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“Published to enhance the community’s knowledge of issues affecting children, families, older adults and the disabled in Forsyth County”

ViewPoint



Joe Raymond,
Director
**Department of
Social Services**

Welcome to the second edition of *Leading By Results*. This issue announces the measurable achievements that the Forsyth County Department of Social Services will pursue in the coming years. These aspirations, expressed as “benchmarks,” (presented on page 5) represent our most critical markers of progress and represent a new way of doing business.

This new way of doing business will be characterized by our evolution of becoming a more results-driven public organization. Our intention is to translate the important mission of the Department, and the complex and critical services that FCDSS provides to over 70,000 Forsyth County residents of all economic and demographic backgrounds. We hope to produce a clear picture of the specific outcomes that benefit all of Forsyth County.

The reason to develop a strategic direction (goals) and measurable benchmarks is to clearly define what constitutes success, gauge progress toward success, and to increase service effectiveness. It also allows a focused use of the organization’s leadership capital to influence larger community factors that are beyond the daily “control” of the Department of Social Services.

Our new focus on clearly stated, important, measures of progress provides new opportunities and new challenges. New opportunities include our increased ability to communicate what we intend to achieve to the general public; an enhanced ability to report progress toward these achievements; a stronger capacity to focus services on measurable results; and building new ways to describe the “return on investment” that DSS services provide to taxpayers.

New challenges may include setting tough but realistic targets for performance; responding to unrealistic expectations about to how quickly difficult achievements can be successfully addressed; dealing with multiple factors beyond the control of DSS

to influence achievement; learning about and implementing best practices; and building effective partnerships designed to achieve these benchmarks.

Each issue of *Leading By Results* will focus on different benchmarks within our results framework, explain why these achievements are important, and describe issues that support or block progress toward their achievement. While we are pleased to announce these benchmarks, there is much new work to do before implementing new strategies. We have to find reliable data about our current performance, and we still have to set realistic but challenging targets for the future. For example, if in the last fiscal year, our data shows that the percent of children who achieved permanence was 37%, what percentage do we intend to achieve in the new fiscal year? If 50% is our new target, then we have to develop strategies that will increase the odds that permanence for children can be improved. This process, which is only just beginning, represents new work which will be reported in the future through this publication. This quarter’s publication focuses on benchmarks about:

- The critical need for “permanence” for the 500 plus children who are in DSS custody annually;
- Older adults and adults with disabilities who rely on In-Home Aide assistance;
- the importance of a quality day care for working parents of young children;
- the emerging work of a new community collaborative approach to important community wide achievements for children, adults and families; and
- the preventable turnover rate of DSS employees.

Learning about these benchmarks of achievement will hopefully assist the reader to understand the importance of DSS services and how these services are performed in the public’s interest.

We thank Mrs. Cynthia Jefferies, the outgoing chair of the Forsyth County Board of Social Services, who is rotating off the board after two consecutive 3-year terms. Mrs. Jefferies deserves sincere congratulations and a commendation for her years of service in support of the mission of the Department of Social Services and for supporting the work of the Board as it started its effort to lead by results.

Leading by Results

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Vision: Forsyth County residents will be safe, self-sufficient, and live in stable and healthy environments.

Mission: Forsyth County DSS will serve and protect vulnerable children and adults; strengthen and preserve families; and enhance economic stability while encouraging personal responsibility.

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Improve the Safety, Quality of Life, and Well-Being of Children and Families

Too many Forsyth County children live in families where they are neglected, physically abused, or sexually assaulted. Though FCDSS works to preserve the family unit or reunify the family, this may not be possible because it jeopardizes the well-being of the child. Whenever this occurs, alternative plans are instituted to establish a permanent and safe environment for the child who can not safely return to their own home. Such alternative plans may consist of reunification with a parent not involved with the abuse or neglect, legal custody/guardianship to a court-approved caretaker or other family member, or adoption.

Benchmark Spotlight On: *Annual percent of children in DSS custody who achieve permanence within one year through reunification, custody or guardianship to a court approved caregiver or adoption.*

What is “permanence?” Why is this benchmark important?

