

Welfare Reform: Bertie County Responds to a Need

The North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service in [Bertie County](#) recognized a responsibility and role to play in Welfare Reform. Forming a partnership with the local Department of Social Services, the local Extension Office prepared 25 welfare participants for a successful transition from the Welfare System to the Workplace through a series of short courses designed to raise the knowledge and skills of potential entrepreneurs and future employees.

To accomplish this goal, an advisory task force was formed and other county agencies were invited to collaborate to meet this broad-based need. The deputy county manager, a member of the task force, asked that we present the program model to the county commissioners and request their endorsement as a county project. Participating partners with Cooperative Extension included the Health Department, a Family Resource Center, Roanoke-Chowan SAFE Home For Battered Women, Emergency Management/Windsor Fire and Rescue, Town of Windsor, County government, Economic Development, county schools, and Martin Community College. A comprehensive model was developed with the premise to empower families to move from dependence on the welfare system to independence. Some of the organizational partners helped teach some of the classes.

The Bertie welfare to independence model has two components. The first, "Empowering to Succeed," is an eight-month (97 hours) program, offering welfare recipients classes to increase their knowledge, skills, and aspirations through personal development, financial management, health and nutrition, employability skills, parenting and volunteerism. The second component, Skills For Profit, offers welfare participants training in child care, cleaning for pay, and lawn care maintenance. During the second phase, twenty persons participated in Child Care For Pay, eight persons in Cleaning For Pay and three in Lawn Care Maintenance. "The Empowering to Succeed" program graduated twenty-six participants.

Elected officials and county management participated in the graduation, and the newspaper recognized participants through several articles. Six participants now report permanent jobs removing them from welfare at an average savings of \$230.00 per month per family. Other participants who were enrolled in the series are in the job training, job search, or GED completion process. Program graduates will be contacted periodically to ascertain their success in remaining independent and to discover if additional training is needed.

In 1998, the program will last six-weeks, three days a week from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. (75 hours) which will meet requirements of the Department of Social Services. A mentoring program will be added if a mini-grant is funded. The Skills For Profit sessions will not be conducted in 1998.

If you would like to see the notebook of educational materials, contact Linda Boyette at (919) 794-5319.

The Extension agents who contributed to the "Empowering to Succeed" program included:

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