

ANSON COUNTY  
WORK FIRST PLAN  
FY 2010-2011 Biennium

September 18, 2008

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## **I. Conditions Within the County**

Anson County has experienced slow economic growth over the last 20 years, and that reality is expected to continue through 2009 through 2011. Most of the low-skilled jobs available to work first clients are part-time and pay low wages with few opportunities for career advancement. Thus, we have many families remaining poor and experiencing financial hardships despite being employed. This can lead to a loss of independence, empowerment and self-esteem.

Through the 1980's and early 1990's Anson County enjoyed economic prosperity on the backs of the textile mills that dotted the county's landscape. Today, only a handful of those mills are still operating and those remaining have idle capacity and can choose from the cream of the crop of the county's employee pool. This dramatic decline in textile manufacturing has driven the county's unemployment rate to double-digit percentages. We envision that during the planning period of 2009 through 2011 that Anson County will continue to experience slow economic growth and relatively high unemployment.

In the past several years, we have seen the closing of a number of businesses – Burnsville Apparel, Flynt Fabrics, Wadesboro Knitting, Broder Brothers, Dan River, Gentry Mill and one of Anson County's oldest businesses B.C. Moore's & Sons Department Store Headquarters.

Conversely, during this same time, new businesses such as Cobb-Vantress, Triangle Brick, Carolina Apparel, Tractor Supply, Peebles, Captain D's, Wal-Mart Supercenter and Meadowview Assisted Living have come to the county. Plus, the opening of a new correctional facility and the expansion of another one have added to the job opportunities in the county. Looking forward, no known major new business or industries are on the horizon.

The key barriers to self-sufficiency include low reading and math skills, lack of transportation, mentoring and childcare, the availability of affordable and decent housing, substance abuse and health problems.

Perhaps the most pressing of these issues is transportation. With the high unemployment and poor economic conditions, our Work First participants are forced to seek employment outside of the county and state – primarily in Union, Stanly, Richmond, and Mecklenburg counties. With commutes upwards of 100 miles a day, reliable, economical transportation is an essential ingredient to maintaining steady employment. Compounding this issue is the high cost of automobile liability insurance for participants who are inexperienced drivers where liability insurance alone can run \$130 and more per month, making it unaffordable for most clients. Further, working weekend and rotating shifts are factors that make it doubly difficult to carpool and coordinate daycare services.

Working together with Anson County Health Department, Anson County Schools, Employment Security Commission, North Carolina Partnership for Children, South Piedmont Community College, Vocational Rehabilitation and other agencies and local partners, Anson County will continue to provide job search, employment services, work experiences, vocational training and other supportive services to Work First participants. With this broad-based support, our number one priority remains to help all able-bodied recipients of public assistance find employment and stay off welfare forever.

## **II. Planning Process**

The membership of our local Work First Planning Committee consisted of the following person and affiliations:

- Ms. Lula Jackson, Anson County DSS Director
- Ms. Shayla Maxwell, Former Work First Participant
- Mr. Lawrence Gatewood, Anson County DSS
- Ms. Shanta Hicks, Employment Security Commission
- Ms. Shirley Allen, Anson County DSS
- Ms. Linda Jones, Anson County Health Department, Nursing Supervisor
- Ms. Misty Harris, Anson County Economic Development Director
- Ms. Cherre McNeil, Anson County DSS
- Ms. April Little, Vocational Rehabilitation
- Ms. Kristi Phifer, SPCC
- Ms. Patricia Seago, Anson County DSS
- Ms. Tomika Tillman, Work First Participant
- Ms. Mary McLean
- Mr. Randy Thomas, Ford Motor Credit
- Clarence Powers, Anson County DSS
- Melody Willoughby, Program Resource Institute Counseling Services

On September 2, 2008, at the regular session of the Anson County Board of Commissioners, the Commissioners voted unanimously for Anson County to remain a Standard County for the Work First Program.

