

DRAFT

**New Hanover County
2003-2005 Work First Plan**

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Contact Person:

**Karen Vincent, Interim Director
New Hanover County Department of Social Services
1650 Greenfield Street
Post Office Drawer 1559
Wilmington, NC 28402
(910) 341-4712
(910) 341-4022 FAX
kvincent@nhcgov.com**

New Hanover County

**2003-2005 Work First Plan
Table of Contents**

	Page
Executive Summary	4
I. Conditions within the County	7
II. Planning Process	8
A. Planning Committee	8
B. Public Comment	9
C. Planning Process	9
III. Outcomes and Goals for the County	10
A. Statewide Work First Goals	10
1. Employment	10
2. Meeting Federal Participation Rates	10
3. Providing Employment Services	10
4. Benefit Diversion	10
5. Staying Off Welfare	10
6. Child Support	11
7. Job Retention	11
8. Caseload Reduction	11
B. County Developed Outcome and Goals	11
IV. Plans to Achieve the Outcomes and Goals	11
A. Activities	11
B. Supportive Services	14
V. Administration	18
A. Authority	18
B. Organization	18

C.	First Stop	19
D.	Child Care	20
E.	Transportation	21
F.	Substance Abuse Services	23
G.	Family Violence Option	24
H.	Maintenance of Effort (MOE)	24
I.	Child Welfare Services	25
VI.	Emergency Assistance	25
VII.	Services to Low Income Families (under 200% of Poverty)	25
VIII.	Services to Non-Custodial Parents	26
IX.	Exemption from the Work Requirement	26
OPTIONAL PLAN ELEMENTS		
X.	Innovative County Strategies	26
XI.	Special Issues	26
REQUIRED FOR ELECTING COUNTIES – Items XII. Through XVI.		27
REQUIRED FOR ALL COUNTIES		
XVII.	Certification	27

Attachment: Memorandum of Understanding - Employment Security Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NEW HANOVER COUNTY 2003-2005 WORK FIRST PLAN

The New Hanover County 2003-2005 Work First Plan was developed by a committee appointed by the New Hanover County Board of County Commissioners and comprised of representatives of human service organizations and the community.

GOALS

The goals developed by the North Carolina Department of Social Services include:

1. Employment
2. Meeting Federal Participation Rates
3. Providing Employment Services
4. Benefit Diversion
5. Staying Off Welfare
6. Child Support
7. Job Retention
8. Caseload Reduction

ACTIVITIES

Activities proposed to assist New Hanover County in meeting these goals include:

- Comprehensive Assessment Process - Thorough up-front assessment to determine if some applicants= needs can be addressed through other resources including but not limited to child care, transportation, emergency financial assistance, benefit diversion and/or referral to other agencies, including educational institutions.
- On-Site ESC Interviewers- To provide employment location assistance to Work First clients and other families with income at or below 200% of poverty level.
- Job Readiness Programs Utilizing Existing Resources - To promote adequate job readiness skills that meet the needs of participants, referring agencies and the business community through resources of Cape Fear Community College.
- Short Term Training - In curricula identified by DSS, Cape Fear Community College, ESC, the Workforce Development Board, the WHA, NHCCA and the Chamber of Commerce which can provide skills that may lead to better paying jobs, including those identified as non-traditional for women.
- Educational Program for Parents - Including information on how to be a working parent, child care and child development issues and preparing for the world of work in a short term Community Service program offered by Cape Fear Community College and developed with the assistance of the New Hanover County Partnership for Children and the New Hanover County Health Department.
- On-Site GED - For persons to work on obtaining a GED at employer-based locations and at housing developments.
- Computer Based Training - Offered through Cape Fear CC at the ESC Office.
- Work Experience at Private Businesses – As an incentive to give our clients a chance at

possibly finding employment at businesses that have openings. Will be paired with WIA programs so that businesses could potentially minimize their costs and our clients could be considered for better jobs.

- Fatherhood Initiative - Exploring possible combined effort on the part of New Hanover County Community Action, the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and the New Hanover County Child Support Office to offer support and information to non-custodial parents regarding their rights and responsibilities, available training and job placement opportunities.

