

Tracking County Responses to Welfare Reform Project 2000-2001*

Caldwell County, North Carolina

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Preface

This report is a descriptive account of how Caldwell County has responded to the 1996 Federal, and the 1997 State, welfare reform legislation. It recounts Caldwell County's story of how it has responded to Federal and State welfare reform legislation that attempted to provide counties with greater discretion in addressing the local welfare situation. The report focuses on changes in the County's infrastructure and ways of doing business. It does not evaluate programs or assess the impact of programs on citizens.

The report is part of the "Tracking County Responses to Welfare Reform" project—an inter-institutional effort by 12 University of North Carolina campuses to understand better the localization of policy implementation in North Carolina counties. Information for the report was provided via surveys and individual interviews with Caldwell County leaders involved with the implementation of welfare reform. In keeping with the project's commitment to neutrality, the views and opinions of those interviewed and surveyed have been aggregated into collective responses. Additional contextual information was provided from a variety of demographic, socioeconomic, and political sources.

In 1996 the U.S. President and Congress signed into law welfare reform legislation. The legislation was historic in that it eliminated welfare as an entitlement, limited the time recipients could receive funds, and emphasized the preparation for economic self-sufficiency. States were given greater discretion on how to implement the legislation. In order to receive federal block grants, states were required to enact legislation on how they plan to implement the federal legislation.

In 1997 North Carolina passed its implementation legislation called "Work First". Since NC is a state-supervised County-administered system for social services, all 100 counties were required to produce local implementation plans. The legislation also enabled 21 Electing Counties greater discretion on setting eligibility criteria, benefit levels, time limits, etc. (Caldwell County chose to be an Electing County). All counties faced the challenge of redesigning their social services in a manner that reflected a host of local demographic, economic, cultural, political, and other factors.

HOW HAS CALDWELL COUNTY RESPONDED TO THIS CHALLENGE?

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The Policy Context

This section provides a basic description of the demographic, economic, social, and political characteristics of Caldwell County, North Carolina. The bulk of this information was compiled from the following information sources: the NC Department of Commerce, the 1990 US Census, the *1998 Caldwell County Work First Plan*, and the *Caldwell County Living Guide* - published by the Caldwell County Chamber of Commerce.

Demographics & Economic Development

According to the North Carolina Department of Commerce (NCDC), the 1998 population estimate for Caldwell County was 75,278 (NCDC, 1999). This estimate indicates a 6.5% increase in population since the 1990 U.S. Census estimate. In terms of race, 94.1% of Caldwell County residents are white while 5.9% are non-white (NCDC, 1999). Most of this non-white population is black with “growing number of Hispanics” (CCWRPC, p. 3).

Caldwell County has a low unemployment rate of 2.4% and a poverty rate of 10.8% (NCDC, 1999). The main sources of County employment are manufacturing, services, and retail trade (NCDC, 1999). According to Caldwell County’s *1997 TANF Plan*:

The Caldwell County economic outlook suggests that there is growing momentum for residential development and some commercial development. Strategies to market the County as a desirable retirement location are being implemented. County infrastructure development, particularly water expansion, is being promoted to support growth. Employers report a need for workers at present, a positive in relation to getting welfare recipients into jobs. On the other hand, without two wage earners contributing families are quite likely to be unable to meet their basic needs (p. 3).

The per capita income for Caldwell County is \$20,158, while the median household income is \$42,525.

Conservative, Not Republican

Caldwell County's political make-up is closely divided between the Republican and Democratic Parties, with the Republican Party holding a slight majority. The North Carolina State Board of Elections (NCSBE) reports 20,292 (45%) registered Republicans in 1998 compared to 18,296 (41%) registered Democrats. In addition to the two major parties, there are 5,995 (13%) unaffiliated voters and 18 (.04%) registered Libertarians in Caldwell County (NCSBE).

Although it is often referred to as a Republican County, perhaps, in light of these figures, Caldwell County is better described as "conservative". After all, Caldwell County leadership is united in its desire for County-based governance, and this shared commitment to local control runs deeper than partisan politics. For example, in October of 1997, County officials and management, working in collaboration with DSS leaders, applied for Electing County status with the State DSS. This decision was in keeping with County leadership's commitment to County-based governance. County leaders hoped to send a "message" to Raleigh that they wanted greater control over their own welfare reform and decisions regarding TANF re-allocation.

