

Leading by Results

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*Published to enhance
the community's knowledge
of issues affecting
children, families, older
adults and the disabled in
ForsythCounty*

ViewPoint



Joe Raymond, Director
Department of Social Services

Welcome to the first edition of **Leading by Results**, a new quarterly publication of the Forsyth County Department of Social Services.

The mission of the Department of Social Services is to serve and protect vulnerable children and adults, strengthen and preserve families, and enhance economic stability while encouraging personal responsibility. These words barely convey the critical role the Department plays in Forsyth County. Most people will be surprised to learn that we serve over 70,000 customers a year or approximately 25% of the entire population of Forsyth County. Others will be surprised to learn that our services generate over 370 million federal and state dollars that are spread many times over throughout our local economy. Some individuals do not know that our services are provided under very strict, highly regulated conditions that have rigid program rules and guidelines. Finally, too many people do not know that 98% of our services are designed to directly benefit children and youth at risk, older adults, and adults with disabilities. These facts are usually hidden below the stereotypes and myths about the customers of the Department of Social Services, how taxpayer money is actually spent, why it is spent, and how the entire community benefits from services provided by the Department of Social Services.

This publication hopes to shine a light on not just the services that we provide, but the underlying issues and challenges that face our entire community. While we are used to reporting how much money we spend and whether we pass an “audit,” it is more difficult to reveal whether our programs and services are making differences in our customers’ lives and how the overall quality of life in our community has been improved.

This is why the Department of Social Services is learning how to **Lead by Results**. The importance of our mission demands that we become clearer about what we intend to achieve and whether reasonable progress has been made in a reasonable amount of time. This is why this newsletter will be organized around five fundamental strategic goals. These goals will be used by the Board of Social Services, by me, and by our leadership staff to guide our thinking about our use of resources and progress toward these goals. In our next newsletter, we intend to announce a series of measurable markers of achievement that will better define how we know success as an agency and as a community. This new focus on “benchmarks” or outcomes will usher in a new era for us as we strive to connect our services, partnerships, and use of resources to these desired achievements. This will be new and difficult work.

Public agencies, by definition, are owned by the public. A true focus on results means that we will be open about our successes and challenges. We look forward to reporting our progress as we travel on the “Leading by Results” journey and report how these issues impact the public’s interest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Raymond". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Leading by Results

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

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

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

WHY IS THIS GOAL IMPORTANT

Too many children are abused and neglected in Forsyth County. Approximately 5,000 children have been formally substantiated as abused or neglected in the past 10 years. In the past 5 years, over 300 have been seriously physically abused and over 200 have been sexually abused. In the past five years, 8 children have died at the hands of their parents or caretakers. These numbers are consistent with NC and national statistics.

These are unfortunate facts. It is also a fact that child abuse may destroy or irreparably harm the future of its victim. Children who are abused or neglected are more likely not to graduate from high school, to use drugs, to have difficulty in personal relationships, to be unable to hold a steady job, to go to jail, and to have children that they abuse or neglect.

The perpetrators of child abuse, usually the parents, are also irreparably changed. In severe cases, the perpetrator may go to jail, and family relationships are destroyed. Many parents improve their parenting, and their children successfully remain in their home. Other problems are too severe and foster care or adoption is the best alternative. These alternatives always bring difficult challenges for victimized children. Some children (particularly older children) may have difficulty obtaining a permanent or adoptive home. Too many find it difficult to successfully transition to adulthood. In all cases, our community is harmed and extensive public resources are spent.

WHAT DOES THE DSS DO TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL?

Our job is to investigate reports of child abuse and/or child neglect and determine the degree of risk to the child. Our mission is to protect children first and whenever possible preserve families. If we believe a child is at serious risk of further harm, we must petition District Court and ask the Court to protect the

child which may include placement of the child outside of the injurious environment. A judge makes this difficult decision.

Our social work staff conducts these investigations within specific timeframes, follows a standardized process, reports abuse findings to the District Attorney, petitions the Court as appropriate, develops safety plans for the child, provides and oversees multiple treatment services for children and their families, and seeks a permanent solution (reunification of the child with the parents OR continued out of home care and/or adoption) within federally specified timeframes. Forsyth County DSS currently has custody of approximately 380 children and youth. About 1/3 of these children live with their parents or relatives, about 1/3 live in traditional foster homes, and about 1/3 live in a group residential setting. Many of these children are receiving extensive and expensive mental health and counseling services. Forsyth County DSS is a licensed adoption agency and about 50 children a year are placed for adoption inside and outside of Forsyth County. Over 5,000 children, parents and family members are served every year and many positive outcomes are achieved in the overwhelming majority of these situations.

