

TAXES AND BENEFITS HANDOUT

Structured Job Search: The Right Choice for Me?

What is Structured Job Search? Structured Job Search (“SJS”) is a program that the Department of Transitional Assistance (“DTA”) tells many recipients they should sign up for. Unless you are sure you are ready for work (in terms of your family situation, health, and education and training background), signing up for SJS may be a problem for you.

What help is actually provided? In Boston, DTA pays three “Career Centers” (called JobNet, Boston Career Link and The Work Place) to provide SJS. Career Centers may be able to provide career-related assessments and counseling, “job-readiness” training, and help with job search. They also may be able to make referrals to education and training programs offered by schools and agencies apart from the career centers. However, they generally do not make these referrals if you are sent to one of the career centers by DTA for SJS. You should ask specifically what services will be provided to you *and* what you will be required to do *before* you sign any papers agreeing to SJS.

What do I have to do to participate in SJS? DTA requires you to sign a paper called an “Employment Development Plan” (EDP) agreeing to a certain number of hours of SJS each week and agreeing that you are looking for and will take a job. Usually, DTA requires that you attend at least 20 hours per week of SJS at a Career Center, unless you have good cause as described below. If you decide to sign an EDP for SJS, you should clearly state in the plan all the help you need before you will be ready to get a full time job. You should also write in the plan what services you will need, such as childcare and transportation benefits. After you sign the EDP, the DTA worker will give you a referral form to take to a Career Center to enroll you in the SJS program.

You are supposed to be able to stop participating in SJS for “good cause,” but there are not very clear rules guaranteeing that you can stop. If you are accused of stopping or *even missing some of the hours* without “good cause”, DTA will reduce your TAFDC and then cut it off altogether if you don’t start doing the full 20 hours right away. You can get help from Legal Services to appeal to make a case that you had good cause.

I am about to hit the time limit, is SJS my only choice? No. You may ask for an Exemption from the time limit (see other handouts for examples of reasons why you might qualify for exemptions) or for a Waiver of the time limit due to past or present domestic violence. You may also ask for a Time Limit Extension, but for that DTA will expect you to be in SJS or another program they approve. If you aren’t, DTA will likely deny your extension request. However, you can get help from Legal Services if you are hitting the time limit and do not think you can do SJS or work right away, or if DTA won’t approve a program that would help you more than SJS.

Where can I get help on these issues?

Call Greater Boston Legal Services at 617-371-1234 to ask for help. **KNOW YOUR RIGHTS!
CALL TODAY !**