The make-up of the Board of County Commissioners further illustrates the "split" political personality of the County. The Board, considered both by themselves and other community leaders, as a "let's-get-down-to-business" Board, is reputed to be more interested in efficiency and effectiveness than partisan politics. One commissioner interviewed stated: "The Democrats on the Board are more conservative than Republicans." All the commissioners interviewed suggested that politics was not hindering the progress of welfare reform in Caldwell County and reported that they did not micromanage DSS.

Furthermore, the narrow margin of political control held by Republicans on the Caldwell County Board of Commissioners may soon come to an end. The Board of Commissioners, which has been led by a Republican majority for the last 15 years, has seen an increase in Democrats on

the Board since 1992 (NCACC, 1999). This fall's election is predicted to be a close race to determine which of the two major parties will hold the majority.

A Spirit of Community

There is a strong spirit of "community" among Caldwell County leaders facilitated by strong inter-governmental communication and common commitment to County-based autonomy. The authors of this paper experienced first-hand the hospitality of Caldwell County leaders when conducting interviews there on Thursday, July 20, 2000. With just a few phone calls, the DSS Director had lined up the Work First Program Supervisor, DSS Board Chair, and the County Manager for interviews. During these interviews, elected and County officials revealed their strong respect for one another and their united philosophy of County-based governance. Likewise, the Caldwell County Department of Social Services holds monthly staff meetings, which engenders a strong sense of community within the entire agency.

Education

Of the adult population in Caldwell County, 56.6% have a high school education while 8.9% have a college education (NCDC, 1999). According to *Caldwell County Living*, Caldwell County "students scored far above the state on all measures in the North Carolina testing and accountability programs referred to as the 'ABC Report Card,'" (CCCC, 1999 p. 20). The same publication also states that students in Caldwell County scored 8% above the state average for the ABC Report Card and that all the three high schools in the County met "Exemplary Academic Growth" standards (p. 20).

In addition to the exemplary K-12 public schools in Caldwell County, another leading educational institution is the Caldwell County Community College and Technical Institute. Along with a recently completed Career Center geared towards high school students (financed by the Caldwell County Chamber of Commerce), some of the more innovative employment training

programs offered by Caldwell County Community College and Technical Institute include the following:

Cooperative Education-combing classroom experience with related work experience; Corporate Computer Training Center-providing up-to-the-minute training customized to meet individual or business computer needs; Focused Industrial Training-individually tailored training on the job site or at the college for as few as two or as many as several hundred employees; Basic Skills Training-free instruction in reading, writing, and math to help employees build self-confidence and improve job performance; New and Expanded Industry Training-stimulating the creation of more challenging and rewarding jobs and assisting in the economic development of the service area; Occupational Extension-classes upgrade skills of law officers, builders, nurses aides, emergency personnel, supervisors, and teachers to name just a few; REAL Enterprises-fostering new businesses; and Small Business Center-providing seminars, printed materials, one-on-one business counseling and access to a revolving loan fund (CCCC, 1999, p. 20-21).

The Caldwell County Community College and Technical Institute enrolls over 15,000 students each year (CCCC, 1999, p. 21). While the Community College did provide job search training for Work First clients in the initial phase of the program, it remains a promising partner for future Work First program initiatives.

Work First Population

According to the *1999 Work First Report Card* there were 334 Work First families living in Caldwell County. This would indicate that 33.3% drop in the number of families in Work First between the period of July 1997 and July 1999.

Decision Dynamics, Goals & Objectives—1997-1998

Opting for Electing County Status

On October 20, 1997 the Caldwell County Board of County Commissioners “by unanimous vote” opted for Electing County status with the NC Division of Social Services (CCWRPC, 1997. p. 4). This vote reflected a strong commitment to County-based governance shared by all County leaders as well as DSS leaders. It was the hope of all these leaders that Electing County status would “provide Caldwell County with some additional flexibility to specifically target the needs of Caldwell County citizens” (CCWRPC, 1997, p. 4).

Welfare Reform Planning Committee

The Caldwell County Board of Commissioners appointed a Welfare Reform Planning Committee in late October of 1997. The DSS Board Chair was appointed Chair of the Welfare Reform Planning Committee, and, according to the *1997 TANF Plan*, the voting members of the committee included:

Chairs of both political parties; an elementary school principal; a member of the Mental Health Board; two County Commissioners; all members of the Social Services Board; the DSS Director; a DSS staff member; a former State Senator; and citizens-at-large (p. 4).

