Mercer County that provides peer support, job training and employment services to non-custodial fathers. One of its primary objectives is to enhance child support collection.

Men are eligible for the program if they are: non-custodial parents 18 years of age or older; Mercer County residents with a child support order for at least one child receiving TANF (or with arrears owed); and unemployed or underemployed, making less than \$7 per hour. Operation Fatherhood also serves participants at two correctional halfway houses and the Albert M. ("Bo") Robinson Assessment and Treatment Center in Mercer County.

➤ ***Learning, Investing and Networking for Kids Sake (LINKS) Program***

The Division of Family Development's Office of Child Support Services is under contract with a private public relations agency to implement a public awareness campaign concerning child support called LINKS. The multi-faceted media campaign promotes voluntary child support compliance and shared parenting responsibility through the theme "Child Support...It's More Than Just Money."

➤ ***Promote Healthy Families Project***

With funding from a federal grant, a program has been piloted in Camden County that provides grass-roots support to help fathers and families become self-sufficient. The Promote Healthy Families Project is designed to bring a holistic approach to addressing the issues surrounding persistent unemployment and underemployment of fathers. The fundamental goal of the project is to improve the economic, emotional and physical well-being of children in the County by encouraging and supporting the father/child relationship and helping fathers and families become self-reliant.

The project is led by the Commission on Healthy Families, comprised of representatives of the Office of Child Support Services and over 25 Camden County organizations and businesses. A comprehensive package of services was coordinated through participating agencies and includes, for example: needs assessment, legal assistance, referral for job training/job placement, substance abuse treatment, mediation and conflict resolution, parenting classes, life skills and partner and premarital counseling. The pilot, scheduled to come to a close in February 2005, had served 78 participants by the end of December 2004. A final report and project analysis should be completed by March 2005.

➤ ***Child Support Amnesty***

Child Support Amnesty Week, held from September 8 through September 14, 2004, proved once again to be a successful program: more than \$725,000 was collected from 1,874 non-custodial parents, with more than \$298,000 pledged in future lump-sum payments. To encourage participation, the Office of Child Support Services ran an advertising campaign, which included radio and newspaper ads, posters and press releases.

The goal of the amnesty program is to increase both short-term and long-term collections. Amnesty week gives non-custodial parents with active bench warrants for non-support the opportunity to visit their local probation divisions to speak with a representative, without being arrested. If a payment arrangement is agreed upon, the bench warrant is dropped, and the non-custodial parent may also take steps to have his or her driver's license restored. The program is also helpful in obtaining location and employment information from non-custodial parents.

➤ ***New Jersey New Hire Directory***

The New Hire Directory requires all employers in the State to report every new employee within 20 days of hiring. This system is designed to assist in the location of child support obligors, as well as to quickly establish income withholding when an obligor changes jobs. In 2003, over 2 million new hires were reported.

The operation of the Directory is maintained by a vendor under contract with the Office of Child Support Services.

➤ ***Re-engineering of the Automated Child Support Enforcement System (ACSES)***

In September 2002, DFD contracted with an independent party to examine our current ACSES system and make recommendations on improvements that would enhance its performance. After a diligent ACSES analysis, the vendor recommended the creation of a new Child Support Enforcement System.

In addition, the vendor worked with OCSS in developing an Advanced Planning Document for the design and implementation of the new system and assisted in developing a Request for Proposals (RFP), each of which conforms to federal requirements and meets federal approval. It is anticipated that the RFP will be posted on the Department of Treasury's website in March 2005.

➤ ***Paternity Opportunity Program (POP)***

The Paternity Opportunity Program allows unmarried parents to establish paternity voluntarily prior to or after the birth of a child without having to go to court.

Unmarried parents are offered the opportunity to voluntarily establish paternity by signing a Certificate of Parentage - the official form for paternity acknowledgment in New Jersey - at the hospital, when the child is born or after at the local registrar or county welfare agency.

New Jersey's voluntary acknowledgment program is unique in that the Certificates of Parentage are imaged and stored on a database. This enables county child support

workers to have immediate access to the imaged forms via personal computer. The forms can then be printed on site when needed for court purposes.

