

Annual Community Report 2008-2009

Union County Department of Social Services



Union County 2010: *“Living within our means and investing in what matters.”*

A Message from the Director and Board Chair

Throughout this Community Report, readers will notice the words *Investment*, *Community* and *Prosperity* noted alongside the globally recognized symbol for “recycling”. This symbol, and these three important words, best represent the efforts of Union County Department of Social Services (UCDSS) to invest in our residents and community, and thus in our local economy. Human capital investments like the programs and services provided by UCDSS, ultimately makes Union County a preferred community in which to live, rear children, and conduct business. The types of investments managed by UCDSS involve federal, state and local resources that advance public aid programs, and are returned to the community multiple times over. On average, \$1.05 is reinvested in our community for every local tax dollar committed to public aid programs. In addition to summarizing the UCDSS accomplishments from the past fiscal year, a portion of our Community Report will also focus on how these public resource investments work to promote prosperity on behalf of all Union County residents.

The programs that are administered by UCDSS affect the lives of many of our community’s residents, both directly and indirectly. Recent times have ushered in a season of transformation for our state and our nation. Despite the current challenges facing public and private human service organizations, UCDSS has advanced the effort to improve the quality of life for residents in Union County while focusing on being a responsible steward of public resources.

Despite the numerous achievements by the dedicated staff of UCDSS, there is much more to be done. We will continue to support families in becoming economically stable and self-sufficient. We will continue to protect the most vulnerable among us: children, disabled adults, and the elderly. We will continue to leverage resources to ensure that our citizens experience permanent and stable living situations in their community. Change is constant. Each day we have a new opportunity to realize the potential that is in each of us, and at the end of each day, the only thing that matters is that we have worked to make someone’s life better. While we are pleased to present this report to our citizens and partners, there is much work still to be done. We are constantly reminded that each accomplishment and opportunity directly correlates with an individual and family. Both of us are honored to be able to lead a team of dedicated and passionate professionals in making an impact in our community. The caliber of services delivered on a daily basis by the staff of UCDSS, along with the support of numerous volunteers, donors, and partners, is what will make the difference as we continue along this journey. We are committed to the people we serve that call Union County home!



D. Dontae Latson, Director



Margaret Hood, Board Chair



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Union County Social Service Board
 Seated (Left to Right): Margaret Hood, Chair; Barbara Liner
 Standing: Florence Miller; Pat Kahle; Nathel Hailey, Vice Chair

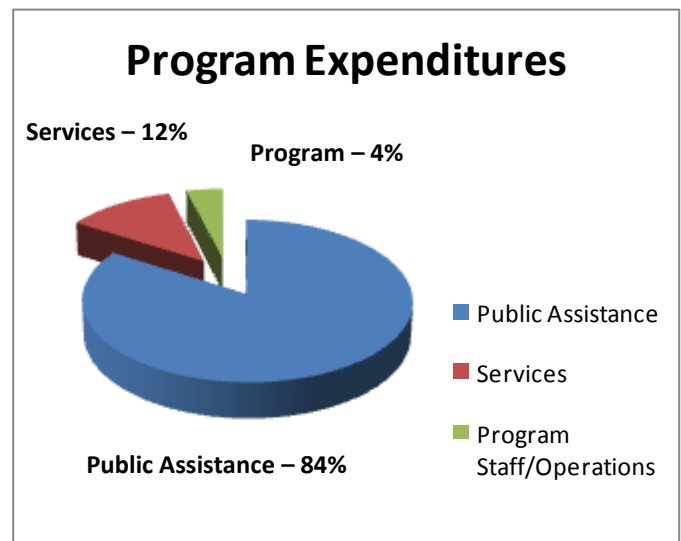
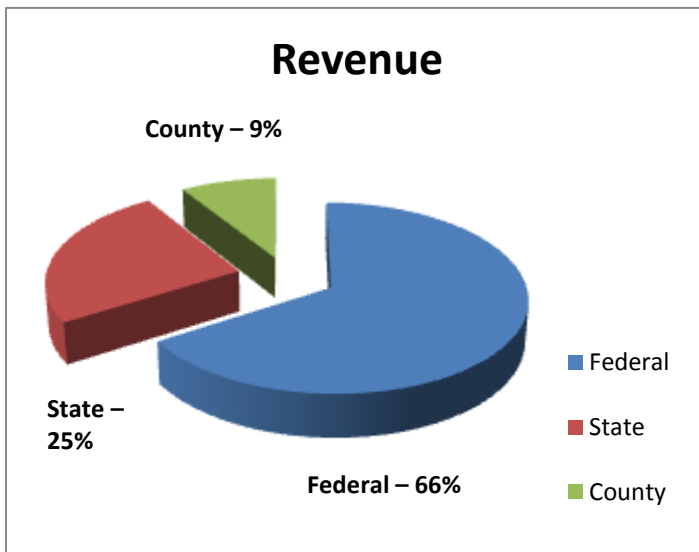
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How does the DSS Budget Affect Me?