Other members, who were not able to vote, included representatives from the “Community Action Agency, Smart Start, local crisis agencies, and additional members of the minority community” (p. 4).

The Welfare Reform Planning Committee was subdivided into five subcommittees which included: “a Child Welfare Services subcommittee, a Fiscal/Budget subcommittee, a subcommittee on Policy and Procedures, a subcommittee on Support and Emergency Services, and a subcommittee on Employment Services” (p.4). Input from these five subcommittees, in addition from the community at-large, was incorporated into the overarching *1997TANF Plan*.

Commitment to Child Welfare

The Welfare Reform Planning Committee also placed a strong emphasis on child welfare as a major priority of welfare reform. The County's welfare reform vision statement, located on the second page of the *1997 TANF Plan*, is entitled "Caldwell County: Improving the Life Chances of Children." The opening paragraph of the statement links child welfare and adult responsibility as key welfare reform goals:

The future of the community will be affected by the development of our future citizens and leaders – children. Healthy children will make healthy adults. Healthy adults – physically, mentally, emotionally, socially – make good citizens, able to contribute to the progress of the community (p. 2).

The County's later states that the ultimate goal for its welfare reform program is to ensure that: "public cash assistance will become, to a much greater extent, a program to support employment" (p. 2).

A Dream Deferred: Caldwell County's Plan for TANF Reallocation

In addition to its commitment to child welfare, the hope of the Caldwell County Welfare Reform Planning Committee was that:

Savings realized through effective local efforts will presumably be available to reprogram for local TANF purposes. Savings in cash assistance will be reprogrammed to other TANF purposes including but not limited to childcare, transportation, emergency assistance, etc. As allowed by law and within MOE requirements, a reserve fund may be established to cover an economic downturn. (p. 11).

This TANF reallocation goal was a cornerstone in Caldwell County's TANF plan. The rejection of this plan was a major disappointment for welfare reform leaders in Caldwell County.

Nevertheless, these leaders have worked within the framework of their finalized TANF plan to restructure their social service delivery system.

Program Implementation—1998-2000

Caldwell County DSS Organizational/Cultural Change

The Caldwell County DSS has taken a proactive stance by focusing less on eligibility determination and public assistance and encouraging clients to become more self-sufficient. Program staff has a positive outlook on the program and believe it is working for the majority of clients. The Caldwell County DSS played a large role in the Welfare Reform Planning Committee and its efforts to engage the Caldwell County citizenry in planning an effective welfare reform delivery system. DSS leaders believe this has enhanced inter-agency collaboration (non-profit and governmental) and its own position in the community. These leaders cite an increase in newspaper articles about the agency.

DSS leaders report that welfare reform has impacted eligibility and employment staff. The eligibility staff experienced a shift from high volume of paperwork to a more direct focus on clients. Employment staff, on the other hand, has shared some of their direct service responsibilities and have been required to complete much more paperwork.

Another change in DSS organizational culture is the current discussion about changing the name of the agency. County officials who believe that DSS needs to re-market itself to the community also mentioned this. One of the suggested names is “Helping Hands.”

County officials, on the other hand, tended to question how much the organizational culture of DSS has changed. One commissioner observed that while the DSS “mentality has changed, the system has not changed that much.” However, this commissioner held the State responsible for not providing the County with “real flexibility” necessary to change the system dramatically.

The Essential Role of the DSS Director

The DSS Director has been essential to the welfare reform implementation process in Caldwell County. He played a critical role in the activities of the Welfare Reform Planning Committee and in the subsequent implementation of the Committee's goals and objectives. Well respected by leaders on all levels of County government, the DSS Director is provided with a large degree of autonomy of social service policy making and implementation. Furthermore, the DSS Director is has numerous contacts at the State-level and State DSS, which bodes well for future welfare reform efforts in the County.

Sounding the Horn of Success: 3 TANF Roll-Over Positions

Caldwell County is serious about assisting Work First clients in the journey from public assistance to gainful employment. Since the Work First Plan was activated in January of 1998, Work First/TANF Job Training has undergone a couple of transformations. An individual was contracted to provide pre-employment training to Work First clients from October 18, 1999 until January of 2000. From January of 2000 until June of 2000, the Caldwell County Community College was contracted to provide a pre-employment class. With roll-over savings from welfare reform, the DSS and Work First program have created three new, contract positions to assist Work First clients in the road to self-sufficiency. These three positions, described in detail below, include the Job Search Coach, Job Developer, and Fatherhood Initiative Coordinator.