SERVICES

The following services will be offered to participants to help them achieve self-sufficiency:

- Case Management – Enhanced Assessment Process - Through the distribution of more information throughout the assessment process on requirements and services, including providing specific contact persons at the HRD program and at New Hanover County Community Action who can supply details to interested clients.
- In-depth Evaluation – For clients who appear to be making no progress toward developing a plan at the end of a reasonable period of time, a thorough evaluation will be considered of academic, medical, psychological and/or developmental issues.
- Coordination/Advocacy between DSS and Wilmington Housing Authority - To better assist clients in getting and keeping subsidized housing and to coordinate service plans.
- Coordination of Personal, Family Counseling and Individual and Family Adjustment Services – By utilizing a variety of public and private resources for more effective screening and follow-up for clients with both mental health and developmental disability disorders.
- Child Care – to assist clients with child day care costs so they can work and/or participate in work-related activities.
- Work-Related Expenses/Participation Expenses – To help with the purchase of equipment, tools, uniforms, etc. as deemed appropriate.
- Transportation Assistance – To help clients with transportation expenses for a specified period of time. Includes development of various strategies to enhance our existing transportation system (e.g. Resident Owned Van Service, Pooling Transportation Resources, Wheels to Work Program, etc.)
- Collaboration with Domestic Violence Shelter and Services - To provide services and support to victims of domestic violence.
- Coordinated Services with SEC for Substance Abuse Screening and Treatment- To provide screening, evaluation and treatment to clients with a substance abuse problem.
- Job Coaching/Adult Mentoring - Exploring available resources in partnership with New Hanover County Community Action, Cape Fear Community College, Employment Security Commission, Wilmington Housing Authority, Vocational Rehabilitation and members of the faith community to provide on-the-job support to employed clients.
- Health Support – To clients through the services of a Family Planning Nurse outposted at our agency and by working in tandem with the Health Department to assist mutual clients.
- ESC Follow-Up - Through telephone calls to Work First employers to assess placement.

- Case Management Follow-Up - To address clients' problems up to four months after case closes.
- Recipient Focus Group/Survey - Of employed current and former Work First clients during and after their follow-up period to receive suggestions for change or improvements to process.
- Mentoring Work First Children - Through programs offered by Cape Fear Partners for Education, the New Hanover County school system, New Hanover County Community Action (Summer Youth Program), the FOCUS Program, the Teen Leadership Program (UNC-W), the City of Wilmington, and other community groups.

APPEAL PROCESS

Applicants/Recipients who wish to contest a decision adversely affecting their receipt of public assistance may appeal in accordance with N.C.G.S. 108A-79 through a process established by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Standard County - No change from state TANF Plan.

FUNDING REQUIREMENTS

Federal/state TANF funds of \$4,434,181 and New Hanover County=s Maintenance of Effort requirement of \$2,437,762 fund Work First activities and some essential child welfare services.

I. Conditions within New Hanover County

As the New Hanover County 2002-2003 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. We have been extremely successful in putting people to

work, reducing the Work First caseload and forming partnerships to help families overcome barriers. Despite these achievements, however, 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 Aworking poor,@ sharing their frustrations and concerns. Others have even more deep-seated problems, including substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health issues, which cannot be resolved with Atemporary assistance.@ Our efforts to address these difficulties must be further tempered by economic realities. We may have a great deal of flexibility in the choices we make, but we still have a limited supply of funds and certain requirements over which we have no control. 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. 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. By the same token, we need the State=s support in asking the Federal government to re-examine participation requirements. In light of the change in composition of our caseload, it has become increasingly more difficult to balance the needs of the participants with some of the rules with which we have to work. All these factors need to be considered if we are to move forward.

New Hanover County is located in the southeastern part of North Carolina. It is the second most dense county in the state with a land area of 185 square miles, a population of 160,307 and a work force of 84,439. New Hanover is a county of “haves” and “have-nots”. It is identified as a “high wealth county” by the State of North Carolina, yet the average starting salary for our clients is approximately \$6.00 per hour based on information from Employment Security Commission staff. 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. Because of the coastal location of New Hanover County, housing prices hover around the highest in the state yet the tourist industry depends on low-paid employees in the hotel/motel, restaurant and service industries.

The county has been impacted by the national economic downturn. Corning, Inc. has laid off over 400 employees in recent months with the possibility of more lay-offs or a plant closing in the future. According to information from the ESC, since May 2002, lay-offs have occurred in manufacturing, retail, service, government and non-profit organizations in our county.

