

LINCOLN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS	MINUTES JANUARY 26, 1998
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The Lincoln County Board of County Commissioners met for a special meeting on January 26, 1998 at the Citizens Center, Commissioners Room, 115 West Main Street, Lincolnton, North Carolina, the regular place of meeting at 6:30 PM. The following were present:

Louis E. McConnell, Chairman
James A. Hallman, Vice Chairman
Terry L. Brotherton
Larry S. Craig
Beth H. Saine

Jeffrey Taylor, Assistant County Attorney
Richard French, County Manager

Also present were Andy Pittman, Director of Social Services, Dawn Warren, Social Worker Supervisor, Kay Canipe, Income Maintenance Supervisor, Lynn Scruggs, Administrative Secretary, and Amy S. Long, Clerk to the Board of Commissioners.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman McConnell called the January 26, 1998 meeting to order.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

Chairman McConnell presented the Agenda for the January 26, 1998 Board of Commissioners special meeting.

AGENDA

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS LINCOLN COUNTY, NORTH CAROLINA

SPECIAL MEETING

JANUARY 26, 1998

- | | |
|------------|--------------------------------|
| 6:30 PM | Call to Order |
| 6:30 PM | Adoption of Agenda |
| 1. 6:30 PM | Lincoln County Work First Plan |

2. 7:30 PM Other Business

Adjourn

Commissioner James Hallman motioned to adopt the agenda for the January 26, 1998 meeting with the addition of Item 3 – Closed Session to discuss a Personnel Matter.

Seconded by Commissioner Larry Craig.
Unanimously approved.

LINCOLN COUNTY WORK FIRST PLAN

Andy Pittman, Dawn Warren, and Lynn Scruggs presented the following Lincoln County Work First Plan to the Commissioners for approval.

Lincoln County Work First Plan

Submitted January 28, 1998

Contact Person: Marvin A. Pittman, Director
Lincoln Co. DSS
PO Box 130, Lincolnton, NC 28093

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Attachments:

MOU with Employment Security Commission

Agreement with Lincoln Recovery Center

Work First Budget for fy99, fy2000

III. Conditions Within the County

A. Needs of Low Income Families

1. Current realities for low income families in Lincoln County is that while the general economic situation is good, with low unemployment and projected job growth in the job base, many clients cannot take advantage of this situation for the following reasons:
 - Lack of available transportation
 - Lack of affordable, quality, child care
 - Poor, or nonexistent, job history
 - Inadequate education
 - Lack of Marketable job skills
 - Alcohol and Substance Abuse Problems

2. Vision Statement - To encourage, empower, and require welfare recipients to become self supporting to the maximum extent possible and to improve the economic security and well being of the entire family.

B. Economic Conditions Within the County

The local Lincolnton economy was particularly vibrant during 1997. Year to date figures reveal an unemployment rate lower than the annual average rate of 5.0% for the county in 1996. A review of the monthly unemployment rates in 1997 further makes the point when not one single monthly rate has met or exceeded the 5.0% figure. It appears that the annual average unemployment rate for Lincoln County for 1997 will end up being somewhere around 4.0%

Recent discussions with several local manufacturing industries centered on expansions in manufacturing capacity and output. Correlating expansions in their workforce also occurred during the year. All of these companies have expressed their opinion that 1998 is expected to continue the upbeat business conditions that have existed throughout 1997. Many have also shared their concern for having a sufficient supply of available job applicants through the coming year.

It should be recognized that although current conditions are relatively good, an unforeseen occurrence, such as a plant closing, would have a negative effect on the ability of Work First recipients to find work.

Planning Process:

Below are the names and organizations of members of the Work First Planning Committee.

