

Work First Plan 2010-2011

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I. Conditions Within Lenoir County

Lenoir County is primarily a rural area comprised of one larger city and several small towns with a total population of 57,691 in 2005. According to the US Census Bureau reports, the county’s population has decreased by 3% since the 2000 Census and predicts that this trend will continue through 2010. If this trend holds true, Lenoir County will become one of the older populations in eastern North Carolina. Several factors have contributed to this population shift including:

- Changes in Federal laws- Lenoir County has experienced a significant reduction in higher paying manufacturing jobs as textile manufacturers relocated their plants outside of the United States as a result of changes in the Federal trade laws. Other companies closed because they were unable to compete in the new global market. The agricultural economy has been affected by the end of the Price Support Quota for tobacco growers and the ensuing federal Tobacco Buyout Program.
- Flood mitigation - Local governments purchased property in the flood-prone areas of the county and relocated people to areas less likely to flood. Most of the homeowners remained in the county but some tenants did not return. Since the worst flooding occurred in sections containing a concentration of lower cost rental homes, this program reduced the availability to affordable rental property in our area. However, this impact should be decreasing over time as flood buyouts will soon be a decade old.
- Economic Downturn – The local economy entered an economic downturn in early 2002. Some areas of the state are recovering from this recession. However, the recovery has been much slower in our area. Local unemployment has remained higher than the statewide and national averages. New jobs have been created in Lenoir County and there have been substantial gains in bringing new employers to the county in the last six months. Prolonged unemployment is scary for most families, but it puts the African-American family in deeper peril much faster. The median U. S. White family has at least \$120,000 in net worth while the median African-American family has less than \$20,000. Laid-off African-American workers are less likely to have family members with money to spare since African-American per capita income was only 57 cents for every dollar earned by a white family in 2001.¹ Following the economic peak in 2001 and the subsequent outflow of jobs, unemployment has deepened in Lenoir County. The local economy is slowly beginning to recover, but the process is repeatedly derailed by volatile energy costs or the uncertainty of financial institutions and the stock market. After talking with several Lenoir County residents, they spoke of sharing the vision of Kinston, as being “On the Way!” as the bumper sticker insists. However, once prosperity begins in Lenoir County things happen on a national

level either in government, national security or finance that creates a sense of doom and despair.

- High Utility Costs – Kinston, like other small cities in North Carolina purchases electrical power to serve the city. The city has repeatedly increased utility charges as the cost of operating the city government has risen. Residents ponder the cost of electricity and potential home owners research the utility company options before making purchases.

Conditions are further complicated by the fact that lower skilled workers have seen little increase in real income (\$.88 per hour) when compared to the wage growth for higher skilled workers (21%). The recent increase in the state's minimum wage has only brought minor improvements to the people who have been working hard in essential jobs as clerks, janitors, waiters, nursing home attendants, and child care providers. But, much needs to be done before these workers will begin to move out of poverty.

It is important to note that the target population served by the Work First Program is composed to three types of families:

- “Child Only” – These families consist of children who live with a relative other than a parent (usually a grandmother) because the parent is unable to care for the children. This represents the largest portion of the current WFFA caseload, not because the actual number of families served has increased, but because of a dramatic drop in the number of single and two parent families enrolled in the program. These children come to this living arrangement for a variety of reasons including Children's Protective Services placement, death of the parent, abandonment, drug or alcohol abuse by parent, mental illness of parent, or incarceration of parent. Frequently the caretaker lacks legal custody of the child or children in their care. They often do not wish to pursue child support from either of the absent parents, because this would involve interaction that neither they nor the child in their care wish to associate. With the program's focus on helping custodial parents to find work, this category of Work First families is the least served because they are usually at or approaching middle age and employment services typically haven't been available to this population.
- “Single Parent” – These families now comprise only one-third of the WFFA caseload. The typical families consists of a young (19 years old to 24 years old) black female who has one pre-school aged child. She did not finish high school and has few if any work skills. She has a very limited work history. She lives in eastern Kinston, one of the higher crime areas in the county. She does not own a car or have a driver's license. She may receive limited in-kind contributions from the child's father, but receives no child support on a consistent basis. The father is often in prison or long-term unemployed and paternity may be unresolved. If paternity is resolved, often a support order for Child Support has never been established therefore the recipient is dependent upon public support. Often, these

participants will withhold information in order to deceive Child Support from establishing paternity and or support.

- “Two Parent” – These families are the smallest portion of the WFFA caseload averaging less than 5 families per month. Before needing WFFA benefits, the father typically worked while the mother stayed home to care for the children. By avoiding childcare costs, these families were able to make ends meet as long as the father remained employed. These families usually do not request assistance if the father is able to quickly find another job. These families are required to complete 55 hours per week in the Work First Employment program if day care assistance is provided. If either parent elects to stay home with the child/children 35 hours per week are required.

According to the 2006 North Carolina Children’s Index one-fourth of Lenoir County children live below the federal poverty level and almost one-half (37%) of Lenoir County children are enrolled in the Free Lunch/Reduced Lunch program.² These poverty statistics are very troubling in light of the fact that children who grow up poor are more likely to experience negative outcomes. Unlike children from affluent homes, poor children have a greater risk of poor health, dying during childhood, experiencing out-of-wedlock births, dropping out of school, lower end of grade test scores, being retained a grade in school, and becoming a victim of a violent crime.³

Outcomes for these children are better when the child attends a quality pre-school program. The Division of Child Development’s “Star-rated” licensing system for child care facilities and the quality enhancement grants from the Lenoir Greene Partnership for Children have encouraged and enabled local child care providers to improve their programs and to hire more qualified teachers. Local families now spend approximately one-third of their income for child care. This cost increase often places quality care out of reach for lower income working families. Both the federal and state governments allocate funds to subsidize child care. However, Lenoir County’s share of these allocations is sufficient to serve only about one-third of the eligible local children. Families without subsidies are left to make very difficult choices each month. This lack of subsidy funding creates a serious barrier for many middle and low income working families.

In summary, the short-term outlook for low-income workers in Lenoir County is not encouraging. To successfully compete in the emerging economy, these workers will need to develop more marketable skills and need help to obtain safe, reliable child care and transportation.

Finally, the eroded value of the TANF funding has an adverse impact on our ability to serve families. The TANF funding in Lenoir County has remained the same since 2000. When adjusted for inflation, this grant was worth 22% less in 2002 than it was in 1997. With the recent increase of inflation it is evident that WFFA grant is still remarkably less than the 1997. Each year, we face the choice of cutting staff needed to provide services or cut services. We have reduced the Work First staff for several

budget years in a row. Additional staffing cuts will significantly impair our ability to serve our clients. In addition, Congress recently reduced funding for child support services at the same time stricter TANF standards were imposed. Many of the participants who are receiving Work First today have more serious barriers to self-sufficiency than earlier participants. The remaining Work First clients have been labeled in several publications as the “hardest to serve.” Participants in this category have domestic violence, substance abuse, mental health and educational issues. Many may terminate from Work First and be deemed to be self-sufficient. However, some return maybe once every year with the persistent problems of poverty.

In today’s economy jobs that pay a living wage require skills and education, that most of the WFFA population lacks. Complying with the new TANF law, gives North Carolina and Lenoir County an opportunity to better help Work First families to gain marketable skills needed for true economic self-sufficiency. The question that many policy makers and long-term employees of the Department of Health and Human Services ask, “Is our welfare system really a welfare system anymore?” We have reduced the welfare rolls in a remarkable fashion, but according to Sharon Hirsch assistant director at Durham County Department of Social Services, “Welfare isn’t about a cash assistance check anymore, but that doesn’t mean we’re not giving help.” She continued by saying, “What has shifted, is the nature of the county’s social services caseload: from those on traditional welfare to working poor who struggle with food, health care, child care.”³

Attachment # 1, “A Look Continued” provides a more detailed description of the conditions in Lenoir County.

