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Informational Letter

Section 1

Transmittal:	09-INF-02
To:	Local District Commissioners
Issuing Division/Office:	Center for Employment and Economic Supports/ Employment and Advancement Bureau
Date:	February 4, 2009
Subject:	<i>WorkPays NY</i> : Introduction of the WorkPays NY Promotional Material and Resource Guide/Checklist
Suggested Distribution:	Employment Directors, TA Directors, MA Directors, HEAP Coordinators Food Stamp Directors Child Support Directors Child Care and Services Directors TOP Coordinators Staff Development Coordinators
Contact Person(s):	Policy Questions: Employment Technical Advisor or EAS Bureau, Frances Shannon-Akstull or Christine Insull (518-486-6106) Forms Questions: Kelly Whitney (1-800-343-8859 Ext. 37791)
Attachments:	myBenefits Palm Card, PUB-4951 WorkPays NY Flyer, PUB-4952 and PUB-4952 SP WorkPays NY Poster, PUB-4952A and PUB-4952A SP WorkPays NY Work Supports Resource Guide/Checklist, LDSS-4954 Employer Resource Guide, PUB-4953
Attachment Available On – Line:	yes

Filing References

Previous ADMs/INFs	Releases Cancelled	Dept. Regs.	Soc. Serv. Law & Other Legal Ref.	Manual Ref.	Misc. Ref.

Section 2

I. Purpose

The purpose of this Informational Letter (INF) is to introduce local departments of social services (LDSS) to the new *WorkPays NY* outreach and marketing materials that are available to support the promotion and maximization of benefits available to support low-income households, particularly working families. These resources include:

- New York's new website www.myBenefits.ny.gov
- [myBenefits Palm Card, PUB-4951](#)
- [WorkPays NY Flyer, PUB-4952](#) and [PUB-4952 SP](#)
- [WorkPays NY Poster, PUB-4952A](#) and [PUB-4952A SP](#)
- [WorkPays NY Work Supports Resource Guide/Checklist, LDSS-4954](#)
- [Employer Resource Guide, PUB-4953](#)

These materials and resources have been developed, with LDSS staff input, to help promote the array of supports available to low-income households, primarily working families. These promotional tools can be used by all stakeholders who interface with low-income households such as LDSS, other government agencies, One-Stop workforce centers, community based organizations (CBOs), employers and employer associations. The LDSS is encouraged to share these materials with its local partners, as appropriate.

An initial supply of the materials described above will be drop shipped to each district. Please note that these materials may arrive via separate shipments and delivery will be staggered.

We solicit and appreciate feedback on these materials as you review and develop experience using them. Any recommendations that can make them more effective tools are appreciated.

II. Background

Governor Paterson's Economic Security Cabinet seeks to increase the extent to which eligible individuals, including low-income working families, access the array of work supports that are available. Low-income workers often may not realize that they are eligible for work support programs.

The Economic Security Cabinet is working to improve access to and coordination of work support benefits that help bring economic stability to low wage earners. Cognizant that no one support can raise a low-income family out of poverty, a combination of supports such as Food Stamps (FS), federal and State Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC), other tax credits and health insurance programs can make a significant difference to the economic wellbeing of New York's workers. For low wage earners, supplementing income with the variety of work supports available may increase employment retention and advancement opportunities through greater family and worker stability.

For example, a typical entry level worker earning \$8.50 per hour has post Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) earnings of \$16,327 annually. At these wages, outside of New York City as of October 2008, a one parent, two child family would be eligible for federal and State Earned Income Tax Credits of \$6,020, Food Stamps at \$3,148, and additional child related

federal and State tax credits of \$2,490. This work supports package is worth \$11,658 and raises the \$16,327 in earnings to \$27,985, well over the poverty level for a family of three. Clearly, the impact of work supports to a low-income working family is significant. Charts depicting some of the programs and tax benefits available to New Yorkers, who earn low wages, are available at <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/main/worksupports/>. Both upstate and NYC examples illustrate how much these work supports can increase a family's income.

However, many families are not accessing these critical supports:

- As of 2006, the last year for which federal statistics are available, about 52% of eligible low income working households in New York are not receiving Food Stamp benefits.
- Approximately 400,000 children and an additional 900,000 adults are currently uninsured, even though they qualify for public health insurance.
- The IRS estimates that about 20 – 25% of low-income working New Yorkers, or about 300,000 households, who are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credits (EITC), do not claim them.

To improve the uptake of work supports and to support the LDSS in educating low-income working families about these meaningful economic supports, OTDA has commenced a marketing campaign called “*WorkPays NY.*” This campaign is aimed at the public, community based organizations (CBOs), government agencies, advocates, employers, and other stakeholders, to promote the utilization of available work support benefits that many low-income workers may be eligible for but not accessing.

