

Wilson County's Family First Plan

*Engaging with Families to Support Child Safety,
Employability and Education*

Fiscal Years: 2023-2026

"Families are the Foundation of Our Workforce"

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Foreword

It is time for change... in the following pages, Wilson County proposes TANF changes that are in step with the 2020s rather than the 1990s when TANF in North Carolina was first implemented. A change that acknowledges the family as the foundation of our workforce. A change that is grounded in the understanding that if one's family is not well and one's children are not safe, it is virtually impossible to be a dependable long-term employee. A change which values individual and family progress and achievement. Our focus is on helping customers with major employability barriers become employable for long term employment rather than simply placing able-bodied people into dead-end jobs. In this plan we propose continuing very successful initiatives that proven to work with new initiatives aimed at strengthening the family as a foundational support for education and employment of its members.

Rationale

The TANF program is a shell of itself as it once existed in 1998 when then Governor Jim Hunt set the central focus of the program as an employment program and named it Work First. During that time there were close to 1,900 cases in Wilson County. Close to 1,500 of those cases were regular cash payment cases and approximately 400 child only cases. During the next several years the department experienced huge success at helping able-bodied participants acquire training and transition into jobs. For several years leading up to 2012, Wilson County was successful in helping hundreds of customers transition from cash assistance to employment. In the past decade, the program began to change dramatically. The number of applicants for the program decreased. The percentage of participants with extreme employability barriers begin to increase to the point they were the only participants left in the regular Work First Program. These are customers with serious mental health diagnosis including drug addiction, poor work history, criminal backgrounds, inadequate interpersonal skills and family issues such as domestic violence, dependent family members that suffer from serious physical and mental health issues, and participants that are a part of struggling families whose wellbeing is suffering.

Currently, in Wilson County and across North Carolina, the participant numbers are at a fraction of where they were when the Work First Program was first created. Wilson has 17 participants in the regular cash assistance program and 90 participants in the child only program. Participation has dropped because the incentive to participate in the program has declined significantly due to 1980s level cash payments, participation requirements that when considered against the cash assistance received add up to less than \$2.00 an hour. In addition, able-bodied participants are not applying because it is easier today than ever before to use on-line services to help find jobs. It is easy to see how the once very successful program has now lost its way.

We propose a new approach to helping current and future participants. A change in direction that still rewards participant progress and achievement. **We call our plan Families First.** You will see our name change throughout this document going forward. We seek to strengthen the

participant's family because it is the most important support system for employment. We seek to help challenged participants address their barriers to long-term employment through both family support and employability enhancement incentives. The following pages serve to outline Wilson County's Family First Plan.

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I. CONDITIONS WITHIN THE COUNTY

Wilson County's Family First Plan is a results-based proactive plan in addressing the needs of families with children living in poverty as well as vulnerable children and families to become economically stable. Since 1995 Wilson County's Work First employment caseload has declined approximately 90%.

This reduction is a result of Welfare Reform changes, innovative best practices, community collaborations and the focus on responsibility, not entitlement. Wilson County's focus has been helping families with children to become economically stable through promoting work, personal and family stability.

As of June 2020, the department has 17 single parent families receiving a cash assistance check. Child only cases (relative caregivers, caregivers with custody order, disabled parents providing for the care of a child or undocumented immigrant applying for child only) represent over three fourths of the total Work First cases at seventy four percent (74%) or 88 cases. Child Only Cases are not subject to work requirements or time limits. However, all NC Fast cases that have a custodial parent (biological parent, adoptive parent or stepparent) living in the home and are not included in the Work First case are subjected to a 60 Month State time clock. The child must be a legal US citizen to be eligible.

It is estimated 55% of all current Work First families lack a high school education or GED. Approximately 30% have some level of substance-related impairment and approximately 50% are experiencing physical and/or mental health issues.

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

- Poverty
- Lack of affordable, adequate and dependable transportation
- Lack of adequate and affordable housing
- Low wages
- Medical and physical limitations
- Criminal background
- Lack of affordable childcare
- Substance abuse
- Domestic violence
- Budgeting and financial management deficiencies
- Teen pregnancy
- Personal and family crisis
- Mental Health issues
- Lack of affordable health coverage

- Lack of job ready skills
- Illiteracy
- Lack of Hope

Wilson County typically has a higher unemployment rate than the state average; however, the county's unemployment rate has declined over the past few years. Below are Wilson County's average annual unemployment rates for the past year:

Year (June)	Wilson	NC
2014	8.8%	6.3%
2015	9.6%	5.8%
2016	8.7%	5.1%
2017	8.3%	4.7%
2018	7.9%	4.3%
2019	7.10%	4.1%
2020	11.80%	9.3%
2021	7.8%	4.9%

According to the 2019 US Census, the estimated persons living in poverty for Wilson County is 18.6%, higher than the state average of 13.6%.¹ According to the Kids Count Data Center, child poverty in Wilson County is 21.2%, higher than the state rate of 13.6%.²

Economic Development Outlook

Currently, economic growth in Wilson County is showing signs of improvement. Manufacturing jobs represent approximately one-third of our work force. Service related and retail jobs are stable.

II. PLANNING PROCESS

A. Planning Committee

Wilson County Boards

¹ <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC,wilsoncountynorthcarolina/PST045216>

² <http://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/2238-children-in-poverty?loc=35&loct=5#detailed/5/4910-5009/true/36,868,867,133,38/any/12873,4680>

Board of County Commissioners

Mr. Leslie Atkinson, Vice Chair
Ms. Sherry Lucas
Ms. JoAnne Daniels
Mr. Roger Lucas
Mr. Rob Boyette, Chair
Mr. Chris Hill
Mr. Bill Blackman

Board of Social Services

Ms. Mary Katherine Rowe, Chair
Ms Nancy Sallenger
Ms. Joanne Daniels, Vice Chair
Mr. Dante Pittman
Mr. Joe Shakour

Ms. Denise Stinagle, County Manager

Mr. Glenn Osborne, Director

Electing County Family First TANF Planning Committee

Ms. JoAnne Daniels
Ms. Mary Katherine Rowe
Ms. Cameron Cochran
Dr. Kendra King
Ms. Lesley Barnes
Ms. Erika Simmons
Mr. Glenn Osborne
Mr. Don Hicks
Ms. Nikki Mears
Ms. Ashley Higson

Board of County Commissioners
Area Board of Mental Health
Wilson Forward
Wilson County Public Schools
Wilson County Transportation
Diversified Opportunities, Inc
Department of Social Services Rep.
Department of Social Services Rep.
Department of Social Services Rep.
Department of Social Services Rep.

The Local Planning Committee is fully representative of the greater Wilson County community and meets all statutory requirements for committee representation. Additional community members were invited to join in the discussions and planning from the following agencies/businesses:

Ms. Tiffany Boone
Ms. Valerie Bulluck
Mr. Burwell Stark
Mr. Rob Holston

Faith Connections Admin-WCDSS
Wilson County Health Dept.
NCWorks
Wilson Community College

B. Public Comment

Opportunity for public review and comments on Wilson County's 2023-2026 Family First Plan were provided from December 20, 2021 through January 3rd, 2021. Copies of the Family First Plan are posted at the County Office, Wilson County Department of Social Services and on our County's web site for the public to review and provide comment. The dates of our Public notice and comment period were advertised through the local newspaper, DSS Website and in our Wilson County Report Newsletter.

C. Planning Development

Local Family First Committee meeting was held on November 30, 2021. All areas of need were addressed in the strategies for Family First Plan. In addition, the committee heard from WCDSS staff on progress and successes as a result of our Leading by Results strategies and indicators. Discussions on new initiatives were reviewed and discussed with the Planning Committee and at several civic club/business meetings. The Committee has reviewed and provided final input of new initiatives before submitting to local DSS Board and County Commissioners

Upon recommendations from the Family First Plan Committee on the 2023-2026 County Plan, a presentation was made to the Wilson County DSS Board for endorsement of the plan on December 16, 2021. A final presentation of the initiatives and request for approval from the County Commissioners of the 2023-2026 Family First Plan was held on January 3, 2022.

It is proposed that the Local Planning Committee continue to meet on an as needed basis to evaluate the implementation of the Plan and the completion of outcome goals. The Department believes that through the strength of its community partnerships and through the development, planning and implementation of these initiatives, the community can continue to make an even greater impact in the lives of those served.

III. Goals and Performance Measures for Wilson County

A. Statewide Family First Goals

1. **Meeting Federal Work Participation Rate for All Families** – 50% for All Families Rate. Since 2020, COVID changes in policy has affected the participation rates.
2. **Meeting Federal Work Participation Rate for Two Parent Families** – Active participation in employment services and activities will lead to full time employment. All two-parent families are required to complete a minimum of 35 hours per week of activities – 55 hours per week for both able bodied parents in order to achieve **90% participation rate**.

