



**Board of County Commissioners/Social Services Board  
Joint Meeting  
March 15, 2012  
Dinner – 5:00 PM  
Meeting – 5:30 PM  
Link Government Services Center  
200 South Cameron Street  
Downstairs Conference Room**

**Agenda**

1. Introductions
2. Poverty Statistics and Public Assistance Data
3. Emerging Issues
  - i) Work Support Strategies
  - ii) North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology (NC FAST)
4. Success Stories
5. Hot Topics
6. Message from the Social Services Board Chair
7. Closing Remarks



## Poverty and the Safety Net in Orange County

According to data from the 2010 American Community Survey, 16% or 19,700 Orange County residents live in poverty. The following report provides an overview of poverty and the safety net in Orange County — who lives in poverty, where they are, how much they earn, and what safety net services they can receive.

### Who Lives in Poverty?

Most— almost 75 percent — of county residents living in poverty are between the ages of 18 and 64. This includes much of the large student population living in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, though most students neither qualify nor need public assistance benefits. More significantly, 15.5% of all Orange County children and 8.4% of families live below the poverty line.

*15.5% of all Orange  
County children and  
8.4% of families live  
below the poverty line.*

More females than males live in poverty — 58 percent — and single mothers suffer disproportionately. Almost one in three single mothers lives in poverty, and that likelihood increases sharply (41.8%) if the mother has a child under age 5.

While most residents who fall below the poverty line are Caucasian, 17% are African-American. Other races make up much smaller percentages of those in poverty. Almost 30% of all county residents of Hispanic or Latino origin live below the poverty line, as do almost a quarter of the Black or African American residents.

### Where do Those in Poverty Live?

The greatest concentrations of individuals and families living below the poverty line are located in and around the city limits of Chapel Hill and Carrboro, as well as in the rural areas surrounding Hillsborough. It should be noted that students are included in counts in some sections of Chapel Hill and Carrboro.

### What is “Poverty”?

The poverty threshold is a formula based on the Consumer Price Index that calculates what income is needed to feed a family. Those whose income is below this threshold are considered unable to feed their family. This measure has been widely criticized as being an inaccurate estimate of the number of families living in poverty, and in fact, most federal programs of public assistance use a higher threshold to determine eligibility. Food and Nutrition Services (formerly food stamps) uses 200% of poverty as its eligibility threshold. In Orange County, approximately 1 in 3 residents have income below 200% of poverty.

## What Does it Mean to be Poor in Orange County?

The current poverty line equals \$11,170 in annual income for an individual and \$23,050 annual income for a family of four. However, while many residents live below the poverty line, almost one in three makes an income that is only 200% of the poverty level — the maximum income that may allow them to meet eligibility requirements for benefits like Food and Nutrition Services and Medicaid.

An individual resident making 200% of the poverty level would earn an annual income of \$22,340, and a family of four would earn \$46,100 per year. This is well above the annual earnings of \$15,080 that a minimum wage job provides.

## How Does the Safety Net Help Those in Poverty?

Orange County provides a safety net of services that helps residents buy food, pay for healthcare, find employment, and afford child care. Each program has a set of eligibility criteria that residents must meet to receive benefits.

### *Food and Nutrition Services (FNS)*

FNS is a federal program that provides residents an Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card they can use to purchase food. Residents cannot make more than 200 percent of the poverty level to qualify for FNS benefits. The maximum allotment of FNS assistance a single resident can receive is \$200 a month, and a family of four cannot receive more than \$668 per month. The number of county residents who receive FNS has continued to increase. In January of 2012 over 6,000 Orange County families were receiving Food and Nutrition benefits, 660 more families than in January of 2011.

*In January of 2012 over 6,000 Orange County families were receiving Food and Nutrition benefits, 660 more families than in January of 2011.*

### *Medicaid*

Medicaid is a health insurance program for residents who have children, are pregnant, or are elderly, blind or disabled. Income guidelines are similar to FNS — most residents must make less than 200% of the poverty level to qualify. The county had more than 7,600 Medicaid cases in January 2012.

### *Work First*

Work First, North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, assists low-income parents in finding employment and become self-sufficient. The program has numerous requirements, including 35 hours per week of job searching or vocational training, and income eligibility thresholds are low. In January 2012, 230 clients were participating in the Work First program in Orange County.

### *Child Care Subsidy*

The Child Care Subsidy Program provides low-income families with information and financial resources to find and afford quality child care for their children. Resources enable families to make informed choices regarding childcare providers. Subsidies are based on eligibility, the need for child care, and the availability of funds.