With the proposed federal, state and county expenditures of over \$153,685,895 in 2008-2009, there are few Union County residents who will not feel the impact of the DSS budget. Whether it is providing health insurance through Medicaid or providing a rental assistance payment to a landlord in order to keep a fragile family intact, how our county allocates resources through UCDSS has an impact on everyone in Union County. Below is a pie chart showing the major categories of revenue and program expenditures.



Total Budget: \$153,717,486

	Total	Federal	State	County
Public Assistance	128,937,783	87,768,547	37,044,305	4,124,931
Child Care Subsidy	7,257,782	5,243,736	0	2,014,046
Services:				
Work First, Adult & Child Welfare	17,490,330	8,302,578	0	6,938,418
Community Contracts	31,591	31,591	0	0
Grand Total	\$153,717,486	\$101,346,452	\$37,044,305	\$13,077,395
Percentage	100%	66%	25%	9%

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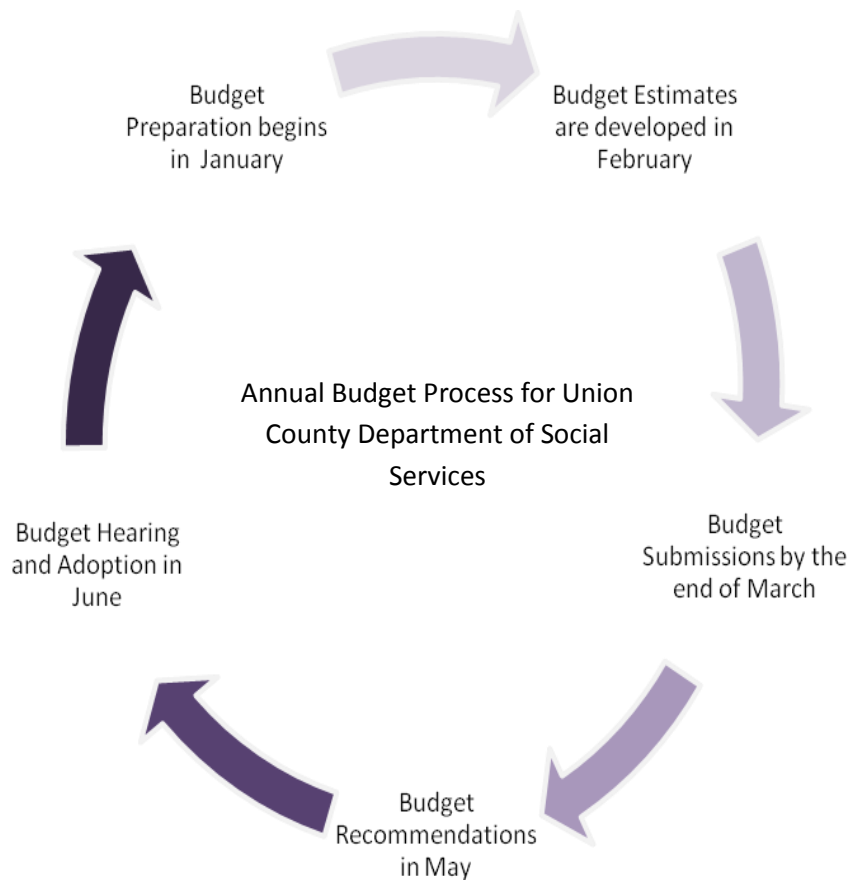
Union County Department of Social Services



