

Tracking County Responses to Welfare Reform*

Cabarrus County, North Carolina

By

Dr. Gary Rassel, Research Associate
Ms. Beth Etringer, Research Assistant

The University of North Carolina at Charlotte

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The Policy Context

Economic and Social Characteristics

Cabarrus County is located in the Charlotte-Gastonia-Rock Hill Metropolitan Statistical Area. In 1998, the population of Cabarrus County was 119,494, making it the seventeenth most populous county in the State of North Carolina. The county experienced a 20.8 percent increase in population from 1990 to 1998, compared to a 13.8 percent population increase for all of North Carolina during that period. According to the 1990 census, 86.3 percent of Cabarrus County's population were Caucasian, 13 percent African American, and about three-tenths of one percent American Indian and approximately the same percent Asian. In 1998, 62,710 or 52.5 percent of Cabarrus County residents were in the workforce (NC Economic Development Scan). In 1990, 67.4 percent of county residents had a high school degree and 12.3 percent had a college degree. The four largest workforces by industry are in manufacturing, government, retail trade and the service industry. During the first quarter of 1999, 13,704 people, or 26.8 percent of the workforce, worked in manufacturing; 9,241 (18.1 percent) worked in government; 8,983 (17.6 percent) worked in retail trade and 8,863 people or 17.3 percent of the labor force worked in the service industry (EDIS County Profile). According to the county's Work First Plan, Cabarrus County was ranked first in the state in per capita investment in new manufacturing plants and fifth in the state in per capita creation of new jobs in manufacturing. The Work First Plan also mentioned how the county has put a high priority on the development of new industries and has "instituted a new investment tax incentive program to help in attracting industries" (Work First Plan, 3).

During the years 1991 and 1992, Cabarrus County had unemployment rates of 5 percent and 5.8 percent respectively. In the most recent five years, however, the county unemployment rate has fallen steadily. In 1995, the unemployment rate was 3.5 percent and in 1996, 3.3 percent. In 1997 it was 2.8 percent, in 1998, 2.4 percent and by 1999 it had dropped to a mere 2.0 percent.

Cabarrus County was ranked seventh in the state in 1999 in median family income at \$52,861. County per capita income in 1997 was \$23,895 – above the state average of \$20,217 (EDIS County Profile). The poverty rate in 1990 was 8.1 percent, which was less than the state’s 12.5 percent poverty rate. An article in the Concord Tribune noted that 28 percent of County residents earned less than the poverty level in 1995 (Plemmons, May 8, 1995, A1). In the first half of 1998, four percent of the population of Cabarrus County was on Food Stamps (Business North Carolina). The number of Work First Families declined by 31.5 percent from July 1997 to 1999 when there were 407 Work First Families (Work First Report Card). The Work First Plan cited lack of childcare resources and lack of public transportation as barriers to job placement for many Work First families.

The county property tax rate in 1998 was 70 cents per 100 dollars of assessed value. The NC Department of Commerce rated Cabarrus County as one of the five least economically distressed counties in the state of North Carolina (Work First Report Card).

Although the majority of residents of Cabarrus County are Caucasian and the largest minority group is comprised of African-Americans, the number of Hispanic and Asian individuals has increased rapidly in recent years. Accurate estimates of the numbers of Hispanics and Asians are not available. However, their presence is obvious and can be seen in the number of stores with signs in Spanish and Viet Nameese. Public agencies have adjusted to this increase by providing Spanish lessons for employees.

The Political Context

Cabarrus County has a five-member Board of County Commissioners whose terms are for four years. The county has staggered elections with Commissioners elected on a rotating basis every two years – three seats are filled during one election and the other two are filled during the next election.

