

**New Hanover County
2005-2007 Work First Plan**

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Attachment: Memorandum of Understanding - Employment Security Commission

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NEW HANOVER COUNTY 2005-2007 WORK FIRST PLAN

The New Hanover County 2005-2007 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. Job Retention

ACTIVITIES

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

- Comprehensive Assessment Process - Thorough up-front assessment with the client 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 and follow-up services 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, including information regarding how to be a working parent, child development issues and how to navigate the school system that meet the needs of participants, referring agencies and the business community through resources such as Cape Fear Community College (CFCC), LifeSkill Institute, Inc., New Hanover County Health Department, Child Support Enforcement Office, and possibly former Work First recipients.
- Further Educational Opportunities - For persons to work on obtaining a GED at housing developments, as well as pursue opportunities for technical skills training and higher education opportunities.
- Computer Based Training - Offered through CFCC at the Employment Security Commission (ESC) Office.

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 Human Resource Development (HRD) program and at New Hanover County Community Action (NHCCA) 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 New Hanover County Department of Social Services (DSS) and Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA) - To better assist clients in getting and keeping subsidized housing and to coordinate service plans.
- Coordination of family counseling and mental health 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, including job search.
- 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.
- Collaboration with Domestic Violence Shelter and Services, Inc. (DVSS) - To provide services and support to victims of domestic violence.
- Coordinated Services with Southeastern Center (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 NHCCA, CFCC, ESC, WHA, Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), Christian Women’s Job Corp 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.
- Mentoring Work First Children - Through programs offered by Cape Fear Partners for Education, the New Hanover County school system, NHCCA (Summer Youth Program), the FOCUS Program, the Teen Leadership Program at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington (UNCW), 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

Total available federal/MOE county administrative funds of \$4,432,571, which includes 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 2005-2007 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 working 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 temporary 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.

New Hanover County is located in the southeastern part of North Carolina. It is the second most densely populated county in the state with a land area of 185 square miles, a population of 171,279 and a work force of 88,779. 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 \$6.50 per hour based on information from ESC 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 Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce’s Cost of Living Study for First Quarter 2004 shows that Wilmington’s composite cost of living is higher than Charlotte, Raleigh, Charleston or Atlanta.

Several new employers have recently set up operations in our county, including Verizon, Kohl’s, and Hecht’s, 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 a major task for this community.

II. Planning Process

A. Planning Committee

<u>Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
LaVaughn Nesmith	New Hanover County Department of Social Services (NHCDSS), Director
Phyllis Gorham	New Hanover County Board of Social Services, Chair
Bill Caster	New Hanover County Board of Social Services, New Hanover Board of Commissioners
Frankie Roberts	New Hanover County Board of Social Services
Wanda Neidig	NHCDSS-Services Division
Ann Barkley	NHCDSS-Prevention/At Risk
Patricia Jessup	NHCDSS- Protective Services
Christine McNamee	NHCDSS- Planning
Jeff Olson	NHCDSS -Children's Services
Liz Schulz	NHCDSS- Family and Children's Medicaid
Arena Everett	NHCDSS-Employment Services
Miranda Pearce	NHCDSS-Employment Services
Ginny Gorman	Southeastern Center for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (SEC)
Pam Stalls	SEC
Pam Cooke	New Hanover County Health Department (NHCHD)
Pam Barnhardt	Greater Wilmington Chamber of Commerce
Catrechia McCoy	Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA)
Patricia Melvin	New Hanover County Manager's Office, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority
Loretta Evans-Thomas	Assisted Care Facility Director, Former Recipient
Mack Wade	NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
Dr. Al Lerch	New Hanover County schools
Darrell Johnson	NC Employment Security Commission/ JobLink (ESC/JobLink)
Tonya Caddle	Current Work First Recipient

Janet Nelson
Margie Parker
Cassandra Woodhouse
Barbara DeBose
Bridget Terry
Lisa Nobles
Cynthia Brown

Renee McGill-Cox

NHC Partnership for Children (Smart Start)
Cape Fear Workforce Development Board
Cape Fear Community College (CFCC)
New Hanover County Child Support Office
Social Security Administration (SSA)
SSA
New Hanover County Community Action
(NHCCA)
Domestic Violence Shelter & Services, Inc.
(DVSS)

