

# Excellent Service for All

Innovation in the Food Stamp Program



Access  
Outreach  
Payment Accuracy  
Nutrition Education  
Certification Policy  
Quality Control

Issue 16  
July 2008

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## Atlantic County, New Jersey

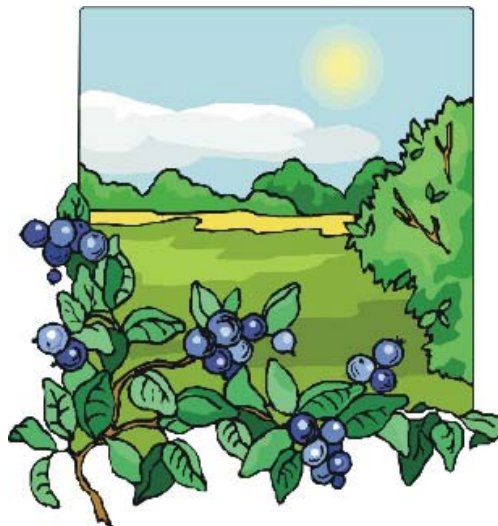
### *Alternate sites accommodate needs of working people and other customers*

There are acres and acres of cranberry bogs and blueberry fields throughout the coastal plains in the southern part of New Jersey - the "Garden State." One of the most heavily populated counties in this area is Atlantic, perhaps more well-known for its beaches and casinos. Although there are sizeable urban and suburban population centers in Atlantic County, many households potentially-eligible for the Food Stamp Program live quite a distance from the closest local office. Convinced that more could be done to reach these households, the county began an aggressive outreach effort.

As a result, there are six outstation sites where individuals can obtain food stamp assistance. In addition, because the local agency

knew a barrier for working families, for example, involved their inability to come to an office during normal business hours, the outstation sites are open from 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Two of the sites are in rural parts of the county. Landisville Spanish Community Center serves a large population of Spanish-speaking people, many of whom do seasonal labor at the farms and fruit orchards that dot the landscape. "The closest regular office is at least



15 miles away, so instead we can meet applicants at the community center on Tuesday and Thursday of each week, and then the office in Hammonton takes over processing the case," says Charles Bell, administrative supervisor, Atlantic County Department of Family and Community Development. The other site is located in the Martin Luther King Community Center. Applications are taken there on Mondays and Wednesdays.

Two other sites are housed in "family centers" that are part of local schools, and application assistance is provided weekly on various days.

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The outreach efforts also specifically target seniors. While anyone can apply at Countryside Meadows, an assisted living center in Galloway Township, the response from seniors has been fantastic. “We made it simple to apply for benefits, since the seniors didn’t have to come out to the office,” Charles says. “We went through the entire building, door-to-door - about 100 apartments. Some were very surprised that we made it so easy, and we were happy to provide them with good customer service right in their building.

“We’ve done a great job of educating the public about the fact that the Food Stamp Program is not a welfare program. Many people didn’t want to participate because of the stigma they felt. But in the first three months of operation, we processed 278 food stamp cases through our outreach efforts, plus all the other help we were able to provide.”

The folks making this happen are the coordinator and the 13 other staff members who provide application assistance for food stamps. All are paid overtime to work at the sites. “I’ve gotten good response from staff and never have a hard time finding someone to work (in the outstation offices),” reports a delighted Charles.

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## *Facts about participation of elderly*

**Historically, individuals age 60 and older participate in the Food Stamp Program at very low rates – about half the overall rate among all eligible individuals. However, the Food Stamp Program is still the Nation’s largest food assistance program for the elderly, serving more than 2 million elderly in an average month.**

Number of households with elderly (thousands)	2,024
Percent of all households	18%
Number of elderly individuals (thousands)	2,229
Percent of all participants	9%
Average household size	1.3
Percent of elderly living alone	72%
Average monthly benefit per household	\$91
Average monthly benefit per person	\$71
Percent with minimum benefit	17%
Percent with maximum benefit	16%
Average certification period (months)	19
Participation rate among eligible elderly (2005)	31%
Percent of total benefits that could have been issued to elderly (2005)	39%

Note:

All statistics for fiscal year 2006 unless otherwise noted.

Source:

Wolkwitz (2007). *Characteristics of Food Stamp Households: Fiscal Year 2006*. Report prepared for the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.

Wolkwitz, *Trends in Food Stamp Program Participation Rates: 1999 to 2005*. Report prepared for the Food and Nutrition Service, USDA.

# *Alternate sites accommodate needs of elderly and others*

*The following article relates the experiences of local offices in West Virginia with outstationing. As a result of this effort, individuals and families who would have been unserved are participating in the Food Stamp Program.*

## *Fayette County, West Virginia*

Located in the southern part of the state, Fayette County is abundant in natural beauty, but public transportation is sparse.

