

# **Forsyth County Work First Plan 2010-2011**



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## I. CONDITIONS WITHIN THE COUNTY

Forsyth County has a population of 332,355 (US Census Bureau, 2006 estimate). The city of Winston-Salem has a population of 215,348 (US Census Bureau, 2007 estimate) and accounts for roughly 59% of the county's population. The population of Forsyth County is 32% minorities (US Census, 2006) with a rapidly increasing Hispanic population (10% US Census 2006) and higher than the state as a whole. The growth in the Hispanic population between 1990 and 2000 was 831% (US Census). The majority of Hispanics and other minorities live in the City of Winston-Salem where the population is about 49% minority. According to one report, the County is losing some population to its more rural neighbors. Those who move away are generally wealthier than those moving in (Angelou Economics, 2003). The majority of the Work First population lives and works in the City.

The County's economy mirrors the national economic downturn and continues to be troubled for some workers. The Winston Salem Journal on Sunday, 7/27/2008 indicated that unemployment in the combined statistical area that includes Forsyth County was 6.4% and exceeded both state (6.2%) and national (5.5%) percentages. Forsyth County itself has an unemployment rate of 6%. This may explain why the population has grown more slowly than other metropolitan areas in the State. In fact, the population growth from 1990-1999 trailed the state's increase by about 6%. The county has historically relied heavily on manufacturing jobs which have provided good paying jobs for many workers. Just since 1998, the percentage of individuals employed in manufacturing has dropped by 24%. In 2006, for the employed population 16 years and older, industries in Forsyth County were Educational Services, Health Care, and Social Assistance, 23%, and Manufacturing, 14%. Like so many other places in North Carolina, manufacturing jobs have been replaced by lower paying service sector jobs or health care jobs that require substantial training. Many of the health care jobs are not often accessible to Work First recipients. One study confirmed that during the 1990's manufacturing lost over 5,000 jobs while the service sector gained over 21,000 (Angelou Economics, 2003).

The County is a major hub for Northwest North Carolina business. However, employment growth trends are not strong for jobs that require limited or no training. In 2005, Dell, Inc. opened an assembly plant that employs 1,000 individuals-original estimates were that 1,500 would be employed by Dell. The recent merger of RJR Tobacco with British American was expected to add jobs but within the last week RJR Tobacco has announced their intent to reduce their workforce. Sara Lee which also used to be a major manufacturing mainstay has also suffered recent layoffs. In June 2007 Hanes manufacturing closed it local plant and laid off approximately 600 employees. Total plant closings for 2006 and 2007 were 55 as reported by ESC, up from 17 in 2005.

Forsyth County was probably the epitome of the North Carolina economic story for workers without much education: get a manufacturing job, work hard, stay with the same company for many years, and provide a decent life for one's family. That is no longer possible. However, in 2005, the average annual wage in Forsyth County for

manufacturing led wages in all sectors except two ---“finance” and “utilities” (ESC, Labor Market Division).

Other indicators of the difficulty of the labor market are shown in the unemployment rate. The labor force of 171,607 (2007, ESC) has seen increased difficulty in getting and keeping jobs. In 1999 Forsyth County’s average unemployment rate was 2.25%-in June 2008 it was 6%.

The Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce indicates that local economic development leaders will continue to concentrate on building and developing the following industry clusters that were also the focus of activity at the time of the 2007-09 Work First plan:

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

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

The largest employment sectors in Forsyth County by industry in 2007 (U. S. Census Bureau, America Community Survey) include the following:

<b>Sector</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Employment</b>
Services	54.14%
Manufacturing	13.2%
Retail Trade	11.2%
F.I.R.E.	9.16%
Construction	4.5%
Transport/Warehouse	4.0%
Wholesale Trade	3.2%
Other	0.5%

| According to the Employment Security Commission (2007) the six largest employers in the county reflect the changing economy and include a mix of old and new industry sectors. The largest employers are:

- Winston-Salem/ Forsyth County Schools,
- NC Baptist Hospital,

- Forsyth Memorial Hospital, Inc.
- R J Reynolds Tobacco Co. (RIF-over 500 in 9/08)
- Wake Forest University School of Medicine and
- Hanesbrands

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

- Median household income is \$45,792 (2006 inflation-adjusted dollars, US Census). This compares to \$43,892 for Guilford Co., \$51,945 for Mecklenburg Co., and \$60,903 for Wake Co.
- Median household income from 2006 that includes city data indicates that Winston-Salem's median household income is \$38,594 a year, compared to \$37,947 for Greensboro, \$48,670 for Charlotte and \$51,123 for Raleigh. and

