WCDSS

Work First and Child Safety County Plan Fiscal Years: 2012-2014

"Work Supports Independence"

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"Helping Families and Children Achieve Success"

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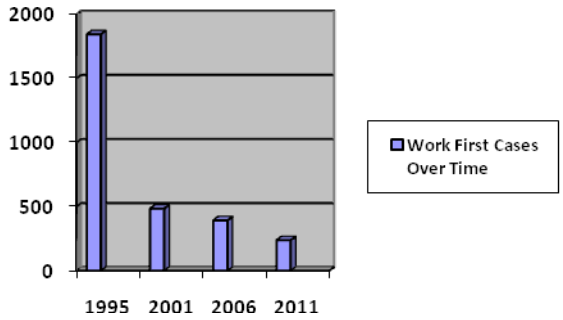
I. CONDITIONS WITHIN THE COUNTY

Wilson County's Work First and Child Safety Plan is a results-based proactive plan in addressing the needs of families with children living in poverty as well as our vulnerable children and families to become economically stable. Since 1995 Wilson County's Work First cash caseload has declined approximately 90**%**. This reduction is a result of Welfare Reform changes, innovative best practices, community collaborations and the focus of responsibility, not entitlement. Wilson County's focus has been helping families with children to become economically stable through promoting work, personal and family responsibility. Below is a chart representing the decline of Work First caseloads in Wilson County from July 1995 to July 2011.

DECLINE IN WORK FIRST CASELOAD OVER TIME



As of July 2011, we have 42 single parent/two parent families receiving a Work First cash assistance check. Child only cases (relative caregivers, disabled parents providing for the care of a child or undocumented immigrant applying for their child) represent over three fourths of our total Work First cases at eighty-two percent (82%) or 196 cases. Child Only Cases are not subject to work requirements or time limits. The child must be a legal US citizen to be eligible.

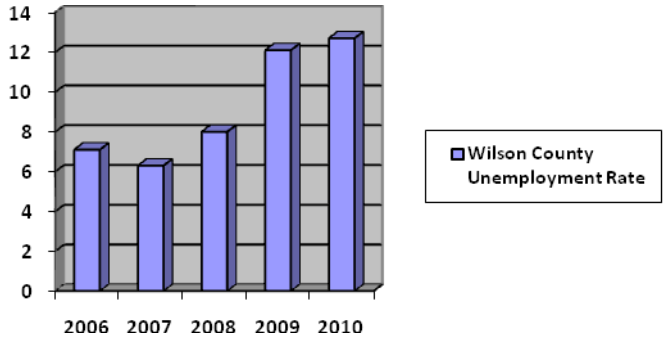
It is estimated 40% of all current Work First families lack a high school education or GED. It is estimated 10% have some level of substance-related impairment and approximately 30% with physical and/or mental health issues.

Some of the realities and most pressing problems facing families today are:

- Poverty
- Lack of affordable, adequate and dependable transportation
- Lack of adequate and affordable child care
- Lack of adequate and affordable housing
- Lack of adequate health coverage
- Lack of adequate wages to sustain self-sufficiency
- Medical and physical limitations

- Criminal background
- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Budgeting and financial management deficiencies
- Teen pregnancy
- Personal and family crisis
- Lack of parenting skills
- Mental Health issues
- Lack of job ready skills
- Illiteracy

Wilson County typically has a higher unemployment rate than the state average. Economists predict a slow economic recovery over the next year. Unemployment rate for June 2011 for Wilson County rose to 13.1%. Below are Wilson County's Average Unemployment Rates for the past five years:



According to 2010 US Census, the estimated persons living in poverty for Wilson County is 20.3%. Child Poverty rates are even higher at 29.3%. (Kids Count Data)

Economic Development Outlook

Currently, economic growth in Wilson County is slow. No significant improvement expected in 2011. Manufacture jobs represent approximately one-third of our work force. Service related and retail jobs are stable.

II. PLANNING PROCESS

A. Planning Committee

Wilson County Boards

Board of County Commissioners

Mr. Thomas Lucas, Chairman
Mr. Tim Williford
Mr. Roger Lucas
Mrs. Bobbie Jones
Mr. Atkinson
Mr. Tad Piner
Mr. Rob Boyette

Board of Social Services

Mr. Jay Gallimore, Chairman
Mr. Charles Davis
Ms. Nancy Sallenger
Mrs. Bobbie Jones
Mrs. Denise Sessoms
Mr. Glenn Osborne, Director

Mr. Ellis Williford, County Manager
Ms. Denise Stinagle, Assistant County Manager

County Work First Planning Committee

Ms. Karen Salacki – Local Mental Health Entity Director
Board of County Commissioner Representative
Ms. Cynthia Floyd - Local School System Representative
Ms. Denna Spach - Business Community Representative
Ms. Karen Boyette - Local Public Health Department
Ms. Genice Hagan – ESC Job Link Representative
Mr. Jay Gallimore – County Board of Social Services
Ms. Elaine Swinson – County Transportation
Ms. Barbara Boyette - Wilson Technical Community College
Ms. Barbara Blackston – Community Agency Representative
Ms. Starr Day – Faith Community Representative
Ms. Eva Barrett – Former Work First Representative
Ms. Susan Parker - Department of Social Services
Mr. Glenn Osborne - Department of Social Services
Ms. Kathy Stone - Department of Social Services
Ms. Barbara Massey – Department of Social Services
Ms. Terri Mitchell – Department of Social Services
Mr. Don Hicks – Career Plus Center Rep.

The Local Planning Committee is fully representative of the greater Wilson County community and meets all statutory requirements for committee representation. Additional community members were invited to join in the discussions and planning from the following agencies/businesses:

Ms. Barbara Carter - Communities in School
Ms. Jennifer Lane, QPSA –PORT Human Services
Ms. Becky Stottlemyre - Faith Connections
Mr. Jimmie Lucas – TEMP/Job Boost Program Coordinator
Ms. Becky Callison - Wilson County Library Director/TEMP Mentor
Ms. Martha Nida – Arts Council of Wilson/TEMP Mentor
Ms. Tracey Mooring - Child Care Supervisor
Ms. Tiffany Heffington – Success in School Case Manager
Ms. Nekia Lyons – Success in School at Risk Social Worker

Ms. Amy Latour – Child Only Kinship Care Social Worker

B. Public Comment

Opportunity for public review and comments on our County's 2012-2014 Work First/Child Welfare Plan were provided from September 1st through September 30, 2011. Copies of the Work First Plan are posted at the County Office, Wilson County Department of Social Services, Wilson County Public Library and on our County's web site for the public to review and provide comment. The dates of our Public notice and comment period were advertised through the local newspaper and in our Wilson County Report Newsletter.

C. Planning Development

Local Work First/Child Safety Committee meeting was held on August 11, 2011. All of the need areas are addressed in our strategies for the 2012-2014 Work First/Child Safety Plan. In addition the committee heard from Work First and community partner staff on progress and successes as a result of our Leading by Results strategies and indicators. Discussions on new initiatives were reviewed and discussed with the Planning Committee and at several civic club/business meetings. The Committee has reviewed and provided final input of new initiatives before submitting to local DSS Board and County Commissioners. (See **Attachment A for local WF Planning Committee minutes)**
Upon recommendations from the Work First and Child Safety Planning Committee on our 2012-2014 County Plan, a presentation was made to the Wilson County DSS Board for endorsement of the plan on August 30, 2011. A final presentation of the initiatives and request for approval from the County Commissioners on our 2012-2014 Work First and Child Safety Plan will be held on September 12, 2011. County Commissioners have unanimously voted to remain an electing county.

It is proposed that the Local Planning Committee continue to meet on an as needed basis to evaluate the implementation of the Plan and the completion of outcome goals. We believe that through the strength of our partnerships and through the development, planning and implementation of these initiatives, we as a community can continue to make an even greater impact in the lives of those that we serve.

III. Outcomes and Goals for Wilson County

A. Statewide Work First Goals

1. **Employment -** Immediate participation in intensive employment services for ***all "work eligible"*** families is necessary in order to meet the participation rate and to ensure families are served adequately before the

end of two years/five year time limits. Wilson County will assist in placing 70 or more Work First participants into employment for each fiscal year.

2. **Meeting Federal Participation Rates –** 50% for All Families Rate and 100% for Two-parent rate. Below is a graph of our Monthly All Family Participation Rate for the past 12 months. We have seen a significant progress in exceeding the federal participation rate as a result of electing county initiatives and pay after performance. A new initiative will be developed for two parent families for addressing healthy relationships, communication, and economic stability.

Month	Year	Rate
July	2010	55.56
August	2010	56.52
September	2010	59.26
October	2010	57.58
November	2010	63.89
December	2010	60.61
January	2011	61.54
February	2011	57.14
March	2011	76.19
April	2011	81.82
May	2011	70.37
June	2011	56.25
July	2011	51.3

3. **Staying Off Welfare – 9**0% of all Work First families who leave Work First because of a job do not return to apply within 12 months
4. **Benefit diversion – 5**0 families will be provided upfront benefit diversion assistance to alleviate a specific family crisis or family episode of need and help families return to full time employment within 2-3 months.

B. County Performance Measures

(*Result Statements are what we want to cause to happen in our County. The Results and indicators are part of our Leading by Results Efforts. We are using indicators to track reasonable progress over reasonable time while we work to meet the federal, state and county goals***)**

Child Welfare Results and Indicators:

Result #1 – Safety, Stability and Quality of Life for Children and Families

Indicator 1: Annual % of abused/neglected children who are not repeat victims of maltreatment.

Outcome: **100%**

Indicator 2: Annual % children active with child protective services that are removed from home and legally secured in placement.

Outcome: This is a new indicator for Wilson County.

Indicator 3: Annual % of children who complete CPS in-home services and do not have another accepted report of child maltreatment within six months or less.

Outcome: This is a new indicator for Wilson County

Indicator 5: Annual % of children who do not have a substantiation of abuse/neglect after successfully completing prevention or kinship care services.

Outcome**: 100%**

Result # 2 –Children and Youth in DSS Care to Thrive In Safe Permanent Homes; Youth Obtain the Education, Experiences and Support to Live Healthy Adult Lives

Indicator 1: Annual % of children in DSS Custody who achieve a permanent placement within 12 months

Outcome**: 40%**

Indicator 2: Annual % of children in foster care placements who are not abused or neglected while in DSS custody

Outcome: **100%**

Indicator 3: Annual % of children who are returned home from foster care and do not experience another incident of abuse and neglect

Outcome**: 100%**

Indicator 4: Annual % of Youth 16 years or older in DSS custody who Demonstrate improved living skills

Outcome: **74%**

Indicator 5: Annual % of Youth who were in DSS custody through the age of 18 who have achieved a stable standard of living through age 23

Outcome: **70%**

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Result 3 - Families with Children to Become Economically Stable

Indicator 1: Number of Work First participants entering employment **–**

Outcome: Wilson County will place **70+** Work First participants into employment each year

Indicator 2: Annual % of teen parents receiving child care subsidy services that remain in school and/or graduate from high school.

Outcome: 70% of teen parents will remain in school and/or graduate each year.

Indicator 3: Annual % of families receiving child care subsidy services with income at or above 150% of poverty level.

Outcome: 20% - Wilson County will assist families in our child care subsidy program to increase level of income above 150% of poverty level by providing intense career exploration, encouraging better job opportunities, referring families for other work support services such as food and nutrition services, Medicaid, financial education/budgeting, EITC and free tax preparation opportunities, IDA Homeownership, emergency crisis financial assistance, child support, etc.

Indicator 4**:** Annual % of child support cases paying full amount of obligation.

Outcome: 43%

Indicator 5: Annual % of eligible recipients receiving Food and Nutrition in Wilson County.

Outcome: **61%**

Indicator 6**:** Annual % of children receiving Medicaid/Health Choice who would otherwise be uninsured**.**

Outcome: **70%**

Other Work First County Goals:

1. Providing employment services to 100% of Work First applicants – All work eligible families applying for Work First Cash Assistance are provided employment services and work supports to achieve economic independence.

2. Staying off welfare/Job Retention - 90% of Work First recipients that transition off of Work First due to employment will continue to be employed 12 months later. - We continue to provide job retention/career progression/financial education to

families transitioning off due to employment. Wilson County also has a great diversion program called Alternative Services that provide families with upfront employment and support services to find immediate employment.

3. Benefit Diversion – 50 applicants will receive Benefit Diversion assistance.

IV. PLANS TO ACHIEVE RESULTS, GOALS, INDICATORS AND OUTCOMES

A. Activities/Strategies:

- Build on collaborative efforts to promote child protection, permanency and self-sufficiency for families and children.

  Strategy: Wilson County will explore Signs of Safety as a practice framework for the provision of Child Welfare Services. This model could build on the already implemented Structured Decision Making practice with the addition of concrete tools for gathering information with children, parents and other family members in creative ways. This model includes an assessment of caregiver protective capacities, an innovative approach that enables CPS staff to use solution-focused therapy techniques within a safety, strengths and risk assessment context. Wilson County was a collaborative partner with the Division of Social Services and the Center for Children and Families in Durham to submit a grant FOA that would incorporate the Signs of Safety framework with an initiative to help our state build on and expand current efforts to develop a trauma-informed and evidence-based service delivery system for those children who have experienced a wide range of trauma and extreme stressors in their young lives—including sexual abuse, physical violence and profound emotional abuse and neglect.