Louis McConnell	149 Williams St. Lincolnton, NC 28092	County Commission
Jim Hallman	435 Olde Kings Trail Vale, NC	County Commission
Terry Brotherton	P.O. Box 10 Denver, NC	County Commission
Larry Craig	525 E. Main St. Maiden, NC	County Commission
Beth Sain	1750 Whispering Pines Drive Lincolnton, NC	County Commission
Ken Hand	520 S. Madison St. Lincolnton, NC 28092	Rhyne Heights United Meth. Ch.
Sharon King	110 Colonial Dr.	Lincoln Recovery Center

	Lincolnton, NC 28092	
Dr. Jennifer Meningall	1 Timken Dr. Lincolnton, NC 28092	Lincoln Campus, Gaston College
Paulette Griffin	PO Box 668768 Charlotte, NC 28266	Goodwill Industries
Allen Mackie	529 Aspen St. Lincolnton, NC 28092	Employment Security Commission
Brent Price Christ	329 E. Main St. Lincolnton, NC 28092	Emmanuel United Church of
Susan Brymer	PO Box 423 Lincolnton, NC 28093	Christian Ministries of Lincolnton
Phyllis Reid	6636 Pine Ridge Rd. Denver, NC 28037	E. Lincoln Christian Ministries
Tommy Kever	c/o Lincoln Drugs 132 E. Main St. Lincolnton, NC 28092	Lincolnton/Lincoln Co. Chamber
Mike Owen	PO Box 735 Lincolnton, NC 28093	Lincolnton Housing Authority
Glain Pennell	PO Box 246 Lincolnton, NC 28093	South Fork Baptist Association
David Hollers Governments	PO Box 35008 Charlotte, NC 28235	Centralina Council of
Rev. James Pyatt	PO Box 661 Denver, NC 28037	Denver United Methodist Church
Andy Pittman	PO Box 130 Lincolnton, NC 28092	Lincoln Co. DSS
Dawn Warren	PO Box 130 Lincolnton, NC 28092	Lincoln Co. DSS
Kay Canipe	PO Box 130 Lincolnton, NC 28092	Lincoln Co. DSS
Delores Bolen		DSS Board Member
Al Arrowood Member		Area Mental Health Board
Gloria Mauney		Public Health Board Member

The Planning Committee met on Thursday, January 8, Monday, Jan. 12, and on Thursday January 15, to identify needs of participants and to develop a plan of administering the Work First Program in Lincoln County.

Outcomes and Goals for the County:

Statewide Work First Goals

- 1. Reducing the Work First Caseload**
Lincoln County's goal for caseload reduction is **15%**
- 2. Putting Adults to Work**
Lincoln County's goal is to put **155** adults to work.
- 3. Staying off Welfare after going to work.**
Lincoln County's goal is for **85%** of families to remain off welfare after going to work.
- 4. Meeting the "all parent" participation rate.**
Lincoln County's goal is for **35%** of all parents to be participating in countable work activities for 30 hrs. or more per week.
- 5. Meeting the "two parent" participation rate.**
Lincoln County's goal is for **90%** of all two-parent families to be participating in countable work activities.
- 6. Avoiding Welfare through diversion assistance.**
Lincoln County's goal is to utilize Diversion Assistance for **5 families**.
- 7. Increasing Child Support Orders and Collections for Work First Families**
The goal for Lincoln County is to increase these areas by **10%**.
- 8. Child Well Being**
Lincoln County's goal is a case plan for **100%** of children receiving both Work First and CPS services.

Plans to Achieve and Measure the Outcomes and Goals:

1. Reducing the Work First Caseload:

Lincoln County will seek to reduce the Work First caseload by making employment the focus of every contact that a recipient or potential recipient has with DSS. As outlined in legislation, all applicants will register with Employment Security Commission before becoming eligible to receive WFFA.

For further details see #2 below.

2. Putting Adults to Work:

All mandatory Work First clients will be entered into the Employment Program as caseload constraints allow. These cases will be managed by a social worker, with active participation in Job Search. We will refer these clients, as appropriate, to Goodwill Industries for Job Development and Vocational Assessment in order to determine suitable placement. We will also make referrals to Vocational Rehabilitation if a disability is observed that would present a barrier to employment. A substance abuse assessment of each client entering the Employment Program will be performed by a clinician from the Recovery Center. This assessment will be done in conjunction with the signing of the Mutual Responsibility Agreement, and any need for further involvement with the

Recovery Center will be a condition of the agreement. Participants in the Employment Program will be offered various Life-Skill training programs, as available, through any of various community resources (i.e. Goodwill Industries, Gaston College, and the faith community.) Vocational training will be available through Gaston College and Goodwill Industries to help clients up-grade their skills, and increase their opportunities for employment. Community Service (Work Experience) will be available for participants that need hands-on experience in order to be prepared to seek regular employment.