An industry that has developed in New Hanover County in recent years is the film industry. More film revenue has been generated in Wilmington in the past decade than in any other United States’ city, with the exception of Los Angeles and New York. This industry has, however, not been very stable, resulting in long periods of under or unemployment for those families dependent upon film revenues for their annual incomes.

Several new employers have recently set up operations in our county, including Renewable Energy, Amerihost Inn and Suites, Port City Capital Bank, as well as numerous small retail and service establishments. However, without adequate education, training or supportive services, locating employment with a living wage that provides benefits for Work First clients (and moving them to self-sufficiency) continues to be an overwhelming task for this community.

II. Planning Process

A. Planning Committee

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
Karen Vincent	New Hanover County Department of Social Services (NHCDSS)
Patricia Jessup	NHCDSS – Protective Services
Christine McNamee	NHCDSS - Planning
Jeff Olson	NHCDSS – Children’s Services
Liz Schulz	NHCDSS – Work First
Leslie Smiley	NHCDSS – Individual and Family Support
Lidia Bly-Herman	Southeastern Center for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (SEC)
Janet McCumbee	New Hanover County Health Department (NHCHD)
Diana Corbett	Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce
Hattie Herring	Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA)
Vanessa Thompson	WHA – Section 8
Marilyn Edge	WHA - Administration
Patricia Melvin	New Hanover County Manager=s Office, New Hanover Transportation Services
Lois C. Steele	YWCA of the Lower Cape Fear (YWCA)
Loretta Evans-Thomas	Assisted Care Facility Director, Former Recipient
Rev. John Burton	St. Stephen=s AME Church
Mack Wade	NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)
Dr. Al Lerch	New Hanover County schools
Jewel Sparrow	NC Employment Security Commission/ JobLink (ESC/JobLink)
Beth Bowen	NHC Partnership for Children (Smart Start)
Margie Parker	Cape Fear Workforce Development Board
Clarence Smith	Cape Fear Community College (CFCC)
Avone Treadwell	CFCC

Barbara DeBose
Bridget Terry
Cynthia Brown

New Hanover County Child Support Office
Social Security Administration (SSA)
New Hanover County Community Action
(NHCCA)

Renee McGill-Cox

Domestic Violence Shelter & Services, Inc.
(DVSS)

Deborah Houston

New Hanover Transportation Services

B. Public Comment

Draft copies of the plan were available for public scrutiny beginning September 30, 2002 through October 14, 2002 at the New Hanover County Public Library Main Branch, New Hanover County Administration Building, New Hanover County Department of Social Services and on the DSS web site, www.nhcgov/DSS/draft.htm.

C. Planning Process

On August 5, 2002, 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 25, 2002 letter to the County Manager. The core of the Work First Planning Committee included persons who developed the Work First plan for the 2001-2003 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. Two meetings were held with this group. The first covered current economic realities and strategies for the future. The second included a review of the draft plan. There was also an exchange of information between group members by phone and e-mail during this time period.

In addition, other groups were approached for ideas and feedback. A focus group was held with Work First clients participating in the HRD class at CFCC. Some ideas generated from this discussion were incorporated into the Work First plan. Suggestions were also solicited from the Work First staff and from the Workforce Development Board and the Cape Fear Operators' Council during presentations made by the Work First Chief during this period. The plan was presented to the New Hanover County Board of Social Services for comments and approval at its meeting on September 25, 2002. The plan was modified based on recommendations received prior to submission to the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners.

The New Hanover County Work First Plan for 2003-2005 was presented to the Board of County Commissioners for comments and approval on October 21, 2002.

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 eight Work First goals.

1. Employment

This is a goal the state will establish prior to the start of each fiscal year.

2. Meeting Federal Participation Rates

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 Atwo parent@ families where both are able to work is tracked as a subset of the overall participation rate and is currently set at 90%.

3. Providing Employment Services

The state established goal is that we provide employment services to at least 75% of our single adult caseload and 100% of our two-parent caseload.

4. Benefit Diversion

This is a goal the state will establish prior to the start of each fiscal year.

5. Staying Off Welfare

The state established goal is that 85% of the families who leave Work First due to earnings do not return to Work First rolls within one year.

6. Child Support

This is a goal the state will establish prior to the start of each fiscal year.

7. Job Retention

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.

8. Caseload Reduction

This is a goal the state will establish prior to the start of each fiscal year.

B. County Developed Outcome Goals

We will place our efforts and resources toward attaining and exceeding the state set goals.

