

# MACON COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES



## WORK FIRST COUNTY PLAN

**2019-2022**

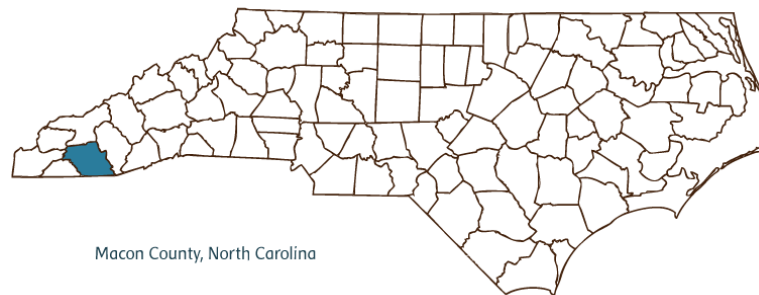
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*Our mission: Partnering to promote, protect, and strengthen our community.*

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## I. COUNTY CONDITIONS

Macon County, founded in 1828 and named for [Nathaniel Macon](#), is a Western North Carolina mountainous county nestled in the cradle of the Nantahala, Chattahoochee-Oconee, and Sumter National Forests. With the [Town of Franklin](#) as its County Seat, Macon County is home to the headwaters of the Nantahala River and, at mile marker 110, is one of the first major stops along the 2,190 mile Appalachian Trail for north-bound hikers. Macon County is a hub of bountiful outdoor activities and one of the most scenic areas within the Smoky Mountains.



Macon County, North Carolina

The county is within easy driving distances to several major metropolitan areas: Atlanta, GA is 127 miles to the south; Knoxville, TN is 112 miles to the north; Greenville, SC is 90 miles to the southeast and Asheville, NC is 60 miles to the east. It is often remarked that Macon County is closer to four other state capitals than her own: Montgomery, AL (290 miles); Nashville, TN (271 miles); Columbia, SC (215 miles); and Atlanta, GA (130 miles) are all a shorter distance than Raleigh (312 miles).

The county has two primary towns: Franklin and Highlands, with a total of eleven townships between.



By 2019, the total county population is projected to increase 8.23% from its current 34,376 (as of July 2016) to 37,204 with the citizens over the age of 65 at 33.9% of the total population. Macon County's population experiences "surges" during the

spring, summer, and early fall months due to the seasonal part-time residents and visitors in the area.

Two hospitals, two free clinics, two urgent care centers, and a locally based Mountain Area Medical Airlift helicopter supports the regional medical facilities and a wide variety of medical and dental practices throughout Macon County. Educationally, there are three public high schools, an advanced high school placement option through Macon Early College, a local satellite campus of one of the state's 58 community colleges (Southwestern Community College) and an easy 25 mile drive to one of only two tuition-free University of North Carolina campuses (Western Carolina University).

In addition to the numerous National Forests mentioned previously, Macon County offers access to several points of cultural and natural interest within easy driving distance including: the Smoky Mountain Center for the Performing Arts; Dry, Cullasaja, Bridal Veil, and Quarry Falls; Lakes Toxaway, Glenville, and Sequoyah, Whiteside Mountain; the Little Tennessee and the Nantahala Rivers and several commercial gem mines open to the public and which bring revenues to the county. The picturesque mountain setting of Macon County has made tourism the number one industry.

Macon County's unemployment rate for April 2015 was 7.1%. Over the past 2¼ years the unemployment rate has fallen to a current 4.1% as of July 2017. With a heavy reliance on tourism and construction, Macon County was especially hard-hit during the 2007-2009 Great Recession. Shown below, the county's unemployment rate has witnessed a slow but steady decline with the current rate at its lowest since the country's emergence from the Great Recession.



Macon County families have learned to be resourceful in different ways such as changing their skill sets through offered education and work incentive programs

(e.g., [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act](#) or WIOA) or, as in most cases, adapting to working for fewer wages per hour while acquiring second jobs as needed. Our families have learned to be more self-reliant and self-sufficient. Macon County Department of Social Services (DSS), as with most social service agencies across North Carolina during the Great Recession, experienced an increase in the number of families being served and accessing additional economic benefits programs for which they have qualified.

Additional challenges faced by Macon County families include:

- lack of affordable housing;
- regionally lower competitive wages / reduced hours;
- easily accessible and dependable transportation;
- equitable lack of access to lower-cost energy sources (e.g. natural gas);
- lack of primary medical providers;
- medical insurance limitations;
- significant poly-substance abuse combined with extreme lack of access to in-patient or medication assisted treatment substance abuse services;
- lack of affordable / subsidized child care
- domestic and family violence;
- poor stress coping mechanisms; and
- lack of access to reliable mental health issues.

In response to the many difficulties that job loss has imposed on our community, Macon County DSS operates a Community Resource Center that helps directs citizens to the appropriate resources within the community. [Macon County CareNet](#), our local food and self-reliance ministry, also operates [CharityTracker](#) that links various charitable organizations in community together so those subscribing remain connected in understanding of the community's needs and to guard against abuses of those charitable organizations. Macon County's Economic Development Committees are diligently seeking new companies in hopes that someone will choose Macon County for their new home site for their business.

## **II. PRINCIPLES OF PARTNERSHIP | CIVIL RIGHTS ACT**

Macon County DSS will continue to promote, protect, and strengthen all of the families we serve (not just our Work First families) through our intentional and diligent application of the six principles of Family Centered Practice and Systems of Care approach in every encounter. This approach is modeled from the agency's Director (who formerly served as North Carolina's Multiple Response Coordinator) and Leadership Team down throughout our organizational structure. All Macon County DSS customers and staff are treated with respect; given a chance to be heard; recognized for their strengths; free from prejudicial judgments; a part of a

greater partnership; and one in which the partnership is equal. It is this agency's committed belief that this approach is crucial in leading to longer term employment and shorter term Work First assistance.

