

4th Annual NCACDSS Best Practices Awards Nomination Form

Category: CSMIE#3 Tier 2
Cost Savings Measures and/or Improvements in Efficiency

Project Title: Social Worker 1/Payment Social Worker for Child Welfare Services

1. Project/Program summary:

In an effort to maximize the use of foster care funds, an income maintenance eligibility specialist position was reclassified to a Social Work I classification and relocated to be a part of the Foster Care and Adoptions Team within the Child Welfare Section of our agency. The job responsibilities included determining initial eligibility for children entering the legal custody of the agency for federal IV-E foster care funds, state foster home funds, and Medicaid. Re-determinations for Medicaid, initial adoption assistance eligibility and re-determinations are also the responsibilities of this position. Further, updates to the Child Welfare Tracking System are completed by the Social Worker I. The knowledge of eligibility program policy and practice, as well as the exceptional skill in accurate and timely updates of the Child Welfare Tracking forms have improved the accuracy rate in this area approaching 100%. Prior to implementing this initiative, we would often find cases where eligibility had been inappropriately determined. In some cases, this meant that a child eligible for federal assistance for his/her foster care board rate did not receive this assistance, increasing the burden of foster home board payments on the State and the County. In other cases, children had been found eligible for this program when they were in fact, not eligible, risking failure of federal audits and possible payback of federal funds.

2. Innovation:

We are unaware of any other North Carolina county with an eligibility expert housed within a child welfare team. Usually eligibility is done by an income maintenance worker located in a traditional income maintenance unit/team, or by social workers who provide foster care services with no background in eligibility determination. By combining these two traditional models, and having the position located with the staff responsible for gathering information from families to make the eligibility determination, the knowledge, accuracy and expertise of all workers has increased. The Payment Social Worker is an integral part of the team, participating in and gathering information to ensure that all eligibility rules and policy are followed. This worker also serves as the liaison for all agency entitlement programs and child support, ensuring that pertinent programs are notified when children who may be receiving benefits come into our agency's legal custody. This prevents overpayments and errors in those programs as well.

3. Project Success and Impact: What were the objectives? How well were they met? How widespread is the impact of the project or program? What is the anticipated long-term impact? Did the project involve collaboration with other agencies, non-profits, businesses, etc.? How well was this collaboration achieved?

The objective of locating an eligibility expert within a social work team was to maximize the use of federal and state funds for foster care board rates, and improve the keying accuracy of the Child Welfare Tracking System. This was a complete success. All Child Welfare staff rely on the expertise of this position in insuring that information gathered and shared is accurate and pertinent. Federal funds are used when appropriately and to the fullest extent possible. State and Federal audits of IV-E eligibility have been passed with 100% accuracy. State audits of SSBG fund use were also passed with 100% accuracy.

4. **Project Effort and Difficulty:** How well did the program use available resources, given the limitations on such resources? What obstacles or challenges had to be overcome? How was this done?

The agency Director advocated for the reclassification of the income maintenance position with the County Manager and included it in the agency budget. Coordination within the agency with other program areas and with the fiscal team was achieved through planning, meetings and honest communication. As programs and expectations changed, our plan for coordination changed to meet the objective. We continue to make changes as the need arises.

5. **Ability to replicate project:** Can this project be duplicated in other counties? What could counties do to minimize obstacles and problems?

This project can definitely be replicated in all counties. Time and staff availability are key areas but taking the time to ensure accuracy and accountability with federal funds for foster care services enable more cost-effective use of State and County dollars. Having a skilled veteran employee in the Payment Social Work position who possesses the highest of work ethic also helps!