

Tracking County Responses to Welfare Reform 2000-2001*

Orange County, North Carolina

By

Dr. Philip Cooke, Professor
Will Alexander, Research Assistant

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill
Odum Institute for Research in Social Sciences
Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3355

August 2000

*This case study is one of several county reports of the Tracking County Responses to Welfare Reform Project 2000-2001. The research is funded in part by grants from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and the UNC-CH.

PREFACE

This report is a descriptive account of how Orange County has responded to the 1996 Federal, and the 1997 State, welfare reform legislation. It recounts Orange 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 Orange 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". Being a state-supervised, county-administered program, a key factor in NC's legislation was giving 21 Electing Counties greater discretion on setting eligibility criteria, benefit levels, time limits, etc. All 100 NC counties were required to produce local, welfare reform implementation plans. Each County 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 ORANGE COUNTY RESPONDED TO THIS CHALLENGE?

Philip W. Cooke, D.S.W.
Will Alexander, Research Assistant
Odum Institute for Research in Social Science
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

FACTORS INFLUENCING ORANGE COUNTY'S RESPONSE TO WELFARE REFORM

This section identifies demographic, economic, social, political, and other factors influencing Orange County's unique response to welfare reform. In addition to personal interviews with County leaders, the information included in this section was primarily compiled from the following public information sources: the North Carolina Department of Commerce's *1998 County and Regional Scans*; the 1990 United States Census; the Orange County Economic Development Commission's *2000 Orange County Statistical Abstract*; the Orange County Welfare Reform Task Force's *1997 Orange County Work First Plan*; and Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services at North Carolina State University's *Orange County 1999 Community Assessment*.

Demographics

The 1998 population estimate for Orange County was 109,288 (North Carolina Department of Commerce, 1999). This estimate indicates a 16.4% increase in population since the 1990 U.S. Census estimate of 93,851. Race estimates for Orange County suggest that 80.8% of the population is White, 15.9% is Black, is 1.4% Latino, and the remaining 1.9% is identified as Asian/Other (1990 US Census). As for education level, 83.6% of adults (over age 25) are high school graduates while 46.1% are college graduates (1990 US Census).

Citizenry of Orange County can be characterized into two important populations. The first is associated with the presence of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, which matriculates over 23,000 undergraduate and graduate students a year. Thus, the 20-29 year-old age bracket is the single largest age bracket in the County at 26.6% and the median age is 32.8. The second factor is the growing presence of retirees relocating to Orange County. This

phenomenon has inflated the 70 years of age and older tier to 6.1%, surpassing the 60-69 years of age category that hovers at 5.5%.

Economic Conditions

The economy in Orange County appears to be relatively strong, receiving an economic standing of 5 (with 5 being the least economically stressed) from the North Carolina Department of Commerce (NCDC, 1999). The Economic Activity Index (EAI) in the Triangle - which includes retail sales, residential construction activity, total employment, and the unemployment rate - increased 11.5% between April 1998 and March 1999. This increase made the Triangle the "second fastest growing regional economy in the state during that 12 month period" (CUACS, 1999, p. 14-15).

The per capita income for Orange County is \$28, 946 (OCEDC, 2000, p. 3). The median household income in Orange County is \$41,169 and the average household income is \$47,894; these figures represent a 37.4% and 21% change respectively between 1990 and 1996 (OCEDC, 2000, p. 3). According to the NCDC, the poverty rate in Orange County is 13.9% compared to the State average of 12.5% (1999).

In its *1999 Orange County Assessment*, the Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services (CUACS) cites "low unemployment; a generally healthy economy; a good quality of life; a generally good environmental health; an abundance of small businesses; a diverse range of jobs and businesses; and farming as a way of life" as leading economic strengths in Orange County (1999, p. 14). On the other hand, CUACS observed the following factors as shortcoming in the economic conditions of Orange County: "reliance on property taxes for government revenue; a lack of moderate skill level jobs paying moderately good wages (especially in the Chapel Hill and Carrboro areas); poor business perception of Orange County (seen as not friendly to businesses); and lack of innovation in recycling and energy efficiency" (p. 19).