The Work First Planning Committee met on September 9, 2008 to review and update the Work First Plan. The Committee met again on September 18, 2008. The Committee has agreed to meet quarterly to keep the plan on track throughout the year. Each member of the Planning Committee will receive a copy of the plan to share with members of their organizations. Plus, a copy of the plan is available for review and public comment in the local DSS office, the Employment Security Commission, the local Health Department, South Piedmont Community College and the Hampton B. Allen Library. Publicity concerning the availability of the plan consists of a notice on the Government Website. All public comments received will be incorporated into the plan as appropriate.

The Anson County Department of Social Services Board reviewed the plan on 9/26/06 during their monthly meeting. The Board endorses and supports the 2007-2009 Work First Plan.

### **III. Outcomes and Goals for the County** Statewide Work First Goals

The NC Department of Health and Human Services has established the following 2009-2011 areas of performance for the State in meeting the six Work First goals listed below. The level of performance should be available by November 1, 2008.

1. Adults Entering Employment: Self-sufficiency and caseload reductions will be realized primarily through the employment of Work First clients.
2. Staying off Welfare After Going to Work: Statewide, 90% of all cases closed due to employment should remain off cash assistance.
3. Meeting the All Parent and Two-Parent Participation Rate: Statewide, the all-parent participation rate requirement is 50% for FFY 2007 and the two-parent participation rate requirement is 90%. Our participation rate for the 2007/2008 fiscal year for all families is 53.39% and 30.95% for two-parent households.
4. Avoiding Dependency through Diversion Assistance: The most successful outcome possible for an applicant for public assistance is to avoid the need to become a recipient.
5. Providing Employment Services: A 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. Statewide, counties need to be working with at least 80% of the single adult caseload and 100% of the two-parent caseload for scheduling activities to prepare adults for self-sufficiency.
6. Employment Retention: This measure will be based on the number of responsible adults that leave TANF for employment who are still employed at 6 and 12 month intervals following termination. The goal is to have 60% retention at 6 months and 50% retention at 12 months.

#### County Developed Outcome Goals

The NC Department of Health and Human Services in consultation with the county department of social services and the county board of commissioners have not established the following 2010-2011 biennium levels of performance for Anson County, but the six Work First goals are listed below.

1. Putting Adults to Work: Self-sufficiency and caseload reductions will be realized primarily through the employment of Work First clients.
2. Staying off Welfare After Going to Work: Statewide and locally, 90% of all cases closed due to employment should remain off cash assistance.
3. Meeting the All Parent and Two-Parent Participation Rate: 50% of single participants in active status should average 35 hours per week or more of activities and 90% of two-parent participants in active status should average of 35 hours per week or more of activities.
4. Avoiding Dependency through Diversion Assistance: The most successful outcome possible for an applicant for public assistance is to avoid the need to become a recipient.
5. Providing Employment Services: TANF recipients need to receive intensive employment services.
6. Employment Retention: Families who leave Work First for employment and continue to be employed 6 to 12 months after leaving the program show evidence of keeping their income and increased job stability, which impacts a family's well being. Anson County will have 60% of families to retain employment at six months and 50% of families to retain employment at 12 months.

#### **IV. Plans to Achieve and Measure the Outcomes and Goals**

By achieving the outcomes and measures for the Statewide Goals, Anson County will be able to achieve the outcomes and measures for the county. Efforts put forth to achieve statewide goals will be the same for the county goals. Listed below for each performance goal are the activities/supportive services that will be provided and how the outcomes will be measured. Anson County plans to meet each goal by informing all clients at application and/or review of the goals and their role in helping the county to meet the goals. Anson County DSS will collaborate with other agencies, organizations and industries to develop activities that will assist clients in achieving goals. Anson County DSS will provide supportive services based on the needs of the clients. Anson County DSS staff, contracted agencies and clients will be responsible for carrying out the activities to achieve goals. Activities/Supportive services will take place primarily in Anson County. Some activities/supportive services will be offered in surrounding counties based on the needs of the client.

1. Putting Adults to Work: Job Placement, job search/job readiness classes, work experience, and on-the-job training activities will help recipients become employed. Child Care, transportation, participation expenses, such as uniforms, fees and other

supportive services will be offered based on the individual need of the client. The outcome will be measured based on the number of job placements each month.

