

**To: Mr Leonard Burke, Principal Officer, Back to Education Allowance Scheme**

**From: Ciara Mc Grath, Information Worker, CentreCare**

**Date: 6<sup>th</sup> October 2005**

**Re: Submission to have time spent in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance treated as qualifying time for eligibility for the Back To Education Allowance.**

**Introduction:**

CentreCare is one of 14 projects of Crosscare, the Social Care Agency of the Dublin Diocese. Established in 1980, CentreCare evolves to meet the diverse and changing information needs of service users. CentreCare is an information service with a particular emphasis on working towards the resolution of housing and social welfare problems. CentreCare constantly updates its service in order to effectively meet the needs of the people who need the service most. Please find enclosed a copy of the CentreCare 2004 Annual Report.

As noted, ' the Back to Education Allowance Scheme which is administrative, is under constant review to ensure it remains relevant to labour market conditions and keeps its focus on helping those most marginalized in terms of employability. In this context the eligibility criteria, for participation in the scheme, is subject to change from time to time.' (FOI, BTEA Scheme)

CentreCare has identified a particularly marginalized group of people that is effectively barred from access to the Back To Education Allowance due to time spent in receipt of Supplementary Welfare Allowance. These are homeless people who spent periods of time on SWA before becoming eligible for other Social Welfare payments.

**Evidence:**

The points below outline CentreCare's rationale for having time spent on SWA recognised as a qualifying time for eligibility for the BTEA.

- The objective of the BTEA is ' to raise the educational and skills levels among the long term unemployed, in order to help them to meet the requirements of the modern day market.' (FOI, BTEA Scheme) Over the lifetime of the scheme there has been an increase in the groups in receipt of social welfare payments qualifying for the BTEA. CentreCare welcomes these inclusions. However it is CentreCare's view that it should include those who spend some time within the qualifying period in receipt of SWA, who are surely more marginalized than some other categories already qualifying.
- People are being rendered ineligible for short periods of time spent in receipt of SWA within the qualifying time. For example, a person who is in receipt of UA for 12 months becomes homeless and their UA payment is stopped, as they have no fixed address. They qualify for SWA as a homeless person. They remain on SWA for 2 months. They find accommodation and are granted a UA payment. They make an application for the BTEA but are turned down, as they do not meet the qualifying criteria due to the two months spent on SWA within the immediate preceding 12 months.

- People wishing raise their educational and skills levels are being prevented from doing so due to time spent on SWA and are therefore remaining welfare dependent for longer periods.
- Allowing this small but specifically marginalized group access to the BTEA would be essentially revenue neutral and may save your Department money in the long run.
- Time spent in receipt of SWA is essentially time spent in receipt of a Social Welfare payment so therefore should act as qualifying time.
- BTEA is an administrative scheme, which implies that there is no need for a change in legislation in order to include this marginalized group.
- Our rationale for having time spent on SWA included as eligibility for the BTEA Scheme appears to be in line with the Departments own thinking in that the aim is to target those 'most marginalized'.

**Recommendations:**

**We recommend that the Minister consider time spent in receipt of SWA as contributing towards qualifying time for eligibility for the Back to Education Allowance Scheme as a matter of urgency.**

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