The 1999 labor force in Orange County was 65,300; the unemployment rate was 1.2%. According to the NCDC, the average annual wage in 1996 was \$27,637; this represents 108.8 percent of the North Carolina average annual wage (qtd. in CUACS, p. 20). According to the OCEDC (2000, p. 9), the 10 largest employers in Orange County include (the number of employees listed in parentheses):

- ◆ **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (10,151)**
- ◆ **UNC Hospitals (4420)**
- ◆ **Blue Cross / Blue Shield of North Carolina (2801)**
- ◆ **Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools (1600)**
- ◆ **Orange County Board of Education (907)**
- ◆ **General Electric Co., Inc. (750)**
- ◆ **Town of Chapel Hill (747)**
- ◆ **Orange County Government (677)**
- ◆ **Harris Teeter, Inc. (550)**
- ◆ **Food Lion (390)**

Note that 6 of these 10 employers are governmental entities (CUACS, p. 20).

Social Characteristics

There is a strong sense of “social capital” in Orange County exhibited by its commitment to education and social welfare. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill is consistently acknowledged as one of the finest public universities in the country while both the Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Orange County School Systems include individual schools ranked “among the top 25 in the state” (OCWRTEF, p. 5).

Another indicator of Orange County’s “social capital” is the presence of more than 150 private nonprofit agencies committed to education and welfare (OCWRTEF, p. 6). Many of the nonprofits

in Orange County serve as model social welfare programs throughout the state of North Carolina and even in the country (OCWRTF, p. 6). EmPOWERment, T.E.A.C.H. Early Childhood Program, the Women's Center (one of only 6 free standing, women's centers in the nation) and the Orange County Dispute Settlement Center (the first in the state) are some of the more well-known nonprofits whose influence stretches across the state and nation (OCWRTF, p. 6).

Orange County has a cohort (and has had one over the last 8 years) of elected and government officials who are committed to education and welfare reform, most recently illustrated by the commitment of County resources to the Orange County Skills Development Center. The faith community is being recruited through the Faith-Community Partnership Program to assist Work First families in their transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency. Moreover, Orange County has a well-known Smart Start Program that can span some gaps in the welfare reform safety net (OCWRTF, p. 6).

Overall, there exists a basic safety net for residents of Orange County made possible by: a committed Board of County Commissioners; a comparatively generous County tax base; a host of nonprofits; and an active civic infrastructure. Poverty does exist in Orange County but it is "invisible" due to the focus on education, health care, and retirement. Some leaders are concerned about a growing class of working poor in Orange County and the ability of the County to deal with an economic disaster. To some, the Orange County Skills Development Center represents the kind of local commitment the County has made to Work First families.

Political Leadership

In their 1998 study, Wright, Cartron, Roquemore, and Seow discussed the "two political cultures" of Orange County (p. 2). These authors describe Orange County's "two political cultures" as follows:

One emanates from the cosmopolitan character of the University of North Carolina and dominates the “towns” of Chapel Hill and Carrboro in the southeast portion of the County. A rural, agricultural (dairy farms), old-South political heritage pervades in the northern and western sections of the County. The County’s conservative character is centered around and in evidence at the county seat in “historic” Hillsborough. Over two centuries ago (in 1788) the first North Carolina constitutional convention met in Hillsborough and *rejected* the Philadelphia drafted constitution. The two main reasons were: (a) too much national power(s) and (b) no guarantees of individual rights and liberties (p. 2).

In terms of Orange County Board of County Commissioners elections, however, Orange County is a relatively stable enclave of the Democratic Party. Over the last four elections (1992-1998), Democrats have been held the majority on the Board of Commissioners (North Carolina Association of County Commissioners). The North Carolina State Board of Elections cites 50,171 registered Democrats compared to 21,098 registered Republicans in 1998. In addition to the two major parties, there are 17,329 unaffiliated voters and 218 Libertarians in Orange County.

Cartron and Wright (1998) caution, however, that it is “important not to glean too much” from the greater number of Democrats than Republicans in Orange County as North Carolina “voting registration has historically favored the Democratic party because until recently it was the only party holding primaries” (Cartron & Wright, 1998, p. 4). Orange County, like most counties in North Carolina, has a county manager style of government. The current Orange County Manager is a former Social Services Director and is well-informed on the complexity of human service programs. He and an Associate County Manager for Human Services work very closely to support current Department of Social Services efforts. Likewise, the Orange County Commissioners have been supportive of the Orange County Department of Social Services.