While this agency realizes that each family has different strengths and needs; our applicants/recipients (A/R) are encouraged to work diligently within their abilities and according to their specific needs and are held accountable in co-authoring their own future success.

Macon County complies with both the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA). Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 compliance in overcoming more than 300+ language barriers for public assistance and social service customers is met through an agency contract with [Telelanguage](#). The agency also employs two full-time front reception area staff to specially meet the interpretation and translation needs of Macon County's Hispanic or Latino population. One staff member's primary language is English with Spanish as a secondary language while the other's primary language is Spanish with English as a secondary. Duties and responsibilities of these two specific staff members are delegated so that they may also accompany field based agency staff as needed. The agency has also purchased to equipment to help meet the needs of our deaf and hard-of-hearing customers.

Macon County DSS employees are equally protected from discrimination under this agency's strict adherence to Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

### **III. PLANNING PROCESS**

#### **A. Planning Committee**

##### **Board of County Commissioners**

Mr. James Tate, Chairman  
Mr. Ronnie Beale, Liaison to DSS  
Mr. Paul Higdon  
Mr. Gary Shields  
Mr. Karl Gillespie

##### **Board of Social Services**

Ms. Lisa Leatherman, Chairman  
Ms. Darlene Green  
Ms. Evelyn Southard

Mr. Derek Roland, County Manager

##### **Welfare Reform Board Committee (Appointed by Position)**

Board of Commissioners – Mr. James Tate  
North Carolina Legislature – Senator Jim Davis  
Social Services Board – Ms. Lisa Leatherman  
Area Mental Health Board – Ms. Dorothy Crawford  
Macon County Schools – Ms. Nancy Cantrell

Macon County Workforce Center – Ms. Dale West  
WIOA Director – Ms. Vanessa Moore  
Macon Program for Progress – Mr. Chuck Sutton, Executive Director  
Consumer – T.B.A.  
Macon County Transit – Ms. Kim Angel, Director  
Franklin Town Council – Mayor Bob Scott  
Macon County CareNet – Ms. Tasha Pinkerton, Interim Executive Director  
Social Services Representative – Mr. R. Patrick Betancourt, Director  
Social Services Representative – Ms. Sheila Conley, Economic Services Supervisor  
Social Services Representative – Ms. Amy Mason  
Macon County Work First Caseworker – Ms. Christina Wallace

## **B. Public Comment**

The public review process included the plan being posted at the following locations from November 28, 2017 through December 11, 2017:

- Macon County Public Library – 149 Siler Farm Rd. Franklin, NC 28734
- Macon County Government Annex – 5 W. Main St. Franklin, NC 28734
- Macon County DSS – 1832 Lakeside Dr. Franklin, NC 28734
- Online at <http://maconnc.org/dss.html>

Public notices of obtaining a copy of and commenting on the plan will be announced on local radio stations [WFSC/WNCC](#) in Franklin and [WHLC](#) in Highlands as well in two local newspapers: [The Franklin Press](#) and the [Macon County News](#). Public comments will be accepted as outlined in Section XVII below (pp. 26). Review of the plan and comments will be obtained formally from the local planning committee members and from public comment as well as informally from community leaders and concerned citizens. The local planning committee members will assist in gathering comments from their respective agencies and will continue to meet on a regular basis to assist in implementing and revising the plan if needed.

## **C. Planning Development**

As a result of the compressed timeframe to update Macon County's Work First planning development was adjusted this year from previous planning development strategies. Following discussions with the North Carolina Division of Social Services in late September 2017, Macon County began plan revisions to incorporate planning feedback from the Division. Macon County's Social Services Board will be provided a plan update on Wednesday, November 15, 2017 while the local planning committee will hold a luncheon meeting on November 28, 2017 to review this updated Work First County Plan. A review of the previous planning processes, proposed modifications to the current plan, and identification of unmet needs within the community will be addressed by the committee and incorporated as an addendum to

this plan if needed. To meet the deadline of plan submission, this revised plan will be presented to the local planning committee simultaneously as public comment is sought. Macon County's Board of Commissioners will meet on Tuesday, December 12, 2017. This will allow for exactly two weeks of public commenting prior to the plan presentation to the Commissioners the evening of December 12. Any public comments provided prior to the Board of County Commissioners' meeting will be recognized at that meeting. If the Board of County Commissioners approves this revised plan, Macon County will submit to the Division a signed plan by December 15, 2017.

As mentioned previously, while unemployment is at a ten-year low, the job market in Macon County remains limited. The local planning committee will be asked to discuss on-going needs and strategies to assist employment-seeking citizens. These strategies may include directing citizens to basic (i.e., GED) or additional educational attainment, technical skills training, soft skills training, child care, accessing public transportation or continued economic development to attract employers to the county. The agency recognizes that in order to understand how to help families within our community, we first need to understand the factors that have impacted them to bring them to the point in which welfare is being requested. Macon County Work First A/R will be assessed by DSS staff and then referred to the county partner that is most suited to help the individuals to obtain self-reliance.