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

- In 2006 in Forsyth County about 15.3% of individuals did not have health insurance, a slight improvement over 2004.
- An unacceptably high infant mortality rate for minorities continues to be one of the biggest issues facing the County. The over-all county rate of 11.4 deaths per thousand (2006) is up from 8.9 per thousand in 2005. The rate by ethnicity for 2006 is 19.2 per thousand for minorities and 8 per thousand for whites.
- 2006 poverty data showed a slight decline for the County to 10.5% from 10.7% (2005). However, much of the poverty is the City of Winston-Salem where most Work First recipients live. Recent Census reports showed that the City has a poverty rate of 20% (2006-estimate).
- More reflective of our Work First population, the same census report indicates that the estimated poverty rate for families with a female head of household is 37%.
- Poverty among children (under 18 years old) was 33.9 % (US Census estimate, 2006).

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

### ***Pressing Problems for Low-Income Workers***

The major issue effecting service to the current Work First population is the high incidence of individuals with difficult and multiple barriers to employment. The Work First population has changed since the inception of the program in North Carolina. Many Work First recipients need more than support services or simple job

search training to help them get a job. A subcommittee of the Work First Planning Committee identified the following as major problems facing the Work First population and keeping them from getting a job:

- **CRIMINAL RECORD**-Many Work First customers have a criminal record that may exclude them for consideration for many positions. In the period of 4/1/08-6/30/08, 72 participants entered Employment Services at Goodwill Industries of NWNC through our contract with Goodwill. Of those 72 participants none had a felony conviction however, 33 or 46% had at least one misdemeanor conviction.
- **SUBSTANCE ABUSE**-There is no clear picture on the prevalence of drug or alcohol abuse in the welfare population although all nation studies indicate that it is higher than in the general population. Goodwill tracked the outcomes of drug testing all Work First participants entering Goodwill during the FY 2007-2008 and found that of 258 drug tests, 73 or 28% were positive for at least one substance.
- **EDUCATIONAL LEVEL**-Poor educational skills continue to be an enormous barrier. While we do not have statistical data for all of the Work First population, Goodwill tracked the educational status for all Work First participants entering Goodwill during the FY 2007-2008 and found that of the 285 enrollees, 41% were without a high school diploma, GED or marketable skill. Many of these participants are further challenged by very low reading and math literacy levels.
- **MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES**-Depression is the most common condition identified and one study in 2000 indicated that as many as 26%-40% of Work First recipients suffered from episodes of depression (Mathematica, Derr, Douglas, Parvett). Forsyth County does not have hard statistical data about the occurrence of mental health issues within the Work First population but anecdotal information indicates that many participants suffer from moderate to severe mental health disorders. The now fragmented mental health system is not readily available to help Work First recipients.
- **LACK OF MOTIVATION**-Lack of personal motivation is a crucial barrier for our participants, which is typically shown by poor attendance in scheduled activities. This is a multi-faceted issue that is reflective of the complexity of the lives of many of the Work First recipients and the barriers they face.
- **TRANSITIONAL SUPPORT**-Work First participants who go to work often voice the need for continued/additional support to be able to maintain employment or possibly further their education. This issue was addressed by participants in a focus group at Goodwill. As a way to help

with the issue of transitional services, Work First Employment Services began offering “Retention Services” in July 2006. Retention Services are voluntary and last for 12 months after the recipient is terminated from Work First cash assistance. These services offered as “Under 200% of Poverty” services include case management, assistance with transportation, necessary uniforms or work equipment, car repairs, short-termed continued education and any other allowable expenditures plus referrals to community resources.

- **HOUSING**-Instability in housing is an ongoing issue faced by many Work First participants. There is a serious lack of accessibility to affordable housing in Forsyth County. Although there is low-income housing available, criminal records and bad credit can make low-income eligible families ineligible. Many Work First participants go through periods of homelessness and stay in shelters or move in with family members in apartment/homes that do not have adequate space. The Section 8 program has not taken new applications in several years.
  
- **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**-Studies have indicated that domestic violence is more prevalent among the Work First population than the general population. Some studies estimate that as many as 50% of welfare recipients nationwide have experienced physical abuse by an intimate partner at some time in their adult lives as compared to 22% of women in the general population (Journal of Social Issues, 2000). As many as 30%, experience abuse in a current relationship. Forsyth County has resources to assist women but the issue is often getting the woman to leave the abuser and avail themselves of services. Domestic violence is another factor in participants failing to attend class and secure and maintain employment. Due to the many issues facing victims of domestic violence, in 2006 the Forsyth County District Attorney received funding to open “Safe on Seven” a one-stop center for victims located on the 7<sup>th</sup> floor of the Hall of Justice. The Department of Social Services has an outreach worker that is stationed part-time at Safe on Seven.
  