B. County Performance Measures

Family First County Goals:

1. **Employment** - Immediate participation in intensive employment services for all **“work eligible”** families is necessary in order to meet the participation rate and to ensure families are adequately served before the end of the two years/five year time limits. Wilson County will assist 50 or more Family First participants into employment for each fiscal year. (See strategies for how we accomplish this goal)
2. **Meeting Federal Participation Rates** – Wilson County will exceed the 50% All Family Participation Rate and 90% Two Parent Participation Rate. Wilson County has consistently exceeded the monthly Federal Participation Rate.

3. Providing Employment Services to 100% of Family First applicants – All work eligible families applying for Family First Cash Assistance are provided employment services and work supports to achieve economic independence. Families are held accountable to comply with their MRA Core and MRA Work Plan of Action. **(Attachment G1, G2)**
4. Staying off Welfare/Job Retention - 90% of Family First recipients that transition off of Family First due to employment will continue to be employed 12 months later. – the Department continues to provide job retention/career progression/financial education to families transitioning off the program due to employment.
5. Benefit Diversion – Approximately ten applicants will receive Benefit Diversion assistance. Families will be provided upfront benefit diversion assistance to alleviate a specific family crisis or family episode of need and help families return to full time employment within two to three months.

IV. PLANS TO ACHIEVE OUTCOMES AND GOALS

Result #1 Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being for Children and Young Adults

Indicator 1: Annual % of children who are not repeat victims of maltreatment.
Outcome: 90-95% of children will not be repeat victims of maltreatment.

Indicator 2: Annual % of children who do not have a substantiation of abuse/neglect after successfully completing prevention services. Outcome: 90-95% of families completing prevention services will not have a substantiated child maltreatment report.

Indicator 3: Annual % of children not reentering foster care within 12 months of their discharge. Outcome: 90-95% of children will not reenter foster care within 12 months of their discharge.

Indicator 4: Annual % of youth in DSS custody through age 18 who achieve a stable standard of living through age 23. Outcome: 65-75% of DSS youth in care through age 18 will achieve a stable standard of living through age 23.

Indicator 5: Annual % of children who do not have a substantiation of abuse/neglect after successfully completing clinical services. Outcome: 90-95% of families completing clinical services will not have a substantiated child maltreatment report.

Successes of our Family Support Services

Wilson County DSS began to educate its Child Welfare Staff about Trauma Informed Practice and incorporate the principles into the culture of the Child Welfare Section in 2010. In 2011-12 Wilson County DSS began implementation of Signs of Safety(SOS) as a practice framework for the provision of Child Welfare Services. Since that time, Wilson County DSS has combined Trauma-Informed practice with Signs of Safety and our data/performance management system,

Leading by Results (LBR) to create a practice model that is safety-organized, trauma-informed and data driven. This combined practice model has provided a clinical-based model across the continuum of Child Welfare practice, from Prevention, through Child Protective Services, Foster Care and Adoption. Practice of this model with fidelity has increased the social worker's ability to identify and understand mental health and its impact on child maltreatment in order to effectively work with clients to address mental health issues, and to engage families in developing skills needed to change behaviors in order to ensure safety and reduce the risk of future harm to children.

During the time that Wilson County DSS began implementing its safety-organized, trauma-informed and data-driven practice, there has been a sharp decrease in the number of children in the Agency's legal custody/foster care. In 2011-12 the agency had 102 children in foster care; as of December 1, 2021, the agency has 27 children in foster care; however, 6 are Youth over 18 who have voluntarily remained in placement with DSS to meet educational and career goals. This reduction, due to our ability to engage families as partners in safety planning and building robust safety networks, has come at the same time as the population of children in foster care statewide has increased 25%. Our success in providing intensive services to families during the Child Protection assessment process has led to restructuring our Child Welfare Section to re-deploy staff to meet the front-end work demands.

Wilson County DSS has incorporated a trauma-informed curriculum for foster parents, Resource Parenting Curriculum, and continues to use it as an in-service training requirement. We are also supporting our parenting coordinator in certification in the Attachment and Bio-Behavioral Catchup model (ABC) which is a trauma-informed evidence-based parenting model that seeks to repair and strengthen child-caregiver bonding for children 6 months to age.

We have continued to provide clinical services at Wilson DSS, one of only a handful of Departments of Social Services to do so. Our staff Psychologist and three Licensed Clinical Social Workers offer an array of evidence-based, trauma-informed treatment models to the children, parents and families with active cases in the Child Welfare Section. These treatment models include Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, trauma-informed play therapy, and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR). We have two clinicians currently certified in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), another trauma-informed intensive treatment model. We continue to have a part-time QPSA (Qualified Professional Substance Abuse) person that provides substance abuse screening and assessments/evaluation to determine if treatment is needed for Family First, Child Welfare and Food and Nutrition clients.

Most recently, Wilson County DSS has infused SOS and Trauma Informed work across all social work programs in the agency including upper management and administrative staff. Wilson county DSS has developed strategic planning to become a Trauma informed community and we have several projects with Wilson

County Schools to help implement this important work into every school in the school system.

Wilson County DSS has developed a matrix tracking system to aid the supervision and training for all SOS social work. This strategy is explained in more detail below.

Finally, Wilson County DSS has embarked on an ongoing journey to become educated and trained in equity and inclusion work to help minimize further trauma to our already marginalized customers. This work is very important to us as we seek healthy, helpful relationships with every adult, child and family.

A. Activities/Strategies:

- ❑ **Build on collaborative efforts to promote child protection, permanency and stability for families and children by creating a uniform practice framework that is outcomes driven, trauma informed, safety focused and unbiased.**

Strategy: Residential setting for hard to place Foster Children

WCDSS would like to explore the idea of a small residential setting that a foster child could be temporarily housed, pending MCO placement with good, highly trained supportive staff. The staff could be comprised of voluntary foster care parents with additional incentives or DSS social work paid staff. The residence could potentially be obtained as a re-possessed, abandoned or tax owed property with safety focused, physical upgrades and camera installments. When empty, the site could serve a dual purpose and be used for SW simulation training. Emergency placements could be jointly funded by the LME and WCDSS.

Strategy: Use of the SOS Training Matrix.

Wilson County DSS has implemented a training structure for Child Welfare, Adult Services and other social work programs to ensure the sustainability of the combined Signs of Safety and Trauma-Informed practice model. This training structure identifies critical topics to be included in every new social work employee's training and development plan and will include a menu of external and internal training opportunities. Practice Leaders will be used to support and sustain Signs of Safety Practice. All employees' practice will be evaluated at a beginner, intermediate or advanced level and have an individualized training development plan that outlines the required training they will attend annually. When complete, the structured training plan will be provided to all new staff that will begin with an overview of the practice framework elements, a manual, and a time-frame for individualized training modules.

Strategy: Continue to use the Signs of Safety Practice Model

This Model helps Child Welfare staff build agility and confidence in assessing families. Staff use genograms, time limited case summaries and information from the social worker on specifically what is needed for the staffing to be a success. Danger statements and safety goals will be drafted by all participants using Signs

of Safety definitions, and the group will hear about the families existing strengths and existing safety within the family.

Strategy: Continue education, training and implementation of equity and inclusion.

Wilson County DSS is committed to utilizing all our training and education to provide our customers with the utmost understanding and support. The work in this area is an ongoing journey of continuous improvement at understanding each customer as an individual with societal impacts on their lives.

Strategy: Collaboration between Child Welfare and Family First

Approximately 10% of Family First families may have been involved in child welfare. WCDSS wants to continue the strategies for sharing information, identifying all resources available to support the family, and work together to help families meet their Family First and Child Welfare Plan Agreements. One of the ways to accomplish this is continue to require Child Welfare staff to contact Family First whenever they receive a report and the case is active to Family First as first collateral contact. Working together to help the families/children in their progress and participation is critical.

Strategy: Continue Kinship Care Services for Family First Child Only cases.

Many of the children in the Child Only cases are in relative placements. The relative caretakers may have difficulty dealing with the emotional and behavioral problems the children display. The Child Only worker will refer on a case-by-case basis to the Kinship Program Social Worker who will provide intervention strategies to reduce the complexity of the challenges faced by this population.

Strategy: Continue Multidisciplinary Team Meetings with Family First

Families. Collaboration with resource providers (mental health, vocational rehabilitation, QPSA, NCWorks, transportation, faith groups, educational partners) and child welfare staff are needed to provide families services to alleviate barriers. The family participates with the agency program staff and resource providers in making appropriate changes to their plan that will enhance their transition from welfare to work. Families are able to identify their own support systems, strengths and needs through this process.

Strategy: Wilson County will assess each Child Only Family First case where a caretaker has been given legal custody by the courts and child welfare has been involved in the protection, safety and placement of the child/children. In cases where the biological parent moves into the home of the legal custodian, Family First staff, with the assistance of Child Welfare, and the legal custodian will determine if the Family First payment should continue to be left in legal custodian's name. It may be in the best interest of the children and biological parents that the Child Only case be terminated and parents encouraged to apply to receive the services in the name of the biological parent.

Only at the discretion of the Director and/or his designee can the case be left in the legal custodian's name. At no time, may the child only case be left in the legal custodian's name where it may be considered or interpreted as avoiding or circumventing time clocks.