2. Staying Off Welfare After Going to Work: Assessment, Job Retention and Job Placement activities will help clients obtain high wage earning jobs and prevent the need to return to assistance. The outcome will be measured based on the number of cases closed due to employment and the length of time a client remains off assistance.

3. Meeting the All Parent and Two Parent Participation Rate: Various activities such as assessment, job search/job readiness, work experience, vocational training, on-the-job training and employment activities will be available to allow the client to schedule 35 hours of activities per week or 55 hours of combined activities between both parents per week if they are receiving federally funded childcare assistance. The outcome will be measured based on the number of hours of activities each client completes in a month.

4. Avoiding Dependency through Diversion Assistance: Each applicant will be assessed individually based on their situation to determine their need for diversion assistance. Each recipient of benefit diversion will be informed of supportive services available. The outcome will be measured based on the number of applicants that receive diversion assistance.

5. Providing Employment Services: All able-bodied applicants/recipients will be referred to the Employment Services Unit for intensive employment services. All able-bodied adults will have scheduled hours and supportive services will be provided based on the need of the adult.

6. Employment Retention: Anson County will provide supportive services as available to employed families to help them retain employment. The Work First Unit will ensure that accurate information is available on adults who leave Work First for employment. Each Work First participant will have a personal, substance abuse and domestic violence assessment, job search/job readiness, vocational training, on the job training, and work experience activities available to them. Transportation, childcare, in-home services, participation expenses and any other supportive services will be available to support their activities

South Piedmont Community College (SPCC) will provide job search/job readiness activities for four weeks each month. The classes, which will be held at the SPCC Lockhart/Taylor Center, will be five days per week for four hours per day. They will focus on job preparedness/job readiness and career choices. SPCC will offer a job seekers lab five days per week, three hours per day. SPCC will offer Computer Skills for the Workplace, Basic PC Literacy for the Workplace, Quick Books, North Carolina Career Readiness for Certification, Career Readiness for Medical Workplace, and Career Readiness for Correctional Officers. SPCC and DSS have worked collaboratively to develop a Customer Service Training course. This program will provide training in the classroom and the workplace. After completion of the training,

participants will be placed in an internship relevant to their classroom training. The internship will be subsidized by Work First and may last up to twelve weeks.

On-the-job training and job search/job readiness will be offered through Employment Security Commission. In addition to working on applications and resumes, participants will receive job referrals. We will contract as needed with McLaurin Vocational Center to provide assessment, job search/job readiness and vocational training. Participants will be scheduled for a total of ten weeks, each participant attending eight hours per day for five days per week. In addition, work experience sites will be available at Headstart, Anson County School System, Anson County Library, Anson County Tax Office, Anson Crisis Ministry, South Piedmont Community College, Lillie Bennett Nursing Home, Heritage Hills Nursing Home, Employment Security Commission, local DSS, and other profit and nonprofit organizations.

## **V. Administration**

### **A. Authority**

Anson County Department of Social Services has the authority for the administration of the Work First Program.

### **B. Agency's Organization**

Clients coming in to request cash assistance are referred to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Unit for intake. Participants' eligibility for cash assistance is determined by the TANF Unit. Once a single parent applies for TANF, an appointment is scheduled for Employment Services orientation. Two parent applicants are referred during the application process to Employment Services. The Employment Services Unit social workers assess participants' needs and offer services based on the needs of the participant. Services offered include but are not limited to employment activities/services, supportive services, assessments/referrals (employment, substance abuse, domestic violence), crisis intervention, child care, transportation, etc. The Crisis Intake Unit handles request for Emergency Assistance. We use the Job Link Center and have staff located there on a rotation basis. We are not currently consolidating employment services and eligibility functions.

### **C. First Stop Program**

All mandatory applicants are referred to the local ESC to register for First Stop. ESC is located in our agency one day per week. We contract with ESC for job search/job readiness, on-the-job training and job development and placement. Applicants are referred in-house to register for First Stop on the day the ESC Interviewer is located in our agency.