- **POOR WORK HISTORY**-Many Work First participants have worked but have had many jobs, all for very short periods of time. They have not worked long enough with one employer to build skills or move up the employment ladder. With unemployment at 6% in Forsyth County, there is a large supply of job seekers, many with years of experience and employers are less likely to give an individual with a spotty work history a job.

Frequently, individuals have more than one of these problems. The Work First Committee is concerned about the lack of emphasis on improving education and job skills that will assist recipients to get better jobs initially and to move up the career ladder

over time. They would like to see a community effort to assist Work First customers to improve their education but are concerned about how to balance that while Forsyth County already struggles with meeting Participation Rate.

The availability of quality entry-level jobs in the current economic climate is a problem. The job market for workers with limited work experience and poor education demonstrates that it will be increasingly difficult to obtain entry-level jobs for Work First clients whose skills may not be as competitive as other workers. The lack of emphasis on skills training under TANF is a continuing concern that affects the quality of job placements. The average wage at placement for Work First recipients was \$7.50 (average data from two contractors) in FY 2007-2008.

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

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

### ***Work First Vision Statement***

In partnership with the Forsyth County human service community, the Department of Social Services will work with families to achieve economic independence from welfare. The Department's strategy will be to work with families to develop an integrated approach that helps families move toward prosperity. Our family-centered approach will demonstrate the six principles of partnership which are:

1. Everyone deserves respect;
2. Everyone needs to be heard;
3. Everyone has strengths;
4. Judgments can wait;
5. Partners share power;
6. Partnership is a process.

This partnership is evidenced by our SUCCESS for families at risk committee that continues to meet bi-weekly and has been meeting consistently for the last eight years. Additionally, all child welfare "blended teams" have a Work First social worker representative.



## **II. PLANNING PROCESS**

Forsyth County's plan for Work First for 2009-2011 reflects the planning effort and input of the Work First Planning Committee. A timeline was developed to ensure that the full plan could be reviewed by the general public before it was presented to the Board of Commissioners.

### **A. Input from Work First Customers**

Three focus groups were held with Work First recipients, one at the on-site Employment Resource Lab, one at Goodwill Industries, a contract provider, and one at a meeting of residents of the Housing Authority of Winston Salem. One of the most common barriers that was expressed involved public transportation and the lack of service, especially on the weekends and outside of the city limits. One participant has to leave home at 6:15 am and take three busses in order to be at Goodwill by 8:00. Her day care van doesn't come until 7:45 so she has to arrange for someone else to look after her children and put them on the van. Another participant who uses public transportation stated there was no way to take her children to day care on the bus and then get to a job on time. Although DSS does provide bus passes to PART (Piedmont Authority for Regional Transportation), traveling to Greensboro or Highpoint for a job takes a considerable amount of time. Another concern that was voiced is the difficulty of persons with criminal records, especially felons, in job searching. Even with help from several specialized programs that work with persons with criminal records to find jobs, finding employment is very difficult. There was also concern about the types of jobs available to Work First participants, many paying \$7/hour with very little opportunity to advance. The lack of affordable housing is very frustrating for many, as is the lack of Section 8 vouchers. There was also discussion about the lack of support for education, from GED study to post-secondary education.

### **B. Planning Committee**

The primary group with responsibility for input into this plan is the Work First Committee appointed by the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners. New appointments to the Committee were made in March of 2008 for two years so that all Committee members will need to be reappointed at the same time in 2010. New appointments were made to round out expertise and fill in appointments for members who had resigned. The Committee now has twenty members including representatives of the:

- Board of Commissioners,
- Board of Social Services,
- Business representatives,
- CenterPoint Human Services,
- Child welfare representative,
- Community-based organizations

- Former Work First recipients,
- Forsyth County Health Department,
- Forsyth Technical Community College,
- Employment Security Commission,
- Housing Authority of Winston-Salem,
- Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School Board,
- Winston-Salem Transit Authority, and
- Workforce Development/JobLink

Members of the current Work First Planning Committee are:

- Tony L. Burton, Northwest Child Development Council, Inc. Child Care representative;
- Ann MacLeod, FirstLine, Community representative;
- Sherry Carpenter, Goodwill Industries of Northwest NC, Inc., Community-Based Organization Representative;
- Tina Carson-Wilkins, Winston-Salem Transit Authority, Transportation Representative;
- Matt Davis, Members Credit Union, Business Representative;
- Margaret Elliott, Crisis Control Ministry. Community-Based Organization Representative;
- Zena Ervin, Forsyth County Department of Social Services, Former Work First Recipient;
- Burnetta Johnson, Housing Authority of Winston-Salem;
- Michael Gray, Treatment Accountability for Safer Communities, Substance Abuse Treatment Representative;
- Michael Harris, Forsyth Technical Community College, Community College Representative;
- Amy Hardin, Forsyth County Department of Social Services, Child Welfare Representative;
- Larry Worthy, Winston-Salem Urban League, Community-Based Organization Representative;
- Archie Hicks, Employment Security Commission;
- Vicki Kimel, Woodland Place Community, Business Representative;
- Walter Marshall, Forsyth County Board of Commissioners/ Board of Social Services;
- Carrie Worsley, Department of Public Health;
- Althea Hairston, NW Piedmont Council of Government, Workforce Development Representative;
- Laura Gorycki, CenterPoint Human Services, Mental Health Authority Representative;
- Twana Wellman-Roebuck, Experiment in Self-Reliance, Community Based-Representative;
- Carolyn Gray, WS/FC Schools, School Board Representative; and

- Pam Peoples-Joyner, The Darryl Hunt Project, Community Based-Representative.

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

### C. Public Comment

The public review process included publication of a notice in two local newspapers in September about where to review the plan. The plan was also available on the county’s web site upon approval by the Work First Committee (beginning September 24). Copies of the plan were available for public review at 11 libraries throughout the county and at the offices of eight partner agencies for two weeks (September 24-October 10). The public was invited to provide written comments. No comments were received on the plan.

## III. OUTCOMES AND GOALS FOR THE COUNTY

### A. Statewide Work First Goals

- **Employment:** Self-sufficiency will be realized primarily through the employment of Work First clients.
- **Meeting Federal Participation Rates:** Active participation in federal countable work activities will lead to full time employment. Forsyth’s Participation Rate for FY ’07-’08 is as follows:

July ’07	29%	January ’08	29.5%
August ’07	27.4%	February ’08	27.9%
September ’07	26.6%	March ’08	30.3%
October ’07	34.8%	April ’08	35.1%
November ’07	33.5%	May ’08	30.3%
December ’07	31.3%	June ’08	33.8%

- **Providing Employment Services:** Active participation in intensive employment services for all families is necessary in order to meet the participation rate and to ensure families are served adequately before the end of five years. One measure of success in Work First is the percentage of families who are subject to the work requirement that counties are assisting with job preparation and job placement.
- **Staying off Welfare:** Efforts to reduce welfare rolls, help adults find jobs and increase self-sufficiency are undermined when families return to welfare. Families leaving Work First Family Assistance because of a job are tracked to determine if they return to cash assistance.

- **Job Retention:** Families who leave Work First for employment continue to be employed six to twelve months after leaving the program show increased job stability which impacts a family’s well-being. This measure will be based on the number of responsible adults that leave Work First Family Assistance for employment who are still employed at six and twelve month intervals following termination.
- **Benefit Diversion:** The most successful outcome possible is for an applicant to avoid the need to become a recipient. This is also recognized in the federal law, which specifies diversion from public assistance as a desired outcome. Use of Work First Diversion Assistance for a specified percentage or number of Work First applications will be established as a goal for each county.

## **B. COUNTY DEVELOPED OUTCOME GOALS**

The Forsyth County DSS has agency-wide goals and a benchmarking process called Leading by Results. Several of the benchmarks developed are in the Work First program area and will serve to improve outcomes for Work First customers as they are fully implemented.

- 3.5-The annual Work First Participation Rate will increase to 50% by 6/30/08. This goal was not met, for the FY the average monthly Participation Rate was 30.8%.
- 3.6-The total number of Work First participants who obtain employment in FY 07-08 will be 400. This goal was not met, for the FY 395 Work First participants went to work. However, we surpassed our state assigned goal of 207.
- 3.7-The annual percentage of Work First participants who obtain employment at a living wage of \$8.50 per hour will increase from 3% to 10% by 6/30/08. This goal was met and surpassed with 16% of the 395 participants who went to work starting at a beginning wage of \$8.50 or more.
- 3.8-The annual percentage of Work First participants who obtain a GED/HS diploma or vocational certificate-no data, target yet to be set. Data to measure achievement on this benchmark proved hard to extract from the state system-due to current Work First policy that severely limits education as a “countable work activity” it is recommended that this benchmark be moved to Goal IV.

## **IV. PLANS TO ACHIEVE AND MEASURE OUTCOMES AND GOALS**

### **A. Activities**

The Forsyth County Department of Social Services will continue to use all existing programs and new programs as they emerge to meet the Work First Family Assistance (WFFA) Employment Program goals. This section describes activities and strategies used to address Work First goals.