The Employment Security Commission has JTPA funds available for OJT that will be used to provide incentive for area employers to hire Work First participants. We also intend to utilize the Job-Link center proposed for our county as soon as it becomes a reality.

Child Care Assistance (as available), Transportation Assistance through direct transportation or mileage reimbursement (as available) are two of the supportive services that will assist clients in becoming employed. Participation Expense payments will also be available to help clients with things such as uniforms, tools, proper clothing, car repairs and insurance.

These activities and services will be managed by DSS staff and staff from various agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation, The Recovery Center, Employment Security Commission, Goodwill Industries, and Gaston College. The activities will take place at a variety of locations including, but not limited to, the offices of the aforementioned agencies.

This goal will be tracked and measured through the EIS system report titled "Work First Employment Goals" as well as through the EPIS tracking report JBREP6 which give monthly employment statistics. It can also be tracked through internal reports within the Employment Unit.

3. Staying Off Welfare after Going to Work:

Several strategies will be in place to help assure that recipients who become employed remain employed. One of these is to make sure that participants are prepared up-front for what lies ahead when they become employed. This will be done by the Life-Skills classes as outlined in #2 above. Another strategy for this goal is to attempt to obtain some follow-up information after the client goes to work. This information could be obtained from the client or from a tracking process performed through the Employment Security Commission. An additional means of meeting this goal will be the utilization of grant money applied for through the Gaston-Lincoln Mental Health Area Authority. This money would be used to establish Employee Assistance Programs for employees of companies that hire welfare recipients. This program would help alleviate potential problems as soon as they arise. It is hoped that this early intervention will help participants remain employed instead of perhaps quitting or getting fired. Transitional Medicaid benefits will be available for up to 12 months for families whose WFFA is terminated due to employment. This will enable clients to remain employed even if they are not eligible for health insurance through their employers for at least a year. These clients will also be screened for referral to the New Focus program. This program,

sponsored by Rhyne Heights United Methodist Church, helps clients form relationships, formulate a budget, and plan for their future. Clients that participate in this program have the support of their peers and their mentors for the rest of their lives if they choose to remain involved.

Social workers and caseworkers will assist employees in accessing these services. Employees of ESC will assist in tracking participants who do not turn in their employment hours to DSS.

This goal will be measured as it is for all counties in the standard state program.

4. Meeting the "All Parent" Participation Rate:

Cases will be assigned to the Employment Unit from the PPF report twice each month. This will allow maximum participation in the Employment Program. Cases will be monitored closely by a social worker in order to insure that each client is completing enough hours to meet this goal and to move to self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. This may require that a client participate in a combination of activities until full-time employment is available. The new sanction structure as outlined in Section VIII will serve as incentive for clients to participate the maximum number of hours needed. The activities described in #2 above will be used to meet this goal also.

Social workers and clients will be responsible for carrying out the activities that

will be needed to meet this goal. DSS staff will have the responsibility of fully explaining expectations and consequences to clients.

These activities will take place at the local DSS, clients' homes, community resource sites, and any other appropriate.

This goal will be measured through the EPIS reporting system, and results obtained in the "All Families Counted" report.

5. Meeting the Two Parent Rate:

This population has proven to be the most difficult to work with. These families often go on and off of public assistance faster than DSS can get cooperation from them for the Employment Program. Even if we do get them in the Employment Program, they often go off of WFFA without ever reporting participation hours. Working with this population requires swift and consistent action on the part of the social worker. These cases will be assigned to the Employment Unit as soon as they are approved through WFFA. This population will be referred immediately to Goodwill Industries for job development and vocational assessment. Barriers to employment will have to be addressed and resolved quickly. Since the state standard program will have this group of participants on a "pay after performance" program, we will also employ this system here. This should maximize participation, and allow us a better strategy to meet this goal.