“We have a lot of elderly people in some of these communities, and some of them were paying friends and neighbors \$10 or \$15 for a ride to the office,” relates Stacey Brown. “That’s why we started outstationing our staff and programs more than eight years ago,” exclaims the economic services supervisor for the Fayette County Department of Health and Human Resources (Fayette County DHHR).

Currently, eligibility specialists regularly staff four outlying locations where they work during regular business hours because overtime pay is not available.



They are usually at the outstation sites from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. (travel time from the main office to the sites can be as long as an hour and a half each way).

In Falls View, a particularly needy area 15 miles from the closest sizable town, the community center provides space free-of-charge. Customers are assisted each month by four staff members. Fayette County DHHR provided funds to acquire connection to the Internet, and staff is able to determine eligibility on-the-spot using laptop computers.

In the town of Meadowbridge, staff is hosted in the city hall once a month. Space is provided free-of-charge, with Fayette County DHHR picking up the cost for phone lines and the DSL service. About 48  
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## *Under Secretary addresses hunger issues of elderly*

Nancy Johner, Under Secretary, Food, Nutrition and Consumer Services, was the principal speaker at a press conference held March 26, at a Giant food store in Harrisburg.

Attendees included Carl Shlicker, president and CEO of Giant, Pennsylvania Deputy Secretary for Public Welfare Linda Blanchette and more than 60 area seniors. The officials talked about the hunger issues of the elderly and the need for this population to participate in the Food Stamp Program.

The seniors also participated in a health fair and pre-screening for the Food Stamp Program, which was conducted by community-based organizations.

Later, Under Secretary Johner participated in a discussion on elderly hunger issues, which was held at the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank. She was joined by Pennsylvania Secretary of Agriculture Dennis Wolff, staff from the offices of Senator Arlen Specter and Representative Tim Holden and representatives from national and local organizations.



*Nancy M. Johner  
Under Secretary, Food,  
Nutrition and Consumer  
Services*

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customers are assisted in Meadowbridge each month, and approximately 60 percent are elderly. Four eligibility specialists come out routinely, while a fifth one coordinates the process at the site.

Staff also works at the senior living facilities, Twin Oaks and Rivermont, and they see 15 to 30 customers during each visit. “The Twin Oaks residents love our worker,” says Stacey. “She has built strong relationships with customers who realize she’s a good resource for all kinds of information and benefits. The social worker there estimates that 50 percent of the residents wouldn’t be receiving benefits without the outstation program.”

The customers agree. “I’ve had clients personally contact me and say that if we didn’t come out, they wouldn’t be receiving benefits,” Stacey says. “Many elderly persons are simply unable to access services if they aren’t within walking distance.”

And the Fayette County DHHR is flexible in making sure that no one is left out. “If there’s a new resident and we’ve just missed him or her, we’ll make another trip back up there to get it done.”

There also has been a very positive response from the staff members who operate the outstation locations. Stacey relates what’s she’s heard from them:

“I saw someone today who’s never been known to the system.”

“Lately, with the increases in food and gas prices, the allotment means even more to folks.”

“Having a way to purchase all the bread and milk you’ll need for the month means a lot.”

### *Nicholas County, West Virginia*

In neighboring Nicholas County, the Presbyterian Church of Richwood is part of the outstation program operated by the Nicholas County Department of Health and Human Resources (Nicholas DHHR). The program has been providing food stamps and other assistance since January 2000. “There are many transportation barriers and a lot of retired folks,” says Patty Martin, family assistance program manager for Nicholas County DHHR. “Many of the neediest residents had difficulty accessing any kind of services.”

The church provides office space and equipment at no cost. Originally, the Nicholas County DHHR staff only took re-certifications, but now customers can apply there as well. The eligibility specialist is available one day a week (and sometimes returns a second time) and takes applications for all programs. The demand has been significant, with an average of 15 customers seen each time. Newly certified applicants receive an EBT card in the mail a few days later. Customers can obtain a PIN by phone.

The Richwood Food and Clothing Pantry also is located at the Presbyterian Church of Richwood. The pantry meets emergency needs and encourages its clientele to go down the hall and find out how the Food Stamp Program could help meet their ongoing food and nutrition needs.

*To swap information, contact: Stacey Brown, Fayette County Department of Health and Human Resources, (304) 465-9613, [staceybrown@wvdhhr.org](mailto:staceybrown@wvdhhr.org); and Patty Martin, Nicholas County Department of Health and Human Resources, (304) 822-0803 ext.176, [pmartin@wvdhhr.org](mailto:pmartin@wvdhhr.org).*

## Portsmouth, Virginia

# Benefit Program University anchors benefits to knowledge

The Benefits Division of the Portsmouth Department of Social Services (DSS) in Virginia has developed an innovative approach to keep its staff proficient in serving customers. What began as refresher courses for eligibility specialists has evolved into the Benefit Programs University (BPU). The university concept was the brainchild of eligibility supervisors. The goal is to improve skills and make the process fun and rewarding.