#### **IV. OUTCOMES AND GOALS**

##### **A. Work First Goals**

- 1. Employment** – Employment Services will work with 100% of all work-eligible families so that self-reliance will be realized and goals for the future can be met for each family.
- 2. Meeting Federal Participation Rates** – Active participation in federal countable work activities will lead to full time employment for 50% of all Single-Parent and 90% of Two-Parent Participation. Macon County DSS has met this goal for the past twelve months as, at the current time, the agency only has child-only cases.
- 3. Providing Employment Services** – Active participation in intensive employment services for all families will be completed in order to meet the participation rate and ensure that families are serviced adequately before the end of five years. Employment services will assist 80% of all Single-Parent Families and 100% of Two-Parent Families in job preparation with the aid of the community partners.



4. **Remaining Off Welfare** - 90% of adults and their families will remain off Work First welfare assistance after obtaining employment.
5. **Job Retention** – 60% of families who leave Work First for employment will continue to be employed 6 months after leaving the program. 50% of families who leave the program for employment will continue to be employed 12 months after leaving the program.
6. **Benefit Diversion** – For a more successful outcome, Benefit Diversion (BD) will be assessed for 4% of families to help alleviate the financial crisis and help families return to full time employment using this temporary assistance.

At this time, Macon County has not established outcome goals beyond those outlined by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services | Division of Social Services.

## V. PLANS TO MEASURE AND ACHIEVE OUTCOMES AND GOALS

### A. Macon County Activities

- **Build on efforts to promote child protection, permanency, and self-reliance for families**

**Methodology:** Expand recruitment efforts to increase diversity of child welfare resource parents. As stated previously, Macon DSS employs two full-time staff who can translate and interpret information for our Hispanic and Latino customers. As Hispanic and Latino citizens comprise 6.8% (as of July 2016) of Macon County's population, the agency recognizes the need for staff that can assist their child welfare colleagues in working with families whose primary language is Spanish as well as additional Spanish speaking resource families. As of this current plan, Macon County DSS has one resource family in which Spanish is the mother's primary language with English as a secondary language and English is the father's primary language and he is proficient in speaking Spanish. Macon County DSS also contracts with a former foster parent / current adoptive parent whose primary language is Spanish to assist our foster care staff in supervising family/sibling visitations.

**Methodology:** Frequent court reviews for children in the legal custody of Macon County are practiced. Child welfare supervisors, legal staff, and the agency Director identify children who would benefit from more frequent court reviews to assist with achieving permanency within 12 months of entering foster care. As of this current plan, Macon County is achieving permanency rates for children

entering foster care within the following timeframes (with NC's average as comparison)<sup>1</sup>:

- Within 12 months of entry = 20.0% (31.3%)
- Within 12-23 months of entry = 25.0% (44.6%)
- Within 24 months or more = 72.7% (37.7%)

**Methodology:** Based on the agency's relatively small size close-working, interdepartmental teams are more easily able to share appropriate case information and identify resources available to support families. These professional relationships accomplish enhanced strategies that more firmly unify the family.

**Methodology:** Many of our Child-Only cases represent caretakers other than the biological parent providing care for children. Some caretakers have difficulty dealing with emotional and behavioral challenged children/teens. This agency has enhanced kinship care by expanding its definition of *relative* in Child-Only cases.

**Methodology:** Macon County will assess each Child-Only case in which the caretaker is not the parent. If the biological parent moves into caretaker's the home, then the case will be reviewed to determine if the Work First payment should continue.

**Methodology:** Macon County will not receive any Work First cash assistance transfer cases from another NC county or State without first assessing the sending county's case and the overall situation of the family. Macon County may decline any cash assistance that does not meet our electing plan criteria. Unless prohibited by Court Order, it may be in the best interest of the children that the Child-Only Work First case be terminated and the children placed with their biological parents.

**Methodology:** Macon County DSS can make relocation funds available to appropriate Work First A/R to relocate them to an area where either a support system or substantial employment can be found. These funds are limited to \$400.00 and are available only to those who meet Work First Family Assistance (WFFA) income and eligibility requirements. These funds are limited to a one-time relocation per family. The Work First Intake worker will evaluate the family for this assistance. The on-going Work First Caseworker may also make this recommendation after the application process has been initiated. The Work First Supervisor must approve any recommendation for this assistance. The Intake worker will be responsible for determining the service to be purchased and complete the vendor payment request. Families who receive relocation assistance may be eligible for one night's lodging provided by a Transient Fund administered by

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<sup>1</sup> Duncan, D.F., Kum, H.C., Flair, K.A., Stewart, C.J., Vaughn, J.S., Guest, S., Rose, R.A., Malley, K.M.D. and Gwaltney, A.Y. (2017). Management Assistance for Child Welfare, Work First, and Food & Nutrition Services in North Carolina (v3.2). Retrieved November 2, 2017, from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Jordan Institute for Families website. URL: <http://ssw.unc.edu/ma/>

the Macon County Sheriff's Department. Social Work staff will be available to assist with transportation needs for these A/R, such as transportation to the bus station.

- **Condition of the Work First Mutual Responsibility Agreement**

**Methodology:** All families involved with Child Protective Service (CPS) and Work First that are screened to have behavioral indicators or substance abuse issues will be referred to a local mental health provider for assessment and any subsequent treatment.

**Methodology:** Each family entering into the Work First program will be evaluated by the DSS staff. At evaluation, staff will determine the most appropriate avenue for the A/R based on the evaluation, including but not limited to: classes at [Southwestern Community College](#), finance/budgeting management assistance, mental health treatment, referral to [Smoky Mountain Pregnancy Care Center](#) or the [Nurse Family Partnership \(NFP\)](#), Workforce Center, or other appropriate agencies within the county. Workers will complete the Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA) with the A/R and the A/R must agree to the conditions on the MRA. Work First participants are required to follow any recommendations outlined on the MRA. Failure to provide verification of compliance as well as comply with conditions will result in termination of Work First Cash Assistance benefits.

