

Good Afternoon,

I would like to add my comments to today's proceedings (TANF/NM Works hearings before the Legislative Health and Human Services Committee Wednesday, September 12). I have chosen to remain anonymous at this time to avoid any further and or future "Backlash" from the TANF/SLStart department. As I have questioned caseworkers before and in turn received delays in processing the renewal of my benefits. I would also receive comments like "well I will not sanction you this time". The question that was asked you may wonder was simple, why are you changing my WPA midstream, when I have all my activities and schedules set. I was told I did not have enough hours each month. My question "Well when my WPA was set up, you the caseworker reviewed all the activities and hours I would be completing each week. So should you not have known that I was short X amount of hours? "

Please do not deceive yourselves and believe that my anonymity is not important. My family depends on the financial support we receive during this transition in life to self-sufficiency.

For the most part I understand the process; however there are definite times when I get frustrated.

The system does not seem to be set up for those who are seeking a long term solution via Education.

Let me explain what I mean by this, from the beginning I established with various case workers (which up until the last four months (I believe) I have had a new case worker every thirty days if not every fifteen days) that my full intention was to complete an Associate's Degree then proceed to a Bachelors' Degree via the traditional route of CNM and UNM. This has left each month a guessing game for me as far as what hours are required, what will be acceptable, finding fill in hours etc. I am put on a WPA to have it change mid-stream and often midterm. This can be very stressful when you have everything planned down to the tee. I do not understand why those that are going to two and four year institutions are not set up on a program that is both beneficial to them and also to the case worker. I have on some occasions had to see my case worker two and three times in a month. This is time consuming, stressful and sometimes feels redundant. I know that they have a program put it has limited space and I am on a waiting list, so every month is filled with the ever popular spin the wheel and find an activity that will meet my core hours. This for many has led to just plain giving up.

I do appreciate the work all of the case workers have done; I do not have a bad word to say about any of them. The system itself does not work in their favor nor ours at times and they spend more time putting out fires (time sheet requirements that seem to be constantly changing) then they do facilitating the long term change that is needed for sustained growth and self-reliance of their clients.

I know that in the past I was successful in the market place without a degree at this time that simply is not so. I understood that the system which I have reluctantly sought for support had the same mindset which was ultimate sustainability for their clients. I feel as though I have to choose between finishing my education and trying to find two and three jobs which in the end leaves me absent from the home and exhausted. This may leave me in a position were once again I have to rely on assistance instead of giving it. It will also continue to set an example for our children that education has little or no value.

I do understand that they are still working out some of the kinks so to speak, with the new administration, however the lack of consistent guidelines lead to miscommunication and frustration.

Overall the program is what it is, I understand they are working towards improvement so I hope my comments will help the next student that passes through their doors. It would be nice if once a WPA was done they could not change the core hours required until the end of a student's term.

The only other point of contention I have with SL Start is their inability to work with the ISD department when clients SNAP benefits are impacted. As they are still having the problem of denying full time UNM and CNM students with dependents and without food stamps for all household members. When caseworkers are told this is happening to their clients they just go well that's the way it is. When the through is many clients have received back pay for SNAP benefits due to the misinterpretation of the policy.

One last note: My last question is this, for those who are a proponent of the SL start/TANF programs. Why has there been no independent survey been done. With a rating system of always and few areas were clients can type for fill in a response. Something similar the example below:

1. I have been informed of all services that I am qualified for (example monthly fuel card, public transportation, clothing assistance)

Strongly Agree

Agree Neutral Disagree

Strongly Disagree

2. I have seen and employment advisor and was assisted in preparing and updating my resume.

Have never Seen

Declined to See

Was not aware of employment advisor

3. Please tell us what SL Start can to improve communication with you.

(questions that should also be included would be if the client has ever felt pushed into a situation that did not fit their original action plan to become self-sufficient)

This way the clients could answer freely with complete anonymity. This would be a true way to gauge what is working and what is not. This would give us as clients a true voice, and a since of empowerment towards our future.

You may find that fewer people will be trying to work the system, they would have the confidence that the system is working for them.