

Quality Corner

This month we will address two recent errors – one involving the homeless shelter deduction and one involving direct payment of child support.

Food Stamp Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction

A recipient family living in a shelter was not allowed the homeless shelter/utility deduction because the AU Manager incorrectly entered the AU's address on the address window. As noted in Field Operations Memo 2001-18, any assistance unit that incurs, or is likely to incur, either a shelter-related or utility-related expense is eligible for the deduction of \$143 per month. Expenses that would be eligible include such items as making phone calls (including pay-phone calls), washer/dryer expenses, or contributions toward common expenses, such as gas or electricity. The memo states that "since almost all AUs incur or can expect to incur some shelter or utility-related expense(s), the AU Manager **may assume** that costs are being incurred and is **not required to document** in the AU record why the Homeless Shelter/Utility Deduction is being allowed" (emphasis in original). Based on this memo, almost all AUs in homeless shelters are eligible for this allowance. Field Operations Memo 2001-18 was issued before BEACON was implemented. BEACON automates the homeless shelter deduction calculation provided the AU Manager correctly enters the address and, if applicable, enters the actual shelter expenses.

What can an AU Manager Do?

To enter an address for a homeless AU, the AU Manager must:

- enter the AU's address under Mailing Address and not under Current Address; and
- indicate that the AU is homeless by checking off the Homeless Box at the bottom of the window.

BEACON will then automatically use the homeless shelter deduction of \$143 when calculating the AU's food stamp benefits.

If the AU verifies shelter expenses in excess of the \$143 homeless shelter deduction, the AU Manager must:

- enter the AU's address as described above; and
- enter the actual expense in the Shelter Expense window.

BEACON will then automatically use the actual expense in determining

the shelter deduction amount for this AU.

See a *User's Guide: Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON*, Chapter IV, Section A, page 4.

Child Support Paid Directly to a Non-Citizen

This AU consisted of two children. One child received SSI benefits while both children received federal food stamp benefits as citizens. Their mother received SSFSP food stamp benefits as a non-citizen. The AU also received child support of \$100 per week directly from the absent father. The AU Manager pro-rated the income between the two food stamp households and reduced the benefit amounts based on the child support. Direct child support payments are made for children only and are considered their income. If there is a related TAFDC AU and if the child support payment goes to DOR, the DEFRA payment (the \$50 pass-through intended to encourage mothers to cooperate with child support enforcement) is countable to the mother and not to the children.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

It is important to remember that child support is just that – for the children. In cases where the children are citizens and the

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mother is not, remember that the income counts for the children, not for the mother. For this case, the AU Manager should have divided the income evenly between the two children and entered the amount for each child on the "Other Income Window" in BEACON. Failing to do this will likely result in a Quality Control error.

Changes Regarding Family Cap, Vendor Payments and Closing/Denial Chart AU Composition Results (Appendix B)

**All
A User's Guide:
Transitional Assistance Programs and BEACON Update 024**

This update transmits the following changes:

- Chapter XIII, Section J: adds procedures for reopening an AU with a Family Cap child not approved for a waiver or exception;
- Chapter XIV, Section I: adds reference to SSPS in the vendor process; and
- Appendix B: adds whether a closing action is an immediate release or a pending release.

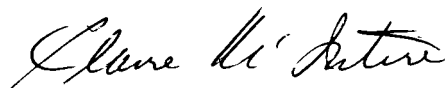
of supervisors and 8% of its clerical support staff. And on top of this, 23% of local office managers retired. Malden, Framingham, Roslindale and North Shore all lost two managers.

Central Office departures were equally across the board. Ten percent of central office managers and more than 8% of central office non-managerial staff retired. These included seven retirees in the Employment Services Unit, five in Policy and Procedure and seven in central Field Operations and Centralized Eligibility. The directors of two Central Office Units, Program Assessment and Employment Services, joined the retirees.

The impact of these departures has already been felt. Field Operations has reassigned managers to ensure appropriate coverage in every office. Reviews of staffing levels for all the offices is ongoing. In Central Office, remaining staff are assuming duties of departed colleagues. In addition to the departure of 270 people, we have lost a tremendous amount of institutional memory. Every local office and central office unit has certain people who you just know you can go to and they will remember how something needs to be done, how a difficult case was handled five years ago, where to find the federal regulation that was issued eight years ago but would help with today's problem. Many of these people have retired.

I told you last month that meeting the challenge of continuing to do our job would not be easy. That has not changed. But I also remain confident that we will find a way and that the people we serve will continue to receive the highest level of service.

Sincerely,



Claire McIntire
Commissioner

"Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself."

Leo Tolstoy
(Russian novelist)