IV. Plans to Achieve the Outcomes and Goals

A. Activities

The following activities are designed to meet the eight State-established goals for the Work First program. The specific 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 Individual and Family Support Intake Units to assist families in crisis. Clients see one worker who assesses 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, referrals to Child Support Enforcement or to our ESC Interviewers. **(Benefit Diversion, Staying Off Welfare, Caseload Reduction)**

On-Site ESC Interviewers – Job Search/Job Follow-up

Two Employment Security Commission Interviewers located in the DSS assist Work First applicants and ongoing participants in finding jobs. They provide this same assistance to families with income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level as a diversionary measure and to former Work First recipients who have lost a job or are seeking other employment. In addition, they register applicants for First Stop, take and process applications for Unemployment Insurance Benefits (UIB), when applicable, follow up with employers after a participant is hired, inform potential employers of incentives for hiring Work First clients through the Workforce Investment Act and complete any required paperwork for WIA programs. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Benefit Diversion, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention, Caseload Reduction).**

Job Readiness Programs Utilizing Existing Resources

We will collaborate with other agencies, including Cape Fear Community College, ESC, the Workforce Development Board, the Wilmington Housing Authority, New Hanover County Community Action and the Chamber of Commerce, to evaluate and refine the Job Readiness curriculum offered by CFCC on a monthly basis. The focus will be on ensuring that the course thoroughly meets the needs of the participants, the agencies referring clients and the business community. Emphasis will be placed on factors affecting job retention, including balancing home and work, interpersonal skills, conflict resolution, budgeting, etc. , in addition to job seeking skills and using a computer. Part-time jobs or work experience activities will be arranged in conjunction with the class work to reinforce topics covered and ideally lead to regular employment, possibly in an area in which the client has expressed an interest.

In addition, these extra hours will help clients meet participation rate requirements. The instructors will provide feedback prior to the end of the class to Work First, WHA, and/or NHCCA staff regarding test results (CASAS) as well as the participants' strengths and weaknesses so that these factors can be considered in the development of the next Plan of Action. Specifically, we hope to use this feedback to determine if plans should include Adult Basic Education or GED classes and/or short-term training as noted in the activity cited below. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention, Caseload Reduction)**

Short Term Training

We plan to work collaboratively with the same agencies noted above (CFCC, ESC, WDB, WHA, NHCCA and the Chamber of Commerce) to provide clients with the necessary short-term training to enable them to obtain employment in the local job market. We have identified 4 areas (Culinary Arts, Allied Health Fields, Lawn Maintenance/Landscaping and Construction Trades) that could potentially prepare participants for higher paying jobs and could be supported by WIA programs. CFCC will design 6-12 week training programs in these areas with sufficient hours to meet participation rate requirements. The Chamber will assist in preparing a survey of selected employers to see what needs to be offered to address their needs and determine if they will commit to interviewing individuals who complete the classes. If we are successful with these, other curricula will also be explored, including auto mechanics, welding, teaching assistants, etc. Funding barriers will be eliminated through partnering with the faith community, other human services agencies, and the programs available through the WIA. We will identify students through the Work First Intake and ongoing units, other community agencies and employers to gain adequate class enrollment. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention, Caseload Reduction)**

Educational Program for Parents

Working with the New Hanover County Partnership for Children and the New

Hanover County Health Department, we will develop an educational /job readiness activity which will be offered as a Community Service Program by CFCC for parents of infants and small children. The program will include elements of how to be a working parent, child care/child development and preparing for the world of work. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention, Caseload Reduction)**

On-Site General Education Degree (GED)

We will develop opportunities for persons to increase job training and education through the support provided by employers. Specifically, we will promote On-Site GED classes at rest homes, nursing homes, and with other employers, along with a paid hour in the day to attend the class. We will also work with the WHA and CFCC to maintain 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 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. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention, Caseload Reduction)**

Computer Based Training

We will promote the computer-based training programs offered by CFCC at ESC's One Stop JobLink Center for Work First clients and others needing assistance in obtaining a job or improving their current position. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention, Caseload Reduction)**

