

**New Hanover County
2010-2011 Work First Plan**

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I. Conditions within New Hanover County

As the New Hanover County 2010-2011 Planning Committee examines the progress of welfare reform and the current realities for low-income families in our county, it is important for us to keep things in perspective. Despite our successes in putting people to work, reducing the Work First caseload and forming partnerships to help families overcome barriers, self-sufficiency still remains an elusive goal for many of our current and former recipients. For some, the key problems include lack of affordable housing, limited transportation options and low wages which cannot lift them above the poverty level. They have joined the ranks of the working poor, sharing their frustrations and concerns. Low level literacy skills and illiteracy are major problems. Others have even more deep-seated problems, including substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health issues, which cannot be resolved with temporary assistance. Our efforts to address these difficulties are further hampered by current economic realities.

New Hanover County is a coastal county located in southeastern North Carolina. It is the second most densely populated county in the state with a land area of 185 square miles, a population of approximately 188,000 and a work force of 105,110. New Hanover County is experiencing the effects of the national economic downturn. In May 2008, the unemployment rate was 4.7% compared to a rate of 3.5% in May 2007. New Hanover's economy is predominately a service economy with 14% of the workforce in retail trade, 13.5% in accommodation and food service and 10.4% in health care and social assistance. The local hospital, county school system, university, community college and city and county governments are included in its list of largest 10 employers. According to the Wilmington Industrial Development, Inc., employment is pretty evenly divided between technical, managerial and professional jobs requiring specific skills and/or educational attainment and sales, laborer and service jobs with relatively low wages and few benefits. North Carolina's Southeast 2008 Data Book lists the average weekly wage in New Hanover County at \$663 or 92.3% of the North Carolina average. Adversely, the Cost of Living Index for the Fourth Quarter 2007 shows that Wilmington's composite cost of living of 100.2 is above the national average and higher than Asheville, Charlotte, Raleigh, Charleston, Dallas or Atlanta. Without adequate education, training or supportive services, locating employment with a living wage that provides benefits for Work First clients (and moves them to self-sufficiency) continues to be a major task for this community. With this in mind, our goal in developing our Work First plan has been to acknowledge the challenges we face and call upon our partners in the community to help us meet them. We also want to focus on the broader picture, helping as many low-income individuals as possible without giving short shrift to those receiving cash assistance.

II. Planning Process

A. Planning Committee

Name

Affiliation

LaVaughn Nesmith	New Hanover County Department of Social Services (NHCDSS), Director
Evelyn Bryant	New Hanover County Board of Social Services
Chris Coudriet	New Hanover County Manager's Office
Wanda Marino	NHCDSS-Services Division
Ann Barkley	NHCDSS-Prevention/Adult Services
Christine McNamee	NHCDSS- Planning
Kari Sanders	NHCDSS -Children's Services
Sam Lane	NHCDSS- Family and Children's Medicaid
Arena Everett	NHCDSS-Employment Services
Paula Marn	NHCDSS-Employment Services
Michelle Cayruth	Work First Participant
Tom Cunningham	Wilmington Chamber of Commerce
Chris Preston	Southeastern Center for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (SEC)
Don Skinner	Phoenix Employment Ministry
Mary B. Rea Poteat	Coastal Enterprises
Jane Albers	East Coast Solutions
Val Nelson	East Coast Solutions
Jennifer Grundy	New Hanover County Health Department (NHCHD)
Trecie Sanders	Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA)
Arlanda Rouse	WAVE Transit Authority (WTA)
Linda Patton	Cape Fear Literacy Council (CFLC)
Becky Setliff	NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Dr. Rick Holliday	New Hanover County schools
Walker Biggs	NC Employment Security Commission/ JobLink (ESC/JobLink)
Janet Nelson	Smart Start of New Hanover County
Renee McGill-Cox	Domestic Violence Shelter and Services, Inc. (DVSS)
Margie Parker	Cape Fear Workforce Development Board
Clarence Smith	Cape Fear Community College (CFCC)
Carla West	New Hanover County Child Support Office
Lois Steele	YWCA
Jonathan Barfield, Jr.	New Beginning Christian Church

B. Public Comment

Draft copies of the plan were available for public scrutiny beginning September 3, 2008 through September 17, 2008 at the New Hanover County Public Library Main Branch, New Hanover County Government Center, New Hanover County Department of Social Services

and on the DSS web site, www.nhcgov/DSS/draft.htm. The New Hanover County Public Information Office distributed media releases to television, radio and newspaper outlets throughout New Hanover County to notify the public of their right to comment.

C. Planning Development

On July 21, 2008, the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners designated representatives to develop the Work First Block Grant Plan in accordance with the State's recommendations in the June 19, 2008 letter to County Directors of Social Services. The core of the Work First Planning Committee includes persons who developed the Work First plan for the 2007- 2009 biennium. These individuals have worked together extensively over the past few years and are committed to helping low income families achieve a greater level of self-sufficiency. As a result, each participant views the planning process as an ongoing collaborative effort that needs to be reassessed periodically. Many are already involved in projects with our agency. Several are members of our SUCCESS and Hardship Status Committees. A draft plan with proposed changes was sent to the Planning Committee in advance of a meeting held August 14, 2008. At the meeting, the committee members reviewed the draft plan and were given the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes and make recommended changes.

In addition, other groups were approached for ideas and feedback. Focus groups were held with Work First clients participating at Coastal Enterprises and Rising to Success class at CFCC to solicit their ideas. Suggestions were also solicited from the Work First staff. The plan was presented to the New Hanover County Board of Social Services for comments and approval at its meeting on September 2, 2008.

The New Hanover County Work First Plan for 2010-2011 was presented to the Board of County Commissioners for comments and approval on September 22, 2008.

III. Outcomes and Goals for the County

A. Statewide Work First Goals

The NC Division of Social Services, in consultation with the county department of social services and county board of commissioners, will establish acceptable levels of performance by counties in meeting the following six Work First goals:

1. Employment-Self sufficiency will be realized primarily through the employment of Work First clients. This is a goal the state will establish prior to the start of each fiscal year.