POP has resulted in a more expedient process and a savings of court time. It has consistently yielded high annual percentages of paternity establishment, making New Jersey's voluntary paternity establishment rate one of the best in the nation. In FFY 2004, Certificates of Parentage were completed for 79% (24,400) of the year's 30,900 out-of-wedlock births.

➤ ***The National Medical Support Project***

A contract for the federally-mandated National Medical Support Notice (NMSN) project was awarded in July 2003 and began operations in October 2003. The NMSN is intended to expedite and simplify the enforcement of medical support orders through use of a standardized form that will be used by all states. The Notice instructs employers to provide health care coverage information, such as availability and, where coverage is appropriate, enroll employees' children. If it is determined that health care coverage is not available through the employer, or not available at a reasonable cost, then NJ FamilyCare will be considered as an alternative. As of September 30, 2004, over 87,000 notices were sent, resulting in medical coverage for children in approximately 16,000 cases.

A NMSN is sent in all cases where the non-custodial parent is ordered to provide health care coverage through an employer-related group health plan and the non-custodial parent's employer is known to the State. Notices sent are tracked to ensure that the employer responds and information that is received is updated daily on our database. Completed notices are imaged, so that the county child support, family division and probation workers can have on-site access to the information. Customer service and public awareness, including an employer website, are important components of the program. The website at <http://www.nmsn.org/nj/> became operational as of January 5, 2004.

## **2. Child Care**

Most of the families on welfare are headed by women, and many of these women have children who need some level of child care. Families on welfare and low-income working families need to find child care that is available when they work that is both conducive to their transportation situation and works with their lifestyle. Secondly, they need to be able to pay for it. For families on welfare, that is not an issue; WFNJ pays for child care entirely while the client is in training or participating in a work activity.

WFNJ also helps pay for at least two years of child care after a woman has left welfare for work. The average monthly subsidy is about \$380 per child. (There is a co-pay based on family size and income.) For this population, there is no waiting list for a child care subsidy: dedicated funds are allocated to ensure that eligible families continue to receive subsidy services after their two years of Transitional Child Care (TCC) benefits.

*Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies* in each county coordinate child care services and related activities. These agencies are primarily responsible for:

- ◆ Providing child care resource and referral services, including providing families with information regarding child care options,
- ◆ Referrals to prospective child care providers,
- ◆ Operating voucher certificate payment systems,
- ◆ Administering the voluntary family day care registration program,
- ◆ Helping to increase child care service capacity and develop additional child care resources,
- ◆ Providing training and technical assistance to providers, and
- ◆ Promoting enhanced quality of child care services

DFD also contracts with 197 child care centers for subsidized child care services and an additional 400 centers that provide wraparound, full-year child care to children receiving pre-school services in the state's 31 Abbott School Districts.

For low-income working women whose financial health hovers precariously close to our welfare program, the cost of child care may mean the difference between making it on their own or going onto public assistance. For many of these families, child care expenses eat up 30, 40 or even 50 percent of their paychecks. By the end of 2004, approximately 9,000 children living within low-income working families were waiting for child care subsidies.

### ***Child Care Accomplishments***

#### **Abbott Pre-school Program**

The Department of Human Services views early child care and education services as an economic issue essential to meeting the growing needs of New Jersey's working families. Programs must be structured in a way to accommodate the needs of clients on welfare who are in full-time training or a work activity. They must also support the labor force needs of women who have left welfare to pursue income-generating activities, as well as the needs of working parents from low-income families.

A large segment of clients served by DHS reside in the 31 Abbott School Districts. According to the recent enrollment statistics available from the Department of Education (DOE), as of the end of September 2004, more than 40,000 children were enrolled in Abbott preschool programs. More than 70 percent of these children are served in community-based programs under contract with the districts.

### **3. Emergency Assistance (EA)**

EA is a supportive service designed to meet the emergent needs of WFNJ recipients who may otherwise be prevented from complying with the program requirements, due to disruptions caused by homelessness and related emergencies. The high cost of housing and limited availability of rental units in New Jersey makes affordable housing difficult to find. Currently, WFNJ/EA is time-limited to 12 cumulative months. Under certain conditions, hardship extensions are possible.