Family First Cases that meet this exception will be reevaluated every 6 months for continued eligibility and assessment of the household and family situation.

Independent of the decision to determine the case name, the biological parent once in the home is considered *work eligible*.

**If the decision is to leave the Family First case in the legal custodian's name, the parent(s) must be responsible for paying child support.

Prevention Services

Strategy: Continue to offer Child Abuse Prevention Services

Prevention staff teaches families how to make connections through the school system, mental health system, as well as through their own support systems. Prevention will provide supportive services that promote and strengthen safe, stable and nurturing homes. Intensive counseling, support and education are offered in the areas of parenting; child development; housekeeping skills; nutrition and shopping; child and household safety; organization skills and personal care. These services are offered to adults and families in several options based on the families needs. Individual, family systems including multiple caregivers, child rearing and group work are all offered with the customer choosing their services per their requests.

Evidenced Based Parenting Education Classes and Home Visiting Services

Strategy: Parenting Education

WCDSS offers ongoing parenting education training to teach Family First and Child Welfare families' positive teaching methods. The models used by our staff and community partners include the Strengthening Families Model, Triple P, Attached Bio-behavioral Catch-up (ABC) Model through Toddler provides consistency and encourages the learning, practice and success of parenting with any age child. The need for consistent and on-going scheduling of an effective parenting education program is a huge need with our Family First and Child welfare families.

Parenting education is needed in our community to help parents deal with the ever-challenging role of parenting. Group work promotes the use of building relationships and parents supporting each other.

Clinical Social Work Intervention Techniques with Family First/TANF staff

Strategy: Signs of Safety in Family First

Family First Social Workers will use the solution focused coaching/counseling Signs of Safety Model which will be adapted for all Employment Programs. Social Worker's will focus on establishing the relationship and addressing participant's desire for change. The eligibility process is secondary. Other training opportunities will be encouraged including child trauma response training for Family First/TANF social work staff.

- ❑ **Continue to conduct substance abuse screenings when a Family First Cash Assistance Application is taken and during assessments in Child Welfare Services.**

Strategy: AUDIT/DAST-10

Staff will follow the NC Substance Use/Mental Health Initiative. All Family First staff will continue to conduct substance abuse screenings using a simple screening tool (AUDIT/DAST-10). Appropriate referrals from positive screenings will be made to a Qualified Professional in Substance Abuse (QPSA) for further evaluation and treatment recommendations. The QPSA is on site at DSS 4 days a week.

- ❑ **Continue to make treatment/recovery programs a condition of the Family First Mutual Responsibility Agreement for persons who struggle with substance misuse. Families who are in need of services through child welfare will be encouraged to attend in compliance with their agreed upon Family Services Case Plan.**

Strategy: All families involved in CPS and Family First that are screened for substance misuse and/or have behavioral indicators will be referred to the QPSA for evaluation and treatment services. All appropriate CPS and Family First families with an assessment result of "Substantiated" or "Services Needed" and substance abuse has been identified as a contributing factor to child abuse and/or neglect will be screened and referred to the QPSA or other local providers to assess and evaluate services when appropriate. The QPSA will complete an assessment and make recommendations for treatment. Case management services will be provided by the QPSA for monitoring and following substance abuse treatment plan and progress for those who have been identified as needing treatment. Support groups, individual counseling and treatment are required for all Family First and CPS families/individuals determined to have a substance abuse problem. Family First participants are required to follow the recommendations for treatment/counseling and are included as part of their Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA). Failure to provide verification of compliance as well as comply with the treatment or counseling will result in a termination of the Family First Cash Assistance.

- ❑ **Continue to require a Child Support Establishment Application prior to making a Family First Cash Assistance Application.**

Strategy: It is vital for the family to move toward independence and self-sufficiency and that both parents of the child(ren) provide financial support for their children. Under the Family First plan all persons applying for Family First cash assistance must complete a Child Support application prior to making a Family First application.

❑ **Continue to build partnerships with the business community.**

Strategy: We will continue our association as an active member of the Wilson Chamber of Commerce, Wilson Education Partnership, Education and Workforce Taskforce, Wilson Forward and Wilson Human Resource Association for continued collaboration and involvement with employers to strengthen the workforce in Wilson County.

❑ **Continue efforts through WCDSS' Faith Connections program for assisting families and children.**

Strategy: Efforts to involve the faith community in providing resources and services to mobilize community to help move those on assistance toward gainful employment ; to retain those recently off assistance in the workforce; and assist in the preservation of families.

"Faith Connections" – Faith Connections is a faith-based and community network of resources designed to assist working families and families in need. The distribution of faith community financial assistance is a process that honors a person's dignity, sense of responsibility, and hope. Referrals to Faith Connections are from the Department of Social Services staff as well as community and faith leaders who have screened, assessed, and determined that the family needs additional resources to alleviate the crisis. The program provides a centralized, stream-line access to faith community resources while managing and tracking the resources provided. Faith Connections receives monetary donations as well as contributions such as furniture, counseling, pro bono medical/dental work, housing resources, Christmas/Thanksgiving donations, food, car donations, housing needs, and counseling. Faith Connections has been recognized as a national best practice in faith-based initiatives. Wilson County's Faith Connections Program has been featured in the Urban Institute "Toolkit" on best practices and was also featured in a White House Paper on Faith-Based Initiatives. Wilson County DSS leaders were invited to present Faith Connections to regional US Department of Health and Human Service TANF Administrators Conference in Texas and Missouri as a "best practice" model for other states and communities to replicate.

"Hardship Hearings"

Strategy: Representatives from our Family First/Child Welfare Planning Committee serve on our Hardship Hearing Panel. Two Representatives from The

Family First/Child Welfare Planning Committee along with DSS Board members are designated by the County DSS Board to hear all 60-month hardship extension hearings and make decision regarding approval or denial of extension requests. Hardship Hearings replaced our former Success Team committee meetings.

Continue to expand efforts in reducing teen pregnancy.

Strategy: Wilson County's teen pregnancy rate continues to drop but still remains a concern for our community. In 2019, Wilson County's teen pregnancy rate was 17th in the State from at one point being among the highest teenage pregnancy rate of the 100 counties. Approximately 136 adolescent pregnancies were reported for 2018.

We will continue to work in partnership with Wilson County Health Department, Wilson Pregnancy Center, Wesley Shelter, Wilson County School System, OIC and Wilson Forward other organizations focusing efforts to reduce the teen pregnancy rate.

We continue to offer monthly "Family Planning" education to Family First families to promote and emphasize the importance of family planning and birth control. We continue to focus efforts with our absent parents of Family First children on the importance of family planning and pregnancy prevention and how failure to plan can affect their financial goals, employment, stress, poverty, relationships, etc.

Wilson County participated in a National Institute on Prevention of Pregnancy and Sexually Transmitted Infection Among Youth in Foster Care. During this institute, the evidence-based curriculum Making Proud Choices was adapted for use with Youth in Foster Care. A Community team was established and strategies were developed for training facilitators, planning for sustainability and delivery of the curriculum to foster youth as well as at-risk youth in the Wilson Community. Eight facilitators were trained by The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy. The curriculum was delivered to all appropriate foster youth in the custody of Wilson County DSS, as well as another identified group of youth determined to be at-risk. Wilson County will continue to work with community partners to offer additional sessions of the curriculum as needed.

Strategy: Through our TEMP and Success in School programs, WCDSS focuses on teen pregnancy prevention with youth in our foster care, childcare and Family First Program. We will focus efforts with teen parents in our Success in School Program to prevent a repeat pregnancy. Grant funding has been established to sustain these much needed services. Wilson County Health Department has provided an office space for DSS staff to be available for direct referrals.

Helping Youth Stay in School

Strategy: Continue implementation of the "Success in School" Program. Wilson County Child Care subsidy program has assigned two social workers to work intensely with teenage custodial parents in high school in an effort to help teen

parents remain in school and progress towards achieving their high school diploma. Intense involvement and case management efforts, assessment, planning, arranging resources and on-going follow up are provided to teen parents. Connecting teens with additional educational resources and encouraging parental involvement to provide a holistic comprehensive supportive approach is the focus of our childcare subsidy social worker. As part of our Leading by Results efforts and grant funding received from NC Dropout Prevention initiative, we have achieved significant results in keeping teen parents enrolled in high school and achieving their high school diploma.

Since implementation of the program in August 2008, WCDSS has served a total of 300 plus Teen Parents. We had a graduation rate of 100% for our 2020-2021 school year. We will continue efforts to provide teenage custodial parents in high school a holistic, supportive, educational, and job preparation training. We offer parenting education to help build an early foundation of communication, awareness of child's development stages, and the importance of nurturing and effective discipline. This initiative was awarded the Crystal Star Award from the National Dropout Prevention Network as a promising best practice.