Where Does the Money Come From?

Over **99%**, or roughly **\$153,716,666**, is dedicated to mandated spending. Mandated programs are ones that are required either by federal or state statute. Optional services enhance our ability to provide the mandated services and give support to community efforts to serve our citizens.

Funding for DSS services represents a mix of federal, state and local tax dollars. While development of the DSS budget focuses primarily on county appropriations, the federal and state government and local partnership provide substantial dollars for the implementation of mandated programs, which in turn funnels money and services into the community. The majority of funding for social service programming comes from the federal government. In addition to determination of policy, the state provides substantial dollars for funding Union County DSS programs. The remaining cost is the county's share. DSS primarily develops its budget based on mandated service requirements issued by the federal and state governments. In determining budget amounts, DSS relies on estimates provided by the North Carolina State Department of Health and Human Services as well as actual historic spending patterns for Union County DSS.



Quick Facts:

Optional vs. Mandated Services

- **Mandated Services:** Includes all Public Assistance programs, Child Protective Services, and Adult Protective Services.
- **Optional Services:** Adult Day Care, Emergency Assistance Services, At-Risk Services for children and adults, General Assistance, Community Contracts, and Community Alternative Program (CAP).
- **Optional Services** are essential to accomplishing Mandated Services and include some foster care services and in-home aid services for the elderly and disabled adults.

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Where Does the Money Go?

Many recipients of Income Maintenance programs and benefits are working adults who rely on these services to fill in gaps left by low wage jobs. Income Maintenance services and benefits include things like food and nutrition supplemental aid, Medicaid, emergency assistance, day care, and Work First.

Eligibility for Medicaid and Health Choice, the state's health insurance program for children, varies depending on age and circumstances. As expansion of the eligibility guidelines has increased, more Union County residents are covered through these two programs. This also means that costs are on the rise.

There are, however, significant benefits to the physical health of our citizens and the health of our economy through Medicaid. Union County medical providers received over \$101,000,000 through the issuance of Medicaid benefits during the fiscal year. These dollars provided medical care, jobs, and economic development that benefit our county and our state.

Benefits for the Food Assistance program represent 100% federal funds. The administration costs (staff and overhead) are shared equally between the Federal government and the County government and these costs mirror the increases in recipients seen above. This fiscal year, nearly \$18,000,000 was funneled into our local economy through the issuance of food and nutrition service benefits. This allows the local grocery stores and food vendors to keep a viable business and to retain valued employees.

The average hourly wage for Food Assistance and Medicaid head of households is \$7.25 and \$9.50 respectively. Income Maintenance programs and benefits received by low wage earners have an impact on the head of the household's hourly wage as represented in the table below:

Program	Increase
Child Care	\$1.91
Medicaid Single	\$3.11
Medicaid Family	\$8.64
Food Stamps	\$1.12
Work First	\$0.23
Emergency Assistance	\$0.33

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A GLANCE AT THE WORK FIRST PROGRAM

The county is required by the federal government to maintain the same level of financial support for welfare-related programs as it did prior to federal welfare reform in 1996. This policy or, "Maintenance of Effort", was enacted to assure that individuals receive the necessary support needed to move toward self-sufficiency. Since 2006, UCDSS has partnered with South Piedmont Community College (SPCC) to provide clients with basic reading skills and math skills that will prepare them for GED testing. This collaborative effort between UCDSS and SPCC also provides on site job coaching, training, retention, development, and readiness for Work First eligible recipients. SPCC offers a variety of entry-level courses and Work First participants are introduced to these courses during the orientation process.

