

**New Hanover County
2007-2009 Work First Plan**

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**New Hanover County
2007-2009 Work First Plan
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I. Conditions within New Hanover County

As the New Hanover County 2007-2009 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. Low level literacy skills and illiteracy are major problems. An estimated 15 % of the county's adult population has below basic skills or are illiterate and another 29% have only basic skills, which means that over 30,000 adults can not achieve their potential because they lack the skills they need. 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 173,554 and a work force of 95,044. 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 2006 shows that Wilmington's composite cost of living is higher than Charlotte, Raleigh or Atlanta.

Several new employers have recently set up or expanded operations in our county, including Verizon, Kohl's, Macy's, General Electric, Costco, the PPD Expansion and the new convention center, 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 moves 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 |
| Frankie Roberts | New Hanover County Board of Social Services, Chair |
| Patricia Melvin | New Hanover County Manager's Office |
| Wanda Marino | NHCDSS-Services Division |
| Ann Barkley | NHCDSS-Prevention/Adult Services |
| Christine McNamee | NHCDSS- Planning |
| Kari Sanders | NHCDSS -Children's Services |
| Sam Lane | NHCDSS- Family and Children's Medicaid |
| Arena Everett | NHCDSS-Employment Services |
| Paula Marn | NHCDSS-Employment Services |
| Angelina Bernard | NHCDSS-Planning |
| Pam Stalls | Southeastern Center for Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services (SEC) |
| Don Skinner | Phoenix Employment Ministry |
| Sylvia Amick | Coastal Enterprises |
| Nicole Obieglo | Coastal Enterprises |
| Kathryn Winston | Coastal Enterprises |
| Jane Albers | East Coast Solutions |
| Miranda Wood | Former Work First Recipient |
| Rebecca Balthazar | New Hanover County Health Department (NHCHD) |
| Benjamin Quattlebaum | Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA) |
| Catrecia McCoy Bowman | Wilmington Housing Authority (WHA) |
| Arlanda Rouse | WAVE Transit Authority (WTA) |
| Linda Patton | Cape Fear Literacy Council (CFLC) |
| Becky Setliff | NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation |
| Dr. Al Lerch | New Hanover County schools |
| Joy Hudson | NC Employment Security Commission/ JobLink (ESC/JobLink) |
| Tonya Caddle | Former Work First Recipient |
| Janet Nelson | NHC Partnership for Children (Smart Start) |
| Sarah Currier | NHC Partnership for Children (Smart Start) |
| Margie Parker | Cape Fear Workforce Development Board |
| Clarence Smith | Cape Fear Community College (CFCC) |
| Carla West | New Hanover County Child Support Office |

Lynne Jenks
Ortha L. Swepson

YWCA
St. Luke AME Zion Church

B. Public Comment

Draft copies of the plan were available for public scrutiny beginning September 21, 2006 through October 5, 2006 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. 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 July 10, 2006, 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 5, 2006 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 2005- 2007 biennium. These individuals have worked together extensively over the past few years and are committed to helping low income families achieve a greater level of self-sufficiency. As a result, each participant views the planning process as an ongoing collaborative effort that needs to be reassessed periodically. Many are already involved in projects with our agency. Several are members of our SUCCESS and Hardship Status Committees. A draft plan with proposed changes was sent to the Planning Committee in advance of a meeting held August 30, 2006. At the meeting, the committee members reviewed the draft plan and were given the opportunity to comment on the proposed changes and make recommended changes.

In addition, other groups were approached for ideas and feedback. Focus groups were held with Work First clients participating in the DSS Survival Skills class and Career Success class at CFCC to solicit their ideas. Suggestions were also solicited from the Work First staff. The plan was presented to the New Hanover County Board of Social Services for comments and approval at its meeting on September 20, 2006.

The New Hanover County Work First Plan for 2007-2009 was presented to the Board of County Commissioners for comments and approval on October 16, 2006.