#### D. Child Care

Child care to support protective services receives top priority with child care funds. We then give priority to parents in need of childcare to support employment. Within this need category, priority is given in the following order: active Work First participants; full-time employees, part-time employees, and child care to seek employment. We currently use TANF Block Grant funds to purchase child care for active Work First participants. Third on the priority list is child care to support training and education. Within this need category, priority is given in the following order: active Work First participants, High School students, and post-secondary students. Childcare to support developmental need and childcare to support child welfare services are then given priority.

Anson County currently does have a waiting list.

#### E. Transportation

We coordinate transportation with our county transportation system (ACTS), private vendors, and participants. The county transportation system and private vendors provides transportation. Private vendors will continue to provide transportation services to clients as needed at a rate of \$0.585 per mile or the IRS rate, whichever is higher. ACTS will continue to provide transportation at the contracted rate. Some participants provide their own transportation. Participants providing their own transportation will be reimbursed at \$0.20 per mile, with a maximum reimbursement of \$200.00 per month. SPCC provides job search transportation as a part of their services.

#### F. Substance Abuse

State law and Work First policy require Work First Family Assistance applicants and recipients to be screened for substance abuse issues. Anson DSS has a Qualified Substance Abuse Professional in the agency on Wednesdays. The Employment Services Social Workers will administer the AUDIT/DAST screening tools in the absence of the QSAP. Anyone screening positive will be referred to the local Sandhills Mental Health center for assessment. The local Area Program will assess the individual and determine the need for treatment. DSS will continue to use the Consent for Release of Confidential Information Form.

Work First social workers and the local Area Program will work closely together to assure that the participants' treatment progress and employment services are coordinated. This will allow the participant to receive treatment services and move forward on job readiness and work placement where appropriate. The Department of Social Services staff and local Program Area staff will attend staffing on Work First participants receiving substance abuse services. The Work First participant as a part of the intake procedure will sign information releases for both agencies. However, refusal to sign such a release will not result in a denial of services.

A client's need for and participation in substance abuse services will not affect that client's eligibility for Work First Assistance Services. Work First substance abuse participants will continue to receive Work First cash assistance, employment services and Medicaid coverage.

Transportation and childcare services will be provided to clients receiving substance abuse services in order to attend treatment and follow-up. There currently is not a local agreement. There is discussion of the best approach, local agreement vs. contract.

#### G. Family Violence Option

Anson County DSS has developed procedures for staff to follow in dealing with victims of family violence. Also, included are procedures to follow in dealing with couples that are being served together. TANF workers and Employment Services workers will notify participants of the Family Violence Option and do an initial screening/questionnaire. Clients who either self-disclose or for whom there are indicators of family violence will be referred to Anson County Domestic Violence Coalition. Once the Anson County Domestic Violence Coalition assesses the clients situation, they will report to the Work First worker the apparent ability of the client to participate in any activities and all needs of the client such as counseling, transportation, childcare, etc.

#### H. Maintenance of Effort (MOE)

Anson County plans to fund employment activities and supportive services with our Maintenance of Effort funds. Anson County DSS currently has several contracts in place to provide services to clients. Anson County DSS contracts with South Piedmont Community College for job search/job readiness, job placement and development, education and training activities and transportation. Anson County DSS contracts with Employment Security Commission for job search/job readiness, job placement and development, and on-the-job training activities. Anson County sets aside \$75,000.00 for childcare services and \$24,000.00 for emergency assistance services.

#### I. Child Welfare Services

Five percent of our Work First Block Grant is earmarked for Child Welfare Services.

### **VI. Emergency Assistance**

Anson County will provide emergency assistance to families based on the following eligibility guidelines:

- The family must have a child who lives with a relative or legal guardian as defined for Work First Family Assistance (WFFA) and who meets the age limit for WFFA.
- Total gross family income must be at or below 200% of federal poverty.
- Family members must meet the same citizenship requirements as for WFFA.

- Assistance may not be provided for any medical care, regardless of whether the participant is covered by Medicaid.

- Only short-term benefits may be provided. Short-term benefits are described as: nonrecurring, short-term benefits designed to deal with a specific episode of need; is not intended to meet recurring or ongoing needs; and not extending beyond four months.