Our Success in School Program initiated a more intense approach to providing 2Gen focused services to our teen parents by offering them our Baby Steps program. Baby Steps is an evidenced based home visiting model which is supported by the NC Department of Public Health. The curriculum used is Making Proud Choices. The goals of the program is promoting child development education, delaying a second pregnancy and preventing child maltreatment. We have two full-time social workers that go into every high school providing easy access to our services for the students.

Strategy: As a result of the success with teen parents, we applied for additional grant funding from NC Dropout Prevention Grant funding to expand our program to include teens from our Family First and foster care programs. We implemented the Teen Employment Mentoring Program (TEMP). This program matches at risk teens with businesses/employers that have received mentoring training and have agreed to provide worksite mentoring to teens referred by DSS. The purpose of TEMP is to provide a work opportunity coupled with mentoring to motivate, encourage, and provide hope while working with caring adults in a safe environment to learn the work and social skills necessary to be successful in school, work and life. Currently we have placed 28 teens in the TEMP Program. Employers such as Merck Manufacturing, City of Wilson, County of Wilson, Wilson Arts Council, Salvation Army, The Spot, La Guadalupana Church and Wilson County Public Library are providing the mentoring and work opportunity. The program is a long-term commitment on both the teen and employer until the youth graduates from high school. The teen works an average of four to 25 hours a month during the academic school year and 25 hours a week during the summer months. Teens present their report card to their mentor each report period and recognition for academic and behavioral progress is provided. Areas needing improvement are discussed and goals and resources are provided. The

goal of the program is to keep teens enrolled in school and working towards achieving their high school diploma, pregnancy prevention and increasing work ready skills.

Strategy: Helping Family First parents and caretakers keep their children in school and progress towards graduation is a major focus of our Family First staff. Social Workers work with the entire family on promoting education and training and the responsibilities of parents to ensure teens remain in school. As part of the Family First “core requirements parents/caretakers are expected to keep their children in school.” Failure to keep their children in school can result in financial penalty/sanction or termination of the Family First cash assistance payment. Parents/caretakers submit report cards each semester to ensure satisfactory progress of children ages 6-18. If report card indicates attendance issues or unsatisfactory grades, an assessment will be conducted. Families not complying with the family/educational assessment may be subject to termination of Family First payment unless good cause is established. Helping parents understand the important role they play in their child’s academic success is a focus of our leading by results efforts.

Family and Employment Supports

There are numerous supportive services that will enable individuals and families to participate in activities that will lead to self-sufficiency. Below are the supportive services that will be utilized to support participation:

- a. **Case Management** – Case management involves planning and directing the provisions of, and/or directly providing services. The workers will be responsible for working with all families in the assessment, planning, directing and providing of direct and indirect supportive services, follow up and documentation of progress for all Work Eligible Families and child only families receiving Family First. Home visits, interviewing, coordinating with agency staff and other community resources to provide the needed services to help families achieve self-sufficiency is a major effort. Planning with the family on constructive ways to resolve work-related and family-related issues. Case management includes assessing family strengths and needs, arranging and or providing all work supports in order to meet the responsibilities identified in the MRA Plan of Action.
- b. **Child Care Subsidy** – We will continue to prioritize Child Welfare Families, Teen Parents attending high school, employed families under 200% of poverty level and Family First families for childcare subsidy assistance. All Family First “work eligible” families and families receiving 200% services are a target group due to their responsibility to participate in work- or work-related activities and compliance with completing their activities. Child Care assistance will continue once they become employed and transition off of Family First as long as they continue to be eligible and meet the need for childcare subsidy services. Parent fees are assessed once they become

employed. We will continue to utilize and refer families to other child care arrangements such as More at Four, Head Start, Smart Start or community/faith based after school programs such as Boys and Girls Club, OIC, Summerville Academy, The Spot, and other after school educational programs for families/children who are on our current waiting list. We have approximately 131 children on our childcare waiting lists due to lack of funding available to meet all the needs.

- c. Transportation Assistance- We will continue to purchase and/or reimburse for transportation services for Family First families to support their active participation in work and work related activities when no other means of transportation is available. We will seek to find the most affordable and accessible transportation methods to enable the family's successful transition to independence. Currently, we provide gas cards for families that have their own transportation. The City of Wilson also offers the RIDE service which is the new city transit system. RIDE is a partnership between Via, a global transportation company, and the City of Wilson. This service allows residents to request a ride from a smart phone app or by phone. The resident will walk to a nearby "virtual bus stop" and be picked up by a standard vehicle instead of a city bus. RIDE vouchers can be provided to families who need transportation.
- d. Participation Expenses – Families can be assisted with miscellaneous items or services needed in order to participate in an agreed upon activity that can lead to employment, parenting education, or financial education training. Items may include, but not limited to, uniforms, shoes, tools, registration fees, insurance coverage, books, assessments, meals/refreshments, academic and financial behavior incentives/retention bonuses, etc.
- e. Health Support – Local providers will be utilized such as Vocational Rehabilitation, Mental Health services, Wilson Community Health Center, Wilson County Health Department, PORT Human Services QPSA and other providers for accessing services for drug and alcohol related issues/barriers, family planning, educational and/or physical, medical and mental health issues.
- f. Clinical Therapeutic Services - A clinical social work team is located on site to help meet the mental health needs of families and children in Child Welfare. We have expanded our efforts to include clinical staff certified in trauma-focused cognitive behavior therapy in order to provide an appropriate in-house treatment resource for children identified as suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The Clinical Team includes a clinical position for a certified Licensed Clinical Addictions Specialist to address the substance abuse issues of children and adults in Child Welfare. The team has participated in the Attachment and Bio-Behavioral Feedback learning collaborative that will enable us to provide this

evidence-based parenting model to children ages 6-24 months. We continue to seek out and utilize other service providers within the community to meet the mental health needs of all customers.

- g. Education and Training – Families will continue to be assessed and referred to educational and training facilities such as Wilson Community College, Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) and NCWorks for education and training opportunities. Other employment and training agencies will be utilized as training opportunities are offered. Families are encouraged to apply for Pell Grants. Family First will pay tuition or other training fees for short term skills as it relates to the participants educational and work/career goals.
- h. Domestic Violence Services – Domestic violence concerns are identified through screening and continued assessment. Immediate referrals are made to the Wesley Shelter for counseling, safety protection and supportive services.

Opportunities for treatment and therapy for offenders are now available in Wilson County through a certified abuser treatment program. Counseling programs and services for the offenders are needed to reduce the cycle of repeat incidences.

- i. Substance Abuse/Mental Health Assessments- A Memorandum of Understanding exists between the MCO and WCDSS. PORT Human Services provides the QPSA on site at Wilson County DSS to provide the Assessment/Evaluation and recommendation for treatment to all Family First and CPS families who are identified as having a positive screening for substance abuse or mental health issues.
- j. Job Center Services - Job Center Coordinator provides assistance to jobseekers for resumes, interviewing, computer skills, access to job leads, job soft skills and referrals to other community partners depending upon needs of individuals.
- k. Financial Social Work Services – The focus of the Financial Social Work program is to help families take control of their money. The financial educator works with families to teach financial education, how to understand their relationship with money, identify sabotaging behaviors and help teach new behaviors that will lead to financial and economic stability. Individual financial counseling/education as well as group workshops are provided to Family First families, IDA participants and families 200% of poverty level.

- l. Medicaid/Health Choice – All families are encouraged to apply for Medicaid to help with medical insurance coverage for all uninsured children and parents with income below 200%.
- m. Food and Nutrition Services – All families are encouraged to apply for Food and Nutrition Services through Wilson County DSS.
- n. Vocational Evaluations and Situational Work Assessments – Working closely with Vocational Rehabilitation Services to assist Family First and/or Child Welfare families will be strengthened.
- o. Compliance with American with Disabilities Act (ADA) – Wilson County DSS will comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and will not discriminate for or against persons on the bases of race, color, national origin, religion, sex, age or disability. In addition, we screen applicants using Form DSS-8228 and the Learning Needs Screening Tool (DSS-5330) which offers the applicant the opportunity to state that they have a disability and ask for accommodation.
- p. Provision of Interpreter Services – All programs or activities administered by the Wilson County Department of Social Services are taking adequate steps to ensure that policies and procedures do not deny or have the effect of denying Limited English Proficiency (LEP) individuals equal access to benefits and services for which such persons qualify. Wilson County DSS has developed a local LEP policy that defines the responsibilities the agency has to ensure LEP individuals can communicate effectively. Wilson County DSS ensures that effective bilingual/interpretive services are provided to serve the needs of the non-English speaking population. The provision of bilingual/interpretive services is prompt without undue delays. Wilson County Department of Social Services has full time interpreter staff who interprets for all program areas across the agency. The staff interprets within their respective program areas as well as across the agency when the need is present. We have four bilingual staff that rotate coverage and are available after hours for any appointments or needs that take place after normal business hours. Our LEP Policy is available and posted for customers and staff.
- q. Housing Assistance- Family First families facing housing crisis will be assessed for short term housing assistance through existing programs/services to prevent homelessness.

