OK Youth! Information Brief

No. 1

At a Glance

- *Case notes are essential to effective case management practices.*
- *Case notes should be written in a manner so that a complete stranger can follow the participant's history in the WIA Youth Program.*
- *Case notes serve a variety of purposes and can be used as legal documents to show that your WIA Youth Program is in compliance with applicable polices and regulations.*
- *Case notes should only contain objective observations about interactions with participants. Never make judgmental remarks about a participant in a case note.*

Make Your Case (Notes)

Tips for Writing Effective Case Notes

The Workforce Investment Act is designed around a case management approach, and case notes are an essential component of effective case management practices. They are used to document and maintain information about clients, their progress, and the process and rationale for providing services to clients. Case notes provide information regarding the importance and value of services offered to clients and aid in evaluating and planning future services.

Case notes serve a variety of purposes, such as justification, documentation, and record-keeping. There are five standard categories of case notes related to Workforce Investment Act (WIA) case management practices. These are:

- Customer demographic information;
- Data element validation;
- Program eligibility and enrollment;
- Service planning , entry and tracking; and
- Performance and outcomes.

The information contained in a case note and the format followed depends on the purpose of the case note and the type. Different styles of case notes are appropriate for different services, different case management practices, and varied organizational characteristics. In general, however case notes for an individual client should provide the following information:

- History and details of the youth's situation, including both strengths and barriers.
- WIA youth activities planned or provided to youth.
- Appropriate reference to other WIA youth case documents, including the youth's Individual Service Strategy (ISS).
- A description of how the youth will benefit from WIA youth activities.

Additionally, case notes should record details of the youth's participation in WIA youth activities, including:

- Details of significant events in the youth's WIA participation.
    - The youth's participation in WIA youth ISS activities and progress toward ISS goals.
    - The youth's participation in non-WIA youth programs or activities like labor exchange services or WIA adult or dislocated worker activities.
    - The need for changes in the youth's ISS.
    - Information provided orally by service providers about the youth's participation or progress.
- Information on contacts with the youth.
    - Date and manner of the contact – face to face, individual or small group, phone call, text or instant message (IM).
    - Purpose of the contact.
    - Activities during the contact.
    - Any information provided orally by the youth.
    - Outcomes of the contact – actions taken, decisions made, and assignments of tasks for next steps.
- Information on contacts with other WIA on non-WIA program staff.
    - Name of the contact, position title, and agency represented.
    - Date and manner of contact.
    - Purpose of the contact, information provided, and description of outcomes of the contact.

What to Include in Case Notes

Case notes must provide a complete, accurate, and concise explanation of frequency and type of contact with customers, as well as type of services provided and the outcomes associated with those services. Although services provided to participants are documented by entering information into the Service & Training plan in Oklahoma Service Link (OSL), additional information is needed so that another case manager to whom a case is transferred, or a program monitor reviewing services, will be able to understand the history of a case. Case notes should be written so that the reader has background information on the client, as well as the purpose of meetings, and where, why, and how contact took place.

In general, case notes resulting from interactions with the client should include the following elements:

- Description of the context of the interaction (i.e. participant dropped by office after school, participant responded to case manager's request for meeting, etc.);
- Purpose of the interaction;
- Observations (appearance, seating, manner, etc);
- Content of the conversation;
- Outcome of the interaction (i.e. Was the purpose achieved? Were other objectives achieved?);
- Impression and assessment; and
- Plans for next steps or next meeting.

All conversations and events should be recorded in a case note as soon as possible after their occurrence. However, many case managers suggest that notes taken should not be recorded in the presence of the client.

What to Leave Out of Case Notes

In your case notes, you are not just representing yourself and your interactions with a youth participant. Case notes are legal documents that are also used to represent your local WIA program and its compliance with federal, state, and local policies. Here are a few rules to follow to ensure that your case notes are objective rather than subjective observations:

- Record facts only – behaviors you observed and statements you heard; don't make a diagnosis.
- Record facts accurately and completely.
- Never include judgmental opinions, stereotypical comments, or any offensive statements. Don't make any comment you couldn't defend in a court of law.
- If you must state an opinion relevant to the youth's WIA participation and progress, be sure to label your statement as an opinion.
- Use clear, simple, concise language, including professional terminology if appropriate.
- Don't use slang or street language, clichés, or jargon.
- Don't make sarcastic comments.
- Avoid metaphors or similes; just say what you mean directly.
- Don't comment on details that are not relevant to the youth's participation in WIA youth activities.

Case Note Examples

Bad

8/19/10 Steven is a youth not currently enrolled in school. He was kicked out of the alternative school. His mom thinks he could have dyslexia because his sister has it. Steven is very immature so I hope he lasts in the program. Keeping his attention for the intake process was challenging.

- *Labeled opinion, "Steven is immature," as though it were fact.*
- *No specific plan created for dyslexia issue.*
- *No timeframes or statements of responsibility.*

Good

8/19/10 Steven is a youth not currently enrolled in school, and he says he was kicked out of the alternative school for poor attendance. His mother sat in on the initial appointment and commented that Steven might be dyslexic because his sister is. At times Steven appeared distracted and uninterested. Steven stared out the window and I had to repeat questions several times. Steven hesitated before answering simple questions and often deferred to his mother.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Case Manager (CM) will call school district to get information on learning disability testing by Thursday.
2. Steven will bring in remaining documentation.
3. Steven and CM will meet Thursday at 1:00.
4. CM will find out if WIA can pay for testing--answer by Thursday @ 1:00.
5. Above steps will be reviewed at next appointment.

Bad

9/30/10 I called Steven today to ask why he did not attend the pre-employment skills workshop. Steven is very immature and said he just forgot. He will not be able to start his work experience until he receives this service. I don't believe he is actually committed to the program.

- *Labeled opinion, "Steven is immature," as though it were fact.*
- *No specific plan created for providing the pre-employment service to Steven.*
- *No timeframes or statements of responsibility.*
- *Negative opinion of Steven is presented by Case Manager.*

Good

9/30/10 I called Steven today to ask why he did not attend the pre-employment skills workshop. He said he forgot that it was today. I informed him that he will not be able to start his work experience until he completes this service. We scheduled him to come into to the Workforce Center after school for an hour every day next week to go over the materials covered in the workshop.

ACTION ITEMS:

1. Case Manager (CM) will call to remind Steven of coming to the Workforce Center after school for pre-employment training.
2. Steven will begin tracking appointments with CM in planner.
3. Steven and CM will meet Monday through Friday next week from 4:00 to 5:00.

Sources

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