

Quality Corner

This month we will review three recent food stamp errors. One was agency caused and could have been prevented. The other two were recipient caused, but could have been prevented if the AU Manager had taken into account **all the circumstances of the case**.

Terminated Income

A TAFDC recipient lost her job in May 2001. She stated on her Monthly Report that the job had terminated and sent a copy of the termination letter from her employer to the AU Manager. Her wages were not zeroed out and she received a reduced grant in July. She did not return her Monthly Report in July, believing it was not necessary since she was no longer working. She was about to be closed in August for failing to complete the Monthly Report. When she reported all this to her AU Manager, the closing was stopped, but the income was still not zeroed out. More than two months after her income stopped, that same income was being deducted. This resulted in a food stamp benefit underissuance of more than \$300 – a very large error. At any of several points this AU could have been corrected. In each instance, however, it was left in error.

High Expenses / Low Income

At the most recent food stamp recertification, the recipient provided a landlord verification that she was paying \$500 rent and was responsible for utilities as well. Her only known income, however, was her \$530 TAFDC grant. Since she had not applied for any rental arrearage, she was likely up to date with her rent. One of two circumstances could exist: she had unreported income or she was mistating her rent. As it turned out, she had completed the landlord verification herself and had a friend sign it.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

The AU Manager in this case should have been suspicious. The recipient's income was lower than her rent and utilities. She was not behind in her rent. If the AU Manager suspected unreported income, she could have investigated that. It is easier, however, to check on the rent. The AU Manager could call the landlord, ask to see a copy of the lease, or ask for a copy of the rent receipt. Any of these would likely have identified the real circumstances.

Direct Shelter Payments

The third error involved a recipient whose divorced husband was voluntarily paying \$200 rent to the landlord. According to the recipient, this was being paid directly to the landlord. Accordingly, the AU Manager subtracted the husband's contribution from the rental amount and allowed the full utilities. The AU Manager did not verify that the money went directly to the landlord.

In fact, the landlord never received the money directly from the ex-husband. As verified by Quality Control, it went to the ex-wife every month. Under these circumstances the money is treated as a voluntary contribution, subject to reporting as any other form of child support. Failing to do so in this case resulted in an overpayment.

What Can an AU Manager Do?

The AU Manager in this case should have verified with the landlord that the money was sent to him directly. If the money was not received directly by him, it should have been treated like any other form of child support paid directly to the recipient.

