

## **How did Work First Develop?**

Work First began by Executive Order of Gov. Jim Hunt in July 1995. In July 1996, waivers granted by the federal government allowed the state to institute work requirements and time limits.

In August 1997, October 1998, and again in July 1999, the North Carolina General Assembly passed, and Governor Hunt signed into law, modifications to the welfare reform legislation. One provision in this legislation gives identified local governments significant control over their Work First program.

The legislation identifies counties as Standard or Electing. Standard counties operate the State's Work First Program while Electing counties have additional flexibility in program design.

### **The following is a list of current Electing Counties:**

Beaufort, Caldwell, Catawba, Iredell, Lenoir, Lincoln, Macon, and Wilson.

Each county must develop a local Work First block grant plan, including descriptions of strategies to achieve measurable statewide outcome goals. Development of county plans must involve a broad range of public, private, and nonprofit groups. Because broad-based community involvement is essential to help families become self-sufficient, the local block grant plan must describe how businesses, community groups, nonprofits, and religious groups will be involved in their Work First program.

Work First cash assistance is provided primarily for children. In standard counties, biological or adoptive parents and stepparents may apply for assistance for a child and must be included in the payment for the family, unless they are disqualified from the program. Other relatives and individuals, regardless of their relationship, who have legal custody or guardianship of children may apply for assistance on their behalf, but will not be included in the payment to the family. Work First cash assistance is not provided to pregnant women without other dependent children.

In standard counties, children are eligible for benefits through age 17. Parents under age 18 must live at home or in an approved adult-supervised arrangement and remain in school. Legal immigrants who were living in the United States on or before August 22, 1996, and who otherwise are eligible, will continue to be eligible for Work First. Please note also that other immigrants who arrived after August 22, 1996 maybe eligible for assistance, depending on their immigration status.

Legislation requires county departments of social services to provide a wide range of services for families with income at or below 200% of the federal poverty level as long as they meet the eligibility criteria. This is an important tool in not only helping former welfare families remain off assistance. It is often a critical source of services for helping families who may have never received assistance, stay off welfare. Services may include, but aren't limited to employment related services, transportation to/from work, post-employment short-term skills training, child and family enrichment services.

In addition, to assist non-custodial parents meet their [child support obligations](#), county departments have the option to provide employment related services for the non-custodial parent when that parent's income is at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, his child is a recipient of Work First cash assistance, and he meets the other eligibility criteria.