#### **4. Health Care**

Medical support services are available through the Medicaid program for children and their parents who meet income eligibility criteria. Participants apply for Medicaid benefits when they apply for WFNJ assistance. Families who leave welfare for work may also be eligible for extended Medicaid benefits for up to 24 months after they begin employment.

With the exception of sanctions related to child support and paternity requirements, sanctions imposed on WFNJ participants do not apply to Medicaid eligibility. Pregnant women may not be subjected to sanctions of ineligibility for Medicaid, and a child of a parent who is sanctioned due to non-compliance with WFNJ child support and paternity requirements may not be declared ineligible for Medicaid benefits.

#### **5. NJ FamilyCare**

DFD promotes NJ FamilyCare as part of our outreach to post-TANF recipients and low-income working families. This program, which is administered by the DHS Division of Medical Assistance and Health Services, provides free or low-cost health insurance to uninsured families.

The program covers children under the age of 19 who have no insurance. For example, a child living in a family of four that has an annual income of approximately \$65,000 would qualify. Families pay as little as \$10 per month for this health insurance and some families pay no monthly premiums or co-payments.

#### **6. Parenting and Nutritional Initiative**

The TANF Initiative for Parents (TIP) is a preventative effort for new TANF moms to help improve their parenting skills and satisfy their WFNJ work requirement at the same time. Through a combination of services – some delivered in the home, others at the One-Stop Career Center – parents will learn about good nutrition, healthy child development, receive employment services and get help with balancing work and raising a family. The program is voluntary for parents of children under three months. For parents with children between 3-12 months, the program can count toward some or all of their work activity.

In-home services started in November 2004 in the pilot county of Camden, followed by a variety of parenting classes and services at the One-Stop Career Center in January 2005. The plan is to be expanded to Essex County in early 2005.

### **C. TARGETED SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WITH SPECIALIZED NEEDS**

#### **1. Supportive Assistance to Individuals and Families (SAIF)**

In April 2003, families and individuals reached the end of two, six-month extensions to their 60-month time limit and were granted continued assistance through the end September of 2003, while the Department of Human Services finalized a service package for them. SAIF was developed for those WFNJ recipients who had exhausted the time limit; it is budget-neutral, with case management and WFNJ service costs being offset by caseload reduction as SAIF clients get jobs and leave the program. SAIF began serving clients early in 2004.

The program combines intensive case management with a continuation of the service package available to Work First New Jersey recipients. If a client continues to work or participate in a work activity, he or she may receive up to 24 months of cash benefits, in addition to services such as child care and transportation. If needed, other services such as mental health and substance abuse treatment may also be available. A case manager keeps in close contact with each client - through phone calls, visits to the office and even visits to the client's worksite or home, to ensure that progress continues.

Services to SAIF families and individual clients are being delivered by seven provider agencies throughout the state, who serve TANF or GA clients or both populations.

**2. Substance Abuse Initiative (SAI)**

The SAI program is a collaboration among the Division of Family Development (DFD), the Division of Addiction Services (DAS) and the Division of Medicaid Assistance and Health Services (DMAHS). SAI provides substance abuse assessment, referral to treatment, utilization management and employment-directed case management for WFNJ TANF and GA recipients who are required to participate in a work activity and who are experiencing drug or alcohol problems. Trained Care Coordinators at the County Welfare Agencies work to identify and assess participants' needs and to expedite their access to available treatment services, so that they may move into employment and eventually attain self-sufficiency.

Clients that are identified as having a drug or alcohol problem are required to enter a treatment program; the treatment is then considered a work activity. TANF parents with active DYFS cases receive intensive case management that promotes the outcomes of child safety and parental responsibility.

The chart below shows the total number of clients that participated in the SAI program during SFY 2003-2004 for the first time (*unduplicated numbers*) and those clients that recycled through the program, due to relapse and the need for referral, assessment and treatment multiple times (*duplicated numbers*).