Prior to 1990, the board had been a mixture of Republicans and Democrats; however, Republicans have dominated in a series of elections during the last decade. In 1998, 65 percent of

Cabarrus County residents were registered to vote. Of those 78,266 people, 43 percent were registered Democrats, 42 percent were registered Republicans, and 16 percent were unaffiliated (The State Board of Elections). Despite an almost equal number of Republicans and Democrats in the county, the Board of Commissioners is an all Republican Board. In fact, Republicans have dominated the Board of Commissioners, holding every seat since 1990. In 1994, Republicans were so dominant that they lost only one local election (Plemmons, November 4, 1994). Democrats came close to having a seat on the board in 1998 when Richard Anderson lost by 42 votes for the third seat on the board (Plemmons, November 19, 1998, A1). A current Commissioner said that Cabarrus County was a conservative county and that it had a conservative board, but that it was a board willing to think outside of the box. This Commissioner noted that members of the board are not all originally from the county and that outsiders have been able to introduce and implement new ideas. She did add, however, that with upcoming elections the board might be moving in a direction that was “too conservative”. This comment was prompted in part by the fact that two conservative Republican candidates defeated two moderate incumbent Republican members of the Board of Commissioners in this spring’s primary election.

Just as Republicans have asserted their dominance over the board, women have started making their own marks on the board. During the 1996 election, three women – two Republicans and one Democrat were vying for two seats on the board. Republicans Carolyn Carpenter and Sue Casper won and are two of only four women to have served on the board. As of this year, Casper has served for twelve years while Carpenter has served on the board for eight years. During the year that the Work First Plan was approved, Sue Casper was the Chair of the Cabarrus County Board of Commissioners.

Managing growth was an important issue in the Cabarrus County Commissioners race in 1998, from the building of new schools to providing incentives to new businesses (Plemmons, October 26, 1998). Tax increases were also a major issue in the campaign. Two of three commissioners elected in that year – Coy Privette and Fennel – belonged to what Commissioner

Ken Mills described as “David Drye’s Dream Team” (Plemmons, May 6, 1998, A1). The term referred to the fact that “they were leaders of the Cabarrus Taxpayers Association (CTA) which opposed a one cent sales tax and one percent real estate transfer tax referenda in February” (Plemmons, May 6, 1998, A1). The “CTA’s campaign against the referendum was heavily funded by Drye”(Plemmons, May 6, 1998, A1). Also winning the election that year was incumbent Jeff Barnhart who had supported the referendum (Plemmons, May 6, 1998, A1). Barnhart had been the only incumbent running as [former Commissioner] Nieblock did not seek reelection and Ken Mills was defeated in the GOP primary (Plemmons, November 4, 1998, A1). “I think that the results show people like the job Jeff Barnhart has done and that our message of no new taxes has gotten through” Privette was quoted as saying the article.

A five member Board of Social Services provides direction to the department and evaluates the performance of the Director. This Board reports to the Board of County Commissioners. Of the five members, two are appointed by the state and the County Commissioners appoint another two. These four elect the fifth person.

Time Frame - Highlights

The JOBS program was started in Cabarrus County in 1988. According to the County's Work First Supervisor, the JOBS program was more of an educational program as it provided assistance to recipients as they were in school. The target population of this program was young mothers. In March of 1995, Cabarrus County DSS Director James Cook proposed a 'workfare' program that would use a "grant diversion of Aide to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Food Stamps money for a portion of an hourly wage to be paid to the recipient" (Plemmons, March 20, 1995, A1). Thus, the cash would be used to supplement the income of welfare recipients. Cook was quoted as saying "what we want to do is turn the welfare program into a work opportunity program" (Plemmons, April 4, 1998, A1). Some of those interested in this new program were the Chairman of the Social Services Board, Fletcher Hartshell, and members of the

Board of County Commissioners. The DSS Director said they were interested in improving the system because it was not producing the results that they wanted. He said that at that time there were not enough financial incentives and not enough disincentives for staying off of welfare. The Chairman of the Board of Commissioners, Jeff Barnhart, was quoted as saying, "Somehow we have got to break that cycle and this is a way to do that". Commissioners and DSS employees were aware of workfare type programs underway in other places such as California and Wisconsin and thought it worthwhile to attempt something similar here.

Approval to implement the workfare program required state legislation. Senator Fletcher Hartshell sponsored Cook's ideas in legislation in the General Assembly. According to Cook, getting the legislation passed took a tremendous amount of work. Cook, members of his staff, the Board of County Commissioners, the County Attorney/Senator Fletcher Hartsell, and Robin Hayes, also a member of the General Assembly, lobbied legislative committees in Raleigh. In June of 1995, the NC legislature authorized Cabarrus County to establish an AFDC and Food Stamp pilot program and an adjunct Demonstration Program modifying the JOBS program (Senate Journal and House Journal). That legislation made Cabarrus County the only county in the state granted legislative approval for welfare reform in 1995. This allowed the county to establish a program called Work Over Welfare (WOW). The Department of Social Services in its Work First plan cited the WOW program as being largely responsible for the county's 40 percent decrease in caseload that the county experienced between the time WOW was created and when the Work First Plan was established.