2. Meeting Federal Participation Rates-Active participation in federal countable work activities will lead to full time employment. The current TANF requirement is that 50% of all families participate in approved work related activities the required number of hours each week. The rate for two parent families where both are able to work is tracked as a subset of the overall participation rate and is currently set at

90%. The following are New Hanover County's work participation rates for the 12 calendar months August 2007 through July 2008.

	<u>All parent rate</u>	<u>Two Parent rate</u>
08/07	48.86%	no cases
09/07	46.32%	100%
10/07	38.10%	93.51%
11/07	47.62%	97.22%
12/07	37.78%	97.26%
01/08	43.21%	98.57%
02/08	36.76%	100%
03/08	39.68%	100%
04/08	45.16%	96.88%
05/08	40.35%	91.53%
06/08	40.68%	95.92%
07/08	49.28%	no cases

3. Providing Employment Services-Active participation in intensive employment services for all families is necessary in order to meet the participation rate and to ensure families are served adequately before the end of five years. One measure of success in Work First is the percentage of families who are subject to the work requirement that counties are assisting with job preparation and job placement. The state established goal is that we provide employment services to at least 80% of our single adult caseload and 100% of our two-parent caseload.

4. Staying Off Welfare-Efforts to reduce welfare rolls, help adults find jobs, and increase self-sufficiency are undermined when families return to welfare. Families leaving Work First because of a job are tracked to determine if they return to cash assistance. The state established goal is that 90% of the families who leave Work First due to earnings do not return to Work First rolls within one year.

5. Job Retention- Families who leave Work First for employment and continue to be employed 6 to 12 months after leaving the program show evidence of keeping their income and increased job stability, which impacts a family's well being. This measure will be based on the number of responsible adults that leave Work First Family Assistance for employment who are still employed at 6 and 12 month intervals following termination. The state established goal is to have a 60% employment retention rate for participants after 6 months off Work First and a 50% employment retention rate after 12 months off Work First.

6. Benefit Diversion- The most successful outcome possible for an applicant for public assistance is to avoid the need to become a recipient. This is also recognized in the federal law, which specifies diversion from public assistance as a desired

outcome. Use of Work First Diversion Assistance for a specified percentage or number of Work First applicants will be established by the state as a goal for each county prior to the start of each fiscal year.

B. County Developed Outcome Goals

New Hanover County DSS is actively involved in developing Leading By Results in our county. Statewide Work First goals 1 and 5 have been identified as top priorities among our indicators. Our county has identified additional indicators that will be directly impacted by our Work First Plan's activities and supportive services. They are (1) annual % of child support enforcement collection compared to support obligated; (2) annual % of persons potentially eligible for child care subsidy to go to work or school who receive subsidy; (3) annual unemployment rate in the county; (4) annual % of citizens able to access affordable transportation in the county.

IV. Plans to Achieve the Outcomes and Goals

A. Activities

The following activities are strategically designed to meet the six State-established goals for the Work First program, as well as our county's Leading By Results Indicators. Special emphasis is placed on increasing our work participation rate while ensuring that family centered services are provided to Work First applicants and recipients. The specific state goals targeted for each activity are noted in parentheses. We are not offering a work supplementation program.

Comprehensive Assessment Process

Reducing the number of people who need to apply for Work First is certainly the first step in reducing the caseload. Work First is just one of many tools used by the Prevention section during the intake process to assist families in crisis and empower these families to be full partners in developing services to meet their needs. Based on the premise that clients are the experts on their family needs and that everyone has strengths, they see one worker who assesses with the clients all their needs on the front end and pulls in appropriate resources from the agency and other community organizations. In this way, we are able to divert many individuals from ever becoming dependent on the Work First Program through the use of child care, transportation resources, Medicaid, Benefit Diversion, Emergency Assistance and referrals to Child Support Enforcement, CFLC and/or ESC. **(Benefit Diversion, Staying Off Welfare)**

Job Search/Job Readiness/Job Placement

We currently contract with Phoenix Employment Ministry to assist Work First clients with significant barriers to employment who are required to work in finding and retaining meaningful employment. In addition to providing a countable activity for meeting participation rate, the program offers intensive one on one job counseling,

emphasizing each individual's self worth, unique gifts and strengths, as well as working as a team of job hunters. Participants identify a specific job that the participant wants to pursue and are then taught how to find those job opportunities and how to market themselves successfully to obtain the job. The program also includes transportation to fill out applications and meet employers. Clients referred are those needing more intensive hands on assistance than what the DSS staff can provide. Phoenix provides written follow-up reports regarding the status of clients who have secured full time employment for one year. Clients are also referred to ESC's Job Link resource center to obtain assistance with resumes and other job search related activities. CFCC currently offers a month long Rising to Success course which covers basic computer literacy skills, assessment of assets and limitations, development of a positive self-concept, development of employability and problem-solving skills, and building awareness of the role of Information Technology in the 21st century. We will continue to promote the computer-based training programs offered by CFCC as part of their Rising to Success classes. The public library has computers available for public use and efforts will be made to link clients to this resource. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Benefit Diversion, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention)**

Increasing Child Support Orders and Collections for Work First Families

New Hanover County plans to increase child support orders and collections through our continued commitment to close collaboration with our local Child Support Enforcement Office. We will continue to support the partnership between the Child Support Enforcement Office, Civil Court and the Pre-release Trial program, to ensure that more defendants are released to work and continue child support.