**Methodology:** Of all adults who leave welfare for work 90% will stay off welfare. Macon County will provide transitional employment services for A/R that work while actively participating in WFFA. A/R can receive up to 3 months of service after receiving their final benefit assistance payment if income is less than 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL). Services may include: a monthly follow-up by DSS staff, transportation reimbursement or assistance, or on-going case management. Support services available to active participants will also be provided to newly employed recipients.

- **Continue to require a Child Support establishment prior to making a Work First cash assistance application**

**Methodology:** It is vital for the family to move toward self-reliance and both parents of the children provide financial support for their children. All persons applying for Work First cash assistance must comply with Child Support Enforcement prior to completing the Work First processing time of 45 days. Failure to comply with this requirement will result in a denial of the Work First Application. As of October 2017, Macon County's overall Child Support Enforcement establishment rate stands at 99.50%<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Based on Self-Assessment scores provided by the North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services | Division of Social Services - Child Support Enforcement Section on November 6, 2017.

- **Strategy planning with potential Work First cash assistance recipients**

**Methodology:** Work First staff will work with all able-bodied adults who have had a recent connection to the workforce. These applicants will be assessed and will be required to complete a mandatory two-week job search with a specified number of applications to be determined based on the assessed skills and abilities of the individual. Staff will conduct applicant job-readiness assessments and work closely with Workforce Center to assist able-bodied adults to be job ready.

**Methodology:** In conjunction with the agency staff, Workforce Center staff will assist those A/R that have experienced a recent no-fault loss of employment in applying for Unemployment Insurance, if eligible and job search activities. Workforce Center is the North Carolina local connector to internet-based, real-time job matching system which offers job seekers access 24/7 for employment opportunities; assistance in employment profile updates; and request referrals when an A/R credentials match employers' criteria.

**Methodology:** DSS will partner with Workforce Center with WIOA, a federally funded program that provides services including employment and training activities for adults and dislocated workers, as well as youth activities. Employment and training direction is provided and focuses on people who have been dislocated from their jobs to assist them in overcoming their disadvantages. Opportunities such as On the Job Training (OJT) enables workers to be hired and trained for six months by employers who can receive reimbursements up to 50% of the starting wages. Partnering with Southwestern Community College, the Workforce Center, through WIOA, can assist in providing workforce readiness education for career change or can assist high school drop-outs in obtaining their GED.

**Methodology:** Southwestern Community College will partner in assessing each A/R to determine if their skills are transferable or if classes are necessary to insure A/R are started on the appropriate path for workforce readiness. [Macon County Transit \(MCT\)](#) public transportation can be arranged by agency staff for A/R that have limited or unreliable transportation. Along with transportation, agency staff will also coordinate with the agency Child Care Subsidy caseworker to determine if the A/R is eligible to receive assistance with child care expenses. If a potential applicant is determined to need Vocational Rehabilitation, an on-site counselor is available through the NC Department of Commerce's Division of Workforce Solutions at Macon County's center each week. Additionally, agency staff can assist with referrals to [Webster Enterprises, Inc.](#), a regionally contracted non-profit provider of educational and training services through the NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation.

- **Households will meet the Federal Participation rate**

**Methodology:** Of One-Parent Households, 50% will be guided by DSS staff in completing the MRA to achieve a more appropriate and A/R specific outcome. Macon County will require active participation of adult parents whose children are more than three months. The MRA Plan of Action will outline the A/R responsibility of a minimum of 40 hours per week of countable work activities in order to qualify for *pay after performance* incentives. Countable work activities may include, but are not limited to: job searches, computer training, resume building, interview practicing, and any activities deemed necessary to help the A/R be successful. A/R will submit a Time Card by the 5<sup>th</sup> of each month (**Attachment A**), at which time a caseworker will release the WFFA benefits following activity verification. The caseworker will monitor, track, and record A/R work activities and hours.

**Methodology:** Of Two-Parent Households, 90% will meet the participation rate. If the Two-Parent Household is not eligible for BD, or has exhausted BD assistance and are not currently employed, the caseworker will coordinate with local resource partners in providing job training activities. Within one week, a MRA Plan of Action outlining 40 hours of countable activities will be completed for signatures. Countable work activities may be defined, but not limited to the same activities as those listed for One-Parent Households. These activities will be completed prior to the WFFA application being processed. A/R will submit a Time Card by the 5<sup>th</sup> of each month, at which time a caseworker will release the WFFA benefits following activity verification. The caseworker will monitor, track, and record A/R work activities and hours.

Following *pay after performance* guidelines as outlined in the [Work First Manual: Section 119 \(Work First Benefits\)](#), at least one adult must participate to be eligible for benefits. If the A/R's children are all over the age of three months, it is required both parents join in the work search.

**Methodology:** In cases where medical or mental disabilities have led the family to apply for assistance, an immediate referral will be made to Vocational Rehabilitation or to the Social Security Administration Office, at the discretion of the DSS staff. The family must follow through with appointments and recommendations of these agencies in order to receive benefits. Cash assistances will be issued on a monthly basis and the caseworker will meet with these families monthly to review progress.