The Director of Social Services and other employees of the Department were instrumental in designing the WOW program. A new employee who had relocated from another state was particular involved in this effort. In addition to changing the focus of welfare, the department underwent other structural and procedural changes to improve how it did business.

The NC Association of County Directors of Social Services in 1995 named James Cook DSS Director of the Year. The association's President, John Blair of Gaston County, was quoted

as saying Cook "embodies the best in creativity, tenacity, fiscal responsibility and ability to navigate the morass of people who have said 'we can't do that'" (Cook Named Director of the Year, May 15, 1995, A7). The article went on to mention Cook's interest in welfare reform. Cook was described as being "actively involved in the association's welfare reform efforts, serving on the welfare reform committee that published 'A Blueprint for Independence: The Family Investment Program' the associations welfare reform proposal" (Cook Named Director of the Year, May 15, 1995, A7). In May of 1997, Cabarrus County received approval from the state to be included in the Smart Start Program - "this year marked the third attempt at being accepted into the state program" (Becker, May 10, 1997, C).

Decision Dynamics

In October of 1997, Cabarrus County officials decided to put in a plan for electing county status. However, an article in the Concord Tribune pointed out that the county could still decide to opt out of the electing county status (Cabarrus Joins Welfare Reform Project, October 24, 1997, B2). The DSS Director was concerned over just what becoming an electing county would mean. "We're trying to figure out how much latitude the state is going to give the pilot programs. We feel like there are some things the state won't let you do" (Cabarrus Joins Welfare Reform Project, October 24, 1997, B2).

The Cabarrus Welfare Reform Planning Committee was formed to establish a Work First Plan for the county. Included on the Committee were individuals representing the Employment Security Commission, the Chamber of Commerce, consumers, Cooperative Christian Ministry, Cabarrus Victims Assistance Network, Cabarrus County Schools, Kannapolis City Schools, the Health Board (Public Health), Cabarrus Health Alliance, Piedmont Area Behavioral Health Board, Centralina Council of Governments, Cabarrus County Board of Commissioners, the Cabarrus County Social Service Board and the Housing Authority (Work First Plan, 3-4). In addition, James Cook was the facilitator of the committee and the members of his staff helped to

assist the members of the committee (Work First Plan, 4). The committee had five goals. These were to assess the needs of families, to secure public comment, to determine how agencies and organizations could work together to provide services and resources, to recommend to the Board of Commissioners a plan that would assist the county in reaching the state's goals, and to contribute to the community's implementation and carrying out of the welfare reform plan (Work First Plan, 4). Draft plans were made immediately available for public comment. "The public was made aware of the planning process through the televising of Board of Commissioners meetings at which progress reports were made and through newspaper coverage of the planning process" (Work First Plan, 5). Copies of the plan were located in various areas around the county including branches of the library, at the Cabarrus County Government Center and the Harrisburg Town Hall (Boger, January 11, 1998).

One of the most important factors of the county's plan was the pay for performance idea. Pay for performance means that in order to receive cash assistance, a person must work the required number of hours. If those hours weren't met, then the client would not receive the cash assistance for that month. In an interview the DSS Director stated that Cabarrus County "threatened to be electing so that they could get pay for performance". The county's goal was to obtain approval to implement the pay for performance concept. The Director noted that the state Department of Social Services did not really want or like electing county status, but that they were supportive of pay for performance. He said that "standard was good for the state, so was innovation". The county plan was approved for the county to become an electing county but that the DSS Director decided to go standard. The Work First Supervisor described Cabarrus County as "standard with waivers". The county did get approval for Pay for Performance - it became a part of the county's WOW program.