Further Educational Opportunities

We currently have a successful partnership with Cape Fear Literacy Council to help improve the literacy skills of Work First participants to enhance their employability. We will continue to work with the WHA and CFCC to maintain GED classes at housing developments. Participants will be strongly encouraged to obtain a GED if they are not high school graduates. Every effort will be made to combine this with other countable components towards participation rate for adults. Teens will be encouraged to pursue this (or school attendance) as a stand-alone activity unless part-time employment appears feasible or is needed to maintain a budget. If a client expresses interest in obtaining a higher education degree, referrals will be made to the financial aid offices of CFCC and UNCW to receive information on financial support through Pell grants and scholarships. WHA residents will be given information on the availability of resident scholarships to the local colleges and universities. Work First clients who were former foster children will be referred to the DSS LINKS social worker to explore eligibility for educational opportunities as well as other services. If clients express interest in pursuing occupational skills training or additional training to enhance their goals of finding jobs that will allow them to achieve self sufficiency, referrals will be made to organizations providing short-term

technical education curriculums. Phoenix Employment Ministry maintains an active relationship with CFCC to enable Work First participants in the program to obtain their GED and pursue their college education while working part time. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention)**

Work Experience

Work experience activities will continue to be developed with private as well as public agencies. For example, we partner with Coastal Enterprises to provide work experience sites for some of our most difficult to serve Work First clients, which bolsters our participation rate. Coastal Enterprises provides direct supervision and progress reports to assist in evaluating job readiness or whether VR services might be indicated. We will also attempt to establish work experience sites at businesses that might be interested in hiring our clients with the assistance of ESC and the Chamber of Commerce. The businesses will also be informed of the WIA incentives to possibly enhance the participant's chances of becoming employed following a brief work experience placement. We have placed special emphasis on developing work experience opportunities that could lead to employment within New Hanover County governmental departments, including Property Management Department, the Health Department and DSS. We will also continue our collaboration with Rachel Freeman, a local elementary school which serves as a neighborhood school to numerous at risk children from the Creekwood Housing Project, in their efforts to engage and empower the parents of these students to be active partners in the educational process. By serving as a work experience site for Work First participants, the school has created a win, win situation for all involved. They build trust and rapport with the parents, which ultimately benefits the children, and it enables us to improve our participation rate and reinforces our family-centered approach to serving families. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Job Retention)**

On the Job Training

In partnership with ESC, we will intensify our efforts to provide On the Job Training (OJT) opportunities for Work First participants as a strategy to improve our work participation rate. Other potential partnerships will be pursued as well. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Job Retention)**

B. Supportive Services

All services indicated in Section 118 of the Work First Manual will be offered to participants. We will use block grant funds or other funding sources, as appropriate, to meet our needs. Some of these services are described in more detail as follows:

Case Management – Enhanced Assessment Process

On the date they apply for Work First, clients are given an appointment to attend a

comprehensive PowerPoint presentation that is offered daily. This outlines Work First requirements as well as available services and is designed to provide a better understanding of each of our roles and responsibilities in supporting participants' efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. Topics covered include the Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA), time limits, the family cap, the job search process, countable activities, sanctions, IV-D requirements and services, Medicaid, budgeting, Food Stamps, child care, Earned Income Tax Credit, housing, transportation, and family planning, etc. Clients then complete the Personal Information Form (PIF) before they leave and are given an appointment to see a Prevention worker within the week. At their first meeting with the worker, a partnership is established through a comprehensive assessment process with the client that focuses on client strengths and tailor-making plans for participation in countable activities. Our enhanced system will include examining some options in more depth and devising long and short-term family-focused goals. For example, information on area organizations that provide specific training programs and possible financial aid, including ESC/Job Link, CFCC, NHCCA, WHA, CFLC, etc. will be distributed and persons will be encouraged to pursue these options. Specific contact persons have been identified at CFCC and NHCCA so that clients can determine if their needs can be better met with a package consisting of educational financial aid, work-study programs, WIA assistance and non cash DSS services such as Medicaid, assistance with child care costs, etc. If appropriate, contact will be made with community partners after employment so that persons can receive support to move from minimum wage to a longer range goal of financial self sufficiency.

In-Depth Evaluation/Coordination of Mental Health Services

For clients who state that they have a disability or other incapacity and are not receiving SSI or SSDI, a functional capacity evaluation (FCE) will be conducted by appropriate professionals in the community to determine the client's ability to perform work from a physical, medical behavioral or mental perspective. One result from the FCE is a finding that the client has no capacity for work, and this finding assists in the SSI or SSDI application process. An alternative finding is that the client has full or limited work capacity, which enables the social worker and client to update the client's MRA Plan of Action to incorporate work activities based on the FCE results. For clients who are having difficulty obtaining employment but want employment, or who appear to be making no progress toward developing and or adhering to a plan for achieving self-sufficiency at the end of a reasonable period of time, a vocational assessment (VA) will be conducted. The VA provides such procedures as psychological and academic testing, observations, interviewing, dexterity and motor skills tests. Additionally, this process will include requesting and reviewing school records. Decisions regarding future service plans will be made once the results of these tests can be evaluated. Based on the results of these tests, appropriate referrals will be made, for example, to VR. Mental health issues are a significant barrier to employment and affect clients in our caseload to varying degrees. We will continue to use a variety of resources to address this through private providers identified by SEC as the Local Managing Authority (LME). This

includes streamlining procedures for referring clients to be seen by a professional immediately if the worker has serious concerns about the individual's behavior or emotional state; or for seeing clients as quickly as possible to evaluate and/or treat them based on information revealed during an assessment. We will continue to use the "Emotional Health Inventory" (EHI) when necessary. All of these providers offer evaluations, psychological testing, and various treatment options, including individual and family counseling, anger management consulting and parent effectiveness training. Following the assessment, the providers will provide feedback, and their recommendations will be taken into consideration in the development of service plans with participants.

Coordination/Advocacy - DSS and WHA

Finding safe and affordable housing is a critical issue for our participants and can affect their ability to function effectively on the job. As a result, we will maintain our partnership with the WHA by having quarterly meetings with supervisory staff and retaining an open line of communication to give us a better understanding of our respective requirements and constraints.

Child Care

These services are currently offered to individuals who meet certain criteria regardless of whether or not they receive Work First. See Item V.D. below for a detailed description of how we prioritize these services. We will work with Smart Start of New Hanover County to investigate ways to address our community's shortage of quality child care for infants and for non-traditional schedules.

Work-Related Expenses/Participation Expenses

Assistance is provided with the purchase of equipment, tools, uniforms, registration fees, etc. as deemed appropriate. In addition, car repairs are also considered if the client needs a vehicle for employment, the expense is within an allowable range, the vehicle will be considered road-worthy following the repair, and funding for the repair cannot be secured from an alternate funding source.