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 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 and referrals to Child Support Enforcement, CFLC and/or ESC. **(Benefit Diversion, Staying Off Welfare)**

Job Search/Job Follow-up

We currently contract with Phoenix Employment Ministry to assist Work First clients **with significant barriers to employment** who are required to work in finding and retaining meaningful employment. The program offers intensive one on one job counseling, emphasizing each individual's worth and unique gifts, as well as working as a team of job hunters. Participants identify a specific job that the participant wants to pursue and are then taught how to find those job opportunities and how to market themselves successfully to obtain the job. The program also includes transportation to fill out applications and meet employers. Clients referred are those needing more intensive hands on assistance than what the DSS staff can provide. Phoenix provides written follow-up reports regarding the status of clients who have secured full time employment for one year. Clients are also referred to ESC's job search class which meets weekly. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Benefit Diversion, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention)**

Job Readiness Programs

We will continue to utilize one of our Prevention social workers as a Job Recruitment/Retention Specialist. She teaches a bi-monthly Survival Skills curriculum which focuses on Assertiveness, Personal Health, Nutrition, Money Management, Child Management, Self Advocacy, Legal Rights, Coping with Crisis, Community Resources, and Re-entry/employment. We contract with Cape Fear Regional Community Development Corporation (CDC) to provide Financial Literacy and Debt Management workshops as part of the Survival Skills classes. Participants are given pre and post tests to evaluate knowledge gained and CDC tracks the success of the participants in establishing savings accounts and addressing credit issues over a six month period. We will continue to partner with CFCC to evaluate and refine the Job Readiness curriculum offered by CFCC on a monthly basis. CFCC currently offers a month long Rising to Success course which covers basic computer literacy skills, assessment of assets and limitations, development of a positive self-concept,

development of employability and problem-solving skills, building awareness of the role of Information Technology in the 21st century, and is a pre-requisite for a second course offered by CFCC entitled Career Success. The Career Success classes focus on career exploration, development of strong communication and problem-solving skills, and access to area employers through “Meet and Greet” events. At these events sponsored jointly by CFCC and DSS, area employers actually come to the Success class and interview Work First participants, often resulting in employment offers. Successful Work First graduates will be invited to job readiness program events to tell their stories and inspire current Work First participants. **(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. We will partner with the New Hanover County Child Support Office in offering a community forum to discuss opportunities to provide non-custodial parents skills and training needed to financially and emotionally support their children. Furthermore, we will continue to support the partnership between the Child Support Enforcement Office, Civil Court and the Pre-release Trial program, to ensure that more defendants are released to work and continue child support.

Further Educational Opportunities

We are currently developing a partnership with Cape Fear Literacy Council to help improve the literacy skills of Work First participants to enhance their employability. We will continue to work with the WHA and CFCC to maintain GED classes at housing developments. Participants will be strongly encouraged to obtain a GED if they are not high school graduates. Every effort will be made to combine this with other countable components for adults. Teens will be encouraged to pursue this (or school attendance) as a stand-alone activity unless part-time employment appears feasible or is needed to maintain a budget. If a client expresses interest in obtaining a higher education degree, referrals will be made to the financial aid offices of CFCC and UNCW to receive information on financial support through Pell grants and scholarships. WHA residents will be given information on the availability of resident scholarships to the local colleges and universities. If clients express interest in pursuing occupational skills training or additional training to enhance their goals of finding jobs that will allow them to achieve self sufficiency, referrals will be made to organizations providing short-term technical education curriculums. Phoenix Employment Ministry plans to pursue partnerships with business and faith communities to provide financial assistance and mentors to Work First participants enabling them to become fulltime community college students while working part-time. **(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 as part of their Rising to Success and Career Success classes. The public library has computers available for public use and efforts will be made to link clients to this resource. We will also explore avenues for securing personal computers for private use by Work First participants to enable them to enhance their computer skills. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Staying Off Welfare, Job Retention)**