**SAI Client Caseload for SFY 2003-2004**

	Total # of GA/TANF first-time clients (unduplicated numbers)	Total # of GA/TANF with multiple episodes of care (duplicated numbers)
Referred	4,799	7,860
Assessed	4,306	6,231
Treated	3,210	4,773

The actual volume of clients being served by the SAI is reflected in the duplicated numbers. To arrive at the duplicated numbers, a client is counted more than once if he or she drops out of treatment but gets referred by the county again for another assessment and more treatment.

**3. Mental Health Initiative**

In collaboration with the DHS Division of Mental Health Services (DMHS), this initiative assists harder-to-serve WFNJ/TANF recipients who have a mental health disability that poses an impediment to employment. The program identifies and assesses clients that may require

specialized services and provides critical mental health and job readiness assistance to enable them to enter the workforce. This program is in its fifth year of operation; this year, it has been expanded to allow DYFS to refer mutual DYFS/TANF/GA clients directly to the Mental Health Initiative Provider Agencies.

DMHS works closely with the County Welfare Agencies (CWAs) and Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) staff, who refer clients to be evaluated by the Mental Health Case Manager. All staff is provided technical assistance to enhance their awareness of mental health disability issues. The term of the current Memorandum of Agreement runs from July 1, 2004 through June 30, 2005.

#### **4. Long-Term Support Pilot Project**

This component of WFNJ provides extended Emergency Assistance (EA) benefits for up to an additional 36 months to unemployable WFNJ/TANF/EA recipients, as well as to GA and Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) recipients, to help stabilize and maintain housing for this population. Services include intensive case management and case coordination with public housing authorities and with mental health and related agencies, in order to move this population toward partial or full independence and away from the emergency assistance program. Through a contract with Legal Services of New Jersey, the Division of Family Development assists recipients who may be eligible for SSI to apply for and obtain SSI benefits.

#### **5. Special Initiatives Program**

The Division of Family Development (DFD) funds the Special Initiative Program to assist counties in developing programs to meet the social service needs for those "hardest to serve" TANF participants. These clients face multiple barriers that impede their ability to become self-sufficient and they require additional support services. Services that have a direct relationship to overcoming such barriers to employment are expanded through this funding.

Special Initiatives should be developed in consultation with the local Workforce Investment Boards and, where relevant, coordinated with the "to work" activities provided through the One-Stop Career Centers.

#### **6. Transportation**

WFNJ TANF and GA clients that are participating in a work activity are eligible to receive a Transportation-Related Expense (TRE) payment. Through county contracts with DFD, other transportation services are offered, such as expansion of bus routes, vehicle repairs and special van services. The counties' plans for use of these funds are to be developed in cooperation with the local One-Stop Career Centers.

### ***SECTION 3. SUPPORTS FOR WORKING FAMILIES***

WFNJ has been successful in moving an unprecedented number of families and individuals from the welfare rolls into the working world. Overall, former welfare clients who are working are better off than when they were receiving public assistance. However, making the transition can be an overwhelming experience for many of these families and individuals, as they attempt to balance their personal and family lives while adjusting to the demands of a job.

WFNJ offers a broad range of critical support services that address the needs of post-TANF families that are working but still struggling. These *Transitional Support Services* are available to those who are working and have recently closed their TANF cases, or have agreed to do so.

*A summary of the Supports for Working Families follows.*

**A. Career Advancement Vouchers (CAV)**

This program offers additional education or occupational training opportunities to post-TANF recipients who are employed. The program targets those individuals who can show that participation in such an activity will result in potential growth in their current job or increased potential for advancement in a new job.

To be eligible for a CAV, persons who are post-TANF recipients within the past 24 months must have been employed for the previous 4 months. Clients must agree to remain employed and not reduce work hours in order to participate in classes or training. Voucher benefits are issued directly to the training/education vendors, for up to \$4,000 per individual. Participants who complete a training program may apply for a second voucher (\$4,000 per individual maximum). Child care services are also provided to participants in the program.