Transportation

Assistance with transportation costs is provided to clients while they are on Work First and for four months following case closure. See Item V.E. below for a detailed description of these services.

Collaboration with Domestic Violence Shelter and Services, Inc.

Violence within the family is also recognized as a major barrier to self-sufficiency. See Item V.G. below for a detailed description of our arrangement with the Domestic Violence Shelter and Services, Inc. for coordinating and providing these services.

Coordinated Services with SEC for Substance Abuse Screening and Treatment

DSS recognizes the barrier to self-sufficiency created by substance dependence and abuse in the family. See Item V. F. below for a detailed description of how these

services are coordinated.

Job Coaching/Adult Mentoring Services

We will continue to partner with NHCCA, Phoenix Employment Ministry, Coastal Enterprises, WHA, VR, Christian Women's Job Corp and members of the faith community to enhance the system currently in place to provide these services.

Health Support Services

A Registered Nurse from the NHCHD is available to meet individually with clients upon request and arranges ongoing family planning and other services as warranted. In addition, Prevention workers discuss service plans with the Health Department's Maternity Care and Child Services' Coordinators for our mutual clients and assist in arranging for other medical care when needed.

Employment/Case Management Follow-Up

Phoenix Employment Ministry will contact Work First clients and employers monthly after the original placement to assess how the employee is doing and if anything needs to be done to improve the transition from Work First to employment. Furthermore, our prevention social workers who provide our employment services provide family-centered follow-up services for four months after termination of cash assistance in an effort to address problems that could impede job performance. Information gathered will be evaluated and acted on to improve the employment opportunities and the retention rate of our clients.

Prevention Services for Work First Children

Our efforts to promote self-sufficiency extend beyond the adult Work First clients with whom we work closely. Using a family centered approach to address the well-being and self-sufficiency issues of the next generation, the prevention social workers educate Work First parents about available resources and help them enroll their children in programs that will be beneficial, such as after school enrichment and tutoring programs. We are also targeting our child only cases for prevention services. Many of these children have been abused or neglected and are at risk of repeat maltreatment and long term welfare dependency. We are prioritizing children who have been victims in multiple CPS reports and are in the 10 to 15 age range. This is the age range when the behaviors of children become especially challenging and our goal is to intervene and offer help before the relative caretakers decide they can no longer care for these children. In addition, relative caretakers are linked with support groups coordinated by the Child Advocacy Commission.

V. Administration

A. Authority

The program is administered in New Hanover County by the Department of Social Services.

B. Organization

With the implementation of the Multiple Response System (MRS) at the end of February 2004, the New Hanover County Department of Social Services made major organizational changes designed to maximize our social work resources, build a closer collaboration between Work First and child welfare, and create an agency that is family-centered, strength-based and solution-focused. This family centered approach empowers families, making them key participants in developing services and demonstrates our commitment to the six principles of partnerships which are:

1. Everyone desires respect;
2. Everyone needs to be heard;
3. Everyone has strengths;
4. Judgments can wait;
5. Partners share power;
6. Partnership is a process;

To achieve these goals, we established a new section of the Social Work Division, Prevention. The Prevention section is responsible for Work First Intake and eligibility determination, Work First cash assistance, Work First employment services, At Risk Case Management and Individual and Family Adjustment services. The social workers have all been trained in MRS, the family-centered and strength-based model and core training for child welfare services, in addition to Work First eligibility and employment services. Thus, if a protective services report is received on one of the Prevention social worker's open cases, and it is a neglect report, that worker conducts the MRS family assessment and provides the services recommended or services needed once the case decision is made, which reinforces the concept of one family, one worker. Abuse reports are referred to Child Protective Services for a traditional forensic investigation. To reinforce the family centered, strength-based concepts and enhance their skills in this area, the prevention social workers participate in Strength-based groups developed in partnership with UNC-W and facilitated by an experienced social work supervisor from the Prevention section.

With this organization, Work First is just one of many tools used by the Prevention section to assist families in need. When clients come in to apply for assistance, they see a worker in this section who assesses with the clients all of the clients' needs on the front end and pulls in appropriate resources from the agency and other community organizations. In this way, we are able to divert many clients from ever becoming dependent on the Work First Program through the use of Benefit Diversion, Emergency Assistance (or other discretionary funds as appropriate), child care, transportation resources, Medicaid, problem-solving/advocacy services or a referral to ESC, CFLC and/or Child Support Enforcement.

If clients choose to apply for Work First, they are scheduled to attend our Work First orientation offered daily. They are assigned to a Prevention Social Worker at this

orientation and given an appointment for completion of the assessment while the application is still pending.

If approved for Work First, the Prevention social worker maintains both the eligibility and employment services portions of the case. They have access to all the agency resources, i.e., child care, transportation, Emergency Assistance, County General Assistance, Medicaid, etc. as well as outside resources to help the client develop and execute a self-sufficiency plan. They immediately begin working with the client once the case is assigned and are sometimes able to divert applicants if other options are identified. They serve as case managers for these participants while they are on Work First, including, sharing information with the child care, Medicaid and Food Stamp units. Following the termination of cash assistance, the client remains with the same social worker for four months of follow-up services, including child care and transportation.

A disproportionately high number of our work eligible clients are F coded clients, i.e. individuals who are incapacitated or unable to participate in countable activities, which negatively impacts our participation rate. These complex cases in which clients are not readily employable are referred to a prevention worker designated as our F code specialist. This social worker utilizes the resources noted above, as well as works more extensively with the client and with certain agencies including DVSS, SEC, VR, Social Security, Phoenix Employment Ministry and Coastal Enterprises, etc. to eliminate barriers and help clients develop self-sufficiency plans, including establishing disability benefits when appropriate.

In keeping with the American Disabilities Act (ADA) and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the New Hanover County Department of Social Services (DSS) does not discriminate or deny services based on race, creed, gender, language, sexual orientation or disability. DSS contracts with the Language Line for a telephone interpreter to assist with all competency assessment needs. Language interpreter services are provided free of charge to Limited English Proficient (LEP) individuals. Bilingual staff throughout the agency are available to assist clients as well.