- **Expand efforts in reducing teen pregnancy in our community**

**Methodology:** Macon County's teen pregnancy rate is right at the state average. 2016 data, extracted from the NC State Center for Health Statistics, indicates Macon County's teen pregnancy rate per 1,000 young women ages 15-19 stands at 28.2 with 63.1% between 18-19 years of age. For comparison, the same data set indicates

that North Carolina's teen pregnancy rate per 1,000 young women ages 15-19 is 28.1 with 50.7% between 18-19 years of age.<sup>3</sup>

Macon County Public Health, Smoky Mountain Pregnancy Care Center, and NFP, and this agency will partner together for the availability of counseling to A/R to place emphasis on the importance of family planning options, neonatal health, and on strong family principles aimed at disrupting the cycle of poverty. This agency will also strongly emphasize the importance of continuing education in support of teen parents receiving a high school diploma as well as continued development of a skill or trade to support their career choice. Assisting eligible teen parents with subsidized child care services only reinforces their school attendance to ensure completion of their education. This strategy is targeted at the promotion of the A/R in becoming self-sufficient and reducing reliance on the welfare system.

## B. Supportive Services

Support services listed above will enable individuals to participate in activities that lead families to self-reliance. Below are additional supportive services that will expand and develop self-confidence in support of A/R participation:

- **Case Management** – Case management means planning, directing and providing services. The caseworker will be responsible for working with families in the assessment, planning, directing and providing of supportive services. Caseworkers will document progress for all Child-Only Families and eligible families that are searching for work. Work First caseworkers and Child Welfare Social Workers will continue to work together to define the responsibilities of each other and strive to improve communication between the agency and the families.
- **Child Care Subsidy Assistance** – this agency continues to prioritize child welfare families in providing subsidized child care services. Through contract negotiations with [Southwestern Child Development Commission](#), our regional subsidy administration agency, Macon County is typically not subject to wait listing for subsidized child care (dependent upon child care subsidy allocations from NC Division of Child Development and Early Education). However, as a rural, mountain community, there is very limited availability for infants and toddlers in child care centers. Work First eligible families and families eligible to receive services based on being below 200% FPL must participate in work or work related activities to ensure they comply with program guidelines. Parent subsidy fees will be assessed by the Child Care Subsidy Caseworker once the parent becomes employed.

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<sup>3</sup> Statewide information on the state of adolescent health and helpful resources. Retrieved November 14, 2017, from the Sexual Health Initiatives for Teens (SHIFT) website. URL: <http://www.shiftnc.org/>.

- **Child Protective Services** – Work First and CPS will continue to work collaboratively to ensure the safety of our children and families. Child Welfare Social Workers rely heavily on [KIDS Place](#), Macon County’s Child Advocacy Center (CAC). KIDS Place, a CAC based on the Huntsville Model, is devoted to the protection and well-being of abused and neglected children by providing a safe, non-threatening environment for multi-disciplinary forensic interviewing, medical examinations and counseling. If necessary, supportive court intervention services are also available through KIDS Place. Macon County child welfare staff also work closely with The Baptist Children Homes of NC and Family Care Ministry at the Moody Home in Franklin, NC. Family Care Ministry is designed to provide housing, job search assistance, money management and parenting instruction to single mothers (over 18 years of age) and their children who are homeless or facing homelessness. Each parent must agree to actively seek employment and a permanent place of residency.
- **Streamlining Eligibility Determination and Services**  
Macon County has established a process of determining eligibility for A/R that will serve them more quickly and efficiently. This continuum of services will emphasize intake diversion services, two-week job search for all able-body adults, job development, and referrals (**Attachment B**).
- **Transportation Assistance** – this agency will continue to coordinate with MCT for our Work First families so that they may successfully transition to independence. This agency may offer gas vouchers to A/R with their own transportation in order to complete job searches or until they receive their first paycheck.
- **Work Expenses** – this agency will assess and may provide assistance with non-recurring, work-related expenses such as: work clothes, tools, equipment and uniforms, etc.
- **Participation Expenses** – this agency will continue to assist families with uniforms, books, registration fees, etc. so that they may continue to complete job readiness and locate or continue work; thus maintaining a lower participation rate.
- **Education/Training** – this agency will continue to refer families to education facilities such as Southwestern Community College, Workforce Solutions, WIOA programs, and other agencies for continuing education classes.
- **Domestic Violence Services** – this agency will continue screening and assessing families facing domestic violence (DV). Families found to be in need of DV

assistance will be referred to [REACH](#), our local DV Awareness and Assistance Agency.

- **Human Resource** – this agency will continue to partner with local resources such as Southwestern Community College to help families learn to budget their finances so that they may become self-reliant.
- **Medicaid/Health Choice** - All families are assisted in applying for Medicaid, Health Choice or the Federally Facilitated Marketplace to help with medical expenses and medical insurance for all children under 200% of poverty. Families receiving Medicaid will continue to be eligible for Non-Emergency Medicaid Transportation (NEMT) for eligible services with approved service providers either through a contract with MCT or by receiving gas vouchers if they provide their own transportation to Medicaid covered services.
- **Food and Nutrition Services** – All families are assisted in applying for Food and Nutrition Services.

## VI. ADMINISTRATION

### A. Authority

The Macon County Board of County Commissioners has delegated the administration of the Work First program to the Macon County Department of Social Services. Nothing in the Macon County Electing Plan shall imply an entitlement to any resources or services at the disposal of Macon County and the implementation of the Electing Plan.

### B. Organization

This agency focuses on providing services in the most efficient, customer-friendly and cost-effective manner possible. Macon County has adequate Economic Service staff to meet with the A/R the same day they enter the agency and take an application as needed.

This agency continually assesses the needs of the community and attempts to be responsive to those needs. Employment Services and Eligibility Services are not a consolidated function. The Workforce Center and DSS have developed a plan whereby all applicants for cash assistance will register for work at the Workforce Center. All Workforce Center partners will enhance job searches and job readiness activities for WFFA participants. The partners include Southwestern Community College, WIOA staff with [Macon Program for Progress \(MPP\)](#), and the NC Division of Vocation Rehabilitation. All partners work for the good of the



families and utilize all resources in order to ensure that each WFFA family becomes self-reliant.

