



***“Working Parents and Strong Families”  
Work First and Child Safety  
County Plan  
Fiscal Years: 2009-2011***

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*“Helping Families and Children Achieve Success”*

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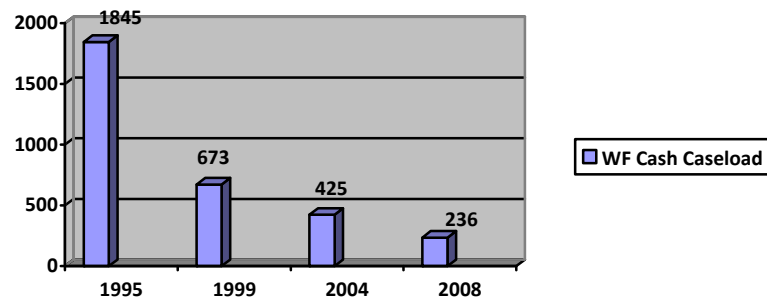
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## I. CONDITIONS WITHIN THE COUNTY

Wilson County's Work First and Child Safety Plan is a results based proactive plan in addressing the needs of our welfare population as well as our vulnerable children and helping families become economically stable. Since 1995 Wilson County's Work First cash caseload has declined approximately 89%.

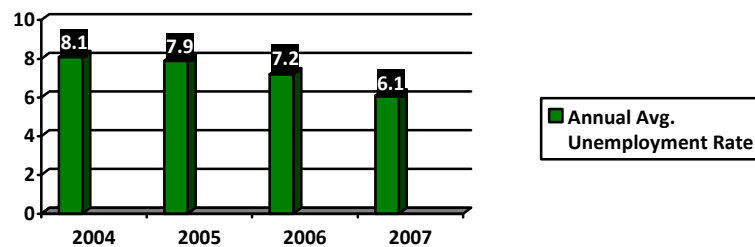
This reduction is a result of Welfare Reform changes, innovative best practices, community involvement and the focus of responsibility, not entitlement. Below is a chart representing the decline of Work First caseloads in Wilson County from July 1995 to July 2008.

DECLINE IN WORK FIRST CASELOAD OVER TIME

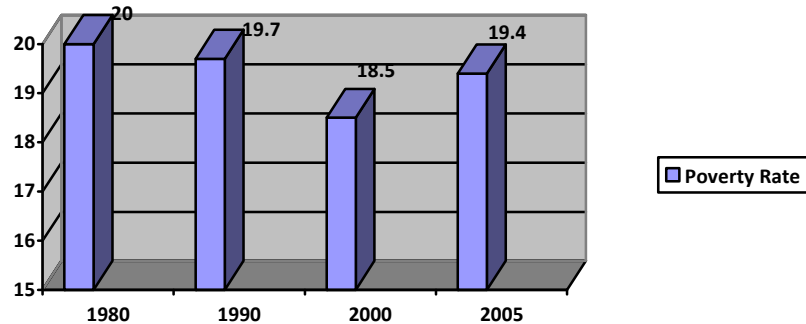


Wilson County's unemployment rate dropped over the past four years. However, due to recent increase in inflation and current economic conditions that are facing our country, we are beginning to see a slight increase this year. Wilson County typically has a higher unemployment rate than the state average. The economic outlook for Wilson is steady with new industry, retail, and food services. However, with the increasing high costs of gas/fuel prices, food, utilities, taxes, and inflation many companies/businesses are beginning to feel the pinch and are cutting hours or beginning to layoff. Unemployment rose slightly last quarter and economists predict a sluggish economy for the next 6 -12 months. Below is a chart of the average county unemployment rate for the last four years.

Average Unemployment Rate by Year

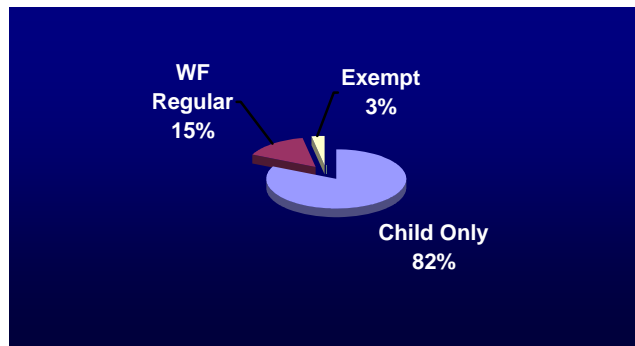


According to NC Justice Center (BTF Brief), the estimated poverty rate for Wilson County for 2005 is 19.45. This represents a slight increase from the 2000 Census of nearly 1%.



\*\*Child Poverty rate is 24.7% in Wilson County.

**As of July 2008, we have 236 families/cases receiving a Work First cash assistance check.** Child only cases represent over three fourths of our total Work First cases at eighty percent (82%) or 191 cases. “Work Eligible” Families represent 18% of our total Work First population, however approximately 3% of these families are exempt due to needed in the home to care for disabled family member and/or exempt due to birth of a child up to 3 months. Child Only Cases (82%) are not subject to work requirements or time limits. Typically our Child only cases are relative caregivers providing for the care of a relative child or undocumented immigrant applying for their child. The child must be a legal US citizen to be eligible. Below is a breakdown of the Work First Caseload as of July 1, 2008.



Thirty percent (30%) of our Work First participants have little or no transportation to and from job sites and childcare centers. It is estimated 35% of all current Work First families lack a high school education or GED. It is estimated 30% have some level of substance-related impairment and approximately 20% with physical/mental health issues. Less than 10% of Work First Families have a history with child welfare.

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

- 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
- Difficulty handling stress
- Teenage pregnancy
- School dropouts
- Personal and family crisis
- Lack of parenting skills
- Mental Health issues

### **Economic Development Outlook**

Currently, economic growth in Wilson County is steady. Growth in outlying areas has provided entry-level employment opportunities. New industry and existing industry have increased, providing more job opportunities. Industries represented in Wilson include automotive parts, aerospace, pharmaceuticals, building materials, food manufacturing, and plastics. Manufacture jobs represent approximately one-third of our work force. Service related and retail jobs are also on the rise.

## **II. PLANNING PROCESS**

### **A. Planning Committee**

#### **Wilson County Boards**

##### **Board of County Commissioners**

Mr. Frank Emory, Chairman  
 Mr. Tim Williford  
 Mr. Roger Lucas  
 Mrs. Bobbie Jones  
 Ms. Josephine Edwards  
 Mr. Grady Robbins  
 Mr. Sid Boyette

##### **Board of Social Services**

Mr. Jay Gallimore, Chairman  
 Mr. Charles Davis  
 Mr. Walt Johnson  
 Mrs. Bobbie Jones  
  
 Mr. Glenn Osborne, Director

Mr. Ellis Williford, County Manager

Ms. Denise Stinagle, Assistant County Manager

**County Work First Planning Committee**

Ms. Mary Katherine Rowe - Area Board of Mental Health  
 Ms. Karen Salacki – Local Mental Health Director  
 Mr. Grady Robbins - Board of County Commissioners  
 Ms. Pam Walthall - Local School System Representative  
 Ms. Denna Spach - Business Community Representative  
 Ms. Karen Boyette - Local Public Health Department  
 Ms. Terri Williams – ESC Job Link Representative  
 Mr. Jay Gallimore – County Board of Social Services  
 Ms. Elaine Swinson – County Transportation  
 Ms. Barbara Boyette - Wilson Technical Community College Representative  
 Ms. Barbara Blackston – Wilson Community Improvements Association, Inc.  
 Ms. Star Day – Faith Community Representative  
 Ms. Eva Barrett – Former Work First Representative  
 Ms. Susan Parker - Department of Social Services Representative  
 Mr. Glenn Osborne - Department of Social Services Representative  
 Ms. Velvet Nixon - Department of Social Services Child Welfare Representative  
 Ms. Christy Nash – Department of Social Services Work First Representative  
 Ms. Amber Denning – Department of Social Services -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.