These families will be offered all the support activities outlined in #2 above. Social workers, income maintenance case workers, ESC staff, and Goodwill Industries will all work together to insure maximum participation and to assist these families in moving to self-sufficiency as quickly as possible. These activities will take place at any appropriate location, including DSS office, ESC, and Goodwill Industries.

This goal can be measured through EPIS reporting and the results found in the report titled "Two Parent Counted" in RMDS.

6. Avoiding Welfare through Diversion Assistance:

This goal will be accomplished at the Family and Children's intake level. When a client applies for WFFA the IM worker will immediately explore with them the alternatives to monthly WFFA payments that are available to them. If determined to be appropriate, the family will be offered Diversion Assistance in the form of a lump sum cash payment that would equal up to three months WFFA payment that would alleviate an immediate need. This payment would be made to carry the family over until the crisis situation is averted through pending employment.

Referrals to community resources, and any other support service available will be offered to these clients.

Family and Children's Intake will coordinate these referrals at the DSS office.

This goal will be measured by tracking the EIS codes for Diversion Assistance.

7. Increasing Child Support Orders and Collections for Work First Families:

New federal guidelines will make efforts to collect child support more intensive. Major provisions of this include:

1. State directory for new hires to ensure that child support continues when the AP changes employment.
2. A financial institution data match, to determine if a delinquent AP has sufficient funds to pay child support.
3. Expedited process to establish and collect child support, including administratively ordering genetic and blood tests, and changing venue without filing a petition.
4. Provides for paternity establishment through written statements from each parent.
5. Requires social security numbers on many documents to aid in tracking.
6. Creates a Central Collection Unit to receive child support payments.

7. Creates a lien on real property and personal obligations of obligors delinquent in child support payments.

All of these provisions will be mandatory for Work First clients, with the goal being to collect as much child support as possible, and thus reduce reliance on public assistance.

Support services for this function will be carried out through close coordination between Work First and Child Support staff. This goal will be measured by a report generated from the state office.

8. Improving Child Well-Being:

Children with parents participating in Work First Employment Services will be afforded maximum protection available through the system. If any child is also in the Child Welfare system, a safety plan will be in place that takes in to consideration any special needs created by the parent's involvement in Employment Services. If a family is under an Employment sanction, the Employment Social Worker will closely follow that case to ensure the children in the home are safe. Appropriate referrals will be made as needed. If there is suspicion of neglect or abuse, referrals to CPS will be made.

Any and all support services available will be used to ensure that parent and child are supported through the Child Welfare and Work First programs.

There will need to be increased coordination between Work First and Child Welfare programs in order to provide maximum protection for these children.

This goal will be measured by having Child Welfare staff alert the Work First Social Worker anytime they learn during the course of the investigation that the client is a Work First client. In addition, Work First staff will coordinate with Child Welfare if it is learned that their participant is also involved with Child Welfare. Since this a statewide goal, we will use whatever provision the state has in place to measure this goal in any other county.

Administration:

A. Authority for Administration of the Work First Program

The Lincoln County board of County Commissioners has authority for administration of the Work First Program in Lincoln County.

B. County Organization for Service Delivery

The Work First and Income Maintenance Units of the Department of Social Services are responsible for administering Work First in Lincoln County. These two units are comprised of 19 budgeted positions.

Work First Employment Unit

The Work First Unit includes two social workers, one working supervisor, and one case aide. This unit works to assess recipients' current status, needs, employment and educational history, and barriers to employment. These workers are responsible for developing the Mutual Responsibility Agreement, Part II, which will deal with the details of moving the recipient into employment status. Case Management and follow up are conducted by this unit, along with any adjustments to the agreement, or possible imposition of sanctions.

Work First Cash Assistance Unit

The Income Maintenance Unit includes one supervisor, one lead worker, and 13 income maintenance caseworkers. This unit administers the Work

First Cash Assistance, Medicaid, and Food Stamp program for families with children. Intake and application processing, case reviews, child support referrals, and administration of the Emergency Assistance program are their prime responsibilities.

Cash assistance recipients undergo orientation and assessment from the Work First Unit social workers to determine what types of employment activities are most appropriate for each recipient. In addition, Lincoln Recovery Center has staff co-located with the Work First Unit on orientation and assessment days to assess recipients. Any recommendations made by the Lincoln Recovery Center become part of the Mutual Responsibility Agreement.