Classes at BPU commenced in September 2007 after a “kick off” celebration in which the concept, courses and registration details were provided to staff. The university is set up in two semesters that offer up to 10 courses per semester.

The participants are given a “passport” when they enroll. Upon completion of a course, they are given a sticker for the courses they have “navigated.”

A graduation ceremony will be held and certificates of completion presented this summer to the first class. **Congratulations to the Class of 2008!**

To swap information, contact Phyllis Lishey, Portsmouth Department of Social Services, (757) 405-1800, ext. 8290, [psl740@eastern.dss.state.va.us](mailto:psl740@eastern.dss.state.va.us); or Angela Ricks, Portsmouth Department of Social Services, (757) 405-1800, ext. 8233, [adr740@eastern.dss.state.va.us](mailto:adr740@eastern.dss.state.va.us).

*Excellent Service for All thanks the staff of the Portsmouth Department of Social Services for this article.*

### Sample Courses

- ADAPT I and II  
(the automated state eligibility system)
- Timely Processing
- Calculating Income
- ABAWDs
- Handling Food Stamp Changes
- Let's Get Organized
- Interviewing and Phone Skills
- Medicaid Overview
- TANF Match/VIEW Transition Payments



*Some of the BPU faculty (l-to-r): Ellsworth Johnson, Brenda Elliott, Angela Ricks, Anita Golden, Linder Belfield, Patricia Cross, Phyllis Lishey, Zenobia Allen, Dianna Elliott and Theresa Hutchinson.*

### BPU - Who We Are

Reynold Jordan, President (Director)  
Melvin Twitty, Vice-President (Assistant Director)  
Anita Golden, Dean (Chief Eligibility Supervisor)  
Patricia Cross, Registrar (Eligibility Supervisor)

#### Faculty

Zenobia Allen, Linder Belfield, Christine Everette,  
Delvonnia Gray, Theresa Hutchinson, Ellsworth  
Johnson, Phyllis Lishey, Selma Mann, Evelyn Perry  
and Angela Ricks (Eligibility Supervisors)  
Brenda Elliott and Dianna Elliott (Office  
Supervisors)

#### Guest Faculty

Elizabeth “Bitsy” Candelario (TANF/View  
Program Consultant)  
Glenn Rainey, (Medical Assistance Program  
Consultant)  
Jim Altice (Food Stamp Program Consultant,  
Virginia Department of Social Services)

## *Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh*

### *Bringing nutrition and other services to the community*

The Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh started 85 years ago to help African-Americans climb the economic ladder and become part of mainstream Pittsburgh. Today the organization operates more than 25 programs with funding from varied sources like United Way and federal, state and local governments. The mission is still the same, but now the Pittsburgh affiliate provides assistance to more than 33,000 people of all ethnicities and backgrounds. “We are all one people and we’re here to help everyone,” says Esther Bush, CEO, Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh.



*Esther Bush, CEO,  
Urban League of  
Greater Pittsburgh*

*Anticipation was high as last minute adjustments were being made. Is there enough room for more yams on the table? Will each guest get enough to eat? Are the hams ready?*

While this may sound like you or your family preparing for company on Thanksgiving, the scenario actually is no ordinary holiday feast. Typically, Boy Scouts, lawyers, government employees, health care professionals - actually folks from all walks of life - roll up their sleeves, ready for the arrival of the guests. This past year, all 800 of them were welcomed to the third Annual Thanksgiving Celebration, hosted by the Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh.

“This event is our way of welcoming our clients into the community and allowing them to share in a true American tradition – Thanksgiving,” says Jim Jackson, program manager of the



*Karen Smith Garrett explains the system to eager volunteers.*

Urban League’s Hunger Services Division.

And what an event it is! Aably organized by Urban League staffer Karen Smith Garrett, the affair provides the makings of a holiday meal – with all the trimmings. Ham, stuffing, mashed potatoes, juice, a voucher for a turkey and much more are distributed by the volunteers as families are escorted through the serving line. But it doesn’t end with food.

Esther Bush, CEO, sums up the full service philosophy of the organization: “We realize this is a great opportunity to provide our customers with more than a holiday meal. We also provide health screenings, flu shots, comfort items and a holiday-themed, taste-testing in the next room.”

During the past three years there has been a consistent growth in the number of families (from 200 to 400) that have benefited from the holiday festival of the Urban League. It is an indication of the need that exists in the Greater Pittsburgh area.