II. The Lenoir County Planning Process:

A. *Planning Committee:*

The Lenoir County Commissioners met on August 4, 2008 to consider the Standard vs. Electing county issue and the composition of the Local Planning Team. During that meeting the commissioners chose to remain an Electing County by a unanimous vote. On September 15, 2008 the Lenoir County Commissioners appointed the following individuals to the Local Planning Team:

- Mr. Jack B. Jones, DSS Director
- Ms. Donna Grady, Principal Moss Hill School, representing the local school system
- Mr. Joey Huff, Director Lenoir County Health Department, representing the Lenoir County Board of Health
- Ms. Jackie Brown, Lenoir County Commissioner and local business owner
- Ms. June Cummings, Director, Lenoir – Greene United Way
- Mr. Chris Maroules, local business owner
- Ms. Annetta Sanders, Director of Section 8 Housing, Kinston Housing Authority and former WFFA recipient

- Ms. Pat Rhodes, Executive director for Salvation Army's Community Center and a former WFFA recipient
- Mr. Mark Pope, Director, Lenoir County Economic Development
- Ms. Beverly Alston, Executive Director, Kinston Employment Security office
- Mr. Ken Jones, Director, Eastpointe

B. Public Comment:

The proposed Electing County Plan was opened for public inspection from October 5, 2008 through October 20, 2008 by posting the plan on the county website at www.co.lenoir.nc.us. Copies of the proposed plan were also available for inspection at Lenoir County Department of Social Services and the Lenoir County Manager's office. Copies of the plan were provided to the county manager and the Lenoir County Commissioners for their review before the final approval of this plan. Copies were also provided to the Lenoir County Board of Social Services. Advertisements posted in The Free Press, a Kinston newspaper, informed the public of the opportunity to comment. A public hearing was held by the Lenoir County Commissioners on October 20, 2008 in the County Courthouse to allow for public comment. The plan was then approved by the Lenoir County Commissioners on October 20, 2008 for submission to the State.

Following approval of the plan, the committee may meet periodically to evaluate the progress and outcome of the welfare reform efforts in Lenoir County and to consider plan revisions as necessary.

C. Planning Process

The Local Planning Team met on October 3, 2008. A wealth of reading and research material was provided to the committee. During the committee meeting, the Planning Team discussed the past success as an "Electing County" and made proposed changes to the Work First plan.

III. Lenoir County Outcomes and Goals for FY 2010-2011

A. Statewide Work First Goals:

The NC Department of Health and Human Services (hereafter DHHS), in consultation with the Lenoir County Department of Social Services and the Lenoir County Board of Commissioners, will establish levels of performance by counties in meeting the following state-level Work First Goals. For planning purposes, the county goals for FY 2007 are included with the understanding that the specific goals may change following approval of the state Work First Plan for 2010-2011.

The Lenoir County Welfare Reform Task Force recommends that Lenoir County adopt the following goals and outcomes established by the State and will be measured by reports generated at the state level.

1. Employment:

Self-sufficiency will be realized primarily through employment. One measure of the success of the Lenoir County Work First Program will be the number of participants who enter paid employment while receiving Work First benefits.

2. Meeting Federal Participation Rates:

Active participation in federal countable work activities and employment services will lead to employment. One measure of the success of the Work First Program is the percentage of mandatory participants who complete the federally required number of 35 hours of countable work activities each week.

3. Providing Employment Services:

Active participation in intensive employment services for all families is necessary in order to meet the participation rates and to ensure that families are served adequately before the end of the five-year limit. One measure of success in Work First is the percentage of families who are subject to the work requirements and who are actually receiving services to remove barriers to employment and to move families from welfare-dependency to employment. Providing employment services is imperative in order for families to save months of their 2 year state time clock for receiving WFFA benefits and also their 5 year federal time clock for benefits.

4. Benefit Diversion:

The most successful outcome possible is for an applicant to avoid the need to become a welfare recipient. This is also recognized in the federal law, which specifies diversion from public assistance as a desired outcome.

5. 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 because of a job are tracked to determine if they return to cash assistance. This plan reflects the goal as a percentage of all cases closed because of employment that should remain off of assistance. These are tracked on 6 and 12 month intervals to determine successful outcomes.

6. Job 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 influences a family's well being. This measure will be based on the number of responsible adults that leave

Work First Family Assistance (WFFA) for employment who are still employed at 6 to 12 months intervals following Work First termination.

It should be noted that it has been suggested from the State of North Carolina that only the participation rate goals be tracked as performance measures.

B. County Developed Outcome Goals:

1. Child Support:

All children are entitled to support from both parents. An effective child support effort will help provide families with necessary resources and prevent families from returning to welfare. The key components of this measure are (1) the percentage of Work First children whose non-custodial parent(s) are under order to pay support, and (2) the percentage increase in child support collections for Work First families. Lenoir County will use Data Warehouse reports and state-generated reports in the NCXPTR system to track progress toward meeting these goals. We project a 5% increase in the number of Work First families with a Child Support order and a 5% increase in overall Child Support Collections for Work First (current and former) families in Lenoir County by June 30, 2011.

2. Increasing the Participation Rate for Work First

There has been recent discussion from the state level to develop one goal for the Work First program due to the fact that the federal government only looks at participation rate. Lenoir County is currently hovering slightly above the 50% federal participation rate and is substantially above the 38% state average. However, the committee feels that Lenoir County could achieve a rate of 60%. The federal government has suggested that if states do not meet participation rates that there will be penalties. The state in turn has suggested that those penalties could be passed down to the counties not meeting the participation rates. The committee also feels that since the WFFA caseload is relatively small, that we need to surpass our goals on a consistent basis, due to the fact that one month with a substantial reduction in participation rate could negatively influence an entire fiscal year.

IV. Plans to Achieve and Measure the Outcomes and Goals:

A. Activities:

The following Work First activities are designed to enable Lenoir County to meet the goals listed above to describe activities that Lenoir County Work First Participants must engage in activities for purposes of meeting work requirements or to pursue personal or family goals related to employment and self-sufficiency.

1. Employment

a) Unsubsidized Employment

This employment can be part-time or full-time unsubsidized work paid 100% by the employer.

2. Job Search and Job Readiness

This activity is countable for twelve weeks and four consecutive weeks in a federal fiscal year (Oct. 1 through Sept. 30). However, all job-ready participants will be assigned job search and/or job readiness activities in addition to other program activities until the participant finds employment.

a) Job Search

Lenoir County will offer structured job search supervised by a Work First Employment Social Worker and a representative from STRIVE. Participants will meet with either the social worker or the STRIVE representative at least weekly to:

- Identify employment goals;
- Outline strategies to engage in meaningful Job Search by registering with local employment agencies, attending Strive Job Readiness Classes, and registering with the JobLink Center;
- Establish a minimum number of employer contacts to be made each week; and
- Review the previous week's employer contacts and develop strategies to overcome newly identified barriers.

The Mutual Responsibility Agreement will be amended to include additional job readiness training as additional barriers to employment are identified. Job search activities may be conducted in groups or an individual setting dependent upon the number of participants in this activity. Participants in Job Search activities must keep a written log of the employers contacted, name of the interviewer, and result of contact. Job search logs will be closely scrutinized for accuracy since past instances of conspiracy to commit fraud have been prevalent.

b) Job Readiness

Activities help participants to develop the knowledge, skills, and attitude necessary to be successful in employment. Job readiness is designed to provide instruction, an opportunity to practice new skills, and to become familiarized with general workplace expectations. This component is intended to help participants to obtain and maintain employment by enhancing job retention and advancement skills. STRIVE of North Carolina is currently providing many of these activities. Lenoir

Community College can also aid with the use of Key Train and Work Keys activities. Activities include but are not limited to:

- Resume and job application completion;
- Interview tactics and mock job interviews
- Developing appropriate responses to difficult interview questions;
- Problem-solving;
- Crisis management
- Planning
- Career readiness
- Appropriate interpersonal communication
- Assertiveness
- Time management for the Working Parent
- Developing a positive work attitude
- Good personal habits and hygiene

3. On-the-Job Training

On-the-Job (OJT) is a subsidized employment opportunity where an employer has agreed to hire and train a participant in exchange for a partial subsidy. This agreement is in the form of a contract. Lenoir County will explore all available local resources to support OJT activities including the WIA programs at Lenoir Community College, local Employment Security programs, and programs through the Older American's Act and the Youth Employment programs at Greene Lamp, Inc.

