



Director:
Nancy Coston

Board of Directors
Pat Garavaglia, Chair
Earl McKee
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Arthrell Sanders
Tamara Dempsey-Tanner

AGENDA

Joint BOCC and DSS Board Meeting
Southern Human Services Center
2501 Homestead Road, Chapel Hill, NC
April 29, 2014
Dinner – 5:00 pm
Meeting - 5:30 pm

- I. Introductions
- II. Overview and Year-in-Review
- III. Anti-Poverty Programs
- IV. Hot Topics

ONE COUNTY FAMILY'S STORY:

The Mendelsons are an Orange County family of four. They've lived in the county all their lives. Larry and Debbie Mendelson are both in their mid-30s, and the couple has two children, Amy, who is three years old, and Lindsey, who is seven. Both Larry and Debbie worked at a local plant for the better part of a decade, but they were laid off when the company folded in 2012.

Though they had never needed public assistance, they had only saved a few hundred dollars, living paycheck to paycheck. Most of the Mendelson's income was used to pay for food, childcare and housing. The family rented a two-bedroom apartment on the outskirts of Chapel Hill in one of the cheaper apartment complexes in the county, paying \$800 a month

Shortly after they were laid off, they began to draw unemployment while they looked for work. When their unemployment ran out and savings were exhausted, they went to the Orange County Department of Social Services for assistance. This is their story:

Larry Mendelson arrived at the county Department of Social Services on Aug. 5, 2012. After a short wait in the agency waiting area, a human services specialist escorted him to a room and discussed his eligibility for department programs.

Because he and his wife received no income and had two small children, they were eligible for a variety of benefits intended to support them as they sought employment. First, both enrolled in the Orange County Work First program. Work First is North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Program. Both Mr. and Mrs. Mendelson attended a two-hour orientation and agreed to spend 40 hours a week in a county job readiness program, where the couple learned skills that would improve their chances of landing employment. They received a \$297 Work First check each of the first three months they were enrolled in Work First. The family also qualified for \$632 a month in Food and Nutrition Services benefits; Medicaid coverage for the entire family; and child care for their two young children. The Mendelson's social worker helped them pay rent and other utilities while receiving Work First.

Three months after they first stepped into DSS, Mr. Mendelson found a full-time job working at a local bakery. His employer offered him a starting wage of \$11 an hour, but couldn't provide health insurance. The family's gross annual income was now \$22,880 – well below the poverty line for a family of four.

While Mr. Mendelson's new employment gave the family a much-needed boost, they now had an income, and that meant their benefits would have to change. The family was no longer eligible for a full Work First payment. They instead opted to accept a Work First job bonus check of \$100 a month for three months. Work First clients who find employment have the option of using job bonus one time in their lives to help ease the transition into employment.

The Mendelsons also had to begin paying a fee of \$115 a month for their child care. The family continued to receive full Medicaid coverage, and their Food and Nutrition Services allotment, \$632 a month, remained unchanged.

Still, money was tight. The Mendelsons had to find creative ways to provide healthy meals even with FNS benefits, and a freak car accident wiped out their meager savings. Fortunately, three months later, Debbie found a full-time job working at a McDonalds near the family's apartment complex. She earned \$7.25 an hour, or about \$15,080 a year. The Mendelsons now had a combined income of \$37,960, and while it was the most financially secure they'd been since they'd been laid off, their new income would further change their benefit allotments. The Work First bonus check expired, and their FNS benefits would fall drastically in two months — from \$632 to \$30 a month. The family would continue to receive Medicaid for a full year, but when the year ended, the parents would no longer be eligible for Medicaid and would have to purchase health care plans through the federal marketplace. The children would be eligible to receive Health Choice. Daycare would remain unchanged.

Orange County DSS workers hear stories like the Mendelsons every day. Families who have two working parents struggle to pay for everything their families need, and small setbacks can have a devastating impact. DSS programs – Work First, Food and Nutrition Services, Medicaid – provide a safety net, but in a county with a high cost of living, even families like the Mendelsons making 150 to 200 percent of the poverty level have a difficult time.

As of March 31, 2014, there are:

- 12,005 Orange County residents receiving Food and Nutrition Services (6,363 cases)
- 10,360 Medicaid cases in Orange County
- 265 Work First cases in Orange County
- 845 Orange County children receiving childcare subsidy
- Over 22,000 (17% of population) Orange County residents living in poverty