Forsyth County DSS has legal custody of approximately 500 children annually. Permanence occurs when a stable and safe living environment is established for a child in the legal custody of DSS. Permanence means having an enduring family relationship that lasts a lifetime.

What does the data say?

For the 2004-2005 fiscal year, 227 children left DSS custody. Eight-four children or 37 % were either reunited with their parents, were placed with a court approved guardian, or were adopted within this same year. In addition to these 84 children, others were placed in a permanent situation after one year, but our intention is to achieve stability for children within 12 months.

What effects permanence?

The goal of achieving stable, permanent families for children is effected by many factors. A few of the factors are: willingness or capacity of parents

to do what is needed to be reunified with their child; persistent substance abuse; inability to complete parent improvement services; inability to maintain consistent and appropriate visitation with the child; unwillingness to participate in family/individual counseling; lengthy judicial procedures and postponements of court hearings; the timing and availability of services provided to the family and/or difficulties locating caretakers willing to care for a child.

What does FCDSS do now to increase permanence for children?

FCDSS staff is focused on the importance of achieving permanence for children. The agency has a staff person dedicated to recruiting local foster and adoptive parents. We are also striving to enhance upfront services to families so children don’t have to leave their families in the first place. Staff is developing new relationships with families so that parents are a part of the process of deciding what is best to achieve permanence for their child. For example, parents are part of team meetings and have the opportunity to influence decisions made regarding their service plans. These meetings also bring together other professionals involved with the family.

How may permanence be achieved more quickly for more children?

FCDSS is beginning to ask this question in earnest. Initial ideas include:

- Improve recruitment of families willing to foster and/or adopt older children;
- Improve services provided for families once reunification has been achieved to prevent possible recidivism;
- Continue working with District Court judges in creating better communications and clarity of expectations for court reporting;
- Decrease the lapse of time in

developing an alternative plan for the child when it appears reunification may not be the best possible permanent goal for the child;

- Develop mentor programs for foster parents;
- Collaborate with the mental health system, schools, juvenile court counselors, and others in developing family-focused services;
- Improve financial assistance provided to relative/non-relative caretakers in getting the special/unusual items for the children placed in their homes. This would assist in preserving such placements when finances are a factor in keeping a child; and
- Develop voluntary prevention services to parents prior to the occurrence of removing the child from the home or even receiving a report of abuse or neglect.

For the good of the children in Forsyth County, we must make the promise of a permanent family come true for all children as quickly as possible.

“Permanence occurs when a stable and safe living environment is established for a child in the legal custody of DSS. Permanence means having an enduring family relationship that lasts a lifetime.”

Goal II Improve the Safety, Well-Being, and Quality of Life of Older Adults and Adults with Disabilities

The need for services for our aging population is increasing in Forsyth County and across the nation. Our benchmarks for this goal reflect this increasing demand. As Forsyth County's aging population becomes larger, more demand is inevitable for in-home services and less expensive health and home care options (the average nursing home bed costs approximately \$5,000 per month). Reports of elder abuse and neglect are increasing and financial exploitation of older adults and disabled adults is a reality.

Benchmark Spotlight On: *Annual percent of older adults and adults with disabilities who request In-Home Aide assistance and receive it.*

What is In-Home Aide assistance and why is it important?

Many older adults and adults with disabilities cannot remain in their own homes without help with light household and personal care tasks. They often face unnecessary institutionalization when a relative or a friend is not available to help.

Forsyth County Department of Social Services offers an alternative, the In-Home Aide Services Program. Through this program, paraprofessionals known as In-Home Aides provide daily living services such as meal preparation, housekeeping, grocery shopping, bill-paying and some personal care. Through this service, about 300 older adults and adults with disabilities are able to remain in their own homes each year.

Those eligible for In-Home Aide services consists of individuals age 18 or older who are unable to carry out tasks essential to activities of daily living (basic self-care, bathing, dressing, grooming, etc) or the core activities of daily living, (basic home management tasks---housekeeping,

cooking, shopping, bill-paying, etc.) or both, and who have no responsible person available to perform these tasks. Eligible persons may participate in voluntary consumer contributions, but no one is denied service based on inability to pay. The average age of customers receiving this service is 78.