Orange County political leaders generally share a strong commitment to ensuring a sustainable social welfare infrastructure for all Orange County residents. This shared commitment is evidenced by a series of innovative and well-coordinated welfare reform policies and actions implemented by County leaders since the 1996 federal and state welfare reform legislation (see subsequent section on Innovations). Orange County social service professionals, in

turn, express a strong appreciation of Orange County's elected and government officials in regard to their commitment to welfare reform. They believe these leaders are well-informed of the nuances of welfare reform and have sufficiently empowered the Department of Social Services and the Work First Program with the autonomy and resources to execute the program successfully.

Goal Compatibility

Based on personal interviews with the county manager, county commissioners, the assistant director for the Department of Social Services, and the Work First program manager, there appears to not only be a shared social welfare ideology but also a common perception of welfare goals and objectives. County leaders believe that reducing the welfare rolls is more of a federal and state mandate than a program goal. One leader (who viewed these mandates as intrusive) suggested that an effectively implemented welfare program would lead to a natural reduction in the welfare rolls, making the mandates unnecessary. All County leaders cited child well-being as the County's highest welfare reform priority. The second highest welfare reform priority, from the perspective of County leadership, is assisting former welfare recipients in obtaining viable work skills and employment. County officials shared a common belief that it is more important that the County expend welfare resources more effectively than reduce or eliminate welfare expenditures altogether.

Elected and government officials tended to question the long-term "health" or sustainability of the welfare infrastructure. One official passionately declared: "We will not be able to sustain welfare needs financially. We absolutely cannot! We cannot [sustain welfare] with volunteers, County, and municipal budgets. Social welfare needs are not going to disappear with the elimination of social welfare programs!"

Another shared perspective among County leaders is that the present welfare reform infrastructure is creating a class of “working poor” in Orange County who are precariously positioned, only one crisis away from poverty or even homelessness. These leaders cited the dearth of affordable housing in the County, a lack of public transportation in some regions of the County, the lack of child care, and the need for more coordinated mental health and substance abuse services, too few living wage jobs, and over-taxed non-profit, charitable, and faith organizations as major gaps in the social welfare delivery system.

Community Engagement

In anticipation of the 1996 welfare reform legislation, Orange County established a Human Services Reform Task Force on January 16, 1996. This task force was comprised of “50 citizens, including human service professionals, business leaders, citizen activists, and human services recipients” divided into four subcommittees (OCWRTF, 1997, p. 12). The Task Force, grounded on a clear vision and mission, formulated the basic guidelines, outcomes, and a philosophy that was to govern welfare reform planning in the Orange County. In October of 1997 most of the original task force reconvened to “develop outcome goals, identify barriers and recommend strategies to overcome the barriers and achieve the outcomes” (OCWRTF, 1997, p.15). During the same month, the Orange County Commissioners unanimously decided to request “Standard Program” status from the State instead of “Elected” status. County leaders considered it better to work as a partner with the NC Division of Social Services in defining eligibility, term limits, etc., rather than dismantle the social welfare entitlement program.

Innovative Responses

Orange County has implemented a number of innovative responses to welfare reform over the past four years (1996-2000). Chief among these is the development of the Orange County Skills Development Center, a \$1.5 M project lead by the Orange County Board of Commissioners

and funded entirely by County revenue. The Skills Development Center, which opened on January 11, 1999, was established to assist all Orange County residents in their efforts to obtain viable employment. In January of 2000, Orange County became one of eight North Carolina Counties to receive TANF funding to initiate a TANF Pilot Housing Program. The program was developed to “promote economic self-sufficiency and home ownership among” TANF-eligible families living in Orange County (Orange County TANF Pilot Housing Program, 2000, p. 1).

The Faith-Community Partnership Program was established in 1997 to match Work First families with Orange County congregations who are willing to provide economic, transportation, child care, and social support (including mentoring and advocacy) to families transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency. The program is run by a community volunteer who receives a stipend through the Work First Program. In the words of one community leader, “if every Orange County congregation adopted a Work First family there would be no need for a public welfare program.” In addition to these three innovative responses to welfare reform, numerous non-profits, including Empowerment, Good Work Program, Orange County literacy, JOCCA, and others have helped strengthen the “welfare safety net” by providing educational, training and other self-sufficiency building programs for families leaving Work First. The below section of this report, titled “Innovative Community Partnerships”, will explore these relationships in more detail.

History of Collaboration

Orange County has a rich history of collaboration between and among human service agencies and programs. According to all the County officials interviewed, collaboration between the different tiers of officials on matters of welfare reform appears to be the rule and not the exception. For example, the decision to become a Standard County as opposed to being an Elected County was, according to one County official, an “automatic decision,” since both county

commissioners and human services leaders share a common commitment to public welfare programs.

