

## **MANAGING THOSE ##### PLANS**

Moderator Jim Dalman, Alaska's Food Stamp Program Officer compared the reinvestment workshop to an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting, "Hi my name is Jim and I've had three sanctions." His engaging manner provided a light touch for the discussion that ensued about a serious subject.

The first of three panelists, Mary Parizo, policy consultant from Connecticut's Department of Social Services followed suit and introduced herself as "a recovering sanction addict." Mary stated that Connecticut's reinvestment projects for sanction years 1996 and 1998 consist of implementing a new hire match, which matches the client data base with files from the Department of Labor to identify earnings cases. The second project (1998) involves "super workers," who examine cases for errors and clean-up purposes before Quality Control reviews and cites errors. In addition, Mary indicated that tracking expenditures is an important aspect of managing reinvestment projects.

The second speaker, Mary Jo Thomas, is the Director of the Office of Performance Management and Quality Assurance for West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources. Mary Jo established that reinvestment can be both good and bad news. Mary feels that focus and juggling are two major areas of importance when administering reinvestment projects.

Similar to many other conference speakers, Mary Jo reiterated the need for commitment from top management to be successful in error rate reduction. From 1989 through 1999, West Virginia received sanctions. Consequently, they have developed a myriad of payment accuracy initiatives that are innovative and comprehensive. Other States would be wise to initiate further dialogue with Mary Jo to learn more about their error reduction activities.

Last, but never least, Lou Pastura, Director of the Program Accountability Division within the United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Services provided a federal point of view. Lou told us that 27 State agencies have reinvestment, 16 States have multi-year plans and nine States have more than two active plans. Two critical points that Lou made are "we have built artificial barriers to reducing error rates and we need to put our heads together and let a little light in." Additionally, Lou pointed out that if he could deliver one message it would be "communicate, communicate, communicate up and down the line."

The workshop ended with a question and answer period with lively participation from both panel and audience members.