This agency will evaluate each family for a one-time cash assistance BD (now optional) not to exceed 3 months cash assistance. BD is intended to be a short-term benefit which may ultimately resolve the crisis for the family.

Crisis Intervention Program (CIP) funds are a means of energy assistance provided to families for a short-term benefit that alleviates the energy crisis such as a utility disconnect notice. The total amount that an A/R may receive in any given fiscal year may not exceed \$600.00. Temporary Assistance to Needy Families - Emergency Assistance (TANF-EA) may also assist 200% FPL families through financial assistance not to exceed \$400.00 in any given fiscal year.

Work First Caseworkers and Social Workers collaborate to provide the best methods to address the situation in the home such as: health, well-being, substance abuse, financial assistance, educational needs or other challenges that stand in the way of self-reliance.

### **C. Child Care**

As mentioned in the Supportive Services section above (pp. 14-16), this agency continues to prioritize child welfare families in providing subsidized child care services. Work First eligible families and families eligible to receive services based on being below 200% FPL must participate in work or work related activities to ensure they comply with program guidelines. Parent subsidy fees will be assessed by the Child Care Subsidy Caseworker once the parent becomes employed.

### **D. Transportation**

Services may be available for Work First applicants, active participants, and those recipients that are newly employed for 3 months following date of employment if income is under 200% of FPL. The estimated allocation for this program is not to exceed \$400.00 per household.

Work First A/R falling within 200% FPL with a recent connection to the workforce within the past 3 months may be eligible for \$35.00 in gas vouchers (**Attachment C**) to be used for job search or employment. This assistance shall not exceed 3 vouchers within a fiscal year per household and no more than 1 per month. Work First applicants are to use the gas vouchers for job search or employment, attending orientation or career assessment classes only. Applicants that have received gas vouchers within the past year must meet with the caseworker prior to receiving the voucher. Applicants without available transportation will be

referred to MCT by the intake worker (**Attachment D**). These vouchers will be covered by TANF funds.

Vehicle repairs, solely at the discretion of the Economic Services Supervisor or the Director, may be made for WFFA active participants only if the participant is employed or is newly hired. The vehicle MUST be registered in the participant's name and repairs may exceed \$400.00.

#### **E. Substance Abuse Screening**

Substance Abuse Screening will be conducted as required by law by the case worker by completing the [DSS-8219 \(Attachment E\)](#) and the [DSS-5325 \(Attachment F\)](#). At the request of DSS, a [Vaya Health](#) contracted substance abuse provider will coordinate with DSS (**Attachment G**) to provide screening, assessments, and referrals for treatment if needed. Non-compliance will result in denial or termination of benefits.

#### **F. Family Violence Option**

Family Violence Option will be provided as required by Federal law. The caseworker will screen applicants using forms [DSS-6965 \(Attachment H\)](#) and for family violence issues and make the appropriate referrals. All applicants are made aware of their right not to participate in Employment Services if employment would place the applicant or applicant's children in danger due to the domestic violence issue via form [DSS-6966 \(Attachment I\)](#). This agency follows all state policies to protect the A/R identity and location.

Procedures for A/R experiencing family violence are as follows:

1. The A/R must read, understand, sign and indicate they wish to speak to someone on the Notification of Family Violence Option form;
2. The caseworkers must refer the A/R for family violence screening or further assessment if they self-disclose, or if there are indicators of family violence present. DSS refers to REACH of Macon County, our local DV Awareness and Assistance Agency to work with domestic violence victims;
3. REACH will administer the screening and assessments for domestic violence; and
4. If the A/R requests a waiver from any Work First requirements, the caseworker will consult with REACH concerning the request before a decision grant waiver is made.

## **G. Maintenance of Effort**

1. Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds will be used for child welfare staffing, child welfare services, Emergency Assistance, and contract services to support employment. MOE for SFY 2018 is budgeted at \$168,596.00.
2. TANF expenditures are budgeted at \$508,100.00 for SFY 2018.
3. Other SFY 2018 budgeted amounts include:

Child Protective Service	\$321,601.00
Work First Cash Assistance	\$20,000.00
Work First EA/Contract Services	\$166,499.00

## **H. Child Welfare Services**

Child welfare services utilize the largest portion of Macon County's TANF Block Grant with the belief that protection of our children and families is protection of the future of our community. Macon County's community response to child abuse and neglect sets the standards for North Carolina and Macon County DSS remains a leader at the center of formidable partnerships with child and family serving agencies within the region.

## **VII. EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE (EA)**

EA cash assistance will be provided to families who meet the eligibility requirements, as stated in the [Work First Manual: Section 102 \(Short-Term Services and Benefits\)](#). Eligibility for this benefit is based on the prudent judgment of the caseworker in consultation with the Economic Services Supervisor when examining the emergency. The maximum payment for Macon County will be \$400.00 per fiscal year. This cap may be re-examined if the county declares a state of emergency due to natural disaster or severe weather. The total amount to be allocated to this program for emergency cash assistance will vary.

EA is designed to assist families with emergency needs and is not intended to meet recurring or ongoing needs. If a family has received EA in a prior fiscal year, the family will be referred to an appropriate, local finance and budgeting education partner agency before approval of EA will be completed. The adult caretaker will be provided an interview and asked to complete a workbook which focuses on family budgeting and job skills. EA applications will not be approved until the adult caretaker meets with the local resource partners and has complied with the services offered. Refusal to comply or fail to keep a scheduled appointment triggers ineligibility for EA assistance for a period of one year.