Focus Area: Families Achieve Economic Well-Being

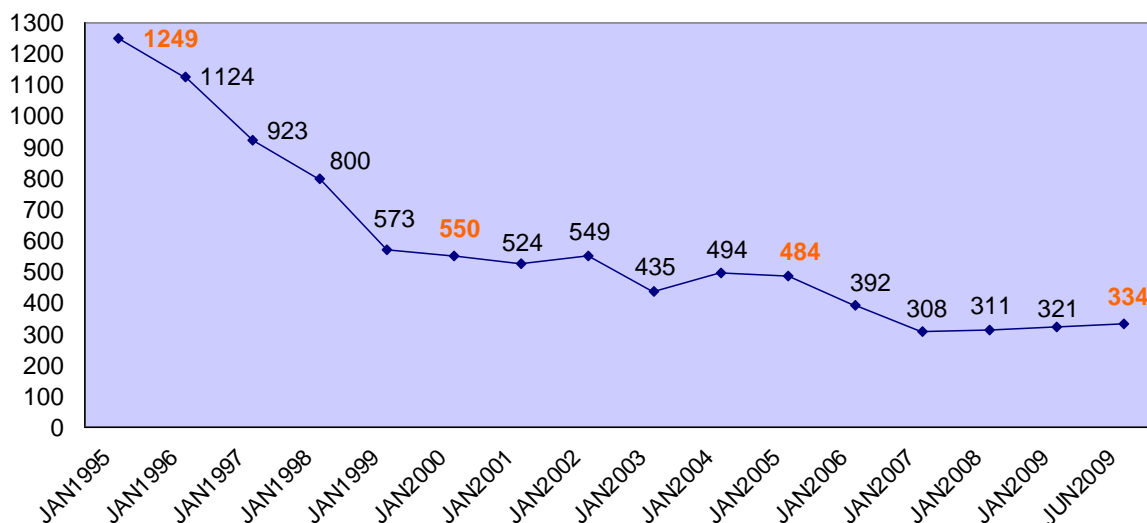
QuickFacts: Work First Employment and Family Services

North Carolina's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, called **Work First**, is based on the premise that parents have a responsibility to support themselves and their children. Through Work First, parents can get short-term training and other services to help them become employed and self-sufficient, but the responsibility is theirs, and most families have two years to move off Work First Family Assistance. Work First emphasizes three main strategies:

- 1. Diversion:** Keeps families off welfare by helping them cope with unexpected emergencies or setbacks.
 - *Under Work First, a county worker performs a needs assessment of the applicants. Qualifying families can get a one-time payment equivalent to up to three months worth of cash Work First benefits, Medicaid, child care and Food and Nutrition Services, and other supportive services, if eligible*
- 2. Work:** Shortens the length of time that families are on Work First Family Assistance by making work mandatory and by limiting how long a family can receive cash assistance.
 - *To receive Work First Family Assistance benefits, parents must register with the First Stop Employment Assistance Program and sign a Mutual Responsibility Agreement (MRA). Once they move into the work component of the program, they can continue to receive benefits for up to 24 months. In most cases, families who have reached the 24-month limit cannot receive Work First Family Assistance for three years.*
- 3. Retention:** Helps families stay off public assistance by encouraging them to save money and ensuring their situation is better while working than on welfare.

The graph below details how the number of recipients has dropped significantly.

