

Forsyth County Work First Plan 2007-2009



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I. CONDITIONS WITHIN THE COUNTY

Forsyth County has a population of 325,967 (US Census, 2005). The city of Winston-Salem accounts for roughly 60% of the county's population (US Census, 2005). The population of Forsyth County is 29% minorities (US Census, 2004) with a rapidly increasing Hispanic population (9% US Census 2004) and higher than the state as a whole. The growth in the Hispanic population between 1990 and 2000 was 831% (US Census). The majority of Hispanics and other minorities live in the City of Winston-Salem where the population is about 44% minority. According to one report, the County is losing some population to its more rural neighbors. Those who move away are generally wealthier than those moving in (Angelou Economics, 2003). The majority of the Work First population lives and works in the City.

The County's economy continues to be troubled for some workers. This may explain why the population has grown more slowly than other metropolitan areas in the State. In fact, the population growth from 1990-1999 trailed the state's increase by about 6%. The county has historically relied heavily on manufacturing jobs which have provided good paying jobs for many workers. Just since 1998, the percentage of individuals employed in manufacturing has dropped by 24%. Like so many other places in North Carolina, they have been replaced by lower paying service sector jobs or health care jobs that require substantial training. Many of the health care jobs are not often accessible to Work First recipients. One study confirmed that during the 1990's manufacturing lost over 5,000 jobs while the service sector gained over 21,000 (Angelou Economics, 2003).

The County is a major hub for Northwest North Carolina business. However, employment growth trends are not strong for jobs that require limited or no training. Dell, Inc. has opened an assembly plant that is expected to employ 1,500 individuals over five years. The recent merger of RJR Tobacco with British American is expected to add jobs. However, it is unlikely many of these jobs will be available to Work First recipients. Sara Lee which also used to be a major manufacturing mainstay has also suffered recent layoffs. In one bright spot, overall plant closings and layoffs have slowed in 2005. Total plant closings reported by ESC were 17 in 2005 compared to 32 in 2004 and 31 in 2003.

Forsyth County is probably the epitome of the North Carolina economic story for workers without much education: get a manufacturing job, work hard, stay with the same company for many years, and provide a decent life for one's family. That is no longer possible in Forsyth County. However, in 2005, the average annual wage in Forsyth County for manufacturing led wages in all sectors except two ---"finance" and "utilities" (ESC, Labor Market Division).

Other indicators of the difficulty of the labor market are shown in the unemployment rate. The labor force of 170,905 (June, 2006, ESC) has seen increased difficulty in getting and keeping jobs. In 1999, the average unemployment rate was 2.25%. While the unemployment rate has improved over the last year, it was 4.5% in June, 2005.

The Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce indicates that local economic development leaders will continue to concentrate on building and developing the following industry clusters that were also the focus of activity at the time of the 2003-05 Work First plan:

- biotech/information technology,
- healthcare,
- high-tech manufacturing,
- financial services,
- distribution/logistics,
- design, and
- hospitality.

This may be good news for the workforce long-term since it includes well-paid jobs and some of these sectors offer good jobs for entry-level workers with specific training, but many welfare recipients do not have the education to take advantage of the better paying jobs in these sectors.

The largest employment sectors in the 4th quarter of 2005 (NC Department of Commerce) include the following:

Sector	Percentage of Total Employment
Manufacturing	14.2%
Health Care and Social Assistance	15.6%
Retail Trade	11.5%
Government	9.9%
Education Services	9.9%
Accommodation and Food Services	7.7%
Administrative and Waste Services	7.1%
Finance and Insurance	5.6%

According to the Chamber of Commerce (8/05) the five largest employers in the county reflect the changing economy and include a mix of old and new industry sectors. The largest employers are:

- Winston-Salem/ Forsyth County Schools,
- NC Baptist Hospital,
- R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company
- Forsyth Memorial Hospital, Inc.
- Sara Lee Branded Apparel, and
- Wake Forest University School of Medicine

As a large urban county, Forsyth continues to maintain its place in terms of income although the picture is changing:

- Median household income is \$41,239 (2003,US Census). This represents an increase of less than 1% since 1999 (the US median household income went up 6% during this same period);
- Median household income from 2005 that includes city data indicates that Winston-Salem's median household income is \$38, 197 a year, less than the statewide estimate and far below that of Charlotte and Raleigh, and
- Per capita income is \$32,067 (2003, NCDC), a decline to sixth highest in the state (in 2000 Forsyth County was ranked third).

Other indicators of well-being also show a troubling picture for some segments of the population –usually those who rely on Work First:

- In 2004 in Forsyth County about 16.3% of individuals did not have health insurance, a slight improvement over 2000. Over eleven percent (11.2%) of individuals below age 18 are uninsured (UNC-CH). This represents a slight improvement from the 2001 Work First plan.
- An unacceptably high infant mortality rate for minorities continues to be one of the biggest issues facing the County, although the County is making slow progress. The county rate of 10 deaths per thousand (2004) is up slightly since 2001 the last Work First plan.
- 2005 poverty data showed a decline in poverty for the County to 10.7% (2005) from 2003 (13%). However, much of the poverty is the City of Winston-Salem where most Work First recipients live. Recent Census reports showed that the City has a poverty rate of 19.2% (2005).
- Poverty among children was 17.3 % (US Census, 2005). Poverty among children is up over 20% since 2000.
- Poverty among female-headed households rose about 5% since the 2000 Census to 29.6% (2005 Census).