  Strategy: Reaching for Excellence and Accountability in Practice (REAP) is North Carolina's Child Welfare Technical Assistance Model. This model is a continuation of prior Child Welfare reform systems that includes focusing on outcomes for children. Wilson County is one of eight pilot Departments of Social Services to implement the REAP process. We have completed our self assessment and are finalizing our achievement plan which will be a part of our Leading By Results strategies to improve safety and stability for children and families.

  Strategy: Wilson County will explore and develop a clinical model for the provision of In-Home Child Protective Services. This model will strive to increase social worker's ability to identify, understand and have a working knowledge of mental health disorders in order to effectively work with clients to address identified mental health issues, and to assist families in developing skills needed to insure safety and reduce the risk of future harm to children.

Strategy: Wilson County will develop a strategic and comprehensive model beginning at the intake phase of child welfare involvement to expeditiously identify and locate non-custodial parents and extended family through the increased use of proven internal and external resources.

Strategy: Continue to promote Job Shadowing/Career Exploration/Mentoring opportunities for youth in foster care ages fifteen to eighteen years old. Continuing education opportunities are available and encouraged by the workers. The connection between education and job opportunities are discussed constantly during LINKS meetings. Establishing a liaison between industries, businesses and DSS, many of our youth have been able to shadow employees working in several different areas. They have gained a better understanding about the parallel between education and employment. They also have received valuable information about the job satisfaction and being qualified to fill vacant positions. At risk foster teens are also referred for participation in the TEMP (Teen Employment Mentoring Program).

Strategy: Continue to promote the LINKS workers' development of skills, knowledge and behavioral competency in Youth Advocacy. Workers have been active in attending SAYSO meetings and supporting those youths that have accepted leadership positions. The purpose of SAYSO is to encourage youth in foster care to advocate for changes in the child welfare system that they believe negatively impacts their ability to be independent and successful after existing foster care.
Youth are using the "record mining" concept to re-establish relationships with significant others in order to alleviate the likelihood of leaving foster care without a support system. DSS directors are meeting yearly with youths in their agency's custody to discuss and develop strategies that will allow them the best opportunities for a successful future. Community organizations that are requesting information on "helping youth transition out of foster care" are aware that transitioning housing is needed.

Strategy: Continue to expand recruitment efforts to increase diversity of foster and adoptive parents. Recruitment announcements and the foster/adoptive parents training curriculum are available in Spanish and English. This agency has a full-time employee who can translate and interpret information for our customers. WCDSS is participating in the Jordan Institute pilot project for Recruitment & Retention of Foster/Adoptive Parents. We continue to utilize private providers to assist us with meeting the placement needs of children in our custody. We work closely with private providers that have a diverse foster/adoptive applicant pool.

Strategy: Continue to implement frequent court reviews for children in the legal custody of WCDSS. Uses guidelines developed to identify children who would benefit from more frequent court reviews to assist with achieving permanency in 12 months of them entering foster care. Agency's attorney and staff have educated the attorneys and judges regarding the positive outcomes that have been achieved due to more frequent court reviews.

Strategy: Develop and utilize a Quality of Life assessment to develop a baseline and rating for foster youth. This assessment will provide a structure for developing approaches and methods to effectively achieve individualized improvements in the youth's living skills and provide comparison data for youth as they exit the foster care system. Child and Family Team meetings will be utilized to target identified areas of need by engaging the Youth and community partners to affect improved living skills.

Strategy: Implement a Quality of Life assessment for all our post discharge foster children to measure their ability to remain safe and secure and thrive on their own. This will be supplemented with Vocational and educational planning with each your to assess interests and aptitudes, develop skills, develop work ethic, address school attendance and performance and behavior, seek employment and supportive employment opportunities.

Strategy: Approximately 10% of Work First families may have been involved in child welfare. We want to continue our strategies for sharing information, identifying all the resources available to support the family, and working together to help families meet their Work First and Child Welfare Plan Agreements. One of the ways to accomplish this is continue to require Child Welfare staff to contact Work First whenever they receive a report and the case is active to Work First as first collateral contact. Working together to help the families/children in their progress and participation is critical.

Strategy: Continue Kinship Care Services for Work First Child Only cases. Many of our Child Only cases represent caretakers other than the biological parent providing care for children. Many of these caretakers have difficulty dealing with the emotional and behavioral problems the children/teens display. We will continue to work on a case-by-case referral with intervention strategies to reduce the complexity of the challenges and problems faced by this population.

Strategy: Continue "Family Resource Conferences" (FRC) with Work First Families. With the implementation of tougher policies through the Deficit Reduction Act and the focus on helping ***all*** families become

successful, we are facilitating "Family Resource "Conferences for Work First and Child Only Families. Increased collaboration with resource providers such as mental health, vocational rehabilitation, QPSA, ESC/Joblink, community action agencies, transportation, faith groups, financial education services, educational partners, and child welfare staff are needed more than ever to provide families the services needed to alleviate barriers and obtain the necessary and appropriate resources/income to meet the needs of families and children. The family participates in making appropriate changes to their plan that will enhance their successful transition from welfare to work, meet the requirements of work for benefits that will lead to full time unsubsidized employment or resolve issues/barriers preventing the family/child from meeting their goals. Families are able to identify their own support systems, strengths and needs through this process.

Strategy: Wilson County will assess each Child Only Work First case where a caretaker has been given legal custody by the courts and child welfare has been involved in the protection, safety and placement of the child/children. In cases where the biological parent moves into the home of the legal custodian, Work First staff, with the assistance of Child Welfare, and the legal custodian will determine if the Work First payment should continue to be left in legal custodian's name. It may be in the best interest of the children and biological parents that the Child Only case be terminated and parents encouraged to apply to receive the services under the Working for Benefits (WFFA) Program.

Only at the discretion of the Director and/or his designee can the case be left in the legal custodian's name. At no time, may the child only case be left in the legal custodian's name where it may be considered or interpreted as avoiding or circumventing time clocks.

Work First Cases that meet this exception will be reevaluated every 6 months for continued eligibility and assessment of the household and family situation.

Independent of the decision to determine the case name, the biological parent once in the home is considered *work eligible*.

**If the decision is to leave the Work First case in the legal custodian's name, the parent(s) must be responsible for paying child support.

- **Expand Foster Care Placement Options for Children**

Strategy: WCDSS currently has 69 children in legal custody. Many of these children have special needs that require a higher level of care and may be placed outside Wilson County, sometimes at great distances from their parents and relatives. In an effort to reduce trauma to these children

by keeping them as close to home as possible, Wilson County DSS is developing a therapeutic foster home licensing component to expand the capacity of its foster care placement options.

In addition to providing clinical services, staff responsible for recruiting, training (MAPP/GPS) and licensing foster homes will receive additional training in order to provide this training to applicants interested in providing therapeutic care.

- **Pathways to Safety/Expansion of Prevention Services**

Strategy: We are exploring grant opportunities to expand prevention services using the Strengthening Families approach in conjunction with the Division of Social Services Community Based Programs. We are interested in exploring unique and creative ways of providing services to families reported to Child Protective Services with issues that do not yet meet the criteria for involuntary intervention. A third pathway of intervention, as utilized in Monterey County, California may be an option for expansion of prevention services as a community model. This model works with families that do not meet the legal definition for abuse and neglect to connect them with community resources to address the underlying causes that may have triggered the call to Child Protective Services. With an emphasis on early intervention, Pathways to Safety offers support and assistance services to families whose circumstances do not warrant a more urgent response. The goal is to keep children safe in their home and out of the child welfare system.

We will continue the Child and Family Team process to assist the family and extended family to create their own plans for child safety and family well-being. Promoting the use of existing resources in strengthening families will enhance the success of safety and family well-being. Concept behind the Child and Family Team approach is that families need to be empowered to make decisions on creating safety plans for their children. Families are their own best experts and they tend to support what they create. The support and intervention from caring relatives will help families to become stronger. Currently we have two Child and Family Team facilitators.

Strategy: As part of our on-going efforts we will continue to offer Child Abuse Prevention Services and case management to families referred to our program and who are committed to making positive changes. Prevention staff prides itself on teaching families how to make connections through the school system, mental health system, as well as through their own support systems. This program is truly making a big difference in the lives of families and children.

Strategy: Wilson County was one of eight national sites that participated in a Breakthrough Series Collaborative to focus on the effects of childhood trauma on the placement stability of children in foster care. The broader mission of the collaborative has been to develop a trauma-informed service delivery system throughout the spectrum of child welfare services, beginning in Prevention Services through Adoption Services. As a partner for the Center for Children and Families, Wilson County will continue efforts to train and educate our staff and our community on trauma-focused services for children and families. Currently we have implemented trauma screening, evaluation and treatment services within our agency, have trained foster parents and child welfare staff on the effects of trauma on children and their behavior. We will continue to partner with CCF to train our foster care licensing staff in order to continue to provide the Parenting Resource Curriculum in an ongoing requirement for re-licensure. We have expanded our clinical services at DSS. We currently have a Psychologist and a two Clinical Social Workers on staff to provide psychological services, testing, assessments and treatment to children and parents in our child welfare systems. One of our clinical social workers is certified in trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy enabling us to provide the whole spectrum of trauma services to the children we serve. Our licensed psychologist is available to work with cases identified as critical or in need of services. We also have a part-time QPSA (Qualified Professional Substance Abuse) person that provides substance abuse and mental health assessments/evaluation to determine if treatment is needed for Work First, Child Welfare and Food and Nutrition clients.

Strategy: We continue to provide supportive services that promote and strengthen safe and nurturing homes to families working with Child Welfare Social Workers, through the position of the Prevention Support Technician. Intensive counseling and education are offered in the areas of housekeeping skills; nutrition and shopping; child and household safety; organization skills and personal care.

Strategy: Research and develop a family supervised visitation center for providing a safe and supportive environment for children to visit with non-custodial adults where there has been domestic abuse, child abuse, conflict with visitation or where there has been a long-term difficulty between parent and child.

- **Continue To Provide Parenting Education Classes**

Strategy: We offer ongoing (quarterly) parenting education training to educate and teach parents of Work First and Child welfare families' positive teaching methods. The models used by our staff and community partners include the Nurturing Parent Model, Strengthening Families

Model, and Parents as Teachers Model which provides consistency and encourages the learning, practice and success of parenting with any age child. We have established through the Wilson County Child Abuse Council, volunteer trainers from DSS, Wesley Shelter, Health Department, Department of Juvenile Justice, City of Wilson Police Department, PRIDE of N.C., Wilson Cooperative Extension, and several other community volunteers involved in our local Child Abuse Prevention Council who are trained facilitators. The need for consistent and on-going scheduling of an effective parenting education program is a huge need with our Work First and Child welfare families. Parenting education is needed in our community to help parents deal with the ever challenging role of parenting, especially with the youth/teen population.

- **Clinical Social Work Intervention Techniques with Work First/TANF staff**

  Strategy: Work First Social Workers will initiate solution focused coaching/counseling model along with motivational interviewing techniques with applicants applying for Work First Family Assistance. Social Worker's will focus on establishing the relationship and addressing participant's desire for change. Focusing on change and developing plans to help applicants begin taking the steps towards the change will be the primary focus. Eligibility process is secondary. Other training opportunities will be encouraged including child trauma response training for Work First/TANF social work staff.

- **Continue to conduct substance abuse screenings at the time a Work First Cash Assistance Application is taken and at the time of assessments through Child Welfare Services.**

  Strategy: All Work First and Child Welfare staff will continue to conduct substance abuse screenings using a very simple screening tool (AUDIT and DAST-10). Referrals from positive screenings will be made to a qualified substance abuse professional for further evaluation and treatment recommendations. The QPSA is on site at DSS 4 days a week. QPSA offers life skill classes and support groups weekly as part of the treatment and supportive plan.

- **Continue to make substance abuse counseling a condition of the Work First Mutual Responsibility Agreement for persons determined to have a substance abuse problem. Families who are in need of services through child welfare will be encouraged to attend in compliance with their treatment plan.**

  Strategy: All families involved in CPS and Work First that are screened and/or have behavioral indicators will be referred to the QPSA for evaluation and treatment services. All appropriate CPS families with an assessment result of Substantiated or "Services Needed" where substance abuse has

been identified as a contributing factor to abuse and/or neglect will be screened and referred to QPSA. The QPSA will complete assessment and make recommendation for treatment. Case management services will be provided by QPSA for monitoring and following substance abuse treatment plan and progress for those who have been identified as needing treatment. Support groups, individual counseling and treatment are required for all Work First and CPS families/individuals determined to have a substance abuse problem. Work First participants are required to follow the recommendations for treatment/counseling and are included as part of their Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA). Failure to provide verification of compliance as well as comply with the treatment or counseling will result in a termination of the Work First Cash Assistance.

Strategy: Intervention to assist Work First participants with alcohol or drug use treatment services in order to help them be successful in applying and obtaining employment is critical. Work First "Work Eligible" families will be required to take a drug test prior to entering wage subsidy Placement/Work Experience components. Helping parents be successful in achieving economic self sufficiency as well as healthy living is at the heart of this initiative. If participant is found to have a positive test, referral for substance abuse treatment will be initiated. If parent fails to comply with treatment plan, without good cause, Work First benefits will be terminated. Parent must comply with treatment plan before re-application will be processed. Once participant is receiving the appropriate treatment/intervention recommended, they will be eligible for wage subsidy express employment. Many employers today require drug test prior to job placement.