*Note: As of July 1, 2004, the Career Advancement Voucher Program was transferred to the Department of Labor and Workforce Development.*

**B. Supplemental Work Support (SWS)**

This program provides TANF clients who are working but still receiving a partial cash grant the opportunity to receive a monthly support payment of \$200 to help offset some of the costs associated with working. By providing a monthly work support, the goal is to enable clients to maintain employment and discontinue receipt of cash assistance, thereby stopping the progression of their 60-month lifetime limit on cash benefits.

To be eligible, individuals must have been receiving WFNJ/TANF benefits for at least the last six months and must agree to voluntarily close their case. They must have been working for at least the past four months for a minimum average of 20 hours per week.

*As of September 30, 2004, there were nearly 1,000 clients receiving SWS.*

**C. Supplemental Living Support (SLS)**

SLS offers an additional cash benefit to both TANF and GA recipients that have been placed into exemption status. This population has been identified as having multiple barriers (i.e., over age 60, permanently disabled) that create additional needs and, therefore, these clients are less likely to obtain employment.

SLS provides an extra \$150 per month (in addition to the monthly cash grant) to all cases where one or both of the adult recipients have met the exemption criteria for post 60-month receipt of WFNJ benefits. Eligible clients receive this supplemental payment each month that they meet compliance with WFNJ program eligibility requirements and are in exempt status after July 1, 2002. If a client's status changes to non-exempt, the household will no longer qualify for the SLS, unless another adult recipient on the case meets the exemption criteria.

#### **D. Transportation Assistance**

WFNJ recipients who become employed may be eligible for assistance with travel costs. Under the WorkPass program, people that utilize public transportation may receive a one-time free monthly bus or train pass from NJ Transit. Under the Extended WorkPass program, recipients may also be eligible for an additional six months of free or low-cost bus or train passes.

In addition to the Transportation Block Grant for current TANF recipients, DFD provides funds to the counties to operate the post-TANF Transportation Block Grant. Counties may develop programs that support the transportation needs of TANF families so that they may retain employment and avoid returning to the TANF program.

#### **E. Family Violence Option (FVO)**

In collaboration with the New Jersey Coalition for Battered Women (NJCBW) and the DHS local domestic violence and sexual assault victim services provider agencies, this initiative assists WFNJ TANF/GA/EA applicants or recipients who are past or present victims of family violence, or at risk of family violence. The goal is to make it easier for such individuals to meet WFNJ program requirements, such as time limits, work and child support cooperation requirements.

The County and Municipal Welfare Agencies (CWAs/MWAs) screen and identify applicants/recipients in need of specialized services. A referral is made to the local service provider for a standardized risk assessment that includes safety and service planning. Information is offered about the availability of family violence and sexual assault service programs within the community, including information about the Address Confidentiality Program. This information is also available to the public at large that comes in contact with the CWA/MWA.

In addition, the service provider conducts specialized training for the CWA/MWA staff on an ongoing basis.

#### **F. Kinship Navigator Program**

The Navigator Program provides information and referral about a wide range of services designed for "kinship caregivers" and the children in their care. Kinship caregivers are family members (frequently grandparents) who have taken on the responsibility of caring for their relatives' children. Navigator staff assists these families in applying for and securing the benefits and services, which include, for example:

- ◆ Medicaid coverage and services
- ◆ Child Support
- ◆ Child Care Subsidies
- ◆ Housing Assistance
- ◆ Custody procedures and related legal services
- ◆ Respite Services

#### ***Kinship Program Highlights:***

- ◆ From January 2003 through September 30, 2004, 6,466 calls were received from kinship caregivers with 11,393 children in their care.
- ◆ As of September 30, 2004, 850 children were receiving assistance under the *Kinship Child Care Subsidy Program*, which assists kinship caregivers with the cost of child care. Financial eligibility depends on the kinship caregiver's age, family size and income. (For

example, for caregivers who are under age 60 and employed, or going to school or training or disabled, the maximum income is approximately \$54,800 annually. For a family of three where the caregiver is age 60 or older, the maximum yearly income is approximately \$78,000.)