WHAT DOES THE DEPARTMENT HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

This newsletter will provide information about these goals in the coming months. Minimally we hope to:

- Raise awareness about the seriousness of the human and economic costs of child abuse,
- Increase services for children aging out of foster care,
- Provide more comprehensive treatment services to children and families, and

- Help create a more comprehensive approach to the prevention of child abuse.

“Our mission is to protect children first and whenever possible preserve families.”



Goal II

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

WHY IS THIS GOAL IMPORTANT?

Many older adults and adults with disabilities face challenges that they cannot resolve by themselves. Many such adults live alone, do not have family to help, do not have the economic means to obtain needed support, are no longer able to care for themselves, may be physically or mentally incapacitated or are being physically abused, neglected or exploited (often for their money). These situations already exist and will become more prominent as the baby boomers get older and the number of older adults and adults with disabilities continue to increase. In Forsyth County projections show a 17% increase in adults age 60 and older by 2020. Forsyth County expects to see a 16% increase in adults over age 85, the greatest of the large NC counties.

WHAT DOES THE DSS DO TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL?

Forsyth County provides extensive services to older adults and adults with disabilities, serving over 13,000 adults each year (about 37% of the Forsyth County population over age 65). The Forsyth County Department of Social Services:

- Provides **Adult Protective Services** for disabled adults who are alleged to be abused, neglected or exploited and in need of protective services,
- Provides **Guardianship Services** for adults who the courts have declared incompetent. DSS may be responsible for all aspects of a disabled adult's personal welfare including where the adult lives, their medical decisions, etc.,
- Provides **In-Home Services** to adults who are physically and/or mentally disabled and need services to remain in their home. DSS social workers develop individual case plans, which include locating and contacting other providers; coordinating and monitoring the delivery of services relating to:

Adult Day Care / Adult Day Health Services, Health Support Services, In-Home Aide Services, Meals-On-Wheels, Representative Payee Services, Special Assistance and other In-Home Programs,

- Prevents unnecessary institutionalization by providing "In-Home Aides" to assist adults with essential home management tasks, personal care tasks, or supervision to enable adults to remain and function effectively in their homes for as long as possible,
- Provides **Special Assistance/In-Home** funds for adults who have been determined by a doctor to need domiciliary level of care (e.g., adult care home, assisted living, family care home, rest home) in order to pay for services that stabilize the adult's home environment,
- Assists individuals/family members with identifying appropriate adult care facility placement,
- Provides **Medicaid Enhanced Personal Care** and case management services for residents in adult care facilities. DSS case managers verify Medicaid eligibility, the need for Enhanced Personal Care Services and authorize the additional hours of PCS in the areas of toileting, eating, and ambulation and locomotion, and
- Conducts **Licensing and Monitoring** activities to foster a protective environment for frail and vulnerable adults served by the adult care facilities' industry. DSS assures that the various types of adult care facilities (from family care homes with as little as two adults to larger homes with as many as one hundred adults) operate within the applicable rules, regulations and laws through on-going planning and the licensure and monitoring process. DSS investigates facility complaints.

WHAT DOES THE DEPARTMENT HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE FUTURE?

This newsletter will provide information about these goals in the coming months. Minimally we hope to:

- Raise awareness about the seriousness of the challenges that face older adults and adults with disabilities, and
- Support the work of Forsyth County's Aging Planning Committee.

"In Forsyth County, projections show a 17% increase in adults age 60 and older by 2020."



An Interview: *Forsyth County Board of Social Services*

Leading by Results: As we launch our newsletter, we are delighted to have the opportunity to speak to the entire DSS Board of Social Services. *Why did the DSS Board decide to adopt strategic goals?*

Cynthia Jeffries: The Board of Social Services is provided with accurate and timely reports on how many people were served in many DSS programs—Food Stamps, Medicaid, Work First, Adult Services, etc. But I think all of us have felt frustrated because what we really want to know is whether the programs are making a difference in the lives of people.

We began to realize that we needed to step back and think about what we wanted to accomplish. That sounds obvious, but many organizations really haven't taken the time to lay out their strategic goals in clear, concise language. We have to write them down, we have to determine how to measure them, and we have to keep repeating them to everyone in the community. We can talk about program "numbers," but still not know if we are making progress in helping families. So we want to become clearer about what we want to achieve. I am confident that we have made a good start with the goals we are setting.