**B. Public Comment**

Opportunity for public review and comments on our County's 2009-2011 Work First/Child Welfare Plan will be provided from September 1st – September 30th. Copies of the Work First Plan will be posted at the County Office, Wilson County Department of Social Services, and on our County's web site for the public to review and provide comment. Public notice and comment period will be 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 20, 2008. All of the need areas are addressed in our strategies for the 2007-2009 Work First/Child Safety Plan. In addition the committee heard from Work First staff on progress and successes as a result of electing county changes and strategies for reducing abuse and neglect of children. 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 2009-2011 County Plan, a presentation was made to the Wilson County DSS Board for endorsement of the plan on August 26, 2008. A final presentation of the initiatives

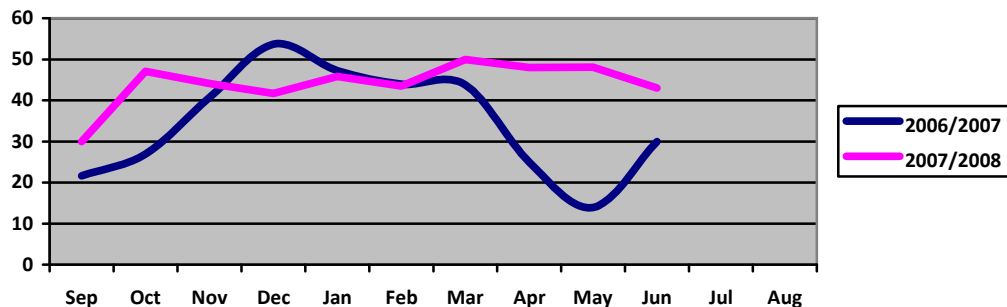
and request for approval from the County Commissioners on our 2007-2009 Work First and Child Safety Plan was held on September 9, 2008. County Commissioner's approved the Work First Child Safety Plan and voted to remain an electing county.

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 difference in the lives of those that we serve.

### III. Outcomes and Goals for Wilson County

#### A. 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 place 50 or more Work First participants into employment for each fiscal year 2009-2011
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. Pink line shows 2007-2008 participation rates and blue line represents our participation rate for the same time period for 2006-2007. We have seen a significant progress in achieving our participation rate as a result of electing county initiatives and pay after performance. Currently we have 0 two parent families receiving Work First Cash Assistance.



3. **Providing Employment Services** – 90% of All Work First participants will receive intense employment services
4. **Staying Off Welfare** – 90% of all Work First families who leave Work First because of a job do not return to apply within 12 months
5. **Benefit diversion** – 60 families will be provided upfront benefit diversion assistance to alleviate the financial crisis and help families return to full time employment within 2-3 months.

## B. Federal and State Outcome Measures for Child Welfare

1. Outcome 1—Reduce recurrence of child abuse and/or neglect
2. Outcome 2—Reduce the incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care
3. Outcome 3—Increase permanency for children in foster care
4. Outcome 4—Reduce time in foster care to reunification without increasing re-entry
5. Outcome 5—Reduce time in foster care to adoption
6. Outcome 6—Increase placement stability
7. Outcome 7—Reduce placements of young children in group homes or institutions

## C. County Developed Outcome Goals:

*(Result Statements are what we want to cause to happen in our County. The Results and many of the goals 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 and state goals)*

### **RESULT #1 - FAMILIES AND CHILDREN TO LIVE IN SAFE AND STABLE HOMES**

Leading By Results County Goals:

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

Outcome: 100%

**Indicator 2:** Annual % of maltreated children who are removed from home but kept with relatives.

Outcome: This is a new indicator for Wilson County. Currently there is no baseline but data will be collected during the 2008-2011 FY

**Indicator 3:** Annual % of children who receive CPS in-home services and do not enter into the custody of DSS.

Outcome: This is a new indicator for Wilson County.

**Indicator 4:** Annual % of children in foster care placements who are not abused or neglected while in DSS custody.

Outcome: 100%

**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 - FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN TO BECOME ECONOMICALLY STABLE**

### **Leading By Results (Indicators)**

**Indicator 1:** Number of Work First participants entering employment - Wilson County will place 50+ Work First participants into employment each year

**Indicator 2:** Annual % of teen parents receiving child care subsidy services who successfully complete high school.

\*This is a new indicator for Wilson County. Currently there is no baseline but strategies are being developed to help our teenage custodial parents receiving child care subsidy to complete high school.

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

Outcome: 30% - 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 and Medicaid, financial education/budgeting, EITC and free tax preparation opportunities, IDA Homeownership, emergency crisis financial assistance, child support, etc.

**Indicator 4:** Annual % of former Work First participants who remain off Work First for employment for 12 months.

Outcome: 90% - Wilson County continues to perform above the state goal in this area. 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 who do return with upfront employment and support services to find immediate employment. Child Care subsidy assistance is one of the best anti-welfare programs we have and families realize the importance of continued employment to avoid losing child care assistance.

**Indicator 5:** Annual % of child support cases paying full amount of obligation.

Outcome: 43%

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

Outcome: This is a new indicator for Wilson County. Baselines will be developed.

**Indicator 7:** Annual % of eligible recipients receiving Food and Nutrition in Wilson County.

Outcome: This is a new indicator for Wilson County. Baselines will be developed.

#### **RESULT # 4 – YOUTH AND CHILDREN IN DSS CUSTODY WILL LIVE IN SAFE PERMANENT HOMES AND APPLY ESSENTIAL LIFE SKILLS**

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

Outcome:

**Indicator 2:** Annual % of children who are returned home from foster care and do not experience another incident of abuse and neglect

Outcome: **100%**

### **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:** Continue to promote Job Shadowing/Career Exploration opportunities for youth in foster care ages fifteen to eighteen years old. Many of our youth do not have long term plans once they leave foster care. 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.

**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:** Approximately 10% of Work First families may have been involved in child welfare. We want to continue to develop specific 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 to enhance our Kinship Care Services for Work First Child Only Families. 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. Continue facilitation of our monthly Kinship Care Community Group, Family Resource Conferences, strengths and needs assessment on all families referred for Kinship Social work services. We will also be applying for The Brookdale Foundation “Relatives as Parents Seed Grant” to enhance our Kinship Care Services and initiatives.

**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, community action agencies, transportation,

faith groups, financial education and consumer credit 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. Work First Social Worker Staff along with community partners are encouraging “Family Resource Conferences” to ensure the services and participation are “on track”, encourage and evaluate appropriate participation in work activities and ensure that supportive services are in place for participation. These Family Resource Conferences are initiated by the Work First Social Worker, family/participant and/or community partners involved with the family.

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.

\*\*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.

□ **Establish and Implement a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Model**

**Strategy:** The Duke Endowment awarded TEDI BEAR Children’s Advocacy Center a grant to fund a full time Outreach Coordinator to develop 12 Multidisciplinary Teams in Eastern North Carolina. The team is composed of members from law enforcement, ADA office, mental health, GAL, medical providers (specialized in assessing child abuse) and DSS child protective services staff. In an effort to prepare for this endeavor, we sponsored the “Darkness to Light” training at WCDSS and several community partners attended. We believe

this training was instrumental in aligning community support for the development of a MDT in our community.

Other rationale for supporting the development of MDT is that it reduces the negative impact of abuse for children and the “falling through the cracks” reality. The National Children’s Alliance and the Children’s Advocacy Center Accrediting Organization recognize this model as a “best practice” for interagency investigations. There are many benefits to using a coordinated team approach. Achieving outcomes are more likely to:

- a. Reduces repetition of interviews
- b. Removes the likelihood of a single individual making key decisions
- c. Decreases the possibility of dissension between disciplines.

The Multidisciplinary Team members will be responsible for reviewing child sexual abuse and severe physical abuse cases investigated by law enforcement and DSS.

□ **Implement Mandated Changes in Child Welfare Practice**

**Strategy:** The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted its Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for NCDSS in March 2007. The CSFR process required the division to identify several counties for which a sample of their child welfare cases would be reviewed. The purpose of the CSFR is to ensure all agencies are striving to provide family-centered services to children and families in order to achieve well-being through self-sufficiency, support, safety and permanence.

The CSFR process measures achieved outcomes in the areas of safety, permanence and well-being. Safety is assessed by ensuring that children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect and maintained safely in their homes. Permanency is measured by determining if the children have continuity of family relationships and a permanent and stable home. Well-being is achieved when families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s educational, physical and mental health needs or the needs are met through appropriate services.