This shared ideology between elected officials and County employees has benefited welfare reform in Orange County. With one county commissioner serving on the DSS Board of Directors and the present county manager having been a former DSS director, a strong tie exists between the Department of Social Services and Orange County government. All the County officials interviewed suggested that this connection has increased Orange County policy-makers sensitivity and commitment to human service issues (including welfare reform) than the average County in North Carolina

Work First Population

According to the *1999 Work First Report Card* there were 314 Work First families living in Orange County. This would indicate a 35.8% reduction in the number of Work First families between the period of July 1997 to July 1999. In July of 1995 there were 754 Work First families and 124 child-only Work First cases. As of July 2000, there were 323 Work First families and 157 child-only Work First cases.

Over the past five years, the Work First Program has made enormous progress in assisting Work First parents in find employment. The following table, the data of which was provided by the Work First Program Manager reflects this progress.

Table 1 Number of Work First Cliens Placed in Employment July 1995 to June 2000

Time Period	Number of Work First Clients Placed in Employment
July 1995 to June 1996	195
July 1996 to June 1997	200
June 1997 to July 1998	125

June 1998 to July 1999	105
June 1999 to June 2000	171

The Work First Program staff requested that this report acknowledge their appreciation of the “total community support which has enabled Orange County to reach this high standard of excellence.”

ORANGE COUNTY'S PROCESS FOR IMPLEMENTING WELFARE REFORM

The following is a brief chronology of Orange County's process for implementing welfare reform.

1995-1996

The Orange County Department of Social Services began preparations for welfare reform in July of 1995 when the first indications surfaced that there would be federal and state level reform. On January 16, 1996, the Orange County Board of Commissioners officially established a Human Services Reform Task Force. This Task Force was comprised of a total of 50 community leaders and citizens (OCWRTF, 1997, p. 12). Grounded by central vision and mission, the Task Force formulated the basic guidelines, outcomes, and philosophy that were to govern future welfare reform planning in the Orange County. In order to fulfill its charge, the Task Force created four subcommittees (Adults, Children and Families, Outcomes, and Outreach) and conducted a series of whole-group meetings. In October 1996, the Task Force presented its preliminary report to the Board of Commissioners.

The following guidelines were adopted for decision making by the 1996 subcommittees (OCWRTF, 1997, p. 12):

1. Provide the essential elements of well-being...not otherwise accessible through the private, nonprofit and public sectors.
2. Develop policies, regulations, and guidelines that help realize the outcomes of well-being for individuals and their families.
3. Make investments in programs that contribute to outcomes of well-being and economic self-sufficiency and that demonstrate cost savings, cost benefits, or cost effectiveness.
4. Provide incentives to create jobs above the minimum wage to ensure economic self-sufficiency for all Orange County citizens.

1997

In October of 1997, the Task Force was reconvened as the Orange County Welfare Reform Task Force. Consisting of 30 of the original 50 members, the 1997 Task Force met over a two-month

period to “develop outcome goals, identify barriers and recommend strategies to overcome the barriers and achieve the outcomes” (OCWRTF, 1997, p.15). During the same month, the Orange County Commissioners unanimously decided to request “Standard Program” status from the North Carolina Division of Social Services (OCWRTF, 1997, p. 42). According to one county commissioner interviewed, this was an “automatic decision” since commissioners shared a common ideology regarding the collaboration of federal, state and local governments in delivering an effective human service entitlement program.

A number of community agencies were involved in creating the *1997 Orange County Work First Plan*. These agencies included:

The Orange County Departments of Health, Housing, and Aging; the Human Relations Commission; the Orange-Person-Chatham Mental Health Association; the Orange County Partnership for Young Children; Day Care Services Association; Orange Enterprises; Adolescents in Need, Habitat for Humanity; Family Resource Centers; The Women’s Center; Family Financial Counseling; Consumer Credit Counseling; faith congregations; Chamber of Commerce; JOCCA; IFC; OCIM; Salvation Army; Vocational Rehabilitation; and many others as well as many individual programs within each of these agencies (OCWRTF, p.15).

