# Case Notes

## 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*
- *Case notes serve a variety of purposes and can be used as legal documents to show that the customer is in compliance with applicable polices and regulations.*
- *Case notes should only contain objective observations about interactions with customers. Never make judgmental remarks about an individual in a case note.*

## **Make Your Case (Notes)**
## Tips for Writing Effective Case Notes

Case notes are an essential component of effective case management practices. They are used to document and maintain information about customers, their progress, and the process and rationale for providing services to customers. Case notes provide information regarding the importance and value of services offered to individuals and aid in evaluating and planning future services.

Case notes serve a variety of purposes, such as justification, documentation, and record-keeping. Some general categories of case notes are:

- Customer demographic information;
- Service planning , entry and tracking; and
- Performance and outcomes.

The information contained in a case note and the format followed depends on the purpose and type of the case note. In general, case notes for customers may provide the following types of information:

- History and details of the situation, including both strengths and barriers
- Activities planned or provided to the customer
- A description of how the individual will benefit from activities

### When to Write a Case Note

◊ When *rescheduling* or posting results for Reemployment Orientation Activities →
◊ When making job referrals

Reemployment Orientation Activities:

- REA (Reemployment Eligibility Assessment)
- EUC (Emergency Unemployment Compensation)
- PO (Profile Orientation)
- JSW (Job Search Workshop)

### 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 staff member will be able to understand the history of a case. Case notes should be written so that the reader has background information on the customer, as well as the purpose of meetings, and where, why, and how the contact took place.

In general, case notes resulting from interactions with the client or with other staff 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.);
- Date and manner of the contact (face to face, individual, phone call, etc.);
- Purpose of the interaction and details of significant events in participation;
- The need for changes in the individuals goals;
- Observations (appearance, attitude, manner, etc.);
- Content of the conversation;
- Outcome of the interaction (actions taken, decisions made, etc.);
- 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 participant. Case notes are used to represent your 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 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 participant's activities.

| Some strong verbs that might be useful: | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Advised | Assessed | Assisted | Clarified | Confronted | Counseled |
| Discussed | Directed | Encouraged | Focused | Identified | Recommended |
| Referred | Reflected | Structure | Summarized | Supported | Urged |

| Some words to avoid: | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Abnormal | Abusive | Anxious | Dangerous | Delusional | Demanding |
| Disturbed | Hysterical | Immature | Impulsive | Irrational | Overwhelmed |
| Resistant | Suicidal | Threatened | Troubled | Unfit | Uncooperative |