Forsyth County continues to struggle with the participation rate. In December 2006 Forsyth County was awarded Demonstration Grant funding to establish an on-site employment lab to be utilized by Work First applicants. The intention of the Demonstration Project was to involve applicants in a 35 hour a week plan from the day of application and to improve the participation rate. The employment lab opened on 3/5/07 and has been a huge success but has failed to improve Forsyth's participation rate. The success of the Demonstration Grant has been in placing Work First applicants in full time, unsubsidized jobs.

Many activities are performed in-house and include eligibility determination, employability assessment, the employment resource lab (Demonstration Grant) that is staff through a contract with ESC, referral to supportive services within the community, and referral to Goodwill Industries of NWNC, Inc., the contractor who provides in-depth job readiness and job placement services for those who do not achieve employment during the application process. Forsyth County is fortunate to have a wide array of community partners who work with the Department to assist Work First clients.

For the FY 2008-09 program year, the Work First program plans to have two contractors offering employment-related services, the ESC staffed on-site employment resource lab and Goodwill Industries. Both are experienced providers and offer a wide array of services. Goodwill offers financial literacy to Work First participants. They also offer short-term vocational training in partnership with Forsyth Technical Community College for some courses.

The Department is continuing its community partnership to assist Work First customers who have multiple barriers to employment called Success for Families. This is a community-wide team consisting of representatives of 10 programs/agencies who assist Work First clients with multiple barriers to successful employment. The goal is to prevent clients from staying on cash assistance. The Success partners use a team approach to assessment and development of the Mutual Responsibility Agreement with the client. Social workers obtain all case information on a client and conduct a home visit. Workers research all income in the home, administer a depression survey, and check criminal records, schools system records, work records, and local emergency assistance records. They share this information with the community team and work together to fill gaps in service and develop a plan with the client to achieve Work First goals. In addition to Work First Employment Service staff, the following agencies participate in the Success for Families initiative:

- DSS Child Support Enforcement -- provides assistance in locating the absent parent and obtaining child support for the child;

- DSS Child Welfare Services -- provide information on any services currently being offered to the family or to determine if services are needed;
- CenterPoint Human Services—provides the services of a staff to assist in assessing the client and making recommendations on mental health issues;
- Department of Public Health –provides an assessment of the needs for family planning information and other related family health needs;
- Vocational Rehabilitation –provides information on services including evaluation and assessment for clients who may be physically or mentally disabled;
- Goodwill Industries of NWNC, Inc.—one of the current Employment Service contractors. They provide information on their job readiness and short-term training services.
- Experiment in Self-Reliance—a community action agency that provides self-sufficiency and housing services to assist client after they enter employment;
- WS/FC Schools—a school social worker provides information on issues related to the children in the family and their school participation;
- DSS Outreach Worker--provides information and services on family counseling particularly services related to domestic violence;
- Housing Authority of Winston-Salem—provides information on shared clients and the services available through the Housing Authority such as Section 8 housing vouchers and public housing assistance.
- Employment Security Commission—with the on-site Employment Lab, ESC employees can provide valuable information on the participation of Work First applicants.

## **B. Supportive Services**

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

The Department offers all clients any allowable services as outlined in this plan. This includes childcare subsidies, Food Stamps, Medicaid, transportation, mental health services, substance abuse services, and any other allowable services to provide the support that clients need to prepare for work and remain employed. Services are provided at the DSS location and at other partner agencies. A new service is “Success Outfitters” which is located at Goodwill and offers career clothing to participants for interviews and to support new employment.

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

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

1. Child Care – as long as funding is available, provision of any necessary child care arrangement to enable participants to obtain and/or maintain full-time employment or to participate in the employment program and its components; can be provided. After leaving Work First Family Assistance (WFFA), child care continues based on income and need.
2. Transportation –The employment social worker helps the participant/family arrange and/or pay or reimburse for any necessary transportation to work including bus passes, gas cards, monthly gas checks to the client or to a third party. Transportation services can be provided as long as participant is involved in employment programs and for up to one year after the termination of Work First, if the participant is receiving “Retention” services. The Department uses both program funds and NC Department of Transportation funds to meet these needs. Although the local transit authority expanded its routes and areas served on September 8<sup>th</sup>, there is still no Sunday service or service outside the city limits.