A number of these collaborating agencies will be discussed in more detail below in the section entitled “Innovative Community Partnerships.” In order to incorporate public input, the *1997 Work First Plan* was made available for review and comment beginning December 19, 1997. Focus groups were also organized to “obtain feedback and support from the community” (OCWRTF, p. 15). Due to the high volume of participation by the community, the 1997 Task Force sub-divided into four committees including: Diversion and Emergency Assistance, Employment and Training, Support Services, and Special Populations.

1998-2000

Since the official adoption of the *1997 Orange County Work First Plan* by the Orange County Board of Commissioners in January of 1998, the major welfare reform highlights have included the

establishment of the Skills Development Center on January 11, 1999 and the TANF Housing Project in January of 2000. These programs are discussed in more depth in the “Innovation Community Partnerships” section below.

In 1999, two additional subcommittees were created to continue the work of the of the 1997 OCWRTE. These two subcommittees included the: Employment/Retention Committee and the Strengthening Independence Committee. The charge of the Employment/Retention Committee was to “identify strategies and resources that will lead to employment and retention of jobs for the hardest to serve Work First clients” (OCWRTE, 1999, p. TBD). The Strengthening Independence Committee was formed “to identify strategies and resources for Work First families that will enable them to increase their income and to become self-sufficient” (OCWRTE, 1999, p. TBD).

SIGNIFICANT IMPACTS OF WELFARE REFORM ON ORANGE COUNTY

Changing Role of Orange County Department of Social Services (DSS)

Unlike other NC counties, the implementation of welfare reform has solidified the Orange County

DSS' role as the “lead” agency in a network of agencies devoted to assisting Work First participants entering the work force. The DSS has taken a proactive stance by focusing less on eligibility determination and public assistance and more on encouraging clients to becoming self-sufficient. Program staff maintains a positive outlook on the Work First Program and believe it is successfully assisting a majority of clients. Staff also emphasized that there remain many “hard cases” in which substance abuse, mental health, developmental disabilities, and domestic violence hinder families from reaching self-sufficiency under the new welfare reforms.

DSS was instrumental in the Orange County Welfare Reform Task Force and its efforts to engage the greater Orange County citizenry in planning an effective welfare reform delivery system. DSS leadership believes this responsibility has enhanced inter-agency collaboration (non-profit and governmental) as well as its own position in the community.

The above changes reflects the level of trust and autonomy with which the county commissioners have empowered the DSS, as well as their representative serving on the DSS Board. It also suggests a similar empowering of the Work First Program Manager within the DSS. This trust was demonstrated in the process of interviewing the various tiers of County leadership. In interviews with these officials, it was obvious that they felt comfortable directing this inquiry to either the county commissioner who serves on the DSS Board or the Work First Program Manager directly.

The New, Pivotal Role of the Work First Program Manager

The welfare reform implementation experience has also defined a new, pivotal role in the agency identified as the “Work First Program Manager”. This new role is critical to the organization and “orchestration” of County resources in implementing welfare reform. Whereas in the past the comparable position in DSS was responsible for ensuring “procedural compliance” in eligibility determination, the new role involves the development and supervision of an evolving “service community” to help Work First recipients meet the mandates of welfare reform.

The new role of the Work First Program Manager in Orange County could be compared to that of an “Executive Director” whose role spans a number of programmatic and technical dimensions. The Work First Program Manager’s role must span these dimensions in order to operationalize the broad community vision and mission of welfare reform and determine the most efficient use of the TANF block grant in order to meet program goals and objectives.

The Orange County Work First Program Manager combines the roles of a program director and a contractor and grantor of available TANF funding for work training services and specialized projects (like the TANF Pilot Housing Project). The Work First Program Manager also serves as a liaison with profit and non-profit community leaders, manages the new Orange County Skills Development Center, coordinates the Welfare Reform Task Force and its numerous subcommittees, and supervises over a staff of 27 Work First specialists. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NC DHHS) is cognizant of the expanding nature of the Work First Program Manager’s role and has contracted with the Social Science Research and Computer Lab at NC State University to assess the effectiveness of this expanding role. The NC DHHS is interested in providing the training and resources needed by Work First Program Managers to become more effective in their multi-dimensional roles.

County-State Relations

County leaders differed in their assessment of the relationship between Orange County and the North Carolina Division of Social Services. Some leaders perceived the State's Division of Social Services to be un-navigable and mired by the usual pitfalls imbedded in a public bureaucracy.

Generally speaking, however, there is general agreement among most of Orange County's leadership that welfare is not just an Orange County but a State and Federal responsibility.

