

Transitions

June 2005
Vol. XX No. 6



A Publication of the Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance

this month in...

Transitions

Quality Corner	2
From the Hotline	4
From the Forms File	4
TAFDC and FS Program Eligibility for Battered Noncitizens	4
TAFDC: Vocational Rehabilitation Services - New ESP Initiative	5
FYI - BEACON Help Revisions	5
FYI - Distance Learning	5
FYI - Food Stamp Application Verifications Assistance	6
FYI - Transportation Costs as an Allowable Food Stamp Medical Deduction	6
FYI - USDA Clarification Regarding the Validity of Faxed Signatures and Verification Proofs	6

From the Commissioner

Dear Fellow Employees,

As part of the Department's ongoing efforts to expand the Food Stamp Program, I am pleased to talk to you this month about the Food Stamp Program's third annual Food for Thought conference. The Food for Thought conference is co-sponsored by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the agenda includes speakers from neighboring states (Maine and New Hampshire), the USDA and our own senior Food Stamp Program staff. This year's event will focus on ways to decrease the negative error rate and to effectively facilitate application processing. These topics support our primary goal of increasing food stamp participation.

Aside from expanding our knowledge and refining on-the-job skills, events like the Food for Thought conference also offer important benefits to all of us. They provide a comfortable atmosphere in which we can get to know one another. I've found that I learn quite a bit from the informal conversations held after these sessions. Chats held outside, in the hallways of conference centers are often the best way to obtain ideas or best practices from other local offices. One office may have mastered a work flow or procedure that another office is still working through. Formally or informally, information exchange is what makes these conferences a success.

I hope that everyone who attends the Food for Thought conference will come prepared both to learn and to share their own experiences about delivering services effectively. These qualities reflect our commitment as Department employees to increasing our knowledge and improving our effectiveness on the job. I appreciate your efforts in this direction. Also, a thank you should go out to the staff that make these events happen. From lining up speakers to menu

Continued on Page 2

planning, conferences like these would not be possible without them. I'd also like to say a special word of thanks to the organizers of the annual DTA Conference, and to everyone who attended recently.

Before closing, I'd like to share news of another successful DTA event. Just a few weeks ago, the Division of Career Services (DCS) along with other career center partners, held a job fair in the New Bedford TAO. Twelve employers joined in the effort: Able Associates, J C Penney, Kelly Services, Price Rite, Sears, Olsten Staffing and United Parcel Service (UPS). Over one hundred of our ESP participants met with these employers. Before the job fair, DCS sponsored workshops preparing participants for the event. One workshop participant has already been offered a job by more than one employer! The skillful planning that went into this event allowed many of our ESP participants to gain a foothold into the working world while normal TAO office routines continued to function smoothly.

This is a great example of what is possible when creative approaches are applied to local collaboration. I want to thank Jeff Travers and all of the staff at the New Bedford TAO, along with DCS, for their signature contribution to our clients. In the future, I hope that similar efforts can be integrated into other local offices. I look forward to hearing about them.

Sincerely,



John Wagner, Commissioner



COMMUNICATION is the KEY

Quality Corner

This month we will review three error cases, two involving earnings errors and the other from a DMH/DMR group home.

Universal Semiannual Reporting

The first error occurred in an NPA family that was on Universal Semiannual Reporting (USR) with a certification period ending in October 2004. The wife was the only employed person in the household, while the husband was awaiting eligibility determination for a Worker's Compensation claim. When the husband's Worker's Compensation claim was approved, the family correctly notified the AU Manager. The income was entered in BEACON at that time, and ordinarily would have reduced the AU's FS benefit amount but as a USR AU, the FS benefits cannot decrease during the certification period. The AU then received notification from the Department that the certification was due to end. The AU recertified timely and verified both the wife's earnings and the husband's Worker's Compensation income. Both incomes were entered in BEACON during the last month of the certification period.