## Work Support Strategies: Streamlining Access, Strengthening Families

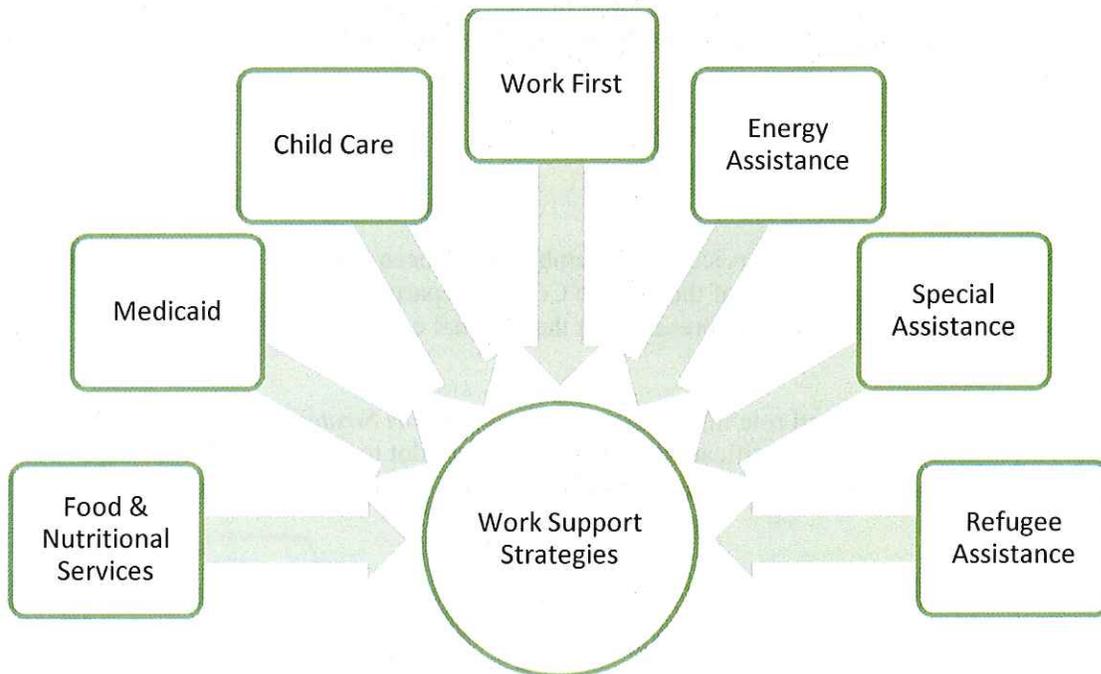
The *Work Support Strategies: Streamlining Access, Strengthening Families* initiative aims to provide a select group of states with the opportunity to design, test, and implement more effective, streamlined, and integrated approaches to delivering key supports for low-income working families, including health coverage, nutrition benefits, and child care subsidies.



This initiative of the Ford Foundation and its partners, the Urban Institute and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, will invest \$17 million over a five-year period to build on recent state and federal innovations by providing states with expert technical assistance, peer support and financial backing to take their efforts to the next level.

### Which Programs are Included?

*Work Support Strategies* includes all programs designed to support low-income working families.



## Work Support Strategies and North Carolina

In February 2011, North Carolina was one of nine states to be awarded grant funding for the *Work Support Strategies* initiative. North Carolina received a \$250,000 planning grant, which runs through early 2012.

The *Work Support Strategies* team includes staff from divisions in North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) that have a direct relationship with local departments of social services as well as local DSS directors and staff from within local social services offices.

With year one of the grant coming to an end, the project team recently submitted North Carolina's application for an implementation grant. States chosen for an implementation grant will experiment with new integrated approaches to delivering work supports to low-income families, including health coverage, nutrition benefits, and child care subsidies.

### What are North Carolina's Goals for Work Support Strategies?

The overall goal of this initiative is to create a new service delivery model for North Carolina families in need. This redesigned system will serve families and individuals in a holistic manner. In the new service delivery model, families will tell their story once and receive the benefits they need.

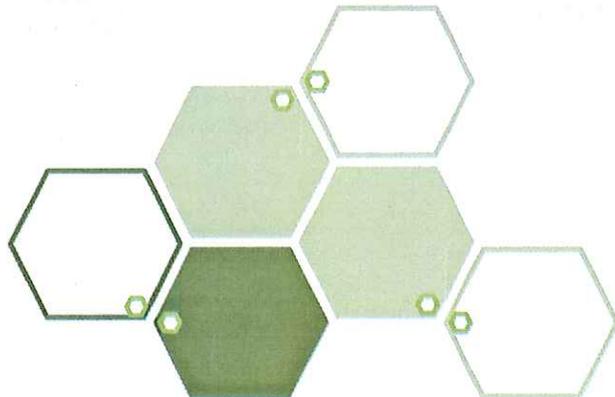
*"In the new service delivery model, families will tell their story once and receive the benefits they need."*

North Carolina aims to eliminate duplicative or redundant steps in application and recertification processes, improve coordination among human service benefit programs, support the integration and automation among program-based systems, and eliminate the silo approach to benefit delivery.

### What is Orange County's Role?

Orange County Department of Social Services staff members have been serving on the project team for North Carolina. Nancy Coston, Director of the Orange County Department of Social Services, was part of the delegation from North Carolina that presented at the national conference on *Work Support Strategies*.