The programs listed above have limited enrollments based on available funding. For that reason, it is not always possible for a Work First participant to receive services from these programs. Based on availability of funding, Lenoir County will provide OJT activities to job-ready participants who are unable to enroll in one these programs or to obtain non-subsidized employment.

Lenoir County Work First OJT will be limited to a maximum of 6 months with the duration of the OJT contract driven by the complexity of the skills required for each job. Each OJT contract will include:

- A job description listing the skills and knowledge necessary to perform the job;
- The number of hours worked per week;
- An outline of the employer's plan to teach the skills needed for the job;
- A guarantee that the participant will be paid at a rate comparable to others performing the same or similar job with that employer including benefits;
- A requirement that the participant receive wages equal to the minimum wage or higher;

- An assurance that the subsidy paid to the employer will be equal to the amount of the family's Work First payment in the month the participant begins OJT, but not to exceed one-half of the wages paid to the Work First participant;
- An agreement that the OJT subsidy amount will remain constant during the OJT employment period (provided the participant continues to work for that employer); and
- An agreement by the employer to protect regular employees by instituting a grievance procedure, ensuring that OJT participants do not displace regular employees, and guaranteeing that OJT participants do not replace regular workers that have been laid off.

OJT has been included in the Work First Employment program and its predecessor program Job Opportunities and Basic Skills, (JOBS). Finding other agencies or private entities to enter into OJT contracts has been problematic. However, if funding is available and further tweaking is needed to meet federal participation rates, OJT may become a viable component to achieve success with federal and county defined participation rates.

4. Work Experience

Work experience is an unpaid training opportunity with a company, agency, organization, or governmental office (public, private, non-profit, and for profit). This activity is intended to provide meaningful duties that have relevance to the local labor market and allow the Work First participant to gain needed work history and experience. Participants who are unable to obtain un-subsidized employment, who need to develop stronger job references, or who lack job-entry skills are good candidates for this activity. Work First Work Experience placements are well supervised. A Work First Employment social worker develops the Work Experience sites by contacting local employers who contract with the Work First Program. These contracts include guarantees that Work First participants are not displacing laid-off employees and that the employer has a grievance policy for regular employees who feel that displacement has occurred. The participants in this component are covered by a Department of Health and Human Services worker's compensation plan that covers any work experience injuries that could occur.

A Human Resource Placement Specialist or Social Worker will regularly monitor all Lenoir County Work First Experience placements to resolve problems and provide supportive services as necessary. The supportive services will be mainly to the participant. However, consultation with the work experience provider may be warranted. Work First participants must submit written weekly reports of hours completed signed by the site supervisor. It is the goal that through work experience contracts that some of the participants in Work First will use this opportunity to prove that they can be productive at the work site and eventually hired.

5. Vocational Educational Training

Vocational Educational Training is education or training designed to provide the participant with the basic skills and certification necessary for employment. This activity may include training used as a primary activity for the participant when it is likely that successful completion will result in employment at wages higher than the participant could attain without the training. Participants are limited to 12 months in a lifetime in this activity for federal tracking purposes. Lenoir Community College provides a majority of the Vocational Educational Training for Lenoir County Work First participants through the college's continuing education, and vocational education courses.

6. GED/HS Completion for Teen Heads of Households

Teenage heads of households, under age 20 will be encouraged to remain in school through graduation from high school or attainment of a GED. Teenaged participants are expected to maintain satisfactory school attendance, including GED studies, and to demonstrate progress toward graduation using the local school system's definition to determine satisfactory attendance and progress.

7. Job Skills Training Directly Related to Employment

Participants may choose to enroll in one of the short-term (less than 3 months) courses at Lenoir Community College that are specifically designed to allow the participant to obtain the knowledge required to enter employment in a specific career such as a Nursing Assistant position or a Child Care teacher position. Each enrolled participant is expected to attend class and demonstrate progress toward completion. These participants must provide written attendance and progress reports every two weeks signed by the course instructor who supervises the participant on a daily basis. This activity is utilized along with other core activities.

Job-ready adult participants may also be referred to Lenoir Community College for testing using the Work Keys and Key Train tools. These tools have been developed and used to measure baseline skill requirements for manufacturing and other occupations, and to provide training to participants to improve basic work skills. The college has already profiled jobs to establish the foundation skill requirements for specific jobs. Each participant works at his/her own pace using a computer-based assessment and training program. The program assesses each participant's competency with regard to the established foundation skills identified. Based on this assessment, the participant then completes Key Train education elements to improve any foundation skills deficiencies identified. After successfully completing the Key Train component, each participant receives a bronze, silver, or gold

certificate indicating the participant's level of competence achieved. Many Lenoir County employers now require job applicants to have a Work Keys certificate. Lenoir Community College staff provides daily supervision of participants in the Key Train and Work Keys activities and assist the participants when necessary. The Work Keys-Key Train component is designed as "open entry – open exit" and independent study program; therefore, a participant can begin the component without waiting for a new class to begin. This will help to reduce the lost time participants often have to wait to begin a traditional skill training program at the college. These participants must provide written attendance and progress reports every two weeks signed by the course instructor who supervises the participant on a daily basis. This activity is utilized along with other core activities.

8. Education Directly Related to Employment

This activity includes Adult Basic education, ESL, GED, or other courses designed to provide knowledge and skills required for the specific occupations or work settings chosen by the participant such as a nursing assistant position or a child care teacher position which both require a high school diploma or GED before employment. Each enrolled participant is expected to attend class and demonstrate progress toward completion. These participants must provide written attendance and progress reports every two weeks signed by the course instructor who supervises the participant on a daily basis. This activity is utilized along with other core activities.

9. Satisfactory Attendance at Secondary School or in a Course of Study Leading to a Certificate of General Equivalence

This activity includes regular attendance (according to the requirements of the school or course of study) in high school or GED classes sponsored by Lenoir Community College regardless of whether a high school diploma or GED is a requirement for employment in the participant's chosen field of occupation. Participants must demonstrate progress using a quantitative measure such as a timeframe for completion based on the institution's standards. Lenoir County Schools and Lenoir Community College provide these activities. Each enrolled participant is expected to attend class and demonstrate progress toward completion. These participants must provide written attendance and progress reports every two weeks signed by the course instructor who supervises the participant on a daily basis. This activity is utilized along with other core activities.

B. Supportive Services

The following supportive services can be provided to Work First eligible families using Work First Block Grant funds. The list is not exhaustive. The agency will

ensure that Work First does not duplicate existing and available resources or services. The DSS Director based on the availability of funding may adjust the spending limits. Lenoir County will add services as appropriate and when available.

1. Case Management:

Case Management means planning and directing the provision of, and/or directly providing services. This includes tracking of what has been provided and what can be provided in relation to the family's needs. Activities include determination and coordination of conditions and methods of service delivery that will best support the family's efforts toward self-sufficiency. This means assuming the role of primary agent who assures dependable and coordinated provision of services to the client as he or she moves toward self-sufficiency.

Case management includes, among other things, gathering information through various methods, such as home visits, interviewing, formal testing, and self-assessment instruments. It includes coordination with agency staff and other community resources when appropriate to prevent duplicative assessments and services. The purchase of diagnostic evaluations to assess an individual's self-sufficiency needs is an allowable use of funds. Time spent arranging for consultative examinations is considered case management.

Case Management activities may include:

- Initial assessment and periodic reassessment of families' needs and participants' job readiness;
- Examination of constructive ways to resolve work-related and family-related issues;
- Mutually-developed strategies (by the participant and worker) for self-sufficiency;
- Identification of responsibilities of both the participant and agency in facilitating the completion of plans;
- Planning and monitoring a participant's job search activity;
- Arranging and/or providing transportation;
- Arranging child/adult care; and
- Arranging any other services needed by the family.

3. Child Care:

Lenoir County plans to use Work First Block Grant if available to purchase or provide child care for eligible WFE families and for employed families who meet 200% of poverty guidelines.