Leading by Results: *Has the board adopted any goals that the public might overlook as needed?*

Florence Corpening: I don't think it has really hit our community that as the baby boomers age we are facing a tremendous growth in the older population in the next decade or so. Elder abuse, exploitation, and neglect have largely been a hidden problem. Our seniors certainly deserve to be safe and have the best possible quality of life. I think this will be one of our most important community priorities in the coming years.

Leading by Results: *Is there one goal that may be of particular importance to the taxpayers of Forsyth County?*

Walter Marshall: I want DSS to be responsive to the community we serve, and I think these goals are a good way to do that. It is very important that one of the goals be about making good use of public resources. As a County Commissioner, I have insisted on that. Public records should always be accessible for citizen review, and our public dollars must go toward achieving results that will have a positive impact on the lives of our most vulnerable citizens.

Leading by Results: *One goal focuses on "economic stability of families." Why is it important to have a goal focused on that issue?*

John Sheldon: Every day in my work at the school system I see how critical a foundation of economic stability is to families. I know that DSS programs like Work First provide temporary assistance, help people find employment and the support services they need like health insurance, child care, and Food Stamps. A focus on enhancing economic stability will enrich our entire community.

Leading by Results: *How can setting goals improve services to children?*

Claudette Weston: I have a heart for all the children in our community. Like everyone, I want to see our children safe and well-cared for. The goal that encourages the safety and well-being of children seems to me to be essential to what we say about ourselves as a community. Nothing could be more important to our future than our children. Everyone in Forsyth County must work together to achieve the safety of all our children. It really will take our entire county to ensure that children are safe.

Leading by Results: *Why did the Board feel it was important to establish a goal around understanding social issues and building effective community partnerships? Is that really the job of DSS?*

Cynthia Jeffries: DSS staff sees firsthand the results of poverty, teen pregnancies, elder and child abuse every day. They also see the many positive results of families that have changed their lives. It is not the job of DSS to try to cure broad societal ills, but we must highlight problems and assist in defining solutions. In fact, this is one of the statutory responsibilities of the Board of Social Services. The DSS Board wants to make the public aware of what is happening in our community on major issues and help everyone take a look at how together we can chip away at our problems and move to solutions. We want to engage the community in serious on-going dialogues about how to accomplish broad social goals. That's where community partnerships come in. No one agency or group can have much impact alone in fighting poverty, or child and elder abuse, but together we can!

"The DSS Board wants to make the public aware of what is happening in our community on major issues and help everyone take a look at how together we can chip away at our problems and move to solutions."

What's New at the Forsyth County Department of Social Services?

This new publication is just one sign of a new way of doing business at the Forsyth County Department of Social Services. There have been other changes worth mentioning as well.

New Personnel and Management Strategies

- In May, 2005 Joe Raymond was hired as Forsyth County DSS Director.
- In October, 2005 Tanya McDougal was named Director of Family and Children's Services.
- A new agency Management Team is working to identify and achieve agency strategic goals and measurable benchmarks of success.
- A new agency Management Team to working to identify and address agency wide operational issues (agency policies, customer services, telephone, information technology, etc.).

A More Customer-Friendly DSS

- The agency is creating customer service "standards," a new customer service slogan, and a way to assess whether customers are being treated respectfully.
- Look for our new logo (designed by our staff) in this newsletter and when you visit DSS.
- The DSS lobby is more customer friendly since the large metal detector/scanner has been removed and art work from students at Regan and West Forsyth High Schools has been installed. Sincere thanks to these students for their beautiful contribution.
- Our web page (www.forsyth.cc/dss) is improving!
- The Adult Services Division is using focus groups to improve services. "Fact sheets" are being used to inform consumers and the community about all the services offered to older and disabled adults in Forsyth County by DSS.
- The Temporary Assistance and Maintenance Division (TEAM) has begun an intensive outreach effort to reach individuals eligible for Food Stamps who are not receiving them.

New Service Strategies

- The Family and Children's Division has restructured better coordinated child protective and foster care service teams. The new "multiple response system" (which emphasizes family assessment, inclusion, and prevention strategies for certain types of child neglect) is being implemented.
- The Food Stamp program has implemented a new approach to taking Food Stamp applications that has cut customer waiting time to complete an application.
- The Adult Services Division is using mail-in applications Medicaid applications.

Enhance the Economic Stability of Individuals and Families

WHY IS THIS GOAL

Our nation has struggled with the issue of poverty. We think we know who is poor, why the poor are poor and what to do about it. We have declared war on poverty and we have reformed “welfare.” But multiple challenges remain.