The Federal CFSR findings identified systemic, case review and services array factors that needed to be resolved. The Division along with county staff and other significant partners developed a Program Improvement Plan that identified key concerns and outlined primary strategies to resolve the concerns.

□ **Research and Conduct Feasibility Study for Operating a Therapeutic Foster Homes.**

**Strategy:** WCDSS currently has 87 children in legal custody. Many of these children have special needs that require a higher level of care. In an effort to meet the needs of the children, we have utilized therapeutic foster homes operated by private agencies located both in and outside the community. We have encountered therapeutic foster homes that were not equipped to meet the needs of our children.

In assessing these facilities, we recognized that some of the placement did not provide the services that were advertised. In some instances, it appeared that the higher monthly board rate was the only difference between the family foster home and the therapeutic foster home.

The agency was approved for another clinical social worker position. This worker would assist with providing the supportive clinical services to children residing in a therapeutic foster home. 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.

In January 2008, the division will be implementing an increase in the monthly board rate for family foster homes. It is our goal to study the impact that the higher board rates will have on our efforts to increase the number of foster homes in our community.

□ **Expand Child Abuse/Neglect Prevention Program**

**Strategy:** We will continue Family Group Conferencing (FGC) services 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 FGC 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 Family Group Conferencing 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. In order to reduce child abuse and neglect, we need to expand our prevention services to serve families more intensely and continue to offer the needed support, training, and education for families to function in positive ways with their children.

**Strategy:** Continue efforts to expand clinical services at DSS. We currently have a Psychologist and a Clinical Social Worker on staff to provide psychological services, testing, assessments and treatment to children and parents in our child welfare systems. 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.

□ **Provide Parenting Education Training Classes**

**Strategy:** We plan to begin offering ongoing (quarterly) parenting education training to educate and teach parents of Work First Families and Child welfare families' positive teaching methods. The model used by our county will be the Nurturing Parent Model which provides consistency and encourages the learning, practice and success of parenting with any age child. We propose to expand the duties/responsibilities of an existing position to provide the coordination to set up parenting education classes quarterly. This position will also facilitate the on-going financial education workshops for families in need of basic financial education. We have volunteer trainers from DSS, Wesley Shelter, Health Department, Department of Juvenile Justice, City of Wilson Police Department, Wilson Cooperative Extension, and several other community volunteers involved in our local Child Abuse Prevention Council who are trained facilitators for the Nurturing Parent Program and who are willing to help facilitate the classes. 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 also needed in our community to help parents deal with the ever challenging role of parenting, especially with the teen population.

□ **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 will be made to a qualified substance abuse professional for evaluation and treatment recommendations. The QPSA is here on site at DSS for 3 hours a day (twice a week). Availability for immediate referral has provided some challenges for workers and customers. We will advocate for additional on-

site hours to accommodate the emerging and on-going mental health and substance abuse needs of the customers that we serve.

- **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 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.

- **Research, develop and implement a 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 Intense Social Worker. These individuals are most likely candidates for pursuing Social Security Disability Income. These families will be provided the option of choosing to continue receiving regular Work First Family Assistance or a newly developed county disability assistance program. The County Disability Assistance Program will offer the same intense case management services available through the Work First program, but they would opt to receive a county assistance payment. Families choosing the County Disability Assistance Payment will receive an additional \$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 after the 1 year period, a Work First application will be initiated and monthly cash assistance through the regular Work First program will begin.

Helping families to understand the disability process is a critical step in the approval of SSI benefits. 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 attending 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 is also based on available funding and approval.

- **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 self-sufficiency and that both of the 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.

- **Expand 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/downturn. Wilson County's Financial Social Worker works with individuals or groups in need of help with gaining control of their financial spending and savings and providing financial education. The Financial Social Worker provides on-going support and education on budgeting assistance, banking, predatory lending, etc., while helping families develop an action plan for making positive changes that will lead to achieving their financial goals. We offer and facilitate the change process through the "Taking Charge" program as well as information from the financial social work certification program developed by the Center for Financial Social Work. Our goal is to provide financial education, help families understand the change process and reward families for making financial and behavior changes. A financial incentive will be provided when families demonstrate positive behavior changes and achieve one of their financial goals consistently. 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. We received a demonstration grant from MDD, in conjunction with IDA and Asset Building Collaborative of NC to support our efforts in this new approach to helping families take control of their money to gain control of their lives.

**Strategy:** Continue our efforts in promoting *NC Saves* to all low income families and encouraging savings and asset accumulation. *NC Saves* has afforded the opportunity for many unbanked individuals to open a savings account with local financial institutions for as little as \$1.00. The purpose of the above initiative is

to encourage financial responsibility and understanding of the financial institutions and the importance of savings.

**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. Currently 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. It is a 10 month financial and homeownership educational program. Under this initiative participants would be 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. Withdrawals from this account would require second party approval. 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 which our county has received. TANF funds will also be utilized for families whose income is below 200% of the poverty level.

**Strategy:** Continue to provide free tax preparation services. We hope to expand our EITC/VITA efforts through grant funding and outreach to promote the use of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) and Advanced Earned Income Tax Credit. 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 and promote financial education programs on site 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 and IDA participants and employed families.

- **Continue to build on our community collaboration and partnerships with the business community.**

**Strategy:** We plan to continue our work with the business community on the many benefits of hiring Work First and former Work First participants. We will continue to promote WOTC and other tax credits when hiring participants from

the Work First or Food Stamp populations. We continue to build on our existing relationships with businesses through our local Chamber of Commerce, Human Resource Association and Economic Development Council. We are currently participating on the Workforce Development Advisory Committee with educational, business, and community leaders to develop systems and programs to equip our current and future workforce with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

**Strategy:** We will continue our association as member of the Wilson Chamber of Commerce and Wilson Human Resource Association for continued relationships, collaboration and involvement with employers. Our job developer is currently the President of the Wilson Human Resource Association for the 2008/2009 FY.

**Strategy:** We have had much success in our planning and coordination of the Annual Greater Wilson Job Fair. We have successfully planned and offered a successful job fair event each year for the past 9 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 the Department of Social Services. The planning is usually a four month planning period each year. We have the support and assistance from many community and business partners in planning for this yearly event. Each year, we have between 600 to 800 jobseekers and 50 + 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 faith 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 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 24 churches donating to our faith connections program totaling over \$20,000 per year in monetary donations in addition to \$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 are presenting Faith Connections to regional US Department of Health and Human Service TANF Administrators Conference in Texas as one of two faith based TANF initiatives in the country that has been identified as a "best practice".

- **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:** As a result of our Work First Demonstration Grant funding, we developed and began facilitating 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, interview techniques, resume development, job searching skills, financial education, career exploration/aptitude, teamwork, expectations of employers, etc. Intensive monitoring and supervision of participant's job search are incorporated into this activity. Our completion and employment rate remains high – hovering around 65-75% graduation and/or employment rate. Plans are to continue offering this monthly class when the grant ends next year.

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

**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 our 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 prior to a cash assistance application being taken 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. We currently are diverting approximately 68% of families.

**Strategy:** Through our Leading by Results Efforts and indicators we have intensified our assessment and case management to families receiving Benefit Diversion. As a result of this strategy, 96% of the total Benefit Diversion applications approved in 2006/2007 did not return to apply within a 12 month period. Families are referred to our Financial Social Worker for financial education/budgeting/money management/coaching upon obtaining or returning to employment within the three month Benefit Diversion period.