Whereas in the past, State-County relations may not have been the most desirable, it is currently apparent that Orange County is attempting to work with the State in a collegial partnership. From the County's standpoint, the State is seen as doing a "reasonably good job" in providing support and resources necessary for a successful partnership. From the State's point of view, Orange County is seen as one of its more progressive, local administrative units and a source of exemplary practices.

INNOVATIVE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

This section identifies and discusses the leading, innovative community partnerships that Orange County has formed to implement its welfare reform process.

Table 2 **Leading Community Partners in Orange County's Welfare Reform Process, Funding Source, & Type of Services Offered**

Name of Partner Agency	Funding Source	Type of Service/s Offered
<p><i>Skills Development/JobLink Center:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Department of Social Services/Work First 2. Employment Security Commission 3. Orange County Literacy Council 4. Durham Technical Community College 5. Vocational Rehabilitation 6. Joint Orange Chatham Community Action Agency (JOCCA) & JTPA 7. Chapel Hill - Carrboro / Orange County Schools/Job Ready 8. Good Work 	<p>County-funded & co-location of service agencies.</p>	<p>Services numbered correspond with agency numbered in first column:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Promotes employment 2. Job Placement 3. Tutoring/GED 4. Associate Degree courses 5. Services to eligible people with disabilities seeking employment 6. Job Training for youth and adults facing serious barriers to employment 7. Provides students with strong foundation of academic & technical skills. 8. Provides small business training and loans to first-time entrepreneurs.
<p><i>TANF Housing Project</i></p>	<p>Contracted with TANF funding.</p>	<p>TANF-eligible families provided homeownership assistance & housing subsidies.</p>
<p><i>Housing Department (Town of Chapel Hill)</i></p>	<p>Town-funded.</p>	<p>ACHIEVE! Curriculum provides workshops on education and job skills training, budgeting and credit counseling, and life skills training.</p>
<p><i>Faith Community/Work First Project</i></p>	<p>Contracted with TANF funding, but largely a volunteer effort.</p>	<p>Connects Work First Families with faith communities for mentoring, advocacy, transportation, and limited financial assistance.</p>
<p><i>Intensive Teen Support Project (Orange County Schools)</i></p>	<p>Contracted with TANF funding.</p>	<p>Expand case management services to pregnant and parenting teens.</p>
<p><i>OPT-Work First Assistance Program</i></p>	<p>Contracted with TANF funding.</p>	<p>Maximum transportation assistance of \$300/year based on availability.</p>
<p><i>Center for Employment Training (CET)</i></p>	<p>Contracted with TANF funding.</p>	<p>Job training and placement.</p>

Community Collaborative

These innovative, community partnerships reflect the solid commitment of Orange County's leaders and citizenry to ensure an effective welfare reform "safety net". These partnerships are considered "innovative" because they represent novel and creative relationships between inter-governmental as well as public and private agencies that did not exist before welfare reform.

These partnerships, and others like them, will be essential to the success of welfare reform in Orange County. As this section will demonstrate, these partnerships are working to reduce barriers and provide specialty services to Work First clients in their transition from public assistance to self-sufficiency. These partnerships represent a combination of volunteer as well as TANF-funded initiatives, both of which are necessary in the present climate of welfare reform. Furthermore, examples of promising partnerships (mentioned below) will also prove essential to the future success of welfare reform in Orange County.

Orange County Skills Development/Job Link Center

Leading the list of innovative community partnerships resulting from 1996 welfare reforms is the development of the Orange County Skills Development/Job Link Center. Established by the Orange County Board of Commissioners, and funded with Orange County tax revenue, the Center is reputed to be a "model" program in the state of North Carolina in offering "a comprehensive range of employment and training services" to citizens in Orange County (Skills Development/JobLink brochure, p.2). The Center promotes itself as "user-friendly facility" which provides individuals access to a variety of career information, career counseling, resume development, interviewing techniques, and job training "all under one roof" (p.2).

Presently, 8 agencies are co-located at the Skills Development including: 1) the Chapel Hill/Carrboro Orange County Schools/Job Ready Program; 2) Durham Tech Community College; 3) Employment Security Commission; 4) Good Work; 5) Joint Orange Chatham Community

Action Agency / JTPA; 6) NC Division of Vocational Rehabilitation; 7) Orange County Literacy Council; and 8) Orange County DSS/Work First. These agencies vary in the arrangement of their co-location at the Skills Development Center. The Orange County Work Skills Development Center is operated by a staff of two. The Orange County Work First Program Manager is the Director the Skills Development Center and a full-time receptionist is also employed by the Center.

