
Benefits Plus Learning Center

Studies show there is a critical need for knowledgeable professionals who can address the barriers low-income families face when accessing public benefits.¹

About the Learning Center

The Benefits Plus Learning Center, a program of the Community Service Society of New York (CSS), established in 1994, is the only resource center of its kind in NYC. Specifically designed to educate social service professionals on government benefit and housing programs, the Learning Center equips professionals with the information, resources and tools they need to help their clients navigate government bureaucracy. Visit <https://bplc.cssny.org>.

About Our Trainings

Through its high quality training opportunities, the Learning Center equips professional to effectively navigate public benefit and housing programs by providing practical knowledge, advocacy skills, and government contacts to cut through government red tape. The Learning Center is recognized by the NYS Education Department's State Board for Social Work as an approved provider of continuing education for licensed social workers #SW-0213.

The Learning Center is unique in that:

- It incorporates principles of adult learning theory to ensure participants walk away with a better comprehension of complex concepts, as well as the skills needed to assist their clients.
- Each course has a set of learning objectives by which we develop our curriculum and measure whether participants have gained confidence in that area.
- We not only explain the rules, but have the participants apply the rules to real life scenarios, and provide critical advocacy techniques when the system does not operate as it should.
- Participants interact with expert instructors, learn best practices, engage in hands-on exercises, and network with other social service professionals.

- We offer a wide variety of benefit and housing programs of interest, including:
 - Medicaid – Basic courses, Spend-down, Managed Care, Blind, Aged and Disabled Population
 - Cash Assistance – Basic, Return to Work
 - Affordable Housing Options
 - SNAP Benefits
 - Benefits and Services for Individuals who are Undocumented
 - Immigrants' Eligibility for Public Benefits
 - Affordable Housing Options
 - Public Housing
- We assess the effect of unearned income on an individual's eligibility and benefit amount, the impact of earned income when beneficiaries return to work, how the receipt of one benefit impacts the eligibility for another benefit.
- Post Training Support: To help staff incorporate information, resources and tools in their work with clients. (to implement the curriculum)

Impact

In Fiscal Year 2017 (July 2016 through June 2017) we facilitated 62 training courses with nearly 1,500 participants, including courses on the Nuts and Bolts of SSI/SSDI, and SSI/SSDI Return to Work Parts 1 & 2.

Participants represented over 200 different agencies including, ADIS Service Center, Center for Independence of Disabled, Legal Aid Society, Montefiore Hospital, Department for the Aging, the Bronx Defenders, Self Help Community Services, Catholic Charities, and much more.

Testimonials

- *"Overall, BPLC provides excellent trainings on benefits and I hope they continue to provide exciting trainings to come."*
- *"I love the package that is given at each workshop. They are well detailed and a great reference."*
- *"I feel like this training helped me to connect the dots!"*
- *"The programming is great! The instruction is effective. I wish I could go to all of the courses."*

¹ The Coalition for Access & Opportunity's May 2012 Report: *Moving to 21-Century Public Benefits: Emerging Options, Great Promise & Key Challenges*