Goals, Objectives, and Program Priorities

The Work First Plan for Cabarrus County describes the means by which the county plans to meet the goals given to them by the state. These goals include:

1. Reducing the Work First Caseload – 15 percent
2. Putting Adults to Work - 174
3. Staying off Welfare After Going To Work – 85 percent
4. Meeting "All Parent" Participation Rate – 35 percent
5. Meeting "Two Parent" Participation Rate – 90 percent
6. Avoiding Welfare through diversion Assistance – 6 percent
7. Increasing Child Support Orders and Collections For Work First – 10 percent
8. Improving Child Well-being (percent of Work First Children with intensive Child Protective Services with a safety plan)- 100 percent (Work First Plan, 5)

The county plan calls for the use of several procedures in order to meet the goal of reducing the Work First Caseload. The first procedure is to identify the barriers and factors that create a need for assistance and to try to remove them. Diversion assistance and the pursuit of child support payments are viewed as a way to help families who need help before they are placed on the welfare roll. The Work First Supervisor said that diversion assistance was good for many clients in that it enabled them to "see light at the end of the tunnel". She also thought that diversion assistance could not have happened before it was decided that cash assistance was not an entitlement. If the client does go on assistance, the county has several steps to try to get them off as soon as it is possible by getting the client working and self-sufficient. The First Stop program is a partnership between DSS and the Economic Security Commission (ESC). The ESC is the "primary deliverer of job placement services in the Work First Program". Clients must be registered for work with the ESC before the Work First application is processed (Work First Plan, 6). To enhance the employability of clients, transportation and childcare assistance are available when the client is interviewing, job hunting or doing other employment related activities. In

addition the clients are offered formal classes in which they learn ways to improve their chances of obtaining as well as keeping a job.

In order to meet the goal of putting adults to work, the Work First Plan notes the importance of the Work Over Welfare program in meeting this goal. "The increased incentives for working, as well as Grant Diversion, where the amount of the cash benefit and food stamps is diverted to an employer to be matched for a salary, will figure in to our plan of putting adults to work" (Work First Plan 7). The plan noted that the county's 40 percent reduction in caseload since 1995 left a population that was harder to serve. Thus the plan called for a simplification of Work First eligibility rules so that the caseworker could spend time helping the client not going through the rules trying to see if the person is eligible. Job-readiness classes are provided - Curtis Classes are mandatory but there is also a Work Experience class to help with those who have no work experience or who have bad work habits.

The goal of staying off welfare after going to work will be met by maintaining "good follow-up and support to make sure that clients are stabilized in their jobs before a crisis occurs and they quit" (Work First Plan, 8). The Plan calls for retaining the case for an unspecified amount of time so that the DSS worker can keep track of the family. It also points out that "WOW incentives, after employment, will make it possible for clients to afford to stay off welfare and remain working" (Work First Plan, 8). The most important means by which to help the client to keep working, according to the plan, would be to check with the employee and employer periodically and to urge the client to call them should they feel that they can not handle a situation or if a crisis situation occurs (Work First Plan, 9). "The lack of reliable transportation for an extended period of time is a common reason for clients losing jobs" (Work First Plan, 9). The plan called for funding from the state Department of Transportation to help to solve this problem.

In order to reduce state and local expenditures, Department of Social Services employees use such tactics as diversion assistance, in which a check worth up to three months of their Work first benefits can be given to the client in one lump sum, or money from the Emergency

Assistance fund could be given to the family instead of automatically placing the family on the welfare rolls (Work First Plan, 11). The plan also calls for an increase in child support orders and collections for Work First families. This not only would cut down on expenditures but would also help to ensure the welfare of the child. The Chair of the Board of Social Services mentioned that the county and DSS have not saved money, but that the money was being spent in different and more effective ways. Now the money is used to give vehicles to recipients, to help them pay for daycare and a variety of other ways. The money is no longer being given out as cash assistance. It is given to clients to aid them while they try to get on their feet and to establish themselves in their jobs. The Work First Supervisor said that reducing state and local expenditures was not really a concern - the concern was with getting people to work so that they could support themselves.

