

BUCHANAN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
PROGRESS REPORT 2016

The Buchanan County Department of Social Services is dedicated to assisting its clients in working toward self-reliance. BCDSS employs a dedicated and competent staff of 51 employees who provide financial and social services for many families and elderly adults in Buchanan County. All staff receives policy and skills training in order to meet the needs of the clients they serve.

The SNAP Program (formerly known as the Food Stamp Program) had a decrease in the number of households, and the number of persons served in Buchanan County from 2014 to 2015. The average number of households served in Buchanan County for the year 2015 was 2,460 and the average number of persons served in Buchanan County for the year 2015 was 4,741. The total amount of SNAP benefits issued for Buchanan County recipients during the year 2015 was \$6,020,164.00.

The Energy Assistance Program is a FUEL/CRISIS Assistance Program with wide participation by the citizens of Buchanan County. The FUEL Assistance Program is designated to assist persons with a portion of their home heating needs. The CRISIS Assistance Program is designated to assist persons with: once-per-lifetime payment of primary heat source, utility security deposit per fuel type, purchase of a portable space heater for temporary use, purchase of primary home heating fuel, payment of emergency shelter in a no heat situation, payment of primary heat utility bill, repair of heating equipment, replacement of heating equipment- if customer owns their home, and provision of supplemental heating equipment/maintenance.

The FUEL Assistance Program begins the second Tuesday in October and runs through the second Friday in November of each year. The CRISIS Assistance Program begins November 1<sup>st</sup> each year through March 15<sup>th</sup> of the following year unless funds are depleted earlier. For the 2015 FUEL/CRISIS season there were 2,030 FUEL applications taken and processed by our agency as well as 756 CRISIS applications taken and processed. The total benefits approved for payment through the FUEL Assistance Program for the 2015 season was \$761,808.47 and the total benefits approved for payment through the CRISIS Assistance Program for the 2014-2015 season was \$397,302.02.

The Energy Assistance Program also has a component for Cooling Assistance, which begins June 15<sup>th</sup> and runs through August 15<sup>th</sup> of each year. This program is designated to provide cooling services to low income households. The types of assistance provided by this program includes: the self-pick-up of a portable fan, air conditioner purchase/installation, repair of a central air conditioning unit or heat pump, a once-per-lifetime payment of an electric security deposit, ceiling,

attic or whole house fan/purchase/installation, repair of ceiling, attic or whole house fan, payment of electric bill to operate cooling equipment and/or self-pick-up and self-installation of an air conditioner. For the 2015 Cooling season, Buchanan County Department of Social Services processed 1,138 applications. The total amount of benefits approved for payment in the 2015 Cooling Season was \$236,859.33.

The Medicaid program serves eligible recipients in LIFC (low income families and children). It also includes other Medicaid programs such as Medically Indigent, Aged, Blind and Disabled categories, Nursing Home, Community Based Care, Auxiliary Grant, FAMIS (Family Access to Medical Insurance Security), FAMIS MOMS, BCCPTA (breast and cervical cancer prevention and treatment), Foster Care, and Plan First. Buchanan County served an average of 8,058 recipients in 2015. This is an increase from 7,079 in 2014. Annual expenditures for all these programs for Buchanan County were \$35,391,393.03 in 2015. This was an increase from \$29,256,479.23 in 2014.

The TANF and TANF-UP programs had an average of 148 cases in 2015. This is a decrease from 157 in 2014. The average number of people receiving TANF and TANF UP was 244 in 2015 a decrease from 263 for 2014. The total amount of payments for these programs in 2015 was \$352,063.17. This is an increase from \$278,987.00 in 2014. This is a monthly average of \$29,338.60

The Fraud Program handles all referrals and investigations received from anonymous sources, computer matches, and from other agencies. Buchanan County Department of Social Services has an Agreement with the Commonwealth Attorney's office in reference to welfare fraud, and referrals have been prosecuted. Welfare Fraud consists of misrepresentations of facts on applications, changes, and interim reports in order to receive public assistance benefits. Fraud referrals on retailers are referred to USDA for investigation. Fraud referrals are received on SNAP, TANF, Medicaid, Heating and Cooling Assistance.

In addition to providing financial benefits that assist with physical needs, the agency also furnishes services to support the emotional and social well being of eligible adults and children in Buchanan County.

Buchanan County's Child Protective Services workers utilize a multi-track system of managing referrals they receive regarding allegations of child abuse and neglect, called the Differential Response System. The purpose of the differential response to child maltreatment is to assist families to better meet the children's developmental and safety needs through partnerships between community agencies, faith based groups, neighborhood associations, and other community groups.

While investigation of allegations of abuse and neglect are still a key part of Child Protective Services, CPS workers are able to assess the strengths and needs of families and offer services to families which will reduce the threat of harm to children. The family assessment process is designed to be more helpful and less punitive to families in situations where allegations of neglect or abuse are less severe.