While the increase in poverty, particularly child poverty and poverty among female-headed households should be particularly alarming, few in the local area have pointed it out. These statistics point out some of the realities that are faced by Work First recipients in the County.

Pressing Problems for Low-Income Workers

The major issue effecting service to the current Work First population is the high incidence of individuals with difficult and multiple barriers to employment. The Work First population has changed since the inception of the program in North Carolina. Many Work First recipients need more than support services or simple job search training to help them get a job. A subcommittee of the Work First Planning Committee identified the following as major problems facing the Work First population and keeping them from getting a job:

- Many Work First customers have a **criminal record** often connected with passing bad checks, or other serious offenses. Depending upon the nature of the offense, employers may not hire workers with any criminal records for certain positions.
- There is no clear picture on the prevalence of drug or alcohol abuse in the welfare population although all nation studies indicate that it is higher than in the general population. While no current data is available, local estimates are that about 30% of the Work First population may have substance abuse issues. **Substance abuse** is an enormous barrier to employment.
- The Work First population often deals with **mental illness**. Depression is the most common condition identified. There is no good local information available on the prevalence of this condition. National estimates are depression is the most common mental health condition reported by TANF recipients and that between 26-42% percent of TANF recipients experiences episodes of depression (Mathematica, 20000, Derr, Douglass, Parvett). Studies link depression clearly to poverty and lack of employment. Depression is much more common among low-income women than among those with higher incomes. Members of the Work First Planning Committee have voiced frustration with dealing with the local mental health system which is not readily able to assist Work First participants.
- Lack of personal **motivation** is often seen as a crucial barrier to meeting participation rates, to getting employed and to staying employed. This typically is shown by the poor attendance record of Work First participants in GED/ABS classes, occupational skills classes or any skill-building opportunity requiring regular participation. This is a multi-faceted issue that is reflective of complexity of the lives of many of the Work First recipients and the barriers they face.
- **Transitional support** and case management for individuals who go to work and continue their education. Many on the subcommittee believed that as Work First participants went to work, additional support beyond the services offered by DSS would make a difference. This would include follow-up and case management to find out what services the customer needed beyond those offered by DSS.
- **Housing instability** is an ongoing issue faced by many Work First participants. There is a serious lack of affordable housing for the Work First population. Section 8 applications are presently closed and two low-income housing communities have been torn down. Most Work First participants are not technically “homeless,” but many have patched together a variety of options that keep them off the street. Participants stay with relatives or friends but may not have the resources to maintain their own household.

- **Domestic violence** is much more prevalent among the Work First population than the general population. Some studies estimate that as many as 50% of welfare recipients nationwide have experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner at some time in their adult lives as compared to 22% of women in the general population (*Journal of Social Issues*, 2000). As many as 30%, experience abuse in a current relationship. While the Forsyth County community has resources to assist women, the issue is getting women to avail themselves of services and take steps to leave the abuser. Domestic abuse is another factor in participants failing to attend class, show up for work, etc.
- **Poor work history** over time. While many Work First customers have worked, they have worked many jobs all for very short periods of time. They have not worked long enough with any one employer to build up skills or move up the employment ladder. New employers are frequently reluctant to give them another chance.
- **Poor educational skills** continue to be an enormous issue. While we do not have in-depth information from the entire Work First population, information from one Employment Services contractor indicated that 63% of Work First Employment Service participants had a high school education. However, assessment of skill levels for a six-month period indicated that 68% had a 8th grade or less reading level. In math, 84% performed at or below the 8th grade level.

Frequently, individuals have more than one of the problems. The Work First Committee is concerned about the lack of emphasis on improving education and job skills that will assist recipients to get better jobs initially and to move up the career ladder over time. They are working on a community effort to assist Work First customers to improve their education but are concerned about how to balance that with meeting participation rates.

The availability of quality entry-level jobs in the current economic climate is a problem. The job market for workers with limited work experience and poor education demonstrates, it will be increasingly difficult to obtain entry-level jobs for Work First clients whose skills may not be as competitive as other workers. The lack of emphasis on skills training under TANF is a continuing concern that affects the quality of job placements. The average wage at placement for Work First recipients was \$ 8.00 (average data from two contractors) in FY 2005-2006. This reflects a decrease since FY 2003-2004 when the average was at placement was \$8.34.

The Work First Planning Committee continues to consider how to link Work First participants with GED programs and other educational programs so that they can move up the career ladder. While collaboration between employment service providers and the community college is strong, Work First program requirements to work make it difficult for clients to combine work with education. Sometimes clients do not understand the career paths that may lead them to better paying jobs. Usually, the difficulties come with

trying to motivate participants to combine work with education along with family responsibilities especially when they have to rely on public transportation.