"Cabarrus County will take any steps necessary to protect children" (Work First Plan, 13). This goal was stated in a variety of different ways by the people interviewed. That protection takes several forms. The Work First plan calls for increasing child support orders and collections for Work First children. Not only does this help to reduce a family's need for public assistance, but it also helps to ensure that children are being supported by the absent parent. The most important factor in ensuring the well being of children is that any child whose family is on Work First, and the child is also in the Child Welfare system, has a safety plan and there is coordination between the social workers from both departments (Work First Plan, 13). The well being of children is a "high priority" for DSS workers. After a Work First Family leaves welfare or if a family is not receiving benefits because they are not performing their work responsibilities, the family's case is still followed by a DSS employee for a month after they get off of the roll or during the month that they are being penalized in order to ensure that the worker is still working and to ensure the welfare of the children. Reducing child and family poverty seems to be of the highest priority to Cabarrus County. Self-sufficiency was mentioned often during the interviews.

The Chair of the Board of Social Services noted that the main goal of WOW and Work First was to get people to be self-supporting. He said someone from the state Department of Social Services once asked him what the main goal of WOW was and he responded, "to put you out of work, and to dissolve DSS". This Board Chair wanted people to be self-sufficient so that they did not depend on the government. Thus, he put a lot of emphasis on getting people off of the welfare rolls by helping them to secure and retain workforce participation. He pointed to the county's initiative to help fund day care and secure transportation for workers. The County Manager said that commissioners seem willing to spend for childcare and health care so long as they aren't simply giving cash assistance.

One way that the county hoped to decrease its Work First Caseload was to include Pay for Performance in its plan. The DSS Director said that moved the responsibility to the parent. It gave them the initiative to get off of welfare by working to become self-sufficient.

Program Implementation

Program Operations

The DSS Director mentioned that in the past, DSS workers had the idea that their job was to identify those eligible for welfare and make certain that they received benefits. He said that DSS workers would ask, "What are you applying for?" and, if the clients were eligible, help them obtain the cash or other assistance to which they were entitled. Today, that mind set has changed. DSS workers now say, "I understand that you are having problems, what do you need help with?". The Director said that the emphasis has changed from how quickly the DSS social workers can get the family onto the welfare roll to figuring out how to help them to get out of the situation they are in. Others also mentioned a new emphasis on figuring out what else can be done to help the family as opposed to just providing cash benefits.

Crisis assistance, childcare assistance and aid in finding jobs have more emphasis now than in the past. NC Health Choice and childcare assistance are provided to families who make

up to 200 percent of the poverty level. That would not have happened before reform. The County Work First Plan calls for funding to help families with childcare, transportation and substance abuse problems that are barriers to working.

Use of Funds

According to those interviewed, the money given to DSS is spent in a different way now. It is used to provide transportation and daycare so that these common barriers to work are abolished. The Chair of the Board of Social Services also mentioned that the County Commissioners had been willing to spend money for DSS because they feel that DSS has been reasonable with the management of the money. He thought that had changes in DSS operations not occurred, that DSS and the Board of Commissioners probably would have fought over the budget. He also mentioned the importance of getting waivers of regulations from the state so that department employees could do a better job.

The DSS Director said that he did not like the funding arrangements for the programs. He said he wished there could be some federal, state, and local funds in every program instead of one layer of government funding one particular program. He said that the state was benefiting from not having to give as much, while the county is losing.

Organizational and Cultural Changes

The county relocated the Social Services Department, the Health Department and Mental Health into the same, newly renovated building two years ago. This relocation made county services more accessible to many people. Since many residents seeking social services were also in need of health and/or mental health services, this merger of locations improved the one-stop shopping aspect of county services. Many of the public health services of Cabarrus County are provided by the Cabarrus Health Alliance, an independent public authority. This allows for more flexibility in public health care.

The county was also the first in the state to use a single application process whereby clients could apply for many types of services without filling out a multitude of applications and

having to make several trips to the DSS office. This new process reduced paperwork and gave more time to the employees to help families instead of taking time to fill out identical information on different applications. It was simply a way to be more efficient. In the past four or five different applications were required. The Board of Commissioners liked the new idea as they saw it as a way to save money and the county wanted other counties to try it. However, the DSS Director said that many state level employees did not like this idea because they felt threatened. Today almost every county in the state uses the application. The county also toyed with an on-line application – however it was not successful.