□ **"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 to gain economic stability**

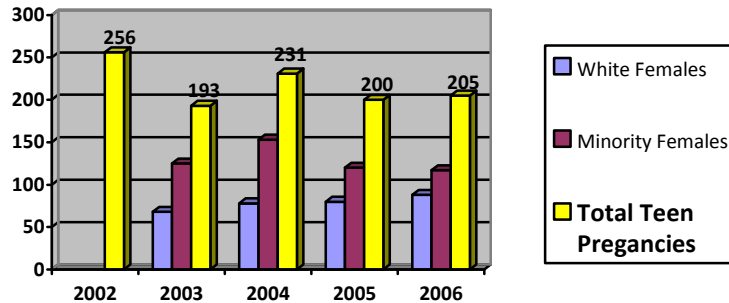
**Strategy:** We will continue to utilize the State Standard Policy for applying the Job Bonus to Work First participants who become employed. At the time of employment, we will disregard their earnings for three months to assist the family in making the transition from welfare to work. Families will 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 want to incorporate a bonus incentive for child care subsidy families, families transitioning from Work First to employment, and families receiving 200% services who receive financial social work services. Families who develop a financial savings plan aimed at decreasing their expenses, increasing their savings and achieving their financial or career advancement goals will be eligible for a bonus/incentive. The bonus/incentive program will be designed to reward families for achieving their financial goals and encouraging positive financial behaviors.

- **Continue to expand efforts in reducing teen age pregnancy in our community.**

**Strategy:** Wilson County's teen pregnancy rate continues to be a concern for our community. Wilson was ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> in the State for the highest teenage pregnancy rate in 2002/2003. In 2005, Wilson County improved and jumped to 22<sup>nd</sup> in the State with the highest teenage pregnancy rate. In 2006, Wilson County ranked 30<sup>th</sup> out of 100 counties. Below is the Pregnancy data for Wilson County indicating the total number of teenage pregnancies for teens age 0-19. Statistics show a steady decline of teen pregnancies of African American females and an increase in the number of white female pregnancies. See chart below.



We will continue to work in partnership with Wilson County Health Department, Wilson Pregnancy Center, Wesley Shelter, Wilson County School System and other organizations focusing efforts on continuing to reduce the teenage 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:** Our County continues to be concerned with the increasing number of gang activities in our community and across the state. Public awareness and training forums have been a focus with the local school system, juvenile justice and law enforcement agencies. Continued education and citizen involvement is needed to impact and reduce gang activity. Continued education, citizen and law enforcement

involvement, and tougher criminal laws must be a focus to reduce gang activity and provide a safe community for our children and families.

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

**Strategy:** - Simulated work experience training is available at the Career Plus Center. Our 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. Part of the time in the mentoring program can be spent doing follow up on job search, giving the client access to both telephones and computers, which may not otherwise be readily available in client's normal environment. The goal of this program is to move clients into a paid full time position in the community. This is done by providing new skills and enhancing already acquired skills, and by instilling confidence in the client in their ability to function in a work setting. Evaluations of the work experience participant are an integral part of the overall performance and skills building component.

• **Focus efforts on reducing the High School Drop Out Rate**

**Strategy:** Teens staying in school and graduating is a focus of the Work First and Child Care Subsidy Program as well as our community at large. 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. Helping Work First parents and caretakers keep their children in school and progress towards graduation will be a major focus of our Work First staff. A new strategy we plan to implement will be to require parents/caretakers to submit report cards every 6/9 weeks 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.

Our public schools system has implemented major reform in our high schools to include academies aimed at providing all students with additional skills training, hands on learning, and increased focus on vocational and technical skills based on their career interest. New High School reform will engage, encourage, and excel students towards completion of high school and furthering their education or readiness for employment. Improving the education and skills of students to compete with 21<sup>st</sup> century skills needed by employers today is a priority for our community. Currently the Work Force Task Force along with the Chamber and Industrial Council are advocating for grant funding to support "school to work" counselors.

**Strategy:** Wilson County Child Care subsidy program has assigned a case manager to work intensely with teenage custodial parents in high school in an effort to help teens remain in school and progress towards achieving their high school diploma. Case management efforts, assessment, planning, arranging resources and on-going follow up will be provided to our teen parent population receiving child care subsidy services. Connecting with guidance counselors, educational resources and support services to provide a holistic comprehensive supportive approach will be the focus of our child care subsidy caseworker. We will be piloting efforts through our Leading by Results initiative to focus efforts on increasing the high school graduation rate of teenage custodial parents. We also plan to apply for a grant through Dept. of Public Instruction that will help in our efforts to provide teenage custodial parents in high school a holistic, supportive, educational, and job preparation experience. We want to offer parenting education to both the teenage custodial parents and the fathers in order to build an early foundation of communication, awareness of child's development stages, and the importance of nurturing provided by both parents of the child. We are hoping that attending the parenting training together will increase involvement of the father in years to come.

## **B. Supportive Services**

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:

- **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. Child Welfare and Work First Social Workers will work together to address the dual-system clients about how case plan goals should be prioritized, responsibilities of each other, and communication between and with the family. 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 transportation, child care, etc. in order to meet the responsibilities identified in the MRA.
- **Child Care Subsidy Assistance** – We will continue to prioritize Child Welfare Families, Teen Parents attending high school, employed families under 200% of poverty level and Work First families with 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 in order to support their participation 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 will be assessed once they become employed. We will also continue to utilize other child care arrangements such as More at Four, Head Start or community/faith based after school programs such as Boys and Girls Club, OIC, Summerville Academy, etc.

- Transportation Assistance- We will continue to purchase and/or reimburse for transportation services for Work First families and child welfare 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 pay a stipend for transportation reimbursement for families that have 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 also receive transitional funds through Department of Transportation to assist low income working families and/or adults in need of transportation assistance. We have applied for supplemental transportation funding to support our efforts with helping "teen parents to remain in high school" and hope to receive additional transportation funding to support this initiative.
- Work Related Expenses - We will continue to assess and provide assistance with non-recurring work-related expenses as it relates to accepting or retaining employment such as tools, equipment, uniforms, etc..
- Participation Expenses – We will 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, incentives/retention bonuses, etc.
- Health Support – We will continue to utilize local providers such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health providers, Wilson County Health Department, QPSA, staff Psychologist, and other agencies for accessing services for drug and alcohol related issues/barriers, family planning, educational and/or physical limitations, as well as mental health issues.
- Counseling Services - We have a psychologist and clinical social work position on staff to work with families both in Work First and Child Welfare to meet the mental health needs of our families and children. We continue to seek out and utilize other service providers within the community to meet the mental health needs of our customers.
- 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), Wesley Shelter, Employment Security Commission/Job Link, WIA, Career Plus, for education and training opportunities and work experience. Other employment and training agencies will be utilized as training is offered.
- 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 will continue to explore opportunities for domestic violence treatment/counseling for offenders. We continue to seek counseling programs and services for the offenders as we believe education and counseling with the perpetrator is needed to reduce the cycle of repeat incidences. 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.

- Substance Abuse/Mental Health Assessments- A Memorandum of Understanding is currently being reviewed 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. Although the number of days and hours has decreased by the mental health provider, we will continue to advocate for increased availability of the QPSA here on site.
- Job Center Services - Assistance provided 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.
- Job Readiness Training -Monthly job readiness classes are offered and provided by Job Center Coordinator, Career Plus staff and Work First staff – Monday – Friday 9:00 – 12:00. In addition, we will be offering on-going quarterly parenting education classes for child welfare and Work First families and children.
- 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.
- IDA Homeownership Matching Funds – in partnership and collaboration with Wilson Community Improvements Association, Inc., Wilson County DSS staff will offer 6 month Financial Education Training during the 10 month financial/homeownership training requirement. 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.
- 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.

- 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 whose income is below 200%.
- Food and Nutrition Services – All families are encouraged to apply for Food and Nutrition Services through Wilson County DSS.
- Vocational Evaluations and Situational Work Assessments – Contract agreement with Diversified Opportunities to provide vocational evaluations and/or situational work assessments for Work First families referred for further assessment. Funding is provided through a Work First Demonstration Grant we received from the State Division of Social Services. Future funding for “functional evaluations” will be reimbursed 100% from the Division of Social Services.
- 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. We use Form DSS-8228 which offers the applicant the opportunity to state that they have a disability and ask for accommodation.
- 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 2 full time interpreter staff that interpret for all program areas across the agency. There is 1 bi-lingual receptionist that is available to greet non-English speaking customers. The agency also has a staff member in the Food & Nutrition Team and the Children’s Health Insurance Team. The staff interpret within their respective program areas as well as across the agency when the need is present. These staff members also 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.