During the fiscal year beginning July 2014 and ending June 2015, Buchanan County's CPS unit received 523 CPS referrals. Of those, 136 were investigated as traditional investigations with 67 unfounded dispositions being made, and 69 referrals having a finding that child abuse or neglect had occurred. 387 referrals were placed in the Family Assessment track where the strengths and needs of families were assessed while determining if children were abused or neglected, and services were provided to the families to protect the children and strengthen the family.

During this fiscal year, the agency's Child Protective Services and Foster Care Units have partnered with many agencies and organizations to provide services to the families they work with, including but not limited to CASA, Family Assessment and Management Team, Community Policy and Management Team, the school system, People, Incorporated, the Health Department, Cumberland Mountain Community Services, DePaul's Family Services, Family Preservation Services, and Appalachian Service Project.

In the past year, the Child Protective Services and Foster Care Units have continued to improve service delivery through the use of Family Partnership Meetings. The Family Partnership Meeting is a relationship focused approach for decision making that empowers the family and involves the community in the decision making process. It involves parents and other caregivers, providers and neighborhood stakeholders. The purpose of the meeting is to establish the family's strengths and needs, and to develop a service plan that will prevent the removal of children in high risk or very high risk CPS families, or develop a service plan that will help the family to work toward the return of children to the home. The family may invite any relevant stakeholders to the meeting, as well as the social worker inviting relevant stakeholders and providers to participate in the meeting.

In a broad sense, all of child welfare is targeted towards preventing harm, and insuring the safety, well-being, and stability of families. Child Protective Services (CPS) is where the most emphasis is placed on safety and reducing the risk of abuse and neglect and out of home care. However, preventing maltreatment and out of home care can begin prior to a valid referral to CPS and continues once a child comes into care by preventing maltreatment and trauma of multiple moves in both foster care and adoption.

The goal of Prevention Services is to strengthen families by ensuring safety, permanency and well-being of its children. These services are designed to: prevent the occurrence (or reoccurrence) of child abuse/neglect from any caretaker; and prevent out of home care, including the prevention of foster care.

The Buchanan County Department of Social Services has implemented new services which will help to meet this goal. Those services include, but are not limited to: the implementation of motivational interviewing skills which will guide parents in identifying personal issues or issues within the family, which will help parents to develop solutions to these issues; the development and implementation of the Fatherhood 24/7 curriculum which will strengthen the abilities of men to become better fathers; and the development of the Buchanan County Resource Guide. The Resource Guide has been distributed county wide.

The Foster Care and adoption unit provides services to foster children normally placed into the agency's custody by the Juvenile and Domestic Relations Court or entrustment signed by the child's legal guardian. Services are provided to the foster child, natural parents, legal guardians and foster parents to ensure all efforts are made to return the child to his/her natural parents or legal guardian. There are currently 72 children in the custody of the Buchanan County Department of Social Services; 18 children are in non-relative foster homes; 4 children are in relative foster homes; 11 children are placed in a Residential Facility; 24 children are in a Therapeutic Foster Home; 1 child in an Emergency Shelter; 6 children are on a Trial Home visit; 2 children are placed at a Group Home; 5 Adoption Non-Finalized. Under certain circumstances, the agency is able to subsidize an adoption of a foster child; the number of families currently receiving adoption subsidy is 83. The agency completed 51 court ordered home studies in 2015. The Buchanan County Department of Social Services continues to recruit foster parents to provide safe and stable homes in the community for children in need.

With an increasing elderly population, this agency's services to senior citizens and disabled adults are of great importance to Buchanan County. Adult Protective Services and Adult Services are two agency programs that ensure the safety and well-being of the elderly and disabled adults in Buchanan County. In 2014 the Adult Protective Services unit investigated 8 adult abuse and neglect complaints, such as physical neglect, exploitation and isolation from family/friends and service providers. The Adult Protective Services and Adult Services workers currently have 203 adult services cases; 17 adult protective services cases, 89 adult services home base care cases, 3 conservator cases, 9 guardianship cases and 21 guardianship report cases. These cases are open due to family physical abuse, family neglect, exploitation, isolation from friends/family, services and self-neglect.

Additionally, the Adult Services workers review approximately two guardianship reports monthly to ensure appropriate care is being given to persons with legal guardians/conservators. The agency is legal guardian for 10 adults and provides

companion services for 26 adults in need of help, which enables them to remain in their home. This unit completes an average of six nursing home pre-screenings and personal care screenings each month. It also makes placement in adult care residences and handles referrals for other resources.

In 2009, the Virginia Department of Social Services underwent a Federal Children and Family Services Review. As a result of that review, localities in Virginia have been required to meet benchmarks in six critical areas of its Child Welfare Programs that the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services determined as needing improvement in Virginia. Those program areas include: Recurrence of Maltreatment with goal to be met at less than 6.1%; Incidence of child abuse or neglect of a child while in foster care with goal to be met at less than .57%; Reunification within twelve months of a child entering foster care with a goal to be met of greater than 76.2%; Adoptions finalized within twenty four months of a child entering foster care with a goal to be met at a rate greater than 32%; No more than two placements during the first twelve months of a child coming into foster care with a goal to be met at a rate greater than 86.7%; and Reentry into foster care within twelve months of a prior foster care episode with a goal to be met at a rate less than 8.6%.