V. Administration

A. Authority

Wilson County Department of Social Services has been designated by the Wilson County Board of County Commissioners as the responsible entity and administrator in carrying out the Family First and Child Safety County Plan and Program Administration.

B. Organization

Diversion from welfare dependency is a major part of Wilson County's Family First Program. A front-end employability assessment is conducted whereby a wide menu of diversionary assistance and services can be utilized based on the specific pre-applicant's situation. For those families found to be job ready we can provide up to 60-days in diversionary case management services in an attempt to find immediate employment. Upon first contact the pre-applicant completes an employability assessment and is assessed for all other work support options prior to a cash assistance application being taken.

Wilson DSS has a Family First Job Center located within the agency. The Job Center Coordinator provides assistance with one-on-one job search, computer skills, resumes, networking, job soft skills, educational assessment testing, and job readiness training. Job Development and referrals for potential job openings are also provided.

If short-term cash assistance is determined to be the best option then a one-time cash assistance grant (Benefit Diversion) may be provided. This payment will not exceed three months of total cash assistance and must meet a specific family crisis or family episode of need. This is not intended for ongoing or recurrent needs. Food Assistance, Medicaid, and childcare subsidy assistance may also be a part of the diversion package.

Crisis Resolution Funds (TANF-Emergency Assistance) is also another means of financial assistance provided to assist families in a short-term crisis and alleviate emergency situations for Family First families, Child Welfare and other families 200% of the poverty level. Families must meet the income and eligibility criteria for assistance. **(Attachment B – Family First – Crisis Resolution Policy, Emergency Assistance)**

If the customer faces more complex employment barriers, more intensive and potentially long-term case management services may be needed. The family and social worker together determine that the barriers are more intensive and that a referral to Family First for application is an alternative. In this instance, the pre-applicant is referred to Child Support. The application is taken for Family First Cash Assistance by Social Workers who complete both the eligibility and employment services functions. The Social Worker's role is to help participants understand their requirements for participation and begin to identify their strengths as well as identifying and eliminating barriers preventing them from obtaining employment. A mutual responsibility contract (plan of action) is signed and families begin receiving the necessary services that will help move them from dependency to independency.

The FAMILY FIRSTFA Social Worker proactively helps participants reach a goal of self-sufficiency and economic independence. They will use extensive knowledge of local

community resources, as well as the many work supports available within our agency, such as child care, food assistance, health care, education, training, work experience mentoring and financial assistance to help bring about the changes necessary to promote employment and family responsibility. Staff will receive on-going training in the areas of Case Management, Family- Centered Practice, Social Work Enhancement Training, Solution Focused techniques and coaching that will continue to affect positive changes in helping participants become self-reliant and resourceful in thinking through potential solutions to challenges.

The social Worker and family will discuss professional intervention services to alleviate various barriers such as mental health difficulties, educational limitations, substance abuse, domestic violence, or other conditions that interfere with a client's ability to work or engage successfully in work related activities, parenting.

Families wishing to apply for financial assistance through Family First are screened for physical limitations/disabilities.

The Income Maintenance case manager has the responsibility for taking all Family First applications for child only applicants and providing on-going case management services. Income Maintenance staff also provide emergency financial assistance and determine eligibility for crisis programs such as CIP, Crisis Resolution, County Emergency Assistance, etc, for all child only cases. Referrals are made to our Kinship Care Social Worker when caretakers have been identified as needing intense social work services due to child behavioral issues, educational barriers, mental health issues, domestic violence, housing issues, discipline, etc.

The Quality Assurance Specialist for the Employment and Family Well-Being Section has the responsibility for Second Partying samples each month from Family First, Child Care Subsidy, Energy, and 200% electronic records. These quality assurance tests are to ensure we are adhering to state and federal policy and procedures.

A Kinship Care Social Worker provides a “strength and needs” assessment on all child only cases referred for intense intervention services. Family-centered approach is utilized in working with relative caretakers or parents in developing a service plan that best meets the needs of the family and will have the greatest intervention impact.

C. NC Works

NC Works provides services to Family First participants that are seeking employment and/or working on their job readiness skills. FAMILY FIRST Participants register with NC Works to ensure every job opportunity is provided to assist in their efforts to become self-sufficient. **(Attachment E)**

D. Child Care

Wilson County's Subsidized Child Care program will continue to prioritize child protective services families, foster parents who are working, teen parents in high school, and all Family First families who are receiving intense employment services or 200% services, and families working 30 hours or more per week. Currently we are serving over 317 low-income families (approximately 519 children) in childcare arrangements. Eighty one percent (81%) of these families are low income working families; 4% are Active Family First Families; 7% are teen parents; 6% are child welfare (CPS and/or Foster Care).

Less than (4%) of the families receiving childcare assistance are Family First families. As families terminate from Family First, their childcare continues as long as they remain employed. Funding for childcare is provided by State subsidies and the Family First (TANF) Block Grant. Follow-up is provided by childcare social workers to monitor progress and continue working toward moving families to independence and self-sufficiency. The job retention, career progression and financial education planning strategies outlined in this plan are targeted to help families' transition off subsidized childcare as family income increases. Our Child Care Social Workers are working with this target group to prevent loss of employment and provide job retention/career advancement services to maintain employment and increase earnings. Currently, only 22% of our working childcare subsidy families are earning above 133% of the poverty level. We want to continue to increase this number by informing families of tax credits, encouraging EITC, education and training opportunities, free tax preparation programs, and financial planning. Encouraging families to utilize the community resources for working on their GED or Adult High School diploma and furthering their education is important to a families' long-term stability and career advancement. We offer financial incentives to childcare subsidy families who choose to work with our Financial Social Worker or Child Care Social Worker on developing a financial improvement and savings plan. (See new initiatives/eligibility). We encourage all single parent households who are not receiving child support to apply. Front end screenings are completed to ensure integrity of our childcare subsidy program and take great efforts to ensure that families receiving are truly eligible. We average a waiting list of 300-500 children whose parents are "in need" of childcare subsidy assistance so they can work. Waiting lists is updated twice a year. Lack of funding is the reason we have a waiting lists.

E. Transportation

Any Family First family needing assistance with transportation will work with their Family First Social Worker. The SW will assess transportation resources and assist with locating accessible and affordable transportation to help the family obtain and maintain employment. Staff will utilize the Wilson County Transportation Coordinator, city and county transportation systems, taxicabs, and referrals to community for volunteer assistance with transportation for those situations where suitable arrangements are not available. Our county has developed through grants from Department of Transportation a rural general public ridership program which provides transportation for families who live outside of the city limits access to get to employment within the city limits. Riders pay a minimum fee to ride to and from their home and job. We will continue to be involved with Wilson County Transportation Services (Coordinated Systems) as well as

coordination with City Transit to promote affordable, accessible transportation for all citizens.

We currently utilize pre-paid gas cards for the purpose of reimbursement for gasoline costs for participants who have their own transportation. We continue to receive transportation funds from Department of Transportation to assist families who are employed and no longer receiving Family First Cash Assistance.

F. Substance Abuse Services

Access to services for mental health and substance misuse has been challenging since the onset of mental health reform in North Carolina. Since most of the services are contracted out by the LME/MCO, it is difficult to establish and coordinate through one entity. PORT Human Services is an organization which caters to people who have issues revolving around chemical substances (drugs/alcohol) and/or mental health disorders. PORT is the entity that contracts with the LME in providing Qualified Professional in Substance Abuse (QPSA). The QPSA provides assessments and counseling and treatment options for families screened and referred by our agency for drug/alcohol abuse problems. The QSAP is on site to work with individuals or groups identified as having substance misuse issues. A Memorandum of Understanding has been developed between LME, DSS and PORT Human Services. **(Attachment F-1)**

G. Family Violence Services

All Family First applicants will be informed of the Notification of Family Violence Option at the time of application. Applicants who disclose that they are victims of family violence will be referred immediately to Wesley Shelter for assessment and to discuss safety plan for the family. **(Attachment F-2)**

H. Maintenance of Effort (MOE)

The following activities, staff, and services will be funded using MOE Funds: Job Development, Job Retention Case Management, Annual Job Fair Event, Participation Expenses, Transportation, Family First staff, Crisis Team and Child Care. Crisis Resolution (Emergency Assistance), Faith Coordination Services, psychological evaluations and counseling services, domestic violence assistance, Bonus/Incentives, pregnancy prevention and dropout prevention efforts will also be funded through our Family First Block Grant. Emergency services funding will continue to be utilized for child abuse prevention services, parenting education, child protective services and foster care to the extent necessary to meet urgent needs and allowable under the TANF Block Rules and Regulations. We will spend MOE timely throughout the year to avoid last minute MOE Expenditures and avoid program improvement plan. (N.C.G.S. 108A-27.9)

I. Child Welfare Services

Approximately fifty percent (50%) of Wilson County's TANF Block Grant Funds will be devoted to Child Welfare Services.