4. Work-Related Expenses:

Work-related expenses are related to accepting or retaining employment (i.e., equipment, tools, uniforms, car repairs, and insurance, etc.). These items will be purchased or provided, as needed, to enable the recipient to accept and maintain employment. Covered work-related expenses must be non-recurring. Payment of these expenses is limited to \$500 per participant per job not to exceed \$1,000 per year.

5. Transportation Services

Transportation services will be purchased (or reimbursed directly to the participant) when the participant owns their own transportation. When the participant is receiving transportation from a third party and a formal contract doesn't exist between the 3rd party and the department, the department will reimburse the client. It will be the responsibility of the client to reimburse the third party with the payment. When no other transportation resources are available the Lenoir County Transit System (LCTS) will be the primary provider of transportation services; however, the county may purchase transportation services from other local vendors when LCTS is unable to provide the needed service. Transportation services are limited to \$300 per participant per month. At the supervisor's discretion in unusual situations, this limit may be increased to \$500 per month. Unusual situations may include but are not limited to participants living outside of the City of Kinston who incur greater travel costs than the typical participant. It is suggested that the transportation reimbursement rate increase for participant who own their own transportation. It is recommended that the county will reimburse the participant \$5 per day for inside the county transportation and \$8 a day for outside the county transportation.

6. Participation Expenses

Participation expenses include miscellaneous items or services needed by the family in order to participate in an activity agreed upon by the caseworker and the family, such as work shoes, uniforms or tools, registration fees, insurance coverage, etc. With supervisory approval, participation expenses may also be used to identify and recognize health-related needs such as alcohol and drug dependency. This may also include payment for counseling and/or treatment. Participation expenditures are limited to \$600 per month per participant not to exceed \$1,200 per year.

7. Personal and Family Counseling

Participants will be referred to the area mental health Local Management Entity for personal and family counseling services or purchased from a qualifying agency to resolve serious emotional conflicts based on the availability of funding. Family who have a need for parenting classes will be

referred to the Lenoir County Cooperative Extension office for parenting classes.

8. Individual and Family Adjustment

Participants will be referred to the area mental health agency, school counselors, Lenoir County Cooperative Extension Services, and other area resources to receive individual and family adjustment services to enable the participant and/or family to recognize, understand, and cope with obstacles to reaching their goals. These obstacles include household management, consumer affairs, family life, alcoholism, drug addiction, mental retardation, emotional disturbances, and school-related problems, etc.

9. Day Care for Adults

Based on the availability of Work First funding, Lenoir County may purchase Adult Day Care services for a disabled adult family member when these services are necessary to allow a Work First parent to participate in program activities or employment and when the family is unable to obtain the necessary services from other programs or resources. Day care for adults provides organized day activities and services purchased from an outside agency that promote personal independence, social, physical, and emotional well being. These services may cover the cost of food, transportation, and attendance fees. In all cases, adult day care services must be provided in a home or center that has been certified to meet State standards.

10. Counseling and Problem-Solving

Work First social workers and Human Resource Placement Specialist will provide counseling to the family that enhances the family's problem solving, decision-making, and conflict resolution skills to begin to eliminate barriers to self-sufficiency and build upon family strengths.

V. Administration:

A. *Authority:*

It is recommendation of the Lenoir County Work First Planning Team, that the Lenoir County Work First Program should continue to be administered by the Lenoir County Department of Social Services.

B. *Organization:*

The Lenoir County Department of Social Services Organization is summarized below. A copy of the agency's organizational chart is included as Attachment # 3

Lenoir County plans to consolidate Work First duties such as employment services and eligibility determination for cash assistance families with few barriers to employment, Emergency Assistance, and 200% of Poverty Services. The Human Resource Placement Specialists will provide both eligibility and employment services for these “lower needs” families. The Work First Employment social workers will continue to provide employment services for families with significant barriers to employment such as a history of involvement with Children’s Protective Services, domestic violence, substance abuse, felony convictions, serious mental health problems, or a lengthy history of welfare dependency. The Human Resource Placement Specialists will determine WFFA eligibility for these “higher needs” families.

- The Adult and Family Services Division is responsible for all services and activities related to the Work First Program, Adult Service, the Child Care Subsidy Program, Medical Transportation Services through Medicaid and EDTAP and Emergency Assistance. The following duties are assigned to division staff:

The two Human Resource Placement Specialists in the Work First unit are responsible for Intake and Eligibility determination for all WFFA cases, on-going eligibility determination for “higher needs” WFFA cases and all “Child Only” WFFA cases, Benefit Diversion, Family Employment Supportive Services (200% of poverty cases) eligibility determination and on-going case management, and Employability Assessment, WFE Employment Services, and Supportive Services for “lower needs” WFE cases.

The WFE Social Workers are responsible for the full employability assessment, employment services, WFE case management services, and supportive services for all “higher needs” WFE cases, all TANF-Domestic Violence cases, Employment Services for Non-custodial Parents, and Parenting Services. The WFE Social Workers will utilize home visits where required to attain program participation.

The Child Care Subsidy Services team consists of two Income Maintenance case managers who determine eligibility for subsidy services and have on-going case management responsibilities for all subsidy cases and a unit Leadworker who works with the Child Care Providers.

Two Processing Assistant IV positions are responsible for arranging and coordinating non-emergency medical transportation for Medicaid recipients and Elderly and Disabled Transportation Program (EDTAP) recipients.

The Adult Services team consists of one Adult Services Supervisor and three Adult Services Social Workers and one part-time Adult Services Social Worker. Emergency Assistance eligibility is the responsibility of Adult Services at this time.

One Office Assistant position is responsible for maintaining intake logs, tracking information about day care attendance sheets and utilizing computer systems to track data and information for the program manager and supervisors in the division.

- The Child Welfare, Child Support, Medicaid, Food and Nutrition, and the Administrative Division comprises the remaining divisions of the Lenoir County Department of Social Services.

C. First Stop:

Lenoir County will continue to adopt state policy related to Option B for First Stop described in Work First manual section 104C. Adults applying for Work First Family Assistance or inclusions to an on-going case must complete First Stop registration with the Kinston Employment Security office or through the Job Link Center before applying for WFFA. If all adults (excluding single parents of a child under age 3 months who request an exemption from work activities, parents age 65 years or older, and parents receiving Disability Social Security benefits, SSI benefits, or 100% Disability Veterans Benefits) in the family applying for Work First Family Assistance or inclusion to an on-going case have not completed First Stop work registration, the visit will be considered an inquiry for Work First Family Assistance.

The family will be offered the opportunity to make a Medicaid application on the date the family visits the agency, unless all of the individuals inquiring about Work First Family Assistance are active in a Medicaid case. The family will be advised that each non-exempt adult must register for First Stop not more than ten working days before returning to the agency to apply or to request inclusion. Failure to complete First Stop work registration and return to the agency to request inclusion means that the on-going case will be issued a timely notice proposing termination.

Lenoir County does not plan to contract with ESC for additional employment services at this time. Many ESC services are now available on-line. Work First staff will assist participants to conduct other ESC activities on-line during the participant's DSS visit such as registering for unemployment insurance benefits and job search.

D. Child Care:

Lenoir County MOE and/or Federal Work First funds will be used to purchase subsidized child care services for the children of Work First Employment participants in need of assistance. The following children or families are not placed on the agency's waiting list:

- WFE families,
- Teen parents (under age 20) enrolled in middle school, high school, alternative high school, or GED classes,
- Children receiving Children’s Protective Services,
- Families who need care for Child Welfare to prevent foster care placement, and
- Children in county custody.

All other families who request subsidized child care services are served from the agency’s waiting list on the following priority:

1. Children’s Protective Services children,
2. Work First Employment Services Participants,
3. Child in Lenoir County DSS legal custody who need care for any reason,
4. Teen Parents attending school,
5. Child Welfare Services,
6. Employment
 - a. 1st priority to full-time employed
 - b. 2nd priority to part-time employed
7. Developmental needs,
8. Education and Training Leading to Employment

Children with special needs are placed on a separate waiting list using the same priorities. Lenoir County had no special needs children on a waiting list when this plan was written.