B. Public Comment

Draft copies of the plan were available for public scrutiny beginning September 30, 2004 through October 14, 2004 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, <http://www.nhcgov.com/dss/pdf/WorkFirst.pdf> . 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 Process

On August 16, 2004, 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 July 6, 2004 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 2003- 2005 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 September 2, 2004. 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. A focus group was held with Work First clients participating in the HRD class at CFCC to solicit their ideas. They provided insight into the development of the HRD curriculum. Continuing participation by our partnering agencies including the Parenting Place, the Health Department, ESC and the

Child Support Enforcement office was strongly encouraged. 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 29, 2004

The New Hanover County Work First Plan for 2005-2007 was presented to the Board of County Commissioners for comments and approval on October 18, 2004.

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

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 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%.

3. Providing Employment Services

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. 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 90% of the families who leave Work First due to earnings do not return to Work First rolls within one year.

6. 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.

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 designed to meet the six State-established goals for the Work First program, as well as our county's Leading By Results Indicators. 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/At Risk section during the intake process to assist families in crisis. Clients 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, referrals to Child Support Enforcement or to our ESC Interviewers. (**Benefit Diversion, Staying Off Welfare**)

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

Two ESC 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).**

Job Readiness Programs Utilizing Existing Resources

We will continue to collaborate with other agencies, including CFCC, Lifeskills Institute, Inc., The Parenting Place, and New Hanover County Schools, as well as former Work First recipients, 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, how to be a working parent, child care, child development, navigating the school system, conflict resolution, budgeting, etc. , in addition to job seeking skills and using a computer. The instructors will provide feedback prior to the end of the class to Work First 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. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, 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.

Further Educational Opportunities

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 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. W HA residents will be given information on the availability of resident scholarships to the local colleges and universities. 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. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention)**

Computer Based Training

We will continue to promote the computer-based training programs offered by CFCC at ESC's One Stop Job Link 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)**

Work Experience

Work experience activities will continue to be developed with private as well as public agencies. We will attempt to establish work experience sites at businesses that might be interested in hiring our clients with the assistance of 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. 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)**

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 Prevention/At Risk worker within the week. At their first meeting with the worker, a complete assessment is done with the client 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 child care costs, etc. 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

To ensure the greater possibility of Work First clients getting and keeping jobs, DSS, working with CFCC, will continue to 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 SEC 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 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. In addition, we have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that formalizes our agreement to combine our efforts to help clients achieve self-sufficiency.

Coordination of Family Counseling and Mental Health Services

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, including SEC and Evergreen Health 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 two providers as appropriate to determine if there is an underlying problem that is impeding their progress. Both of these providers offer evaluations, psychologicals, and various treatment options, including counseling, anger management consulting and parent effectiveness training. Following the assessment, SEC and Evergreen will provide feedback, and 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, 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 with the SEC.

Job Coaching/Adult Mentoring Services

We will explore available resources in partnership with CFCC, NHCCA, ESC, WHA, VR, Christian Women's Job Corp and members of the faith community. 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, Prevention/At Risk 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 Security Commission (ESC) Follow-Up

ESC 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

Prevention/At Risk social workers 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.

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 community partners such as 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.

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. To achieve these goals, we

established a new section of the Social Work Division, Prevention/At Risk, by merging Services Intake social workers, At Risk social workers and Employment Services social workers who were transferred from the Economic Services Division. The Prevention/At Risk section is responsible for Work First Intake and eligibility determination, Work First cash assistance, Work First employment services, Child and Adult Protective Services Intake, and At Risk/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/At Risk 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.

With this re-organization, Work First is just one of many tools used by the Prevention/At Risk section to assist families in crisis. 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 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 Prevention/At Risk 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/At Risk 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 and for up to four months following termination of cash assistance, including, sharing information with the child care, Medicaid and Food Stamp units.

In the more complex cases, the Prevention/At Risk social workers utilize the resources noted above and work more extensively with the client and with certain agencies including Domestic Violence, SEC, VR, Social Security, etc. to eliminate

barriers and help clients develop self-sufficiency plans.

An important strategy in our securing employment for Work First clients is our relationship with ESC. Two ESC 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 SEC uses TANF funding to outpost a Qualified Substance Abuse Professional in our office as well.