The June 2008 launching and ongoing expansion of www.myBenefits.ny.gov along with the promotional material attached is the first phase of this marketing campaign. Promotion includes the stream-lining of work supports by highlighting the ease with which someone can check their eligibility for and obtain more information on work support benefits at www.myBenefits.ny.gov, including Food Stamps, Earned Income Tax Credits, Child and Dependent Care Tax Credits, Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Women, Infants and Children (WIC) and School Breakfast and Lunch Meals. More programs will be added to this prescreening feature, which includes where and how to apply for the programs. The second component of **myBenefits** is operational in several upstate pilot districts using community partners to facilitate on-line applications for Food Stamps Benefits through a secure, internet application. Future expansion plans include adding health care related programs, other work support programs and other functionalities. The goal of **myBenefits** is to provide a single site for New York State's families and community partners to connect with benefits, services and work supports – a single portal for human services. Ultimately, **myBenefits** will allow individuals and families to learn about and apply for an array of work supports, customized to fit their unique circumstances, by answering one set of simple questions online.

III. Program Implications

A. LDSS Activities to Promote Work Supports

- LDSS are urged to institutionalize policies and procedures that routinely instruct and encourage LDSS staff to take steps to link working families and other eligible households to the full array of work supports available.
- Each LDSS is encouraged to determine how program areas/units in the agency can best promote work supports. Recommended areas to promote work supports include:
 - ... Intake for all applicants;
 - ... Employment Units;
 - ... Jobs Staff
 - ... PA or FS Units for earned income cases;
 - ... Units/workers responsible for PA and FS case closings due to excess income;
 - ... MA Units for NPA earned income cases;
 - ... HEAP Units for NPA, NFS earned income cases; and,
 - ... Other Units serving working families not in receipt of PA, FS, MA or HEAP.
- It is suggested that each LDSS determine points in the client flow when work supports could be promoted. The following points of contact are recommended:
 - ... Orientation;
 - ... Reception areas;
 - ... Assessment;
 - ... Recertification (group or individual);
 - ... Employment Plan development;
 - ... Job placement and retention;
 - ... Exit interview due to excess income;
 - ... Client mailings, add outreach material;
 - ... Case management meetings; and
 - ... Volunteer Income Tax Assistance sites.
- It is recommended that the *WorkPays NY Resource Guide and Checklist* and the promotional materials be shared across all program lines (i.e. Services, Employment, FS, MA, HEAP, Child Support, Day Care Unit, etc.) and with community stakeholders such as CBOs, other government agencies (i.e. Department of Labor Workforce Centers) and faith-based organizations that assist low-income households. Consider bringing together managers from all the LDSS program areas to share these materials, including www.myBenefits.ny.gov and educate them on this initiative. Also, inviting your community partners to help promote *WorkPays NY* can greatly increase the effectiveness of this initiative.
- It is recommended that regular meetings across programs be established to promote collaboration for work supports.
- It is recommended that districts promote EITC and other tax credits and the use of local Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) sites. Conduct periodic mailings to working families on assistance.
- It is recommended that districts consider becoming a VITA site.
- It is recommended that districts promote and use [myBenefits](#) for program information and screening. A [myBenefits](#) demonstration video is available on OTDA's Centraport site at

<http://otda.state.ny.net/centraport/secform.aspx>, under *PA, FS, HEAP*. This video could be copied to be played in the LDSS reception areas. Also, internet access to **myBenefits** in LDSS reception areas could be beneficial.

- Districts can make a huge impact on promoting work supports by engaging local employers in this initiative. It is recommended that all the *WorkPays NY* materials, especially the Employer Resource Guide, PUB-4953, be shared with the local business community, including employer associations.

B. Promotional and Outreach Materials

[myBenefits Palm Card, PUB-4951](#)

This business card is a quick and easy way to let people know about the new website www.myBenefits.ny.gov, including clients, community based partners, faith based organizations, local employers and other stakeholders. LDSSs should encourage the dissemination of these cards with as wide a scope of partners as possible. These are English front and translated into the following six languages on the back: Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, Haitian-Creole, Korean and Russian.

[WorkPays NY Flyer, PUB-4952 and PUB-4952 SP](#)

These flyers are meant to draw the attention of low-income working people to the major supports they may be losing out on. Also, the flyer prompts them to check their eligibility for and to obtain more information on work supports on **myBenefits**. The flyer emphasizes the ease with which people can explore their eligibility for many supports on the website, in anonymity if they choose. The intent is to educate and re-frame the way some people view these programs. These resources and materials may also serve to reduce stigma sometimes associated with public benefits and motivate workers to pursue needed supports they are eligible for. This is a two-sided flyer with the Spanish translation on the back. Arabic, Chinese, Haitian-Creole, Korean and Russian versions are also available to local districts. The NYS Hotline number is included to accommodate those without computer/internet access.

The work supports flyer complements the “*Helping Hands for People in Need*” brochure, PUB-4916 (4/08). As such, an example of how a district may choose to distribute the flyer is to insert it into the *Helping Hands* brochure, highlighting work supports and **myBenefits**. Please share an ample amount of flyers with your community partners so they can also promote work supports with the people they serve.