Work Experience

Work experience activities will continue to be developed with private as well as public agencies. For example, we recently partnered with Coastal Enterprises to provide work experience sites for some of our most difficult to serve Work First clients. Coastal Enterprises will be providing direct supervision and progress reports to assist in evaluating job readiness or whether VR services might be indicated. We will also attempt to establish work experience sites at businesses that might be interested in hiring our clients with the assistance of ESC and the Chamber of Commerce. The businesses will also be informed of the WIA incentives to possibly enhance the participant's chances of becoming employed following a brief work experience placement. We will place special emphasis on developing work experience opportunities that could lead to employment within New Hanover County governmental departments. **(Employment, Meeting Federal Participation Rates, Providing Employment Services, Job Retention)**

B. Supportive Services

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

Case Management – Enhanced Assessment Process

On the date they apply for Work First, clients are given an appointment to attend a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation that is offered daily. This outlines Work First requirements as well as available services and is designed to provide a better understanding of each of our roles and responsibilities in supporting participants' efforts to achieve self-sufficiency. Topics covered include the Mutual Responsibility Agreement, 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. The Family Planning Nurse makes a short presentation at two of the sessions each week. Clients then complete the Personal Information Form (PIF) before they leave and are given an appointment to see a Prevention worker within the week. We plan to investigate the need for a bi-lingual version of the Power Point. 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, CFLC, 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 Survival Skills, Rising to Success and Career Success classes as noted above. For clients who have not attended these classes 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 through SEC or at Evergreen Health Services who has agreed to provide this service. Decisions regarding future service plans will be made once the results of these tests can be evaluated. Based on the results of these tests, appropriate referrals will be made, for example, to VR.

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. 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. We will work with the New Hanover County Partnership for Children to investigate ways to address our community's shortage of quality child care for infants and for non-traditional schedules.

Work-Related Expenses/Participation Expenses

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

Transportation

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

Collaboration with Domestic Violence Shelter and Services, Inc.

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

Coordinated Services with SEC for Substance Abuse Screening and Treatment

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

Job Coaching/Adult Mentoring Services

We will explore available resources in partnership with CFCC, NHCCA, Phoenix Employment Ministry, Coastal Enterprises, 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, meets individually with clients upon request and arranges for

ongoing family planning and other services as warranted. In addition, Prevention workers discuss service plans with the Health Department's Maternity Care and Child Services' Coordinators for our mutual clients and assist in arranging for other medical care when needed.

Employment/Case Management Follow-Up

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

Prevention Services for Work First Children

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

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

With this re-organization, Work First is just one of many tools used by the Prevention 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 ESC, CFLC and/or Child Support Enforcement.

If clients choose to apply for Work First, they are scheduled to attend our Work First orientation offered daily. They are assigned to a Prevention Social Worker at this orientation and given an appointment for completion of the assessment while the application is still pending.

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

In the more complex cases in which clients are not readily employable, the

Prevention social workers utilize the resources noted above, make referrals to Survival Skills, and the CFCC classes, as well as work more extensively with the client and with certain agencies including Domestic Violence, SEC, VR, Social Security, Phoenix Employment Ministry and Coastal Enterprises, 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. They register applicants for First Stop, take and process applications for Unemployment Insurance Benefits (UIB), when applicable, and inform potential employers of incentives for hiring Work First clients through the Workforce Investment Act and complete any required paperwork for WIA programs. DSS is an active partner with the One Stop/Job Link Center.

There are two 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.

C. First Stop

According to the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the New Hanover County Department of Social Services and ESC, ESC will provide First Stop registration at the ESC office. A copy of the MOU is attached.

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, private employers and interested citizens since January 2000 to improve transportation options for Work First and other low-income county residents. DSS was an active participant in the creation of the Cape Fear Public Transportation Authority, DBA Wave Transit, and currently has representation on the Authority. Since its inception, Wave Transit has provided both fixed route and paratransit services to low-income, disabled and elderly persons, as well as the general public. DSS has a MOA with Wave Transit to coordinate employment transportation for all eligible Work First recipients using Wave Transit services or other providers, if determined to be more cost effective.