- **Continue the County Disability Assistance Program**

Strategy: Parents who are truly disabled and who indicate multiple barriers to participation in work or work activities will be assigned to a specialized Work First Social Worker. These individuals are most likely candidates for pursuing Social Security Disability Income.
Families are provided the option of choosing to continue receiving regular Work First Family Assistance or participate in Wilson County Disability Assistance Program. The County Disability Assistance Program offers the same intense case management services available through the Work First program. Families choosing the County Disability Assistance Payment will receive a county assistance check which is approximately $50.00 per month more than the regular Work First Cash Assistance Program. Assistance will be provided for a period of up to one year or until SSI is received ***whichever is less***. After the one year period, it is our hope that the parents will have secured social security disability approval. If parents are still pursuing the SSI route due to severe physical/mental barriers an extension with the County Disability Assistance Program would be offered or family can opt to apply for Work First regular cash assistance.

The Social worker will work closely with the disability hearing specialists and medical providers to ensure that the documentation of medical information is submitted timely and will attend all hearings to ensure compliance with Social Security Disability process. Families choosing the County Disability Assistance Program must meet the same eligibility requirements that are required of our Work First cash assistance program in order to qualify to receive the County Disability Assistance Program. This initiative will continue as long as funding is available. 60% of the Wilson County Disability caseload has obtained approval for SSI benefits within six months as a result of the intense case management services provided.

- **Continue to require a Child Support Establishment Application prior to making a Work First Cash Assistance Application.**

  Strategy: It is vital for the family to move toward independence and self-sufficiency and that both parents of the child(ren) provide financial support for their children. Under the Work First plan all persons applying for Work First cash assistance must complete a Child Support application prior to making a Work First application.

- **Continue efforts with Asset Accumulation and Financial Social Work Services to help Potential, Current and Former Work First Families, Child Care Subsidy Families and Families involved in Child Welfare to increase economic stability**

  Strategy: Promoting financial education, budgeting and asset accumulation is a focus of Wilson County DSS, especially in these times of economic hardships. Wilson County's Financial Social Worker works with individuals or groups in need of help with gaining control of their financial spending and savings in order to gain control of their lives. The Financial Social Worker provides on-going support and education on budgeting assistance, banking, predatory lending, tax credits, etc., while helping families develop an action plan for making positive changes that will lead to achieving their financial goals. Our goal is to provide financial education, help families understand the change process and reward families for making financial and behavior changes. Financial incentives are provided when families demonstrate positive behavior changes and achieve one of their financial goals. The goal is to teach families positive behaviors that will lead to positive changes regarding financial and family stability, asset building and financial success. Incentives will be provided as long as funding is available.

  Strategy: Allow Work First participants or families 200% of federal poverty level to build limited Individual Development Accounts that are restricted for homeownership. The purpose of the above initiative is to encourage continued progression towards economic well being and asset accumulation

through home ownership. Wilson County DSS is partnering with Wilson Community Improvements Association in providing an IDA Program in Wilson County for low income families interested in becoming homeowners. Wilson County DSS provides the six month financial education classes for IDA participants and WCIA provides the homeownership education classes and assistance with the loan and closing process. It is a 10 month financial and homeownership educational program. Under this initiative participants are allowed to accumulate and deposit a portion of their earned income into an Individual Development Account and still be eligible for transitional benefits such as subsidized child care assistance and children's Medicaid. The funds would be restricted for use exclusively for the purchase of a home. Each month participants deposit a minimum of $50.00 in their IDA savings account. Once they complete the 10 month education classes and have been approved for a home loan and are ready to close on their first home, their savings are matched up to a 1:3 match. Matching funds are provided through CDBG grant or Assets for Independence (AFI) grant funds TANF funds are also utilized for families whose income is below 200% of the poverty level. Approximately 12 families have become homeowners through this program. 42 families have been provided the financial education and homeownership training. 22 are still progressing in their efforts to save and increase their credit scores to be eligible for loan and continue the process of asset building and owning their own home.

Strategy: Continue to promote and provide VITA (Volunteer Income Tax Assistance) free tax preparation services. We have expanded our EITC/VITA efforts through grant funding and outreach to promote the use of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). Promoting free tax preparation services to low income families continues to be a major focus for our organization and community. Plans are to reach out to local employers to encourage "free tax help day" and prepare taxes on-site and promote financial education programs especially in the outlying county areas. This will be an on-going effort to continue to promote EITC and assist low income families with free tax preparations from January through April of each year. We plan to extend the availability and operation of our VITA site to serve more families. Flyers, announcements, marketing efforts will be especially targeted to customers receiving Food and Nutrition Assistance, Child Care Subsidy, Work First, Child Support, Child Welfare, families receiving 200% services, IDA participants and working families.

Strategy: Eliminate the Resource Limit for families applying for Work First.

- **Continue to build partnerships with the business community.**

Strategy: We continue to work with the business community on the many benefits of hiring Work First and TANF eligible participants. We will continue to promote tax credits and wage subsidy opportunities when hiring

participants from the Work First or Food Stamp populations. We continue to build on our existing relationships with businesses through Wilson Chamber of Commerce, Human Resource Association and Economic Development Council. We are currently participating on the Workforce Development Taskforce with educational, government, business, and community leaders to develop broad based coordinated system to "Insulate the educational pipeline" to ensure that all children, youth and adults have access to the supports/services they need to be ready for college, work and life. Strengthening collaborations to improve workforce readiness is a focus of our business, education, government, non-profit and faith community leaders.

Strategy: We will continue our association as member of the Wilson Chamber of Commerce, Wilson Education Partnership, Education and Workforce Taskforce, and Wilson Human Resource Association for continued collaboration and involvement with employers to improve the workforce in Wilson County.

Strategy: We want to develop an express pathway to employment for Work First applicants who are determined to be job ready and who have a recent connection with employment. We would provide the wage subsidy using the cash assistance payment as part of the wage reimbursement to employers. Through our job boost wage subsidy funding we have been successful in placing Work First and TANF eligible unemployed participants to work utilizing grant funded wage subsidy. We will continue this effort using existing cash assistance through the Express Pathway to Employment Initiative.

Strategy: We have had much success with our annual Greater Wilson Job Fair. We have successfully planned and offered a successful job fair event each year for the past 11 years. We want to continue to make this a need satisfying and outcome based event for our business partners and jobseekers. We have had tremendous success in promoting the event with local media (First Media Radio Group and Wilson Daily Times) and making this event a positive public relations event for not only the Department of Social Services but for the Wilson community. The planning is usually a three month planning period each year. We have the support and assistance from many community and business partners in planning this event. Each year, we have between 800 - 1000 jobseekers and 45 + businesses to participate in this event. We want to continue to make this a need satisfying and outcome based event for our community partners, employers and jobseekers.

- **Continue efforts through our Faith Connections program for assisting families and children.**

Strategy: Efforts continue to involve the faith community in providing resources and services to mobilize community support to prevent welfare dependency through diversion; to move those on welfare into work; to retain

those recently off welfare in the workforce; and assist in the preservation of families. One of the most successful "best practice" faith based community partnership is our Faith Connections Program.

"Faith Connections" –This program is a nationally recognized faith based initiative that works! Faith Connections is a faith based and community network of resources designed to assist working families and families in need with access to limited financial assistance to resolve financial crisis that are otherwise not available. The distribution of faith community financial assistance is a process that honors a person's dignity, sense of responsibility, and hope. Referrals to Faith Connections are from the Department of Social Services staff as well as other community and faith leaders who have screened, assessed, and have determined that the family needs additional resources to alleviate the crisis in order that the family can maintain employment or assist in preservation of the family. This program provides a centralized, stream-line access to faith community resources and provides management and tracking of resources provided. The program has expanded to 41 churches donating to our faith connections program totaling over $30,000 per year in monetary donations in addition to over $100,000 non-monetary contributions such as (furniture, counseling, pro bono medical/dental work, housing resources, Christmas/Thanksgiving donations, food, car donations, housing needs, counseling, etc.) Faith Connections has been recognized as a national best practice in faith based initiatives. Wilson County's Faith Connections Program has been featured in the Urban Institute "Toolkit" on best practices and was also featured in a White House Paper on Faith Based Initiatives. Wilson County DSS administrators were invited to present Faith Connections to regional US Department of Health and Human Service TANF Administrators Conference in Texas and Missouri as a "best practice" model for other states and communities to replicate.

- **Continue to provide intense job search, job readiness training to families through our M.O.R.E. (Motivating others to be Responsible Employees) class.**

Strategy: We will continue to facilitate an in-house 4 week job readiness class to provide Work First applicants/recipients the structure and focus for successful job seeking and interviewing that will lead to immediate employment. The class includes but not limited to training on:

- first impressions,
- professional attire,
- interview techniques,
- resume development, job searching skills,
- financial education,
- parenting skills,
- career exploration/aptitude,

- teamwork,
- expectations of employers,
- life skills,
- CPR/First Aid,
- Attitude
- Communication;
- Problem solving skills

Strategy: We currently have 2 staff attending ESC/Job Link Center each week for approximately 2 hours, working directly with customers on job placement. ESC/Job Link offers a variety of resources such as job placement, bonding of potential employees with criminal records, assistance for veterans, etc.

Career Plus Job Developer also provides direct employment contacts and will facilitate and "connect" participants for direct referrals. We are providing job ready clients with employment opportunities and opening doors that clients could not open on their own through our current "Wilson Works" Job Boost grant.

Strategy: Our Work First Job Center is the hub for providing educational assessment and job seeking skills for jobseekers. The Center is located in our agency lobby and is available for Work First families and families 200% of poverty level to develop their resumes, practice skills building and provide assessment and referrals to other agency providers depending on client needs.

- **Continue to expand Diversionary Efforts and Intensive Services at Point of First Contact.**

Strategy: An intensive employability assessment is conducted at first contact. If the pre-applicant is found to be job ready, then efforts are made to place the pre-applicant into a job immediately. This involves helping the participant identify available jobs and making arrangements for the pre-applicant to interview and be placed in a job. For those families found to be job ready we provide up to a 60-day diversionary case management in an attempt to prevent welfare dependency. Upon first contact the pre-applicant must register for work with ESC, undergo an employability assessment and be assessed for all other work support options such as Medicaid, Food Assistance, Child Support, etc.

We have an array of supportive services to offer families including Benefit Diversion, which is one-time cash assistance grant, not to exceed three months of total cash assistance. Many families recognize that Work First Cash Assistance will not meet their family's total needs and are willing to work with upfront social work staff in finding immediate employment. This program has been successful in our efforts with meeting our State Work First Goals as well as our Leading by Results efforts.

- **"Hardship Hearings"**

Strategy: Representatives from our Work First/Child Welfare Planning Committee serve on our Hardship Hearing Panel. Two Representatives from The Work First/Child Welfare Planning Committee along with DSS Board member have been designated by the County DSS Board to hear all 60 month hardship extension hearings and make decision regarding approval or denial of extension requests. Hardship Hearings replaced our former Success Team committee meetings.

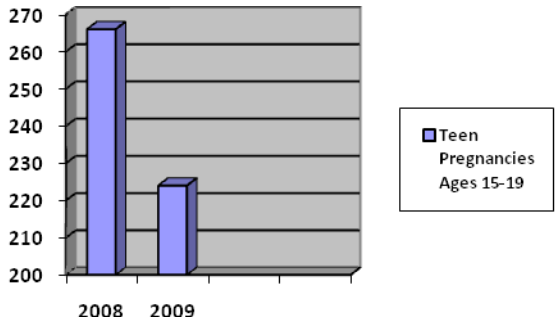
- **Helping Families and children gain economic stability**

Strategy: We will continue to utilize the State Standard Policy for applying the Job Bonus to Work First participants who become employed. At the time of employment, we will disregard their earnings for three months to assist the family in making the transition from welfare to work. Families will continue to receive their Work First check in addition to their employment check for three months. Families will be referred to our financial social worker for intense financial education and assist in developing their financial savings and asset goals.

Strategy:
We implemented a bonus incentive for child care subsidy families, families transitioning from Work First to employment, and families receiving 200% services who are receiving services from CASH-N program. Families who develop a financial savings plan aimed at decreasing their expenses, increasing their savings and achieving their financial and career advancement goals will be eligible for a financial/educational incentive. The incentive program is designed to reward families for achieving their financial goals and encouraging positive financial behaviors.

- **Continue to expand efforts in reducing teen pregnancy.**

Strategy: Wilson County's teen pregnancy rate continues to be a concern for our community. In 2008, Wilson County's teen pregnancy rate was 7th in the State with the highest teenage pregnancy rate out of all 100 counties. In 2009, Wilson County ranked 14th out of 100 counties with the highest teen pregnancy rate per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 years of age. Below is the Pregnancy data for Wilson County indicating the total number of teenage pregnancies for females between the ages of 15-19 years.



We will continue to work in partnership with Wilson County Health Department, Wilson Pregnancy Center, Wesley Shelter, Wilson County School System, OIC and other organizations focusing efforts to reduce the teen pregnancy rate.
We continue to offer monthly "Family Planning" Workshops to Work First families to promote and emphasize the importance of family planning and birth control.
We continue to focus efforts with our absent parents of Work First children on the importance of family planning and pregnancy prevention and how failure to plan can affect their financial goals, employment, stress, poverty, relationships, etc.

Strategy: Through our TEMP and Success in School programs, we will focus on teen pregnancy prevention with youth ages 16 -21 in our foster care and Work First Program. We will focus efforts with teen parents in our Success in School Program to prevent a repeat pregnancy. We will apply for grant funding to support these efforts.

- **Helping Youth Stay in School**

Strategy: Extending 200% services for youth age 18-21 terminating from Work First Cash Assistance who continue to be enrolled in school and have been previously identified as "at risk" of dropping out due to grade retention, attendance and/or behavioral issues. Youth aging out will sign 200% Eligibility form to continue to receive case management intervention and services to ensure that young adults transitioning from WFFA graduate from high school and continue on a path to post-secondary/skills training and employment. Intense involvement will be critical to ensuring that services and support are provided to help young adults be successful.