## **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 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 prior to a cash assistance application being taken (See **Attachment B-1, B-2**: "Comprehensive Work First Strategy"; Work First: From Dependence to Independence).

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. Food Assistance, Medicaid, and childcare subsidy assistance may also be a part of the diversion package.

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 First Stop, and customer is referred to attend the Work First Application/Orientation session which is held each day Monday – Friday at 9:00 a.m. The application is taken for Work First Cash Assistance by Social Workers who complete both the eligibility and employment services functions. Immediately upon completion of the application, families are scheduled a follow up meeting to begin the process of assessment and working on developing the family's Mutual Responsibility Contract that will detail their participation and activities leading to employment. Each plan is individually developed by the family with the assistance from the social worker. The

Social Worker's role is to help participants understand their requirements for participation and begin to identify their strengths as well as eliminating barriers preventing them from obtaining employment. A mutual responsibility contract 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 supportive services available within our agency, such as child care, 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 and coaching that will continue to bring about 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.

Families wishing to apply for financial assistance through Work First who have been identified as having severe physical limitations/disabilities will be offered the choice to apply for regular Work First cash assistance or the new proposed County Disability Assistance Program. Based on client's choice, families will receive the same intense services however the focus will be to expedite the approval of Social Security disability payments or achieve part-time or full time employment through the services of vocational rehabilitation. The goal is to help the family secure approval or obtain employment within 12 months. If SSI is not approved after one year, the County Disability Assistance Program ends and a Work First application will be initiated. Families choosing the County Disability Assistance Program will be evaluated for on-going Medicaid for parents/children.

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. First Stop Services**

Employment Security Commission/Job Link Center provides First Stop services to potential applicants of Work First Cash Assistance. We require the individual to register for First Stop before we take the Work First application. This applies to all work eligible applicants and re-applicants, however we assure that families apply for Medicaid on the same day they come to the agency. (**Attachment D-MOU**)

### **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 685 low-income families (approximately 1200 children) in childcare arrangements. Eighty-six percent (86%) of these families are low income working families; 6% are Active Work First Families; 3% are teen parents; 5% are child welfare (CPS and/or Foster Care).

Less than (6%) 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, Smart Start, and 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 strategies/services to maintain employment and increase earnings. Currently, 26% of our working child care subsidy families are earning above 150% of the poverty level which is a slight decrease from last year LBR results. We want to continue to increase this number by informing families of tax credits, encouraging EITC and Advanced 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 programs and furthering their education is important to a families' long term career advancement. We want to 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. Wilson County has a contract for transportation services 24 hours, 7 days a week. 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 assistance check 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 overseeing payments to public providers. We are interested in exploring incentive systems that reward Work First participants for their diligent efforts to overcome transportation barriers. We currently utilize the pre-paid gas cards for purpose of reimbursement for gasoline versus writing checks to participants. 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 also have a Car Donation Program, which is coordinated through our Faith Connections Program. 27 cars have been donated to families within the past eight 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. They are providing prevention services to adults and children through out patient substance abuse counseling and group therapy. They provide a walk-in clinic on Thursdays from 8-5 where clients can see a Psychiatrist for medication management. They are located inside the Wilson Greene Mental Health Center. PORT is the entity that contracts with our department in providing our 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. We hope to increase the number of hours a 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.

### **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 G**).

### **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, 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.

### **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**

### **A. 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 (under 200% of poverty)**

**Financial SW/Career Plus Services, Alternative Services/ Diversionary Services, 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 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, job retention and career advancement. With the decline of Work First caseloads, we are shifting emphasis to the "working poor". We are providing intense financial education and counseling services to former Work First participants to assist with retention, asset accumulation 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 may be offered as appropriate to meet the needs of children and families. We continue to facilitate monthly Kinship Care Support Group meetings.

## **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. 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 9 years to what we believe to be our future “Family 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. Our faith community collaboration efforts have evolved over the past 9 years, to a comprehensive best practice Faith Connections program where faith community resources are available through a “one stop” referral and assistance process. This center has evolved to providing services to families that will enrich their lives through increased parenting skills and successful outcomes for children, to asset building opportunities and connections to faith based assistance and/or programs services for economic stability and wealth building. We offer employment opportunities through 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, child care assistance and child abuse prevention. We are hoping to expand to include a Family Visitation Center and on-going Parenting Education Resources/Training for parents and caretakers. Below is a list of some of the unique and innovative programs offered at our Career Plus Center:

- **EITC/VITA Program** - We have worked very hard in the last 5 years to build a successful Volunteer Income Tax Assistance Program. Our Career Plus VITA initiative served 712 families for Tax Year 2007 and generated \$581,341 of refunds for families and the Wilson County Economy. Our VITA program won the 2004 Ralph Ketner employee Productivity Award given by the NC Association of County Commissioners; the 2004 Best Practice Award given by the NC Association of County Directors of Social Services as well as recognition from the United Way Volunteer Action Center of Wilson County. Providing assistance to low income working families with free tax preparation and e-filing has provided opportunities for asset building, financial education and savings opportunities for many families in our community.
- **IDA Homeownership Program**- We are currently partnering with WCIA, a community based non profit organization, and have received two grants to begin an IDA program in Wilson County. We believe that the development of a comprehensive IDA program will provide hope, motivation, and a sense of accomplishment for many low to moderate income working families.

Although many families will require more intense counseling there will be some families that we have been working with through our Career Plus Center, Money Smart Graduates and VITA customers that will be ready to take the next step of economic well being – home ownership! We look forward to helping many of our customers to increase their assets through savings and home ownership! We will 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 3 new families this past year to become homeowners. There are approximately 12-16 families that continue to work on their savings goals and credit scores and hope to soon be ready to purchase their first home.

- **NC SAVES County Initiative**

We have partnered with the NC Treasurers Office to be a lead site to encourage individuals/families to save, reduce debt and build wealth through the NC Saves Campaign. This social marketing campaign is an initiative that is going on throughout the state and Wilson County has been very successful in efforts to promote the program. Since January 2006 Wilson County has signed up over 700 NC Savers!! Our county participated in the National Saves week along with North Carolina Saves in February 2008. Wilson County was the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest NC Save Partner in the state to enroll new NC Savers.

- **Financial Social Work**

We partnered with the Financial Social Work Center in Ashville, NC to 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. We have also received grant funding from MDC to assist in start up projects and activities to help in demonstrating the impact and effectiveness of financial social work education/counseling. Through the grant we received we are able to help families with developing their own financial resource center in their homes and teaching families how organization and spending time with their money each week can create a sense of “control” of their bills, payment schedules, filing of receipts, etc. Getting control in this area is a huge need for many families. We develop and offer a quarterly “Money Talks” Newsletter which is distributed to staff within the DSS agency to share personally and professionally the financial resources, tips and information to those who may benefit.

- **Faith Connections** – A faith-based community resource development and coordination program. 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.

*Faith Connections Financial Assistance* - This program is a faith network of resources designed to assist working families 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 received from the Department of Social Services staff 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. This program would centralize access to faith community resources and provide management and tracking of resources provided and repayment of the assistance given. We average approximately \$20,000 in financial assistance through our faith partners in helping families with children and adults with additional financial needs that federal/state/county funded programs are unable to provide. Faith Connections has also received 27 donated vehicles of which we have donated to former Work First families in need of on-going transportation. Faith Connections and our faith partners have provided over \$100,000 in in-kind services for families, children and adults in crisis situations.

- **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.
- **Family Group Conferencing Coordination Services** –Family Group Conferencing Services offers families in Wilson County an opportunity to meet as a whole family unit to discuss family situations that may involve the placement of children. The whole family is invited including extended family relatives. Relevant community partners are also invited. Family Group Conferencing is a well-planned meeting that brings everyone to the table and allows everyone a voice. Family Group Conferencing provides families with an opportunity to help support each other and provide a plan of future protection for the children. It is a best practice family-centered program!