Goodwill Inc. has a job developer available to work with the Work First Unit to assist with employment of job ready individuals.

C. Administration of the First Stop Program

Attached is a copy of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Lincoln Co. DSS and the Lincoln Co. ESC.

D. Community Service Program

Lincoln Co. DSS will place recipients in community service work experience jobs with Lincoln County Government, the public school system, Lincoln Housing Authority, Salem Industries of Lincolnton, Lincoln Co. DSS and the Clerk of Court.

E. Child Care, Transportation, and Substance Abuse

Priorities for Child Care Funds

- a. 4.5 % Special Needs Children (Special State Set-Aside)
- b. Day Care to Support Employment of Foster Parents
- c. Day Care to Support Employment for Parents:
 1. When participating in Work First Employment Services
 2. When receiving Work First Cash and working, but not mandatory
 3. When employed, not receiving cash, but at risk of dependency w/o day care.
- d. Day Care to Support Training/Education Leading to Employment
- e. Day Care to Support Developmental Needs of the Child.

Transportation Services

If an individual is active in the employment program and transportation is a barrier to employment, DSS will attempt to assist with transportation.

Assistance may be provided directly by DSS staff using DSS vehicles, by car pooling with other active employment participants, through contract with Carolina Transportation, utilizing community volunteers, or through mileage reimbursement. In addition to these alternatives, Goodwill Industries has committed to helping develop a “wheels to work” program in Lincoln County, which would receive donated automobiles, assure their serviceability, and provide them to clients in need of a car.

Substance Abuse Services

The Lincoln Recovery Center will provide substance abuse assessments on each active participant in Work First. On days when the DSS is conducting orientation classes, the Recovery Center will have staff located in the Work First office. Any substance abuse recommendations will be made a part of the participants Work First Mutual Responsibility Agreement, part II.

A copy of the local agreement with The Recovery Center is attached.

F. Utilizing Public and Private Resources

See section X.

G. Appeals Process

A client may file a written request for appeal within 60 days of the date of the notice to the client regarding decisions made in the Work First Cash Assistance case. Upon receipt of the written request, a local conference with the worker's supervisor and the recipient will be scheduled within five days, or at the recipient's earliest convenience. A response will be mailed to the recipient within 5 days. If the issue cannot be resolved at this conference, the client may file an appeal within 15 days of the local conference to have his appeal heard by an impartial hearing officer. A response will be mailed to the recipient within 5 days.

Eligibility for Cash Assistance

Lincoln County's criteria for eligibility for Cash Assistance, the benefit levels, and the period of eligibility will be the same as that established by the State of North Carolina for standard counties with the following exceptions relating to sanctions for non-compliance with the Work First Mutual Responsibility Agreement, countable income, and living arrangement:

Failure to sign the Mutual Responsibility Agreement will result in a period of ineligibility for three months before the recipient may again receive cash assistance.

Failure to comply with the Mutual Responsibility Agreement will result in the following sanctions:

1st. sanction - reduce the TANF grant by half for three months or until they comply.

2nd sanction - terminate cash assistance for three months

3rd sanction - terminate cash assistance for six months

4th sanction - terminate cash assistance for twelve months

All income earned in the first three months will be disregarded in computing the amount of the cash assistance payment.

25% of all earned income will be counted in computing the amount of the cash assistance payment during the second three-month period.

50% of all earned income will be counted in computing the amount of the cash assistance payment during the next six-month period.

75% of all earned income will be counted in computing the amount of the cash assistance payment for the next 12 months.

In cases where the minor child is not living with a parent, the director or his designee must determine that the living arrangement is in the best interest of the child before cash assistance can be authorized.

These changes to the state standard eligibility criteria have been made to provide additional incentive to recipients to become self sufficient and to assure the well being of children who are living apart from their parents.

Mutual Responsibility Agreement requirements for applicants and recipients will be the same as for standard counties under the state plan.

Emergency Assistance

Lincoln County DSS will use the following criteria to determine eligibility for Emergency Assistance:

There must be a minor child residing in the home with a relative as defined in the Cash Assistance regulations.