Strategy: Continue implementation of our "Success in School" Program. Wilson County Child Care subsidy program has assigned two case managers to work intensely with teenage custodial parents in high school in an effort to help teen parents remain in school and progress towards achieving their high school diploma. Intense involvement and case management efforts, assessment, planning, arranging resources and on-going follow up are provided to teen parents. Connecting teens with additional educational resources and encouraging parental involvement to provide a holistic comprehensive supportive approach is the focus of our child care subsidy caseworker. As part of our

Leading by Results efforts and grant funding received from NC Dropout Prevention initiative, we have achieved significant results in keeping teen parents enrolled in high school and achieving their high school diploma.

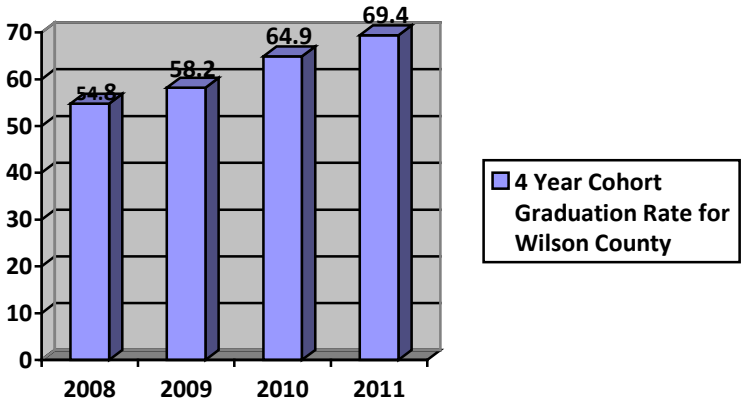
Since implementation of the program in August 2008, we have served a total of 104 Teen Parents. 75% have remained in school and/or graduated since implementation. (44 teen parents have achieved their high school diploma, 35 continue to be enrolled). We will continue efforts to provide teenage custodial parents in high school a holistic, supportive, educational, and job preparation training. We offer parenting education to help build an early foundation of communication, awareness of child's development stages, and the importance of nurturing and effective discipline. This initiative was awarded the Crystal Star Award from the National Dropout Prevention Network as a promising best practice.

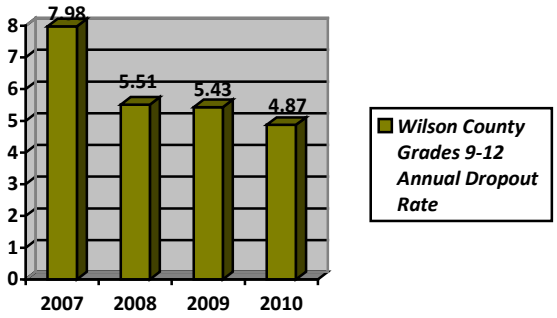
Strategy: As a result of the success with teen parents, we applied for additional grant funding from NC Dropout Prevention Grant funding to expand our program to include teens from our Work First and foster care programs. We implemented the Teen Employment Mentoring Program (TEMP). This program matches at risk teens with businesses/employers that have received mentoring training and have agreed to provide worksite mentoring to teens referred by DSS. The purpose of TEMP is to provide a work opportunity coupled with mentoring to motivate, encourage, and provide hope while working with caring adults in a safe environment to learn the work and social skills necessary to be successful in school, work and life. TANF funds will be used to provide the wage subsidy paid to the employers. Currently we have placed13 teens in the TEMP Program. Employers such as Merck Manufacturing, City of Wilson, County of Wilson, Wilson Arts Council, Salvation Army, The Spot, and Wilson County Public Library are providing the mentoring and work opportunity. The program is a long term commitment on both the teen and employer until the youth graduates from high school. The teen works an average of 4 to 25 hours a month during the academic school year and 30 hours a week during the summer months. Teens present their report card to their mentor each report period and recognition for academic and behavioral progress is provided. Areas needing improvement are discussed and goals and resources are provided. The goal of the program is is to keep teens enrolled in school and working towards achieving their high school diploma, pregnancy prevention and increasing work ready skills.

Strategy: Helping Work First parents and caretakers keep their children in school and progress towards graduation is a major focus of our Work First staff. Social Workers work with the entire family on promoting education and training and the responsibilities of parents to ensure teens remain in school. As part of the Work First "core requirements parents/caretakers are expected to keep their children in school. "Failure to keep their children in school can result in financial penalty/sanction or termination of the Work First cash assistance payment. Parents/caretakers submit report cards each semester to ensure satisfactory

progress of children ages 6-18. If report card indicates attendance issues or unsatisfactory grades, an assessment will be conducted. Families not complying with the family/educational assessment may be subject to termination of Work First payment unless good cause is established. Helping parents understand the important role they play in their child's academic success is a focus of our leading by results efforts.

We want to expand our collaborative with Wilson County Schools to strengthen intervention and prevention strategies to help at risk disadvantaged youth stay in school and graduate. Since implementation of Success in School, our county 4 year cohort graduation rates also increased each year. High School dropout rates decreased as well. Below is a chart representing the success of our schools, and community in helping our youth stay in school and graduate:





- **Rewarding Academic Achievement**

<u>Strategy:</u> As part of the Working for Benefits Pay After Performance program, Wilson County implemented the "academic incentive" initiative. Work First participants who achieve a GED or Adult High School Diploma, Skills Training or Post Secondary Diploma/Degree will be eligible to receive an academic financial incentive. The purpose of the "academic incentive" is to encourage and recognize hard work, perseverance, determination and efforts of Work First participant who complete significant education and training achievements that will

lead to better employment opportunities in order to become economically self sufficient: Below is a list of the academic achievement and the monetary incentive award:

High School Diploma/GED/Adult High School Diploma	$250
Manufacturing Certificate Training	$250
Welding Certificate	$300
Forklift Operator Certificate	$300
Nursing Assistant I or II Certificate	$300
Early Childhood Certificate	$250
Two Year Associates Degree Completion	$500
Completion of 30 hours or more college credits leading to a 4 year college degree	$600 per year

- **Continue our Office Training Mentoring Program for Work First participants**.

  Strategy: - Simulated work experience training is available at the Career Plus Center. Faith Connections Coordinator oversees and mentors Work First clients in an office-training environment. This is counted as a work experience and allows clients to learn office skills in a functioning office setting, while including a mentoring relationship. Along with receptionist duties, general computer skills and office equipment training, clients are coached on appropriate office attire and etiquette.

- **Implement Healthy Relationships/Healthy Family Initiative**

  Strategy: Two parent families applying for Work First Cash Assistance will be offered the opportunity to receive services through our "Healthy Relationship/Healthy Families" Program. Two Parent families must meet eligibility requirements for Work First cash assistance to be eligible to participate. We will utilize effective best practice programs such as Building Strong Families model or other national best practice models that have shown evidence of change.

B. Supportive Services (Work Supports)

There are numerous supportive services that will enable individuals and families to participate in activities that will lead to self-sufficiency. Below are the supportive services that will be utilized to support participation:

1. Case Management – Case management means planning and directing the provisions of, and/or directly providing services. The workers will be responsible for working with all families in the assessment, planning, directing and providing of direct and indirect supportive services, follow up and documentation of progress for all Work Eligible Families and child only families receiving Work First. Home visits, interviewing, coordinating with agency staff and other community resources to

provide the needed services to help families achieve self sufficiency is a major effort. Planning with the family on constructive ways to resolve work-related and family-related issues. Case management includes assessing family strengths and needs, arranging and or providing all work supports in order to meet the responsibilities identified in the MRA Plan of Action.

2. Child Care Subsidy – We will continue to prioritize Child Welfare Families, Teen Parents attending high school, employed families under 200% of poverty level and Work First families for childcare subsidy assistance. All Work First "work eligible" families and families receiving 200% services are a target group due to their responsibility to participate in work or work related activities and compliance with completing their activities. Child Care assistance will continue once they become employed and transition off of Work First as long as they continue to be eligible and meet the need for child care subsidy services. Parent fees are assessed once they become employed. We will continue to utilize and refer families to other child care arrangements such as More at Four, Head Start, Smart Start or community/faith based after school programs such as Boys and Girls Club, OIC, Summerville Academy, The Spot, and other after school educational programs for families/children who are on our current waiting list. We have approximately 490 children on our child care waiting lists due to lack of funding available to meet all the needs.
3. Transportation Assistance- We will continue to purchase and/or reimburse for transportation services for Work First families to support their active participation in work and work related activities when no other means of transportation is available. We will seek to find the most affordable and accessible transportation methods to enable the family's successful transition to independence. Currently we provide gas cards for families that have their own transportation. We also provide a stipend for transportation costs for families to arrange their own transportation. We also use the city transient service as well as county transportation system. We have a car donation program through our Faith Connections Program. We receive transitional funds through Department of Transportation to assist low income working families and/or adults in need of transportation assistance.
4. Participation Expenses – We assist families with miscellaneous items or services needed in order to participate in an agreed upon activity leading to employment or completion of job readiness, parenting education, or financial education training. Items may include but not limited to uniforms, shoes, tools, registration fees, insurance coverage, books, assessments, meals/refreshments, academic and financial behavior incentives/retention bonuses, etc.
5. Health Support – We will continue to utilize local providers such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health providers, Wilson Community Health Center, Wilson County Health Department, QPSA, staff

Psychologist, and other providers for accessing services for drug and alcohol related issues/barriers, family planning, educational and/or physical, medical and mental health issues.

6. Counseling Services - We have clinical social work staff on site to work with families both in Work First and Child Welfare to meet the mental health needs of families and children. We have expanded our efforts to include clinical staff certified in trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy in order to provide an appropriate treatment resource in-house for children identified as suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).We continue to seek out and utilize other service providers within the community to meet the mental health needs of all customers.
7. Education and Training - We will continue to assess and refer families to educational and training facilities such as Wilson Technical Community College, Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC), WIA-Employment Security Commission/Job Link, for education and training opportunities. Other employment and training agencies will be utilized as training is offered. We encourage families to apply for pell grants. Work First will pay tuition or other short term skills training fees as it relates to participants educational and work/career goals.
8. Domestic Violence Services - Through our screening and continued assessment we find many families facing domestic violence issues. Immediate referrals are made to the Wesley Shelter for counseling, safety protection and supportive services. The coordination and use of the Domestic Violence TANF funds are provided to support the safety, protection, financial needs and health of families and children. We receive funding to provide direct emergency financial assistance to families and children in need of safety, protection, housing, transportation, clothing, etc. We continue to work closely with our DV experts through referrals and coordination of services for families and children affected by domestic violence.
   Opportunities for treatment and counseling for offenders is now available in Wilson County through a certified abuser treatment program. Counseling programs and services for the offenders are needed to reduce the cycle of repeat incidences. (See TANF/DV Plan – Attachment E)
9. Substance Abuse/Mental Health Assessments- A Memorandum of Understanding exists between the LME and WCDSS. PORT Human Services provides the QPSA on site at Wilson County DSS to provide the Assessment/Evaluation and recommendation for treatment to all Work First families and CPS families who are identified as having a positive screening for substance abuse or mental health issues.
10. Job Center Services - Assistance provided by Job Center Coordinator to jobseekers for resumes, job seeking, interviewing, computer skills and access to job leads, counseling, and referrals to other community partners depending upon needs of individuals.

11. Job Readiness Training -Monthly job readiness classes are offered and provided by Job Center Coordinator and Career Plus staff Monday – Friday 9:00 – 12:00. In addition, we offer on-going quarterly parenting education classes for child welfare and Work First families and children.
12. Financial Social Work Services – helping families to take control of their money to gain control of their lives is a focus of the Financial Social Work program. Working with families to teach financial education, understand their relationship with money, identify sabotaging behaviors and help teach new behaviors that will lead to financial and economic stability is a priority for our agency. We will provide one on one counseling/education as well as group workshops to Work First families, IDA participants and families 200% of poverty level.
13. IDA Homeownership Matching Funds – in partnership and collaboration with Wilson Community Improvements Association, Inc., Wilson County DSS staff will provide the Financial Education Training during the 10 month financial/homeownership training program. For families that qualify for 200% TANF services, they will receive case management services as well as opportunity to receive up to $1,000 in matching funds.
14. Free Tax Preparation Services (EITC/VITA) – Wilson County DSS continues to promote EITC and offers free tax preparation services to low to moderate working families. We have been providing free tax preparation through our Career Plus Center since 2003 and have a volunteer base of about 30 – 40 tax preparers/screeners. Our agency has sustained and grown this invaluable service to low income working families in our community. Plans are to expand through grant opportunities and increase our volunteer base.
15. Medicaid/Health Choice – All families are encouraged to apply for Medicaid or Health Choice to help with medical insurance coverage for all uninsured children and parents with income below 200%.
16. Food and Nutrition Services – All families are encouraged to apply for Food and Nutrition Services through Wilson County DSS.
17. Vocational Evaluations and Situational Work Assessments – Working closely with Vocational Rehabilitation Services to assist Work First and/or Child Welfare families will be strengthened.
18. Compliance with American with Disabilities Act (ADA) – Wilson County DSS will comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and will not discriminate for or against persons on the bases of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age or disability. In addition, we screen applicants using Form DSS-8228 and the Learning Needs Screening Tool (DSS-5330) which offers the applicant the opportunity to state that they have a disability and ask for accommodation.
19. Provision of Interpreter Services – In order to avoid discrimination on the grounds of national origin, all programs or activities administered by the Wilson County Department of Social Services are taking adequate steps to ensure that their policies and procedures do not deny or have

the effect of denying Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals with equal access to benefits and services for which such persons qualify. Wilson County DSS has developed a local LEP policy that defines the responsibilities the agency has to ensure LEP individuals can communicate effectively. Wilson County DSS ensures that effective bilingual/interpretive services are provided to serve the needs of the non-English speaking population. The provision of bilingual/interpretive services is prompt without undue delays. Wilson County Department of Social Services has 4 full time interpreter staff that interprets for all program areas across the agency. The agency also has a staff member in the Food & Nutrition Team, Children's Health Insurance and Child Support Team. The staff interprets within their respective program areas as well as across the agency when the need is present. We have four bilingual staff that rotate coverage and are available after hours for any appointments or needs that take place after normal business hours. Our LEP Policy is available and posted for customers and staff. We also use the Language line for customers that speak other languages.