**“Working For Kids” (Absent Parent Employment Program)** - We work in partnership with the Child Support Establishment and Enforcement Team as well as the Child Support Court in providing employment services to non-custodial parents. 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. (See VI C)

**Work First “Job Center”** - Wilson County DSS Job Center is a hub of employment services designed to prepare individuals looking for employment. The mission of the center is to assist our customers in all aspects of employment services, from basic job search to career advancement activities. An array of services are available through our center such as job seeking, resume building and writing, interviewing skills, career counseling, testing, assessments, typing, computer skill building. Evaluation and assessment of skills and needs are used in making appropriate referrals to partnering agencies. Some services require an appointment, while others are available anytime during our business hours.

**Work First Demonstration Grant**

**VIP** –Vocational Incentive Program is a “Work Experience” and vocational evaluation program designed through the efforts of the Work First Program to address the issues related to disability as a major barrier to gaining employment. The V.I.P. program was designed to assist participants claiming a disability the opportunity to participate in and receive an evaluation of their individual abilities as it relates to ones employability. Through the 12 week assessment and work experience program individuals are evaluated to determine the abilities they have that can be directly related to employment. Participants not only receive the encouragement needed to increase their sense of self-worth, grow their self esteem and identify their abilities but many receive additional financial benefits by completing the assessment process and participating in the program to the fullest extent possible. As a direct result of participating in the VIP program participants have successfully entered employment, began receiving services of a job coach and employment through Vocational Rehabilitation or transitioned off of the Work First program and developed another means of financial assistance such as Child Support or Social Security Disability income. Many participants find the VIP program to be encouraging and helpful in their efforts to take personal responsibility for their families.

**M.O.R.E. Job Readiness Class** – (Motivating Others to be Responsible Employees) is a classroom based instructional program designed to increase the participant’s awareness of themselves during the job search and interview process, understand the process of job searching, identify the do’s and don’ts of the job search process and develop alternative plans for dealing with the individuals barriers to employment. Instructors are from diverse program areas and all have specialized resources and information that help the participant design their individual job search, secure interviews, and employment. Participants are offered a plethora of supportive services including but not limited to career counseling, mental and substance abuse awareness, treatment and/or support groups, childcare, and transportation. Classes are held Monday through Friday from 9:00am until noon for four (4) consecutive weeks. Participants are encouraged to utilize the Job Center for resume assistance, job seeking and to

improve computer based or typing skills. Additionally, participants have access to one-on-one assistance at the Employment Security Commission weekly and the Financial Social worker here at WCDSS.

**Clinical Services Team** – We currently have the infrastructure of a Clinical Services Team composed of a staff psychologist, clinical social worker and Quality Substance Abuse Professional.

**Kinship Care Support Group** - We have a monthly Kinship Care Support Group to provide support, resources, education and counseling for relative caregivers of Work First children. Majority of our Child Only Cases are grandparents raising or caring for their grandchildren. They face many issues from discipline, education, parenting, financial, emotional and physical health, permanency, etc. The support group meetings will be held each month on the 4<sup>th</sup> Tuesday at the Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club. This collaboration is between Wilson County DSS, Wilson County Cooperative Extension, Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club. We look forward to providing the resources to relative caregivers to help them provide the best possible care, safety and meet the diverse needs of the children.

## **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.

## **XII. Eligibility Criteria (Required for Electing County)**

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

- Age limits for children
- Definition of relationships
- Payment levels
- Who can apply/be included in the payment
- Benefit Calculation –
- Sanctions
- Resource requirements (limit and countable items)
- 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 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. **Design and Implement "Transitional Pay after Performance Incentive Program"**.

As part of the Working for Benefits Pay after Performance program, Wilson County will implement a "transitional incentive payment" to all new applicants. The transitional incentive payment will provide an additional cash incentive payment for completing their required hours during the first 3 months from the time their MRA plans are approved. The incentive payment would be reduced for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> months and by the 6<sup>th</sup> month, the participants will only receive their regular Work First payment for completing their hours. The transitional incentive payment is meant to encourage families to progress quickly towards transitioning off public assistance into full time employment. With the rising costs of inflation, gas prices, utility rates and the fact that the Work First payment has not increased since 1987, families who end up on Work First become worse off and in many incidences are evicted from their homes, end up homeless or move in with friends/relatives/shelters and become even more depressed than they were prior to applying for assistance. The transitional incentive is a way to reward families for completing the 35-40 hours per week requirement while having partial resources to maintain their most basic shelter (housing). The Transitional Incentive Payment would only be a one time assistance incentive. Individuals who fail to meet their required number of hours during any part of the first 5 month period will be disqualified and not be eligible to continue receiving the incentive program payment. Families who are found to "have good cause" for not completing their hours for that month may still qualify for the transitional incentive once they complete their required number of hours during any time during the 5 month period. Individuals who obtain employment after the initial 3 month period following approval of their application and who have successfully completed their required number of hours will be eligible to receive the Transitional Payment incentive in addition to regular Job Bonus. The intent is to help families during the transition period. Note: Work First participants/applicants enrolled in the VIP Demonstration Grant Program at Diversified Opportunities will not be eligible

for the transitional incentive payment as they will be eligible to receive a special incentive through the grant funding.

3. 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 3 behavioral changing goals. (Ex. Open a savings account and depositing a regular amount in each month for a minimum of 4 consecutive months; or Paying all their bills on time to avoid late fees for a minimum period of 3 months; or increasing their credit score by minimum of 15 points; or who achieve increase in earnings through either a 2<sup>nd</sup> job or better paying job. This incentive will also be offered to families on our child care subsidy assistance program. The goal is to reward families for changing behaviors that will lead to positive financial and economic stability.
4. We will count/include SSI as countable income for children and parents in Work First Family Assistance Cases.
5. 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 10<sup>th</sup> month prior to the baby's birth, even if the mother was under a sanction.
6. If a WFFA participant 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.
7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.

10. 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.
11. 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).
12. All Work First families who fail to comply with the treatment, compliance and verification of substance abuse progress will be subject to termination of benefits.
13. Plan, develop and implement a County Disability Assistance Program where parents applying for Work First Family Assistance who have indicated the inability to perform activities due to physical or mental challenges will be given the option to apply and receive regular WFFA or the new County Disability Assistance Program. Funding for CDAP will be funded from our county reserve funding and an additional amount of \$50.00 above the Work First benefit level will be provided monthly for a period of 1 year. During the 1 year period, intense testing, assessment, medical documentation will be gathered to expedite the SSI approval through Social Security Administration. Once the parent receives SSI, they will be evaluated for WFFA. After one year of receiving CDAP, a WF application will be initiated for on-going regular WF payments.

### **Child Welfare Initiatives/Changes:**

#### **1. Establish and Implement a Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) Model**

The Duke Endowment awarded TEDI BEAR Children’s Advocacy Center a grant to fund a full time Outreach Coordinator to develop 12 Multidisciplinary Teams in Eastern North Carolina. The team is composed of members from law enforcement; ADA office, mental health, GAL, medical providers (specialized in assessing child abuse and DSS child protective services staff. In an effort to

prepare for this endeavor, we sponsored the “Darkness to Light” training at WCDSS and several community partners attended. We believe this training was instrumental in aligning community support for the development of a MDT in our community.

Other rationale for supporting the development of MDT is that it reduces the negative impact of abuse for children and the “falling through the cracks” reality. The National Children’s Alliance and the Children’s Advocacy Center Accrediting Organization recognize this model as a “best practice” for interagency investigations. There are many benefits to using a coordinated team approach. Achieving outcomes are more likely; it reduces repetition of interviews; it removes the likelihood of a single individual making key decisions and it decreases the possibility of dissension between disciplines.

The Multidisciplinary Team members will be responsible reviewing child sexual abuse and severe physical abuse cases investigated by law enforcement and DSS.

## **2. Implement Mandated Changes in Child Welfare Practice**

The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) conducted its Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) for NCDSS in March 2007. The CSFR process required the division to identify several counties for which a sample of their child welfare cases would be reviewed. The purpose of the CSFR is to ensure all agencies are striving to provide family-centered services to children and families in order to achieve well-being through self-sufficiency, support, safety and permanence.

The CSFR process measures achieved outcomes in the areas of safety, permanency and well-being. Safety is assessed by ensuring that children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect and maintained safely in their homes. Permanency is measured by determining if the children have continuity of family relationships and a permanent and stable home. Well-being is achieved when families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s educational, physical and mental health needs or the needs are met through appropriate services.