Lenoir County will use Work First funds to purchase child care services for employed families who meet the eligibility requirements for 200% of poverty and when other subsidy services are unavailable and Work First funds are available. The Lenoir County priority for Child Care Services is Attachment # 4 to this document.

E. Transportation:

Work First Employment Services participants may receive transportation assistance to all support program activities. The Lenoir County Transit System is the primary provider of transportation services for Work First participants. The Lenoir County Department of Social Services also contracts with local taxi companies, provides direct reimbursement to participants who use their own vehicles and provides direct reimbursement to the client to reimburse family or friends who transport participants. Work First staff arranges transportation services for participants when family or friends aren’t available or consistently available. The maximum monthly transportation benefit for each WFE participant will be set at the beginning of each fiscal year and will be based on the availability of funding.

When it is more cost efficient and economical, covered services may include up to \$600 per family to assist with the down payment for a vehicle. Families may receive assistance with a vehicle down payment once per family.

Employed former WFE participants who no longer receive WFFA due to wages may receive Family Employment Supportive Services. This may include transportation assistance for twelve months if the family's income remains below 200% of the federal poverty and the family meets all other eligibility criteria. Eligibility for this program will be for a year from the date of application. Other Lenoir County working families who meet the 200% of poverty eligibility criteria may receive transportation assistance for twelve months.

Lenoir County will budget approximately \$90,000 per year for Work First transportation services per year.

F. Substance Abuse Services:

Due to a decrease in available funding and difficulty in hiring a qualified individual, Eastpointe, the Area Mental Health Authority for Sampson, Duplin, Wayne, and Lenoir Counties has been unable to co-locate a Qualified Substance Abuse Professional (QSAP) in the DSS office. Work First staff screens all applicants and recipients for substance abuse issues using the AUDIT and DAST-10 and the Substance Abuse Behavioral Indicator Checklist. Each applicant and recipient signs a consent form (DSS-8129) authorizing DSS Work First staff and Eastpointe staff to share necessary information related to the individual's substance abuse issues and/or treatment. Individuals who have been convicted of a Class H or I substance abuse felony in North Carolina or who screen positive are referred to Eastpointe or to contracting agency for Eastpointe for a full assessment of substance abuse problems and appropriate treatment. In the event that Eastpointe or contracting agency staff determines a need for further assessment or treatment, the staff coordinates with DSS to have the Mutual Responsibility Agreement completed and signed.

G. Family Violence Option:

Lenoir County adopted the North Carolina Family Violence Option to assist those participants who are or have been victims of family violence by providing the necessary tools to address the issues related to the abuse. For some participants, the Option provides an opportunity for a waiver of one or more Work First requirements. For all participants, however, the Option seeks to heighten awareness of family violence and provides the means and impetus to develop appropriate methods for dealing with this issue.

Adults seeking Work First cash assistance, Emergency Assistance, and Family Employment Services, including payees in child only cases and teen heads of

household are given written and verbal information about family violence and the services available to deal with the issue. Should the adult self-disclose or the worker find evidence of family violence, the worker discusses with the individual the services available to deal with the issue and makes any appropriate referrals.

All WFFA applicants and WFE participants are notified of the potential to request a waiver of some or all of the Work First requirements because of Domestic Violence. Participants are given the Family Violence Option brochure (DSS-6967) along with written materials from SAFE in Lenoir County, a local domestic violence agency. If, at any time, a participant discloses being a victim of family violence, the participant is referred to an individual trained in family violence at SAFE in Lenoir County, a local family violence agency where a family violence counselor conducts a screening and/or an assessment of the participant's barriers to obtaining and/or keeping a job and meeting other Work First requirements.

Family Counselors at SAFE and Children's Protective Services social workers work closely with Work First staff to ensure that families receive necessary services, and to assist victims of family violence to implement a safety plan for the family. A copy of the TANF/Domestic Violence Plan for Lenoir County is included as Attachment # 5. Under this plan, SAFE assesses the family's violence situation and the family's ability to participate with the Work First program. This agreement allows the SAFE Family Counselor to assist the family with relocation expenses, legal expenses, and other emergency needs related to the family violence issue. DSS then reimburses SAFE for approved expenditures up to \$1,000 per family.

Lenoir County receives a separate allocation from the Division of Social Services for TANF-Domestic Violence Emergency Assistance. These funds are used to support the family as they implement the family's safety plan. Covered services include help with housing and utility costs, transportation and travel costs, legal expenses, counseling, and other emergency needs. It should be noted that travel often encompasses travel to other states and, in very rare occasions, outside of the country. Sometimes travel may be in the form of purchasing fuel for the participant's vehicle or a bus ticket for the participant and their child/children. Another cost associated with either of these modes of transportation is food and lodging. All of the aforementioned expenses should be addressed on a case by case basis with strong input from SAFE and the DSS supervisor of the Domestic Violence Emergency Assistance program. Due to the complex nature of the logistics involved in this type of safety plan, extreme latitude should be granted to ensure the safety of the individual in crisis.

H. Maintenance of Effort (MOE):

As an Electing County, Lenoir County's Maintenance of Effort is reduced to \$921,356 per year. The following activities and services will be funded using MOE funds:

I. *Child Welfare Services:*

Lenoir County plans to use \$1,241,667 of federal TANF funds for child welfare services each year.

VI. Emergency Assistance:

Lenoir County will provide Emergency Assistance to families with sporadic emergency needs, such as a utility cut-off or a pending eviction due a temporary interruption of income or a sporadic episode of need beyond the family's ability to pay. Emergency Assistance benefits are not intended to improve the family's current standard of living or to meet on-going needs. Emergency Assistance is intended to provide non-recurring, short-term benefits designed to deal with the specific episode of need and may not extend beyond one 30-day period per year. See Attachment #6 for a detailed description of the Lenoir County Emergency Assistance Program, services, eligibility criteria, and restrictions.

In keeping with the philosophy that every family desires and needs to be self-sufficient, we propose that every family receiving Emergency Assistance be required to enter into a Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA) stating what steps the family will take to insure future emergencies of the same manner will be avoided. Future assistance from the Emergency Assistance program will be based on whether the family has complied with the conditions stated in the MRA or by supervisor approval for situations involving special circumstances.

An eligible family will be certified to receive Emergency Assistance during one thirty day period between July 1st and June 30th each year. The family may receive up to \$600 of Emergency Assistance per year. Families receiving Emergency Assistance may also be certified to receive Family Employment Supportive Services up to twelve months beginning with the month of application for Emergency Assistance as appropriate to meet the family's needs.

Eligible families must have an emergency that is a threat to health, life, safety, or employment status for which Emergency Assistance funds or a combination of Emergency Assistance funds and other available resources will resolve the emergency situation.

Only short-term benefits may be provided. Short-term benefits are defined as:

1. Non-recurring, short-term benefits designed to deal with a specific episode of need;
2. Not intended to meet recurring or ongoing needs; and
3. Not extending beyond four months.

Based upon the Children's Protective Services worker's recommendation, parents of children in DSS custody with a plan of reunification and who meet all other eligibility requirements will be eligible for Emergency Assistance provided the parent is in

compliance with the reunification plan and family reunification is expected to occur within the next sixty days.

Based upon the DSS Children's Protective Services social worker's recommendation, families under investigation for alleged child abuse or child neglect, families where abuse and/or neglect has been substantiated, and families currently receiving protective services may receive Emergency Assistance without regard to employment if the Emergency Assistance will alleviate the family crisis and thereby, avoid foster care placement or future abuse and/or neglect of the child(ren). The family must meet all other eligibility criteria for Emergency Assistance other than employment criteria. Social workers in Children's Protective Services should make prudent, fiscal decisions when recommending the use of Emergency Assistance fund for families under investigation or for families that are due to be reunified. Participants receiving help with rent and/or utilities should have, or have the immediate opportunity to achieve income that is sustainable to pay ongoing bills. These families are limited to a maximum of \$600 in a thirty-day period once per year.

The DSS agency based on availability of funding may adjust spending limits for Emergency Assistance.