Finally, the lack of daycare and transportation for second and third shift work continues to be a problem for Work First recipients. Transportation is also limited on Saturdays. There is no Sunday bus service. Childcare for sick children to allow parents to work is not available.

Work First Vision Statement

In partnership with the Forsyth County human service community, the Department of Social Services will work with families to achieve economic independence from welfare. The Department's strategy will be to work with families to develop an integrated approach that helps families move toward prosperity.

II. PLANNING PROCESS

Forsyth County's plan for Work First for 2007-2008 involved the designation of a small subcommittee that met once to review possible changes to the plan. The subcommittee also reviewed the results of a focus group held with current and former Work First recipients and surveys conducted on a similar group. The subcommittee also developed a timeline of what needed to be done to ensure that the full plan could be reviewed by the full Work First Planning Committee and reviewed by the general public before it was presented to the Board of Commissioners.

A. Input from Work First Customers

The Committee agreed to hold a focus group and survey current and former Work First customers. A focus group of current and former Work First customers was held on August 10th at Goodwill Industries. About 18 individuals attended. There were five former Work First customers in attendance who are all now successfully employed. One of the biggest themes to emerge was the importance of support ---from social workers, from staff at contractors, from family, and from each other. The group recommended that DSS form support groups for customers after they go to work and include people who have successfully made the transition from welfare-to-work, those who have dealt with the balancing of work and family and persevered.

The written surveys were not as helpful. Respondents did not always understand the directions and response rates were low. Fifty-five surveys were received from DSS, the Housing Authority, and ESR (a partner agency). While the groups were divided into "employed/not employed" the responses have been reported together. Individuals were asked about what services helped them to get a job and what would help them progress in they were currently employed. Childcare and transportation were rated as they most helpful services. Skills' training was deemed to be the service most needed to get a better job. Respondents were also asked about other services that would be helpful to them.

Responses included information on money management and information on buying a home.

B. Planning Committee

The primary group with responsibility for input into this plan is the Work First Committee appointed by the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners. New appointments to the Committee were made in May of 2006 for two years so that all Committee members will need to be reappointed at the same time in 2008. New appointments were made to round out expertise and fill in appointments for members who had resigned. The Committee now has twenty-two members including representatives of the:

- Board of Commissioners,
- Board of Social Services,
- Business representatives,
- CenterPoint Human Services,
- Child welfare representative,
- Community-based organizations
- Former Work First recipients,
- Forsyth County Health Department,
- Forsyth Technical Community College,
- Employment Security Commission,
- Housing Authority of Winston-Salem,
- Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School Board,
- Winston-Salem Transit Authority, and
- Workforce Development/JobLink

Members of the current Work First Planning Committee are:

- The Reverend Ginny Britt, The Advocacy for the Poor, Community Representative;
- Tony L. Burton, Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, School-Board Representative;
- Christy Cauty, FirstLine, Community representative;
- Sherry Carpenter, Goodwill Industries of Northwest NC, Inc., Community-Based Organization Representative;
- Tina Carson-Wilkins, Winston-Salem Transit Authority, Transportation Representative;
- Matt Davis, Members Credit Union, Business Representative;
- Margaret Elliott, Crisis Control Ministry. Community-Based Organization Representative;
- Zena Ervin, Forsyth County Department of Social Services, Community Representative;

- Burnetta Evans, Housing Authority of Winston-Salem;
- Michael Gray, Treatment Accountability for Safer Communities, Substance Abuse Treatment Representative;
- Michael Harris, Forsyth Technical Community College, Community College Representative;
- Mandi Jackson, Forsyth County Department of Social Services, Child Welfare Representative;
- Steve Jones, Winston-Salem Urban League, Community-Based Organization Representative;
- Antwon Keith, Employment Security Commission;
- Sara Keville, Temporary Resources, Business Representative;
- Vicki Kimel, Woodland Place Community, Business Representative;
- Walter Marshall, Forsyth County Board of Commissioners/ Board of Social Services;
- Dr. Tim Monroe, Department of Public Health;
- Bob Parker, NC Baptist Hospital, Business Representative;
- Theresa Reynolds, NW Piedmont Council of Government, Workforce Development Representative;
- Penny Rogers, Somerset Court, Business Representative;
- Betty Taylor, CenterPoint Human Services, Mental Health Authority Representative; and
- Twana Wellman, Experiment in Self-Reliance, Community Based-Representative.

The full committee will continue to monitor the goals and progress against state goals and will review progress on Work First goals during the coming year.

C. Public Comment

The public review process included publication of a notice in two local newspapers in September about where to review the plan. The plan was also available on the county's web site upon approval by the Work First Committee (beginning September 14). Copies of the plan were available for public review at 11 libraries throughout the county and at the offices of eight partner agencies for two weeks (September 14-September 28). The public was invited to provide written comments. No comments were received on the plan.

III. OUTCOMES AND GOALS FOR THE COUNTY

A. Statewide Work First Goals

- **Employment:** Self-sufficiency will be realized primarily through the employment of Work First clients.