Although the incomes were entered in BEACON, it was processed as a change rather than a reevaluation because the Reevaluation box was not checked. Since this was a USR AU, BEACON logic prevented the FS benefits from correctly decreasing because the system treated the change as occurring during the certification period. As a result of this mistake, the AU received a large overissuance in FS benefits. If the Reevaluation box had been checked, BEACON would have correctly allowed a reduction in FS benefits due to the increase in income for this AU.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

This action should have been processed as a Reevaluation since it was part of the recertification. If the Reevaluations box had been checked, the income would have been counted correctly and the FS benefit reduced. Based on the initial mistake, the case remained in error for the next six months.

A Leave of Absence from Work

The other earnings error occurred in a TAFDC and PA FS case. The client had applied for TAFDC in July because she

was on a leave of absence from her job. She provided a letter stating that she was on leave, her last day of work was July 12th, and her last pay date was August 5th. The letter did not specify whether this was paid or unpaid leave, or the expected duration of the leave. Her child was born on July 14th.

Quality Control found out that the client returned to work on September 2 and received her first pay check on September 16th. She never reported this to DTA. Her last recertification was on July 21st, for a certification period beginning August 13th.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

When a recipient verifies absence from work, the verification must also speak to the issue of length of absence and paid leave versus unpaid leave. This is critical information for the AU Manager to collect. When the verification provided does not adequately address the issue being verified, the AU Manager must follow up by requesting more information from the recipient. Since the recipient was on paid medical or family leave, if the AU Manager had investigated the expected duration of the leave and the date the recipient was scheduled to resume work, the error could have been prevented. If a recipient is on a leave from work, be sure to get as much information as needed to accurately determine continued eligibility.

Quality Control Alert: DMR/DMH Group Home Cases

During the past few months, there have been errors on DMR/DMH group home cases. One occurred when the rent as listed on the FS-ACSE-2 was incorrectly entered without subtracting the one-person FS allotment of \$149 from the rental amount. When an applicant or recipient who is a group home resident verifies shelter expenses, the AU Manager must do the math in the Dept Use Only Section in the bottom right side of the FS-ACSE-2 form. Since, group home residents are provided with meals as part of their overall cost of care, the \$149 deduction is taken out to compensate for the meals that are provided now that the resident is applying for FS benefits. For more information on shelter expenses for group home residents, see 106 CMR 365.630(B).



From the Hotline

Q. Can a TAFDC recipient be referred for child care services before she has actually started her training course?

A. Yes. The referral for child care services can be issued two weeks prior to the start of her training course. The CCR&R will determine when it is appropriate to authorize these services.

Refer to 106 CMR 207.210 and Field Operations Memo 2005-1A for more information about ESP support services.

Q. A TAFDC recipient in our office has completed one training course and has a four-week break before her next course begins. In the meantime, she's afraid of losing the child care arrangement she currently has. Can she continue these child care services and keep her current arrangement?

A. Yes. Child care services may continue for this ESP participant for a period of up to one month if the child care arrangements would otherwise be lost and a subsequent component activity or the resumption of the current activity is scheduled to begin within the month.

Q. A TAFDC recipient in our office is an undocumented noncitizen who must perform Community Service, in accordance with 106 CMR 203.400(A)(3). She has found a Community Service placement and is now requesting a referral for child care services. Is she eligible for a child care referral?

A. Yes. This ineligible noncitizen can be referred to the CCR&R for child care services.

Q. A TAFDC documented ineligible noncitizen has a one-month-old child and is exempt from the work program requirement. Can she be referred for child care services as an ESP volunteer?

A. Yes. This ineligible noncitizen can be referred for child care services upon verification of her activity.

Note: Recipients who pay for child care expenses may be eligible for an expense deduction in the Food Stamp Program, if verified.



From the Forms File

Brochure Available in Other Languages

02-616-0505-05 (Spanish)
02-650-0505-05 (Portuguese)
02-651-0505-05 (Russian)
02-652-0505-05 (Vietnamese)
DVB (Rev. 5/2005)
You and Your Children
Deserve to Be Safe



TAFDC and FS Program Eligibility for Battered Noncitizens

TAFDC and FS
Field Operations Memo
2005-22

TAFDC and FS eligibility of battered noncitizens is a complex subject to understand and even more challenging to implement. This memo clarifies the eligibility determination process for battered noncitizens primarily through a series of detailed Qs & As. These explain a wide range of issues related to their eligibility and are intended to serve as a quick reference for AU Managers.