Without In-Home Aide Service, many people would be placed in more expensive group care facilities. Through the In-Home Aide Service Program, consumers remain independent and remain able to live in familiar and supportive surroundings.

What does our data say now?

The In-Home Aide Service Program provides aide service to more than 200 customers monthly. In FY 2004-05, 70% of the elderly and disabled adults who requested In-Home Aide Services received the service.

The provision of In-Home Aide service is subject to availability of resources and some individuals may have to wait to receive the service because of inadequate resources. Those needing services when none are available are placed on a waiting list that is up-dated every 90 days.

Additionally, the needs of older adults and adults with disabilities who want to remain in their homes is increasing. Transportation is a major need for many. In-Home Aide Services assist with medical transportation and errands. From July – June, the In-Home Aide Program provided more than 126,000 miles in medical transportation and essential errands (grocery-shopping, bill-paying, medication /pick-up).

What needs to improve?

Our goal is to serve all older and disabled adults who need the service. In order to reach as many consumers as possible we need to constantly make improvements. This includes:

- Improving communication between consumers and DSS staff;
- Securing more funds to reduce the waiting list for services; and
- Continuing annual focus groups with consumers to get feedback for improvement to the program.

The demand (and our waiting list) for services is only expected to grow. It would cost at least \$250,000 more annually to serve the individuals on the waiting list. We will need community support to help older adults and the disabled live at home as long as possible.

“Through the In-Home Aide Service Program, older and disabled adults remain independent and remain able to live in familiar and supportive surroundings.”



Introducing FCDSS Benchmarks

Goal I: Improve the safety, well-being and quality of life of children and families	
Benchmarks	
1.1	Annual percent of children in DSS custody who achieve permanence within one year through reunification, guardianship to a court approved caregiver, or adoption
1.2	Annual percent of maltreated children who are not repeat victims of substantiated maltreatment
1.3	Annual percent of children who are adopted within a year of having a permanent plan of adoption
1.4	Annual percent of foster youth who are in care at age 18 and who are employed or enrolled in post-secondary education from the ages of 18 – 23
1.5	Annual percent of children who are adopted whose placement is not disrupted
1.6	Annual percent of children in foster or facility care who have not been maltreated by a foster parent or facility staff
Goal II: Improve the safety, well-being and quality of life for older adults and adults with disabilities	
Benchmarks	
2.1	Annual percent of older adults and adults with disabilities who request In-Home Aide Assistance and receive it
2.2	Annual percent of older adults and adults with disabilities served by DSS (Adult Services) who live in the least restrictive, most appropriate setting
2.3	Annual percent of older and disabled adults who are not abused, neglected, or exploited while living in licensed care facilities
2.4	Annual percent of Adult Medicaid applicants whose applications are completed within the 45 day (Medical Assistance for the Aged) or 90 day (Medical Assistance for the Disabled) standard
2.5	Annual percent of older and disabled adults served who are not found to be repeat victims of abuse, neglect, or exploitation
Goal III: Enhance the economic stability of individuals and families	
Benchmarks	
3.1	Annual percent of children potentially eligible for the child care subsidy and receive it
3.2	Annual percent of Work First participants who obtain a GED/High School diploma or vocational certificate
3.3	Annual Child Support Enforcement collection rate
3.4	Annual percent of Child and Family Medicaid applicants whose applications are completed within 45 days
3.5	Annual percent of Child Health Choice applicants whose applications are completed within 45 days
3.6	Annual percent of Work First participants who obtain employment
3.7	Annual percent of Work First participants who obtain employment at a living wage (defined as over \$8.50 per hour)
3.8	Annual percent of Child Support cases with court orders
3.9	Annual percent of individuals potentially eligible for Food Stamp services and receive them
Goal IV: Increase public understanding of relevant social issues and build effective community partnerships	
Benchmarks	
4.1	Annual percent of residents who have access to private health insurance or publicly funded health care
4.2	Annual percent of children and adults in need of mental health services who have access to timely services
4.3	Annual percent of families with access to affordable and quality child care
4.4	Annual percent of 9 th graders who graduate from high school
4.5	Annual percent of child abuse and child neglect
4.6	Annual domestic violence rate
4.7	Annual repeat domestic violence rate
4.8	Annual percent of older and disabled adults who are not abused, neglected, or exploited
Goal V: Be publicly accountable for efficient use of resources and timely delivery of services	
Benchmarks	
5.1	Annual percent of preventable employee turnover
5.2	Annual percent DSS programs not in program improvement status
5.3	Annual percent of customers who report that they were treated with respect
5.4	Annual percent of available state and federal dollars drawn down
5.5	Annual amount of dollars recovered through program integrity efforts