- **Meeting Federal Participation Rates:** Active participation in federal countable work activities will lead to full time employment.
- **Providing Employment Services:** Active participation in intensive employment services for all families is necessary in order to meet the participation rate and to ensure families are served adequately before the end of five years. One measure of success in Work First is the percentage of families who are subject to the work requirement that counties are assisting with job preparation and job placement.
- **Benefit Diversion:** The most successful outcome possible is for an applicant to avoid the need to become a recipient.
- **Staying off Welfare:** Efforts to reduce welfare rolls, help adults find jobs and increase self-sufficiency are undermined when families return to welfare. Families leaving Work First Family Assistance because of a job are tracked to determine if they return to cash assistance.
- **Job Retention:** Families who leave Work First for employment continue to be employed six to twelve months after leaving the program show increased job stability which impacts a family's well-being. This measure will be based on the number of responsible adults that leave Work First Family Assistance for employment who are still employed at six and twelve months intervals following termination.

B. COUNTY DEVELOPED OUTCOME GOALS

The Work First Committee recommended to the County Commissioners that no additional outcome goals be adopted. Instead, the Committee will track progress on several indicators that affect the Work First population but are outside the scope of Work First as it currently exists. Most of these indicators relate to improving educational outcomes for participants. The Committee is still working on implementation plans for these indicators.

In addition, the Department is working on an agency-wide goals and benchmarking process called Leading by Results. Several of the benchmarks developed are in the Work First program area and will serve to improve outcomes for Work First customers as they are fully implemented.

IV. PLANS TO ACHIEVE AND MEASURE OUTCOMES AND GOALS

A. Activities

The Forsyth County Department of Social Services will continue during this period to use all existing programs and new programs as they emerge to meet the Work First Family

Assistance (WFFA) Employment Program goals. This section describes activities and strategies used to address Work First goals.

Many activities are performed in-house and include eligibility determination, employability assessment, in-house job readiness, referral to supportive services within the community, and referral to the contractor who provides in-depth job readiness and job placement services. Forsyth County is fortunate to have a wide array of community partners who work with the Department to assist Work First clients.

For the FY 2006-07 program year, the Work First program plans to have one contractor offering employment-related services, Goodwill Industries. They are an experienced provider and offer a wide array of services including financial literacy in conjunction with a local community-based organization, the Experiment in Self-Reliance. They also offer short-term vocational training in partnership with Forsyth Technical Community College for some courses.

The Department is continuing its community partnership to assist Work First customers who have multiple barriers to employment called Success for Families. This is a community-wide team consisting of representatives of 15 programs/agencies who assist Work First clients with multiple barriers to successful employment. The goal is to prevent clients from staying on cash assistance. The Success partners use a team approach to assessment and development of the Mutual Responsibility Agreement with the client. Social workers obtain all case information on a client and conduct a home visit. Workers research all income in the home, administer a depression survey, and check criminal records, schools system records, work records, and local emergency assistance records. They share this information with the community team and work together to fill gaps in service and develop a plan with the client to achieve Work First goals. In addition to Work First Employment Service staff, the following agencies participate in the Success for Families initiative:

- DSS Child Support Enforcement -- provides assistance in locating the absent parent and obtaining child support for the child;
- DSS Child Welfare Services -- provide information on any services currently being offered to the family or to determine if services are needed;
- CenterPoint Human Services—provides the services of a staff psychiatrist to assist in assessing the client and making recommendations on mental health issues;
- Department of Public Health –provides an assessment of the needs for family planning information and other related family health needs;
- Vocational Rehabilitation –provides information on services including evaluation and assessment for clients who may be physically or mentally disabled;
- Goodwill Industries of NWNC, Inc.—one of the current Employment Service contractors. They provide information on their job readiness and short-term training services.

- Experiment in Self-Reliance—a community action agency that provides self-sufficiency and housing services to assist in the transition to employment;
- WS/FC Schools—a school social worker provides information on issues related to the children in the family and their school participation;
- Family Services—provides information and services on family counseling particularly services related to domestic violence;
- Housing Authority of Winston-Salem—provides information on shared clients and the services available through the Housing Authority such as Section 8 housing vouchers and public housing assistance.

B. Supportive Services

The County offers a wide variety of supportive services either internally or through partner agencies. Some of these are delineated in the “Employment” section below.

The Department offers all clients any allowable services as outlined in this plan. This includes childcare subsidies, Food Stamps, Medicaid, transportation, mental health services, substance abuse services, and any other allowable services to provide the support that clients need to prepare for work and remain employed. Services are provided at the DSS location and at other partner agencies.

Many community agencies provide support services and job-seeking services to Work First clients. This includes CenterPoint Human Services, the Forsyth County Health Department, the Experiment in Self-Reliance, Employment Security Commission, JobLink Career Center, Crisis Control Ministry, Goodwill Industries (contractor), Consumer Credit Counseling, etc.