Work Experience

Work experience activities will be developed with private as well as public agencies. Based on a suggestion from a client focus group, we will attempt to establish work experience sites at businesses that might be interested in hiring our clients. We will ask the Chamber of Commerce for assistance in identifying some of these. 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. This approach will be taken in conjunction with attendance in the HRD class as noted above and as a separate activity, possibly coupled with a job readiness component. The client will be referred to our ESC Interviewers, who will make the contact with potential employers to encourage consideration of this option if direct job placement is not feasible. We will monitor this arrangement closely to ensure that we are achieving the desired result and not just placing participants in unpaid positions that are not really beneficial. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Job Retention, Caseload Reduction)**

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. In addition, we are exploring a possible combined effort on the part of NHCCA, the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and the Child Support Office in developing a Fatherhood Initiative Program. The objective will be to offer support and information to non-custodial parents regarding their rights and responsibilities, available training and job placement opportunities. Since many non-custodial parents face some of the same barriers to self-sufficiency that custodial parents do, a program of this nature could result in both increased income for our Work First families and better relationships between non-custodial parents and their children. It is conceivable that this group could also advocate with different resources such as Cape Fear Community College, the JobLink Career Center, the New Hanover Partnership for Children, Cape Fear Partners for Education and the faith community.
(Child Support, Caseload Reduction)

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 several times a week. 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, 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, family planning, etc. Guest speakers (e.g. Family Planning Nurse) often make a short presentation. Clients then complete the Personal Information Form (PIF) before they leave and are given an appointment to see a Work First worker within the week. At their first meeting with the worker, a complete assessment is done and plans for participation are developed. 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/JobLink, CFCC, NHCCA, WHA, etc. will be distributed and persons encouraged to participate if appropriate. 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 day care costs, etc.

In-Depth Evaluation

To ensure the greater possibility of Work First clients getting and keeping jobs, DSS working with Cape Fear Community College will offer a more thorough and comprehensive assessment for participants enrolled in the HRD class as noted above. For clients who have not attended this class and who appear to be making no progress toward developing a plan at the end of a reasonable period of time, a thorough evaluation will be considered of academic, medical, psychological and/or developmental issues. This will include administering the CASAS test, requesting and reviewing school records, and referring clients for a screening by designated staff at the Southeastern Center or at Evergreen Health Services who have agreed to provide this service. Decisions regarding future service plans will be made once the results of these tests can be evaluated.

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 Wilmington Housing Authority 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. In addition, we are drafting a Memorandum of Understanding that formalizes our agreement to combine our efforts to help clients achieve self-sufficiency. This includes coordinating service plans for mutual clients with the WHA's Family Self-Sufficiency and Hope VI Programs so we do not work at cross-purposes with each other.

Coordination of Personal, Family Counseling and Individual and Family Adjustment Services

Mental health issues are a significant barrier to employment for the majority of the clients reviewed through the SUCCESS initiative, and affect others in our caseload to varying degrees. We plan to use a variety of resources to address this and have made arrangements with SEC and Evergreen Health Services to utilize their services. 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. In addition, as noted above, if clients have been unsuccessful in developing a plan within a set period of time, referral will be made to one of these 2 providers as appropriate to determine if there is an underlying problem that is impeding their progress. Both of these providers have indicated they offer evaluations, psychologicals, and various treatment options, including counseling, anger management consulting and parent effectiveness training. Following the assessment, SEC and Evergreen will send us a summary, diagnosis and treatment plan. Their

recommendations will be taken into consideration in the development of service plans with participants.

Child Care

These services are currently offered to individuals who meet certain criteria regardless of whether or not they receive Work First. At this time, no TANF money is budgeted for this, though the situation could change at some point in the future. See Item V.D. below for a detailed description of how we prioritize these services.

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, and the vehicle will be considered road-worthy following the repair.

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

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

The New Hanover County Department of Social Services (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 with the SEC.

Job Coaching/Adult Mentoring Services

We will explore available resources in partnership with CFCC, NHCCA, ESC, WHA, VR and members of the faith community. Several agencies and churches already offer these services for a select population. We would like to promote better coordination and cultivation of new resources among the parties mentioned to enhance the system currently in place.

Health Support Services

Family planning and other health services are currently offered by a Registered Nurse who is outposted on a part-time basis at the DSS. She makes presentations at our Work First orientation, at Medicaid group reviews and elsewhere. She also meets individually with clients upon request and arranges for ongoing family planning and other services as warranted. In addition, Work First staff 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 Security Commission (ESC) Follow-Up

Employment Security Commission personnel will call employers of Work First clients several times in the first month 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. Information gathered will be evaluated and acted on to improve the employment opportunities and the retention rate of our clients.