TANF Housing Project

Orange County is one of 8 counties in NC to receive TANF funding to “promote economic self-sufficiency and home ownership” for TANF-eligible families living in Orange County (Orange County TANF Pilot Housing Program, 2000, p. 1). The TANF Housing Program consists of the following three dimensions.

First, the ACHIEVE! Curriculum developed and offered through the Town of Chapel Hill’s Housing Department “provides workshops on education and job skills training, budgeting and credit counseling, and life skills training free to Orange County residents” (p.1). The second dimension consists of rental subsidies offered to a maximum of 20 TANF-eligible families whose income does not exceed 200% of the poverty level and who are employed or in training for at least 20 hours a week. Next, the program will enable 5 families to become homeowners through “a new matching savings program: The Individual Development Account, (IDA)” and by linking them to home development agencies like Habitat for Humanity (p.1). The Orange County TANF Pilot Housing Program gives priority to families who are working (or training), those whom have been receiving welfare for over two years, and homeless families (p.1).

Faith-Community Partnership Program

The Faith-Community Partnership Program began in 1997. A full-time Program Coordinator (funded part-time through TANF and volunteering the other half) directs the Program.

The Faith-Community Partnership Program matches eligible and willing Work First families with participating churches for “a special partnership” of at least one year (Orange County Work First Program, p. 1). The participating congregation forms a Work First Team to “encourage and support” the Work First family throughout the agreed upon time period and provide them with “faith, hope, and love as they work toward their goal” (p. 1). All that is expected in return from the Work First family is that they be “honest and open” with the Work First Team as to their family’s needs and developments (p.1).

The Work First family is under no obligation to participate in religious activities at the adopting church (Orange County Work First Program, p. 1). Participating faith communities "adopt" the Work First families and may provide them with the following suggested forms of assistance: 1) job-readiness and job finding assistance; 2) transportation assistance; 3) child care assistance; 4) emergency assistance; 5) tutoring assistance; 6) assistance locating stable housing; 7) assistance securing a phone; and 8) assistance securing a driving license (Orange County Faith Community Partnership Program, p. 1-2). Faith communities can also serve as mentors to Work First families by: donating professional clothes (and sometimes automobiles) to their family; soliciting services and coupons on behalf of the family; offering activities for school-age youth and creating support groups for adults seeking work; teaching the family how to repair and maintain and automobile; and collaborating with the Work First Program to create an incentive package to reward the family's progress in reaching self-sufficiency (p. 1-2).

The Intensive Teen Support Project

Orange County Work First contracted (using TANF funds) with the Orange County Schools to develop and operate the Intensive Teen Support Project. The Intensive Teen Support Project was “designed to expand case management services to pregnant and parenting teens” (State of North Carolina, Division of Social Services, Contract Application, p. 7). The goals of the Intensive Teen

Support Project include: retaining teen parents in school; guiding teens in avoiding a second pregnancy; improving access and quality of health care for teen parents and their children; assisting teens in their educational advancement; providing teens with job training and self-sufficiency skills; and enhancing the parenting skills of teen parents (p. 7).

Orange County Schools was contracted by the Orange County Work First Program (using TANF funding) to operate the Intensive Teen Support Program. In turn, Orange County Schools will hire a social worker to “provide case management services to eligible teens, serve on the Adolescent Parenting Advisory Committee, coordinate teen support group meetings, recruit and train volunteers, complete required documentation, and submit monthly reports” (p.7). The social worker is expected to create a team within the school to focus on the aforementioned goals for each participating teen. The stated outcomes of the Intensive Teen Support Program are to ensure that 85% of teen mothers will avoid a second pregnancy [and] continue their education” (p.7).

Orange County Transportation Program

Working in collaboration with Orange County Work First, Orange County Public Transportation (OPT) has created a transportation stipend, using TANF-funding, for former Work First participants. These individuals must be “engaged in work-related activities” (OPT, 1998). The maximum assistance, based on availability, is an annual stipend of \$300 per participant; these stipends are made available on a first-come-first-serve basis until depleted. Those participants who own automobiles can apply the stipend toward car insurance and repairs; those that do not are given bus passes or stipends to cover carpool expenses (OPT, 1998).