What's New at DSS

- **Edwin Moser Estate Gives Money to Help the Elderly:** DSS creates the “If Only” Program: In an amazing display of community generosity, Mr. Edwin Moser bequeathed \$269,000 to FCDSS for the support of older adults. This money will be used to create an “Edwin Moser Trust” and funds will be used to grant requests from persons 55 years of age and older who have a chronic or terminal illness who would otherwise not have the means to make a dream come true. For more information, or if you would like to volunteer to serve on an advisory committee or to help implement this program, please contact Diane Wimmer at 703-3870.



DSS Food Stamp Employees

- **“Welfare” is Changing (again):** Congress recently reauthorized national legislation that reestablished the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Act (TANF). Since welfare reform in 1996, the number of people on cash assistance in Forsyth County has dropped by 65% (from 11,501 to 2,891). Forsyth County DSS continues to emphasize “work first.” Since June 1, applicants must initially attend a Work First orientation that explains Work First employment expectations and register for work at the Employment Security Commission (before receiving cash assistance).
- **Medicaid Relief Given to NC Counties:** The new NC 2006 – 2007 budget provides a one-time capping of county Medicaid costs at 2005 – 2006 actual expenditures. The Forsyth County share of Medicaid expenditures for State fiscal year 2006 was \$14.4 million. The approximate 06-07 “savings” for Forsyth County are estimated to be \$2.1 million. NC remains the only state to require a local financial match for Medicaid expenditures.
- **DSS Names Employee of the Year:** Mr. Rodney Green is a Computing Consultant who was recently named “Employee of the Year” for his design of DSS’ new logo and work on this publication. He also consistently has a “can do” attitude and produces high quality work.
- **Food Stamp Program Wins Award:** Forsyth County DSS’ Food Stamp program was recently recognized for excellence. The staff achieved a payment accuracy rate of 98.2% for the period of October 2004 - September, 2005 (the State standard is 94%). Accuracy is important to families who receive benefits and to those who pay for them (the taxpayers). Errors may cause delays in benefits, an incorrect amount of benefits to a family, or may result in financial penalties. Congratulations for a job well done.
- **Partnership Benefits Children in Forsyth Foster Care:** DSS is pleased to recognize the Law Department at RJR Tobacco Company for their contributions to Forsyth County’s children in foster care. Since December, 2005, RJR has contributed duffle bags filled with toiletries for boys and girls, infant safety seats, diapers, and more. Thanks to RJR for this important contribution to the lives of children in foster care!
- **Forsyth County Children in Foster Care Need Your Help:** If your company, civic group, or church would like to help children in foster care with a one-time or on-going contribution, DSS is always in need of diapers, baby wipes, scientific calculators for older youth, sponsorships for extra curricular activities and for Christmas. We are also in need of a storage unit for those times when we do get lots of donations. To learn more contact Brigitte Lindsay at 703-CHILD (2445) or email her at (lindsabp@forsyth.cc).
- **New Positions Received:** The Forsyth County Department of Social Services recently received 12 new positions from the Forsyth County Board of County Commissioners. These positions are needed due to growing and extremely high caseloads.



Rodney Green

Enhance the Economic Stability of Individuals and Families

Economic stability is critical for low income families. This is why the availability and affordability of Day Care services for children of low and moderate-income families remains a critical linchpin that tests our society's seriousness about "work first."

Benchmark Spotlight On: *Annual percent of children potentially eligible for the child care subsidy and receive it.*

What are day care services?

Using a combination of State (35%) and Federal funds (65%), North Carolina provides subsidized child care services to eligible families. Subsidized child care services provide protection, care, and developmental experiences for children ages birth through age 12. These services help parents pay for child care so they can work, attend school, support protective and child welfare services, or meet developmental needs of children. These services also provide information to parents about how to choose a safe, quality child care arrangement for pre-school or after-school as well as full-time care.