Case Management Follow-up

Work First staff will retain cases as needed, but no longer than four months, following termination of cash assistance in an effort to address problems that could impede job performance.

Recipient Survey/Focus Group

Former Work First clients will be surveyed during and after their follow up period to obtain feedback on services received and whether services offered to assist them in obtaining employment might be improved or changed to better support employment retention. Participants in the HRD class will continue to be surveyed prior to completion of their class. This feedback will allow us to make changes in our procedures that might be more effective.

Mentoring Work First Children

Our efforts to promote self-sufficiency extend beyond the adult Work First clients with whom we work closely. To address the self-sufficiency issues of the next generation, we will explore the possibility of working with Cape Fear Partners for Education, the New Hanover County school system, NHCCA’s Summer Youth Program, the Workforce Development Board’s FOCUS Program, UNC-W’s Teen Leadership Program, the City of Wilmington and other community groups. The intent will be to educate parents about available resources and help them enroll their children in programs that will be beneficial. Parents will be made aware of community after-school enrichment and tutoring programs through brochures and flyers developed and distributed through the DSS.

V. Administration

A. Authority

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

B. Organization

Work First is just one of many tools used by the Individual and Family Support Intake Units to assist families in crisis. When clients come in to apply for assistance, they see a worker in this section who assesses all of the client=s 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 our ESC interviewers and/or Child Support Enforcement.

If clients choose to apply for Work First, they are scheduled to attend our Work First orientation offered several times a week. They are assigned to a Family Support Worker or Employment Services Social Worker at this orientation and given an appointment for completion of the assessment while the application is still pending. Cases are designated as “low maintenance” or “high maintenance” based on the barriers identified. Factors considered in making this determination include recidivism, time limits, non-cooperation with IV-D, substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence, and/or protective services issues.

Family Support Workers, located in the ongoing Work First Units, maintain both the eligibility and employment services portions of low maintenance cases. 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 and for four months following termination of cash assistance, including maintaining ongoing eligibility for Medicaid and sharing information with the day care and food stamp sections. If the client is unable to move forward within a specified period of time, the case becomes “high maintenance” and is transferred to an Employment Services Social Worker.

The more complex cases are assigned to Employment Services Social Workers who utilize the resources noted above and work more extensively with the client, with our Protective Services/Children’s Services staff and with certain agencies including Domestic Violence, Southeastern Center, V. R., Social Security, etc. to eliminate barriers and help clients develop self-sufficiency plans. They also serve as case managers for participants throughout receipt of cash assistance and for four months following termination. The eligibility portion of these cases is handled by Economic Services Workers. Two of these Economic Services workers also handle the “Child Only” cases.

Two Employment Security Commission Interviewers located in the DSS assist Work

First applicants and ongoing participants in finding jobs. They provide this same assistance to families with income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level as a diversionary measure and to former Work First recipients who have lost a job or are seeking other employment. In addition, they register applicants for First Stop, take and process applications for Unemployment Insurance Benefits (UIB), when applicable, follow up with employers after a participant is hired, inform potential employers of incentives for hiring Work First clients through the Workforce Investment Act and complete any required paperwork for WIA programs.

There are two other non-DSS workers who provide supportive services to clients in our office. A registered nurse who specializes in family planning and women's health issues works part-time in our agency. The Health Department received a TANF pregnancy prevention grant to offset part of her salary. The Southeastern Center uses TANF funding to outpost a Qualified Substance Abuse Professional in our office as well.

We in turn have assigned one Employment Services Social Worker to work four hours a week at the One Stop/JobLink Center located at the Employment Security Commission.

C. First Stop and other Services with ESC

The New Hanover County Department of Social Services purchases Work Registration, Job Readiness, Job Search, Job Development and Job Placement Services from the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina through the placement of two ESC Interviewers at the Department of Social Services (See Attachment 1). The cost of these contracted services is currently \$96,144. The ESC Interviewers' duties include providing the following services to Work First applicants and recipients as well as to individuals in families who meet the expanded TANF guidelines with income at or below 200% of the poverty level :

Completing work registration and determining job readiness; providing job development services; matching job skills of participants with job openings; referring participants to jobs for which they qualify (emphasis will be upon obtaining jobs that hold the promise of enabling participants to support themselves and their families over the long run); providing individual and group job search assistance; assisting with job readiness activities; providing job retention services by following up with employers for a period of time after participants are placed on a job; completing UIB and WIA applications; utilizing the computer terminal to access the Employment Services Information System and other pertinent information necessary for the operation of the Work First Program.