Our Work First program will ensure equal access and provide reasonable accommodations to individuals with disabilities as outlined in the Work First manual Section 117. Individuals with disabilities will receive individualized treatment, i.e. treated on a case by case basis and not on stereotypes and generalizations. Further, individuals with disabilities will be afforded the opportunity to benefit from Work First in the same manner as those individuals who do not have disabilities.

C. First Stop

According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the New Hanover County Department of Social Services and ESC, ESC will provide First Stop registration at the ESC office. An important strategy in our securing employment for

Work First clients is our relationship with ESC. They not only register applicants for First Stop, but take and process applications for Unemployment Insurance Benefits (UIB), when applicable, inform potential employers of incentives for hiring Work First clients through the Workforce Investment Act and complete any required paperwork for WIA programs. DSS is an active partner with the One Stop/Job Link Center.

A copy of the MOU is attached.

D. Child Care

When the availability of Child Care funding is less than the amount needed to serve all eligible children, New Hanover County DSS will prioritize the order in which funds will be expended as follows:

- 1) Children who need child care assistance to support child protective services.
- 2) Children of mandatory Work First recipients or Benefit Diversion clients who need child care in order to maintain employment, participate in job search or job training programs.
- 3) Children placed with foster parents who need child day care in order to maintain employment.
- 4) Children whose parents, or other adults responsible for the care of the child need child day care in order to maintain employment.
- 5) Children whose parents, foster parents, or other adults responsible for the care of the child need child day care to attend school or job training activities that lead to employment.
 - a. Foster parents
 - b. Teen parents attending high school or its equivalent
 - c. Adults participating in GED or ABED programs (6 months maximum)
 - d. Parents or responsible adults who are enrolled in a post-secondary education training (maximum of 2 year enrollment)
- 6) Children who receive Child Welfare Services and whose families need child day care assistance to prevent or remedy problems that may result in the neglect or abuse of children, to prevent foster care placement, to support family reunification, and to provide support in times of crisis.
- 7) Children who need child day care to meet developmental needs whose emotional, cognitive, social or physical development is delayed or at risk of delay.
- 8) Children over the age of ten who are not documented special needs and not

receiving care in second or third shifts.

- 9) Children in relative placements with the exception of children receiving care in second or third shifts.

We also have a "Share the Care" program that is a public/private collaboration of Smart Start of New Hanover County, the DSS, private child care providers and the general community. The intent is to locate alternate sources of funding to address the growing needs for assistance with child care costs for low income families.

E. Transportation

New Hanover County DSS coordinates its employment transportation needs through the local public transportation provider, Wave Transit. Since its inception in July 2004, Wave Transit has provided both fixed route and paratransit services to low-income, disabled and elderly persons, as well as the general public. DSS has a MOA with Wave Transit to coordinate employment transportation for all eligible Work First recipients using Wave Transit services or other providers, if determined to be more cost effective.

Wave Transit increased its regional transportation options to include both the Brunswick County and Columbus County Connectors. The Columbus County Connector, however, ended in June 2008 due to insufficient funding. As of April 2008, Wave Transit restructured fixed bus routes to expand access throughout a greater portion of New Hanover County. This restructuring will allow Work First participants access to a larger number of employment opportunities located throughout New Hanover County.

New Hanover County DSS also provides reimbursement to Work First clients who provide their own transportation to countable activities and work sites.

The amount of funds from our Work First Block Grant allocated for transportation services for FY09 is \$75,000.

F. Substance Abuse Services

The New Hanover County Department of Social Services recognizes the barrier to self-sufficiency created by substance dependence and abuse in the family. All applicants for Work First Financial Assistance are screened for substance abuse. A positive screen automatically generates a referral to the Qualified Professional in Substance Abuse (QPSA) located at the DSS. The client is also asked to sign a standardized consent form so that pertinent information can be shared between DSS and private providers. In addition, if a recipient is not referred as a result of the screening, but a worker identifies certain "behavioral indicators" that could reflect substance abuse problems, a referral is made to the QPSA for further evaluation.

Since September 25, 2006, SEC as the LME, has contracted with East Coast Solutions to provide DSS with QPSA services.

The QPSA provides an in-depth, on site assessment to clients potentially in need of substance abuse services using the federal Substance Use Disorders Diagnostic Schedule (SUDDS) evaluation. When chemical dependence is indicated, she refers clients for inpatient or out patient long-term treatment programs. Once they are in these treatment programs, random drug tests are required. The QPSA monitors continued compliance with a treatment plan and notifies the DSS staff accordingly as to her findings. In addition, she attends staffings to review Work First cases in which the recipient has used at least 30 months of TANF benefits; attends staffings for recipients who have exhausted 15 or more months of the State's 24 month time limit; serves as a resource for workers who have questions or concerns about clients whom they feel may need to be evaluated for substance abuse and/or mental health problems and provides periodic training sessions for DSS staff.

Our agency strictly adheres to State policy in regard to applicants/recipients who refuse to be screened, evaluated or follow through with treatment plans. Action is taken to deny benefits, apply sanctions or reduce benefits and appoint a Protective Payee in these situations as appropriate. In addition, anytime substance abuse is suspected in a household with children and the parent refuses screening and/or treatment, a protective services report is made.

Our Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the DSS, SEC and East Coast Solutions expresses our intent to reduce substance abuse related barriers to employment for current Work First applicants/recipients and for Food Stamp applicants convicted of a class H or I substance abuse felony offense, and includes evaluation of clients for whom an investigative assessment resulted in a substantiation of abuse, neglect and/or dependency, and substance abuse was identified as one of the reasons the child was maltreated. The MOA spells out the responsibilities of each agency. Some of these have already been addressed in this narrative. Broadly speaking, under the terms of the MOA, the QPSA is to provide on site assessment and referral to recipients in need of substance abuse services, to share in the responsibility of screening applicants and recipients, to provide prevention or treatment services for the recipients' children, and to provide a care coordination plan and case management for the recipient while in treatment. The DSS agrees to do the initial screening, utilize a standardized consent form and develop a case plan that will coordinate services needed to ensure compliance, including assistance with arranging and paying for transportation and child care as appropriate.