VI. Emergency Assistance

Crisis Resolution (TANF Emergency Assistance)

The Wilson County Department of Social Services provides emergency assistance grants to families through our TANF-EA funding called the "Crisis Resolution" Program. The Department will focus its efforts with families in order to achieve employment, support continued employment or, in child welfare cases, to secure a plan for the safety and protection of children. Criteria for eligibility will be consistent with current federal emergency cash assistance requirements. Family Crisis Resolution grants will be approved for unexpected or unforeseen crisis situations and targeted to promote self-sufficiency, proactive planning, personal responsibility and parental responsibility. A crisis resolution grant will only be provided when it will alleviate the crisis and foster independence rather than dependence. Approximately \$50,000 of our Family First Block Grant is reserved for Emergency Assistance each year. See attached Crisis Resolution Program (**Attachment B**).

VII. Services to low-income families and individuals (under 200% of poverty)

Financial SW/ Crisis Services, TEMP, Kinship Care and Prevention Services -

Wilson County commits a percentage of our Family First Block Grant to provide services to families with children whose household income is at or below 200% of the poverty level. With the decline of Family First caseloads, WCDSS is shifting emphasis to the adults and youth transitioning off of Family First who continue to need intense services to continue on their path to success. We provide intense financial education and counseling services to former Family First participants to assist with educational attainments, asset accumulation, mentoring, employment and career progression opportunities.

The Department also provides upfront case management services to families 200% of federal poverty level through our Crisis Intervention Intake Unit to encourage immediate employment while providing supportive services to achieve that goal.

Kinship Care Services - WCDSS believes that children are best served and protected when the needs of the entire family are assessed and addressed. Wilson has one Social Worker who provides services to TANF Child Only Families. The purpose of this position is to provide intensive services to assist families who may be experiencing difficulties which are disrupting or could possibly disrupt the stability of the family's functioning. The goal of the services is to reduce risk to children. Services offered may include strengths and needs assessments and/or referrals to and coordination of services with community agencies and/or treatment providers. Intensive in-home mentoring, coordination of services with child welfare, local legal and educational systems, and other supportive services are offered to meet the needs of children, youth and families. The Department

proposes enhanced cash assistance payments to kinship care families (grandparents, aunts, uncles, etc.) which make of a subset of these cases.

VIII. Services to Non-Custodial Parents

If success is to be achieved in moving families to self-sufficiency from all needs-based programs, child support will be crucial from non-custodial parents. Equal emphasis is placed on single parent households, children in foster care and children living with specified relatives (single parent cases). We are helping non-custodial parents to support their children through employment opportunities, payment of child support and increased involvement in their children's lives. We have developed a successful employment program for non-custodial parents called "Working for Kids". The social workers/coordinator dedicated to working with the non-custodial parents of Family First and former Family First families who are either unemployed, underemployed or in violation of their court order to pay child support. We work closely with the Child Support Establishment and Enforcement Team as well as the Child Support Court in screening and referring non-custodial parents for participation in this program. We work with the absent parent through assessment of employment opportunities, reducing barriers preventing them from obtaining employment, job readiness, attitude, support groups, education of child support payment system, and job development.

Activities with non-custodial parents include but are not limited to parental responsibility education and job readiness; direct referrals to employers through job link partners, referrals to mediation services for non-custodial and custodial parents to help resolve child support and visitation disputes; non-custodial parent and child visitation planning sessions; Pre-trial conferences; advocacy for non-custodial parents in the court; parental responsibility workshops; specific fatherhood education workshops and support groups.

We will continue efforts to increase awareness of the important role that fathers have in the lives of their children in all programs within the Department of Social Services. Wilson County currently has a Child Support Agent dedicated to locating and engaging absent parents involved in child welfare cases.

Mediation services are available and families are referred when appropriate.

IX. Exemption from the Work Requirement

Wilson DSS will provide exemption from the work requirements for single custodial parents based on the ***age of the child***. The age limit to receive the exemption is **birth to three months of age**. Any single custodial parent who does not have a child between the ages of birth to three months old will not be eligible to claim the Exemption.

The month following the child's three month birthday, the parent will be subject to the Work Requirements. Child Care will be made available and provided to active Family First recipients to support their Mutual Responsibility Contract and participation.

If the family indicates that due to reasons such as health of the baby or parent, or other reasons why they cannot participate in work or work related activities after the three month limit, they can claim the work exemption **only** with medical documentation. There is a 12 month lifetime limit to claim this exemption. Once their lifetime limit is exhausted they may no longer be able to claim this exemption.

X. Innovative County Strategies

- ❑ **Family First Redesign-** TANF participation numbers have been declining across the country for many years. Wilson DSS is redesigning the Family First program to offer a two phase design with the goal of helping customers not only get a job but to retain it and to build a rewarding career. An assessment will be given to each customer during the application process to determine which phase is the best option. “Phase One” will continue to implement the standard Family First Program policy (with Electing County revisions noted in this plan) for customers who are job ready, need minimal guidance finding a job and do not need more intensive social work services. Again, it must be emphasized that very few of these job ready customers apply to the program. Phase Two is designed for customers who need more services to work toward overcoming barriers such as homelessness, mental health concerns, substance misuse, frequent job quits or terminations, criminal records, family challenges and/or problematic behaviors. It will include a substantial incentive component, in addition to the basic Family First payment for completing the goals that are determined on the MRA by the customer and the social worker. The social worker will, also, work on any child safety and wellbeing concerns, strengthening the customer’s support system, and advocate for the best resources. The social worker will make frequent home visits and work to help the family resolve issues that may interfere with the customer sustaining employment. These changes are just the first steps in the TANF overhaul that will be come in the upcoming years.
- ❑ **Expungement Services** – Customers with criminal records face significant barriers to employment. Wilson DSS works with community partners, such as RC3, Farris and Farris Law Firm, Legal Aid and other local law firms to assist the customer in the expungement process.
- ❑ **Clinical Services Team** – The agency currently has a Clinical Services Team composed of three licensed clinical social workers that provide services to the Child Welfare Department. An additional licensed clinical social worker position will be added to support the employment programs. This therapist will assist employment customers with mental health concerns that may be inhibiting their ability to gain or keep a job. This will include conducting mental health assessments and evaluation for DSM-5 disorders. An assessment will be conducted to determine the extent of the disorders in relation to being able to achieve sustainable employment. The goal is to develop a specialized therapeutic model for removing barriers to sustaining employment.
- ❑ **Wilson County Disability Assistance Program (WCDAP)** – This program provides intense social work services to assist parents and/or children with the Social Security Disability application process. Services are provided to customers who are eligible for

- Family First but unable to participate in employment related activities due to disability. The customer will be required to meet monthly goals and it is a time-limited program.
- ❑ **Financial Social Work – CASH-N Program-** Offers financial social work services to families in need of financial education and support to develop positive behaviors around spending and savings. The financial social worker works one-on-one with families, as well as in group settings, to teach financial education and how to take control of their money in order to gain control of their lives.
 - ❑ **Faith Connections** – Our faith community collaboration efforts have evolved over the past 17 years into a comprehensive best practice Faith Connections program model. Faith community resources are available through a “one stop” referral and assistance process. Faith Connections has been named a national best practice faith based model.
 - ❑ **Child Abuse Prevention Services** - Prevention Services is a volunteer program that serves families interested in making positive changes. The program helps families identify their needs and provides encouragement and support in achieving their goals. Prevention Services embraces and utilizes family-centered practice and works with the family to help improve their family environment, including all areas of social, economic, family relationships, education, employment, etc. The program does this by educating parents on healthy child rearing practices and helping them set goals and identify resources to help achieve those goals. Families can be referred by DSS, schools, and the community.
 - ❑ **Success in School & Baby Steps**– Helping at risk teen parents stay in school and achieve a high school diploma is part of our Leading By Results efforts. We received grant funding from NC Dropout Prevention to implement Success in School. The Success in School Program has been selected by the National Dropout Prevention Network as a promising best practice in dropout prevention.
 - ❑ **TEMP (Teen Employment Mentoring Program)** – Helping at risk high school students and foster care youth stay in school and achieve a high school diploma with the help of a mentor. This program’s success is a result of the intense involvement from social work staff, and the employers/mentors.

XI. Special Issues

The economic conditions, of course, may impact any TANF reform effort. Wilson DSS continues to explore creative ways to help families take responsibility for the personal, safety and financial tasks in providing for their children. Agency programs continue to work with more of the working poor which continue to be the focus in helping families move from poverty to economic well-being. We continue to work in partnership with our community partners and business community.

XII. Eligibility Criteria (Required for Electing County)

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

- Definition of relationships

- Payment levels
- Who can apply/be included in the payment
- Benefit Calculation
- Sanctions
- Time limits and extensions
- Benefit Diversion requirements
- Citizenship/Identity requirements
- Substance Use/Mental Health Initiative
- Working For Benefits” Pay after Performance Program with the exceptions listed below.

Wilson County proposes the following initiatives and changes to current policy. Unless otherwise noted, these changes will be implemented once the State and Wilson County’s plan have been approved.