Anson County will determine eligibility based on income and emergency. Income will be determined using the Work First income guidelines. An emergency situation is one that may potentially place a child at risk of being deprived of basic necessities or at risk of out of home placement. Anson County will provide assistance using the voucher method. Benefits will be limited to \$500 per applicant/per year. Assistance will be provided for temporary shelter, rent/eviction, mortgages/foreclosure and utilities.

## **VII. Services for Families with Income at or Below 200% of Poverty**

Anson County will provide services for families with income at or below 200% of poverty using an allocated amount of the Work First Block Grant funds. DSS will assist former recipients with transportation that are eligible based on income less than 200%. Transitional transportation support will be provided for participants working 32 hours or more per week for 90 working days. Eligibility guidelines are the same as Emergency Assistance. Benefits will be provided based on the needs of the family. Once the allocated amount of funding is exhausted, families will be referred to other resources.

## **VIII. Services for Non-Custodial Parents of Work First Recipient Children**

Anson County will provide services for non-custodial parents of Work First recipient children using an allocated amount of Work First Block Grand funds. Eligibility guidelines are the same as Emergency Assistance. Benefits will be provided based on the needs of the non-custodial parent. Once the allocated amount of funding is exhausted, non-custodial parents will be referred to other resources.

## **IX. Exemption from the Work Requirement**

Anson County will exempt a single custodial parent of a child under the age of two months from the work requirement.

## **X. Innovative County Strategies**

Incentives for clients completing GED or ABE educational activities, higher education programs such as Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program will receive a \$50 gift card.

A seminar may be held during the year. The seminar will allow clients to gain information and acquire training to help them become more employable. Clients who attend the most days will receive a \$50 gift certificate. Following each seminar, a banquet conducted by the clients will be held to recognize the achievements of the client and the success of the program.

SPCC will continue to offer a Customer Service Training course. The course program will provide training in the classroom and the workplace. SPCC will provide training in the area of Customer Service & Computer Skills, and Office Assistant. After completion of the training, participants will be placed in a work experience relevant to their classroom training. The work experience will be subsidized by DSS and may last 4-6 months.

A special matching grant program will be offered to help clients purchase a reliable vehicle. It will provide a one-time per client \$4,500.00 grant to be used toward the purchase of a reliable vehicle, the client will match with \$500. In addition, DSS will pay up to \$100.00 for a pre-purchase vehicle inspection by a certified mechanic. For clients needing help to purchase auto insurance, DSS will offer a one-time payment up to \$500.00 for 6 months of insurance coverage. The program will follow the same guidelines as the Work First Demonstration Grant-Wheels That Work Program.

The Anson County Work First program plans to focus more attention on the well being of our participants. The programs/activities currently being offered will be enhanced by subject areas such as strong work ethics, developing problem solving skills, developing survival skills, equipping participants with skills to handle conflict, money management, anger management, stress management, nutrition, preventive health measures, proper substance use, vehicle education, banking procedures, understanding employer expectations, developing strategies for career advancement, etc. There will be a collaborative effort on the part of contracted providers, Anson County Extension Services, Anson County Partnership for Children, and Sandhills Mental Health to incorporate these subjects into our existing four-week program. The Committee strongly feels that in order to be successful our participants must be empowered from within.

We will continue our focus on family planning. DSS, in cooperation with the Anson County Health Department, will offer gift certificates to TANF recipients that go to the Health Department for family planning services. Recipients, both female and male, will receive a \$25 gift card for their 1<sup>st</sup> visit, a \$25 gift card for the follow-up visit and the \$50 annually thereafter. The program will be available to recipients age 12 and older.

We will continue to encourage parents to volunteer time at their child's school. This will help to meet the required hours of activities and also allow an opportunity for the parents to become involved with their children at school.

**XI. Special Issues**

Lack of education, high school dropout rate, lack of work history, lack of minimum wage jobs, physical illnesses and/or disabilities and reliable transportation after obtaining employment could affect the operation of our Work First Program.

Certifications

County Block Grant Plan Approved By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman, Anson County Board of Commissioners

Date: \_\_\_\_\_