

ANSON COUNTY
WORK FIRST PLAN
FY 2003-2005

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I. Conditions Within the County

Anson County has a long history of slow economic growth, and that reality is expected to continue through the duration of this planning period (2003 through 2005). We have few “good jobs” in the county. We are referring to the prized jobs that pay above minimum wage and can potentially lead to sustained employment and career advancement. Anson County acknowledges that we have many individuals and families experiencing financial hardships and insecurity. This can precipitate a loss of independence and empowerment; two highly regarded personal assets in our society.

Through the 1980’s and early 1990’s Anson County experienced economic prosperity on the backs of the many textile mills that dotted the county’s landscape. Today, only a hand full of those mills is still operating in the county. This decline in textile manufacturing, along with the recent recession, has driven the county’s unemployment rate to double-digit percentages. We envision that Anson County will continue to experience slow economic growth and high unemployment. Further, we anticipate that there will be very few “good jobs” available in the county for individuals with limited education and job skills.

According to the county’s economic development director, “Economic conditions in Anson County are in a state of flux, it is difficult to know where we are going.” In the past several years, we have experienced the closing to several plants, Charles Craft, Burnsville Apparel, Flynt Fabrics and Wadesboro Knitting. Conversely, during this same time period, new companies such as Gentry Mill, Cobb-Vantress, Triangle Brick, Carolina Apparel, Wire and Plastics Machinery, and Carolina Landscape Packaging have come to the county. Plus, the construction of the new correctional facility has added to the job opportunities in the county. Still, many of the people who live in our county work in other counties because of higher wages and better advancement opportunities.

The key issues and barriers to self sufficiency that we face include low reading and math skills, transportation, childcare, availability of affordable and decent housing, substance abuse and wellness.

Perhaps the most pressing of these issues is transportation. Given the high unemployment and poor economic conditions in Anson County, our participants must seek employment outside of the county – primarily in Union, Stanly, Richmond and Mecklenburg counties. With commutes upwards of 100 to 120 miles each day, reliable, cost-effective transportation is essential to maintaining steady employment. Adding to this issue is the high cost of automobile liability insurance for participants who are inexperienced drivers. The cost of this insurance can run \$130 and more per month, making it cost prohibitive for most clients. Working weekend and rotating working shifts is an issue that affects both transportation and childcare. Working such schedules makes it difficult to secure and coordinate reliable transportation and daycare.

Anson County will continue to help all able-bodied recipients of public assistance find employment and stay off welfare. This support will reduce their need for public assistance and provide the means to support themselves and their children.

We will continue to work with families to become self sufficient through programs and services offered by local, state, and federal agencies, and community and faith-based organizations. We are encouraged by the opportunity to work collaboratively with these agencies and organizations to provide services that will help our needy families.

II. Planning Process

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

- Maxter Allen, Anson County Schools, Assist. Superintendent*
- Anna Baucom, Anson County DSS Board Member*
- Judy Carpenter, Employment Security Commission*
- Steve Leary, Economic Development*
- Elbert Marshall, Anson Chamber of Commerce*
- Alicia Molaro, N.C. Cooperative Extension*
- Kristi Phiefer, South Piedmont Community College*
- Kaye Ratliff, Sandhills Mental Health Center Unit Manager*
- Jim Roosen, Anson County Health Department Director*
- Scott Rowell, Anson County Transportation System*
- Ross Steater, Anson County Board of County Commissioners*
- Cindy Taylor, Smart Start*
- Larry Crandell, Anson County DSS Director
- Kishia Dunlap, Anson County DSS
- Lawrence Gatewood, Anson County DSS
- Bertha Hardin, Anson County DSS
- Terri Heilig, Anson County DSS
- Lula Jackson, Anson County DSS
- Nancy Robinson, Anson County DSS

On July 9, 2002, 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. At the September 17, 2002 meeting, the Commissioners approved the members of the planning committee (denoted by an asterisk). The commissioners feel that all agencies and organizations should have input in identifying the needs of the population to be served, and the planning committee is structured with this goal in mind.