The cost of child care in Forsyth County ranges from \$300-600 per month depending upon the age of the child and the quality of the provider. Often these costs exceed the ability for working families to pay.

Who receives them and why are they important?

Subsidized child care services may be provided to families demonstrating a need for child care and who have been determined eligible for services. The eligibility requirements include but are not limited to residency, citizenship, age of child, and income.

The provision of subsidized child care services means that families with

moderate incomes can afford child care services. These services offer a quality early childhood education and therefore, will increase the chances for children to be healthy and succeed socially and academically. All families pay a percentage of the cost of subsidized day care.

Subsidized day care services provide additional financial support that many working families need, and serve as a welfare prevention service. Also, the provision of child care services for families experiencing a crisis or needing the intervention offered through child protective services offers stability and educational opportunities for the children and serves to keep families together in times of crisis.

What does our data say now?

During the 2004-2005 fiscal year, 12,937 children in Forsyth County were eligible for child care subsidy services based upon data from the 2000 census and 2004 population projections. Forsyth County DSS spent nearly \$14 million in State and Federal funds serving an average of 3,625 children a month who received child care services. This represented only 27.5% of all eligible children. Unfortunately, the lack of sufficient funding has created a subsidy waiting list for many eligible families in North Carolina. DSS is serving fewer children due to an 18% reduction in funding over the last 5 years. The waiting list in Forsyth County is 2,100 children. It would take \$6.6 million to serve every Forsyth County child currently on the waiting list.

What affects the day care waiting list?

Money is the critical issue. Receiving less funding yearly increases the waiting list. Without funding the waiting list grows. It is

updated periodically. Families are removed if they no longer have needs. However, the demand is increasing.

What do we need to do to serve more families?

DSS already works closely with the local Smart Start to coordinate funding and ensure that all day care funds coming into Forsyth County are stretched as far as possible. Other actions that can be taken include:

- Petition the legislature for an increase in funding.
- Raise the minimum wage. With more income in the family, the parent fee (based on income) would increase and the subsidy money spent would be less. This would allow more children to be served.
- Urge employers to promote the use of dependent care "flexible spending accounts." This would help employees to use pre-tax dollars to pay for day care.

With an increase in the number of mothers working outside the home, quality child care is essential. Unfortunately, the need is greater than the number of subsidies provided.

"The availability and affordability of day care services for children of low and moderate-income families remains a critical linchpin that tests our society's seriousness about "work first."

Increase Public Understanding of Relevant Social Issues and Build Effective Community Partnerships

There are critical issues (or benchmarks) that are beyond the responsibility or ability of the Department of Social Services to achieve alone. The benchmarks in Goal IV define issues that are critical to DSS but can only be successfully attacked through community collaborative efforts.

It has been challenging for communities to proactively identify and pursue the achievement of these “community – wide” issues. In some ways, these issues have been everyone’s and nobody’s responsibility. For example, the rate of child abuse is a critical challenge. Most people would probably identify the local Department of Social Services as the agency “responsible for fixing” child abuse. However, while the local DSS is a critical component, it would be a mistake to think that a local DSS, by itself, can successfully address the County’s rate of child abuse. There are many reasons for this including the fact that DSS typically provides services **after** child abuse or child neglect has occurred. In other words, DSS is not a primary prevention organization, nor does it have any appreciable role or funding to prevent child abuse. Even if it did, the problem of child abuse is too complex for any one agency or even the public sector to tackle by itself.

While there are prevention and other community efforts taking place with probably any list of community – wide issues, there is still much work to be done and it seems to make sense to try to focus such efforts in a more coordinated approach. This is why an integrated community approach is needed to address many “outcomes” that communities would like to see improved. The benchmarks listed in Goal IV on page 5 were taken from a larger list currently being pursued by our local United Way and from the emerging work of a new community collaborative, named Forsyth Futures.

Forsyth Futures, formerly the Forsyth Council for Children and Youth, has been created to help identify a list of critical community wide “outcomes” or achievements for children, older adults and families. Their intent is to help inspire and implement a more coordinated set of prevention and inter-agency service strategies, increased public will to address these challenges, and create inclusive support and engagement with a diverse set of community and neighborhood stakeholders (all of this work is tentative and in a draft stage at this point).