Job Search Coach

The Work First Program has used TANF savings to create a Job Search Coach position. The Job Search Coach assists Work First clients in locating and applying for appropriate employment. This instruction includes "assisting participants in locating prospective employers, preparing for the application and interview process, and arranging transportation and child care once employment is secured" (CCDSS, 2000, Job Search Coach, p. 1). The Job Search Coach is

required to provide the client's case manager with an assessment of the client's efforts in the job search process. Finally, the Job Search Coach is expected to "perform other duties as requested including, but not limited, to client employment retention services, employment training services, and other project work" (p. 1).

Due to the lack of an effective public transportation system in Caldwell County, the Work First Program purchased a Job Search Van to eliminate transportation as a potential barrier for Work First clients. The Job Search Van transports Work First clients to and from work in the early morning and afternoon. According to the Work First Program Supervisor, the van driver works a split shift starting "around five in the morning" in order to get clients to work on time; many of the Work First clients are lumber and furniture employees so their workday begins at 7:00 am.

Job Developer

In addition to the Job Search Coach, a Job Developer position was also created out of the TANF savings. The Job Developer serves as a liaison with the business community to develop "positive productive relationships" in an effort to obtain employment possibilities for Work First clients (CCDSS, 2000, Job Developer, p. 1). The Job Developer also serves as the DSS contact person when employers have concerns regarding Work First clients (p. 1). After a Work First client is placed in stable employment, the Job Developer assesses the progress of the client and satisfaction of the employer and reports this information to the client's Work First case manager (p. 1). The Job Developer is also responsible for tracking how long Work First clients remain in stable employment and non-dependent on the Work First Program (p.1).

Fatherhood Initiative Coordinator

Another federal and state initiative that has evolved out of welfare reform is the Fatherhood Initiative. The Fatherhood Initiative Program is a national program that seeks to operationally roll-over TANF funds to increase the parental involvement of non-custodial parents, most of whom are fathers. The Fatherhood Initiative represents a shift in paradigm from a primarily punitive approach of child support collection to a more family-centered approach of involving fathers in family life first, and then seeking a financial contribution from them later.

The Caldwell County Fatherhood Initiative Coordinator was created to “research Fatherhood Initiative activities across the state and nation” and “establish a local coalition to support the development” of this federal program in Caldwell County (CCDSS, 2000, Fatherhood Initiative Coordinator, p. 1). The Fatherhood Initiative Coordinator is also expected to collaborate with Child Support Enforcement to refer non-custodial parents to Work First (p.1).

Once an application has been accepted for Work First, the Work First staff makes a home visit within one week. Clients are expected to apply for work at 7 prospective employment sites each day until they locate employment. As each client finds employment, the Work First case manager sounds a party horn, which in turn boosts the Work First Team with the news of another successful job placement.

Success for Families Program

The Work First Program Supervisor coordinates this program in Caldwell County. The Success for Families Program is a State-mandated, multi-disciplinary team-approach to working with families in the Work First program. In Caldwell County, the Success for Families team is made up of representatives from Caldwell County Smart Start, Mental Health, and Vocational Rehabilitation agencies. This team, which meets directly with each family, provides a community assessment, and then links the family to appropriate service agencies in the County. The program

attempts to consolidate all the services needed by a Work First family through this single, team-based approach. The team also stresses to the Work First Families (in very concrete terms) the amount of time and financial allotments the families has remaining before they will have to exit the Work First Program.

Nurturing Program

The Nurturing Program offered through Caldwell County DSS is available for mothers under age 29 with children from birth to 5 years old. The program provides mothers with a variety of parenting skills including: nutritional, health, educational, developmental, and disciplinary information appropriate for infants and young children. A Smart Start employee and DSS employee, the latter funded through the TANF program, administer the program.

Identified Work Experience Sites

A number of sites have been identified as work experience or job placement sites for Work First clients in Caldwell County. These include: the Caldwell County Animal Shelter; the Caldwell County Memorial Hospital; the Caldwell County Department of Social Services; the Caldwell County Health Department; the Employment Security Commission; the Family Resource Center; the Caldwell County Public Schools; Caldwell County Community College and Technical Institute; and the Caldwell County Library. At this point in time, the Caldwell County Animal Shelter and Caldwell County Memorial Hospital have been the most utilized work experience sites by Work First clients.