DSS is an active partner with the One Stop/Job Link Center. We have assigned one Economic Services caseworker 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 \$77,931. 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 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 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 care costs for low income families.

E. Transportation – Local Coordination and Collaboration

New Hanover County DSS 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 merger of the New Hanover Transportation Service and Wilmington Transit Authority. The new entity, Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority, DBA Wave Transit, provides a coordinated fixed route and paratransit service for 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. A Job Access Reverse Commute continuation grant will allow for a contract with 2 Plus, to develop van pools, improve routing of paratransit trips and secure taxi rides, if it is determined to be the most cost effective option.

Wave Transit has expanded its bus routes (including a Brunswick County Connector) and services to evenings and Sundays, allowing more Work First participants to access buses for employment transportation more frequently.

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. 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 \$100,060.

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 SEC 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, he 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 his findings. In addition, he 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 and SEC 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, 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. At intake and at scheduled Work First reviews, the Prevention/At Risk 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/At Risk 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: Prevention/At Risk Social Workers; CPS and CWS Social Workers; Administrative Support and Managerial staff; two ESC Interviewers for First Stop registration and employment placement.

Services: Transportation, Emergency Assistance

I. Child Welfare Services

We will devote approximately \$1,797,724 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.

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 as a priority. However, we would certainly support any community initiatives in this area.

IX. Exemption from the Work Requirement

We currently exempt single custodial parents with a child under age 12 months from the work requirement. If a single custodial parent with a child under age 12 months is in need of services, we 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.

Single custodial parents with a child under age 12 months who do not comply with child support regulations will be allowed to re-claim their “S code” exemption status upon their compliance with child support requirements.

OPTIONAL PLAN ELEMENTS

X. Innovative County Strategies

We believe one of our most innovative strategies is our re-organization in conjunction with the implementation of MRS to bring about a more family-centered agency, as well as a closer collaboration between Work First and child welfare services, which is also one of the seven MRS strategies identified by the state. This is described in more detail in section V.B., page 16.

We realized that to achieve our goal of becoming a more family-centered, strength-based, solution-focused agency, would require a true mindset change on the part of our entire staff. Furthermore, we recognized that to successfully bring the community on board with MRS and the community’s responsibility to support families, would require DSS to take the lead in education and awareness building within the community. Thus, we developed two comprehensive training initiatives.

To facilitate the mindset change among staff, we contracted with Dr. Robert Blundo, Professor of Social Work at the University of North Carolina at Wilmington, to provide training for all DSS staff in family-centered, strength-based concepts. Staff were grouped according to job function, and the training was tailor-made to the need of each group, depending on their level of client contact. Dr. Blundo has availed himself for follow-up sessions as we deem appropriate to help reinforce these critical concepts.

To more effectively engage the community in grasping the concept of MRS and partnering with us to better serve families, we were awarded a scholarship from The North Carolina Methodist Home for Children and Hackley & Associates of North Carolina, to provide

character, ethics and leadership development trainings and workshops for DSS staff, other professionals and the community at large. Dr. Lloyd Hackley, of Hackley & Associates, conducted four days of training in June 2004. During this period of time, all DSS staff attended workshops on organizational ethics and over 100 agencies were invited to a three hour training entitled “Ethics in Public Service: Personal Conduct and Organizational Ethics in Service to America.” As a result, UNCW, the New Hanover County School system, churches and other agencies have contacted us to request further training. We have agreed to assist in the coordination of the training in recognition that the end result will benefit the entire community. Dr. Hackley has committed to conduct these trainings because of his belief in the community coming together to embrace the MRS cause.

Both training initiatives have been a catalyst for the development and expansion of DSS partnerships with the community. They have enabled us to begin to effect the mindset change that must occur to ensure success with MRS, through not only educating DSS staff, but by taking the concepts to the community. By taking these concepts to the community, through ethics and character education, the community is more receptive and willing to partner with us as we attempt to empower families not only as part of MRS, but through Work First as well.

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 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 ninth 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, 2004

Bobby Greer, Chairman
New Hanover County Board of Commissioners

Phyllis Gorham, Chairman
New Hanover County Board of Social
Services