Center for Employment Training

The Center for Employment Training (CET) is a non-profit agency located in the Research Triangle Park. The CET provides job placement services to Orange County Work First

participants' transition from public assistance into employment. The CET is well-known for its client-centered approach; its training programs are geared towards the learning styles and pace (OCWRTF, p. 35). According to the *1997 Orange County Work First Plan*, the CET is has "been successful in locating employment with wages above the poverty level" (p. 35).

Work First Program Evaluation

The Orange County Department of Social Services, using TANF funding, contracted with Child Care Services Association of Orange County to conduct a research study of 100 former Work First clients. The study was composed of in-depth interviews with these former clients in an effort to evaluate their experiences and impressions of welfare reform. Volunteers from the Women's Commission conducted the interviews. Public viewing of this study is pending approval from the Orange County Board of Social Service.

Proposed Fatherhood Initiative

Another outgrowth of the Orange County Welfare Reform Task Forces was the formation of the Strengthening Independence Sub-Committee. This Sub-Committee is presently seeking, with assistance from the NC Division of Social Services, TANF funding to support an Orange County Fatherhood Initiative Program.

The Fatherhood Initiative Program is a national program that seeks to operationalize 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.

Two broad strategies have been set forth by the committee to guide the development of the Fatherhood Initiative. First, the Sub-Committee has identified the Orange County Work First Program, Orange County Child Support Enforcement, and the Orange County Adolescent

Parenting Program as lead agencies to develop a system for identifying appropriate program participants (OCWRTF, 1999, p. TBD). Second, the Strengthening Independence Sub-Committee will form a County-wide workgroup (including nonprofit leaders and potential contracting agencies) to write grants proposals to fund the Fatherhood Initiative (p. TBD).

Promising Community Partnerships

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the Orange County Economic Development Commission, the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce, and the Orange County Chamber of Commerce remain promising community partners in Orange County's welfare reform efforts. In 1997, the Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce's Board of Directors formed an oversight committee on reforming welfare (OCWRTF, 1997). This committee hosted a "job fair" and, in collaboration with the Orange County Economic Development Commission, met with leading area employers to promote the "benefits of hiring Work First participants and listing job orders with the Economic Security Commission," (OCWRTF, 1997, p. 35). In the intervening years, however, these efforts have proved to be a larger undertaking than volunteers alone can support.

UNC Hospitals, Piedmont Health Services, and Accent on Service have served as leading work experience and job placement sites for Work First participants over the past four years. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and other leading Orange County employers remain promising potential work experience and job placement sites for future Work First clients.

REFERENCES

- Cartron, K., & Wright, D. S. (1998). Master of Public Administration Program, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. *State Capacity Study Field Research Project 1997-98-Implementing Welfare Reform in American, State and Local Government: Orange County Report.*
- Center for Urban Affairs and Community Services (CUACS), North Carolina State University. *Orange County 1999 Community Assessment.*
- North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. *Tentative 1992-1998 Election Results.*
- North Carolina State Board of Elections.
- North Carolina Department of Commerce (NCDC). *1998 County and Regional Scans.*
- North Carolina Department of Commerce (NCDC). *1990 U.S. Census Data.*
- Orange County Economic Development Commission (OCEDC). *2000 Orange County Statistical Abstract.*
- Orange County Faith Community Partnership Program. *Faith Communities and Work First in Orange County: Ideas for Faith Community Involvement*
- Orange County Public Transportation (OPT). *1998 Transitional Work First Participants Procedures for Applying for Transportation Assistance.*
- Orange County Skills Development/JobLink Center. *1999-2000 Program Brochure.*
- Orange County TANF Pilot Housing Project (2000). *Homeward Bound!*
- Orange County Welfare Reform Task Force (OCWRTF). *1997 Orange County Work First Plan.*
- Orange County Welfare Reform Task Force (OCWRTF). *1999 Orange County Work First Plan Update.*
- Orange County Work First Program. *Orange County Work First Family Partnering Agreement and Confidentiality Form.*
- State of North Carolina, Division of Social Services, Contract Application. *Service Program Description.*
- Wright, D.S., Cartron, K., Roquemore, S., & Seow, S. (1998). Master of Public Administration

Program, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. *Implementing Welfare Reform in North Carolina: An Overview of Three Counties—Chatham, Durham, and Orange.*

United States Census Bureau. *1990 U.S. Census.*