

4th Annual NCACDSS Best Practices Awards Nomination Form

**Category: CSMIE#7 Tier 3
Innovations in Services to Customers**

Project Title: What a Difference a Meal Makes!

. **Project/Program Summary:** Briefly summarize the project's history, purpose, timeline and budget.

History – The Mecklenburg County Senior Citizens Nutrition Program (SCNP) has been serving the community daily through delivering hot homebound meals since 1970. During this time period the Mecklenburg County Transportation System supported the delivery of daily hot homebound meals with 18 homebound routes along with many volunteer routes. However, the deliveries of daily hot homebound meals were restricted to the number of customers served based on the meal delivery temperature compliance issues. On September 30, 2004, the Mecklenburg County Department of Social Services purchased specialized delivery trucks. This equipment is equipped with frozen, refrigeration and oven compartments. By purchasing these specialized vehicles the new frozen meal program was created. The new service allowed the delivery of a 5 pack frozen meal to be distributed once weekly to the SCNP customers and meets the North Carolina Division of Aging Standards. This allowed SCNP to deliver frozen meals to customers under the properly controlled temperatures throughout a 7 ½ hour delivery time instead of the restricted hot meal timeline of 45 minutes to an hour.

Purpose – The purpose of the frozen meal program is to provide a weekly meal delivery versus the daily meal delivery, therefore providing more service to Mecklenburg County customers. One driver with one specially equipped vehicle can deliver up to 55 (5-pack) frozen meals for a total of 275 meals per day versus 10-15 hot meals per route per day. By only delivering to specific county regions one time a week SCNP is able to save on fuel and labor cost as well as provide more meals per week, per region.

	Number of Clients Served Per Week	Number of Delivery Hours Per Week
County Transportation (Hot Meals)	270	270
SCNP (Frozen Meals)	410	80

Timeline/Budget – The purchase of the specialized equipment and the transfer from hot to frozen meals was done within the yearly budget allowance for SCNP.

2. **Innovation:** Why is the program unique? How does your project differ from similar projects?

The Mecklenburg County SCNP frozen homebound meal program is unique in that the meal delivery system is divided up into a regional delivery concept. The entire Mecklenburg County area is broken down into daily delivery regions. Therefore Mecklenburg County does not have any non-deliverable areas for this service. With the hot homebound meal delivery the meal service delivery area was limited due to the time limit and food temperatures and the customer was limited to the menu for the current day. By providing a 5-pack frozen meal this provides the customer with the opportunity to choose the type of menu they would like for any particular day. During the holidays or county closed days a double frozen meal delivery is made therefore shelf stable meals are not needed for this program (frozen meals are more cost effective than shelf stable meals). A 2-pack Shelf stable meal is provided to the customers for emergency situations only.

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

The Mecklenburg County Senior Citizens Nutrition Program's main objective was to decrease the waiting list of 349 clients waiting for homebound service, while additional customers were constantly inquiring about our homebound service. The SCNP frozen meal program has addressed a total of 554 customers inquiring about our homebound program within a two year period. As of July 31, 2006, we have a total number of 8 customers waiting for service. SCNP works closely with the Mecklenburg County DSS – Adult Social Work Services Department to provide a holistic assessment of the customer to ensure they can accept and properly store, heat and consume the frozen meals. Due to the loss of the daily contact with the customers SCNP has implemented a Homebound Wellness Program that coincides with the home visits of the social workers. During this visit the SCNP Site Coordinators will assess meal service for customer satisfaction and provide information on nutrition, safety and support services in the community. The Mecklenburg County Transportation System was not being reimbursed for meal delivery services. The Transportation Department had 36 hours daily involved in the SCNP hot homebound meal delivery and were serving fewer customers. Now SCNP is using two couriers with a combined total of 15 hours daily and providing more homebound meal services to more customers in a larger delivery region.

4. **Project Effort and Difficulty:** How well did the program use limited resources? What obstacles or challenges did you overcome? How was this done?

SCNP currently has a warehouse that has a walk-in freezer which size limits the number of frozen meals that can be accepted from an outside vendor for delivery. This in turn affects the meal cost and ordering process. Another challenge is to always make sure there is a backup vehicle available in case one of the other trucks is in for service or repairs.

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

With the support of County Administration, other counties can duplicate this type of meal delivery service by purchasing the specialized equipment trucks, along with additional back up vehicles. Also maintain adequate freezer storage which will relieve meal cost. Interested counties will also need to hire the necessary personnel to deliver the meals and administer the program.