Work First Cash Assistance Recipients



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Accomplishments:

- Reorganized Income Maintenance unit to maximize efficiency and effectiveness
- Implemented functional capacity assessment for all participants claiming to be disabled
- Facilitated the availability of behavioral health resources onsite to screen and triage clients presenting with mental health and substance abuse issues
- Career Readiness Certificate (CRC) testing made available onsite
- Participated in coordination of annual county employment fair
- Despite the difficult economic times, during the FY, 70% of Work First clients are still working one year after leaving the program

Challenges:

- Adequate staffing levels to meet the needs for the growing number of citizens eligible for economic services to address program integrity issues (currently able to work on only 12% of identified cases)
- Resources to meet the need of growing number of Latino families in Union County
- Modernize and streamline technology processes

Focus Area: Families Achieve Economic Well-Being

The economic well being of a community is directly related to the ability of its residents to achieve a decent quality of life. Union County Department of Social Services (UCDSS) assists individuals and families in achieving a decent quality of life through various programs and services, which focus on economic well-being. These include:

- Work First Program- helped **11,084** people gain employment
- Medicaid- leveraging dollars to help more than **15,000** people per month obtain medical coverage and access to healthcare
- NC Health Choice- ensuring more than **2,300** children had health insurance
- Low Income Energy Assistance Program- ensured stability of **2,409** households by helping **6,700** individuals cope with the rising cost of heating their homes
- Food & Nutrition Services- served an average of **10,376** individuals per month by ensuring access to food
- The Child Care unit received a score of **98.8%** from State monitoring
- Program integrity collections increased **26%** for all programs compared to last year
- Increased participation in the Work First program to **42.5%**
- Referred **107** clients to GED and/or high school diploma classes at SPCC; 31 (29%) obtained their diploma



Goals:

1. Implement plan of action to process applications received from Social Security Administration in a more timely and efficient manner
2. Improve unit effectiveness by use of computer resources to enhance productivity.
3. Implement new state child care EBT payment program.

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Focus Area: Families Achieve Safety

The safety of a community is a fundamental element to creating desirability and stability. UCDSS promotes safety by striving to protect the most vulnerable citizens through services aimed at children and families, individuals with disabilities, and the elderly. To this end, the following services and programs are those, which are provided by UCDSS to help families achieve safety:

- Family and Children's Services (FCS) Intake- received and screened **1,923** reports of alleged child abuse and/or neglect
- Protective Services for Children (investigations)- responded to **1,504** reports (21% were substantiated)
- Protective Services for Children (ongoing services)- provided ongoing, in-homes services to **169** children
- Prevention and Aftercare Services- served **54** children in prevention services and **11** children in aftercare services
- Protective Services for Adults- received **102** reports, of which 13 had confirmed mistreatment
- Adult Services- served **131** cases referred to the agency (an increase of 13 cases from prior year)

Accomplishments:

- Child Protective Services (CPS) In-Home, Foster Care and Services Intake cases successfully achieved the 2008 Child and Family Service Review (State audit)
- Partnered with Union County Drug Court Program to serve families involved in substance abuse
- Raised more than \$10,000 to supplement county funds to support children and families in need
- Hired a social work clinician to triage safety issues with families involved in abuse and neglect cases

Challenges:

- Leveraging mental health and substance abuse resources
- Reducing delays in intake, assessment and service planning despite shrinking personnel resources
- Recoup reimbursement from past due coding errors
- Address the need for additional managerial oversight for FCS to cover growth of services.
- Meet state established guidelines concerning Child Protective Services assessments and timeframes.

Goals:

1. To achieve goal of 10-20 (maximum) cases per CPS Investigator
2. To initiate 100% of cases within established timeframes or provide documentation of reasonable efforts
3. Partner with other community agencies to develop and implement crisis respite facility for children
4. To continue outreach efforts in the community in an effort to increase awareness about abuse and neglect. Continue to increase efficiencies through staff training about community services and resources, as well as funding and coding expectations
5. Finalize 70% of agency adoptions.





Accomplishments:

- Increased the number of foster homes by **25%**
- Exceeded State baseline for finalized adoptions for a total of **38** agency adoptions
- Exceeded the NC baseline of achieving adoptions for **38** children resulting in receipt of **\$111,379** from the special children's adoptive fund to be used to support adoption
- Foster parent certified to co-lead MAPP curriculum in an effort to increase training effectiveness
- Provided in-service training for local attorneys and established relationship with Clerk of Courts Office to expedite adoption process for children waiting for a home

Challenges:

- Placement facilities for behavioral and emotionally challenged children with a criminal history.
- Adequate treatment for children transitioning from Level III & IV facilities.