The family must be facing an unforeseen emergency that threatens the health, safety, or well being of the family. An example could be eviction from housing, cut off of utilities, etc.

Proof of the existence of the emergency must be presented, such as a written eviction notice, cut off notice from the power company, or some other proof of a valid emergency.

Assistance will be provided in the form of a vender payment to the vendor of the service.

Assistance may not be provided for any medical care.

Assistance will be limited to one payment, up to \$300, in any 12-month period.

Assistance will not be provided to any person who is currently under a sanction resulting in termination of the Cash Assistance payment.

To be eligible for Emergency Assistance, the household net income must be at or below the current poverty level and there can be no more than \$500 liquid assets (cash, or savings).

Any SSI payments in the home will be included as countable income.

Work First Block Grant funds in the amount of \$92,692 are being allocated in each year of the plan for Emergency Assistance requests.

X. Funding Requirements

Lincoln County is budgeting 90% of the fy97 MOE requirement in both years of the Work First Local Plan, as allowed by legislation. The local savings from the 10% reduction in MOE will be placed in the county fund balance to be available to the county in the case of higher than expected expenditures in the Work First program.

Please see Work First budget figures for fy99 and fy2000, which are attached to this plan.

XI. Innovative County Strategies

Lincoln County is combining generous earned income disregard incentives with increased sanctions for non-compliance with the MRA to send a clear message to applicants and recipients that efforts to find and retain employment are expected.

XII. Special Issues

None Noted

XIII. Certification

The Lincoln County Work First Local Plan was reviewed by the Lincoln County Board of Commissioners on Monday night, January 26, 1998, and approved unanimously.

Louis E. McConnell, Chairman, Lincoln County Board of Commissioners

A motion by Commissioner Larry Craig to accept the Lincoln County Work First Plan as submitted.

Seconded by Commissioner Beth Saine.
Unanimously approved.

Chairman McConnell called for a five minute recess.

Chairman McConnell called the meeting back to order.

OTHER BUSINESS

Rick French, County Manager, reminded the Board of the meeting planned with the School Board on February 9, 1998. He also told the Board that a Public Hearing needs to be scheduled for the Green Acres Subdivision for a leash law. He reminded Chairman McConnell and Commissioner Saine of the meeting on Wednesday, January 28, 1998 with the Trust for Public Land and Gaston County.

Commissioner Beth Saine stated that she would not be able to attend this meeting.

Rick French asked the Board if they would be able to attend the meeting with the EDA on February 11, 1998 at 10:00 a.m. He stated that he would ask Phyllis Owens to reschedule the meeting for evening hours.

Commissioner Larry Craig stated that he had been receiving concerns from the Community about what the Gaston College will offer at the new Lincoln campus.

Commissioner James Hallman stated that as he understands it, the same instructors and classes will be at the Lincoln Campus as are in Dallas.

Commissioner Larry Craig stated that he would like the County Manager to get a Gaston College official to speak to the Board about this matter.

Commissioner Terry Brotherton stated that he believes in the format of the Economic Development Association, but he has questions about how development can be approached differently.

Commissioner James Hallman suggested that the Commissioners meet with the EDA Executive Committee more often, and keep dialog open with them.

Allen Mackie stated that he is an ex-officio member of the EDA Board, and he strongly encourages the Commissioners to interact with the EDA Board.

CLOSED SESSION

Chairman McConnell advised that there was a need for a Closed Session for the purpose of discussing a Personnel Matter.

Commissioner James Hallman motioned that the Board go in to Closed Session.

Seconded by Commissioner Beth Saine.
Unanimously approved.

Commissioner James Hallman motioned for the Board to come out of Closed Session.

Seconded by Commissioner Beth Saine.
Unanimously approved.

Chairman McConnell advised that the Board would return to Open Session.

ADJOURNMENT

Being no further business to come before the Board of Commissioners at this time, Chairman McConnell entertained a motion to adjourn the January 26, 1998 Special Meeting.

Commissioner James Hallman motioned that the Board adjourn the January 26, 1998 Special Meeting.

Seconded by Commissioner Larry Craig.
Unanimously approved.