[WorkPays NY Poster, PUB-4952A and PUB-4952A SP](#)

Similarly, the *WorkPays NY* poster promotes work supports and encourages working people to obtain more information on and to explore their eligibility for work supports on **myBenefits**. A Spanish version of the poster will be distributed along with the English version, as described below. Additional Spanish posters are available upon request. Arabic, Chinese, Haitian-Creole, Korean and Russian versions are also available to local districts. The NYS Hotline number is included to accommodate those without computer/internet access.

[Employer Resource Guide, PUB-4953](#)

The purpose of the Employer Resource Guide is threefold; to outline major work supports, to share strategies on how employers can promote these and other work supports, and to persuade employers that it makes good business sense to promote governmental work supports to employees who maybe struggling financially. It is important that those in the agency who interface with Employers are aware of this publication and share it with local employers and employer associations. Please note, OTDA Jobs staff will receive an inventory of this publication and the other *WorkPays NY* documents.

[Video](#)

A video is being developed for use in LDSS and other venues. This video will encourage work, promote the benefits of work supports, and show the significant impact work support receipt has on increasing the economic standing of low-income working families. Realistic family scenarios will be the primary way this information is conveyed in the video.

C. New Tool for Human Services Professionals

[WorkPays NY Work Supports Resource Guide/Checklist, LDSS-4954](#)

The *WorkPays NY Resource Guide/Checklist*, LDSS-4954 is a new form that can be used by any human services professional to learn more about the myriad of work support benefits and to promote those supports with the people they serve. The *Guide* can also be used as a checklist to review that all work support options available have been discussed with eligible clients and there is a place to note referrals and worker notes.

To accommodate local information, column “*Where to Apply/Get More Info*” may be enhanced electronically to include local contacts and resources. The “*Action Taken/Date*” may be populated with any free text, including worker notes.

Although optional for local districts, it is recommended that this tool be used in the agency, across program areas (i.e. Employment, PA, FS, HEAP, Child Support, Day Care, Services, etc.) to promote work supports that are New York’s safety net for those who work, but struggle to make ends meet. The tool may also be shared with your community partners.

Please note, this Guide will be updated annually to reflect new benefit levels and the revised version will be available at www.otda.state.ny.us. Every district should appoint a staff person to be responsible for retrieving and disseminating the updated materials each year.

IV. Additional Information

A. Training

To support local district staff, OTDA’s Training and Management Analysis (TAMA) is developing Transitional Benefits/Separate Determination training on the *WorkPays NY* initiative. This training curriculum will be advertised when it is available so that districts may work through Staff Development to request the training. This will include topics on correct PA case closing so that working families/individuals transitioning off of welfare

are provided the appropriate transitional benefits (Transitional Medical Assistance, Transitional Benefit Alternative Food Stamps, and Transitional Child Care), coupled with information on maximizing work supports for working families. It is expected that this program will be available in 2009.

- B. Distribution of the *WorkPays NY Resource Guide/Checklist*, LDSS-4954 and work supports promotional material:

An initial supply of the following will be drop shipped to each LDSS. Please note that these materials may arrive via separate shipments and delivery will be staggered:

- *myBenefits Palm Card*, PUB-4951
- English/Spanish *WorkPays NY Flyer*, PUB-4952 and PUB-4952SP (Eng/Sp)
- English and Spanish versions of *WorkPays NY Poster*, PUB-4952A and PUB-4952A SP
- *WorkPays NY Resource Guide/Checklist, LDSS-4954*
- *Employer Resource Guide*, PUB-4953.

We have included a small sample of Spanish materials. Additional materials may be ordered following the directions in Section C below.

Again, please note that the *WorkPays NY flyer*, PUB-4952, and *WorkPays NY Poster*, PUB-4952A is available in Arabic, Chinese, Haitian-Creole, Korean and Russian. These have been posted on the OTDA internet and intranet sites and may be downloaded following the directions in Section C below.

- C. Forms/PUB Ordering Information

- Any future requests for printed copies of the Form/Publications should be submitted on OTDA-876, "*Request for Forms or Publications*" and should be either sent to:

Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance
BMS Document Services and Operational Support
P.O. Box 1990
Albany, New York 12201

OR

- Download and complete OTDA-876 Form (http://otda.state.nyenet/psqi/eforms/OTDA-876-Req_For_Documents_or_Publications.dot) and e-mail form to gg7359@dfa.state.ny.us.

Questions concerning ordering forms should be directed to BMS Document Services at 1-800-343-8859, ext. 4-9522.

- The *WorkPays NY* documents are posted on the OTDA intranet website at http://otda.state.nyenet/ldss_eforms/default.htm and the OTDA internet site at <http://www.otda.state.ny.us/main/publications> and may be downloaded as needed.

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