

March 29, 2019

To: Employment First stakeholders

From: Acacia McGuire Anderson, Statewide Employment First Coordinator

Re: [Employment First](#): Benefits Counseling for Students and Youth

(Please forward to your local partners & stakeholders)

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In July 2018, the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS) added benefits counseling services in the Home and Community Based Services waiver as part of Employment Path Community services.

Since that time, we have received a lot of stakeholder feedback that this an important service for transition-age students and youth, and is not a service typically available through schools under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Based on this feedback, ODDS has revised guidance to clarify that transition-age students and youth may access ODDS benefits counseling if it is not readily available through the [Work Incentives Network](#) (WIN) or Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) [Plan for Work](#). People younger than 18 will still need ODDS approval.

Clarification is available in the following ODDS Worker's Guide documents which took effect March 8, 2019:

- [Worker's Guide ODDS Employment Services Transition-age Individuals and Youth](#)
- [Worker's Guide ODDS Benefits Counseling](#)

With regards to Benefits Counseling services more generally, we'd like to take the opportunity to encourage people to use this service when it is needed.

Level One benefits counseling through ODDS may be useful if:

- A person is using ODDS employment path services to explore employment or gain employment related skills.
- A person has questions about the impact of working on benefits.
- A person does not want to explore work because the person is worried about the impact of working on benefits.

If a person has a job or expects to have a job soon, Level Two benefits counseling may be useful.

Service Coordinators and Personal Agents are encouraged to authorize Level One and/or Level Two benefits counseling when it is needed and not readily available through WIN or WIPA (particularly Level One benefits counseling that cannot be prioritized by a WIN benefits counselor).

A list of certified and ODDS-approved Benefits Counselors can be found on the [Employment First I/DD employment policy web page](#). There are many resources on this web page regarding **benefits counseling**, including a FAQ document, fact sheets, videos and much more.

~ Acacia