

# 4<sup>th</sup> Annual NCACDSS Best Practices Awards Nomination Form

**Category: ISC#7 Tier 2  
Innovations In Services to Customers**

**Project Title: Families Opting for Change Utilizing Supports - FOCUS**

## 1. **Project/Program Summary:**

The Community Social Services Assistant Program (CSSAP) has evolved and undergone modification since being in existence and is being expanded this fiscal year from two to four full-time positions. The CSSAP provides an array of customized home and community based interventions, coupled with psycho educational and prevention services. The CSSAP's intent is to stabilize and help families through paraprofessional family support to enhance the safety and protection of children by improving parenting competency. The program aims to prevent and/or reduce the recurrence of child maltreatment and the need for unnecessary out-of-home placement. The initiative is in keeping with the Multiple Response System strategy to redesign in-home family services and practices that seek to empower families and help them recognize and build on their strengths. Service delivery is tailored to meet the needs of families and is driven by the family-centered approach core beliefs. Depending upon the family's need, the work may entail: partnering with families to model and demonstrate advocacy skills, comprehensive family care; to address well being needs, child care and cleanliness, discussion of basic child rearing practices and discipline techniques, budgetary management, preparation of nutritious inexpensive meals, coping skills techniques, developmental issues, accessing resources; medical, social, mental health and educational, assisting with essential transportation and assisting with location of housing and/or job placements. The initiative's holistic design is "outcome focused" to strengthen and support families to lower the level of risk to its members, while preserving the family unit. This approach emphasizes prevention oriented services targeted towards restoring family functioning and establishing of healthier family relationships. Services are provided in the family home or community, utilizing a family systems approach. The minimum starting salary for one position is under \$20,000.

## 2. **Innovation:**

The complexity of family problems has increased tremendously and traditional social work practices do not appear to address the presenting deep and persistent problems or the high recidivism rates. Additionally, resources have not kept pace with the diverse and ever changing needs of families and the system to support families while protecting children in the community is inadequate. This effort recognizes that each family is its own greatest resource and builds on family strengths and empowerment as the basis of the therapeutic process. The CSSAP embraces a comprehensive continuum of family-focused, multidisciplinary intervention and prevention services to formulate a partnership for change. The assistant works in concert with the assigned social worker and the Child and Family Team to provide comprehensive family centered services and is a critical member of the agency's protection team. Additional objectives include strengthening the parent-child bond, reducing social isolation, building trust, helping parents identify their children's needs and ways to respond to those needs. Advocacy is embedded in work with the family to

empower the family unit to procure needed resources, develop formal and informal support systems to reduce the rate of recidivism, and promote self-sufficiency.

### **3. Project Success and Impact:**

The CSSAP addresses gaps in community home-based services to enhance parental skills as the failure of coping skills has a direct correlation to child maltreatment and family violence. The generational affects of unresolved family issues permeates and undermines the family structure. Front loaded services, tailored to address an array of family needs in an efficient and timely manner, promotes the engagement process with families that are traditionally most resistant to intervention. The CSSAP partners with parents to compartmentalize accomplishment of objective to promote a sense of success and positive outcomes. The assistant monitors the family's progress and observes and reports any information that suggests the plan needs to be modified. Regular conferences are held with the assigned CPS social worker to debrief progress or regression, and make recommendations regarding additional needed services. The assistant routinely observes and reports any factors that could place the child or family at risk. Not only are families preserved, but children are also better protected. Frequent involvement with families allows for greater child protection by providing an opportunity to alter poor patterns of interaction. The family is empowered to remedy those conditions which caused or led to abuse, neglect or dependency and to prevent the reoccurrence of maltreatment by modifying patterns of interaction. The assistants are invaluable in frontloading services to address family self sufficiency in addition to safety, well-being and permanency. In 2005 the two current assistants provided prevention and psycho educational services to a total of 59 families to promote positive outcomes.

### **4. Project Effort and Difficulty:**

Onslow County is a low wealth rural-like community, lacking efficient resources to meet the compounded diverse needs of families. The CSSAP provides critical home-based services to families and children at risk. During peak periods of turnover, the assistants are able to continue monitoring families at risk when social workers resign serving as a safety net for children in the community. They are instrumental in assisting with implementation of short term intensive treatment on the front end. The assistant supports the social worker and family in assessing need and developing a plan that will guide the worker's intervention with the family, monitoring the family's progress and observing and reporting any information that suggests the plan needs to be modified, informing the assigned social worker when and if progress or regressions occur; and making recommendations regarding additional services that may be needed. Unique and compelling data was provided during the budgetary process to highlight the state of affairs and the need for additional paraprofessional staff. Onslow County is also a young transit military community and is among the counties leading the state in the preschool population. Many of our young parents frequently lack parenting skills, child developmental knowledge, and extended family, readily accessible, formal and informal support networks, to navigate through the pitfalls of parenting. Often they fall prey to being the perpetrator instead of protector while they struggle to parent. .During SFY 04-05, the number of local CPS assessments, involving children between the 0-6 years of age, was 8% higher than the state's average as 53% of the agency's reports were in this category (NC DHHS DSS, Oct 05). The county hosts the youngest population in the state based on a median county age of 23.75 (NC State Demographics). Many of the parents and/or caretakers are much younger, to include a large segment of the teenage population. Onslow County is ranked as the 16th highest county in the state for teenage pregnancies, which is a decrease from the ranking of being the 6<sup>th</sup> in 2004 (Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention Coalition of North Carolina. The NC Child Advocacy Institute published an

abstract that found that the rates for children being killed are significantly higher for military families in the state than for the non-military population. Reportedly, child abuse homicides occurred more than twice as often in Onslow and Cumberland Counties compared to the other ninety-eight counties in the state (NC Child Advocacy Institute).

## **5. Ability to Replicate Project**

This project should be easily replicated in other agencies within our state.