## **STATE PERFORMANCE GOALS**

### **1. EMPLOYMENT**

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

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

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

Additional partnerships and services provided include:

1. NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation - resource for in-depth job preparation and support services for participants with physical, mental, and emotional barriers to employment. DVR is active in the Success for Families initiative and referrals are made as appropriate to DVR.
2. Work Experience/Community Service - provision of job preparation which places WFEP participants with non-profit, for-profit agencies, and government programs for the purpose of the participant gaining on-the-job experience in order to be more viable in the job market. DSS is a major Work Experience site.
3. Subsidized Employment—the Department will explore the use of part-time and full-time subsidized employment, resources permitting, both in the public and private sector particularly for individuals without extensive work experience. This may include wage supplementation. These components have not been used in the past.
4. On-the-Job Training (OJT) - the Department will first explore the use OJT through the local JobLink Centers. If they are not able to accommodate Work First customers, the Department will approach employers about developing OJT contracts for Work First customers. OJT has not been a component used in the past.
5. Vocational Education – short-term skills training to provide the participant with a specific job skill. Short-term training offered includes:
  - Certified Nursing Assistant
  - Careers in Food Services
  - Computer Basics
  - Customer Service
  - Data Entry
  - Electrical
  - General Clerical
  - Forklift operation
  - Heating and Air Conditioning Repair
  - Housekeeping Services
  - Hospitality Management
  - Introduction to Medical Terminology and Coding
  - Medication Training
  - Personal Care Assistant
  - Phlebotomy
  - Pharmacy Technician
  - Plumbing
  - Truck Driving



6. Training is provided for a maximum of six months and generally less than 12 weeks and is provided by Goodwill staff and/or Forsyth Technical Community College.
7. HS/GED - component available through school system and/or community college to obtain a high school diploma and/or GED used in combination with a work component. Goodwill Industries provides an on-site lab to help Work First customers prepare for the GED.
8. Ways-to-Work—a service provided by Family Services, Inc., this program provides low-interest loans up to \$4,000 to purchase a used car or to provide a loan for car repairs for repairs over \$500. It is available for people who are working.
9. Screening for domestic violence issues and referral for specialized services -- Contract with Family Services, Inc. to provide assessment, counseling services to individuals and families who are victims of domestic violence, and nights of care in the family shelter. Funding for certain supportive services is also available.
10. Job Retention through Contractors - contract with Goodwill Industries provides a tracking of individuals who have gone to work. Contacts are made with clients at specific intervals up to 12 months after they obtain full time employment and stop receiving cash assistance.
11. Other Referrals -- for all other services which will enhance a family's ability to function without being dependent upon Work First Family Assistance (WFFA) cash assistance such as subsidized housing assistance services and various free or reduced fee health care services.
12. Transition Services -- Utilization of Food Stamps and Extended Medicaid benefits and Child Support, to supplement earned income. Increase efforts to inform clients as they leave cash assistance about these services.
13. Expanded relationships with employers – With the third year funding of the Demonstration Project, Forsyth County plans to explore adding a fourth position to our contract with ESC that would provide targeted job development services for our participants.
14. Increase linkages with economic development efforts and workforce development --Continue to work with local community development corporations to find opportunities for new employers or planned expansion activities to hire Work First recipients.
15. Job Link Career Centers—provides career counseling, job readiness services, OJT and vocational training.

## **2. MEETING FEDERAL PARTICIPATION RATES**

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

The new application procedure begins with a client being assigned to an orientation session. They are all given child support paper work and informed that they must register for First Stop at ESC. Orientations are held on Monday and Friday at 9:00 and 1:30. Once a client has successfully completed an orientation, they are told to return for the actual application process. They are given a choice of four days to return to apply for Work First. Since beginning the new application process Forsyth County's adult head of household cases have been reduced from 613 in 6/06 to 331 in 8/08 (46%).

In addition, the Department will:

- Serve 100% of mandatory clients in Employment Services;
- Increase the use of work experience, subsidized employment including work supplementation, and OJT;
- Monitor all participant activity to ensure social work staff have a solid understanding of who is meeting/not meeting participation rates and why;
- Utilize all the employment-related activities that "count" toward meeting participation rates;
- Increase support activities to keep clients in countable activities;
- Monitor state systems to ensure that clients hours of participation are reported accurately;
- Continue to train staff on the importance of client interactions in meeting the participation rates;
- Use prompt sanctions for non-compliance; and
- Use Quantitative Interdisciplinary Evaluations (QIE's) as an assessment tool for all participants who have doctor's documentation of less than full-time work capacity;
- Use supported employment through our Goodwill contract.

## **3. PROVIDING EMPLOYMENT SERVICES**

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

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

#### **4. BENEFIT DIVERSION**

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

Families are carefully screened to determine if they are job ready and if the presenting problem that brings them to DSS can be addressed with a one-time infusion of funds. In order not to encourage dependency on benefit diversion, the staff carefully screens repeat requests for benefit diversion.