20. Housing Assistance- Work First families facing housing crisis will be assessed for short term housing assistance through existing programs/services to prevent homelessness.

V. Administration

A. Authority

Wilson County Department of Social Services has been designated by the Wilson County Board of County Commissioners as the responsible entity and administrator in carrying out the Work First and Child Safety County Plan and Program Administration.

B. Organization

Diversion from welfare dependency is a major part of Wilson County's Work First Program. Over the past 10 years we have provided a "Shield from Dependency". These services are provided by social work crisis assistance staff within our Alternative Services Team. A front-end employability assessment is conducted whereby a wide menu of diversionary assistance and services can be utilized based on the specific pre-applicant's situation. For those families found to be job ready we can provide up to a 60-day diversionary case management service in an attempt to find immediate employment including express application for wage subsidy. Upon first contact the pre-applicant completes an employability assessment and is assessed for all other work support options prior to a cash assistance application being taken

We have a Work First Job Center located in our lobby. The Job Center Coordinator provides one on one job search, computer skills, resumes, networking, educational assessment testing, and job readiness class training. Job Development and referrals for potential job openings are also provided. Currently families who are working with Alternative Services through intense upfront case management services are referred for assistance with childcare once employment is secured.

If short-term cash assistance is determined to be the best option than one-time cash assistance grant (Benefit Diversion) may be provided not to exceed three months of total cash assistance and must meet a specific family crisis or family episode of need. This is not intended for ongoing or recurrent needs. Food Assistance, Medicaid, and childcare subsidy assistance may also be a part of the diversion package. We have a Food Assistance Express Application Center in the lobby where quick access to food assistance and Medicaid applications are taken.

Crisis Resolution Funds (TANF-Emergency Assistance) is also another means of financial assistance provided to assist families in a short term crisis and alleviate emergency situations for Work First families, Child Welfare and other families 200% of the poverty level. Families must meet the income and eligibility criteria for assistance. The total amount families could receive through the Crisis Resolution Funds is up to $500.00 per application. Families cannot qualify for assistance under this program again until 12 months later. (**Attachment C – Work First – Crisis Resolution (Emergency Assistance) Policy**

The more complex the employment barriers faced by the pre-applicant, the more intensive and potentially long term case management services is needed. The family and social worker together determine that the barriers are more intensive and that a referral to Work First for application is an alternative. In this instance, the pre-applicant is referred to Child Support and customer is referred to attend the Work First Application/Orientation session. The application is taken for Work First Cash Assistance by Social Workers who complete both the eligibility and employment services functions. The Social Worker's role is to help participants understand their requirements for participation and begin to identify their strengths as well as identifying and eliminating barriers preventing them from obtaining employment. A mutual responsibility contract (plan of action) is signed and families begin receiving the necessary services that will help move them from dependency to independency.

The WFFA Social Worker proactively helps participants reach a goal of self-sufficiency and economic independence. They will use extensive knowledge of local community resources, as well as the many work supports available within our agency, such as child care, food assistance, health care, education, training, work experience mentoring and financial assistance to help bring about the changes necessary to promote employment and family responsibility. Staff will

receive on-going training in the areas of Case Management, Family Centered Practice, Social Work Enhancement Training, Solution Focused techniques and coaching that will continue to affect positive changes in helping participants become self-reliant and resourceful in thinking through potential solutions to challenges.

Social Worker and family discuss professional intervention services to alleviate various barriers such as mental health difficulties, educational limitations, substance abuse, domestic violence, or other conditions that interfere with a client's ability to work or engage successfully in work related activities, parenting.

Families wishing to apply for financial assistance through Work First are screened for physical limitations/disabilities.

Two (2) Income Maintenance case managers have the responsibility for taking all Work First applications for child only applicants and providing on-going case management services. Income Maintenance staff also provide emergency financial assistance and determine eligibility for crisis programs such as CIP, Crisis Resolution, County Emergency Assistance, etc, for all child only cases. Referrals are made to our Kinship Care Social Worker when caretakers have been identified as needing intense social work services due to child behavioral issues, educational barriers, mental health issues, domestic violence, housing issues, discipline, etc.

Kinship Care Social Worker provides a “strength and needs” assessment on all child only cases referred for intense intervention services. Family centered approach is utilized in working with caretakers or parents in developing service plan that best meet the needs of the family and will have the greatest intervention impact.

C. Employment Security Commission/Joblink Services

Employment Security Commission/Job Link provides services to Work First participants that are seeking employment and/or working on their job readiness skills. WF Participants register with ESC to ensure every job opportunity is provided to assist in their efforts to become self sufficient.

D. Child Care

Wilson County’s Subsidized Child Care program will continue to prioritize child protective services families, foster parents who are working, teen parents in high school, and all Work First families who are receiving intense employment services or 200% services, and families working 30 hours or more per week. Currently we are serving over 460 low-income families (approximately 753 children) in childcare arrangements. Seventy-six percent (76%) of these families are low income ***working*** families; 9% are Active Work First Families; 6% are teen parents; 9% are child welfare (CPS and/or Foster Care).

Less than (9%) of the families receiving childcare assistance are Work First families. As families terminate from Work First, their childcare continues as long as they remain employed. Funding for childcare is provided by State subsidies and the Work First (TANF) Block Grant. Follow-up and quarterly reviews are provided by childcare social workers to monitor progress and continue working toward moving families to independence and self-sufficiency. The job retention, career progression and financial education planning strategies outlined in this plan are targeted to help families' transition off subsidized childcare as family income increases. Our Child Care Social Workers are working with this target group to prevent loss of employment and provide job retention/career advancement services to maintain employment and increase earnings. Currently, only 20% of our working child care subsidy families are earning above 150% of the poverty level. We want to continue to increase this number by informing families of tax credits, encouraging EITC, education and training opportunities, free tax preparation programs, and financial planning. Encouraging families to utilize the community resources for working on their GED or Adult High School diploma and furthering their education is important to a families' long term stability and career advancement. We offer financial incentives to child care subsidy families who choose to work with our Financial Social Worker or Child Care Social Worker on developing a financial improvement and savings plan. (See new initiatives/eligibility). We encourage all single parent households who are not receiving child support to apply. Front end screenings are completed to ensure integrity of our child care subsidy program and take great efforts to ensure that families receiving are truly eligible. We average a waiting list of 400-600 children whose parents are "in need" of child care subsidy assistance so they can work. Waiting lists is updated twice a year. Lack of funding is the reason we have a waiting lists.

E. Transportation

Any Work First family needing assistance with transportation is referred to Work First Social Worker and/or Alternative Services Social Work staff. Staff will assess transportation resources and assist with locating accessible and affordable transportation to help the family obtain and maintain employment. Staff will utilize the Wilson County Transportation Coordinator, city and county transportation systems, taxicabs, and referrals to community for volunteer assistance with transportation for those situations where suitable arrangements are not available. Our county has developed through grants from Department of Transportation a rural general public ridership program which provides transportation for families who live outside of the city limits access to get to employment within the city limits. Riders pay a minimum fee to ride to and from their home and job. We will continue to be involved with Wilson County Transportation Services (Coordinated Systems) as well as coordination with City Transit to promote affordable, accessible transportation for all citizens.

For Work First families who enter employment and have demonstrated financial responsibility and money management receive a transportation stipend for accessing and arranging their own transportation. This has resulted in tremendous savings for our county not only financially but administrative time arranging, managing and coordinating transportation for Work First Families. We currently utilize pre-paid gas cards for purpose of reimbursement for gasoline costs for participants who have their own transportation. We continue to receive transportation funds from Department of Transportation to assist families who are employed and no longer receiving Work First Cash Assistance. The City of Wilson has expanded routes to the I-95/264 Interchange, Airport Blvd, and Heritage Crossing Shopping Center and will continue to expand transportation as needed to help retain former Work First participants in the work force.

We have a Car Donation Program, which is coordinated through our Faith Connections Program. 27 cars have been donated to families within the past ten years.

F. Substance Abuse Services

With the onset of mental health reform in North Carolina over the past several years, access to mental health and substance abuse services has been challenging. Because most of the services are contracted out by the LME, it is difficult to establish and coordinate through one entity. PORT Human Services is an organization which caters to people who have issues revolving around chemical substances (drugs/alcohol) and/or mental disorders. PORT is the entity that contracts with our department in providing Qualified Professional in Substance Abuse (QPSA). The QPSA provides assessments, counseling, and treatment for families screened and referred by our agency for drug/alcohol abuse problems. Qualified Substance Abuse Professional is on site to work with individuals or groups identified as having substance abuse issues. A Memorandum of Understanding has been developed between LME, DSS and PORT Human Services. **(Attachment F)**

G. Family Violence Services

All Work First applicants will be informed of the Notification of Family Violence Option at the time of application. Applicants who disclose that they are victims of family violence will be referred immediately to Wesley Shelter for assessment and to discuss safety plan for the family. In addition, Wesley Shelter will complete the Work First Family Option Waiver Assessment form with recommendations regarding work hours. TANF/Domestic Violence Funds will be used to assist with direct services for victims of domestic violence to assist in cost of relocation, housing, utilities, clothing, emergency food, counseling, attorney fees, transportation and other basic necessities deemed necessary for safety of families and children. Attached is a copy of our Domestic Violence Plan. **(Attachment E**).

H. Maintenance of Effort (MOE)

The following activities, staff, and services will be funded by using MOE Funds: Job Development, Job Retention Case Management, Annual Job Fair Event, Participation Expenses, Transportation, Work First staff, Alternative Services Team, Career Plus Center, and Child Care. Crisis Resolution (Emergency Assistance), Faith Coordination Services, psychological evaluations and counseling services, domestic violence assistance, Bonus/Incentives, pregnancy prevention and dropout prevention efforts, assessments, will also be funded through our Work First Block Grant. Emergency services funding will continue to be utilized for child abuse prevention services, parenting education, child protective services and foster care to the extent necessary to meet urgent needs and allowable under the TANF Block Rules and Regulations. We will spend MOE timely throughout the year to avoid last minute MOE Expenditures and avoid program improvement plan. (N.C.G.S. 108A-27.9)

I. Child Welfare Services

Approximately fifty percent (50%) of our Work First Block Grant Funds will be devoted to Child Welfare Services.

VI. Emergency Assistance

Crisis Resolution (TANF Emergency Assistance)

The Wilson County Department of Social Services provides emergency assistance grants to families through our TANF-EA funding that we call “Crisis Resolution” Program. The Department will focus its efforts with families in order to achieve employment, support continued employment or, in child welfare cases, to secure a plan for the safety and protection of children. Criteria for eligibility will be consistent with current federal emergency cash assistance requirements. Family Crisis Resolution grants will be approved for unexpected or unforeseen crisis situations and targeted to promote self-sufficiency, proactive planning, personal responsibility and parental responsibility. A crisis resolution grant will only be provided when it will alleviate the crisis and foster independence rather than dependence. Approximately $50,000 of our Work First Block Grant is reserved for Emergency Assistance each year. See attached Crisis Resolution Program (**Attachment C).**

VII. Services to low income families and individuals (under 200% of poverty)

Financial SW/Career Plus Services, Alternative Services/ Diversionary Services, TEMP, Kinship Care and Prevention Services - Wilson County will provide services to families with children whose household income is at or below 200% of the poverty level and youth transitioning off of Work First due to termination of cash assistance to assist with non-cash like services such as

counseling, budgeting, transportation for employment up to 3 months, job readiness training, one time work related expenses, short-term skills training that will lead to employment, financial education, intense case management services, job retention and career advancement. With the decline of Work First caseloads, we are shifting emphasis to the "working poor" and youth/adults transitioning off of Work First who continue to need intense services to continue educational requirements. We provide intense financial education and counseling services to former Work First participants to assist with educational attainments, asset accumulation, mentoring, employment and career progression opportunities. We also provide upfront case management services to families 200% of federal poverty level through our Alternative Services Intake Unit to encourage immediate employment while providing supportive services to achieve that goal.

Kinship Care Services - Wilson County believes that children are best served and protected when the needs of the entire family are assessed and addressed. We have one Social Worker who provides services to TANF Child Only Families. The purpose of this position is to provide intensive short/long term services to assist families who may be experiencing difficulties which are disrupting or could possibly disrupt the stability of the family's functioning. The goal of the services is to reduce risk to children. Services offered may include strengths and needs assessments and/or referrals to and coordination of services with community agencies and/or treatment providers. Intensive in-home mentoring, coordination of services with child welfare, local legal and educational systems, and other supportive services including TEMP are offered to meet the needs of children, youth and families**.**

Wilson County will also provide 200% services to youth age 18-21 terminating from WF Cash Assistance who continue to be enrolled in school and have been previously identified as "at risk" of dropping out due to grade retention, attendance, and/or behavioral issues. Youth aging out will sign 200% Eligibility form to continue to receive intervention assistance and services to ensure the young adults transitioning from WF Cash Assistance graduate from high school. An educational incentive award will be provided upon graduation from high school as long as funds are available. Education and resources to prevent pregnancy will be provided.

