



A Better Life Questions & Answers

The following are a series of the most common questions and answers relating to our proposal.

Questions Regarding Age

1. For single person households, what are the age limits for the program?

Single family households consisting of a sole member that is 55 years old and older will be exempted from the program requirements.

2. For family households, what are the age limits for the program?

Family households where all adults are 55 years old and older will be exempted from the program requirements.

Questions Regarding Exemptions to the Program Requirements

1. Is there an exemption to the program requirements for individuals who are disabled?

Those adults, within a household, unable to work because of a documented disability will be exempted from the program requirements. For issues relating to disability, residents may request a reasonable accommodation. Reasonable accommodation notices and forms are provided to tenants upon lease signing and also may be obtained from the management office upon request.

2. Are there any other exemptions for hardship or other circumstances?

For issues not relating to disability, a "hardship committee" will be established comprised of residents participating in the program and housing authority staff who will consider applications by participating residents to modify or exempt their participation in the program beyond the parameters described herein.

3. What happens to our exemption if a family member or the composition of the family changes?

Exemptions apply to the family at the time they are requested. If the age of family members changes so that it has an impact on the requirements of the program (a member turns 55 or 18 years old), the exemption status will change accordingly. A change in disability status would also change the exemption status.

Questions Regarding Employment

1. What is considered Full-Time employment?

For the purposes of this program, employment will be considered full-time, if it meets all of the following:

- * Employed for no less than 1200 hours during the year;
- * Employed at minimum wage or higher;
- * Resident earns no less than 1200 hours x the minimum wage (\$9.00 as of 1/1/15)

2. What if I get laid-off from work?

The requirements of the program regarding work are for 1200 hours of employment which equals only 30 weeks of full-time work. If you get laid-off from your full-time job, you would have up to 20 weeks to find a full time job. However, your obligation is to accrue 1200 hours either full-time or full and part-time over the course of a year.

3. What if I only can find a part-time job?

Any combination of jobs which equals 1200 hours of work will satisfy the requirement including part-time work.

4. What if my partner/adult child works and I do not?

Our hope is that every adult goes to work or attends school. However, the program requires only a single adult to work 1200 hours to satisfy the requirements of the program.

5. What if I work part-time and my partner works part-time. Can we combine our hours to reach the 1200 hour requirement?

No. The 1200 hour requirement must be attained by a single member of the household to satisfy the work requirement.

Questions Regarding Education

1. What is considered Full-Time enrollment in accredited academic program?

For the purposes of this program, enrollment in an accredited academic program will be considered full time, if it meets all of the following:

- * Is a student, in good standing, is enrolled and attending an accredited post high school program;
- * Is attending school full-time in both the winter/spring and fall semesters;

* Has met the requirements of the educational institution as being enrolled in good standing on a full-time basis.

2. What is considered Part-Time employment/Part-Time enrollment in academic program?

For the purposes of this program, the combination of part-time employment and part-time enrollment in an accredited academic program must equal the requirements of full-time employment. To that end, the WHA will assign an hour value to the part-time academic program for the year. That amount plus the number of part-time employment hours must equal no less than 1200 hours annually to be given credit.

3. What if I drop out or flunk out of school?

If you drop out or flunk out of school, you will receive no credit for the most recent semester, class or program you are attending.

4. What if I only go to school part-time?

The WHA will assign an hour value to the part-time academic program for the year. That amount plus the number of part-time employment hours must equal no less than 1200 hours annually to be given credit.

5. What if my partner/adult child goes to school and I do not?

Our hope is that every adult goes to work or attends school. However, the program requires only a single adult to work 1200 hours or to attend school full-time to satisfy the requirements of the program.

Questions About Finding a Job or Going Back to School

To assist both those residing in state public housing, the Worcester Housing Authority offers the following:

1. "A Better Life" programs including case management.
2. Life Skills classes provided at no cost offering training in areas including but not limited to (1) job readiness and other job related training (2) computer literacy (3) financial literacy (4) parenting (various ages).
3. Through MassEd Co, offer professional higher educational counseling and placement advice and assistance.
4. Several "Step-Up" apprentice programs.
5. Dedicated case management staff who work with interested residents to help find them employment.

6. The WHA has an "Employment Specialist" on staff whose job it is to seek out job opportunities for participants.

Other Questions

1. Does income/hours worked from a Live-In Aide count?

No. A live-in aide is not considered a member of the household for the purposes of this program.

