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March 18, 2003

Deborah L. Outten-Mills, Director
National Audit and Evaluations Office
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Ave., N.W., Room N-5620
Washington, DC 20210

Reference: Florida Department of Education Migrant and Seasonal Farmworker Program
Report No. 21-03-011-03-365.

Dear Ms. Outten-Mills:

We thank you for the opportunity to review the draft report and to submit our responses to the one finding and the recommendations. We also wish to commend the members of your audit and evaluation team, Mr. Edwin Terrel, Ms. Renee Harrison, and Ms. Tinuke Oladimeji, for the thoroughness and professional manner in which they carried out their task.

Before responding to the one finding and the team's recommendations, we would like to offer the following changes to the narrative for your consideration:

Page 1 - Executive Summary. Paragraph 4 - under Finding. Sentence 2 - "Fifty of these participants files were at one service center, ..." Suggest substituting service center with project office to be consistent with other parts of the narrative.

Page 2- Introduction and Background. Paragraph 5 - "FDE pays for the participant's tuition and books, and provides . . . for 50 percent of the participant's costs." Suggest substituting FDE with projects operated by the FDE pay for the participant's tuition and books, and . . . provide . . . for 50% of the participant's costs."

CARLOS R. SAAVEDRA
ADULT MIGRANT PROGRAM AND SERVICES

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Page 4 - Objectives, Scope and Methodology. Paragraph 3 - "The largest group of those receiving services were migrant farmworkers who received supportive services / emergency assistance, such as vouchers for food, transportation assistance, clothing, rent, electricity, uniforms, tools and hotel room stay." Recommend deleting hotel room stay. Rental assistance is limited to those farmworkers who received a notice of eviction from their landlord and also limited to a one-time payment.

Page 6 - Findings and Recommendation. 1. Participant Files Were Incomplete At One Service Center. Suggest substituting Service Center with Project Office to be consistent with other parts of the narrative.

Findings

Page 7 - Paragraph 1 - "Of the 50 participant files reviewed at ALPI (The Agricultural Labor Program, Inc.), 13 contained the documentation described, and were qualified at the ALPI office. Thirty participant files contained a staff verification sheet where the staff attested to the fact that they saw the required documentation, and checked off those documents the participant presented. We accepted this document as a substitute for copies of the required documentation, and for the participant's self-verification, but informed ALPI that in the future we would expect to see the actual documentation."

Page 7 - Paragraph 2 - "Seven participant files did not have any documentation. We asked the ALPI director why the documentation had not been obtained. We were told that many of the participants were qualified in the field and there was no way to copy the documents. Therefore, the staff reviewed the information the applicant presented and qualified them for the services. For those instances where participants were qualified at the one-stop centers, we were told that the staff were not aware they could use the one-stop's photocopying equipment."

Recommendations

Page 7 - Paragraph 5 - "ALPI needs to strengthen its internal controls over participant selection by developing and implementing a policy that prohibits the payment of funds to any participant until documents in the participant's file support the eligibility."

Response

As a result of the recommendations made by the audit and evaluation team during its visit, the Florida Department of Education immediately required the Agricultural Labor Program, Inc. to obtain and retain copies of support documentation for all recipients of Emergency Assistance, specifically in regards to (1) state issued identification card, (2) government issued identification, (3) social security card, (4) birth certificate, (5) INS card, (6) W-2 form, and (7) a verification letter from the last employer, or a statement from someone that worked with the individual during the period the client claimed to have worked, or a statement from someone who observed the client performing migrant or seasonal farm work.

In most cases, emergency assistance is delivered by a small staff of experienced individuals who go to those counties where the need for this type of service has been identified. Since services are provided in the field, staff are given temporary space by faith based organizations, Title I, Migrant Education Programs, family literacy centers, health clinics, but rarely in the One-Stop Centers, as these are not open in the evenings or weekends when farmworkers are able to take time off from work. As most of these organizations have limited resources, staff were not able to obtain copies of support documentation for the seven (7) cases identified in the report.

In order to eliminate this problem, ALPI was instructed to: (1) set up an account in order to compensate these organizations for the use of their equipment. (2) staff primarily responsible for delivering services in the field will be provided digital cameras by ALPI so that they can photocopy support documentation that can be electronically saved as well as printed in hard form.

Should you have any questions about our response or need additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Sincerely,



Carlos R. Saavedra
Senior Educational Policy Director
Adult Migrant Program and Services