VIII. Services to Non-Custodial Parents

If success is to be achieved in moving families to self-sufficiency from all needs-based programs, child support will be crucial from absent parents. Equal emphasis is placed on single parent households, children in foster care and children living with specified relatives (single parent cases). We are helping non-custodial parents to support their children through employment opportunities, payment of child support and increased involvement in their children's lives. We have developed a very successful absent parent employment program called "Working for Kids". We have two full time social workers/coordinator dedicated to working with the non-custodial parents of Work First and former Work First

families who are either unemployed, underemployed or in violation of their court order to pay child support. We work closely with the Child Support Establishment and Enforcement Team as well as the Child Support Court in screening and referring non-custodial parents for participation in this program. We work with the absent parent through assessment of employment opportunities, reducing barriers preventing them from obtaining employment, job readiness, attitude, support groups, education of child support payment system, and job development.
Activities with non-custodial parents include but not limited to parental responsibility education and job readiness; direct referrals to employers through job link partners, referrals to mediation services for non-custodial and custodial parents to help resolve child support and visitation disputes; non-custodial parent and child visitation planning sessions; Pre-trial conferences; advocacy for non-custodial parents in the court; parental responsibility workshops; specific fatherhood education workshops and support groups.

We will continue efforts to increase awareness of the important role that fathers have in the lives of their children in all programs within the Department of Social Services. Wilson County currently has an identified Child Support Agent dedicated to locating and engaging absent parents involved in child welfare cases. We will continue efforts to encourage and focus on increasing the involvement of absent parents with their children through child support, Work First and Child Welfare Services.

Mediation services are available and families are referred when appropriate.

IX. Exemption from the Work Requirement

We will provide exemption from the work requirements for single custodial based on the ***age of the child***. The age limit to receive the “S” exemption is **birth to 3 months of age.** Any single custodial parent who does not have a child between the ages of 0 – 3 months old will not be eligible to claim the “S” Exemption.
The month following the child’s three month birthday, the parent will be coded “L” and will be subject to the Work Requirements. Child Care will be made available and provided to active Work First recipients to support their Mutual Responsibility Contract and participation. Each case will be flagged manually in the record as well as in our EIS tracking with a special review code, which will notify worker that a change needs to be made.

If the family indicates that due to reasons such as health of the baby, or parent, or other reasons why they cannot participate in work or work related activities after the 3 month limit, they can claim the work exemption ***only*** with medical documentation. There is a 12 month lifetime limit to claim this exemption. Once their lifetime limit is exhausted they may no longer be able to claim this exemption.

X. Innovative County Strategies

- **Career Plus Center - a *Work First Self Sufficiency Center*** - The Center has evolved over the past 11 years to what we believe to be our future "Family Resource and Enrichment Center". We have developed and implemented programs that have resulted in asset building opportunities for families through implementation of VITA Program, Financial Social Work, asset building initiatives/programs and intense Job Development/Career Advancement opportunities. Through development and implementation of our child abuse prevention program and family resource conferencing, we have improved parent/child relationships and outcomes, offered one-on-one parenting education, and taught families at risk how to connect with mental health systems, educational systems, family systems and social services/community/faith based systems. We offer employment opportunities through Job Boost Wage Subsidy, job placement/career progression services as well as annual community wide job fair event. Our focus continues to be helping families achieve economic well being and safety through asset accumulation and wealth building initiatives to parenting education, home safety, and child abuse prevention. We are hoping to expand to include a Family Visitation Center. Below is a list of some of the unique and innovative programs offered at our Career Plus Center:
- **IDA Homeownership**- We are currently partnering with WCIA, a community based non-profit organization, on the IDA program in Wilson County. We utilize TANF funding to support the matching contribution as long as funding is available and families meet the TANF/Work First eligibility requirements for 200% services. We have helped to assist 12 families to become homeowners. There are approximately 30 families that continue to work on their savings goals and credit scores with the hope of becoming homeowners in the future.
- **Financial Social Work – CASH-N Program-** We offer financial social work services to families in need of financial education and support to develop positive behaviors around spending and savings. The financial social worker works one on one with families as well as in group settings teaching financial education and helping families to take control of their money in order to gain control of their lives. Combination of training materials and methods used through the counseling process such as Money Smart, FSW Model, Taking Charge Model, FDIC, Building Wealth, and many other materials based on where the family is in their knowledge, level of understanding and financial goals.
- **Faith Connections –** Our faith community collaboration efforts have evolved over the past 11 years, to a comprehensive best practice Faith Connections program model where faith community resources are available through a "one stop" referral and assistance process. Faith Connections has been named a national best practice faith based model. The mission of the Faith Connections Program is to provide real time access to faith community

leadership and resources in order to coordinate the assistance given to families in poverty, crisis, or in need.

- **Child Abuse Prevention Services** - Prevention Services has been developed to provide services to families in Wilson County with a focus on preventing future child abuse and neglect. Prevention Services is a volunteer program that serves families that are interested in making positive changes. The program helps families identify their needs and provides encouragement and support in achieving their goals. Prevention Services embraces and utilizes family centered practice and works together with the family in helping improve their family environment including all areas of social, economic, family relationships, education, employment, etc. The program does this by educating parents on healthy child rearing practices and helping them to set goals and identify resources to help achieve those goals. Families can be referred by DSS, schools, and the community.
- **Success in School and TEMP (Teen Employment Mentoring Program)** – Helping at risk teen parents, foster teens and WF teens stay in school and achieve a high school diploma is part of our leading by results efforts. We have received grant funding from NC Dropout Prevention to implement Success in School. Due to the success of the program, we applied for second round of funding to expand our efforts with foster teens and WF teens and included mentoring and work component. Through partnerships with our business community, we have been able to place 14 at risk teens with employers who provide the one on one mentoring and work skills training necessary to be successful in school, work and life. This program has been selected by the National Dropout Prevention Network as a promising best practice in dropout prevention. The program earned the Crystal Star Award. This programs success is a result of the intense involvement from social work staff, employers/mentors and our wage subsidy coordinator.
- **Clinical Services Team –** We currently have the infrastructure of a Clinical Services Team composed of a staff psychologist, two licensed clinical social workers and Quality Substance Abuse Professional.

XI. Special Issues

The economic conditions, of course, may impact any welfare reform effort. We continue to explore creative ways to help families take responsibility for the personal, safety and financial tasks in providing for their children. We continue to work with more of the working poor which continue to be our focus in helping families move from poverty to self sufficiency to economic well-being. We continue to work in partnership with our community partners and business community.

XII. Eligibility Criteria (Required for Electing County)

Wilson County will follow criteria established and implemented by the State for the following:

- Definition of relationships
- Payment levels
- Who can apply/be included in the payment
- Benefit Calculation
- Sanctions
- Time limits and extensions
- Benefit Diversion requirements
- Citizenship/Identity requirements

Wilson County proposes the following initiatives and changes to current policy. Unless otherwise noted, these changes will be implemented once the State and Wilson County's plan have been approved.

1. We will continue implementation of our "*Working For Benefits" Pay after Performance Program*. All "Work Eligible" Work First Family Assistance participants will be required to participate in countable work and work related activities and complete satisfactorily to receive a Work First cash benefit check at the end of each month. Families who fail to complete their required hours as mutually agreed upon in their MRA Plan of Action must establish "Good Cause" reason for non-compliance. Wilson County will determine "Good Cause" as outlined in the NC Work First Policy. Work First Social Work staff will assist participants who are non compliant by requesting a meeting or Family Resource Conference. This will be done immediately to assist the family/participant with program compliance. Failure to attend the Family Resource Conference or complete hours of participation without good cause will result in sanction (no WFFA check received). Families must complete their required hours each month to be eligible for a cash assistance check

2. All WFFA work eligible individuals are required to be actively participating in work and work related activities for a total of 35 -40 hours per week. Participation will be a combination of activities which include but not limited to employment, subsidized employment, vocational training, skills training, education, work experience, substance abuse counseling, mental health, vocational rehabilitation, job readiness/job search, etc. Participants will be required to establish the first 20 hours of their participation in "federally countable activities" as stated in the NC Work First Policy. Education ***will be*** supported in combination with other federal countable work activities.

3. Expand 200% services to serve Work First teens/adults terminating from WF Cash Assistance due to turning age 18. Many of these teens continue to need on-going intense involvement to continue efforts to help young adults achieve a high school diploma, prevent pregnancy and continue pathways to self sufficiency.

4. Work First cases will not be transferred to MAF after one month of not receiving a check. Work First cases will be kept open until the third month of not receiving a check. (This includes the month of application if employment services are being offered.) All applicants sign agreement at application stating they understand how this may affect their child support payments. Cases that don't comply during first month, often comply during 2nd month.

5. Continue our Educational Incentive Rewards Program – July 2011, we implemented the Educational Incentive Rewards Program for Work First families. Education and skills training are critical in helping families achieve economic well-being. Rewarding parents who achieve their GED or obtain a skills training certificate or a two year degree will help in achieving better employment opportunities. Encouraging and rewarding parents will hopefully encourage them to encourage their children.

6. All WFFA participant's whose employment results in termination of their WFFA benefits or who are receiving Job Bonus will be referred to our Financial Social Work Services at Career Plus to develop a Financial Education and Savings Plan. Families that follow through with their Financial and Savings Goals and achieve outcomes/goals will be eligible for a financial education incentive bonus. Bonuses will be authorized once the family meets any of their identified goals. A family may receive up to (3) financial incentive bonuses per year based on achieving behavioral changing goals. The goal is to reward families for changing behaviors that will lead to positive financial and economic stability.

7. We will count SSI payments as countable income for children and parents in Work First Family Assistance Cases. <u>The Wilson County Board of County Commissioners requested in April 2009, that the NC General Assembly direct the NC DHHS to formally request a "waiver" from the Federal Government (HHS) for Electing Counties to count SSI/SSDI of parents and children as countable income in determining eligibility for Work First. We will ask County DSS Board and County Commissioners to request waiver for upcoming fiscal years 2012-2014 Work First Electing Plan.</u>

8. Any child born to a Work First Family Assistance recipient is considered a "Cap" child and not included in the WFFA grant amount if the mother was receiving assistance in any state the 10th month prior to the baby's birth, even if the mother was under a sanction. (In determining "CAP" status, we include in our definition of sanction as having an open TANF case and not receiving a check due to not meeting employment services requirements as well as non-coop with child support.)

9. If a WFFA Child Only Case head fails to return a Quarterly Review and requests reopening due to termination from that non-compliance, the

participant/family's WFFA case will be re-opened with a one month penalty for failure to comply. This does not require a new application.

10. All WFFA cases will adhere to an eligibility review at least once every 12 months. Families are still expected to report changes or when information is received by other sources the eligibility worker may request a review more often if needed.

11. All WFFA applicants will have a 1 month penalty imposed for quitting a job unless "good cause" is established. This does not affect their Medicaid eligibility. At application, the Medicaid will continue to be authorized starting with the month of application if all other eligibility requirements are met. Child support payments being received by applicants should not be ended until the month the WFFA payment begins.

12. All Child Only Kinship Care cases that have a prior involvement with CPS, Prevention, Juvenile Justice or Foster Care within the last 6 months will be required to comply with the Kinship Care Family Assessment. For families/children determined "at risk" of abuse, neglect, dependency or disruption of placement will be recommended for services. Services include on-going case management, strengths and needs assessment, referral services, advocacy, counseling, monitoring, etc.

13. All Child Only Work First Family Assistance cases with children age 6-17 who are not attending school regularly OR whose grades are not on grade level will be required to comply with the Kinship Care Family Assessment. The goal is to help identify possible educational interventions to avoid children falling below grade levels and ultimately dropping out of school. Resources and services will be provided based on outcomes of the assessment and participation of both the child and caretaker. Caretakers who do not comply with the school requirements, and participate in the Kinship Care Family Assessment and who are determined to not have good cause will be sanctioned and may not be eligible to receive WFFA payment (Work First Manual Sect 103).

14. Work First recipients entering Wage Subsidy "Express Application" component will be required to complete drug test prior to placement. If participant is found to have a positive test, referral for substance abuse treatment will be initiated through our QPSA. Failure of participant to comply with treatment plan, without good cause, will result in termination of benefits. If family chooses to reapply for WFFA, family must comply with treatment plan before re-application will be processed.

15. Eliminate Reserve/Resource Limit.

XIII. Appeal Process ***

Wilson County will have a two tier appeals process that complies with state law (G.S. 108A-79). Wilson County has a hearing officer that will conduct and preside over the first and second level appeal hearings. We will continue to follow the State procedures in "Request for Hearing, Scheduling, Place, Summary, Attendance and Conducting the Hearing" for 1st level appeals/hearings. **If the a/r is not satisfied with the local hearing decision, he may ask for a second level hearing from the county DSS.**

2nd Level Appeal/Hearings:
Wilson County will utilize a three person panel for all 2nd level appeal requests. The panel shall include two members from our Work First Planning Committee, and a representative from our County Board of Social Services. The appointed members have been approved by the Wilson County Board of Commissioners to hear all second level appeals. **(Attachment D-1, D-2, D-3**)

2nd level hearing request can be made in writing or verbally. Within 5 calendar days from the date of request (whether verbally or in writing), complete Request for Second Level Appeal Form (**Attachment D-1**) and submit to local Hearing Officer. The Hearing Officer or designee will coordinate the hearing scheduling with the Board Member and representatives from the Work First Planning Committee. Hearing officer will give reasonable notice to the worker of the date and time of hearing. The worker will be responsible for notifying the client of the date and time. The client may request a postponement or rescheduling of hearing with good cause. Good cause reasons will follow Work First Policy in Section 264 of the Work First Manual. We will follow Work First Manual Section 264 with regards to Place, Record Review, Summary, Attendance, & Conducting the Hearing.
The designated hearing panel will render a decision according to WFFA Manual, not more than 90 days from the date of the request for 2nd level hearing. When decision is made, notification will be given to worker and mailed by certified mail to client via the Notice of 2nd Level Appeal Decision Letter **(Attachment D-2**).