#### **5. STAYING OFF WELFARE**

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

The Department continues efforts to encourage economic literacy. A major strategy is to ensure that individuals who leave assistance remain employed, become good financial managers of their income, use the tax system to their advantage, and begin to acquire assets. Work First clients are offered information as they prepare for work on the how to use the tax system to their benefit including applying for the Advanced Earned Income Tax Credit to increase their take home pay, accessing the free tax clinics to make use of other tax credits, and choosing not to use refund anticipation loans.

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

The Department is an active partner with the United Way's effort to expand the IDA program to 500 accounts over 5 years. The Department continues to provide an

allocation of matching funds for individuals who are within 200% of poverty and meet IDA guidelines.

## **6. JOB RETENTION**

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

Work First Employment Social Workers offer retention services to their participants. The package of services includes continued support for transportation, counseling services to help retain employment, budgeting and continued education services to help our participants advance in their careers. It is also our hope that by offering these services, we will help our participants not have to return to cash assistance, thereby helping our participation rate.

As part of this plan, the Department will continue to explore both internally and through contractor services the use of support groups for Work First recipients who go to work and to the extent possible mentoring of former customers. Several attempts have been made to organize support groups at Goodwill in the past, without consistent success. Goodwill is now looking at a new way to organize their retention services to support clients after they go to work and hope to be able to implement this new program by 1/09.

## **V. ADMINISTRATION**

### **A. Authority**

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

### **B. Organization**

All Work First services are offered at the Department's building. Work First cash assistance, Child and Family Medicaid, Child Care, and Work First Employment Services and Emergency Services (TANF-EA) staff are all conveniently located on one floor.

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

There is currently one outreach position in the TEAM Division, under the direct supervision of the Work First Social Work Program Manager, who provides outreach services to several organizations including the main Job Link location at ESC, Safe-on-Seven, the one stop center for victims of domestic violence, the Salvation Army shelter and Sunnyside Ministries of the Moravian Church (an emergency assistance provider). Family and Children's Medicaid/NCHC staff is located at health facilities throughout the county. All Work First intake, eligibility, assessment, and employment services are under one Division Director who also has responsibility for Child Support, Medicaid, Childcare, Food and Nutrition services and related supportive services. Work First Employment Services continues to be a function of Social Worker staff and the application/review process is a function of Income Maintenance staff. There are no plans to consolidate functions.

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

1. **Intake and eligibility determination** for all programs are provided at one location by both Income Maintenance staff and Work First Employment Service Staff who also conduct orientation and initial assessment. As noted earlier, intake begins by asking individuals to register for First Stop and return to DSS for Orientation. Only after customers complete orientation is an application taken.
2. **Employability assessment** begins with assessment by Income Maintenance staff to screen individuals for benefit diversion. Income Maintenance staff also identify "red flags" that alert Employment Service staff of potential barriers to employment.
3. **TANF emergency assistance** is administered by the Work First Employment social work staff.
4. **Employment Services and supportive services** are provided by social work staff who assess for transportation, childcare, and other needs. WFES staff makes decisions on how to meet transportation needs. They refer Work First clients, as needed, to childcare services located on the same floor.

### **C. First Stop**

The County requires individuals who apply for cash assistance to register for work with First Stop before they complete their Work First orientation and application. Applicants can choose to register for First Stop at the main ESC office which has recently moved to a location several miles from DSS or at the Employment Resource Lab located on-site at DSS. Currently over 90% of applicants use the on-site Employment Lab to register for First Stop.

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

Through the Demonstration Grant and the Employment Resource Lab, FCDSS has a contract with ESC for on-site services.

#### **D. Childcare**

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

1. Children who are involved in a Child Protective Services Investigation or whose family is receiving CPS Case Planning and Management services.
2. Children in DSS custody who are placed in a foster home where the foster parent is employed full time.
3. Children whose parent(s) is a Work First Employment Services participant and is in compliance with the MRA-B, and child care is needed to support this plan-this interpretation has been expanded to include Work First applicants.
4. Children whose parent(s) have obtained employment subsequent to a Benefit Diversion service plan and child care is needed to initiate and/or maintain employment.
5. Children in “child only” households (child receives WFFA) and whose relative is working full-time.
6. Children referred to other funding sources due to lack of DSS funds and who are losing that subsidy and child care is needed for the parent(s) to remain employed or in training.
7. Children have been on a Day Care Waiting List in a first-on-first removed order depending upon the eligibility status.
8. Children who live in families that meet the criteria with incomes below 75% of the North Carolina median income.

#### **E. Transportation**

The Department works closely with the Winston-Salem Transit Authority (WSTA) to serve the Work First population. However, bus service does not meet the needs of this population as well as it needs to. There is limited service for night shifts and Saturday and currently no bus service on Sunday. A member of the WSTA staff serves on the Work First Planning Committee and is well aware of the limitations for the Work First population.