Information on the two most common types of support services, child care and transportation follows:

1. Child Care – as long as funding is available, provision of any necessary child care arrangement to enable participants to obtain and/or maintain full-time employment or to participate in the employment program and its components; can be provided. After leaving Work First Family Assistance (WFFA), child care continues based on income need.
2. Transportation - arrange and/or pay for any necessary transportation to work including bus passes, or direct payment to client or to third party. Transportation services can be provided as long as participant is involved in employment programs. The Department uses both program funds and NC Department of Transportation funds to meet these needs.

1. EMPLOYMENT

Forsyth County has been proactive in assisting individuals who go to work. DSS has utilized contracts with local partners to assist individuals in obtaining employment. Goodwill Industries, in partnership with Forsyth Technical and Community College (FTCC), provides classes that include some vocational training for those who are less job-ready. Self-directed job search is used, and the JobLink Career Center is also used for some clients.

Staff work with customers to assist them in better managing their money and contractors include modules on money management. Added to the mix of tools to make families more economically literate has been a focus on the use of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). For years, the Department's staff has worked with a community collaborative, the Forsyth Working Families Partnership, to staff free tax clinics located in the community to prepare taxes for low-income individuals during the tax season. DSS staff provides free tax preparation on site.

Departmental staff continues to provide services for families with special needs such as domestic violence. This year, Departmental staff became part of a community initiative called Safe on Seventh (SOS) which provides one-stop services to victims of domestic violence. The center is located at the court house and brings together law enforcement, victim advocates, legal advocates and social services. DSS staff is on-site one and a half days a week and takes applications for services on-site as well as providing information about services.

Additional partnerships and services provided include:

1. NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation - resource for in-depth job preparation and support services for participants with physical, mental, and emotional barriers to employment. DVR is active in the Success for Families initiative and referrals are made as appropriate to DVR.
2. Work Experience/Community Service - provision of job preparation which places WFEP participants with non-profit, for-profit agencies, and government programs for the purpose of the participant gaining on-the-job experience in order to be more viable in the job market.
3. Subsidized Employment—the Department will explore the use of part-time and full-time subsidized employment, resources permitting, both in the public and private sector particularly for individuals without extensive work experience. This may include wage supplementation.
4. On-the-Job Training (OJT) - the Department will first explore the use OJT through the local JobLink Centers. If they are not able to accommodate Work First customers, the Department will approach employers about developing OJT contracts for Work First customers.

5. Vocational Education – short-term skills training to provide the participant with a specific job skill. Short-term training offered includes:
 - Certified Nursing Assistant
 - Chef
 - Computer Basics
 - Customer Service
 - Data Entry
 - Electrical
 - General Clerical
 - Forklift operation
 - Heating and Air Conditioning Repair
 - Housekeeping Services
 - Hospitality Management
 - Introduction to Medical Terminology and Coding
 - Medication Training
 - Personal Care Assistant
 - Phlebotomy
 - Pharmacy Technician
 - Plumbing
6. Training is provided for a maximum of six months and generally less than 12 weeks and is provided by Goodwill staff and/or Forsyth Technical Community College.
7. HS/GED - component available through school system and/or community college to obtain a high school diploma and/or GED used in combination with a work component. This year, Goodwill Industries will be providing an on-site lab to help Work First customers prepare for the GED.
8. Ways-to-Work—a service provided by Family Services, Inc. It provides low-interest loans up to \$4,000 to purchase a used car or to provide a loan for car repairs for repairs over \$500. It is available for people who are working.
9. Screening for domestic violence issues and referral for specialized services -- Contract with Family Services to provide assessment, counseling services to individuals and families who are victims of domestic violence, and nights of care in the family shelter.
10. Job Retention through Contractors - contract with Goodwill Industries provides a tracking of individuals who have gone to work. Contacts are made with clients at specific intervals up to 12 months after they obtain full time employment and stop receiving cash assistance.

11. Other Referrals -- for all other services which will enhance a family's ability to function without being dependent upon Work First Family Assistance (WFFA) cash assistance such as subsidized housing assistance services and various free or reduced fee health care services.
12. Transition Services -- Utilization of Food Stamps and Extended Medicaid benefits and Child Support, to supplement earned income. Increase efforts to inform clients as they leave cash assistance about these services.
13. Expanded relationships with employers --Continue to work with the Chamber to build relationships with employers using a variety of strategies so that they understand the Work First Program. Continue to meet with employment service providers to ensure that they understand, support, and promote the expanded emphasis on employer relationships. Continue to make visits to major employers to develop jobs for Work First clients and provide information on various incentive programs available to them to increase hiring of Work First recipients such as the Worker Opportunity Tax Credits.
14. Increase linkages with economic development efforts and workforce development --Continue to work with local community development corporations to find opportunities for new employers or planned expansion activities to hire Work First recipients.
15. JobLink Career Centers—provides career counseling, job readiness services, OJT and vocational training.

2. MEETING FEDERAL PARTICIPATION RATES

Beginning on 6/1/06, the TEAM Division changed the way in which Work First cash assistance applications are taken. This new procedure was begun in order to help applicants better understand all of the eligibility requirements when applying for and receiving Work First. Previously, a large percentage of applicants failed to meet all of the conditions of eligibility, and had their applications denied after involving several hours of staff time. Others met eligibility conditions, only to fail to fully cooperate with the Work First Employment Services' requirements and were subsequently sanctioned.