VII. Services to low income families (Under 200% of poverty):

Lenoir County may provide Family Employment Services if funding is available to families who do not receive WFFA benefits and who are employed or are experiencing a temporary (four months or less) period of unemployment between jobs. See Attachment #7 for a detailed description of the Lenoir County Family Employment Services Program. The DSS Director based on the availability of funding may adjust spending limits for the Family Support Services Program. Services described in this section may be provided to a family with income at or below 200% of poverty, provided there is a child in the household who is under age 18 and the family meets the other program guidelines in Work First Manual Section 102 with the following exceptions:

- Adults, who have quit a job or WFE work experience placement, abandoned a job or WFE work experience placement, or voluntarily reduced pay or work hours without a good cause reason are not eligible for assistance for a three month period. Quitting a job or reducing work hours in order to attend college, training, or other post-secondary school will not meet the definition of "good cause".
- Adults who are fired from a job or WFE work experience due to a personal conduct reason, for which any reasonable person would expect to be fired, are not eligible for benefits for three months beginning the month the job ended. Examples: theft, embezzlement, assaults on a customer or employer.

These services are designed to support job retention and advancement, strengthen the family, promote the healthy development of children and parents; and encourage the formation of two-parent families.

Services may be provided to enable families to participate in a wide range of activities that will prepare them to seek and retain employment or enrich their family's life.

Lenoir County will not provide services that meet the federal definition of assistance.

Lenoir County will assess the family members' skills, abilities, and needs, including the children's needs, as you would Work First cash assistance recipients. The HRPS will identify the barriers and challenges which may be preventing the family from maintaining self-sufficiency. Jointly with the family members, the HRPS will develop a plan for how the adults will stay employed and a Mutual Responsibility Agreement.

Services and assistance available based on 200% of poverty criteria are limited to \$600 per month not to exceed \$1,200 per family per year.

VIII. Exemption from the Work Requirement:

A. *Child Under Three Months Old*

Lenoir County will exempt a new mother from work activities for three months following the birth of a baby. The new mother must provide a written statement from her physician if she requests an exemption for a longer period due to incapacity. If the mother later has another child, she may request another three month exemption not to exceed a total of 12-months of exemption in her lifetime. Although new mothers are exempted from work activities, these individuals will be subject to Pay-After-Performance. The HRPS and the participant will jointly develop a MRA to include these activities:

- Well-baby check-ups for the baby
- Post-partum check-up for the mother
- Arranging for primary and back-up child care to begin after the 3-month work exemption ends
- Registering for WIC services
- Applying for Child Support Services to establish paternity and support for the baby
- Meeting with the HRPS in the last month of the 3-month exemption to modify the MRA, identify barriers and supportive services needed, and select work activities for the following month.

B. Domestic Violence

Families experiencing domestic violence may request an exemption from work activities. The request for exemption must be supported by a recommendation from SAFE in Lenoir County, CPS staff, or Work First staff. Although these families are exempted from work activities, these individuals will be subject to Pay-After-Performance. These families may be exempted from some or all Work First activities, based on the recommendations of the DSS CPS social worker, SAFE staff, and/or Work First staff. These families will develop a MRA jointly with the Work First staff. This MRA will include activities necessary to implement the family's safety plan and supportive services to be provided. The Lenoir County TANF-DV Emergency Assistance Plan is Attachment # 8 to this plan. Activities included on the MRA may include but are not limited to:

- Attending the Empowerment classes at SAFE
- Searching for new housing
- Establishing a new household
- Registering children in a new school
- Attending court
- Attending counseling
- Meeting with attorney
- Arranging for child care

C. Incapacity

Adults who are incapacitated and unable to work or participate in program activities may be exempted from all or some program activities. A written statement from a physician must support the request for exemption. The statement must include the expected duration of the incapacity and degree of capacity for participation if any. Although these families are exempted from work activities based on the recommendation of the physician, these individuals will be subject to Pay-After-Performance. These families will develop a MRA jointly with the Work First staff. This MRA will include activities and supportive services to be provided. Activities included on the MRA may include but are not limited to:

- Physician's visits
- Therapy sessions
- Applying for SSI or Disability Social Security benefits
- Filing an appeal of a SSI or Disability Social Security application
- Attending an appeal hearing
- Meeting with Vocational Rehabilitation

D. Caring for incapacitated family members in the home

Adults who are unable to fully participate in work activities because he/she is needed in the home to care for an incapacitated family member or household member may be exempted from some or all work activities. A written statement

from a physician must support the request for exemption. The statement must include the expected duration of the incapacity and degree of capacity for participation if any. Although these families may be exempted from work activities based on the recommendation of the physician, these individuals will be subject to Pay-After-Performance. These families will develop a MRA jointly with the Work First staff. This MRA will include activities and supportive services to be provided. Activities included on the MRA may include but are not limited to:

- Physician's visits
- Therapy sessions
- Applying for SSI, Disability Social Security benefits, and/or Medicaid for the family or household member
- Filing an appeal of a SSI or Disability Social Security denial
- Attending an appeal hearing
- Exploring alternatives such as Home Health
- Meeting with Vocational Rehabilitation

OPTIONAL PLAN ELEMENTS:

X. Innovative County Strategies:

A. *Supportive Services for Applicants*

The Work First intake staff will assist each adult applicant to develop short and long term employment goals, select appropriate program activities, and to initiate a Mutual Responsibility Agreement during the applicant's first visit. Lenoir County will offer intensive employment services to all adult applicants at intake in an effort to quickly move the family into employment or to an appropriate program component. This will give program participants an opportunity to immediately begin program activities with a minimum of lost time between intake and starting an activity.

B. *Pay-After-Performance:*

All on-going Work First cases (except "child only" cases) will be Pay-After-Performance beginning the first month of authorization. This policy applies to all single parent and two parent families including incapacitated individuals and individuals needed in the home to care for a sick family member. The monthly Work First payments will be released after the participant submits verification of compliance with the terms of the individual's Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA). Each MRA will include the activities and hours required for the participant each month and what supportive services the agency will provide. The hours and activities required will vary based on the participant's capacity to participate, which activities the participant selects, and what supportive services are required. Participants who substantially complete the required number of activity hours on his/her MRA will receive a WFFA payment. Substantially completing activity hours for able-bodied adults is defined as completing sufficient activity hours to meet federal participant requirements for the month. Substantially completing activity hours for participants who opted out of work activities for three months due to the birth of new baby, incapacitated adults, adults needed in the home to care for an incapacitated family member, or adults with reduced activity hours due to Domestic Violence is defined as completing the activities and hours listed on his/her MRA regardless of whether the scheduled activity or hours are federally countable. Participants who do not complete the required number of activities as agreed to on the MRA without a good cause reason will not receive a WFFA payment for that month.

C. *Benefit Diversion:*

Lenoir County will offer a Benefit Diversion package of benefits and intensive employment services to all applicants who expect to have a sufficient source of income within the next three months or who believe he/she will be able to find

employment within the next three months. This Benefit Diversion package of benefits will include a lump sum payment not to exceed three months of WFFA benefits for the family, intensive employment services to assist the family to rapidly obtain employment, and supportive services.

D. Services to Incapacitated Parents

The Work First Program allows a family just two years to become self-sufficient. For that reason, Lenoir County will offer employment services to all adult WFFA applicants. Although individuals with an incapacity may be temporarily unable to perform all program activities, each adult WFFA applicant/recipient will be expected to participate in program activities at the fullest appropriate level. Lenoir County will provide services to incapacitated applicants/recipients to maximize the participant's earning potential.

These participants will receive referrals to Vocational Rehabilitation Services, local sheltered workshops, or other appropriate employment or training services identified by the social worker and/or assistance in obtaining income from Social Security and/or Supplement Security Income. Assistance with these services may require the social worker to aid the participant in completing applications for these services.

Failure to meet for appointments with the social worker or to follow through on strategies offered by the social worker without a good cause reason will result in termination of WFFA benefits. Should the family reapply for WFFA, approval of the application will be based on whether the family has met with and followed through with the recommendations of social worker.

E. Services to Parents Whom are Needed in the Home to Care for a Sick Family Member

The Work First Program allows a family just two years to become self-sufficient. For that reason, Lenoir County will offer employment services to all adult WFFA applicants. Although individuals who are currently needed in the home to provide care for a sick family member may be temporarily unable to perform all program activities, each adult WFFA applicant/recipient will be expected to participate in program activities at the fullest appropriate level.