Census data tell us 13% of individuals in Forsyth County fall below the poverty level. The data also tell us that 22 % of children are poor and 45% of children receive free lunches. The overall percentage of poor has remained more or less the same for many years. “Welfare” has changed of course. Recipients of cash assistance can only receive help for 5 years and most must meet stringent work requirements. This caseload in the past 10 years has fallen from approximately 5,000 households to 1,562 households. Once trained, most recipients do obtain work and stay employed. Last year, 547 Work First participants found employment exceeding the goal established by the state by 23%. About 90% of individuals who went to work remained employed for at least six months.

But the reality is that these individuals may meet all societal expectations to “Work First” (this is the right expectation) but that too many jobs pay at or close to the minimum wage. An adult who makes \$5.15 an hour (minimum wage) and works 40 hours a week grosses \$206 a week or \$10,629 a year. Most of these jobs do not provide health insurance or other benefits. So despite “working first,” these individuals, their children, and families still need to move out of poverty or become self-sufficient without other public assistance (Medicaid, Housing Assistance, etc.).

WHAT DOES THE DSS DO TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL?

This goal connects to critical issues facing Forsyth County. It is important to know that the Department of Social Services:

- Determines eligibility for the federal **Medicaid Program**. Medicaid provides access to health care for approximately 40,000 Forsyth County residents (12.5% of total Forsyth County residents). Strict and complex eligibility guidelines are used, but facts reveal that 71% of Forsyth County individuals covered by Medicaid are under age 18 or over the age of 65. The Medicaid budget is large, \$285 million a year (the County pays \$15 million of this amount). The majority of Medicaid dollars pay for nursing home care (which is usually thousands of dollars a month), terminal illnesses, and care for premature or sick infants. North Carolina Health Choice is available for children between the ages of 5 and 19. The working poor are largely ineligible for Medicaid because even if they make minimum wage, most do not qualify which is why there are another 48,000 Forsyth County residents with no health insurance at all.
- Determines eligibility for the **Food Stamp Program** which has greatly increased the nutritional health of low income children and older adults across this nation. Statistics reveal that 58% of Food Stamp participants in Forsyth County are under age 18 or are over the age of 65. There are approximately 12,500 households receiving Food Stamps, with a total of approximately 25,000 participants (8% of total Forsyth County residents). The average monthly Food Stamp value per household is \$217 per month. The working poor are largely ineligible for Food Stamps because even at minimum wage, most do not qualify. Many of these working poor rely on community food banks, churches, and other sources of free or reduced cost food.
- Provides **Child Support Enforcement** services for parents receiving economic assistance from the Department and for anyone else in Forsyth County regardless of income. We establish paternity, locate absent parents, obtain court orders, and collect \$18,000,000 of child support a year. This is a positive achievement. This money is directly used to support children and offset public expenditures.
- Provide **Temporary Economic Assistance** and **Work First** to low

income families. The facts tell us that the average monthly check is \$220 a month. The average family size is three. These recipients must “Work First,” may only receive assistance for a total of five years, and must enroll in work related activities.

- Provide **Crisis Intervention** and various **Emergency Assistance** services. Low income families are hit hardest by crisis. Many struggle to pay heating and cooling bills and when there are legitimate health risks involved for the elderly and small children, DSS has a limited amount of federal funding to pay some of these bills.
- Provide assistance with **Day Care** for working families. Forsyth County assists almost 3,800 children to remain in quality child care by subsidizing the amounts parents pay. Last year, approximately \$13 million in assistance was provided to families.

WHAT DOES THE DEPARTMENT HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

This newsletter will be used to provide information about our goals in the coming months. In the meantime we look forward to:

- Raising awareness about issues that impact the rate of poverty in Forsyth County, and
- Supporting the Work First Planning Committee to focus on more long-term issues relating to employment and education, and
- Improving access to Food Stamps and Day Care for eligible families.

“We have declared war on poverty and we have reformed “welfare.”

But multiple challenges remain.”

Goal IV

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

WHY IS THIS GOAL IMPORTANT?

The Forsyth County Department of Social Services provides a large spectrum of services to children and youth at risk and to older adults and adults with disabilities. Most of these services are crisis driven (child abuse, elder abuse, poverty, lack of access to health care, etc.) Every day we work cooperatively with law enforcement, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and multiple public and private non-profit organizations.

These relationships increase the accessibility and effectiveness of our daily services. But at our best, we must also affect the fundamental causes of these crisis situations and lower the rates of incidence of important problems that go well beyond our daily delivery of services. For example, the rates of child abuse, teen pregnancy, abuse of older adults, youth that do not complete high school, etc. are all specific challenges that face Forsyth County. All of these issues affect how often DSS services are utilized. The old saying, “Pay now, or pay later,” is very accurate.