An emergency is defined as failure to meet a child's basic needs including, but not limited to:

- lack of appropriate housing;
- notice of intent to foreclose;
- court-ordered eviction;
- loss of shelter due to natural disaster or condemnation of property;
- food spoilage due to lack of refrigeration; etc.

The emergency must exist as a result of a situation beyond the control of the adult caretaker including, but not limited to:

- reduction in force (RIF);
- lay-off as a result of plant or facility closure;
- stolen paycheck; or
- unexpected car repairs; etc.

Cash assistance directed at services provided to help meet these emergency situations may include, but not limited to:

- household utilities;
- vehicle repair (at agency discretion); or
- childcare; etc.

No EA will be provided to applicants if the assistance cannot alleviate the stated emergency. EA will not be provided for any medical care, regardless of A/R coverage by Medicaid.

## **VIII. SERVICES TO FAMILIES UNDER 200% FPL**

Services provided to families with income at or below 200% FPL include:

- budgeting;
- supporting job retention;
- strengthening families; and
- promoting healthy development parent/child relationships.

Funds available for this service are limited to \$400.00 per year per household.

Therefore, services are prioritized as:

1. former Work First families (within one year of termination of support);
2. child welfare families; and
3. single incident hardship cases (as determined by the Economic Services Supervisor).

## **IX. SERVICES FOR NON-CUSTODIAL PARENTS**

Macon County will not utilize TANF funds to serve non-custodial parents.

## **X. WORK REQUIREMENT EXEMPTION**

To be eligible for WFFA, applicants must register with Workforce Center, unless exempt for the following reasons:

- caretaker of a child less than 3 months old;
- DV victim in which participation would place the family at risk;
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipient; or
- caretaker receiving Social Security Disability (SSD) for a non-budget household member or non-parent caretaker in a Child-Only case.

Macon County elects to retain the work requirement policy for single parents of children under the age of three months. This policy will be limited to 3 month exemption per child not to exceed a lifetime maximum of twelve months. The 3 month exemption is in alignment with the [Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993](#).

This work exemption will terminate on the last day of the month in which the child turns 3 months of age. At this point, a single parent will be required to meet with the Work First caseworker to begin their mandatory work requirement activities.

Once the child turns 2 months of age, a child care referral will be made to ensure services will be available at the end of the third month exemption period. If child care placement is unable to be obtained, the parent will be determined to be exempt from work requirement activities until the first available child care opening is secured for a period not to exceed 12 months.

If a medical condition prevents the child from being placed on the first day of the fourth month, the work registration code in NC FAST will accurately note the parent's need to care for an incapacitated person in their home and their 24 month clock will not begin until the household circumstances change.

## **XI. INNOVATIVE COUNTY STRATEGIES**

### **Intensive job development and job coaching**

Family-centered services are provided to the A/R as a priority of achieving outcomes and goals. Agency staff and local resource partners will provide coaching to overcome obstacles such as: financial budgeting, assisting families to learn to shop within their budget, provide vouchers for consignment clothing shops and thrift stores, etc.

Workforce Center will partner with DSS to provide job searches, job placement, and

determine the type of work role for which the A/R is best suited. The A/R will be assisted in determining financial aid for continuing education, if appropriate.

#### Child-Only case reviews

Reviews for Child-Only cases will be completed every two years unless the following circumstances indicate an earlier review:

- the child reaches 18 years of age;
- the child moves out of the home of the caregiver; or
- the death of the caregiver.

Macon County will forego the first 6 month review as stated in the State Plan and will only review every two years.

#### Provide career assessment for all applicants

SCC will assess skill level of A/R using a standardized Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) and career choice using the Career Decision Making System (CDMS) in on-site classes. WIOA participants may also attend the classes to meet WIOA eligibility and assessment requirements.

#### Retention Assistance

The agency will provide assistance to working families for up to 3 months after leaving welfare for work.

#### Coordinated Transportation Services

As stated previously under Section V (pp. 15), the agency will coordinate transportation assistance to promote and maintain employment.

#### Time Limits for Working Participants

A/Rs receiving Work First cash assistance for a total of 24 months become ineligible for additional benefits for a period of 36 months following termination, unless granted an extension (not to exceed 60 months assistance in a lifetime). This time limit is a cumulative total that includes time receiving TANF assistance in other NC counties or in other states.

#### Caretakers of infants

The agency is committed to the safety and well-being of Macon County's children. Agency staff will assist caretakers of infants once the child reaches 3 months of age by requiring participation in work, education, or job-readiness activities and assisting with referrals to childcare providers. As with other participants, these caretakers will be referred to job searches and retention services.

#### Services for Mental and Physical Impairments

A/R with declared mental and physical impairments will be referred to VR or the Social Security Administration to participate in a Functional Assessment to determine

assistance eligibility under those programs. The A/R may also be referred to Webster Enterprises for job skills training or to Vaya Health for on-going treatment as needed.

*Housing for Urban Development (HUD)*

The agency coordinates with HUD which keeps an updated list of subsidized housing in the community. We make appropriate referrals to HUD for our recipients.

*Provide information on Food Pantries in our Community*

Access to the agency operated Community Resource Center is provided to A/R as a resource to locate local food pantries and any other resources needed to assist families. This one-stop center (housed in the county's old library) assures that participants have access to all resources in the county.

## **XII. SPECIAL ISSUES**

As economic conditions may impact any welfare reform effort, the agency will continue to explore creative ways to help families take responsibility for their own safety, for their financial well-being, and for their personal life choices in providing for their children. The agency will continue to place emphasis on assisting families in moving from poverty to greater self-reliance.