Orange County has also taken a lead role in piloting new *Work Support Strategies* initiatives. Currently, staff members are participating in a certification period alignment pilot to streamline the participation in both Medicaid and Food and Nutrition Services for Orange County families. Other pilot opportunities for Orange County are likely.





## What is NC FAST?

North Carolina Families Accessing Services through Technology (NC FAST) is an automated system designed to improve the way the NC Department of Health and Human Services and county departments of social services do business.

NC FAST introduces new technological tools and business processes that will enable workers to spend less time on administrative tasks and more time assisting families.

## What Programs are Impacted?

Social services programs will be implemented in phases.

Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4	Phase 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Food and Nutrition Services</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Medicaid</li><li>• Work First</li><li>• Special Assistance</li><li>• Refugee Assistance</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Child Welfare</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Energy Programs</li><li>• Child Care</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Adult and Family Services</li></ul>

## NC FAST Will...

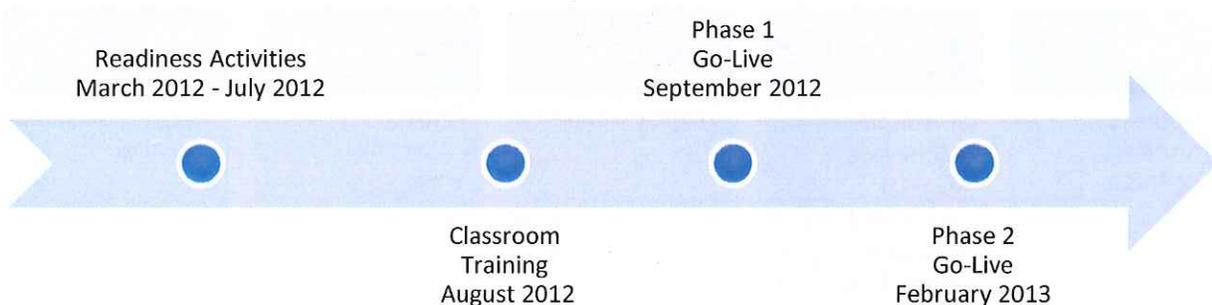
- Allow certain information about families to be available to other benefit programs in NC FAST - creating a more cohesive benefit administration process across all programs.
- Reduce the capturing of duplicate sets of data and maintain a detailed history of case information.
- Replace legacy systems, such as FSIS, and incorporate new systems, such as On-Line Verification (OLV).
- Provide more control to DSS supervisors and managers over the distribution of work and the ability to schedule work according to staff availability.
- Incorporate system technology into individual calendars and task lists, providing workers with a more detailed view of the work that is required and the dates by which it must be completed.
- Calculate timely and accurate benefit payment amounts automatically based on the appropriate policies and eligibility rules.
- Incorporate eligibility rules into the data capturing system allowing case workers to perform their responsibilities without having to have as intimate knowledge of policy nuances.
- Increase system availability to 24/7 to provide flexibility to meet the needs of the State's most vulnerable families.
- Allow clients to apply for benefits online, and have data routed to the appropriate county.

## When Will NC FAST Come to Orange County?

Orange County is on track to begin using NC FAST in Food and Nutrition Services in September of this year. Staff are currently engaged in readiness activities.

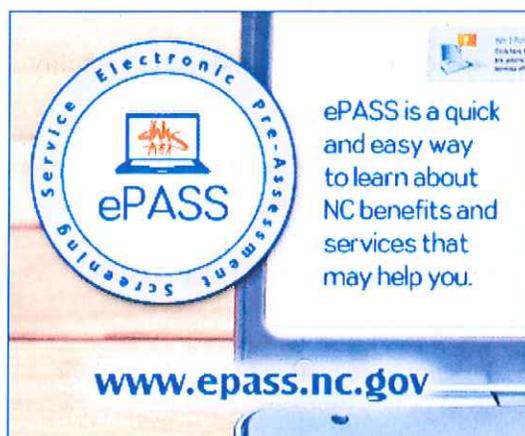
Orange County was selected to be a pilot county for Phase 2 of NC FAST which includes Medicaid. Staff will be “going live” in the Medicaid system just months after Food and Nutrition Services which will be a huge benefit to Orange County residents.

The timeline below gives a brief overview of the NC FAST rollout schedule in Orange County for the first two phases.



## What Changes Can Orange County Residents Expect with NC FAST?

NC FAST already allows residents to fill out an online application through ePASS for Food and Nutrition Services that can be printed and faxed or mailed in to Social Services. By the end of the year, Orange County residents should be able to apply for Food and Nutrition Services online. The county website currently links to ePASS in multiple locations to assist families in completing the online application.



Application processes for Food and Nutrition Services may be slower initially as staff learn the new system. However, benefits should be processed more quickly once the new system has been in place for several months.