To the degree that we, as a community, can positively address these issues, our job gets easier. If we are not successful, the DSS job gets more complicated, the quality of our entire community is hurt, and more resources are spent at the back end of the problem, instead of fewer resources in the beginning.

WHAT DOES THE DEPARTMENT HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH?

As stated, we are already engaged in numerous relationships that support our current services. These will continue and will be improved as necessary. In the future, DSS has to become more strategic and more involved in community planning issues. Targeted partnerships and real collaboration (not just being cooperative) are areas that will be improved. There are two basic approaches to be used.

First, most people are not aware that the local Board of Social Services is legally charged with advising county/municipal authorities in developing policies/plans to improve social conditions of the community. Accordingly, the Board of Social Services will soon be announcing a new series of priorities designed to focus on issues that we cannot address by ourselves. These priorities will bring new challenges for our Department but will hopefully result in new strategies and resources aimed at critical problems affecting vulnerable populations served by the Department of Social Services.

Second, community work is underway to create a set of strategic goals and measurable benchmarks of success designed to focus collaborative resources in the coming years. This work holds the potential to become clearer about key issues that should be addressed (County wide) and to develop an actionable set of strategies to successfully address these issues.

This publication will provide information about both of these efforts in the coming months.

“Most DSS services are crisis driven (child abuse, elder abuse, poverty, lack of access to health care, etc.)... We must also affect the fundamental causes of these crisis situations...”



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

WHY IS THIS GOAL IMPORTANT?

The Department of Social Services is a public agency. This means that our business is the public's business and the use of public funding should be totally transparent. Confidentiality laws prohibit discussion of individual situations or cases, but this should not keep us from being accountable for the use of resources and being honest about how well the public's interests are being met.

The Department's financial accountability is \$397 million (the County share is approximately \$28 million). This amount includes federal, state, and county funding for over 20 major DSS "programs." Medicaid consumes the largest share of our budget (approximately \$285 million). Funding for programs is complex and the Department is highly regulated. The costs of these programs are shared between the federal, state, and county levels. The Department has the obligation to see that residents who are eligible for programs get the services they need while being good stewards of public funds.

Many of our programs are income based but some of our most important services are not. Physical abuse and neglect of children and disabled adults occurs at all income levels. Last year, the Department of Social Services served well over 70,000 individuals – more than 25% of the entire population of Forsyth County. We strive to ensure that all individuals are treated with dignity and respect and that they receive the best service possible.

WHAT DOES THE DSS DO TO ACHIEVE THIS GOAL?

The following facts may be useful to consider.

(1) DSS administers a highly regulated set of programs with very complex and specific rules and regulations. In other words, "not just anyone" can receive our

services. This bureaucracy was created by federal and state officials to assure that DSS funding only goes to those truly eligible to receive it.

(2) DSS is constantly audited by state and federal officials. These audits reveal whether our programs need improvement and whether customers who received services were actually eligible to receive them. It is unlikely that any other public agency in North Carolina receives more scrutiny than does the Department of Social Services.

(3) DSS is required by law to do much of its work within specified time frames and at defined levels of quality. Failure to do our work in accordance with these standards may result in financial penalties to the County and to the State.

(4) The Department employs 428 people to accomplish the goals. Our staff is our most valuable resource in providing services to the citizens of Forsyth County. They are skilled, committed, and motivated to provide excellent service to families and children, but we are constantly asking them to do more. Programs such as Child and Family Medicaid and Food Stamps have seen large increases in the volume of people served. In the last 4 years, the agency has seen its caseload increase by 11,000 cases, but the number of staff has actually declined by 10 staff in these programs. This is a serious problem and has caused many programs to not reach minimum program performance goals in the past 18 months, while increasing employee turnover.

WHAT DOES THE DEPARTMENT HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE FUTURE?

Forsyth County DSS intends to be open about its successes and challenges. This means honesty about what is going well and equal honesty about programs that need improvement. Next year's annual report will contain information about

which programs meet minimum standards of performance and which do not. Our Department will set annual benchmarks of success related to this goal – (being publicly accountable for efficient use of resources and timely delivery of services) and will report progress or lack of

***"The Department has the
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public funds."***



“In the Next Issue”

Look for further information about DSS’s new “benchmarks of success” in the next issue of *Leading by Results*. These benchmarks will become our measurable markers of progress toward important achievements that matter to the entire community.



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