According to Virginia's Progress to Excellence Report which reports each locality's performance in meeting these six goals, Buchanan County's Child Welfare Program met all six of the goals during the reporting period which ended December 31, 2008. This report reflects the hard work on behalf of, and dedication to children and families, of the Child Protective Services and Foster Care staff in Buchanan County.

The Temporary Payroll Tax Cut Continuation Act of 2011 extends the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005 which authorizes the TANF and VIEW Programs. The focus of the VIEW Program is on work, program integrity and strengthening families. One of the major objectives of the VIEW program is a definition of work activities, which are divided into two categories: core work activities and non-core work activities. Employment will only be counted if the individual is earning at least federal minimum wage; full time employment is counted as 30 hours per week while part time employment is counted as ten to 29 hours per week. If participants are not employed full time, they are required to participate twenty hours in a core activity and 15 hours in a non-core activity. Core activities include paid work, paid on the job training, and community work site placements. Non-core activities include job skills training and limited education programs. There are fewer exemptions for a participant to receive. Therefore, more participants are referred to VIEW as a mandatory participant if they want to receive TANF benefits.

The VIEW case manager's responsibility is to complete a thorough assessment of the participant, complete with an activity plan which includes short-term and long-term goals, allow a 30 day job search period and if not employed by the end

of that 30 day period, assign the participant to unsubsidized employment, work experience, or on the job training. Many of the participants can receive child care and transportation services as part of their service plan. Job Readiness classes, skills assessments, parenting classes, job club, anger management classes, substance abuse education classes, and GED classes are also provided to VIEW participants.

Over the past year, an average of 45% to 50% of the agency's VIEW cases is successfully participating with the VIEW program. The remaining participants are assigned to non-core activities or are medically exempt from the VIEW program. The agency's VIEW case manager has an average of 25 to 30 cases per month. The VIEW program collaborates with other agencies located in Buchanan and surrounding counties in an effort to provide the most efficient and streamlined opportunities available for the participants. Some of these agencies include the Department of Rehabilitative Services, Virginia Employment Commission, Southwest Regional Adult Education Program, and Project Access through Southwest Virginia Community College.

The Agency's Child Care Program offers child day care services for income eligible families with children who need child care and who are under the age of 13, or children up to 18 years of age if they are physically or mentally incapable of caring for themselves. The child day care program provides family focused services that serve to increase the availability, affordability, and quality of child day care services in Buchanan County.

At the present time three separate funding sources are available to assist families with day care costs. VIEW day care funds are used to provide day care for children whose parents are receiving TANF and participate in the VIEW program. Non-VIEW day care funds are used to assist with the payment of day care costs for children whose parents work and/or are involved in an educational training program. Income eligibility criteria must be met to qualify for day care in this category. Head Start Transition to Work funds are used to provide day care for both children who attend Head Start and their siblings, while their parents work.

Buchanan County is currently in need of licensed Family Day Home providers to better meet the community's child care needs. Buchanan County Department of Social Services encourages anyone interested in becoming a Voluntarily Registered or Licensed Child Care Provider to contact the Department to receive information to assist you in beginning the process. Child Care Providers must meet stringent standards to be approved, for example current policy requires all Providers become certified in Pediatric CPR and First Aid as well as complete four hours of skills training relating to child health, child safety, and/or child development to be eligible to receive payment from the Child Care Program.

A continuing effort to inform the citizens of Buchanan County has resulted in the development of the staff and information about agency services to dental and health clinics, Kids Day, Head Start programs and the school system.

Buchanan County Department of Social Services is a proud partner of Eddie Sturgill's Coal Miner's Christmas Fund. The agency receives donations from the community and provides gifts to needy families in Buchanan County. Many businesses have participated in the drive by sponsoring children and providing gifts. There is also a Christmas party with fun, food, and Santa for recipients and their families. For more information, please contact Cynthia Elswick at 935-6807 or mail donations to Buchanan County DSS Attn: Coal Miner's Christmas Fund 3174 Slate Creek Road Grundy, VA 24614. Please put Coal Miner's Christmas Fund in the memo section of the check and we will send a tax receipt.

The agency is governed by an Administrative Board which meets the third Tuesday of each month at 6:00 PM at the Buchanan County Department of Social Services located on Slate Creek.

Buchanan County Department of Social Services hours of operation are 8:00 A.M. to 4:30 P.M. Monday through Friday. After hours, emergency calls related to Child or Adult abuse can be made by calling the Buchanan County Sheriff's Department or by dialing the 24 hour hotline at 800-362-3678.

The dedicated staff of the agency looks forward to continuing to provide financial benefits and social services to eligible citizens in Buchanan County.

Ruth E. Horn  
Director