Goals:

1. Increase the number of foster homes by 25%
2. Finalize 70% of adoptions
3. Partner with service providers to find appropriate placements for children with mental health and behavioral issues within 2-3 weeks of child entering care.
4. Achieve permanency for 60% of children coming into foster care within one year

Focus Area: Families Achieve Permanence

Permanency and stability in one's living situation are important elements in assuring community well-being. UCDSS strives towards the goal that families achieve permanency by facilitating an array of services and programs towards this goal:

- Adult Care Homes- manage 12 homes and two adult day care centers (includes a total of **515** beds)
- Adult Placement- facilitated and managed **599** placements
- Child Placement- total of licensed foster homes is **43**
- Achieved permanency in less than 12 months for **53%** of children in UCDSS custody
- Union Co Group Home for Children- served **90** children
- Adoption Services- finalized **97%** of adoptions in the active caseload
- Independent Living Program (LINKS)- served an average of **45** youth in UCDSS custody per month

Success Story:

A mother and her two children came to the attention of UCDSS when, after residing in a domestic violence shelter, the family was asked to leave because of the child's mental health and behavioral issues. The family did not have a place to live, but had relatives residing in Virginia. UCDSS was able to prevent the children from entering foster care by assisting the family with hotel accommodations for one night until the mother's sister could arrive from Virginia. Without this preventive assistance, these children would have ended up in foster care, creating unnecessary strain on the family and the system.

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DSS Accomplishments and Facts

Accomplishments:

Agency Wide:

- Recovered more than **\$213,000** through fraud investigations
- Helped residents return to work with **98%** of former program participants remaining employed for 12 months
- Prevented or delayed **95%** of senior and disabled adults being placed into a nursing home
- **97%** of agency adoptions were finalized.
- **92%** of customers report that they were treated with dignity and respect

Client Visits:

- 30,811 clients seeking Income Maintenance services
- 7,977 clients seeking Family and Children Services
- 2,806 clients seeking Child Day Care
- 3,859 clients seeking Adult Services
- 4,958 clients seeking Work First
- 304 work permits issues
- 11 Hearings
- Total Client Visits: 50,726
- 29,871 Client delivered mail
- 115,000 Client calls routed through switchboard operator
- Total Clients assisted: 195,597

Volunteer Services:

- 418 individual volunteers
- 504 volunteer groups
- 6,504 hours contributed (Monetary Value = \$124,941.84)

Volunteer Income Tax:

- 463 taxpayers serviced
- Total refunds of \$252,441.00
- Total earned income credit of \$94,207.00

Interpreting Services:

- 4,830 clients with limited English proficiency served

Information Technology:

- 894 help calls processed

The County's total Medicaid cost for the fiscal year was \$111,190,147.

*65% is the Federal share
32% is the State share
3% is the County share*

DSS spent roughly \$7,257,782 on Child Care Subsidies.

This helped 2,590 children and their families during the fiscal year.

DSS spent roughly \$59,274.11 on Emergency Assistance. Emergency Assistance covers various expenses such as rent payments, utility payments, food and other assistance that helps keep families intact and prevents them from needing public assistance.

143 individuals and/or families received benefits from Emergency Assistance during the fiscal year.