1. In order for a customer to participate in the Family First Program the customer has to be job ready or willing to work on goals toward becoming job ready. A doctor’s note **will not be accepted** to exempt the customer from participating in work related activities required by Family First policy. The customer will be required to participate in required employment related activities determined by the customer and social worker on the MRA. If the customer needs assistance with the disability process they can be assessed for the Disability Program if there is space and funding available. They will not be eligible for the Family First Program (either Phase) if they are not job ready, willing to work, and able to complete work related hours.
2. Wilson County is requesting that NC DHHS request a federal demonstration waiver to disregard TANF incentive payments as countable income in the following federal programs: SNAP, Medicaid, HUD Assistance and Child Care Subsidy for customers participating in Family First Phase Two, Kinship Program or the Disability Program. This is to mitigate the “Cliff Effect” where federal programs work against each other in helping the customer rather than as a collective transition out of poverty. The purpose of the program is to work toward family goals, employment and financial stability with the customer and not have policies in place that will harm or penalize the family for involvement. The waiver will be effective as long as the customers is enrolled and participating in these Wilson County programs. Current federal policy will resume and be enforced once the case is closed. We realize this is a “moving the mountain” level request but know the secret to a 100 mile journey is in taking the first step.
3. There will be no restriction in countable months of education. Customer needs to be progressing and passing classes with C average or above.
4. In the Family First Redesign customers will receive incentives after the MRA goals **are met and completed**. Job Bonus customers will also receive an additional incentive payment. Once a customer obtains employment an incentive will be provided for retaining the job at three and six months.

5. Social worker and SW Supervisor have the final determination in denial of incentive in goals that are not met or complete or customer is not participating or complying with the program policies.
6. If the customer is not cooperative or compliant with Phase Two policy (continual aggressive behavior, not meeting goals, not showing up for appointments without good cause as defined in Family First policy, etc) they will be moved to Phase One and not eligible to return to Phase two during their current 24 month state time clock period. An approval to be reassessed for Phase 2 will have to be determined by the social worker and the social work supervisor if the customer returns to begin another 24 months (after off of the program for a year or more). The customer will not be eligible if it is during the last 12 months on their state/federal timeclock if they have been previously moved to Phase One because of behavior issues or noncompliance.
7. Any customers with exemptions (per Family First state policy) can participate in Phase One or Disability (if caring for a child) but are not eligible for Phase Two until the medical issue is resolved and they are ready for employment transition.
8. There will be no hearings or appeals for Phase Two. Phase One will continue with the state policy appeals process.
9. As long as the child is enrolled in high school and attending regularly they can remain on the case regardless of age until they graduate.
10. Child Only customers will receive incentive payments for goals met in an MRA in addition to their regular Family First Payment if they are working with the Kinship Social Worker.
11. Allow women who have verified their pregnancy by a medical provider to apply for Family First. A medical form, provided by Family First worker, must be signed by an MD, PA-C or FNP-C. Participation in agency parenting classes, verification of ongoing medical care and compliance with prenatal care will be required in order to receive monthly benefits. Once the child is born participant must comply with federal policy regarding child support compliance. Participant must also complete federal work requirements.
12. All Family First “work eligible” individuals are required to be actively participating in work and work related activities for a minimum of 35 hours per week. Participation will be a combination of activities which include but not limited to employment, subsidized employment, vocational training, skills training, education, work experience, substance abuse counseling, mental health, vocational rehabilitation, job readiness/job search, etc. Participants will be required to establish the first 20 hours of their participation in “federally countable activities” as stated in the NC Family First Policy. Education **will be** supported in combination with other federal countable work activities. In two-parent households, both parents in the case must be work eligible. The parents may combine their hours to meet the required average of 35 per week, or 55 hours if they receive federally funded childcare.

13. Offer 200% services to TANF families who do not receive Family First cash assistance to ensure that all family members are progressing educationally and economically through intense case management services. We want to continue efforts to help parents and their children achieve a high school diploma, prevent pregnancy or repeat pregnancy.
14. Phase One and Phase Two Family First cases will be kept open until 90 days of not receiving Family First Benefits. (This includes the month of application if employment services are being offered.) All applicants sign agreement at application stating they understand how this may affect their child support payments. Activities must be started with 90 days of application date.
15. All Family First participant's whose employment results in termination of their FAMILY FIRSTFA benefits or who are receiving Job Bonus will be referred to our Financial Social Work Services to develop a Financial Education and Savings Plan.
16. All Family First cases will adhere to an eligibility review at least once every 12 months. Families are still expected to report changes or when information is received by other sources the eligibility worker may request a review more often if needed.
17. All Child Only Kinship Care cases that have a prior involvement with CPS, Prevention, Juvenile Justice or Foster Care within the last 6 months will be required to comply with the Kinship Care Family Assessment. For families/children determined "at risk" of abuse, neglect, dependency or disruption of placement will be recommended for services. Services include on-going case management, strengths and needs assessment, referral services, advocacy, counseling, monitoring, etc.
18. All Child Only Family First Family Assistance cases with children age 6-17 who are not attending school regularly OR whose grades are not on grade level will be required to comply with the Kinship Care Family Assessment. The goal is to help identify possible educational interventions to avoid children falling below grade levels and ultimately dropping out of school. Resources and services will be provided based on outcomes of the assessment and participation of both the child and caretaker. Caretakers who do not comply with the school requirements, and participate in the Kinship Care Family Assessment and who are determined to not have good cause will be sanctioned and may not be eligible to receive Family First payment (Family First Manual Sect 103).

XIII. Community Service Employment

Wilson County is not choosing to require parents or caretakers receiving assistance to participate in community service employment, if after receiving for two months, they are not participating in federally countable activities for enough hours to count toward the participation rate.

XIV. Appeal Process ***

Wilson County will have a two tier appeals process that complies with state law (G.S. 108A-79). Wilson County has a hearing officer that will conduct and preside over the first and second level appeal hearings. We will continue to follow the State procedures in “Request for Hearing, Scheduling, Place, Summary, Attendance and Conducting the Hearing” for 1st level appeals/hearings. **If the applicant/recipient is not satisfied with the local hearing decision, he/she may ask for a second level hearing from the county DSS.**

2nd Level Appeal/Hearings:

Wilson County will utilize a three person panel for all 2nd level appeal requests. The panel shall include two members from our Family First Planning Committee, and a representative from our County Board of Social Services. The appointed members have been approved by the Wilson County Board of Commissioners to hear all second level appeals. **(Attachment C-1, C-2, C-3)**

2nd level hearing request can be made in writing or verbally. Within five calendar days from the date of request (whether verbally or in writing), complete Request for Second Level Appeal Form (Attachment C-1) and submit to local Hearing Officer. Hearing officer will ensure that all parties are notified of the hearing date/time. The Hearing Officer or designee will coordinate the hearing scheduling with the Board Member and representatives from the Family First Planning Committee. Hearing officer will give reasonable notice to the worker of the date and time of hearing. Hearing officer is not a voting member on 2nd level hearing requests. The worker will be responsible for notifying the client of the date and time. The client may request a postponement or rescheduling of hearing with good cause. Good cause reasons will follow Family First Policy in Section 264 of the Family First Manual. We will follow Family First Manual Section 264 with regards to Place, Record Review, Summary, Attendance, & Conducting the Hearing. The designated 3 member hearing panel which consists of 2 representatives from our Family First County Planning Committee and member of our DSS Board of Directors will render a decision according to Family First Manual, not more than 90 days from the date of the request for 2nd level hearing. When decision is made, notification will be given to worker and mailed by certified mail to client via the Notice of 2nd Level Appeal Decision Letter (Attachment C-2).

Further Appeal

If the applicant/recipient is not satisfied with the final decision following the 2nd level hearing, they may file a petition for judicial review in Superior Court within 30 calendar days of the receipt of that decision. For appeals filed after 30 calendar days, a Superior Court judge may issue an order permitting a review if the judge believes good cause exists for the delay in filing.

The County DSS may not appeal a hearing decision to Superior Court.

XV. Review Prior to Expiration of Time Limits

Wilson County will follow the Standard procedures as outlined in the State Work First Policy Manual, Section 105, III & Section 105A, IV and State Law (N.C.G.S. 108A-27.4(e)(7) to review all caseloads upon termination of benefits due to time clock expirations.

XVI. Funding Requirements

We estimate 100% of our Family First Block Grant will be spent on Benefit Diversion, Employment Services, TANF EA, 200% services and child welfare services. We estimate spending all of our cash assistance. Any unused cash assistance will be set up in a reserve account through the county and used in support of the TANF program.

Attachment B

Rev. 03/09

FAMILY FIRST TANF Crisis Resolution

The Wilson County Department of Social Services will administer the Crisis Resolution Program. This assistance will be offered to families who complete an application and meet the criteria of the program. This **Crisis Resolution Program** fund will be used to alleviate the emergency the family may be experiencing at the time an application is taken. Each application will be evaluated on its own merits.

