

BRIDGES TO PRACTICE

**PROGRAM QUALITY INDICATORS
FOR AGENCIES PROVIDING TEMPORARY ASSISTANCE
FOR NEEDY FAMILIES (TANF)**

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**Learning Disabilities Training and Dissemination Project
A Partnership of ProLiteracy America and the National Institute for Literacy**



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Background

The *Program Quality Indicators for TANF Agencies* were developed to accompany the *Bridges to Practice* guidebooks and training. *Bridges to Practice: A Research-based Guide for Literacy Practitioners Serving Adults with Learning Disabilities* was produced in 1999 as part of a National Institute for Literacy project. In this series of five guidebooks, *Bridges to Practice* describes what is needed to create systemic reform in the adult education system's approach to learning disabilities. The guidebooks take programs from the preparation and planning stages through client assessment and instruction to professional development. In order to fully understand *Bridges to Practice*, TANF staff are encouraged to participate in a companion professional development program incorporating the *Program Quality Indicators for TANF Agencies*.

Development of the *Program Quality Indicators for TANF Agencies*

The basic points in the *Indicators* are taken directly from the Indicators of High-Quality Services section included in each *Bridges* guidebook. The *Indicators* are organized into tables to correspond with the first two guidebooks, which are most relevant to TANF agencies. Each table is divided into three topic areas: staff, agency, and clients. Although there is some overlap between the areas, in general the staff activities are those activities that are primarily carried out by individual TANF agency staff. The agency area addresses the policies and procedures that shape the work of the agency, and the client area addresses the clients' participation in the program.

An additional source for this project is *Policy Guidance on the Prohibition Against Discrimination on the Basis of Disability in the Administration of TANF* from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office for Civil Rights, www.hhs.gov/ocr/tanf/ocrguidance.html.

After the *Indicators* were drafted, they were reviewed by several persons who are actively involved in TANF agencies and knowledgeable about *Bridges to Practice*. As much as possible, their input was incorporated into the final document. Our deep appreciation goes to those persons who spent time reviewing the drafts. Their perceptive suggestions for modifications were very helpful to us. In particular we would like to thank Beth Blanchard, planner/education specialist for the Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County, Washington, for her assistance throughout the development of these *Indicators*, and for the development of many of the materials that served as resources for these *Indicators*.

Using the *Indicators*

It is important to keep in mind that the *Indicators* are intended to accompany training in the *Bridges to Practice* systems and principles, which were specifically developed for use by people working with adults with **learning** disabilities. We understand that TANF agencies also serve adults with other disabilities, that these disabilities are often interrelated, and that the laws that relate to people with disabilities cover a broad range of disabilities. Many of the general principles in the *Indicators* relate to serving all adults with disabilities, but the focus of the *Indicators* is learning disabilities.

It is our hope that the *Indicators* will be useful to *all* TANF agency staff, even though they were designed primarily as a *Bridges to Practice* tool. The *Indicators* incorporate the language of the *Bridges to Practice* guidebooks and follow the sequence of topics addressed in the guidebooks. The *Bridges* materials are inclusive and research-based, but neither they nor these *Indicators* could possibly include all of the thinking on learning disabilities that exists in the adult education and vocational rehabilitation fields.

The legal issues related to serving adults with disabilities are very complex and may vary from area to area, e.g., a worksite versus an adult education program. All TANF agencies need to be aware of these issues. When clients with diagnosed learning disabilities disclose this, staff should be able to discuss with them their rights and responsibilities as well as the accommodations to which the clients are legally entitled. For clients with the characteristics of learning disabilities but no formal diagnosis, the discussion generally centers on their learning strengths and difficulties. However, the opportunity for screening and assessment should be explored. We have grouped these two categories of clients together in some places in the *Indicators*, but agency staff should be aware of the differences.

Because each of the tables in the *Indicators* corresponds to one of the *Bridges* books, there is some redundancy between them—just as there is among the *Bridges* book topics. Each table is intended to stand alone with the corresponding *Bridges* book so that it can be used as a tool for agencies as they begin to address systemic change and how they can increase the quality of their services to clients with learning disabilities.

It is important to remember that *Bridges to Practice* is a tool to help create **systemic** change in services for people with learning disabilities. As with any systemic change, this change will require time and must involve the whole delivery system if it is to be successful. Each time we look at the system, we will see new ways to improve it. *Bridges to Practice* is intended to be a catalyst for this change, helping practitioners, agencies, and policymakers improve their system for providing services to adults with learning disabilities.

Action Plan

As agencies use *Bridges to Practice* for systemic change work, they will develop action plans with specific steps to be taken, areas of responsibility, and follow-up to check the progress. It is not possible to include that level of detail in the *Indicators*, and each agency needs to shape a plan that meets its specific areas of need. However, in the context of ongoing training and systemic change, the *Indicators* can be used as a general tool to measure progress. An agency using the *Indicators* in this way could circulate the document among its staff annually and compare the Action Needed sections in order to study progress from one year to the next.