This is an exciting opportunity but will be challenging to bring to life. The good news is that there are great examples of communities that have developed and sustained similar successful efforts. We should learn from these examples. We can focus our local leadership capital on strategies that are likely to make measurable differences in critical achievements that no one agency can accomplish alone.

From the DSS’ perspective, we hope that such an effort will improve our ability to prioritize and partner around a finite list of issues that connect most directly to our mission. We look forward to reporting our progress in this regard and to being a part of this still developing community work.

“We should learn from ... communities and pursue courses of action that hold promise to focus our local leadership capital on strategies that are likely to make measurable differences in achieving critical achievements that we know to be important.”



Be Publicly Accountable for Efficient Use of Resources and Timely Delivery of Services

Public agencies must be accountable for use of the public's resources. DSS services require competent professional staff to work closely with children, families, and older adults and adults with disabilities.

Benchmark Spotlight On: *Annual percent of preventable employee turnover.*

Forsyth County Department of Social Services is the second largest County agency. The Department serves over 70,000 people annually through 440 employees. Hiring and retaining trained staff is the key to providing efficient and effective services.

What is employee "preventable" turnover and why is it important?

People leave organizations for a variety of reasons. People retire, families relocate, and employees are promoted. All are good things for the individual, but sometimes less so for the organization.

There are instances when the organization wants people to stay so that turnover might be prevented. Staff also leave for better professional opportunities, or because of job burnout, better salaries or benefits, or poor management or supervision. This is "preventable" turn over.

All turnover is very costly. It takes months and even years to become proficient at most DSS jobs. Our programs are governed by complex federal and state regulations and carry large human and financial consequences for error. Training is time-consuming and costly. It takes years to master a particular job or program, thus DSS wants to reduce preventable turnover.

What is the FCDSS turnover rate now?

In FY 2004-2005, the overall turnover rate was 17% for the entire agency. In 2005 – 2006 the overall turnover rate was 11% (preventable turnover was not tracked for these years, which was lower than these numbers, but it will be counted in the future). DSS turnover was higher in some parts of the agency than in others. It is difficult to judge whether these are "good" or "bad" turnover rates. According to the American Public Human Services Organization, the turnover rate for child protective service (CPS) workers in 2003 was 22% throughout the country. In 2004 – 2005 our CPS turnover rate was 17%. Protecting children from abuse and neglect is one of the most important and stressful jobs at the agency.

What effects DSS employee turnover?

Preventable turnover in the social service world seems to be largely a result of factors that can be improved. The agency's information from exit interviews with employees and studies of social service agencies confirm similar factors that effect staff turnover:

- An imbalance between the demands of the work and financial compensation;
- High caseloads, e.g. stress that overwhelms staff;
- Insufficient resources available for families and children;
- Quality of supervision;
- Salaries that are not competitive with those in surrounding large counties or the local private sector labor market;
- A negative public perception about the value of DSS work with families and children, or with older and disabled adults, and
- Workers don't always feel valued for their contribution to the agency.

How can DSS lower its turnover rate?

Some solutions are already being implemented. We are providing more on-site educational opportunities for staff to improve their advancement potential. We now offer both a BSW and a MSW program in our agency. The culture of DSS is changing. The agency is enhancing its openness and accessibility to staff, and welcomes their input while holding staff accountable for outcomes. The Board of Social Services is working on new strategies to help secure new resources for the families and children we serve, and we are working to add new capacities to our human resources and staff development units.

It is critical that salaries and compensation become market based. We cannot afford to lose current or potential staff to surrounding counties. Staff workloads must continue to be reduced through a combination of new positions and greater efficiencies, including the continued enhancement of information technology.

Progress toward reducing the "preventable" turnover rate will continue to be reported since its reduction is directly in the public's interest.

"Preventable turnover in the social service world seems to be largely a result of factors that can be improved."

“In the Next Issue”

*In the next issue of **Leading By Results**, DSS will continue to report on specific benchmarks associated with each goal. The newsletter will also include an interview on a topic of interest related to these benchmarks.*



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