Guide to Effective Case Notes for Employment Services

Minnesota Family Investment Program (MFIP) and Diversionary Work Program (DWP)

Introduction

Case notes are electronic and chronological records of events, interactions and observations of a case and are used for case management, appeals and professional reviews. This document will guide workers in writing case notes that are appropriate, understandable and meets the documentation and verification requirements for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Work Participation Rate (WPR). This document does not provide in-depth instruction on what to write for every situation, so check with your agency for details.

Purpose of case notes

Represent the participant situation

Case notes recount the story, a participant's history, present circumstances, reflections and actions.

Provide a permanent record

- Case notes sequentially track participant's progress, services provided, and interactions between participant and worker.
- Case notes can clarify any missing or additional details of documentation on file or hours tracked in Workforce (WF1).
- Case notes can supplement or substantiate verifications for TANF WPR.

Support an action

Case notes provides details and reasons for a proposed action or any action already taken.

Improve case management

Case notes provide detailed information to help current, back-up, and future workers about the case status, history and follow-up required.

Best practices for case notes

- Be clear, concise, and objective.
- Provide accurate details of the situation and what occurred (who, what, where, when, why, and how).
- Include discussions related to goals, action steps, timelines, strengths and barriers.
- Exclude sensitive information such as medical diagnoses and detailed information about family violence.
- Complete case notes as soon as possible after the event happens.

Use of abbreviations and acronyms in case notes

Agencies use different abbreviations and acronyms for MFIP/DWP. When using abbreviations and acronyms, keep in mind that people outside your agency such as auditors, appeals judges, and participants may need to read and will need to understand your case notes.

- Use very few acronyms and abbreviations in case notes.
- Use Plain Language Guidelines.

Sample case note

Bad case note

PT rptd new job. EV rec'd. FTE, DOH 03/30, 1st PD 4/17. EP updated. Ver. sent.

Good case note

Participant reported new job at Minnesota National Bank. Employment verification form received that work is full-time at 40 hours per week. The date of hire was 03/30 with first pay date of 04/17. Employment plan updated and signed today with new job activity. Informed participant that I will inform the eligibility worker and child care worker of the new job and forward the verification form.

When entering a case note in WF1

- Complete all the required fields (*).
- Complete the Subject field with a short description of the content of the case note.
- Complete the Note field with the details.
- Complete other optional fields such as Category, Contact Method, and Contact Type.
    - The case note search feature in WF1 uses these fields as search criteria to find specific case notes.

Special instructions when case noting certain activities

Job search logs

On the back of the Job Search Log called Part 2, there is a section that an employment counselor can complete to meet the job search verification requirements. The employment counselor can document that the weekly check-in occurred, the method of the check-in, and the verification of bi-weekly verification of a job contact (check job search log to see if anything is missed). If the employment counselor correctly completes the Part 2 of the Job Search Log, no further case noting is required.

- Job search bi-weekly verifications: This requirement can be met by speaking to the participant about a job search and can be noted on Part 2 of the job search log.
- Job search weekly check-ins: This requirement can be done in-person, by phone, or by email. However, it must also to be noted and complete on Part 2 of the job search log.

Assessments

Medical diagnoses and other confidential information about a participant's health should not be included in case notes. This information can be kept in the file, and the employment counselor can note there is a "medical condition" and where the documentation can be found if needed.

Community service program

The employment counselor must case note why the placement is of useful public purpose, and why the placement will improve the participant's employability. For court ordered community service, case note how many hours are required for the court order.

Holding activity

Always case note why the activity is open, and the timeframe for which this activity will remain open.

Sanctions

Monthly contact is required for participant who are in sanction. Case note monthly engagement.

Transition period of 48-60 months

There are specific instructions for case noting during this time period – refer to the Employment Services Manual.

Holidays & Excused absences

Any hours entered in WF1 for holidays & excused absences should be case noted, documenting the need, and noting what documentation about excused absences was received

Review these resources

[Employment Services Manual]

[MFIP Activity Guide Tip Sheet (DHS-5784A)]