The new application procedure begins with a client being assigned to an orientation session. They are all given child support paper work and informed that they must register for First Stop at ESC. Orientations are held on Monday and Tuesday at 9:00 and 1:30. Once a client has successfully completed an orientation, they are told to return for the actual application process. They are given a choice of four days to return to apply for Work First.

It is hoped that this new procedure will help boost Participation Rate by giving applicants for Work First all the information and requirements so they can make an informed choice about whether Work First is the appropriate program for them.

In addition, the Department will:

- Serve 100% of mandatory clients in Employment Services;
- Increase the required number of hours from 35 hours a week to 40 hours a week in anticipation of federal changes;
- Increase the use of work experience, subsidized employment including work supplementation, and OJT;
- Monitor all participant activity to ensure social work staff have a solid understanding of who is meeting/not meeting participation rates and why;
- Utilize all the employment-related activities that “count” toward meeting participation rates;
- Increase support activities to keep clients in countable activities;
- Monitor state systems to ensure that clients hours of participation are reported accurately;
- Continue to train staff on importance of client interactions in meeting the participation rates; and
- Use prompt sanctions for non-compliance.

3. PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT SERVICES

Staff uses various strategies to ensure that all clients subject to the work requirement are actively participating in employment services. The WFES staff is serving 100% of all mandatory participants. With the current caseload, this does not appear to be a problem. Additional strategies include:

- a. Increasing use of upfront assessment and benefit diversion to ensure that clients who do not need employment services are served in other ways. Avoiding cash assistance is beneficial to clients and helps staff focus employment services on those who need them most.
- b. Reviewing monthly state reports of individuals who have not been assigned a social worker and getting them assigned quickly.

4. BENEFIT DIVERSION

The Department continues to use benefit diversion when prospective Work First clients have a good work history. All income maintenance workers assess clients who apply for cash assistance for suitability for benefit diversion.

Families are carefully screened to determine if they are job ready and if the presenting problem that brings them to DSS can be addressed with a one-time infusion of funds. In

order not to encourage dependency on benefit diversion, the staff carefully screens repeat requests for benefit diversion.

5. STAYING OFF WELFARE

Staff aggressively promote transitional assistance and work with community based organizations whose missions are to serve the working poor. One such organization, the Experiment in Self-Reliance, assists individuals in improving their education, ensures stable housing, and offers other services to enable participants to remain employed and to keep from returning to Work First Family Assistance (WFFA).

The Department continues efforts to encourage economic literacy. A major strategy is to ensure that individuals who leave assistance remain employed, become good financial managers of their income, use the tax system to their advantage, and begin to acquire assets. Work First clients are offered information as they prepare for work on the how to use the tax system to their benefit including applying for the Advanced Earned Income Tax Credit to increase their take home pay, accessing the free tax clinics to make use of other tax credits, and choosing not to use refund anticipation loans. Data from the IRS indicates that almost 77% of taxpayers in Forsyth County who are eligible for the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) use a paid preparer. Many of them may be paying high fees and high interest rates for refund anticipation loans.

The Forsyth Working Families Partnership (FWFP) continues to support the efforts of the Department to join with other community partners to encourage the use of the Earned Income Tax Credit, and the free tax clinics, and to link the EITC with asset accumulation programs such as the Individual Development Account (IDA) program. The FWFP has 22 active public/private partners that include the Chamber of Commerce and the United Way.

The Department is an active partner with the United Way's effort to expand the IDA program to 500 accounts over 5 years. The Department continues to provide some matching funds for individuals who are within 200% of poverty and meet IDA guidelines.

6. JOB RETENTION

As of 7/1/06, Work First Employment Services began a program to offer services to Work First participants who have gone to work. Previously, once Work First cash assistance was terminated, no further services were provided to the newly employed participants. With the steady decline of those clients receiving cash assistance, case loads of the Employment Social Workers are now at a level that would allow us to offer services to help clients retain employment. Many of our participants don't have trouble finding employment but are unable to maintain employment for more than a few months, cycling back on cash assistance.

At a recent focus group of both active cash assistance recipients and former cash assistance recipients, the lack of services to support newly employed participants was listed as a barrier for retaining jobs. Services that were mentioned as needed were not only tangible services like transportation assistance but also mentoring and counseling services to help the newly employed participant adjust to the world of work and budgeting to help with increased income. Work First Employment Social Workers are offering our newly designed retention services to their participants. The package of services will include continued support for transportation, counseling services to help retain employment, budgeting and continued education services to help our participants advance in their careers. It is also our hope that by offering these services, we will help our participants not have to return to cash assistance, thereby helping our participation rate.

As part of this plan, the Department will explore both internally and through contractor services the use of support groups for Work First recipients who go to work and to the extent possible mentoring of former customers.

V. ADMINISTRATION

A. Authority

Authority for administering the Work First Program has been assigned to the Forsyth County Department of Social Services by the County Commissioners.