The Department provides bus passes, mileage reimbursements, gas cards, car repairs for those participants who qualify, and use of any other means of transportation that is available to assist individuals to get to and from work and childcare facilities. Transportation needs of the Work First population are met through the use of every possible funding stream:

- Existing Work First resources. The Department estimates that about \$265,000 of the Work First Block Grant will go to Transportation.
- Foundation funds: the Department receives a “fill the gap” grant from a local foundation to meet unmet needs. When no other funds are available, these funds are used to provide bus passes or car repairs.
- Ways-to-Work: Forsyth County developed a new model program to provide low interest loans (below market rate) to individuals with a poor credit history and incomes less than 200% of poverty. The program is operated by Family Services Inc. In addition, the program provides for low-interest loans for car repairs.
- NCDOT grant: the Department uses this grant for a variety of transportation services that include automobile repairs, bus passes, and gas cards. These resources are targeted to people who are not receiving Work First cash assistance.
- If participants are working, they may be eligible for Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds for transportation if they are enrolled with WIA.

## **F. Substance Abuse Services**

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

A Qualified Professional in Substance Abuse is employed by the WISH program and available to serve Work First participants. The QPSA is on-site at the Work First Employment Services location for at least 20 hours per week and the actual offices for WISH are in an adjoining building.

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

## **G. Family Violence Option**

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

The DSS outreach staff is an active member of the local Domestic Violence Coordinating Council (staffed by Family Services). Family Services is the lead agency coordinating services at Safe On Seven a one-stop center at the courthouse and DSS provides an outreach staff person for SOS.

**H. Maintenance Of Effort (MOE)**

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

2008-2009 FORSYTH CO DSS BUDGETED MAINTENANCE OF EFFORT (MOE)

452003	TANF/Medicaid	917,428
452009	Work First – Jobs	2,249,532
453008	Children’s Services to WFBG	153,351
452003	TANF Emergency Assistance	106,400
452002	Daycare Expenditures as needed	<u>500,000</u>
TOTAL		3,926,711

**I. Child Welfare Services**

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

**VI. EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE**

Eligibility Determination and Procedures

An emergency situation occurs if:

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

Eligibility provisions include:

- The family must have a child who lives with a relative as defined by Work First cash assistance and who meets the age limit for Work First cash assistance;



- Meet the same citizenship requirements as for Work First cash assistance;
- Have a total monthly countable income at or below 200 percent of poverty; and
- Cannot receive EA more than once in a 12-month period without approval of the appropriate Program Manager.
- EA is limited to \$300 unless otherwise approved by the Program Manager.

#### Types of Assistance Provided

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

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

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

- Transportation Assistance: Bus passes, mileage allowances up to \$150 per month, car repairs (up to \$750 in a 12 month period), and low-interest loans to purchase vehicles;
- Uniforms or clothing for work up to \$150 in a 12 month period;
- Part-time tuition assistance at the community college for individuals who maintain a 2.5 GPA;
- Special work equipment up to \$400 once in a 12 month period;
- Extending the IDA match to individuals who have met all IDA requirements and are otherwise eligible for matching funds if funds are available; and
- Other services as needed, if services are allowable for funding, and funds are available.

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

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

**IX. EXEMPTIONS FROM THE WORK REQUIREMENT**

The County’s policy is that parents with children under the age of one can be exempt from the work requirement for no more than three months. If the parent loses this exemption due to failure to comply with child support, it is not reinstated. This exemption is limited to 12 months lifetime pursuant to the Work First Manual Section 003-XI.

**X. INNOVATIVE COUNTY STRATEGIES**

1. The Department has developed benchmarks for the entire agency to focus attention on results that go beyond those required by the state. Several of these are in the area of Work First. They include:
  - Annual participation rate of 50%
  - Annual percent of children potentially eligible for the child care subsidy and receive it
  - Annual percent of Work First participants who obtain a GED/High School diploma or vocational certificate
  - Annual percent of Work First participants who obtain employment
  - Annual percent of Work First participants who obtain employment at a living wage (defined as more than \$8.50 per hour)
  
2. As far as we know, the SOS one-stop center to serve victims of domestic violence is the first of its kind in the state of North Carolina.
  
3. Goodwill Industries plans to organize and implement by 1/09, a new program of retention services to support participants when they leave Work First cash assistance for employment.

**XI. SPECIAL ISSUES**

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

**XVII. CERTIFICATION**

The Work First Plan for 2010-2011 was reviewed by the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners and approved for submission to the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services.

Signed by \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Gloria Whisenhunt, Commissioner  
Forsyth County Board of Commissioners