Work First Child Care

In Caldwell County, Work First clients are given first priority in terms of available child care slots. According to DSS officials, Work First Clients have had little difficulty in finding child care. Work First staff refers clients to Choices in Child Care, a non-profit child care referral agency, which helps locate and place children in area child care agencies.

DSS officials expressed that child care shortages are a Countywide problem and not specific to Work First. It is reported that occasionally, especially with families with young children, Work First clients are unsuccessful in locating their own daycare either on their own or through the assistance of Choices in Care. Fortunately, each of these situations has been resolved through relatives or informal kin networks, but officials remain concerned about the tight day care market. Though not a direct result of welfare reform, Berhardt Furniture, a private industry, is building a large day care in the community that may offer relief to some DSS and Work First clients.

TANF/Child Welfare Collaborative

Caldwell County is presently pursuing the TANF/Child Welfare Collaborative in the hopes of improving internal coordination of services for Work First clients. The Collaborative stresses measurable outcomes and is based on the following 9-point vision articulated by the Caldwell County DSS Director (CCDSS, TANF/Child Welfare Collaborative, p.1):

1. Increase community-based support for families to eliminate poverty and family violence
2. Establish one casework team per family
3. Reduce the Work First caseload
4. Increase child support collections and involvement fathers in parenting
5. Increase adoptions and other permanent arrangements for children
6. Reduce “high end” residential foster care placements
7. Reduce the number of children in foster care
8. Reduce the number of reports of abuse and neglect
9. Increase employment placements for custodial and non-custodial parents.

In addition to improving the coordination of services for Work First families, the DSS Director stresses that these measurable outcomes will “increase our [DSS’s] credibility for funding purposes” (p.1).

**Caldwell County:
A “Standard-Plus” County
(Interpretations)**

The Caldwell County motto proclaims itself to be a place “Where Progress Meets Tradition,” and perhaps there is no more ideal venue in Caldwell County for observing the operationalization of this motto than welfare reform. Welfare reform has served a catalyst for bringing progress and tradition, liberals and conservatives, Elected officials and County government together in Caldwell County around a central vision of: “increase[d] discretion and responsibility for local officials in planning for specific welfare assistance needs by local citizens” (CCWRPC, p. 1).

To explicate this vision, one must first separate the wheat from the chaff— the ideology of “counties’ rights” from the “political fodder” of partisan politics. Such winnowing, for the purposes of understanding welfare reform in Caldwell County, requires a distinction between the terms “conservative” and “Republican.” While these two descriptors can be, and often are, used interchangeably, one of Webster’s definitions for conservative reads: “tending or disposed to maintain existing views conditions, or institutions: TRADITIONAL.” For many Caldwell County citizens, the definition of conservative transcends political parties. One County leader observed: “Our Democrats,” referring to the 2 Democrats out of 5 County commissioners, “are more conservative than our Republicans.”

Furthermore, if one distills the term “Republican” to its core political meaning it is defined as “one of the two major political parties evolving in the U.S. in the mid-19th century that is usually primarily associated with business, financial, and some agricultural interest and is held to favor a restricted government role in economic life.” Using this core definition, the line between Republican and Democrat, at least in Caldwell County, becomes real fuzzy.

So why go through this exercise in semantics? For one, the Caldwell County Welfare Reform Planning Committee believed it was important to call attention to the fact that while

welfare reform - “as we know it” - has driven by partisan politics on the federal and state levels, Caldwell County was determined to rise above these political shenanigans. The opening lines of the Caldwell County *1997 TANF Plan* frame this determination:

The issue of welfare reform has been a part of public debate for over ten years. The public perception of “welfare” is generally negative. People receiving welfare have increasingly come under criticism as the problem themselves rather than victims of various societal problems. Bipolar hyperbole in the political arenas has become the rule - welfare recipients are portrayed as either poor helpless victims or greedy, lazy ne’er-do-wells. A more accurate characterization is that persons receiving welfare, for many reasons - some of their own making, others beyond their control - cannot fully meet their own family needs (p. 1).

Thus, despite the fact that Caldwell County welfare reform leaders are evenly split in terms of political party — there are 3 Republicans to 2 Democrats on the Board of County Commissioners and 3 Democrats to 2 Republicans on the DSS Board — these leaders report that there has been a general consensus in their basic welfare reform philosophy from the beginning.