B. Organization

All Work First services are offered at the Department's new building. Cash assistance, Work First Medicaid, Child Care, and Work First Employment Services staff all conveniently located on one floor.

All services are offered through the Temporary Economic Assistance and Maintenance (TEAM) Division. The Work First Program Manager reports to the TEAM Division Director.

At the current time, no Work First staff is co-located at other organizations although Medicaid staff is located at other health facilities throughout the county. The relationship with ESC, WIA, and JobLink Centers is referral only. All Work First intake, eligibility, assessment, and employment services are under one Division director who also has responsibility for Child Support, Medicaid, Childcare, and related supportive services.

An organization chart for this Division is attached in Appendix C.

1. **Intake and eligibility determination** for all programs are provided at one location by both Income Maintenance staff and Work First Employment

Service Staff who also conduct orientation and initial assessment. As noted earlier, intake begins by asking individuals to register for First Stop and return to DSS for Orientation. Only after customers complete orientation is an application taken.

2. **Employability assessment** begins with assessment by Income Maintenance staff to screen individuals for benefit diversion. Income Maintenance staff also identify “red flags” that alert Employment Service staff of potential barriers to employment.
3. **Emergency assistance** is provided by WFES staff.
4. **Employment Services and supportive services** are provided by social work staff who assess for transportation, childcare, and other needs. WFES staff makes decisions on how to meet transportation needs. They refer Work First clients as needed to childcare services located on the same floor.

C. First Stop

The Employment Security Commission is located several blocks from the new offices of the Department, but it is accessible by bus or on foot. The County requires individuals who apply for cash assistance to register for work with First Stop before they complete their Work First application.

First Stop has become one way to assist people who may not need cash assistance. The Employment Security Commission continues to assist clients by providing job search, job development, and job placement services.

A copy of the current Memorandum of Understanding is attached in Appendix A.

D. Childcare

Daycare is one of the most critical services provided to Work First participants. The current priorities for daycare are:

1. Children who are involved in a Child Protective Services Investigation or whose family is receiving CPS Case Planning and Management services.
2. Children in DSS custody who are placed in a foster home where the foster parent is employed full time.
3. Children whose parent(s) is a Work First Employment Services participant and is in compliance with the MRA-B, and child care is needed to support this plan.
4. Children whose parent(s) have obtained employment subsequent to a Benefit Diversion service plan and child care is needed to initiate and/or maintain employment.
5. Children in “child only” households (child receives WFFA) and whose relative is working full-time.
6. Children referred to other funding sources due to lack of DSS funds and who are losing that subsidy and child care is needed for the parent(s) to remain employed or in training.

7. Children have been on a Day Care Waiting List in a first-on-first removed order depending upon the eligibility status.
8. Children who live in families that meet the criteria with incomes below 75% of the North Carolina median income.

If participants are working, they may be eligible for Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds for childcare if they are enrolled with WIA.

E. Transportation

The Department works closely with the Winston-Salem Transit Authority (WSTA) to serve the Work First population. However, bus service does not meet the needs of this population as well as it needs to. There is limited service for night shifts and weekends. A member of the WSTA staff serves on the Work First Planning Committee and is well aware of the limitations for the Work First population.

The Department provides bus passes, mileage reimbursements, van pools, some car repairs, and some use of taxis to assist individuals to get to and from work and childcare facilities. Transportation needs of the Work First population are met through the use of every possible funding stream:

- Existing Work First resources. The Department estimates that about \$300,000 of the Work First Block Grant will go to Transportation.
- Foundation funds: the Department receives a “fill the gap” grant from a local foundation to meet unmet needs. When no other funds are available, these funds are used to provide bus passes or car repairs.
- Ways-to-Work: Forsyth County developed a new model program to provide low interest loans (below market rate) to individuals with a poor credit history and incomes less than 200% of poverty. The program is operated by Family Services Inc. In addition, the program provides for low-interest loans for car repairs. The Wheels-to-Work program was reinstated as a component of the Ways-to-Work program for people who have been working for six months.
- NCDOT grant: the Department uses this grant for a variety of transportation services that include automobile repairs, bus passes, and gas cards. These resources are targeted to people who are no longer eligible for Work First.
- If participants are working, they may be eligible for Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds for transportation if they are enrolled with WIA.

F. Substance Abuse Services

The Department has an ongoing working relationship with CenterPoint Human Services, the local management entity for the mental health services. They manage mental health services, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse services.

Two Qualified Substance Abuse professionals are employed by the WISH program and available to serve Work First participants. One or more will be on-site at Work First Employment Services location for at least 20 hours per week.

Their duties include providing in-depth assessment for anyone who fails the drug screening, anyone who fails the AUDIT or DAST, or anyone who the Work First Employment Service social worker has referred for screening due to repeated behavioral issues. See Appendix C for a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding with CenterPoint Human Services, the local management entity.