WCDSS expects that each family use their own abilities and resources to meet the needs of their family. Applications for Crisis Resolution may be appropriate once the family has effectively exhausted their resources and experienced an unusual circumstance beyond their control. Crisis Resolution assistance is to be used when the approval of funds will prevent a child from being placed outside of the home of family or friends and the applicant, or immediate family, have explored alternative living arrangements with family and friends. Crisis Resolution primarily assists families in the areas of housing and utilities or with help in keeping the participant employed.

The criteria for assistance are as follows:

1. We will serve families with dependent children, ages zero through 17 years, who are actively attending school, registered with ESC and are actively seeking employment, or are employed. All adults in the family, under age 65, must be working or registered for employment, actively seeking employment, or unable to work verified by a doctor's statement. This does not include pregnant women without other children.

To be eligible for Crisis Resolution Assistance, families must:

- Live in Wilson County or be moving to Wilson County to alleviate a verified emergency such as domestic violence or personal disaster.
- United States citizen and qualified, or otherwise eligible, immigrants.
- Have a child in the home age 17 or younger who lives with a relative related by blood, marriage or adoption or;
- Have a child in the home that lives with a household member who has legal custody of the child;

A relative is defined as:

- Parent – Natural mother or father, legal or alleged father, or adoptive parents.

- Blood, half-blood, or adoptive relatives, brother, sister, grandparents, any degree of great-grandparents, uncle, aunt any degree of great-uncle or great-aunt, nephew, niece, first cousin once removed-defined as a child of a first cousin.
- Step-relative – Step-parent, stepbrother or stepsister.
- Individual who has legal custody or guardianship.

2. Experiencing Unusual Circumstances:

The family needs to have had an unusual circumstance that caused them to be in a crisis; i.e. catastrophic illness, substantial loss of shelter, food, clothing, or household furnishings due to fire, flood, or similar natural or manmade disaster, or crime of violence. Crisis Resolution may be used for services or items at the discretion of DSS that may prevent out of home placement, and alleviate the emergency. Unpaid water bills or lack of cooking gas, **alone**, does not meet Crisis Resolution guidelines. Crisis resolution funds cannot be used to pay for any medical expenses.

The unusual circumstances must have been beyond their control: Maternity leave does not constitute an unusual circumstance unless a Doctor's note recommends the client stop working earlier than planned.

Acquiring approval from subsidized housing to move into a new location does not constitute an unusual circumstance and is not considered for CR, unless there are other circumstances that meet CR guidelines.

3. Verification of Emergency/Crisis

The applicant must have **verification** that an emergency exists. There must be a disconnect notice for utility service, or a notice *of intent* to Foreclose. For rentals, a court ordered eviction is required unless: - a child is in danger and in threat of being removed from the home, spouse abuse, domestic violence, or –loss of shelter due to a natural disaster, condemned property, etc.

The worker will explore all family resources at the time of application and families will be expected to use those resources in lieu of public assistance. Crisis Resolution is to be used when it will alleviate the emergency and the family has or will have the resources to meet their on-going needs monthly. The Information Sheet is a tool you may use to evaluate this, and to determine if the family has used their resources to meet the essential needs of the family prior to paying for nonessential items and service. The worker must evaluate whether the situation is actually an emergency or request to improve the standard of living. The worker should determine if the applicant has a history of being in a crisis. If so, evaluate whether Crisis Resolution can alleviate the crisis if they are repetitive. Crisis Resolution is to be considered limited public assistance. Refer participant Financial Education class if needed.

All family members included in the budget must cooperate with all Agency programs; i.e., Family First, Food Stamps, Child Support, Family First Family Assistance, Day Care etc.

The family cannot refuse employment or training for employment without good cause. Use the Information Sheet to obtain Employment history.

4. Counting Income

All income in the household whether earned or unearned will be counted in the budget when determining eligibility for crisis resolution, except the earned income of a student. The worker may accept the client's statement regarding income or require verification of income if questionable. In addition, incentives provided through the WCDSS Family First Program will not be counted.

Count the Total Gross income of the household.

Earned Income: Count the actual gross income received for the previous 4 weeks if they are employed. If income begins during the month of application, count the amount that was actually received thus far that month.

Terminated Income: Count the actual gross income received during the month of application. If income terminates and is last received prior to the month of application, do not count the income. If income terminates during the month of application, count the amount received.

Unearned income: Count the actual amount received prior to the month of application.

5. Authorization Amount

The **maximum** payment will be \$600.00 within a 30-day period twice a year. You may authorize re-application within the 30-day period as long as the total does not exceed \$1200.00 within a 12-month period. If any person living in the home has received Crisis Resolution within the last 12 months, the household is not eligible at this time.

Attachment C-1

REQUEST FOR SECOND LEVEL APPEAL

Appellant:
Address:

City State: Zip

Date of Request:
Date of Application:
Date of Birth
Phone #:

Dates of local appeal:

Date of 1st Request: Hearing date: Decision:
Reason for requesting Second Level Appeal:

Is client expected to be assisted by legal counsel or other representative? Yes No
If so, state name and address:

Please attach a copy of the following:

- Local Appeal hearing decision
- Medical verifications for cases involving a disability or incapacity

Worker _____ Date _____

Team Leader _____ Date _____

Submit to County Hearing officer for scheduling of 2nd level hearing and for distribution to Hearing Panel members.

Attachment C-2

Dear

On _____ your request for a Second Level Appeal was heard by the Appeal Board.
Your appeal has been _____
(Approved or Denied)

The reason for this action is:

The State regulations requiring this action are found in Sect _____ of the Family First Manual.

If you are not satisfied with the final decision of the Appeal Board, either, you, or your representative may, within 30 days of the receipt of this decision, file a petition for judicial review in Superior Court.

SW Signature

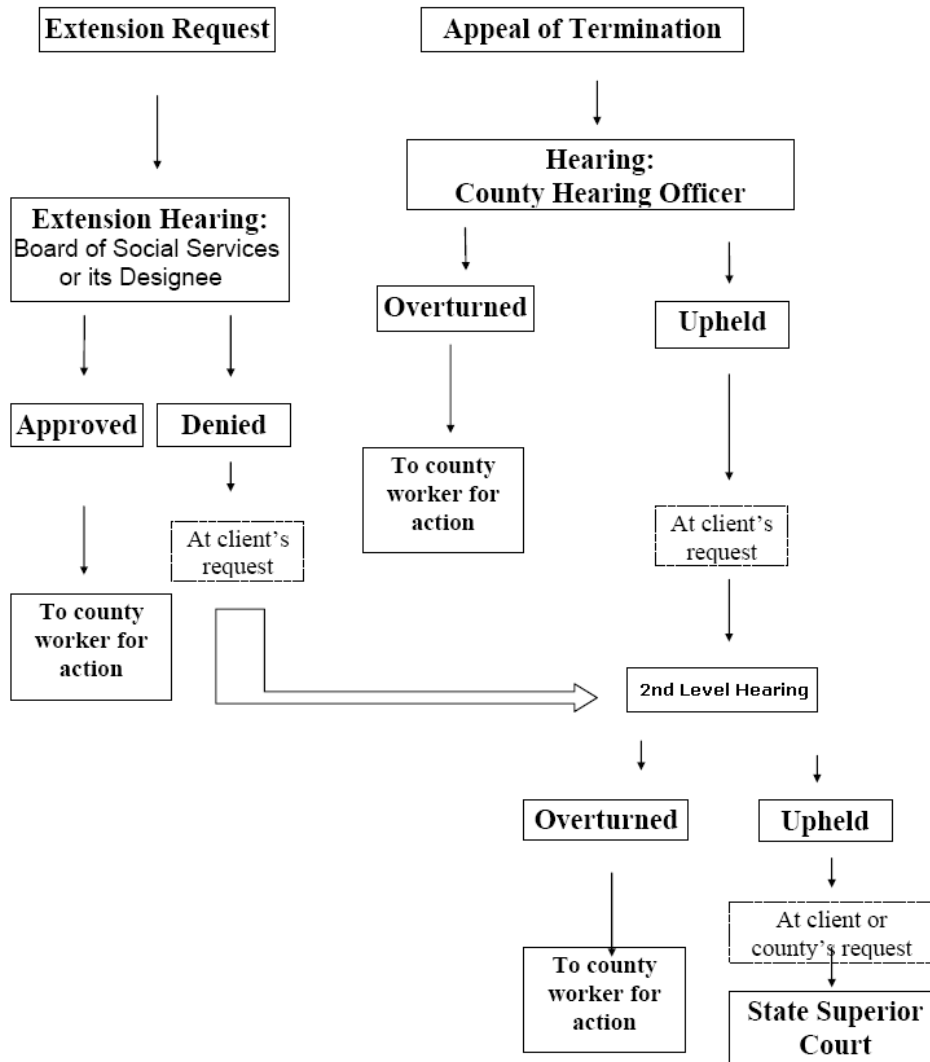
252-_____
Phone

Family First Team Leader

252-_____
Phone

Attachment C-3

Work First Extensions and Appeals



***When the 2nd Level Hearing Committee overturns a local decision and grants an extension, the County Hearing Officer must determine the length of the extension.**

