

Local

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Randy Olson — Mercury News

It will be next year before the Fullers, including Susan and her daughter Katrina, get more welfare assistance

Welfare rules can mean penniless months

By Lynn Meyerson
Staff Writer

When Susan and Tyrone Fuller, the parents of three young children, received a \$5,106 payment for a workman's compensation claim, they did what most people would do — they spent it, mostly to pay off old debts and buy a used car.

Now, though, they are unemployed and behind on their rent. And because of a change in federal regulations, they also are ineligible for the welfare payments that have been their major source of income since Fuller injured his back on the job in 1979.

"If I had known we had to live off of it, I would have paid the rent and bought groceries," Mrs. Fuller said of the workman's compensation payment. "But our eligibility worker never told us they

had changed the rules."

Under old regulations, the Fullers would have lost their Aid to Families with Dependent Children payments for just the month when they actually got the workman's compensation payment.

But under cost-cutting regulations that went into effect in April, any lump-sum cash payment is applied against all future welfare benefits — meaning the Fullers will not be eligible for AFDC aid again until 1983.

"Welfare is not the way to go, but until you can find a way to make it, sometimes you have to take it," Mrs. Fuller said. "And then they make it impossible to get."

The Fullers are not alone. According to Bob Watson, assistant director of the Welfare Assistance League, an increasing number of Santa Clara County families are being caught by new welfare

distribution policies aimed at cutting costs.

"We had three cases just this week of people who thought they would be ineligible for only one month, but found out too late that it would be several months," Watson said.

The bottom line is that several families are finding themselves facing several months with no source of income.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," said Irene Jurado, a mother of four boys, who finds herself in similar straits. "I guess I'll go to a church down here that gives out food baskets to feed my kids."

Jurado's problems began with a \$470 income tax refund on her earnings last year as an assembler at an electronics plant in Salinas. Like most people, she spent the money.

Continued on Page 3B

Families caught by welfare rules

Continued from Page 1B

"We really whooped it up with that money," she said wryly. "I bought my son two pairs of pants and some groceries."

Jurado's case is complicated by the fact that she also has been denied food stamps. With no money to pay rent, she had moved her family into a girlfriend's house.

But because Jurado cannot prove that her friend is eating separately, her friend's ineligibility for food stamps means that Jurado is not eligible either.

Watson said cases such as the Fullers' and Jurado's will end up in court. Eventually, he says, the state will be ordered to renew welfare benefits.

"It's a state law that the county has to support indigents if no one else will," Watson said. "We know the regulations better than the eligibility workers. Better than their supervisors."

But the possibility of an eventual court victory is hardly comforting for Jurado.

"We barely survived last month," she said, "and now they say we can't have anything until August."