The level of detail that should be addressed in an agency's action plan is different from the general standards in the *Indicators*. Each agency needs to determine what factors are most important for its clientele and then include these in its action plan. One of our reviewers pointed out that certain points in the indicators may be the responsibility of a rehabilitative services agency or another service partner. Those are operational decisions that need to be addressed in the action plan and may vary from one state to another.

Companion Publications for Volunteer Literacy Programs and Adult Education Programs

The *Program Quality Indicators for TANF Agencies* are designed specifically for agencies that serve adults through TANF programs and do not provide direct educational services. Companion publications: *Program Quality Indicators for Volunteer Literacy Programs* and *Program Quality Indicators for Adult Education Programs* are also available from ProLiteracy America.

**BRIDGES TO PRACTICE
PROGRAM QUALITY INDICATORS FOR TANF AGENCIES**

TABLE 1: Preparing to Serve Adults with Learning Disabilities

| INDICATOR | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|---------------|
| Our staff: | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand learning disabilities and their impact on the lives of the clients and in particular on their efforts to look for, get, and keep a job. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are trained to recognize the characteristics of learning disabilities | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the law and the legal requirements regarding adults with learning disabilities in TANF and agencies providing services to TANF clients. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are familiar with the guidance regarding TANF and disabilities from the HHS Office for Civil Rights. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Our agency: | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilizes a written definition of learning disabilities that is based on current knowledge in the field of vocational rehabilitation and other appropriate disciplines (e.g., as applicable, federal special education definitions). | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Follows written policies and procedures for working with adults with learning disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Utilizes approved statewide policies, procedures, and screening and assessment materials. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participates in an interagency project steering committee that regularly evaluates its goals for better services to clients with learning disabilities and progress toward those goals. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evaluates policies and procedures annually to maintain and improve services for adults with learning disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides staff with ongoing professional development opportunities and resources focused on improving services for adults with learning disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintains community links to strengthen and expand services for adults with learning disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informs clients about learning disabilities as detailed below. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |

| INDICATOR | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE | ACTION NEEDED |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|---------------|
| Our clients: | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand that people learn in different ways and that some people have specific learning disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand that they can voluntarily disclose a diagnosed learning disability and participate in a screening and assessment process for learning disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are informed of the legal right to obtain reasonable accommodations for diagnosed learning disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand their legal rights with regard to learning disabilities and the services they may need. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand their responsibilities regarding disability disclosure and documentation. | | | | | |

TABLE 2: The Assessment Process

| INDICATOR | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE | ACTION NEEDED |
|---|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|---------------|
| Our staff: | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a voluntary learning disabilities screening performed by qualified personnel to determine whether clients need a more comprehensive assessment. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer application/intake assistance, specifying examples, alternatives, and/or further instructions. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make reasonable modifications when the modifications are necessary to avoid discrimination on the basis of learning disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Arrange for a comprehensive assessment if the need for one is indicated by the screening. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform clients they can voluntarily disclose diagnosed learning disabilities and request reasonable accommodations. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make recommendations for modifications or accommodations in training or job opportunities based on the assessment. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep information confidential unless client gives permission to share. | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
| Our agency: | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Features posters, signage, or notices alerting people with disabilities to ways they can obtain further assistance. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uses research-based learning disabilities screening tools that are appropriate for TANF clients. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a process for further assessment after initial intake where indicated, using persons who are trained in making focused assessments of adults with disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has access to diagnostic testing for clients when use is indicated through screening and discussion with the client. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a referral process that makes appropriate resources available to clients. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Refers clients to job training and education programs that are suited to their needs and assists with enrollment in these. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has appropriate training and meaningful employment opportunities available for clients with learning disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has a system for monitoring how individuals with learning disabilities function in training programs or employment. | | | | | |

| INDICATOR | STRONGLY AGREE | AGREE | DISAGREE | STRONGLY DISAGREE | ACTION NEEDED |
|--|----------------|-------|----------|-------------------|---------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures that potential obstacles to sustaining employment for people with learning disabilities are being addressed. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures that employers and other agencies that receive client referrals are aware of the legal rights and responsibilities of clients with learning disabilities and of the employer/agency responsibility to provide accommodations in accordance with those. | | | | | |
| Our clients: | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand that participation in the screening and assessment process is voluntary. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand that they can discuss their past learning experiences as a part of the screening and assessment process. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receive a clear explanation of the intake screening/assessment results. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are informed of their legal rights regarding diagnosed learning disabilities. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Know how to obtain information about learning disabilities screening and diagnosis. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are referred to other resources for additional screening or diagnosis when referral is requested or indicated. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can describe their diagnosed learning disability and ask for accommodations. | | | | | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participate in developing a plan for action that is appropriate to their strengths and weaknesses, goal-oriented, and based on learning disability documentation. | | | | | |