The Work First Planning Committee met on September 26 and October 3, to develop the Work First Plan. The Committee will continue to meet bi-monthly to keep the plan on track throughout the year. Each member of the Planning Committee received a copy of the plan to share with members of their organizations. Plus, a copy of the plan was 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 consisted of a notice in the local newspaper and a public announcement on the local radio station and Government Access channel. All public comments received were incorporated into the plan as appropriate.

III. Outcomes and Goals for the County

Statewide Work First Goals

The NC Department of Health and Human Services has established the following 2002-2003 levels of performance for the State in meeting the eight Work First goals listed below.

1. Reducing the Work First Caseload: A steady decline of the State's Work First cases is an indicator of success of movement to self-sufficiency through gainful employment. The State plans to reduce the number of Work First cases by 17,559.
2. Adults Entering Employment: Self-sufficiency and caseload reductions will be realized primarily through the employment of Work First clients. The State's goal is to put 12,532 adults to work.
3. Staying off Welfare After Going to Work: Statewide, 85% of all cases closed due to employment should remain off cash assistance.
4. Meeting the All Parent and Two-Parent Participation Rate: Statewide, the all-parent participation rate requirement is 50% for FFY 2003 and the two-parent participation rate requirement is 90%.
5. 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. The Statewide goal is for 12,000 applicants to avoid the need to become a recipient.
6. Increasing Child Support Orders & Collections: An effective child support effort will help prevent families from returning to welfare. Statewide, the goals are to increase child support orders by 3% of the number of TANF cases under order as of June 2002 which is 48,473 and increase the amount of collections by 4% of the annual TANF and former TANF collections for 2001-2002 which is \$297,085,506.

7. 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 75% of the single adult caseload and 100% of the two-parent caseload for scheduling activities to prepare adults for self-sufficiency.
8. 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 has established the following 2002-2003 levels of performance for Anson County in meeting the eight Work First goals listed below.

1. Reducing the Work First Caseload: A steady decline of the State's Work First cases is an indicator of success of movement to self-sufficiency through gainful employment. Anson County's goal is to reduce the number of Work First cases by 41.
2. Putting Adults to Work: Self-sufficiency and caseload reductions will be realized primarily through the employment of Work First clients. Anson County's goal is to help 32 Work First recipients become employed.
3. Staying off Welfare After Going to Work: Statewide and locally, 85% of all cases closed due to employment should remain off cash assistance.
4. 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 of activities.
5. 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. In Anson County, 48 applicants will avoid the need to become a recipient by receiving Diversion Assistance.
6. Increasing Child Support Orders & Collections: An effective child support effort will help prevent families from returning to welfare. Anson County's goal is to increase orders by 393 and increase collections by \$2,197,627.
7. Providing Employment Services: TANF recipients need to receive intensive employment services. Anson County will work with at least 75% of the single adult caseload and 100% of the two-parent caseload for scheduling activities to prepare adults for self-sufficiency.

8. 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. Reducing the Work First Caseload: Job Placements and referrals to Child Support will allow the county to meet this goal. 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 cases closed each month due to employment.

2. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. Increasing Child Support Orders & Collections: Anson County Work First Unit will work with Anson County Child Support to provide information and assistance as needed to establish orders and increase collections. The Work First Unit will gather information during the application/review process and provide information to the Child Support Office. The outcome will be measured based on the number of orders processed and the dollar amount of support collected.

7. 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.