The screening and follow up assessment by the onsite QPSA has proven to be very effective in terms of identifying those with dependence on alcohol and drugs, in accessing treatment for them, and in terms of costs. In light of the strides made in the area of substance abuse treatment, the QPSA has also been used as a resource to

assist clients who need to be evaluated for mental health services and acts as a liaison between DSS and mental health providers in this area when necessary.

A copy of the MOA is attached.

G. Family Violence Option

Violence within the family is also recognized as a major barrier to self-sufficiency. At intake and at scheduled Work First reviews, the Prevention social worker notifies applicants/recipients at the end of the interview of their right to claim an exemption from work requirements under the Family Violence Option. If clients indicate they wish to speak with someone further about family violence, the worker calls DVSS and schedules an appointment. Although the Prevention social worker arranges for appropriate services for the client, compliance with employment requirements is not addressed until the Family Violence Assessment is returned from DVSS. The Social Worker then develops a plan of action with the client, incorporating the recommendations of the DVSS personnel. This may include waiving some, all or none of the work requirements and arranging necessary services.

Our agency has an extremely congenial relationship with our local shelter, which has enabled us to help participants who are victims of domestic violence more effectively.

H. Maintenance of Effort (MOE)

The following activities, staff, and services will be funded using Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds:

Activities: Contractual agreements with Phoenix Employment Ministry for finding and maintaining meaningful employment, ADR Center for Child and Family Team facilitation of TANF eligible families, and Methodist Home for Children for Reunification and Family Preservation services for TANF eligible children and families

Staff: Prevention Social Workers; CPS and CWS Social Workers; Child Care; Administrative Support and Managerial staff

Services: Transportation, Emergency Assistance, Child Care and Employment Financial Assistance

I. Child Welfare Services

We will devote approximately \$1,300,000 of our Work First Block Grant to Child Welfare Services.

VI. Emergency Assistance

Clients are assessed for Emergency Assistance as a part of an overall problem solving and

planning process with the clients to enable them to be self-sufficient. This aid might be appropriate for families suffering temporary economic setbacks or whose lives are in a state of crisis due to medical/psychological problems, family violence, sudden loss of employment, inability to obtain or retain suitable housing without some support, etc. The following guidelines apply:

- A. The family must have a child who lives with a relative as defined for Work First cash assistance and who meets the age limit for WFFA.
- B. Total gross family income must be at or below 200% of federal poverty level.
- C. Family members must meet the same citizenship requirements as for WFFA.
- D. Assistance may not be provided for any medical care, regardless of whether the participant is covered by Medicaid.
- E. Only short-term assistance may be provided. This is defined as nonrecurring, short term benefits designed to deal with a specific episode of need; is not intended to meet recurring or ongoing needs; and not extending beyond four months (e.g. payment of rent, mortgage, utility deposits/expenses to avoid loss of housing or essential services; temporary emergency shelter costs; repair/replacement of household items lost due to a fire; etc.
- F. The annual benefit amount will not exceed \$300.00 per family per fiscal year.

Currently there is \$50,000 included in the FY09 budget for TANF Emergency Assistance.

VII. Services to Low Income Families (Under 200% of Poverty)

New Hanover County is currently serving all Work First parents who are subject to the work requirements. We are providing follow-up and retention services for four months for former Work First recipients and Benefit Diversion clients. We will also continue to provide services to families with income at or below 200% of the poverty level through our prevention services section.

Services may include problem solving, case management, counseling, job search, job readiness, work-related expenses, transportation and child care. Other allowable services such as parenting skills will be provided on a referral basis. We also have access to state and county emergency assistance funds to assist these families, as well as funding from the local Good Friends organization and the faith community.

The amount of funds from our Work First Block Grant declared for low income families under 200% of the poverty level threshold is an estimated \$120,000.

VIII. Services to Non-Custodial Parents

New Hanover County will not provide employment related services to non-custodial parents using Work First Block Grant funds. However, we will emphasize responsible fatherhood and increased participation by non-custodial fathers and will certainly support any community initiatives in this area. For example, we co-sponsored our second annual

Fatherhood Conference in June 2008 with Lincs, Inc., NHCCA, New Hanover Child Support Enforcement, DVSS, Community in Schools, the NC Division of Social Services and several faith based organizations. Entitled "Fatherhood, the Hope and the Future," the conference focused on the gang awareness and legal and child support issues. Wilmington Health Access for Teens brought in some teens to share experiences from the Synergy Peer Health Educators program. The program was well received by over 60 attendees from the community.

IX. Exemption from the Work Requirement

Single custodial parents with a child under age three months will be exempt from the work requirement. If a single custodial parent with a child under age three months is in need of services, we will provide case management utilizing other resources available in the agency and community. We strongly encourage all parents to attend a Work First orientation session, regardless of the age of the child.

OPTIONAL PLAN ELEMENTS

X. Innovative County Strategies

We believe our most innovative strategies are our re-organization in conjunction with the implementation of MRS to bring about a more family-centered agency, a closer collaboration between Work First and child welfare services, which is also one of the seven MRS strategies identified by the state, as well as our prevention focus, particularly with our child only cases, and the strength-based groups we offer staff for skill-building in strength-based practice. These are described in more detail in section II B. and V.B.

Additionally, we were awarded a Work First Demonstration grant to boost the county's participation rate beginning in SFY 06/07 and are currently in our third and final year which will end May 31, 2009. One of our most successful grant funded strategies is our expanded child care program which has provided child care subsidy to Work First participants with children aged three months to 12 months to enable them to participate in countable activities leading to employment and to obtain employment. During SFY 07/08, this group of participants met the participation rate each month, with a rate ranging from 50% in September to 100% in both November and December. Because of the success of this strategy in impacting participation rate, as specified in section IX, we will incorporate this strategy into our 2010/2011 Work First plan and only exempt participants with children less than three months of age from the work requirements.