The Federal CFSR findings identified systemic, case review and services array factors that needed to be resolved. The Division along with county staff and other significant partners developed a Program Improvement Plan that identified key concerns and outlined primary strategies to resolve the concerns.

## **3. Research/Conduct Feasibility Study for Operating a Therapeutic Foster Home.**

WCDSS currently has # children in its legal custody. Many of these children have special needs that require a higher level of care. In an effort to meet the needs of the children, we have utilized therapeutic foster homes operated by private agencies located both in and outside the community. We have

encountered therapeutic foster homes that were not equipped to meet the needs of our children. In assessing these facilities, we recognized that some of the placement did not provide the services that were advertised. In some instances, it appeared that the higher monthly board rate was the only difference between the family foster home and the therapeutic foster homes.

The agency was approved for another clinical social worker position. This worker would assist with providing the supportive clinical services to children residing in a therapeutic foster home. 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 training to applicants interested in providing therapeutic care.

In January 2008, the division will be implementing an increase in the monthly board rate for family foster homes. It is our goal to study the impact that the higher board rates will have on our efforts to increase the number of foster homes in our community.

### **XIII. Community Service Programs**

Wilson County chooses not to use the Community Service Program option for 2009-2011 periods.

### **XIV. 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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.**

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Level Appeal/Hearings:

Wilson County will utilize a three person panel for all 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 E-1, E-2, E-3**)

2<sup>nd</sup> 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 E-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 2<sup>nd</sup> level hearing. When decision is made, notification will be given to worker and mailed by certified mail to client via the Notice of 2<sup>nd</sup> Level Appeal Decision Letter (Attachment E-2).

#### **Further Appeal**

If the a/r is not satisfied with the final decision following the 2<sup>nd</sup> 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.

#### **XV. 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.

#### **XVI. 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.

**XVII. 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 October 2006.

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**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 has been reviewed and approved by the Wilson County Board of Commissioners at its meeting on Monday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2007.

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**Frank Emory, Chairman**  
**Wilson County Board of County Commissioners**

## ATTACHMENT A

## Work First/Child Welfare Planning Committee

## Agenda

August 20, 2008

10:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.

The meeting was called to order by Glenn Osborne, Director. Glenn welcomed Planning members and reviewed the planning process and timelines for completing our 2009-2011 Work First/Child Welfare Plan. Members in attendance: Karen Salacki, Jay Gallimore, Grady Robbins, Barbara Boyette, Terri Williams, Mary Katherine Rowe, Elaine Swinson, Christy Nash, Terri Mitchell, Susan Parker, Velvet Nixon, Glenn Osborne.

Velvet Nixon, Child Welfare Program Manager facilitated the introductions and “sharing of resources” activity. All members shared updates or new resources regarding services and programs for adults and children.

Susan Parker, Self Sufficiency Program Manager provided update on our most recent national recognition for our faith based initiative, Faith Connections. The US Department of Health And Human Services has recognized Wilson County’s Faith Connection Program as a National Best Practice in Faith Based initiatives. Glenn Osborne will be presenting our faith based initiative to US TANF Administrators on September 23, 2008 in Dallas, Texas. Our faith based initiative started in 1999 when we contracted and hired our first Faith Community Coordinator. Today, the program is coordinated by Becky Stottlemire, who has done a fine job in growing and improving the Faith Connections process. We have over 24 churches involved and who donate financial as well as in-kind resources to help needy families involved with Work First and Child Welfare programs. This is truly a wonderful recognition of the partnership between the faith community and DSS.

Christy Nash, Work First Supervisor presented updates on our 2007-2009 Work First County Plan. Updates were provided on the Working for Benefits Initiative that began October 2007. Demographics on our caseload size and characteristics of families receiving were also provided.

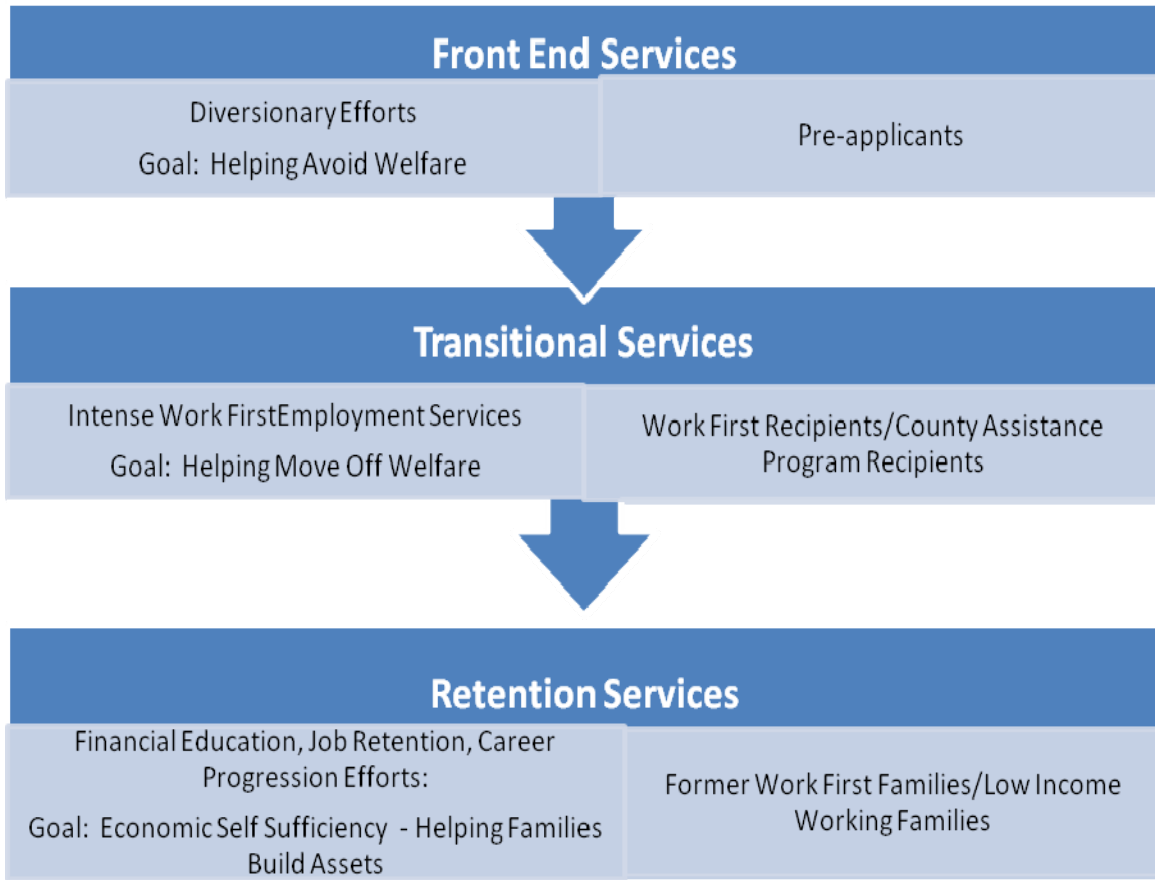
Terri Mitchell, Co-Work First Supervisor provided updates on the eligibility changes that were implemented as a result of Electing County Status in October 2007.

Velvet Nixon shared updates on our child welfare stats as well as new child welfare initiatives/changes for 2009-2011.