Further Appeal
If the a/r is not satisfied with the final decision following the 2nd level hearing, he/she may file a petition for judicial review in Superior Court within 30 calendar days of the receipt of that decision. For appeals filed after 30 calendar days, a Superior Court judge may issue an order permitting a review if the judge believes good cause exists for the delay in filing.
The County DSS may not appeal a hearing decision to Superior Court.

XIV. Review Prior to Expiration of Time Limits

Wilson County will follow the Standard procedures as outlined in the State Work First Policy Manual, Section 105, III & Section 105A, IV and State Law (N.C.G.S. 108A-27.4(e)(7) to review all Work First caseloads upon termination of benefits due to time clock expirations.

XV. Funding Requirements

We estimate 100% of our Work First Block Grant will be spent on Benefit Diversion, Employment Services, TANF EA, 200% services and child welfare services. We estimate spending all of our cash assistance. Any unused cash assistance will be set up in a reserve account through the county.

XVI. Certifications

CERTIFICATION REQUIRED OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD CHAIRMAN

As Chairman of the Wilson County Social Services Board, I certify that this County Plan has been reviewed and endorsed by the Wilson County Social Services Board at its meeting on September 2008.

_____

Jay Gallimore, Chairman
Wilson County Board of Social Services

CERTIFICATION REQUIRED OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

As Chairman of the Wilson County Board of Commissioners, I certify that this County Plan and the changes/clarifications have been reviewed and approved by the Wilson County Board of Commissioners at its meeting on Monday, September 2011.

_____

Mr. Lucas, Chairman
Wilson County Board of County Commissioners

Attachment A

Wilson County Department of Social Services
Work First/Child Welfare Planning Committee Minutes

To: Work First Planning Committee Members and Community Partners
From: Suzie Jones
Date: August 15, 2011
Subject: Minutes from Work First Planning Committee on August 11, 2011

1. Mrs. Susan Parker opened the floor for introductions and went over housekeeping items and agenda.

2. Wilson County DSS became an Electing County in 2007. Mrs. Parker explained that being a Work First Electing County allows counties to create their own eligibility and employment program. One of the initiatives implemented by Wilson County was Pay after Performance. A Pay after Performance case is a case in which the recipient does not receive WFFA benefits until after he/she completes 30 hours a week of employment or employment related activities for the month. All one hundred counties have adopted this strategy since it was first initiated.

3. The Wilson County Work First Electing County Plan will be presented to the DSS Board in August, then to the County Commissioners in September. The plan is due to the State by September 30th with expected feedback by October 15th. Public comment period will be September 1, 2011 through September 30, 2011.

4. As a guide to determine what strategies will make the most positive impact on children, adults and families WCDSS looks to its five Key Results - keeping children safe, helping youth to thrive, helping families become economically self sufficient, keeping adults safe and providing reliable services.

5. In 1995 Wilson County had over 1400 single parent/two parent families receiving Work First. The number has dramatically decreased resulting in only around 40 families that are receiving a Work First check monthly in 2011. Caretaker/Relative cases (child only) have slightly decreased during this same time period with an average monthly caseload of 189.

6. There has been a substantial increase in the number of teen parents that are staying in school and graduating. Tiffany Heffington, Day Care Social Worker, shared statistics of high school drop-out rates pertaining to teen parents. In 2008-2011 80% of teen parents remained in school or graduated as opposed to 33% in 2006-2008. The case management intervention and mentoring that teens are receiving year round from their Day Care Social Workers is really having an impact. DSS staff facilitates the Teen MORE class annually. The class is designed to help teen moms develop life skills, employment skills, parenting skills and money management.

7. Jimmy Lucas, Job Boost Coordinator, works closely with community employers to place parents and teens in jobs. 21 Teen Parents are working this summer and 13 teens are being mentored while learning job skills as a result of the TEMP Program which helps youth develop employment and life skills. Merck Pharmaceuticals currently employs and mentors five teens ranging in age from 16-18. Strategies such as recognizing and rewarding behavioral and academic achievement has also been essential to keeping teens motivated to finish school.

8. Martha Nida, Arts Council of Wilson and Becky Callison, Director of Wilson Public Library shared positive comments about their experiences working and mentoring students from the TEMP Program. Both agreed that the TEMP program is essential to providing crucial work/life skills as well raising the level of self esteem and confidence of students.

9. Terri Mitchell, WFFA Co-Team Leader shared with the committee new initiative/strategy to implement drug testing for Work First recipients. The purpose of the testing would be to identify and address a parents' need for treatment prior to referring them for employment or job related activities.

10. Kathy Stone shared Child Welfare Initiatives including expanding Foster Care Placement Options for Children, Expanding Practice Capacities in Child Welfare Service Delivery. Ms. Cynthia Floyd, Wilson County Schools, shared McKinney Veto definition of homelessness and children who are awaiting foster care placement may meet definition to receive services. Referrals will need to be made.

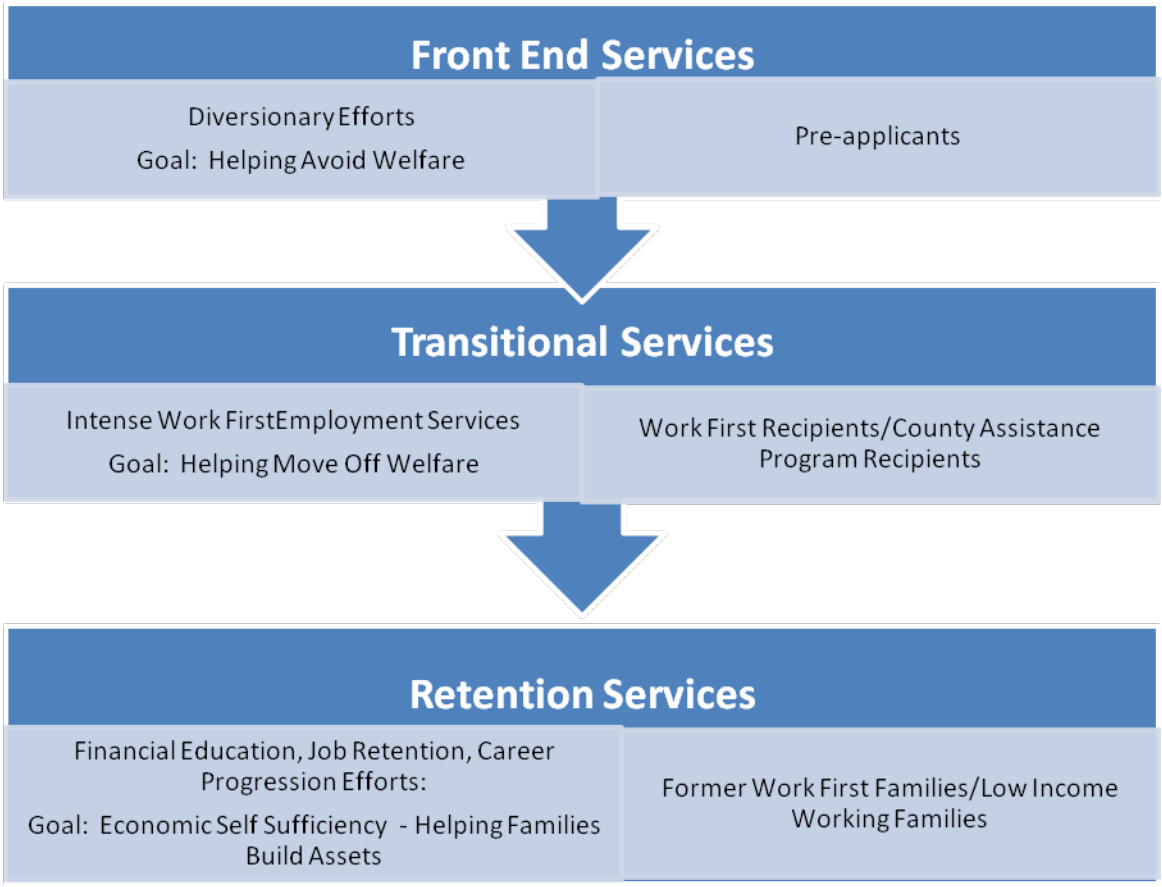
11. Barbara Massey, WFFA Team Leader shared initiative to extend eligibility to serve Work First youth 18-21 who are no longer eligible under Work First Cash Assistance. We want to offer and provide case management services to continue efforts to keep them in school and working towards graduation. Included would be incentives to stay in school and not become pregnant or father a child.

12. Howard Anthony, Alternative Services Team Leader, shared initiative to develop an express employment application for "work ready participants". Immediate referral for wage subsidy placement. The cash assistance would be provided as wag subsidy assistance to employer.

13. Susan Parker shared an initiative we want to implement with two parent families applying for Work First Cash Assistance -"Healthy Relationship/Healthy Family Initiative". The focus would be on strengthening families by helping them with communication skills, relationship building, parenting and financial education.

Meeting Adjourned at 12:10 p.m.

Attachment B



Attachment C

Rev. 03/09

WORK FIRST
TANF Crisis Resolution

The Wilson County Department of Social Services will administer the Crisis Resolution. This assistance will be offered to families who make application and meet the criteria of the program. This **Crisis Resolution Program** fund will be used to alleviate the emergency the family may be experiencing at the time an application is taken. Each application will be evaluated on its own merits.

Wilson County expects that each family use their own abilities and resources to meet the needs of their family. Applications for Crisis Resolution may be appropriate once the family has exhausted their resources effectively and have experienced an unusual circumstance beyond their control. Crisis Resolution funds are to be used when the approval will prevent a child from being placed outside the home of family or friends and alternative living arrangements with family and friends have been explored by the immediate family or applicant. Crisis Resolution primarily assists families in the areas of housing and utilities or help in keeping participant employed.

The criteria for assistance are as follows:

1. We will serve families with dependent children ages 0 through 17 years who are actively attending school or registered with ESC and are actively seeking employment or who are employed. All adults, under age 65, in the family must be working, or registered for employment and actively seeking employment, or unable to work verified by a doctor's statement. This does not include pregnant women without other children.

To be eligible for Crisis Resolution Assistance, families must:

-Live in Wilson County or be moving to Wilson County to alleviate a verified emergency such as domestic violence or personal disaster.
-United States citizen and certain qualified or otherwise eligible immigrants.
-Have a child in the home age 17 or younger who lives with a relative related by blood, marriage or adoption or;
-Have a child in the home that lives with a household member who has legal custody of the child;

A relative is defined as:

-Parent – Natural mother or father, legal or alleged father, or adoptive parents.
-Blood, half blood, or adoptive relatives, brother, sister, grandparents, any degree of great grandparents, uncle, aunt any degree of great uncle or great aunt, nephew, niece, first cousin once removed-defined as a child of a first cousin.
-Step-relative – Stepparent, stepbrother, or stepsister.
- Individual who has legal custody or guardianship.

2. Experiencing Unusual Circumstances:

The family needs to have had an unusual circumstance that caused them to be in a crisis; i.e. catastrophic illness, substantial loss of shelter, food, clothing, or household furnishings due to fire, flood, or similar natural or manmade disaster, or crime of violence. Crisis Resolution may be used for services or items at the discretion of DSS that may prevent out of home placement, and alleviate the emergency. Unpaid water bills or lack of cooking gas, **alone,** does not meet Crisis Resolution guidelines. Crisis resolution funds cannot be used to pay for any medical expenses.

The unusual circumstances must have been beyond their control: Maternity leave does not constitute an unusual circumstance unless a Doctor's note recommends the client stop working earlier than planned.
Acquiring approval from subsidized housing to move into a new location does not constitute an unusual circumstance and is not considered for CR, unless there are other circumstances that meet CR guidelines.

3. **Verification of Emergency/Crisis**

The applicant must have **verification** that an emergency exists. There must be a disconnect notice for utility service, or a notice *of intent* to Foreclose. For rentals, a court ordered eviction is required unless: - a child is in danger and in threat of being removed from the home, spouse abuse, domestic violence, or –loss of shelter due to a natural disaster, condemned property, etc.

The worker will explore all family resources at the time of application and families will be expected to use those resources in lieu of public assistance. Crisis Resolution is to be used when it will alleviate the emergency and the family has or will have the resources to meet their on-going needs monthly. The Information Sheet is a tool you may use to evaluate this, and to determine if the family has used their resources to meet the essential needs of the family prior to paying for nonessential items and service. The worker must evaluate whether the situation is actually an emergency or request to improve the standard of living. The worker should determine if the applicant has a history of being in a crisis. If so, evaluate whether Crisis Resolution can alleviate the crisis if they are repetitive. Crisis Resolution is to be considered limited public assistance. Refer participant to Money Smart Workshop if needed.

All family members included in the budget must cooperate with all Agency programs; i.e., Work First, Food Stamps, Child Support, Work First Family Assistance, Day Care etc.

The family cannot refuse employment or training for employment without good cause. Use the Information Sheet to obtain Employment history.