G. Family Violence Option

The Department has a close working relationship with Family Services, Inc., the primary victim services group for domestic violence in the county. The Department contracts with Family Services for full assessment of domestic violence (Departmental staff conducts initial screening as part of the Family Violence Option). Family Services also provides individual and group treatment for both adult victims and offenders and for children. They also operate the local family shelter for victims of domestic violence.

Departmental staff are active members of the local Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (staffed by Family Services). Family Services is the lead agency coordinating services at the SOS one-stop center at the courthouse

H. Maintenance Of Effort (MOE)

Forsyth County will use Maintenance of Effort funds for the following activities:

1. Salaries and fringe benefits for Work First Cash Assistance, Work First Employment, some child welfare staff, and some Emergency Assistance staff.
2. Transportation needs for clients including bus passes and car repairs.
3. Professional services such as contracts with vendors and other community agencies that serve Work First families.
4. New activities identified during the program year to serve Work First families.
5. Expenses related to education, training, job readiness, job retention, and other expenses directed to help clients obtain and retain employment.
6. Emergency assistance services aimed at helping individuals remain employed and off other cash assistance.
7. If funds are available, and needed, some funds will be used to pay for daycare to ensure that families can remain employed.

I. Child Welfare Services

Forsyth County estimates spending approximately \$153,000 of the block grant for Child Welfare services.

VI. EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

Eligibility Determination and Procedures

An emergency situation occurs if:

- The situation involves a sudden change which was beyond the clients' control and that caused a decrease in income and/or an increase in expenses; or
- The situation places a child at risk of being destitute or deprived of necessities; or
- The situation is a result of a catastrophic illness, a natural or manmade disaster, or a crime of violence; and
- There are no other household or community resources that will alleviate the emergency in a timely manner; and
- The assistance will prevent the reoccurrence of the emergency.

Eligibility provisions include:

- The family must have a child who lives with a relative as defined by Work First cash assistance and who meets the age limit for Work First cash assistance;
- Meet the same citizenship requirements as for Work First cash assistance;
- Have a total monthly countable income at or below 200 percent of poverty; and
- Cannot receive EA more than once in a 12-month period without approval of the appropriate Program Manager.

Types of Assistance Provided

Non-recurring, short-term benefits designed to deal with a specific episode of need that does not extend beyond four months.

VII. SERVICES FOR FAMILIES WITH INCOMES AT OR BELOW 200% OF POVERTY

Forsyth County's focus will be on rewarding work and helping individuals with families stay employed or accept employment. Services will be provided if there is a precipitating event that jeopardizes the individual's employment situation or home situation. Services will be prioritized to serve current recipients first, former Work First Cash recipients (with incomes equal to or less than 200% of poverty) second, and families who meet income guidelines and have never received cash assistance as the third priority group. Forsyth County will follow the same policies for determining limits on services as those that are currently in place with the exceptions noted below. Services will include, but are not be limited to, the following:

- Transportation Assistance: Bus passes, mileage allowances up to \$75 per month, car repairs (up to \$1,000 in a 12 month period), and low-interest loans to purchase vehicles;
- Uniforms or clothing for work up to \$150 in a 12 month period;
- Part-time tuition assistance at the community college for individuals who maintain a 2.5 GPA;
- Special work equipment up to \$400 once in a 12 month period;
- Extending the IDA match to individuals who have met all IDA requirements and are otherwise eligible for matching funds if funds are available; and
- Other services as needed, if services are allowable for funding, and funds are available.

VIII. SERVICES FOR NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS OF WORK FIRST CHILDREN

The Department will provide these services through referrals to the JobLink Center and other agencies that provide job training and employment services and to fatherhood programs.

IX. EXEMPTIONS FROM THE WORK REQUIREMENT

The County's policy is that parents with children under the age of one can be exempt from the work requirement for no more than three months. If the parent loses this exemption due to failure to comply with child support, it is not reinstated. This exemption is limited to 12 months lifetime pursuant to the Work First Manual Section 103-IV.A.2

X. INNOVATIVE COUNTY STRATEGIES

1. The Department is developing benchmarks for the entire agency to focus attention on results that go beyond those required by the state. Several of these are in the area of Work First. They include:
 - Annual percent of children potentially eligible for the child care subsidy and receive it
 - Annual percent of Work First participants who obtain a GED/High School diploma or vocational certificate
 - Annual percent of Work First participants who obtain employment
 - Annual percent of Work First participants who obtain employment at a living wage (defined as more than \$8.50 per hour)
2. As far as we know, the SOS one-stop center to serve victims of domestic violence is the first of its kind in the state of North Carolina.

3. The use of ongoing support groups for Work First customers is a new and innovative practice that is rarely used to provide the group-mentoring that participants need. The focus group of current and former clients confirmed that many of our customers lack this key element to keep them motivated toward success.

XI. SPECIAL ISSUES

The major areas of concern in the community and to the DSS, in particular, which can create barriers to the success of this effort, are linked to the lack of automation. This issue is being addressed by the county.

XVII. CERTIFICATION

The Work First Plan for 2007-2008 was reviewed by the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners and approved for submission to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Signed by _____ Date _____

Gloria Whisenhunt, Commissioner
Forsyth County Board of Commissioners