Furthermore, we are one of several demonstration grant counties selected to possibly implement a pay for performance strategy for our final grant year, which should improve our participation rate. Pay for performance is true "work first," in that all Work First clients who are receiving Work First cash assistance at the time of implementation and who are not exempt from participation, will receive their check after they complete the required hours as identified in their Mutual Responsibility Agreement Plan of Action. During the first month of their pay for performance, the family will receive a transition check equal to their Work

First check. Because of the anticipated success of this strategy in impacting participation rate, we will explore with the NC Division of Social Services options for continuing this practice as part of our 2010/2011 Work First plan, once the demonstration grant ends May 31, 2009.

XI. Special Issues

Substance abuse is a serious problem due to the density and urban nature of New Hanover County. Due to insufficient mental health resources, we are seeing an increasing proportion of our work mandatory persons identified as F code clients or persons unable to work due to health or mental health issues.

New Hanover is a coastal community and as such is very susceptible to hurricanes. When we are hit by a hurricane, staff throughout the agency are pulled from their normal functions to handle the disaster. Typically we must staff shelters for some time after the agency reopens. Large numbers of citizens normally not receiving any assistance from the county are thrown into economic situations that require assistance. Staff operates the Disaster Food Stamp program and sees a high volume of clients for financial help and problem solving/advocacy. At times we have had to operate one or more Disaster Relief Fund programs as well.

Being a coastal community also affects job opportunities in the county. As a tourist community, a significant number of available jobs are minimum wage at entry level, most without benefits. Our challenge is to assist Work First recipients in obtaining jobs with higher wages and benefits sufficient to meet the basic cost of living which, in New Hanover County, is higher than any other area in the state.

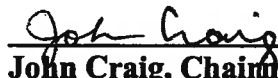
Items XII. through XVI. apply only to Electing Counties. Since we are a Standard County, these areas have not been addressed.

XVII. Certification

This plan was adopted by the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners on the 22nd day of September 2008.



**Robert G. Greer, Chairman
New Hanover County
Board of Commissioners**



**John Craig, Chairman
New Hanover County
Board of Social Services**



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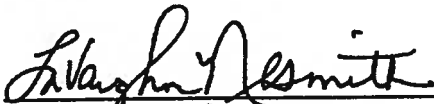
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

NEW HANOVER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES AND
EMPLOYMENT SECURITY COMMISSION
OF NORTH CAROLINA

FIRST STOP EMPLOYMENT

Pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 108-A-29(a), the undersigned parties hereby acknowledge that effective July 1, 2008 through June 30, 2009, the point of registration in New Hanover County for the First Stop Employment Assistance Program administered by the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina shall be in the offices of the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina located as set forth below.

Employment Security Commission of North Carolina
717 Market St.
Wilmington, NC 28401



LaVaughn Nesmith, Director
New Hanover County Department of Social Services
Date: 06-16-08



Walker Biggs, Director
Employment Security Commission
Of North Carolina
Date: 6-18-08



Approved as to form/County Attorney

ORIGINAL

MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT
NEW HANOVER COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
AND
SOUTHEASTERN MH/DD/SA Area Program/LME
AND
EAST COAST SOLUTIONS

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This Memorandum of Agreement is entered into and by the New Hanover County Department of Social Services, hereinafter called the Department, and the Southeastern Center LME MH/DD/SA Program, hereinafter called the Area Program/LME and the East Coast Solutions, hereinafter called the Provider.

MISSION:

The Work First/Child Protective Services/Substance Abuse (WF/CPS/SA) Initiative provides early identification of a substance abuse disorder(s) or a mental illness that will affect the WF/CPS consumer's ability to secure and maintain employment through screening (AUDIT, DAST-10 and Behavior Observation Checklist), assessment (SUDDS IV), and referral and case management services to the eligible populations to be served. The WF/CPS/SA Initiative also facilitates substance abuse services and mental health services to parents and caretakers of children, where there has been substantiated child abuse, neglect and/or dependency, in order to better assure the safety, permanence and well being of children. The services for WF/CPS/SA-involved families provided under this Agreement are assessment, referral and case management. Responsibilities also include collaboration to ensure that barriers to receiving treatment are addressed and that the requirements of G.S. 108A-25.2 and G.S. 108A-29.1 (Appendix A) are adhered to, case consultation, follow-up, training with local Department staff and other activities approved by the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services (MH/DD/SAS).

ELIGIBLE POPULATIONS TO BE SERVED:

The eligible populations to be served are as follows:

- a. Work First applicants and recipients
- b. Class H or I Controlled Substance Felons applying for Work First assistance and/or food stamps
- c. Families with income at or below 200% of federal poverty guidelines (The eligibility status of this population is based on inclusion of this population in the county Work First Plan)
- d. Parent(s)/caretakers who have a substantiated or in need of services finding that involves substance abuse

Child Protective Services encompasses the provision of specialized services for maltreated children or those who are at risk of harm. Services are aimed at strengthening family life by supporting and improving parental/caretaker responsibility that, in turn, assures for each child a safe, nurturing home. Services focus on prevention and rehabilitation and are directed toward identifying and changing the cause of the maltreating behavior. This is accomplished through

parent/caretaker cooperation and consent or, in the event that conditions pose serious issues for the child's safety, through the agency petitioning for court intervention.

This Memorandum of Agreement with the Department of Social Services establishes procedures surrounding the services of a Work First/Child Protective Services Qualified Professional in Substance Abuse (WF/CPS QP in Substance Abuse). Its purpose is to facilitate appropriate substance abuse services and mental health services to parents and caretakers of children in order to better assure the safety, permanence and well being of children, when there has been substantiated child abuse, neglect and/or dependency or when the need for CPS services has been identified and substance abuse or mental illness has been a factor in the maltreatment.

Substance abuse and mental health issues are significant barriers to employment for the number of adult Work First participants. To assist these families in becoming employed and maintaining employment, all Work First adult applicants/recipients will be screened for possible substance abuse (See Section II. Below), and they may be voluntarily screened for mental health (See Section VIII. Below). Families with incomes at or below 200% of poverty may also volunteer to be screened for mental health, or substance abuse.