- ◆ Under the *Kinship Wraparound Program*, caregivers may qualify for help in paying for short-term or one-time expenses, such as furniture, moving expenses, legal services and respite care. For the period of January 2003 through September 30, 2004, more than 5,000 referrals were made to the four regional agencies administering the Kinship Wraparound Program. Income limits are the same as for the Kinship Child Care Subsidy Program.
- ◆ The *Kinship Care Subsidy Program* provides a monthly subsidy of up to \$250 per month per child for children living with low-income caregivers. Caregivers who meet an income requirement of up to 150% of the federal poverty level, and go to court to acquire legal guardianship of the relative child in their home, may be eligible. (For example, a family of three can have a maximum income of approximately \$23,500 per year and receive the subsidy.)

As of September 30, 2004, there were 564 completed assessments sent to court for 1,062 children and 364 caregivers granted Kinship Legal Guardianship by the courts for 696 children.

### **G. Food Stamp Outreach Initiative**

The enactment of the Food Stamp Reauthorization Act of 2002 by Congress in May 2002 placed a high priority on simplifying the process for people who apply for or receive food stamp benefits. New Jersey is working to increase the utilization of food stamps throughout the state, particularly among four targeted groups: the elderly, immigrants, the working poor and victims of family/domestic violence.

During the past year alone, New Jersey increased the level of participation in its Food Stamp program by more than nine percent. This increase is the result of a number of initiatives that have been implemented, including:

- ◆ A multi-pronged outreach campaign based on the theme, "Everyday People use Food Stamps Every Day." The campaign theme has two goals: to eliminate some of the stigma attached to using food stamps and to shatter some of the myths about who is eligible for the program.

Media and print materials that were developed in both English and Spanish include: NJ Transit bus posters; advertising on grocery carts in 75 major supermarkets; posters in pharmacies throughout the state; print ads in ethnic, weekly and senior citizen publications around the state; and a 2004 calendar for food stamp staff, as well as a poster, refrigerator magnet and shopping list magnet.

Another element of the campaign was the creation of an informational video to be used in grassroots outreach sessions. "Grocery Talk" is a light-hearted informational video focusing on breaking the myths about who is eligible for food stamps.

- ◆ Development of a shorter, simplified food stamp application form and publication in multiple foreign languages.
- ◆ Publication of easy-to-read brochures and other materials to help potential clients understand the Food Stamp program, the application process and how to apply.
- ◆ Introduction of NJHELPS on the web ([www.njhelps.org](http://www.njhelps.org)), an interactive service that helps people determine whether they may be eligible for Food Stamps (as well as Medicaid and several other assistance programs offered by the Department of Human Services).
- ◆ Improvement of access to Food Stamps by providing the application forms on the web and by enabling applicants to apply on line at [www.njfoodstamps.com](http://www.njfoodstamps.com).
- ◆ Development of Outreach Plans by each County Welfare Agency.

#### **H. Food Stamp Payment Accuracy**

In September 2004, New Jersey received a High Performance Bonus of more than \$1.6 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), recognizing our Food Stamp Program as having the second lowest payment accuracy error rate in the nation. The Food Stamp program, which is federally-funded, is directly administered by the 21 County Welfare Agencies, under the supervision of DFD. Nearly 165,000 households receive these benefits in New Jersey.

### **SECTION 4. WELFARE REFORM REAUTHORIZATION**

Congress has continued to pass "Continuing Resolutions" to maintain the current TANF law. The American Public Human Services Association, the National Conference of State Legislatures and the National Governors Association have sent correspondence to Congress, urging enactment of a 3-year extension of the law before the current session comes to an end, in order to ensure program continuity and continuation of progress.

### **SECTION 5. APPENDICES**

**Appendix A:** A Summary of the WFNJ Program Expenditures covering this report period.

**Appendix B:** In accordance with State law (PL 1997, c.13), the Department submits a Quarterly Progress Update on Work First New Jersey to the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee and the Assembly Appropriations Committee. Appended is a copy of the most recent report, covering the quarter ending September 2004.

Additional copies of the September 2004 report or prior quarterly updates, as well as further information concerning any of the issues addressed in this Biennial Report, are available by contacting Jeanette Page-Hawkins, Director, Division of Family Development, at 609-588-2401.