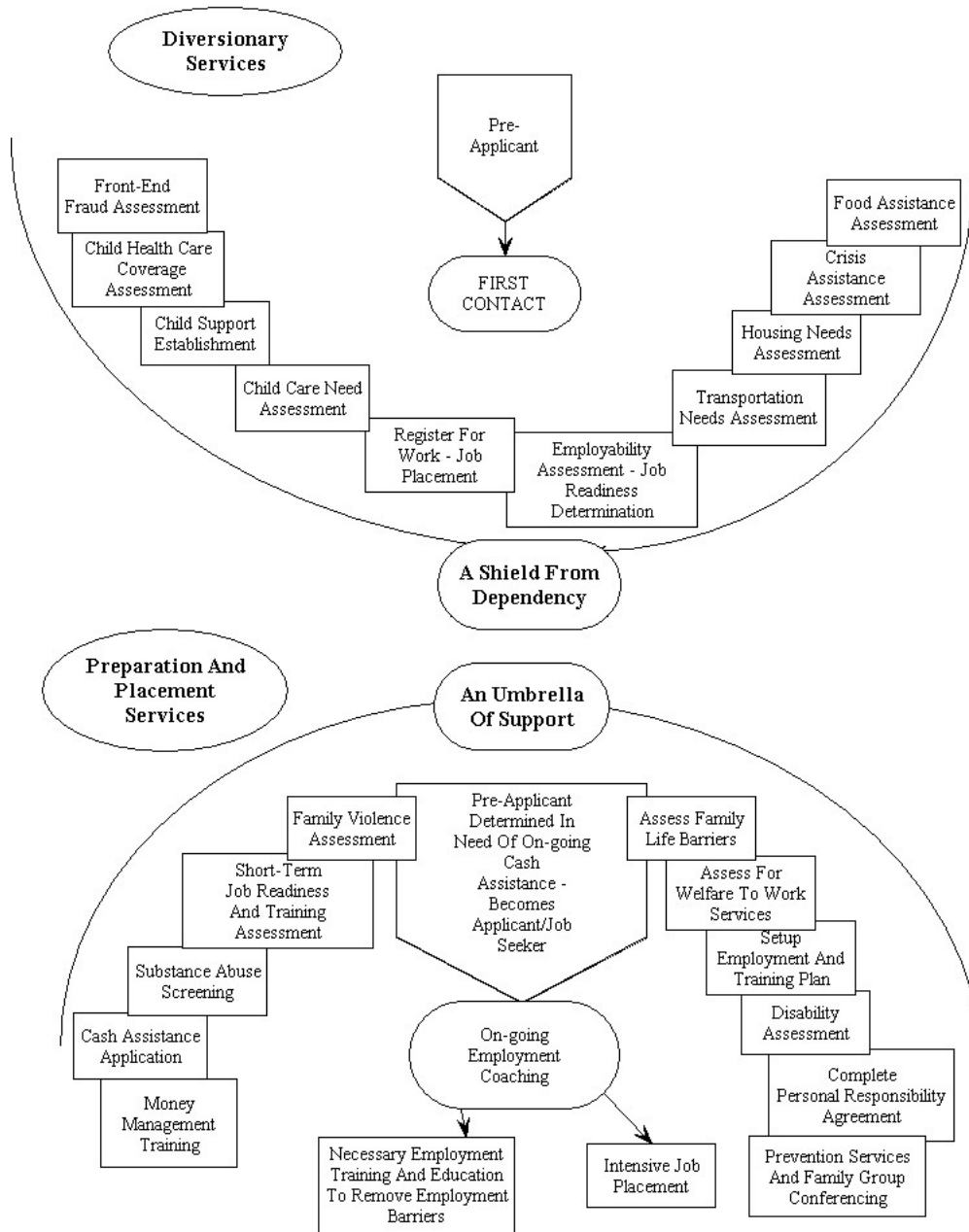
Christy Nash and Susan Parker provided overview of proposed initiatives for Work First. The first initiative is the development of a County Disability Assistance Program for Work First families who have been identified as potential candidates for Social Security Disability. The proposed plan was shared with members of the committee. Also, Transitional Work for Benefits Incentive was shared. Susan Parker shared proposed program focus for drop out prevention strategies for Work First children and Teenage Custodial Parents receiving child care subsidy to remain in high school. The committee discussed and recommended that the DSS Board and County Commissioners accept and approve the new initiatives for 2009-2011 Fiscal Years. They also recommend that the County Commissioners continue Electing County Status for the 2009-2011 FY.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Parker



**Work First: From Dependence To Independence**



## ATTACHMENT C

Rev. 06/05

**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 Crisis Resolution Assistance Program is as follows:**

1. We will serve families with dependent children ages 0 through 18 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 or legal alien.
- Have a child in the home age 18 or younger who lives with a relative related by blood, marriage or adoption or;
- Have a child in the home who 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, grand parents, any degree of great grand parents, 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.

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 the previous 4 weeks if they are currently 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.

**Attachment D**

Date: **August 20, 2008**

**Letter of Agreement**

First Stop Employment Assistance Program

Pursuant to the provisions of G.S. 108A-29(a2), the undersigned parties hereby acknowledge that the point of registration in Wilson County for the First Stop Employment Assistance Program shall be the office of the Employment Security Commission of North Carolina located as set forth below.

**Employment Security Commission  
Of North Carolina**

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Manager, Wilson Local Office

**Wilson County Department of Social Services**

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Director

## 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 1<sup>st</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> level hearing and for distribution to Hearing Panel members.

Attachment E-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.

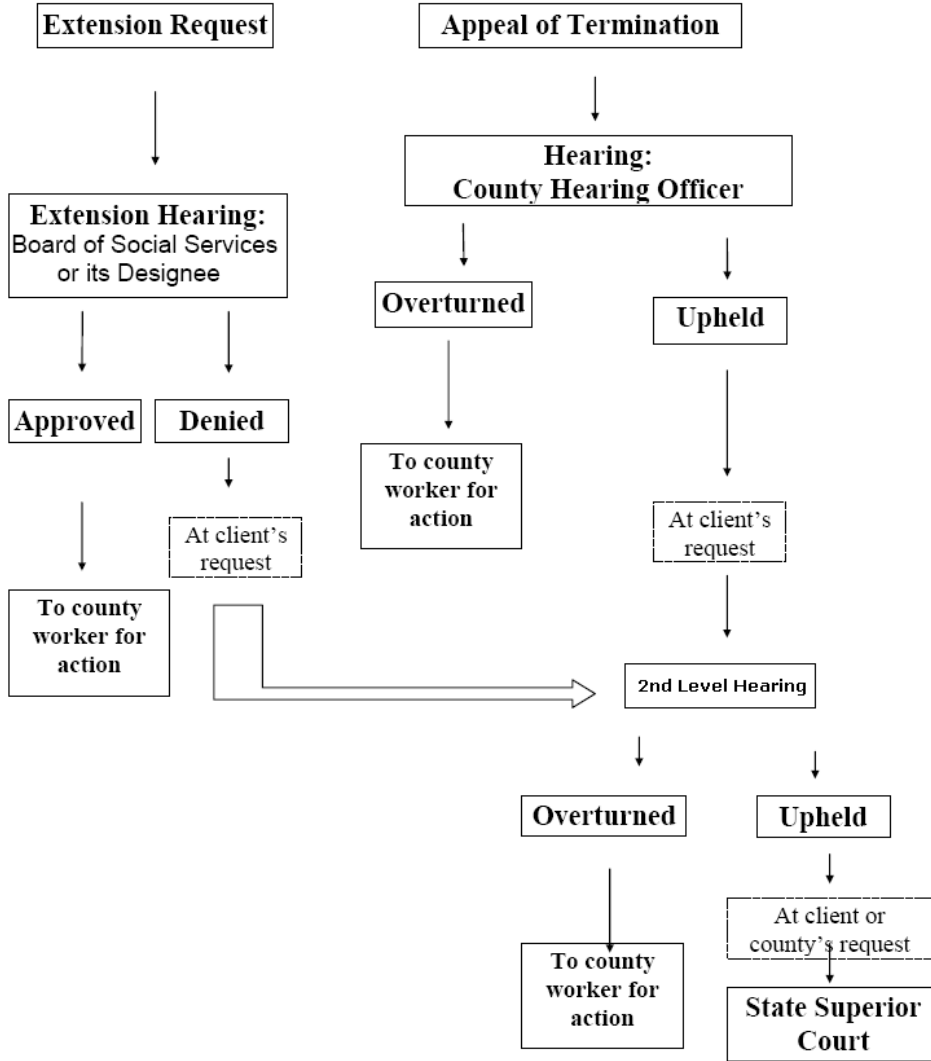
\_\_\_\_\_  
SW Signature

252-\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

\_\_\_\_\_  
Work First Team Leader

252-\_\_\_\_\_  
Phone

**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.**