D. Child Care Prioritization

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 whose parents, foster parents, or other adult responsible for the care of the child need child day care in order to maintain employment.
 - a. Mandatory Work First recipients who work full-time (30+ hours).
 - b. Foster parents who work full-time.
 - c. Parents/responsible adults who are employed full-time.
 - d. Mandatory Work First recipients who work part-time.
 - e. Foster parents who work part-time.
 - f. Parents/responsible adults who are employed part-time.
- 3) Children whose parents, foster parents, or other adult responsible for the care of the child need childcare to seek employment. **Seeking employment:** When a parent is unemployed but is seeking employment, child day care services must be provided for a minimum of 30 days **only** if requested **and** the parent or responsible adult is **already receiving** subsidized child day care services.
 - a. Mandatory Work First recipients who are seeking employment.
 - b. Foster parents who are seeking employment.
 - c. Parents/responsible adults who are seeking employment.
- 4) 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. Work First recipients
 - b. Foster parents
 - c. Teen parents attending high school or its equivalent
 - d. Adults participating in GED or ABED programs (6 months maximum)
 - e. Parents or responsible adults who are enrolled in a post-secondary education training (maximum of 2 year enrollment)
- 5) 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.

- 6) Children who need child day care to meet developmental needs whose emotional, cognitive, social or physical development is delayed or at risk of delay.
- 7) Children over the age of ten who are not documented special needs and not receiving care in second or third shifts.
- 8) Children in relative placements with the exception of children receiving care in second or third shifts.

We also have been exploring a “Share the Care” program that is a public/private collaboration of the New Hanover County Partnership for Children, 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 day care costs for low income families, including those on Work First.

E. Transportation – Local Coordination and Collaboration

New Hanover County Department of Social Services has been working collaboratively with other community agencies and private employers since January 2000 to improve transportation options for Work First and other low-income county residents. DSS has been an active participant in the New Hanover Transportation Service (NHTS), which provides a coordinated van service to a variety of health and human service organizations as well as the general public. To ensure the most cost effective and efficient transportation system, other potential providers have been approached for additional options to provide employment transportation. NHTS has contracts with several private taxi operations to provide transportation whenever the NHTS van pool is unable or it is determined that a taxi would be more cost effective. NHTS also has a contract with 2Plus, a private non-profit vanpool service, to market the idea of vanpooling to area employers. A quality assurance plan was implemented to monitor the transportation providers.

The Wilmington Transit Authority provides bus service within the city limits and the lower-cost bus tickets are provided to Work First participants for employment transportation whenever possible.

The Wilmington Housing Authority and Wilmington Community Development Corporation have committed to work with us to explore the possibility of developing a housing authority resident-owned van shuttle service. The WHA, through its Family Self-Sufficiency and HOPE VI programs, will identify residents who have expressed an interest in establishing their own business. Residents will work with the CDC to receive technical assistance in starting a van service, and making it profitable. WHA will lease vans to selected residents and DSS will contract with them to provide employment related transportation.

The Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce has sponsored a Work First Employers Workshop that addressed business issues regarding hiring and retaining Work First employees, including the availability of tax incentives of employer-sponsored transportation and 2Plus vanpooling options. Additional Chamber workshops are anticipated in the future.

Through the new Transportation Coordinator position at NHTS, all human service organizations currently providing transportation to their clients, either through agency vans or through a contract, have been approached to determine if it would be cost effective to pool our resources. The availability of transportation funds has been expanded by the award of Federal Job Access monies to New Hanover County. We have submitted a proposal for a continuation grant from this funding source. These federal dollars, when pooled with local funds currently allocated for employment transportation, allow us to bargain more effectively with transportation providers. A strategic plan is currently being developed. When implemented, the result will be a more reliable and comprehensive transportation system for all organizations.

Working with Engine Angels, a faith based organization, and other community resources, we have developed a Wheels to Work program for current and former Work First clients. We are considering expanding this to include other persons with families whose income is at or below 200% of the poverty level and who don't have access to transportation to get to work. Engine Angels accepted a donation of surplus automobiles from New Hanover County Government and made necessary repairs so that those clients with employment transportation needs identified by DSS can receive the cars for a modest cost.

