

## 2.1 Overview

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The *Supports-Overview* section includes:

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### 2.1.1 What do we mean by "supports"?

A person receiving WorkFirst/SFA gets cash assistance to help meet the basic needs of the family. WorkFirst offers a variety of supports to help families become and remain employed.

As wages increase, these supports gradually drop away, until the family can sustain themselves without any further help. This brings independence and a better life.

### 2.1.2 What supports are available?

It is very important that we explain to everyone that the supports listed below do not carry time limits and do not affect the family's WorkFirst cash assistance time limit. We also want to make sure people understand what supports are available, so they can start planning for their future independence.

WorkFirst support services and the Working Connections Child Care (WCCC) program are described in the following sections of the chapter. Other supports available to low-income families include:

- **Washington Apple Health:** Families may have Washington Apple Health coverage while they are on WorkFirst cash assistance and for up to one year after leaving assistance (TANF closed for excess earned income). After that, children may qualify for Washington Apple Health until the family reaches 200% of the federal poverty level.
- **Food assistance:** The department provides food assistance based on family size, income, and expenses. Also, the department provides Transitional Food Assistance (TFA). TFA is a program to provide stable food benefits for up to five months to families leaving the WorkFirst cash assistance or Tribal TANF programs while receiving Basic Food ~~except if the family was in Sanction when the case closed~~ when TANF closes due to non-compliance sanction. If a parent is in WorkFirst sanction and TANF closes for a different reason, the remaining family members may receive TFA. TFA is meant to help meet a family's nutritional needs for five months as they transition into self-sufficiency.
- **Child support:** The Division of Child Support uses innovative techniques to collect child support for low-income families. While on WorkFirst, child support collected goes to the

state to repay the costs of the parent's WorkFirst. Once a person leaves WorkFirst, however, they start to receive any current child support collected.

- **Additional requirements (AREN):** Supplemental WorkFirst cash assistance can be authorized by DSHS case managers for emergent needs such as homelessness. This grant can pay a family's rent (to prevent eviction) or utilities. It can also cover items such as first and last month's rent.
- **Post Employment services.** Specific types of services and information may vary from office to office but should include:
  - Opportunities for accessing training - skills upgrade.
  - Mentoring, coaching, and employment counseling.
  - Resource information for accessing:
    - Money Management classes
    - Work Skill Assessment
    - Labor Market Information
    - Community Resources - Food Banks, Utilities Assistance, Community Action Programs
  - **Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC):** The state has established a toll-free hotline to make it easier for workers to file for the EITC. The EITC provides up to \$4,400 a year for low-income workers. For some families, taking advantage of the EITC means a 40 percent increase in take-home pay. The EITC hotline number is 1-800-755-5317. Calls are answered 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Monday-Friday. Information is available in both English and Spanish. Hearing impaired persons can call 1-800-833-6388 for TDD/TYY.
- **Community Resources:** Many communities provide supports to low income families, like food or clothing banks. There are also federally funded benefits available, like food supplements from the Woman and Infant Care (WIC) program.

### 2.1.3 When do we offer supports?

There are some critical stages parents go through as they move from welfare to self-sufficiency. As shown on the chart below, the types of necessary supports may change as they make this transition, and should be reviewed regularly.

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Likely necessary supports</i>
Before Cash Assistance approval	Look at what support services and child care the family may need to attend the WorkFirst Orientation
<b>WorkFirst Cash Assistance approval</b>	The family will have a cash grant, and likely food assistance and Washington Apple Health. Child support will be pursued.

<i>Stage</i>	<i>Likely necessary supports</i>
	Look at what support services and child care the family needs to look for work, prepare for work.
<b>Gets a Job</b>	<p>Support service needs will likely change. Review with the participant:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EITC</li> <li>• How much child support is being paid</li> <li>• Employer-provided medical coverage</li> <li>• Post-Employment Services options</li> </ul>
<b>Exits WorkFirst Cash Assistance</b>	<p>Family can continue to get food assistance, with no impact on their WorkFirst cash assistance time limit. Review with the parent how they might qualify for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EITC</li> <li>• How much child support they will receive</li> <li>• How to access or apply for Washington Apple Health or other health care coverage</li> <li>• BHP and children's medical coverage</li> <li>• WCCC</li> <li>• Job retention/wage progression services</li> <li>• Diversion or AREN for emergencies</li> <li>• Transitional Food Assistance</li> </ul>
<b>First year off WorkFirst Cash Assistance</b>	We continue to help families, using the supports listed above, during their first year off WorkFirst cash assistance (like help with financial emergencies)

#### 2.1.4 What are the overall principles for supports?

There are some common themes you will see whenever we talk about supports for WorkFirst parents.

Support is available to help parents become and stay employed, for example health care coverage and child care that parents can access and afford. These supports can help lift low-income working families out of poverty and reduce their chance of going back on welfare.

Parents have the primary responsibility for supporting their children. Parents and the state share responsibility for helping families leave welfare. Parents are responsible for moving quickly into

jobs. The state is responsible for helping parents find and keep a job, and for collecting child support.

WorkFirst gets involved with people's lives in ways that the old welfare system never could. Whether it is getting quality child care, child support, stable housing, reliable transportation, new clothes, a new hairdo or glasses. All these things are offered to help people become more employable, but they also improve people's lives in general. Increased self-esteem. Better role models. Healthier kids.

The types of support needed change as a person gets a job, then transitions off assistance. Continued supports once off WorkFirst cash assistance, like health care coverage, food assistance or wage progression services, can make all the difference in a family staying independent.

Remind parents on a regular basis what supports are available and what supports they can receive after they leave WorkFirst cash assistance (without affecting their time limit for WorkFirst cash assistance benefit receipt).

If receiving a low WorkFirst grant, parents might choose to "bank" months of WorkFirst for times of greater need.

Providing the appropriate supports, while encouraging employment, can help us increase WorkFirst exits, reduce WorkFirst returns, and keep caseloads down.

## Resources

### Related WorkFirst Handbook Sections

- [1.4 WorkFirst Orientation](#)
- [6.1 Resolving Issues](#)
- [8.1 Employment](#)

### Other Resources

- [Earned Income Tax Credit](#)
- [Tuition Assistance](#)

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