Redesign Implementation Team & Process

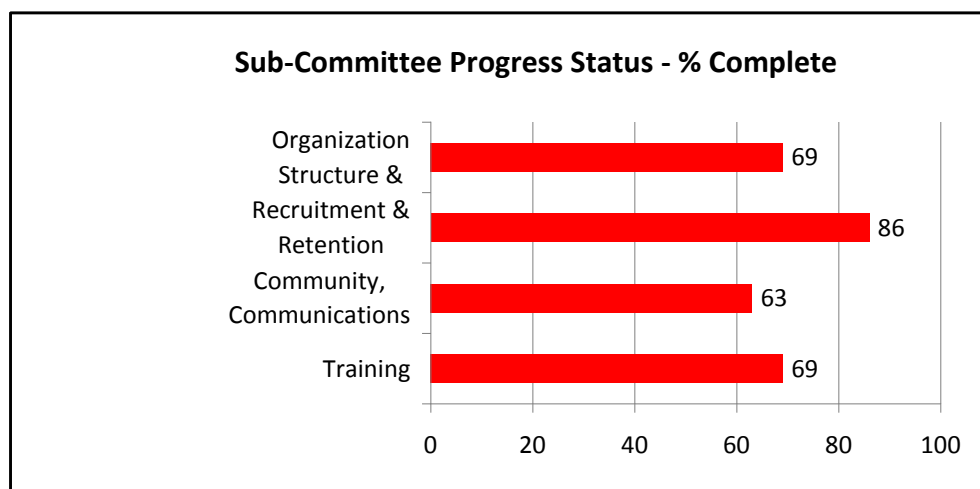
At the beginning of Mr. Latson’s tenure with UCDSS, he initiated a continuous quality improvement process. Utilizing the assistance of two external consultants, this process involved broad employee engagement, beginning with a series of focus groups to test observations and gather additional data pertaining to the agency functioning and operation.

A total of five (5) focus groups were held, one for each of the service areas and each lasting for approximately two hours. The agenda for each focus group centered around two main discussion activities. The first was the “Start, Stop & Continue” activity and the second was a brainstorming activity around the future vision for the organization surrounding the five key themes of Leadership Development, “Teamness”, Workflow Process, Quality Assurance, and Organizational Climate. Staff was selected to participate in the focus groups based on the following criteria: 1) knowledge of their core business; 2) demonstrated leadership within the organization; and 3) diversity in position, level of supervision, and race/gender/age where possible.

Based on the data collected from the focus group process, a set of recommendations was identified and a corresponding implementation plan was developed as a planning framework. Below are nine recommendations, which are the basis of this implementation plan:

1. Assess organizational capacity and workload
2. Reorganize the organization to maximize efficiency and effectiveness
3. Develop a strategy for recruiting, hiring and retaining staff
4. Develop a training plan which focuses on existing and new staff
5. Identify and execute work processes to improve organization’s efficiency and effectiveness
6. Develop a policy and legislative platform including a clear advocacy strategy
7. Develop a communication strategy for internal and external audiences
8. Develop a plan for cultivating and enhancing community partnerships
9. Develop a resource plan to support the growth of the organization and needs of the community

An Implementation Team consisting of staff from various areas and levels within the organization was convened to develop and champion the execution of the above noted recommendations. The Implementation Team was divided into four topic specific sub-committees: Training; Community, Communications & Resources; Recruitment & Retention; and Organizational Structure & Performance. Below is an account of the progress status for each sub-committee.



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The mission of Union County Department of Social Services is to partner with families in achieving *economic well-being, safety, and permanence* within our community.

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A look to the future...

There are many human service issues and needs on the horizon in Union County. The Department of Social Services will be focusing its efforts on continuing to be a premier health and human service provider in our region as well as in the State and across the nation. In addition to the focus on continuous quality improvement of the service delivery continuum, another focus will be on workforce development.

When Mr. Latson began his tenure in April 2008, he commissioned an analysis of projected attrition over the next three to five years. This study revealed that one-third of the UCDSS workforce would be eligible for some form of retirement, a reality that creates a significant impact on the future of the agency in terms of intellectual capital, community relations, and culture. Therefore, a future priority will be on the recruitment and retention of quality workforce as well as a cultural shift to meet the demands of an ever-changing industry.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve, and to ensure that families in our community achieve economic well-being, safety and permanence.