Adults who will be unable to fully participate in WFE activities more than two months will be offered services intended to maximize the participant's earning potential through referrals to the Community Alternative Program (CAP), to local home health and hospice providers, to the agency In-Home Aide Program, to Child Care Resource and Referral for help to identify provides who accept special needs children, or other appropriate services. When appropriate the WFE social worker will assist the family to obtain income from Social Security, Supplement Security Income, or the Veterans Administration.

These individuals will be required to meet with the social worker to explore all resources available to the family. Failure to meet with the Success for Families Team or to follow through on suggested course of action without a good cause reason will result in termination of WFFA benefits. Subsequent eligibility will be based on compliance with this requirement.

F. Services to Families to Avoid Foster Care Placement

Based on the recommendation of the DSS Children's Protective Services social worker, Lenoir County will provide emergency assistance to families who are receiving Children's Protective Services who are under investigation for alleged child abuse and/or child neglect, or when abuse and/or neglect have been substantiated. These services will be provided without regard to employment eligibility criteria and are intended to resolve a family crisis and remove or reduce the likelihood of foster care placement for the children and/or additional abuse and/or neglect. Families are limited to \$600 per month up to four months not to exceed \$1,200 per family per year.

XI. Special Issues

Local Unemployment Rate and Poverty

Like many of the counties “Down East”, Lenoir County is struggling to recover from the economic transitions that shook this area earlier in this decade. The total number of employed individuals is slowly rising by two to three percent per year. However, the local unemployment rate remains high and in August 2008 the rate was 6.9% for Lenoir County. There are few indicators of the rate dropping in the near future. The third largest employer in our county is Manpower Temporary Services, an agency that provides temporary workers to the manufacturing firms in our area. This shift to temporary employment has allowed employers to reduce hiring costs and benefit costs for their workforce. Although this shift may be good for employers, it has been a mixed blessing for employees. Workers employed through a temporary agency have little or no assurance that their jobs will exist tomorrow. This instability leads to anxiety and stress in the workforce. This concern is compounded by the limited benefits temporary workers receive. These lower paid employees often depend upon Medicaid or N. C. Health Choice to provide health insurance for their children because health coverage is unavailable through their employer or the cost is beyond their ability to pay.

We are also concerned because poverty rates for our area continue to exceed statewide averages. The 2008 North Carolina Children’s Index reports that one-fourth of Lenoir County children live below the federal poverty level and almost one-half (37%) of Lenoir County children are enrolled in the Free Lunch/Reduced Lunch program. These poverty statistics are very troubling in light of the fact that children who grow up poor are more likely to experience negative outcomes. Unlike children

from more affluent homes, poor children have a greater risk of poor health, dying during childhood, experiencing out-of-wedlock births, dropping out of school, lower end of grade test scores, being retained a grade in school, and becoming a victim of a violent crime.

XII. Eligibility Criteria

Lenoir County plans to use the following criteria to determine eligibility for WFFA benefits. Individual spending limits for services may be adjusted at the director's discretion based on the availability of funding

Manual Section	Proposed Policy
101 - Initial Screening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applicants must register with the First Stop Program at the Kinston Employment Security office not more than 10 workdays before applying for WFFA. • Applicants, excluding intact families, must cooperate with the Child Support Program before applying for WFFA.
102 - Short-term Services and Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The benefit limits for short-term services and benefits may be adjusted at the director's discretion based on the availability of funding. • Adopt state policy for Benefit Diversion with the exception that Benefit Diversion will be offered to any applicant who is unemployed but who has a good work history or who feels there is a high likelihood of finding a new job or other income within 3 months. • Follow county policy for Emergency Assistance. See Attachment # 7 for a detailed description of the Lenoir County Emergency Assistance criteria. • Provide Family Employment Services to families that meet 200% of Poverty guidelines according to Attachment # 8 Should additional funding become available, services will be expanded at that time. • Adopt state policy for Employment Services to Non-custodial parents of a WFFA child with the exceptions noted in section VIII above. • Services will be offered as funds allow.
104 – Application Interview	Adopt state policy with the addition that all caretaker relatives will be encouraged to seek legal custody of the children in their care.
104A - Individual Criminal Violations	Adopt state policy
104B- Substance Abuse/ Mental Health Initiative	Adopt state policy
104C- First Stop Employment	Lenoir County will continue with Option B of the state policy. Adult applicants or adults who request inclusion must register with the First

Assistance	Stop Program at the Kinston Employment Security office not more than 10 work days before applying for WFFA. Adults 65 years old or older and new mothers who receive a work exemption (S Code) following the birth of a baby (3-month maximum exemption) are exempted from the First Stop Program. Immediately following the 3-month exemption, new mothers must register with the First Stop Program.
105 - Federal 60-Month Time Limit	Adopt state policy. The Lenoir County DSS Board will hear all requests for Hardship Exemptions.
105A - Work First 24-Month Time Limit	Adopt state policy. The Lenoir County DSS Board will hear all requests for extension of benefits.
106 - Family Cap	Adopt state policy with the exception that newborns of a minor mother are included in the Family Cap Rule.
107 - Minor Parent Rules	Adopt state policy
108 - State/County Residence Rule	Adopt state policy
109 - Age Rule for Children	Adopt state policy
110 - Rule to Apply for A Social Security Number	Adopt state policy
111 - Citizenship / Immigrant Rules	Adopt state policy
112 Kinship / Living With Rule	Adopt state policy with these additions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A child or parent may be temporarily absent from the home up to 12 months for medical treatment. • A child or parent may be temporarily absent from the home no more than 30 days for all reasons other than to receive medical treatment.
113 - Parental Support and Care	Adopt state policy
114 - Income and Needs Assessment	SSI will be counted toward eligibility for WFFA
115 - Resources	Adopt state policy
116 - Child Support Services	Adopt state policy with the following additions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All applicants, except intact families, are required to cooperate with the Child Support Program before applying for WFFA. • The family is not eligible for WFFA benefits if the parent or caretaker fails to cooperate with the Child Support Program. • Families who fail to cooperate with the Child Support Program are referred to the Family Medicaid Unit for evaluation of Medicaid eligibility on the same day.
117 - Automatic Food Stamps	Lenoir County will not offer automatic Food Stamps to WFFA households. A separate Food Stamps application is required.
118 - Work	Adopt state policy with the following exceptions:

<p>Requirements and Services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Single parents of a child less than 3 months old may request an exemption from WFE work activities; however, the new parent will be required to complete some activities during this period including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-baby check-up • Post-partum check-up for mother • Register for WIC services • Make plans for primary and back-up child care at the end of the 3-month exemption period • Contact Child Support to establish paternity and support for the new baby. • Schedule visit to select program activities and identify need for supportive services at the end of the 3-month exemption period. • The family is limited to no more than 12 months exemption in a lifetime for the purpose of child birth. • All mandatory (able-bodied) participants will be scheduled to complete at least 35 hours of work or work-related activities per week and to submit weekly time sheets. • Job Search reports must be submitted weekly. • Transportation expenses for WFE participants, Family Employment Services participants, and Non-custodial parents of WFFA children are limited to \$300 per month but may be increased to \$600 per month at supervisor's discretion for unusual situation • Direct reimbursement of transportation expenses for use of a personal vehicle is limited to \$5 per day for participants working inside of Lenoir County and \$8 per day for participants working outside of Lenoir County. • All WFE participants are encouraged to complete high school or a GED within the 24-month time limit. • All unemployed WFE participants must complete STRIVE or other classes at Lenoir Community College if appropriate. • Adults who claim an exemption from WFE activities due to incapacity must provide a physician's statement indicating participant's functional capacity. The county reserves the right to request a functional evaluation from a qualified evaluator of the agency's choice. • Participants who have 3 "No shows" in one month for agency arranged transportation are ineligible for transportation services for a period of one month. A second occurrence of 3 "no shows" in one month will result in 3 months of ineligibility for transportation services • All participants who claim an incapacity exemption from WFE activities for more than two months will be referred to Vocational
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	<p>Rehabilitation for assessment and to develop training opportunities with sheltered workshops as appropriate.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All unemployed or under-employed adult applicants/participants must register for work at the Lenoir Community College JobLink Center. • Participants will be referred to the WIA Program at Lenoir Community College. If accepted into that program, the participant is required to comply with the terms of the WIA program as a condition of the MRA. • All Work First families with an adult under age 65 years are subject to Pay-After-Performance beginning the first months of receiving a Work First payment (excluding Benefit Diversion). This includes single-parent families in which the only child receives SSI. • Family is ineligible for one month for failure to submit a quarterly report.
119 - Work First for Two-Parent Families	<p>Adopt state policy with the following addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each parent must complete at least 35 hours of WFE activities per week. Families receiving child care subsidy services must complete 55 hours per week of WFE activities per family.
120 - Sanctions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt state policy with the following additions: • Job-Quit Sanction: -- 3 Months of Ineligibility The family is not eligible for a period of three months if the parent quits a job or WFE work-experience placement, abandons a job or WFE work-experience placement, or voluntarily reduces work hours or rate of pay without a good cause reason. <u>Quitting a job or reducing work hours in order to attend college, training, or other post-secondary education does not meet the definition of “good cause”.</u> Job abandonment is defined as failing to go to work and failure to notify the employer. For applicants, the 3 months of ineligibility begin the month the parent stops work or the work experience or reduces work hours or rate of pay. For recipients, the 3 months of ineligibility begin the month following expiration of an advance notice. The participant may cure this sanction by returning to work at an equivalent rate of pay and number of work hours compared to the last job. • Transportation “no show” Sanction: 1st Sanction - 1 month of Ineligibility for Transportation Assistance, 2nd Sanction – 3 months of Ineligibility for Transportation Assistance. Participants who have 3 "No shows" in one month for agency arranged transportation are ineligible for transportation services for a period of one month. A second occurrence of 3 "no shows" in one month will result in 3 months of ineligibility for transportation services. • Sanction for Non-cooperation with Child Support: The entire family is ineligible for Work First benefits until the parent or

	<p>caretaker has fully complied with the Child Support Program.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • MRA sanctions: (Same as state policy with these additions:) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants who claim an incapacity exemption from WFE activities for more than two months will be referred to Vocational Rehabilitation for assessment and to develop training opportunities with sheltered workshops as appropriate. Refusal of a Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) referral or failure to comply with the VR Program without a good cause reason will result in a MRA sanction. • All unemployed or under-employed adult applicants and participants who are determined to be "job-ready" must register for work at the Kinston Employment Security office, Lenoir Community College JobLink Center, and with all area temporary employment agencies. Failure to register for work with the JobLink Center, ESC, or local temporary employment agencies will result in a MRA sanction. • Participants will be referred to the WIA Program at Lenoir Community College. If accepted into that program, the participant is required to comply with the terms of the WIA program as a condition of the MRA. Refusal of a referral to WIA or failure to comply with the WIA program without a good cause reason will result in a MRA sanction.
130 - Application Processing	<p>Adopt state policy with the following exception:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elimination of automatic reopening of a WFFA case. The family must reapply if the assistance is terminated for any reason other than agency error or receipt of a Pay-After-Performance check due to compliance after two months of non-compliance. • All WFFA approvals for single parent or two parent families will be approved in Pay-After-Performance (payment type 2) status. • All WFFA approvals for "child only" cases will continue to be payment Type 1 status.
140 - Automated Inquiry and Match Procedures	<p>Adopt state policy with the following addition:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Department of Correction checks are mandatory at application and review for all applicants/recipients 16 years old or older.
201 - Reviews for Work First Family Assistance	Adopt state policy.
202 - Changes in Situation	Adopt state policy.
203 - Administrative Reopen / Reapplication	Elimination of automatic reopening of a WFFA case. The family must reapply if the assistance is terminated for any reason other than agency error or receipt of a Pay-After-Performance check due to compliance after two months of non-compliance.
204 - Change in County Residence	Adopt state policy

205 - Payment Rules for Payees	Adopt state policy
206 - SSI and 1634 Medicaid	Adopt state policy
207 - Fraud and Intentional Program Violations	Adopt state policy
210 - Payment Procedures	Adopt state policy
263 - Financial Responsibility: Part 1 - Overpayments	Adopt state policy
263 - Financial Responsibility: Part 2 - Underpayments	Adopt state policy
263 - Financial Responsibility: Part 3 - Reconciliation	Adopt state policy
264 - Notice and Hearings Process	<p>Lenoir County will adopt state notice and hearing policy with the following exceptions. Lenoir County's WFFA Hearing Process is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopt state policy for 1st level hearing before a local hearing officer. Agency Supervisors are appointed by the Director to serve as hearing officers. Work First supervisors do not serve as the hearing officer for a Work First hearing. • The Lenoir County Board of Social Services serves as the hearing officer for 2nd level WFFA hearings. All other state policy rules regarding 2nd level hearings are adopted. • The appellant may petition to Lenoir County Superior Court if dissatisfied with the result of the 2nd level hearing. <p>The Lenoir County Board of Social Services also serves as the hearing officer for all requests for a Hardship Exemption to the 60-Month Federal Time Limit or for Extensions of the 24-Month State Time Limit.</p>

XIII. Community Service Program

Lenoir County does not plan to require community service employment.

XIV. Appeals Process

Lenoir County adopts the appeals procedures as defined in the Work First manual and in N. C. G. S. 108A-79. As an Electing County, Lenoir County has established the following Appeals Process for Work First:

- Agency supervisors for Food Stamps, Medicaid, Child Support, Adult Services, and Children's Services will serve as the hearing officer for first level Work First hearings.
- The Lenoir County Board of Social Services serves as the hearing officer for all second level Work First hearings.
- The applicant or recipient may appeal to the Lenoir County Superior Court if dissatisfied with the results of the second level hearing.
- The Lenoir County Board of Social Services also serves as the hearing officer for all requests for a Hardship Extension of the 60-Month Federal limit or requests for WFFA benefits beyond the 24-month state limit.

XV. Review Prior to Expiration of Time Limits

Lenoir County will follow standard procedures for meeting the requirements of State Law {GS 108A-27.4(e)(7)} as detailed in Work First manual section 105A, IV that require a review of all Work First cases no later than three months before the expiration of time limits for receiving cash assistance to ensure that time limitations are computed correctly, that the family is informed in writing about public assistance benefits for which the family may be eligible after leaving Work First, to provide an extension of benefits if the family qualifies for an extension, to review family status and to assist the family to identify resources, and to support the family's needs to maintain employment and family stability.

XVI. Certification

On October 20, 2008 the Board of Commissioners for Lenoir County voted to approve the Amended Work First Plan for 2010 through 2011.

The vote was _____ for and _____ against.

_____ October 20, 2008
Paul Taylor, Chairman

References

¹ “Black Job Loss Déjà vu,” by Betsy Leondar-Wright, Dollar & Sense, The Magazine of Economic Justice, <http://www.dollarsandsense.org/archives/2004/0504leondar.html>

² Economic (In)Security, 2006 NC Children’s Index, www.ncchild.org

³ “Is Welfare Working?” <http://www.governing.com/articles/0802welfare.com>

Attachments

1 – A Look Continued – A detailed description of economic and social conditions in Lenoir County as they apply to the Work First Planning process.

2 – A Work First Progress Report – A description of Lenoir County’s success toward meeting Work First goals and a history of the Work First program in our county.

3 - Lenoir County DSS Organizational Chart

4 – Memorandum of Agreement between Lenoir County Department of Social Services and the Kinston Employment Security office

5 - Lenoir County Child Care Subsidy Priority

6 - Lenoir County TANF-Domestic Violence Emergency Assistance Plan

7 - Lenoir County Emergency Assistance for Families Program

8 – Lenoir County Family Employment Services Program – a description of services provided to families that meet 200% of poverty guidelines

9 – Samples of the Mutual Responsibility Agreements used in Lenoir County

10 – Application form for Emergency Assistance, 200% of Poverty Services, TANF-DV-EA.

11 – Sample MRA

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