## **XIII. ELECTING COUNTY ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA**

Macon County will follow criteria established as outlined within the Work First Manual for:

- age limits for children;
- payment levels;
- benefit calculation;
- sanctions;
- resource requirements (limit and countable items);
- change in circumstances;
- citizenship and identity requirements;
- residency requirements; and
- BD requirements.

The North Carolina Work First Standard Plan will be followed except for changes as noted below. Any future statewide policy changes will be reviewed and evaluated before Macon County implements such changes. If changes are made, the Macon County Work First Plan will be amended to incorporate changes.

1. Pay After Performance - all work eligible family participants will be required to participate in countable work and work-related activities and completed satisfactorily in order for this agency to provide to the vendor/vendors a benefit check on behalf of the A/Rs at the end of each month. Vendor payments will be agreed upon by the families and this agency and documented on the signed MRA. Families who fail to complete their required hours as agreed within their MRA are considered to be in non-compliance. Families must complete the required hours to be eligible to receive the benefit assistance.
2. All work eligible individuals are required to actively participate in work and work related activities for a total of 40 hours per week. Participation will be a combination of activities including but not limited to:
  - a. employment;
  - b. subsidized employment;
  - c. vocational training;
  - d. work skills training;
  - e. education;
  - f. work experience;
  - g. mental health and/or substance abuse treatment;
  - h. vocational rehabilitation;
  - i. job readiness / job search activities; or
  - j. other agency approved activities endorsed under this plan.
3. The agency will continue to count earned and unearned income for household members excluding SSI recipients receiving benefits and SSD recipients for non-required budget household members (in Child-Only cases). This agency will follow standard Work First policy in all other areas in order to be in compliance with NC FAST system requirements.
4. All A/R will experience a 3 month ineligibility penalty for each episode of a job quit unless "good cause" is established by the Work First caseworker with approval from the Economic Services Supervisor. The ineligibility period is defined as the month of application and the next three months. An individual may reapply for Work First assistance at any time but is ineligible for benefits during a job quit penalty period. There is no remedy for a job quit penalty once the penalty period begins.
5. Reviews for Child-Only cases will be completed every two years except as noted above in Section XI (pp. 22).
6. In order to receive WFFA, children must live with an adult relative who is within a certain degree of kinship defined as:
  - parent, including a biological mother, father, or adoptive parent;
  - legal father or mother, or step-father or step-mother;
  - an alleged biological or legal father or other alleged paternal relative;



- spouses of the above individuals (that also meet kinship requirements) even if the marriage has been terminated through death or divorce;
- paternal or maternal grandparents, great-grandparents, or great-great-grandparents;
- paternal or maternal uncles or aunts, great uncles or great aunts, great-great uncles or great-great aunts, nephews, nieces, or first cousins;
- brothers, sisters, half-brothers, half-sisters, adoptive brothers, adoptive sisters, step-brothers or step-sisters; or
- other adults who have court ordered legal custody or guardianship of a child.

Biological parents and their relatives are not eligible to receive WFFA for a legally adopted child. This relative must be providing care for the child on a daily basis and be responsible for ongoing decisions regarding the child's well being. A relative who meets the above relationships must be included in the case with the child, unless they are an SSI benefit recipient. This agency will comply with the State Standard Plan of Kinship requirements.

#### **XIV. APPEALS PROCESS**

A public assistance A/R has the right to appeal the decision of the Macon County Department of Social Services or the Board of County Commissioners granting, denying, terminating, or modifying assistance. Each applicant or recipient shall be notified in writing of his or her right to appeal. An example of the appeals rights notification is provided and submitted (**Attachment J**).

This agency will follow the appeals process as stated in [G. S. § 108A-79](#) (**Attachment K**) with the exception of A/R appeals beyond the decision of the local hearing officer as outlined in subsection (g) of the above cited statute, which will be replaced with an impartial two-member team. The Macon County Board of Commissioners will appoint the members of the impartial team.

#### **XV. REVIEW PRIOR TO TIME LIMIT EXPIRATION**

The process by which the agency will review all Work First caseloads prior to expiration of federal and state time limits will follow policy as in the [Work First Manual: Section 105 \(Federal and State Time Limits\)](#).

#### **XVI. FUNDING REQUIREMENTS**

The agency anticipates 100% of its Work First Block Grant will be expended on BD, employment services, TANF EA, 200% FPL services, and child welfare services.

## **XVII. PUBLIC COMMENT PROCESS**

Public comment on this plan may be submitted to Sheila Conley, Economic Services Supervisor, in any of the following manner:

Via mail:

Macon County Department of Social Services  
Attn: WF 19-22  
1832 Lakeside Dr.  
Franklin, NC 28734

Via email:

[sconley@maconnc.org](mailto:sconley@maconnc.org)

Via telephone:

828-349-2124

Via website:

<http://maconnc.org/dss.html> (click public comment button)

## **XVIII. CERTIFICATIONS**

### **SOCIAL SERVICE BOARD CHAIRMAN CERTIFICATION**

As Chairman of the Macon County Social Service Board, I certify that this Work First Plan was been reviewed and endorsed by the Macon County Social Services Board at its regularly held meeting on November 15, 2017.

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Lisa Leatherman, Chairman  
Macon County Board of Social Services

### **BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS CHAIRMAN CERTIFICATION**

As Chairman of the Macon County Board of Commissioners, I certify that Work First Plan was reviewed and approved by the Macon County Board of Commissioners at its regularly scheduled meeting on December 9, 2017.

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James P. Tate, Chairman  
Macon County Board of County Commissioners