Undoubtedly, the “glue” which holds these otherwise political opponents together, especially in the venue of welfare reform, is the concept of “Counties’ rights.” In the words of one County commissioner, Counties’ rights is the basic notion that: “County and local governments need block grants and the autonomy to spend it. Locals know what is best for locals.” On October 20, 1997, the Caldwell County Commissioners acted upon its commitment to counties’ rights by approving the motion to deem Caldwell County an Electing County.

Caldwell County officials had hoped to earn their Electing County status “on merit,” but in October of 1998 General Assembly used a lottery method to decide which counties would be Electing Counties. Caldwell County was of the 25 Electing Counties chosen through this lottery process.

Though chosen as an Electing County, Caldwell County leaders report that their TANF Plan was largely “rejected” by the State, bringing legitimacy of Electing County status under

suspicion by County leaders. In the colorful words of one County leader: “apparently the evolution of devolution stopped at the State...the power stayed down there in Raleigh.”

Nevertheless, Caldwell County leaders have rallied behind the principles of County-based decision-making in the arena of welfare reform. Their earnest desire to make their own decisions regarding welfare reform policy and re-allocations of TANF savings constitutes a “conservative” and fundamentally “Republican” belief that there is not, in the words of another County leader, “enough local autonomy in addressing the needs of the citizenry. These needs differ from County to County; it is not a one-size-fits all solution.”

As a result of the State’s “rejection” of much of its Work First Plan, County leaders jestingly refer to themselves as a “Standard-Plus” County. Certainly not an inappropriate title as Caldwell County, regardless of its status, is serious about assisting individuals in their journey from public assistance to self-sufficiency.

There have been a number of innovative responses to welfare reform in Caldwell County through the reallocation of TANF funding (roll-over funding) over the past four years. Chief among these is the development of three new Work First Positions. These include the Job Search Coach, Job Search Van Driver, Job Developer, and Fatherhood Initiative Coordinator. At least one new programs was generated out of TANF roll-over funding: the Nurturing Program.

Additionally, welfare reform has provided DSS leaders an opportunity to better educate the community, especially, as one DSS official stated, “a group of influential citizens” as to the important mission and programs of the agency, as well as the efficiency with which the agency performs these duties. As another DSS official shared, many community leaders were surprised to learn that there “was not another penny to be squeezed out of DSS” as the agency (from the perspective of its leadership), is already running at maximum efficiency. On the other hand, one commissioner pointed out that while welfare reform provided a platform for promoting the image

of DSS, that “this message gets lost every time because the...Social Services budget keeps going out the roof.” This same commissioner further clarified his statement, by suggesting (as did nearly all the County officials interviewed) that escalating Medicaid costs in the County is the real culprit behind the inflating Social Services budget.

According to one County official, “if welfare reform has done nothing else it has created more partnering and collaboration,” and for this alone, “it has been well worth it.”

DSS leaders report that this community education and collaborative process has resulted in a positive “boost” to staff. One key ingredient in this atmosphere of collaboration is the Welfare Reform Planning Committee, presently a standing committee. Both DSS and County officials agree that this Welfare Reform Planning Committee will be reactivated in the near future.

According to one commissioner, there has even been some discussion about convening the Planning Committee on an annual basis to “assess where we are” and provide the community with updates about the welfare reform process.

In keeping with their allegiance to local control, County commissioners and County management have provided DSS with a great deal of autonomy in regards to social service issues. “We, as County commissioners, do not micromanage; we let them [DSS Board and staff] run their own show,” stated one commissioner; all four commissioners interviewed shared this same perception. County officials interviewed spoke highly of the DSS Director and shared the belief that the agency is doing an excellent job. On the topic of DSS being able to reallocate TANF savings to other social service programs, County officials shared the view that if “they earn it, they should be able to use it.” DSS leaders expressed their appreciation for not being “micromanaged” by the County officials.

Yet, in terms of micromanagement, there remains much to be seen in the eyes of Caldwell County leaders before they can feel that the State is not micromanaging the County. In the words

of one commissioner: “If we have done anything,” with welfare reform, “we are getting ready to get ready for change.” For a “Standard-Plus” County, which prides itself on a “tradition” of self-reliance, the State’s efforts to micromanage the County is hindering the “progress” of welfare reform in Caldwell County. And while this has be a truly frustrating experience, it has also reinforced the County’s shared commitment to County-based governance. In the hopeful words of one commissioner, “We’re off to a good start...Maybe, in the end, it will all come together.”

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