The Department changed the approach to eligibility determination, case review, and case management. The goal of service was changed and more services were provided through a team approach. The DSS Director called the new process a "Reengineering of the Corporation". He said that the role of many employees changed and that it was hard for many of them. He said many had made a career out of being welfare eligibility experts and that made them "real comfortable" but that "reform changed that". He said that in the past an intake employee could look at dollar figures (the person's income, the value of the family car, the value of the home) and determine whether or not the family would be eligible for welfare services. Today decisions are not as clear-cut. According to the Director, for many employees, welfare reform had been a pain in the neck. There was more confusion, work and complexity for the DSS workers. In the few years since Work First started the grumbling has lessened "as employees realized that this was how it was going to be".

County and State Relations

A Commissioner noted that Cabarrus County has good leadership at the state government level and that in turn has helped the County's relationship with the state. Several of those interviewed referred to the importance in the welfare reform process of Fletcher Hartshell, State Senator from Cabarrus County and County Attorney. The state has given the county more leeway to try new things. The Commissioner said that reform helped to "open the arena for innovation".

The Director of DSS agreed with this assessment. He said that DSS has more flexibility now. There may be more rules, he said, but there are also more options.

At times the researchers were left with the impression that over the years the relationship between county officials and state DSS officials may have been strained. Cabarrus County had asked for waivers from state regulations on more than one occasion. Currently the relationship between County and State regarding DSS seemed to be one in which the county had more flexibility and autonomy. However, this appears to have been as much a result of earlier actions by Cabarrus County officials as a result of Work First.

The County Manager expressed a great deal of concern about changes taking place in the Mental Health system. He noted how the County would be required to spend a great deal more money in providing services through Mental Health than in the past. Although he saw benefits of Welfare Reform, he saw no savings in short term county expenditures as a result. He also noted that although welfare had not been reformed many important changes had taken place.

Chief Successes, Achievements and Positive Results

Several of those interviewed thought that the biggest success brought about by Work First was the change in outlook of the recipients and the impact of this on their lives. The Work First Manager said that the reform helped to put people to work in stable jobs and helped them to provide for their children. She said that it changed the recipient's outlook on life in a positive way. The Social Services Board Chair said that the reform made people self-supporting. Welfare recipients were able to see that they could do it - they could get off of welfare and provide for their families. A County Commissioner said that welfare recipients had "self-esteem that they didn't have before". All of those interviewed made it clear that welfare reform had provided more than just a job or just a handout. It was truly making a difference in the lives of people. The Commissioner said that she thinks that reform may have broken the welfare cycle.

The Work First Supervisor was pleased with retention, the number of people who do not come back onto the welfare roles. She said that this was possible due to the day care support and

transportation support that the county was now able to help obtain for those who had a job and wanted to work. Cabarrus County has no public transportation system and many new workers could not find a day care that they could afford. According to a Commissioner, the county is able to do all of this and still have a reasonable budget – pleasing both county commissioners and residents.

The DSS Director said that families were receiving more help now; however, it was not just reform that caused this. He said DSS has “improved what we are all about”. The department is helping clients to get off of welfare by giving them the resources to get off and to stay off. Some interviewees noted that the County was willing to invest resources in providing services to individuals who would work and keep working. As long as there seemed to be an end point to providing these resources and if they weren’t going as cash gifts to those who could but wouldn’t work, this very politically conservative county seemed willing to provide.

Chief Shortcomings, Barriers, Problems, and Failures

With all of the successes of welfare reform, several of those interviewed commented on failures with the new system. The Work First Supervisor said that it was upsetting to her that with the emphasis now on Work First, people were not able to take advantage of educational programs as they had under the JOBS program. She called it a "missed opportunity" for people to go to school. With the time limit on benefits, many clients who could benefit from technical training programs are not able to do so. The Board of Social Services Chair said that there will always be failure - not everyone will get off of the rolls - and that there will always be someone there to publicize the failures. Many commented that welfare has not really been reformed, that some changes have been made and that much of the success can be attributed to the robust economy. One interviewee even noted that if the economy turned sour for a long period that we might be back to the old ways again. However, even this person thought that the changes of the last few years were beneficial.

The County Manager and a Commissioner expressed concern that welfare reform had done little to impact the state of secondary education in the county. They were concerned about the number of high school students reading below grade level and those who failed to complete high school.

