

Executive Summary
Johnston County
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The Department of Social Services (DSS) in Johnston County shaped the county's response to DSS. The management style of the DSS Director, who was active at both the state and county levels, facilitated changes associated with welfare reform. With welfare reform shifted what the agency did and how it did it. Three themes in contemporary management illustrate the changes in DSS with welfare reform: (1) the focus on customer service and outcomes, (2) collaboration and cooperation among agencies, and (3) the diffusion of technology.

The Work First plan illustrated two of these themes, i.e., customer services and interagency: Improving customer services included seeking services that enhanced clients' employability or supported clients with special needs. The Work First plan included:

1. Creating a program with Employment Security Commission to identify clients eligible to collect unemployment insurance.
2. Working with the local economic development office and the Chamber of Commerce to match Work First clients with job opportunities.
3. Working with other human service agencies to extend child care hours
4. Cooperating with vocational rehabilitation and the local Social Security Office to identify clients eligible for specialized placement services or SSI.

These themes and the use of technology were evident during implementation. Although not directly related to Work First, the DSS response to two weather-related emergencies demonstrates customer service. During a flood and a blizzard staff worked on Sundays and by-passed normal procedures to meet critical needs. Interagency cooperation continues, with contacts and ideas stemming from staff members community involvement or participation on interagency task

forces. The DSS Director credits the use of technology to computerize records and make them more accessible and enabling staff to work "faster, more efficiently, and smarter." A list serve for state DSS Directors disseminates ideas quickly from agency to agency.

During the period of welfare reform and a booming economy the county's welfare caseload (other than child-only cases) has been reduced by 62 percent, and 93 percent of Work First participants have not returned to the welfare rolls. Although staff worry about what will happen with an economic downturn, they anticipate that customer service, interagency cooperation, and use of technology will continue.