TAFDC: Vocational Rehabilitation Services – New ESP Initiative

TAFDC New Initiative Memo

As a new initiative in certain offices, the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) is offering a new ESP activity to TAFDC recipients: Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services. This activity will give TAFDC recipients the opportunity to meet with a qualified vocational rehabilitation provider who is offering a program of employment services, which will enhance recipients' self-sufficiency. DTA has entered into agreements with qualified employment services providers for specific services. This initiative will be conducted in the Lowell, Hyannis, Dorchester, Newmarket Square, Springfield Liberty, Springfield State and New Bedford TAOs.

FYI

BEACON Help Revisions

The following is a list of Help windows that have been added or revised.

Added:

CAP Shelter Expense Type and Amount
Interview Wrap-up
Authorization: Warnings,
Edits and Messages

Revised:

Active by Grantee Name (View)
Interview Wrap-up Authorization
Shelter Expenses
Standard Utility Allowance
What If Calculation Tab

FYI

Distance Learning

Distance Learning refers to a video-and computer-based educational activity available on the Internet. The Department has identified six Distance Learning sites funded by the Massachusetts Department of Education that help recipients get their GED or high school equivalency diploma and that meet the work program requirement through education for up to **20 hours** per week. These DTA-approved Distance Learning program sites monitor time spent online by each participant; therefore, instructors are able to verify hourly participation in the activity. Teen parents can meet their education requirement through Distance Learning sites provided they participate for 20 hours per week.

These approved Distance Learning sites are located in Brockton (Brockton Private Industry Council), Worcester (Quinsigamond Community College), Holyoke (Juntos Distance Learning Project), Greenfield (The Literacy Project), North Adams (Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts) and South Boston (Notre Dame Education Center). They are distinguished from other GED or high school equivalency activities by having the words "Distance Learning" in the Resource Title in BEACON.

The South Boston site offers courses only in ESL. The sites in Brockton, Worcester, Holyoke, Greenfield and North Adams only offer GED courses.

Recipients can be enrolled in these programs following normal procedures by creating an EDP. As with other approved activities, participants are still responsible for having the Participation and Attendance form (ESP-7) filled out by Distance Learning staff every month. Failure to return the form or meet the participation hours without good cause would result in a work program sanction being created.

If the approved Distance Learning activity is less than the required work program hours, the recipient must participate in another activity to meet the hours needed to fulfill his or her work program requirement.

As additional Distance Learning programs are approved, we will inform you of each specific program and site.

FYI

Food Stamp Application Verifications Assistance

AU Managers are reminded that food stamp regulations at 106 CMR 361.650 and 106 CMR 361.920 - 930 require AU Managers to assist food stamp applicants in obtaining the required verifications, when necessary. You must inform applicants of alternative forms of acceptable verifications and advise them to call you if they are having difficulty obtaining the required verifications.

Remember also that you must not deny applications for failure to provide verification when the outstanding verification is not mandatory, but would result in an increased benefit amount for example, verification of shelter, utility or child care expenses.

FYI

Transportation Costs as an Allowable Food Stamp Medical Deduction

Food stamp regulations at 106 CMR 364.400 allow elderly and/or disabled assistance unit members to deduct medical expenses in excess of \$35 per month. This includes *“the reasonable cost of transportation and lodging to obtain medical treatment or services.”* If a recipient claims mileage for medical transportation to and from medical appointments, the federal mileage rate of 40.5 cents per mile must be used to calculate the transportation cost that will be allowed as a medical deduction.

“A Senegalese poet said ‘In the end we will conserve only what we love. We love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.’ We must learn about other cultures in order to understand, in order to love, and in order to preserve our common world heritage.”

Yo Yo Ma, White House Conference on Culture and Diplomacy

FYI

USDA Clarification Regarding the Validity of Faxed Signatures and Verification Proofs

Original signatures or verification proofs are not required for Food Stamp purposes. Faxed documents and copies must be accepted unless questionable. If a signature or document looks like it has been altered or tampered with, the AU Manager may request the original document.

J

U

N

E