“We see the number of people in need of help increasing, and we are working throughout the year to address their needs through a  
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variety of assistance programs,” Esther says. These services run the gamut: education and youth development; employment, training and economic development; family and child development; housing and hunger services; and even a charter school.

“We also realize that our approach must be holistic and multi-cultural as our clients have many needs and are from a variety of backgrounds. We turn no one away.”

Two of the valuable services that are provided by the organization’s Hunger Services Division are food stamp outreach and enrollment as well as referral to emergency food assistance.

“Food is the most basic of needs and one of the first priorities that we address with our clients,” says Dawn Williams, director of the Urban League’s Housing Services. “One of the first questions we ask new clients is if they receive food stamps.”

The Urban League participates in the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare’s

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*Two of the valuable services that are provided by the organization’s Hunger Services Division are food stamp outreach and enrollment as well as referral to emergency food assistance.*

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outreach plan. For this fiscal year, the organization proposed to provide food stamp outreach services that would reach potentially-eligible people in Allegheny, Washington and Westmoreland counties. The goal is to address barriers to participation by pre-screening and preparing hundreds of households for enrollment through the Department’s online system. Packets of information related to food purchasing power and eating wisely were

to be distributed to a variety of populations such as working parents who utilize a day care center, parent-teacher associations, individuals and families in homeless shelters, elderly folks and full-time adult students who work at least 20 hours a week and/or are struggling to provide care for children under the age of 12. The Urban League also was to partner with a food retailer to inform store customers about the value

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## *Howard County, Maryland*

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### *Center provides food stamps and other assistance*

The Howard County Department of Social Services (DSS) has further heightened its visibility by joining eight community partners in serving customers who may not be able to obtain assistance because of transportation issues in the southern part of the county.

At the North Laurel-Savage Multi-Service Center on All Saints Road in Laurel, staff members from each agency administer their representative programs. Every Wednesday from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m., DSS eligibility specialists offer information, answer questions, take applications, conduct interviews and make referrals to other DSS services such as child support, child or adult protective services and the work participation component of TANF. Customers also may apply themselves online at the center.

The DSS eligibility specialists began operating there in January 2007 on a rotational basis. In order to serve even more individuals and families at the center, DSS is in the process of hiring an eligibility specialist who will be located there part-time (16 hours).

The DSS staff says the multi-service center provides a great service to the community - for the customers who are unable to come to the office - and the customers enjoy the option of obtaining service there because it is located more closely to their homes. An added benefit is the personal relationship the customers build with service providers to whom they may not otherwise have been exposed.

The partnering organizations collectively provide benefits ranging from family and child services to language interpretation to legal assistance.

*To swap information, contact Charlene Gallion, Howard County Department of Social Services, (410) 872-8260; or Gail Johnson, Howard County Department of Social Services, (410) 872-8260, [gjohnson@dhr.state.md.us](mailto:gjohnson@dhr.state.md.us).*

## *Mid-Atlantic Region prepares state partners for disasters*

The Mid-Atlantic Region of the Food and Nutrition Service hosted a disaster preparedness conference in July for state and local food stamp agencies in the region. Virginia Department of Social Services Commissioner Anthony Conyers and Regional Administrator Yvette Jackson opened the two-day meeting, which was attended by 70 participants, including the ESF-11 coordinators from USDA, APHIS Regions II and III. Presentations were made on disaster preparedness planning, the general components of disaster response, disaster food stamps and “lessons learned” by Florida, Virginia and the Virgin Islands.

## *Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh*

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of food stamps and the relative ease with which they may be obtained. Rounding out the outreach would be appearances on radio and cable programs.

The Urban League also is involved in direct food assistance. Individuals and families can call the food distribution program for referral to one of more than 300 pantries in the network. In emergency cases, food and food vouchers are provided from an onsite pantry. The pantry network receives its food through various sources, including commodities from The Emergency Food Assistance Program, administered by the Food and Nutrition Service.

## *USDA releases menu planner to build better diets*

Most people have little idea whether they're eating a balanced diet or not. The U.S. Department of Agriculture wants to change that. On March 11, the Department announced the release of MyPyramid Menu Planner, a new state-of-the-art, online nutrition guidance tool to help individuals and homemakers plan healthier menus based on the recommendations of the MyPyramid food guidance system and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

To use MyPyramid Menu Planner, go to this website: [www.MyPyramid.gov](http://www.MyPyramid.gov) and click on the link

to the interactive My Pyramid Menu Planner. After you enter information such as age, sex and physical activity level, you can begin entering food items and amounts you might consume each day. The screen displays feedback as each item is added. From this, various reports can be seen and printed, which include a daily, weekly or family menu, whether you or your family's food choices are balanced for the day or an average over a week, breakdown by food item and goal-setting worksheets.



*Excellent Service for All* is published for state and local food stamp agencies.

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