Wave Transit has increased its regional transportation options to include both the Brunswick County and Columbus County Connectors. They have developed a plan to expand bus routes throughout New Hanover County which would allow more Work First participants to access employment opportunities through affordable bus

transportation more frequently.

The amount of funds from our Work First Block Grant allocated for transportation services is \$54,000.

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 is currently an employee of SEC. However, effective September 25, 2006, SEC is contracting with East Coast Solutions to provide DSS with QSAP services.

The QSAP 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. A MOA between DSS and East Coast Solutions is currently being developed.

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 social worker notifies applicants/recipients at the end of the interview of their right to claim an exemption from work requirements under the Family Violence Option. If clients indicate they wish to speak with someone further about family violence, the worker calls DVSS and schedules an appointment. Although the Prevention social worker arranges for appropriate services for the client, compliance with employment requirements is not addressed until the Family Violence Assessment is returned from 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: Contractual agreements with Phoenix Employment Ministry for finding

and maintaining meaningful employment, and Cape Fear Regional Community Development Corporation for Financial Literacy and Debt Management workshops.

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

Services: Transportation, Emergency Assistance

I. Child Welfare Services

We will devote approximately \$1,994,767 of our Work First Block Grant to Child Welfare Services.

VI. Emergency Assistance

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

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

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 and Benefit Diversion clients. We will also continue to provide services to families with income at or below 200% of the poverty level through our prevention services section.

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

VIII. Services to Non-Custodial Parents

New Hanover County will not provide employment related services to non-custodial parents using Work First Block Grant funds. However, we will emphasize responsible fatherhood and increased participation by non-custodial fathers and will certainly support any community initiatives in this area. We are currently working with Links, Inc., NHCCA and other community organizations to sponsor a Fatherhood Conference tentatively scheduled for Spring 2007.

IX. Exemption from the Work Requirement

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

OPTIONAL PLAN ELEMENTS

X. Innovative County Strategies

We believe our most innovative strategies are our re-organization in conjunction with the implementation of MRS to bring about a more family-centered agency, a closer collaboration between Work First and child welfare services, which is also one of the seven MRS strategies identified by the state, as well as our prevention focus and the strength-based groups we offer staff for skill-building in strength-based practice. These are described in more detail in section V.B., page 13.

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 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.

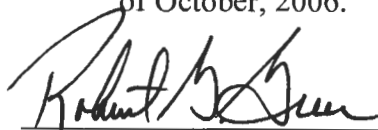
We are the second smallest county in land size and ninth largest in population. In addition, like most other North Carolina counties, we are seeing an increase in the number of Hispanic families moving to the area.

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.

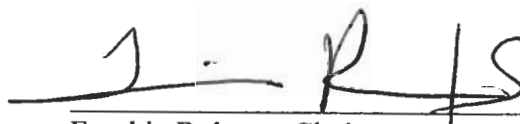
Items XII. through XVI. apply only to Electing Counties. Since we are a Standard County, these areas have not been addressed.

XVII. Certification

This plan was adopted by the New Hanover County Board of Commissioners on the 16th day of October, 2006.



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



Frankie Roberts, Chairman
New Hanover County Board of Social Services

ATTACHMENT 1

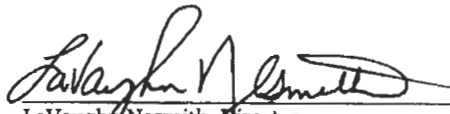
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING

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

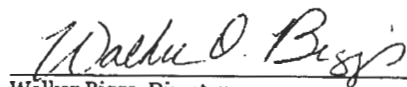
FIRST STOP EMPLOYMENT

Pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 108-A-29(a), the undersigned parties hereby acknowledge that effective July 1, 2006, the point of registration in New Hanover County for the First Stop Employment Assistance Program administered by the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina shall be in the offices of the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina located as set forth below.

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



LaVaughn Nesmith, Director
New Hanover County Department of Social Services
Date: 06-09-06



Walker Biggs, Director
Employment Security Commission
Of North Carolina
Date: 6-9-06