The amount of funds from our Work First Block Grant allocated for transportation services is \$106,173.

F. Substance Abuse Services – Collaboration with the Area Authority

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 Substance Abuse Professional (QSAP) 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 SEC staff. 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 QSAP for further evaluation.

The QSAP from the Southeastern Center for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities, and Substance Abuse Services 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 QSAP monitors continued compliance with a treatment plan and notifies the DSS staff accordingly as to her findings. In addition, she attends monthly SUCCESS team 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.

We initially developed a Memorandum of Agreement between the DSS and SEC that expressed 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. Within the past year, this agreement was expanded to include 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, SEC agrees to provide representation on the committee developing the Work First plan, 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 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 QSAP 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 QSAP 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 SEC staff in this area when necessary.

G. Family Violence Option

Violence within the family is also recognized as a major barrier to self-sufficiency. The Individual and Family Support Intake worker or the ongoing Work First 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 the Domestic Violence Shelter and schedules an appointment. Although the Employment Services Social Worker arranges for appropriate services for the client, compliance with employment requirements is not addressed until the Family Violence Assessment is returned from Domestic Violence. The Social Worker then develops a plan of action with the client, incorporating the recommendations of the Domestic Violence Shelter 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: n/a

Staff: Work First/TANF Economic Services Caseworkers; Work First/TANF Employment Services Social Workers; CPS and CWS Social Workers; Administrative Support and Managerial staff; two ESC Interviewers for First Stop registration and employment placement.

Services: Transportation, Work First cash assistance (Diversion payments); Emergency Assistance

I. Child Welfare Services

We will devote approximately \$1,862,101 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 to enable them to be self-sufficient. The following guidelines are used in

assessing persons for this aid:

- § 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 Work First cash assistance.
- § Total gross family income must be at or below 200% of the federal poverty level.
- § Family members must meet the same citizenship requirements as for Work First cash assistance.
- § Assistance may not be provided for any medical care, regardless of whether the participant is covered by Medicaid.
- § 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.

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 up to 4 months for former Work First recipients. Depending on availability of funding, we will continue to provide services to families with income at or below 200% of the poverty level.

Services may include problem solving, case management, counseling, job search, job readiness, work-related expenses, transportation and child care. Other allowable services as indicated in TANF guidelines, such as skills training, education, on-the-job training and parenting skills will be provided on a referral basis. We will assess our expenditures and staffing patterns in these areas at regular intervals to determine if we have sufficient funds to continue offering these services to those other than Work First recipients and at what level.

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. We need to stay focused on providing services to all Work First participants first. We do intend to provide support to the development of a Fatherhood Initiative Program on the part of NHCCA, the New Hanover County Child Support Office and Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity as noted in Section IV.A. of this plan.

IX. Exemption from the Work Requirement

We currently exempt single custodial parents with a child under 12 months of age from the work requirement. We do require all parents to attend a Work First orientation session, give them an appointment for an assessment and assign them to a Work First worker, however,

regardless of the age of the child.

OPTIONAL PLAN ELEMENTS

X. Innovative County Strategies

We believe our more innovative strategies include the “Educational Program for Parents,” to be developed by the Partnership and the Health Department; the “Fatherhood Initiative Program,” considered by New Hanover County Community Action, Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity and the New Hanover County Child Support Office; the “In-Depth Evaluation” of academic, medical, psychological and/or developmental issues of clients not moving forward at a certain point in time; and the partnership we hope to form for “Mentoring Work First Children.” These are described in detail in Section IV.

XI. Special Issues

New Hanover is a coastal community and as such is very susceptible to hurricanes. When we are hit by a hurricane, staff from 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 through the Individual and Family Support Intake unit for financial help and problem solving/advocacy. At times we have had to operate one or more Disaster Relief Fund programs as well.

Substance abuse is a serious problem due to the high urban nature of New Hanover County. We are the second smallest county in land size and seventh largest in population. In addition, like most other North Carolina counties, we are seeing an increase in the number of Hispanic families moving to the area.

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.

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 _____ day of October, 2002.

Ted Davis, Jr., Chairman
New Hanover County Board of Commissioners

Sherman L. Criner, Chairman
New Hanover County Board of Social
Services

ATTACHMENT 1