If the screening indicates the adult is at risk for substance abuse, he/she will be referred to a Qualified Substance Abuse Professional (QP in Substance Abuse) or other qualified staff. The QP in Substance Abuse will conduct a comprehensive substance abuse assessment. If treatment is appropriate, the QP in Substance Abuse will facilitate the arrangements for the treatment. Applicants/recipients who do not comply with their treatment plan are not eligible for Work First cash assistance.

The responsibilities of the above two agencies in meeting the objectives are as follows:

THE DEPARTMENT AGREES TO:

- Explain to the consumer the nature of the QP in Substance Abuse assessment and the services provided by the QP in Substance Abuse. Secure the signature on the approved Release of Confidential Information Form when the consumer consents to the referral. Explain the type of information to be disclosed and ensure that the consumer initials each category of information he/she is willing to have the QP in Substance Abuse disclose.
- Screen all initial Work First applicants for possible substance abuse or dependence and mental illness using the designated screening tools.
- Refer appropriate Work First applicants to the QP in Substance Abuse for further substance abuse assessment/evaluation or a mental health assessment.
- Refer (accompanied with the Release of Confidential Information Form) all parents/caretakers of children who have been determined to be in need of child protective services to the QP in Substance Abuse within thirty (30) days and after to the case decision, and incorporate the referral into the Family Service Agreement.
- Arrange for child care and transportation for consumers of children receiving substance abuse services.
- Provide background information (child protective services involvement, Family Strengths and Needs Assessment and Family Assessment, and the status of any services that may be recommended) about the case that will enable the Area Program staff to sufficiently conduct a substance abuse assessment or a mental health assessment and make recommendations.

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- Collaborate with the QP in Substance Abuse assigned to the consumer to develop care coordination plans and to support the provision of care coordination and case management/case support services to access services recommended by the Area Program, when indicated.
- Include substance abuse treatment or mental health treatment recommendations in the Family Services Agreement.
- Inform the QP in Substance Abuse of actions or sanctions to be imposed when Work First recipients do not keep scheduled appointments.
- Notify Work First recipients as soon as possible when he/she has failed to comply with his/her care coordination plan.
- Inform and coordinate with QP in Substance Abuse when a Work First recipient is to be placed in a "protective pay" status.
- Designate a staff person to serve as liaison under this Memorandum of Agreement.

THE AREA PROGRAM/LME AND THE CONTRACT PROVIDER AGREE TO:

- Arrange for an appointment for eligible consumers to have a substance abuse assessment or a mental health assessment by the QP in Substance Abuse.
- Provide further substance abuse assessment/evaluation or mental health evaluations for Work First consumers as needed.
- Administer the substance abuse assessment or mental health assessment to parents/caretakers of children who have been determined to be in need of child protective services and determine if there is a substance abuse or dependency diagnosis or a mental illness disorder using the identified diagnostic tool (the Substance Use Disorder Diagnostic Schedule ((SUDDS-IV Assessment Tool)) or the DSM-IV).
- Refer consumers for substance abuse treatment or mental illness treatment when the assessment indicates medical necessity criteria for substance abuse services or mental health services are met.
- Authorize the appropriate level of substance abuse treatment or mental health treatment as recommended by the QP in Substance Abuse
- Provide care coordination and case management/case support services for the consumer receiving substance abuse services or mental health services including:
 - Tracking the provision of consumer/client services;
 - Following up with treatment providers;
 - Reporting to the Department's staff information that relates to the individual's treatment plan;
 - Participating in interagency staffing with the Department's staff;
 - Acting as liaison between treatment providers and the Department
 - Provide outreach to engage families in treatment;
 - Provide substance abuse training and mental health training to the WF/CPS staff by the QP in Substance Abuse.

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THE DEPARTMENT AND THE AREA PROGRAM/LME THROUGH THE PROVIDER JOINTLY AGREE TO:

- Develop a plan for current Work First recipients, applicants, and Work First and Food Stamp applicants convicted of Class H or I substance abuse felony offenses to access substance abuse, mental health and developmental disabilities services.
- Utilize the screening tools identified by DME/DD/SAS and the SUDDS IV and AUDIT/DAST/Behavior Observation Checklist or DSM IV assessment tools. (QP in Substance Abuse may use additional screening tools when necessary to ensure accurate referrals to appropriate level of care.)
- Confer about treatment recommendations when the assessment results in a diagnosis of substance abuse or dependency or mental illness.
- Provide ongoing collaboration and consultation regarding decision affecting substance abuse treatment outcomes or mental illness outcomes and/or child safety.
- Arrange for appointments for the consumer and coordinate planning for child care and transportation.
- Inform the consumer about the method of payment for substance abuse treatment or mental health treatment in the event the consumer must bear any of the cost.
- Maintain regular contact on how the consumer is progressing in treatment.
- Utilize the standardized consent form to facilitate confidentiality as provided by the State Division of Social Services.
- Arrange ongoing cross training for staff of both agencies.
- Develop a reporting system of non-compliance by consumers.
- QP in Substance Abuse will attend all appropriate collaborative meetings including Success Council.
- Support collection and provide data for outcomes and program evaluation.
- Track consumers assessed, where they attend treatment and send updated list to LME contact with quarterly report.
- Forward to the service provider a copy of the clients SUDDS IV and comprehensive clinical assessment for their record.
- Abide by confidentiality regulations as set forth by State Division of Social Services or NC Division of MH/DD/SAS as well as Federal regulations.

TERMS OF THIS AGREEMENT:

The term of this Agreement shall commence on the date hereof and shall be renewed prior to the beginning of each State fiscal year.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, each Party has caused this Contract to be executed in multiple copies, each of which shall be deemed an original, as the act of said Party. Each individual signing below warrants he/she is duly authorized by the Party to sign this Contract and to bind the Party to the terms and conditions of this Contract.

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New Hanover County Department of Social Services:

Stephen N. Smith 07-02-08
Director Date

East Coast Solutions:

Jane E. Allen 07.22.08
Director Date

Local Management Entity:
Southeastern Center

William J. Carter 8/15/08
Area Director Date

Per G.S. 159-28, this instrument has been pre-audited in the manner required by the Local Government Budget and Fiscal Control Act.

Vicki Steele 8/15/08
Vicki Steele, Deputy Director Date

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