

**Work Force**

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those who leave the welfare rolls for the workforce. But Rickard says her transition from welfare to work was not a smooth one. She says she ran into problems with her Medicaid benefits, child care service and rent payments.

Rickard says she saw an almost \$420 increase in her rent after she notified the Winston-Salem Housing Authority that she was employed. She said her \$7 an hour job as a dietary aide, was just not enough to pay the rent and other expenses. In order to get her rent back down to \$122, Rickard says she had to quit her job.

"I had no choice but to quit. I couldn't see any other way out of it," she said.

Rickard said a number of women have made the choice. She is no longer eligible for welfare benefits, and now must rely on relatives to help with her bills.

But many enrolled in welfare reform programs across the nation are eligible for exemption periods, where rent payments are frozen for up to 18 months after residents begin working.

Cleveland Avenue Homes resident Tonya Bennett said that after her rent jumped from \$59 to \$239 she wasn't informed that she could be eligible for the 18-month freeze period.

"I was doing better before I started working because I had everything at a level where I could take care of it," Bennett said.

Bennett says that just recently a housing manager told her about the exemption, saying that it was brand new and that she would be one of the first in the community on the program.

But HAWS officials received notice of the exemptions from the Department of Housing and Urban Development as early as January 1998, according to Section 8 Manager Karen Young. A reminder notice was sent out on Dec. 14, Young said.

Young - who spoke on behalf of Housing Management Supervisor Fulton Meachem who is on vacation - said she was unaware of whether information about the exemptions were distributed to individual managers.

She did say that the agency was aware that some tenants may be eligible for the 18-month freeze but are instead paying higher rent.

It is a problem she says the



Charlene Rickard points to the certificate she earned for completing Work First. Since graduating from the program, Rickard has faced a number of setbacks.

agency is actively trying to fix.

She said the problem occurred because tenants did not tell HAWS officials they were in the Work First program.

"We are in the process of working with Work First to see what residents qualify," Young said.

But Work First Committee member and County Commissioner Walter Marshall says the mistakes made by HAWS are unexcusable.

"How would the housing authority not know that residents were in the program," Marshall asked at a Work First Committee meeting Monday.

Marshall said he has documentation proving that HAWS knew that some residents were in Work First but still raised their rent payments.

Marshall was scheduled to meet with HAWS Executive Director J. Reid Lawrence late yesterday after The Chronicle's press time.

Marshall also has concerns about the Work First Committee on which he sits. Each county has a committee, which makes recommendations to Work First officials in the Department of Social Services.

Marshall says the committee - which is overwhelmingly white - may not be fully aware of the problems many of the women in the program face.

"I know the problems, I've had people in my family (on welfare). We don't need to be giving pats on the back, we need to find out what's happening to people being taken off of welfare," Marshall said.

No state law requires that former welfare recipients sit on Work First committees. Marshall said that the local committee appointed two former recipients only after he insisted on it.

Marshall says that he will meet

with the women who signed the petition to gauge exactly what their problems are.

Rickard said the Work First officials have shot down proposals that some women in the program have suggested. For example, Rickard said that many women could not find jobs that paid at least \$7 an hour within Winston-Salem. Rickard said when a group of women asked for vans to transport them to Greensboro, they were turned down.

A proposal to apply for federal dollars to start a community-based business was also given the thumbs down by Work First officials, Rickard said.

Work First Program Manager for Forsyth County Bobbi Bales spoke to The Chronicle briefly after Monday's meeting, but calls to her office for additional information were not returned by press time Wednesday morning.

Bales said that she has heard about the list of women circulating around around public housing communities, but that she wasn't sure who was on the list or what their particular grievances are.

Bales says that many recipients think that welfare reform is unfair and aren't pleased with any aspect of the Work First program.

"Some people just don't want to be a part of (welfare reform)," Bales said.

But Rickard disagrees. She says that an overwhelming majority of those on welfare want to work but they don't want to go hungry in the process.

"After we pay this higher rent, there is no money left for food...They cut our food stamps or take them away as soon as we get jobs. They are hurting us more than they are helping us," Rickard said.

**Meeting**

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Three assistant superintendents did however attend the meeting to show the system's commitment to adequately educate African Americans.

After the meeting, Assistant Superintendent Edna Crews said that Martin shared some of the group's goals, such as more minority teachers and equitable discipline for black students.

Eversley also faulted the school board for ignoring public concern before creating the redistricting plan and county residents for refusing to elect blacks to at-large seats on the board.

"We know we have a racist school board...We live in a red-neck, racist, backwoods, reactionary territory," he said.

For the two African Americans on the school board, the Caucus will provide them with a forum to hear voices from the community whenever they don't see eye-to-eye on a particular issue.

Both Geneva Brown and Victor Johnson attended Tuesday's meeting. Brown praised those who packed the church.

"It's a good sign," she said about the large turnout. "It's time for us to do something."

In order to form different committees, Caucus members broke up into mini groups. The Caucus will have nine different sections, including groups for parents, teachers, pastors, business leaders and legal professionals. Although business was the top priority at the meeting it also had a noticeable undertone of spirituality, which



Among those who attended the meeting was Larry Fields, far left. Fields, filed a claim against the state against the ABC testing program.

was apparent from the beginning of the meeting when Eversley led the crowd through a rousing version of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" to the end when the audience sang "We Shall Overcome."

Eversley said after the meeting, that the religious base will help the group in the long run.

"Because we have a church base, (the Caucus') spirit is not going to run out," he said.

The Caucus will meet the first Tuesday of each month at Dellabrook. The NAACP plans to pursue the lawsuit against the school system as early as March.



The Rev. Carlton Eversley led Tuesday's meeting of the Education Caucus.

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