Range of Players

Cabarrus County utilizes both public and private resources to aid their Work First Families - among those agencies are the ESC, VR and Mental Health. They also have a relationship with the community college to help to provide training, the public schools in order to help those on welfare and in school to graduate, and the housing authority (Work First Plan, 18). The Chamber of Commerce is named in the Work First plan as being an important liaison between DSS/Work First and the businesses.

Churches have been a valuable means by which to aid welfare families. Members of the church help to serve as "mentors and instill a work ethic" (Work First Plan, 19). They also "provide supportive services, such as transportation and in some cases, child care" (Work First Plan, 19). Some churches were asked to "'adopt' individuals on a one on one basis to provide specific needs" (Work First Plan, 19). Cooperative Christian Ministries and the Salvation Army were cited as beneficial to helping families in a crisis situation.

A County Commissioner said that she thought there was greater utilization of the private and non-profit sector in aiding welfare clients. She cited a recent change in which more private doctors were involved in helping to treat welfare recipients. Others noted that welfare reform did not really expand the number of agencies or organizations that DSS had a relationship with but that DSS seemed to work more closely with some by means of contracting out and on-site workers. The Work First Supervisor also pointed out that due to the economy, the business community and DSS did not have a need to work together but that some stores such as Target, Hardees, and Food Lion were businesses that frequently hired welfare participants.

The County Manager did not think that the range of non-profit organizations involved in welfare had increased with reform. He did, however, say that some nonprofit agencies had found a bigger niche in which to be involved.

All of those interviewed seemed to feel that Welfare Reform had achieved some success in Cabarrus County. Different actors may have had differing opinions about the amount of success and the durability of any changes. Most attributed the changes to the actions of local officials and employees, however, rather than to the state level Work First initiatives. James Cook, Director of Social Services for Cabarrus County, Fletcher Hartshell, State Senator and County Attorney, DSS employees, and members of the County Commission and Board of Social Services, all were mentioned as contributing to changes in the provision of welfare services in the county.

Assessment by Research Associate

All of those interviewed in Cabarrus County seemed pleased with the results of welfare reform and the changes that have come about. It is clear, however, that the process by which these changes were set in motion began well before Work First was implemented. The Director of the Department of Social Services, James Cook, was, with the involvement of staff, County Commissioners, and Social Services Board members, able to design and implement an innovative approach, Work Over Welfare (WOW) to providing welfare services in 1995, before Work First was developed. This required extensive negotiations with state bureaucrats and lobbying of elected officials to obtain necessary waivers.

Work First seems to have been easily meshed with the WOW program. The department had made important changes that impacted the culture of the organization and the outlook of its employees before Work First. Although these changes were not easy, they seem to have 'stuck'. At this point it is not apparent that county-state relations have changed very much. Interviewees noted that they have some more autonomy from the state and the flexibility to try new

approaches. Some of this seems to result from a feeling that they have permission to try new approaches on their own. Having realized a certain amount of success with WOW and then with Work First, career and elected officials seemed somewhat eager to be able to strike out on their own in other areas without state interference.

Interviewees noted that at first, many welfare recipients did not accept the fact that benefits would end at a time certain. This message seems to have been driven home now. The economy in Cabarrus County is so robust that many commented that any able bodied person who wanted a job could have one. Several of those interviewed expressed concern about what would happen to those recently removed from the welfare rolls if the economy faltered.

By most indicators, Cabarrus County is conservative politically. Hence it was surprising to hear that Commissioners seemed willing to continue to invest resources in welfare as long as it appeared that these expenditures would result in putting people to work and were not cash entitlements. Those interviewed believed that attitudes toward welfare by those in the system had changed. Those in the system included county employees, elected officials, recipients, private nonprofit organizations and businesses working with the county to provide jobs and services. However, several interviewees noted that they did not believe that the general public knew much about the changes that had taken place or how it impacted policy or administration.

Cabarrus County is getting ready to revise its Work First Plan. From the results of interviewees, we would not expect much conflict or controversy, as there seems to be a general impression that Work First and WOW have been successful. However, the nature of the Board of Commissioners will change somewhat with the replacement of two experienced, moderate members with two very conservative members. Other stresses will impact county government. County expenditures for welfare have not decreased. Changes made in the Mental Health system by state government will increase county financial obligations in this area. Significant changes in county-state relations will be more long term and are likely to be evident in many areas, not just in welfare.

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