4. Counting Income
All income in the household whether earned or unearned will be counted in the budget when determining eligibility for crisis resolution, except the earned income of a student. The income scale is attached. The worker may accept the client's statement regarding income or require verification of income if questionable.

Count the Total Gross income of the household.
Earned Income: Count the actual gross income received for the previous 4 weeks if they are employed. If income begins during the month of application, count the amount that was actually received thus far that month.

Terminated Income: Count the actual gross income received during the month of application. If income terminates and is last received prior to the month of application, do not count the income. If income terminates during the month of application, count the amount received.
Unearned income: Count the actual amount received prior to the month of application.

5. Authorization Amount
The **maximum** payment will be $500.00 within a 30-day period once a year. You may authorize re-application within the 30 day period as long as the total does not exceed $500.00. The family can only receive assistance **once** within a 12-month period. If any person living in the home has received Crisis Resolution within the last 12 months, the household is not eligible at this time.

Appendix D-1

REQUEST FOR SECOND LEVEL APPEAL

Appellant:
Address:

City State: Zip

Date of Request:
Date of Application:
Date of Birth
Phone #:

Dates of local appeal:

Date of 1st Request: Hearing date: Decision:
Reason for requesting Second Level Appeal:

Is client expected to be assisted by legal counsel or other representative? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If so, state name and address:

Please attach a copy of the following:

Local Appeal hearing decision
Medical verifications for cases involving a disability or incapacity

Worker _____ Date _____

Team Leader _____ Date _____

Submit to County Hearing officer for scheduling of 2nd level hearing and for distribution to Hearing Panel members.

Attachment D-2

Dear

On your request for a Second Level Appeal was heard by the Appeal Board.
Your appeal has been _____
(Approved or Denied)

The reason for this action is:

The State regulations requiring this action are found in Sect of the Work First Manual.

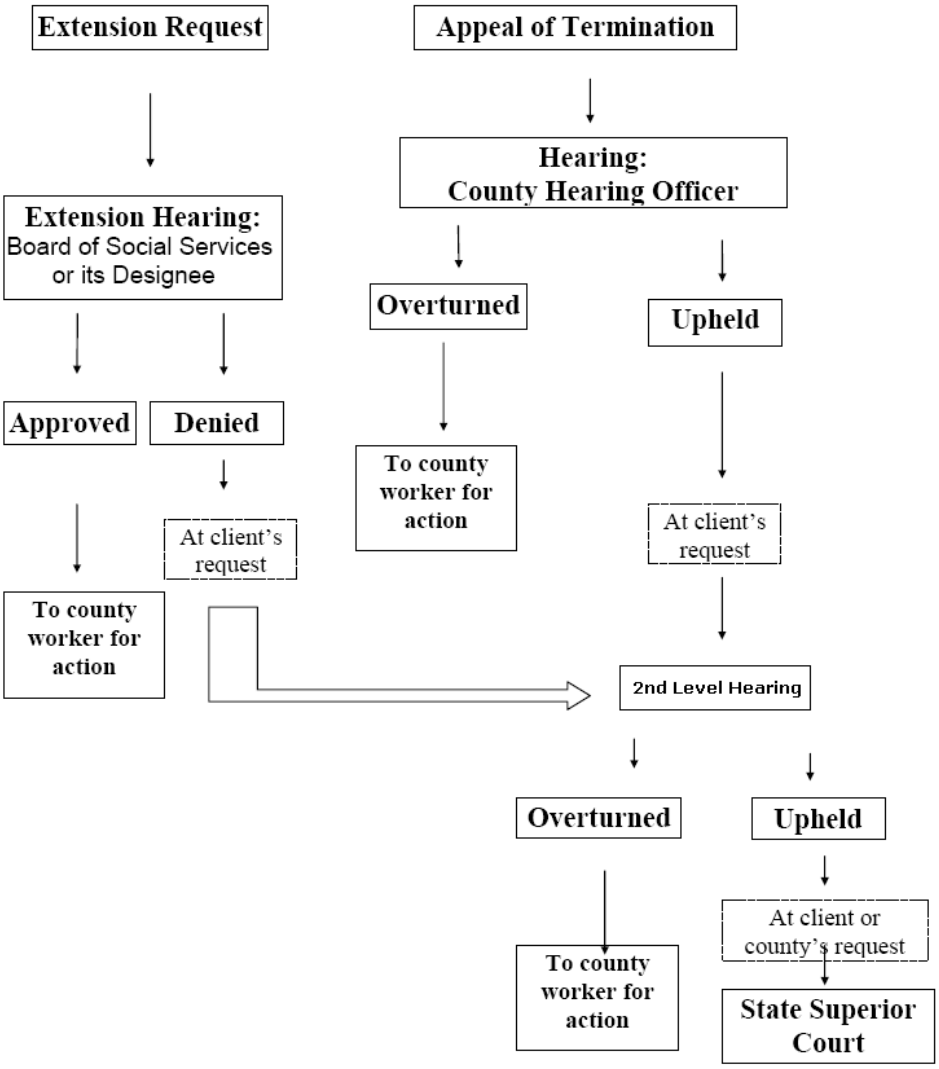
If you are not satisfied with the final decision of the Appeal Board, either, you, or your representative may, within 30 days of the receipt of this decision, file a petition for judicial review in Superior Court.

_____ 252-_____
SW Signature Phone

_____ 252-_____
Work First Team Leader Phone

Attachment D-3

Work First Extensions and Appeals



*When the 2nd Level Hearing Committee overturns a local decision and grants an extension, the County Hearing Officer must determine the length of the extension.

Attachment E

Wilson County

TANF/Domestic Violence and Family Violence Preventions Services Act (FVPSA) Plan
FY 2010-2011

PURPOSE:
The purpose of this plan is to establish the procedures that Wilson County Department of Social Services and Wesley Shelter, Inc. have developed jointly for utilizing the Domestic Violence/TANF Funds. This is an agreement on how to proceed and interact with families with children who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence. The current allocation for the Fiscal Year 2010-2011 beginning July 1, 2010 is $__21,053.00_____. This plan will be in effect from July 1, 2010 through June 30, 2011.

USE OF FUNDS

Wilson County will use ***all*** Domestic Violence/TANF Funds to provide direct services to domestic violence victims and children who meet the TANF/Work First eligibility criteria. Both Wilson County Department of Social Services and Wesley Shelter, Inc. agree that direct financial aid and counseling services to victims of Domestic Violence would be the best use of these funds. Direct services include, but not limited to:

- Housing expenses including rent, mortgage payment, re-location costs
- Security/safety needs
- Clothing
- Food
- Utilities
- Counseling services – up to $60.00 per hour for professional counseling services (clinical social worker/psychologist) and up to $40.00 per hour for paraprofessional which includes but is not limited to counseling, court advocacy, individual assessments, parenting education facilitators, batter's intervention class and/or parenting classes)
- Educational or Job Training Activities: Reasonable actual costs are allowed for these services as approved by the local department of social services and the domestic violence agency and can include tuition, books, transportation, day care, etc.
- Legal fees up to $90.00 per hour for professional legal fee: The fee can be used for any civil action that will enable a victim to be safe and/or economically independent.
- Transportation (car repairs, insurance, cab services, van services, car payments, gas card, etc)
- Short-term child care (not to exceed three months)
- Essential Household Needs
- Cost for shelter up to $50.00 per person per night for shelter at Wesley Shelter, Inc.'s safe house.

These funds will be used for direct client assistance and/or counseling for purpose of the above needs for eligible Domestic Violence families and children.
Funds paid on behalf of eligible domestic violence victims for purpose of housing, child care, utilities, transportation cannot exceed ***three*** months of assistance. ***No services will be provided utilizing TANF DV funding that meets the federal definition of "assistance" defined as services that have cash like value and are intended to meet basic on-going needs.***

****Medical expenses and prescriptions are not allowable costs for DV/TANF Funds. State or local funds may be used for medical expenses or prescriptions.***

REFERRAL PROCESS:

Clients requesting domestic violence services will be referred to Wesley Shelter. Coordination with Wesley Shelter is critical in identifying needs of the client and avoiding duplication of services. Wesley Shelter will provide documentation that client has been assessed and domestic violence has been identified and/or verified. The DSS Social Worker will need to complete 200% Income Eligibility Sheet and obtain the client signature on the DSS-5027 Services Information Form using ***Service Code 351***. Social Worker may authorize financial aid under the TANF/DV guidelines and procedures through completing county order through our Financial Aid Database Tracking. All county orders are entered in this system under the Domestic Violence Fund Account. Financial Aid should only be approved for families who are involved or follow through with assessment and services provided by Wesley Shelter and who meet the eligibility requirements as stated below.

Wesley Shelter staff along with other community partners may refer victims of Domestic Violence to Wilson County DSS for financial assistance. Wesley Shelter staff will complete the Work First DV Assessment document (DSS 6965) and indicate appropriate assistance needed for families with children. If the victim has an on-going social worker, that social worker will be responsible for determining eligibility and completing all necessary forms and assisting the family with the financial assistance authorization. Coordination between the two agencies must occur to avoid duplication of services. On-going Communication between social worker and DV Shelter is encouraged.

If the family does not have an on-going social worker, they will be referred to our Alternative Services Unit for intake and assessment with our Domestic Violence Social Worker. All forms as indicated above must be completed (200% eligibility form and DSS-5027 Services Information Form). WCDSS will determine eligibility and complete all the necessary forms for determining eligibility and assist victims/families with financial emergencies and/or counseling services.

BILLING PROCESS:

All TANF/DV funds will be paid through a voucher system and expenditures paid directly to vendors on behalf of domestic violence families and children. Workers must have an original receipt and attach to the county order for processing payment to the vendor.

ELIGIBILITY PROCESS/FAMILIES TO BE SERVED:

The TANF Domestic Violence Funds will be provided to families who are:

- ✓ Families receiving Work First Cash assistance or applicants; or
- ✓ Families who have a child in the home (under age 17 and meet the kinship and citizenship requirements) ***and*** whose income is 200% of the federal poverty level or below; or
- ✓ Qualified aliens who have at least one child under age 17 and meet the kinship and citizenship requirements outlined in the Work First Manual

CPS AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AGENCY COLLABORATION:

See the attached Domestic Violence Program Memorandum of Understanding for details.

REALLOCATION:
Both Wesley Shelter and Wilson County DSS understand that TANF/DV & FVPSA funds may be reallocated during the fiscal year at the discretion of the Division of Social Services.

OTHER COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS:
Domestic Violence Counselor will be available to Wilson County Department of Social Services as needed for the purpose of staffing cases, collaboration, assessment and education. Within 24 hours of referral, Wesley Shelter staff and WCDSS SW will confer to staff situation. The representatives from Wesley Shelter, Child Welfare Program Manager, Work First Team Leaders, Self Sufficiency Program Manager, Crisis Intervention Team Leader and DV SW will meet quarterly. The collaboration efforts between the two agencies have and will continue to provide open communication and dialogue as we continue providing support and services to domestic violence victims.

Child Welfare staff and Work First/TANF Staff continue to utilize the resources through Wesley Shelter in order to meet the needs of families and children who are victims of domestic violence. On-going education and partnerships will enhance service delivery, eliminate duplication, and increase opportunities for effective and positive change for families and children. The following are outcomes that we will strive to achieve:

1. Continue to enhance our collaboration efforts in serving victims of domestic violence through on-going communication and staffing on dual cases as needed. This is accomplished through direct one-on-one meetings, Family Group Conferences, Family Resource Conferences, Child and Family Team meetings, and quarterly TANF/DV Collaborative meetings, etc.
2. Refer and Provide Emergency Financial Assistance to meet the emergency/safety financial needs of families/children involved in domestic violence.
3. Increase safety and well-being of families and children in Wilson County through our continued collaboration and partnerships.
4. Provide two in-service trainings on use of DV Funds to Wesley Shelter staff each year as well as Wesley Shelter provide in-service training on programs/services they offer to DSS staff.

FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION SERVICE ACT (FVPSA)
July 1, 2010 through September 30, 2010

Wilson County has received an allotment of funding through FVPSA for Domestic Violence services. Effective July 1, 2010 through September 30, 2010, $3140.00 is available to assist families/children/victims and/or offenders with services and/or emergency needs. FVPSA funding allows for service provision to men and women who are victims and/or offenders of domestic violence with or without children.

REFERRAL PROCESS

Clients requesting FVPSA services will be referred to Wesley Shelter and/or Wilson County DSS. Coordination with Wesley Shelter is critical in identifying needs of the client and avoiding duplication of services. Clients must have an assessment/documentation (DSS-6965) completed by Wesley Shelter verifying that client has been assessed and domestic violence has been identified and/or verified.
Upon receiving the assessment from Wesley Shelter, DSS Social Worker will need to obtain the client signature on DSS-5027 application for services using ***Service Code 353***. FVPSA ***does not*** require a 200% Income Eligibility Sheet.

If the family/individual does not have an on-going social worker, they will be referred to Alternative Services Unit for intake and assessment with Domestic Violence Social Worker. WCDSS will refer to Wesley Shelter for assessment and upon return with verification of assessment; social worker will complete application for Services (DSS-5027) and necessary forms for authorizing assistance to assist victims/families with financial emergencies and/or counseling services.

BILLING PROCESS:

All FVPSA funds will be paid through a voucher system and expenditures paid directly to vendors on behalf of domestic violence families and children. Workers must have an original receipt and attach to the county order for processing payment to the vendor. The DSS worker will put the customer's 200# on all county orders. Work First Team Leaders will manually monitor the balance due to the limited funding and timeframe.