8. 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. Columbus Copeland, Inc. will provide assessment and job search/job readiness for three weeks per month. The classes will be held at Johnson Chapel Church, Monday through Friday for four hours per day. The classes will focus on personal development; self esteem, interviewing skills, etc. 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. Also, they will offer Computer Skills for the Workplace, Basic PC Literacy for the Workplace and Career Readiness for Correctional Officers. A new program, Joint Administrative Development Education (JADE) provides career readiness for the workplace and job skills through internships. On-the-job training and job search/job readiness will be offered through Employment Security Commission. Job search classes will be held three days per week for two hours each day. 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 across the county. Such sites will include Headstart, Anson County School System, Lillie Bennett

Nursing Home, Heritage Hills Nursing Home, 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 TANF Unit for intake. Participants' eligibility for cash assistance is determined by the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families 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. The agency's organizational chart is located on page 15. 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. The current cost of the ESC contract is \$61,110.

D. Child Care

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

Anson County currently does not have a waiting list.

E. Transportation

We coordinate transportation with our county transportation system (ACTS), private vendors, and participants. The county transportation system provides transportation within the city limits and to the McLaurin Vocational Center in Hamlet. The private vendors provide transportation outside the city limits and to potential work sites in other counties. Some participants provide their own transportation. ACTS works with DSS to coordinate transportation to employment sites outside of the county. DSS will assist former recipients with transportation that are eligible based on income less than 200%.

F. Substance Abuse

State budget restraints and reorganization of mental health services have affected the Work First Substance Abuse Initiative. Anson will no longer have a Qualified Substance Abuse Professional in the county. State law and Work First policy require Work First Family Assistance applicants and recipients to be screened for substance abuse issues. The Employment Services Social Workers will administer the AUDIT/DAST screening tools. 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 participants who receive substance abuse services will also receive case management services. These services will assist the client in obtaining housing, healthcare, and other community services. In addition, the substance abuse services provided will be gender specific. Issues such as domestic violence, relationships, parenting and life management will be covered during treatment. These are key issues to the development of "self sufficiency" skills for Work First participants.

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 at a cost of \$92,464.00. We contract with Columbus Copeland, Inc. for job search/job readiness activities at a cost of \$55,926.00. Anson County DSS contracts with Employment Security Commission for job search/job readiness, job placement and development, and on-the-job training activities at a cost of \$61,110.00. In order to provide supportive services, DSS contracts with Anson County Transportation System for transportation services at a cost of \$40,810.00. We also contract with private vendors and participants to provide transportation at a cost of approximately \$100,000. Anson County sets aside \$60,000.00 for childcare services and \$12,000.00 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 \$300 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. 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 Grant 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

As an incentive, before clients' transfer from TANF to extended medicaid, clients will receive a once in a lifetime job bonus. The bonus is received if the client is employed 20 hours or more per week and the employment is assumed to become permanent. After this the client will receive a 27.5% reduction in their gross wages counted. If the client is ineligible after the reduction is given, the client will receive extended medicaid.

Incentives for clients in work training would consist of a \$50 educational bonus for clients under 20 enrolled and participating satisfactorily in GED or ABE educational activities. Clients, who are pregnant and continue to participate in employment services

activities satisfactorily until date of delivery, will receive a gift certificate and baby gift totaling \$50.

A two-week seminar will be held twice during the year. The seminars will allow clients to gain information and acquire training to help them be more employable. The client who attends the most days will receive a \$50 gift certificate. If more than one client is eligible for the certificate, it is divided equally among the clients. Following each seminar, a banquet conducted by the clients is held to recognize the achievements of the client and the success of the program.

SPCC and DSS have worked collaboratively to develop the Joint Administrative Development Education (JADE) Program. The JADE program will provide training in the classroom and the workplace. SPCC will provide training in the area of Customer Service & Computer Skills, Office Assistant, Financial Records and Medical Records. After completion of the four-week training, participants will be placed in an internship relevant to their classroom training. The internship will be subsidized by DSS and may last up to twelve weeks.

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, 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 two, three and four week programs. The Committee strongly feels that in order to be successful our participants must be empowered from within.

X. Special Issues

Lack of education, high school drop-out rate, lack of work history, lack of minimum wage jobs, 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: