



NEMO WIB Issuance #02-10

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To: All Program Operators
From: Mark Fuqua, Executive Director
Subject: Guidance on Writing Service Notes

Purpose: To provide policy and guidance regarding the content of Service Notes (formerly called case notes) in the Northeast Missouri Workforce Investment Board Region.

Background: The Workforce Investment act of 1998 is designed around Career Center services which are documented through the use of service notes. Service notes and file documentation are critical foundations that provide evidence of services and activities provided to participants while enrolled in Career Center Services such as Wagner Peyser and Workforce Investment Act Services as well as compliance with Federal, State and Local regulations. The guidelines in this policy are not intended to replace or supersede any legal or confidential policies. This policy is intended to provide specific guidance to Missouri Career Center staff on the requirements of the content and recording of service notes. Career Center Functional Leaders are ultimately responsible for ensuring their staff is trained in writing service notes to meet specific legal and confidentiality requirements.

Substance: Service notes are required to document details about the customer's needs and services throughout their participation in program services. The notes should document the story of the customer from start to finish. Service notes can provide information on an individual's strengths and needs that can provide a justification for specific services and activities. The notes can also sometimes serve as documentation of factors affecting an individual's eligibility or other important information such as data validation, customer participation, and customer services and outcomes. Service notes are critical when communicating the customer's needs and situation with the team of staff that will be helping them.

All participant files must contain relevant and appropriate service notes but should not contain details about confidential information or information that is not relevant to the services being provided to the customer. Confidential information is information that relates to the client's health, domestic violence situation, substance abuse, custody hearings, or specific information related to other family members. If needed, the details of confidential information can be kept on a service note in the customers hard copy file. The note should only contain information about the customer that affects:

- the customer's ability to participate in employment or training activities
- tracks their progress
- lists their accomplishments
- employment outcomes

A. Purpose of Service Notes

Service notes record the details of an individual's participation and record their progress toward their goals of employment and/or training. They are used as a tool to help career center staff organize and analyze the information gathered on participants and to plan case management strategies.

Information such as, the type of activity or service(s) and placement in employment are documented by entering the activities into a customer's Toolbox record. Service notes are a way to provide additional information needed to add detail and clarity to the customer's situation. Generally, information available through public records can be included in Toolbox.

Other purposes of service notes include:

- Document contact with customers
- Provide information relevant to the customer's case
- Indicate when sensitive documentation/information is contained in a paper file
- Facilitate seamless service delivery
- Provide information regarding topics and plans that have been discussed
- Provide documentation to meet regulatory requirements
- Document information obtained from staff and career consultants not using Toolbox
- Reduce duplication of effort
- Facilitate monitoring at local, regional, state and federal levels
- Make information accessible by other agency staff and partners working with the customer
- Document information obtained from partners not using Toolbox
- Document information about the customer's progress toward their goals and plans
- Document information about the customer's needs
- Justify staff's request for changes to the data in Toolbox to correct information on the customer's record

B. Case Management Contact

The Workforce Investment Act, (Section 101(5)), defines case management as:

The provision of a client-centered approach in the delivery of services, designed -

1. to prepare and coordinate comprehensive employment and training plans, such as service strategies, for participants to ensure access to necessary workforce investment activities and support services, using where feasible, computer based technologies **and**

2. to provide job and career counseling during program participation and after job placement.

Through the NGCC integrated model case management services will be streamlined. Customers who do not receive a service at least every 89 days will exit and at that point, be included in the cohort of exiters. An attempt to reengage customers who are not actively participating in services should be made on or about the 60th day of no service. Contact with customers enrolled into intensive or training level services should occur at least every 60 days to evaluate the need for continued services. Some services/activities such as OJT and work experience require contact to be made at least every 30 days while the customer is actively participating in that activity. Depending on the needs, some customers may require more frequent contacts.

Service notes should reflect the customer's progress toward demonstrating basic work competencies that include, acceptable work habits, attendance, punctuality, dependability, knowledge of work, employment transition planning, job development and referral, assistance toward identifying and resolving any potential problems, labor market, and job seeking skills.

C. Content of Service Notes

When writing service notes, care should be taken to list only the facts and avoid including personal opinions. Staff's professional opinion is acceptable when assessing the customer's preparedness for skills such as job readiness.

Service notes must provide a complete, accurate and concise explanation of the type of contact with customers as well as, the type of services provided. Toolbox contains the following service note topics: Assessment, Case Review, Case Staffing, Customer Contact, Customer Information Update, Employment Exchange, Employment Plan Participation, Job Development, Problem Solving, Progress Evaluation, Referral, Service Closure, Skills Review, Support Services, UI Four Week Report and Youth Follow-Up.

The two parts to recording service notes are:

1. **Data/Facts learned about the participant** - Career Center staff must sort out the information to include only the facts, observations and information received that affect participation in employment and training programs. Service notes should focus on information that is most directly related to the participant.
2. **Plan** - Strategies to address needs and to support and enhance the customer's participation in the program and to guide them toward attaining their goals of self sufficiency. When documenting problems, also document solutions.

D. Types of Service Notes

Initial Services - Welcome Team should enter a service note on the individuals going through the Welcome Process. Service notes should include: customer's reason for coming to the center, assets, employment needs, education status, services provided, and

verification of driver license and/or other eligibility documentation. In addition, the note should identify the team they were directed to once completing Welcome Process.

Exclusionary Exits - Service notes are commonly used to document the justification for any one of the following exclusionary exit reasons for hard exit:

- Institutionalized
- Health/medical
- Deceased
- Reserve forces called to active duty
- Relocated to a mandated program (Youth only)

Medical Information - Specific details of a medical situation should not be entered into Toolbox. Service notes should state the individual has a medical condition and determine if the condition affects their participation in employment or training services. If applicable, the estimated time the individual will not be able to participate should also be included. Specifics of the medical condition can be placed in a service note and retained in the hard copy file if needed.

Grades - Customers enrolled into training will be expected to provide and report their grades at a minimum of every 60 days. Grades should be service noted in Toolbox along with placing a hard copy in the customers file. Students experiencing difficulty in their studies may need some type of intervention.

Legal Issues - It is important to document the customer's barriers to employment. Any conviction or involvement with the legal system can have an impact on an individual's ability to obtain employment and/or type of employment. The details of the conviction should not be included, and care should be taken to ensure information is limited to that which is public. Details of the legal situation can be placed in a service note and retained in the hard copy file if needed.

Exit Service Notes - When a customer who was enrolled into intensive or training level services has reached their goals and no further services are planned, the career consultant should discuss exit strategies with the customer to ensure the customer is knowledgeable of the services available to them once they have exited. The exit strategy plan should be noted in the service notes. The service note should reflect information about the outcome of the individual such as place of employment, wages, current needs and expected services if any.

Unable to Contact - Service notes should be entered on customers who are enrolled into training level services that staff is unable to contact. Information should include facts such as number called, alternate numbers used, if a message was left, if the number was operational or has been disconnected, and any other information that may aide in future efforts to contact the customer.

Follow-Up - Follow-up services must be made available to customers, but they are not a requirement. Based upon the needs of the customer, follow-up services can be provided at 30, 60, 90 days, 6, 9 and 12 months. For those in follow-up services, the information about each follow-up contact should be entered and the activity posted into Toolbox. The

following information should be included in service notes: name of employer, current situation, needs or any other details measuring the outcome and needs of the individual.

Violent Individual - If an individual comes into the center and displays anger outburst or violent behavior, a service note should be entered into Toolbox stating the customer was *violent or displayed anger outburst*. The details of the situation (he said, she said) are not necessary. The service note should serve as an alert to staff allowing them to handle this person appropriately in the future.

Complaint and Grievance Rights Notification - Customers with an automatic enrollment based on a MCS registration created prior to July 1, 2010 must be directed to the Equal Opportunity link (found at the bottom of every page in MCS) and staff must write a service note to document the notification.

Low Income Status Food Stamps/TANF - If low income status is based on the receipt of TANF for Food Stamps from the Missouri Family Support Division, staff should enter a service note documenting the fact that they have seen proof of such public assistance. The note should include the DCN case number.

E. Do's of Service Note Writing

- Do place all contacts and attempts to contact individuals in Toolbox
- Do get all of the main ideas
- Do record facts
- Record only key details
- Do record a service note in Toolbox indicating additional documentation or information is located in the file
- Do record information that is pertinent to the customer's employment and/or training goals and needs
- Do record information that supports regulatory requirements or documentation
- Do make sure information is accurate
- Do make sure information is being entered on the correct customer's record

F. Don'ts of Service Note Writing

- Don't rewrite the entire conversation; limit information to the facts of the conversation that affects the customer's ability to participate in employment and training services.
- Don't make notes about what the customer should have said or should feel
- Don't include your personal feelings or opinions
- Don't use abbreviations that may not be commonly understood by anyone who may need to read the service note
- Don't write in the third party; use I, we, you
- Don't write in all CAPITAL letters
- Don't place specific details about medical conditions or treatment in Toolbox
- Don't place details of the individual's convictions in Toolbox
- Don't place details about privileged or confidential information in Toolbox

- Do not label your opinions and judgments as facts
- Do not use profanity in service notes

Staff must not allow anyone to access the Toolbox system using their user ID for the purpose of entering data, service notes or for any other reason. Functional Leaders may request Toolbox access for staff needing to access or enter data. All staff/volunteers working in the career center that have access to confidential information (written or verbal) must pass the confidentiality test.

The purpose of using Toolbox is for all partners to enter service notes on their customers to communicate the services and activities with all career consultants working with the individual. When writing service notes, keep in mind these notes could be read by staff providing services in other programs, other regions, central office staff, or other supervisory personnel. Service notes can and have been used as evidence in court. Toolbox is an integrated case management system with multiple partners who have access to the service notes. In addition, customers have the right to request copies of their service notes at any time.

Functional Leaders and Team Leaders will be responsible for regularly reviewing the service notes of their staff to ensure that they contain the required and appropriate content. When a service note has been identified that is inappropriate, a Toolbox change request should be submitted to the WIB asking for the service note to be deleted. Career Center staff will enter a service note with the appropriate details of the situation.

Contact: If you have any questions or comments, please contact Mark Fuqua or Linda Studer, NEMO Workforce Investment Board, at 660-327-5125.

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