2. Does income earned for foster care count? How are the hours determined?

Yes. Hours earned toward the 1200 requirement will be determined based on the income divided by the minimum wage at the time.

Question Regarding Disability Exemption

1. What type of disabilities exempt you from the requirements of this program?

All individuals that are determined to be disabled and unable to work are exempt from the program.

2. There are two adults in my household. One is disabled, the other is not. Are we exempted?

If all adult household members are determined to be disabled and unable to work, the household would be exempt from the program requirements. In cases where there are adult household members that are not disabled, the program requirements would apply. If some of the adult household members are disabled and others are not, but the disability present requires care by the remaining adult member, the household may apply for a reasonable accommodation.

3. If I have a disabled child, am I exempted?

Each disability will be considered on a case by case basis by the WHA. In the example provided, a family may apply for a reasonable accommodation.

Additional A Better Life Questions & Answers

The following are additional questions and answers relating to our proposal.

Questions Regarding Education

1. Do my hours attending Hi-Set (GED) classes count toward satisfying the educational hourly requirement?

The requirements of the program relate to post-secondary education. However, under the following circumstances, Hi-Set hours will be counted if the resident meets all of the following:

- * Is attending full-time, a minimum of 15 classroom hours per week offered by the WHA;
- * Full time hours will be credited if the resident is a student, in good standing, is enrolled and attending at least 85% of classes offered by the WHA (calculated on a monthly basis);
- * Those who attend less than 85% of the classes offered (calculated monthly) will receive credit for the actual hours attended.
- * Is enrolled and in full compliance with the state self-sufficiency program.
- * Hours credited only for those months attending class.

2. Do my hours attending ESL classes count toward satisfying the educational hourly requirement?

The requirements of the program relate to post-secondary education. However, under the following circumstances, ESL hours will be counted if the resident meets all of the following:

- * Is attending full-time, a minimum of 10 classroom hours per week offered by the WHA;
- * Additionally, is completing a minimum of 5 on-line hours of Rosetta Stone each week at the WHA offices;
- * Full time hours will be credited if the resident is a student, in good standing, is enrolled and attending at least 85% of classes plus on-line hours offered by the WHA;
- * Those who attend less than 85% of the classes offered plus on-line hours (calculated monthly) will receive credit for the actual hours attended.
- * Is enrolled and in full compliance with the state self-sufficiency program.
- * Hours credited only for those months attending class.

3. Do my hours attending a Certification or Licensure academic program count toward satisfying the educational hourly requirement?

Yes. Certification and Licensure academic programs are post secondary and therefore count. For the purposes of this program, enrollment in a Certification or Licensure academic program will be considered full time, if it meets all of the following:

- * Is a student, in good standing, is enrolled and attending an accredited post high school program;
- * Is attending 15 classroom hours per week;
- * Hours credited only for those months attending class.
- * Successfully completes the current semester/period of the program.

Other Questions

1. Am I required to be enrolled in the case management program (A Better Life) in order to be in compliance with the work/school requirement?

No. But there are numerous benefits that are only available to residents who are enrolled in the A Better Life (ABL) program.

ABL is a voluntary self-sufficiency program offered to residents residing in State Public Housing. As residents go to work, their income and therefore their rent will increase. Participants of ABL are eligible to have their increase in rent put aside for them for later use.

Additionally, participants receive valuable coaching, mentoring, and support from program staff. Participants are expected to establish short and long term goals, attend meetings with their Family Life Coach and attend Life Skills workshops.

As it relates to educational programs, a resident enrolled in ABL and performing 15 weekly hours of Hi-SET or ESL will be considered as meeting the work/school requirement, which is 23 hours per week. Residents not enrolled in ABL will not receive credit for either Hi-SET or ESL classes to apply toward their work/school requirement.

The following are additional questions and responses added November 25, 2015.

2. A husband and wife both work part time. Can they combine their hours to meet the work/school requirement?

No. The work/school requirement is fairly minimal only 1200 hours annually. This averages to about 24 hours a week. At least one adult must meet that requirement.

3. A senior who is exempt from the work/school requirement works at least 1200 hours a year. The senior's adult child is not working or going to school. Is this family fulfilling the work/school requirement?

The short answer is yes. Even though the senior is not required to go to work or attend school, if they are working at least 1200 hours then they would have fulfilled the families requirement and the child would not be required to attend school or work. Of course, we would encourage the adult child to participate in case management services and look to move toward self-sufficiency but they would not be required to do so as long as another member of their household is working the required 1200 hours.