

## OVERVIEW

### Oh Boy! Redeploy

The puzzle to be solved was how to manage Hanover County Social Services' increased workflow alongside decreased budget allocations, yet maintaining excellent customer service; additionally, how to handle decreased demand in other County departments, while preserving an exceptional and dedicated workforce. Hanover County and its leadership have always been highly dedicated to their citizens and staff, committed to giving the best possible service to external and internal customers. Redeployment became the key strategy to ensuring adequate workload coverage and continued excellent external customer service, while avoiding layoffs of existing staff--internal customers--in departments with less demand. Hanover County Department of Social Services received six redeployed staff between November 2011 and April 2012 from other, very different County departments. Employees diverted from their previous areas of expertise into the culture of social services were certainly taken by surprise; but with proper fit and training, including hands-on experience, all are becoming acclimated and excellent additions to the social services team.

Although the learning curve for the newly redeployed was steep, the County redeployed staff were dedicated to County customers and committed to serving them through their new roles. Financing the redeployments came at no cost to the County. The results of this collaboration between Hanover County Department of Social Services and the six other Hanover County departments has been a success for the citizens, involved departments, and the County as a whole.

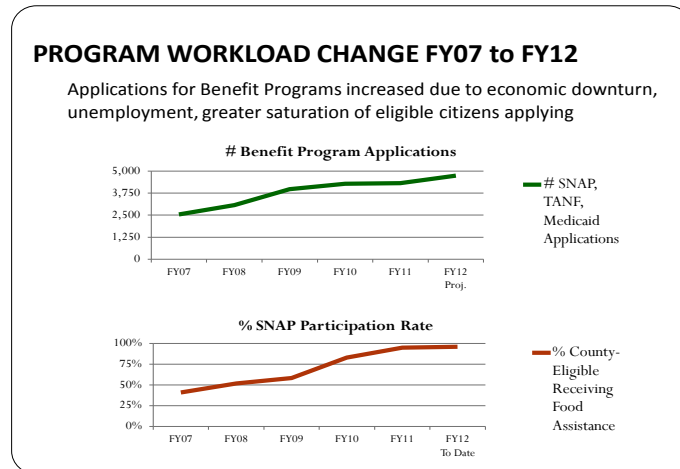
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Hanover County with a population just over 100,000 is a dynamic community in east-central Virginia, within the Greater Richmond area. Hanover is characterized by its picturesque landscape, seasonable climate, business-friendly location with competitive tax rates, and national ranking by America's Promise as one of the "Top 100 Best Communities for Young People." Seventy percent of the County is planned for rural residential and agricultural uses, and maintaining Hanover's pastoral quality is important to its citizens. The rural and widespread population aspects, however, may in part contribute to the higher demand for social services during a faltering economy.

Business in other governmental departments has slowed during the recent economic downturn, as nationwide social services workloads have experienced an upsurge. The demand for economic

support or benefit programs, specifically food assistance, temporary assistance payments, and medical insurance, has risen significantly during the recession beginning late 2007. At Hanover County Social Services, citizens' increased needs for benefit programs to sustain nutrition, daily living and health are illustrated by the increase in both 1.) applications received and 2.) the number eligible in Hanover County actually applying:



Additionally, the financial impact potential of the programs administered by Social Services is significant to the local economy. In Hanover in FY 2011, this was more than \$41 million, notably through the Child Care, Energy Assistance, Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families programs.

Hanover County departments have experienced a decline in the use of many of their business processes. With fewer houses and retail sites being built and fewer citizen inquiries being made, this has impacted, among others, **Building Inspections** (i.e. building code enforcement), **General Services** (i.e. print shop, cross-county delivery, mail room), and **Planning** (i.e. land use, zoning, architectural review). Further, a decrease in State funding has impacted the County's **Circuit Court Clerk's Office** and the number they can continue to employ. Additionally, an employee from **Animal Control** on extended light duty due to an injury in the field, plus an employee from **Information and Technology**,

whose position had become obsolete, were both relocated to Social Services. Hanover Department of Social Services collaborated, in coordination with Human Resources, with these other County departments by absorbing their staff, therefore avoiding layoffs, and providing needed staff to Social Services with its increased workload.

Social services provides service and eligibility determination for a myriad of State and Federal programs, with some income-based and others not. Many customers are economically challenged, have barriers to understanding or learning, and/or are faced with numerous daily struggles just to achieve the basics of everyday living. Social services values the empowerment of individuals, and focuses on building an individual's and/or family's strengths with the goal of helping our customers be the best they can be with minimum dependence on the human service delivery system. At the same time, staff must demonstrate understanding, empathy and compassion for the current state of the individuals/families being served, and must make services accessible and acceptable to customers, while reflecting cultural sensitivity and an appreciation for the diversity of people, their ideas and their values.

The six staff from six different County departments were redeployed to Social Services in FY 2012 and reassigned to two Units, Self-Sufficiency (one employee) and Customer Service (five employees). The keys to successfully moving these employees from their previous job type to the new culture of Social Services' clients with their unique needs were: assessment of and matching the employee's strengths to the new job, adequate training, and providing hands-on experience. One example is the newly assigned Self-Sufficiency Unit Employment Services Worker. Her background is in business, and she had worked in the County's Planning Department for five years. She was already very proficient working with the public, particularly with citizens who were often less than welcoming. She

performed land code or zoning enforcement, so finesse with confrontation and de-escalation was a staple in her skill set. She understood the similarities between the citizen who collects junk cars and doesn't want to give them up and the TANF-VIEW participant having trouble holding down a job. Both customers exhibit barriers in their environments or thoughts that prevent them from successfully resolving these issues. Communicating, coaching, and helping both customers with change is paramount in both positions. This new Social Worker's training has included one-on-one mentoring from a seasoned, six-year TANF-VIEW social worker, new VIEW worker on-line and classroom training, and on-the-job agency training.

The other five workers redeployed from Animal Control, Building Inspections, Circuit Court, General Services, and Information and Technology were assigned to Social Services customer service positions. These new workers perform a range of duties that include, but are not limited to: front end assessment of social services client needs; referrals to appropriate programs; computer use; customer follow up; scheduling of appointments; and case opening. People skills, an important facet of these external and internal customer service positions, appear second nature and transferrable for those redeployed from other departments. Good communication skills and an understanding of customer needs are vital; but, skills of empathy and sensitivity to client situations and demeanor are key. Many external customers enter the process upset, depressed, and/or defensive because it is uncomfortable and overwhelming asking for help. The former animal control officer cited her awareness that both jobs involve citizens' defense mechanisms: defensiveness about one's care for his/her animals can be compared to the humbling experience of applying for public assistance for one's family.

In conclusion, the steepest slope of the learning curve for the newly redeployed has been learning the language, programs and culture of social services, and mastering the forms to use and paperwork to submit. Financing the redeployments was at no cost for the lateral grade moves, although one employee did take a sizable cut in pay due to a major reclassification downward and to ensure equity with her new co-workers. The results of this collaboration between Hanover County Department of Social Services and the six other Hanover County departments has been a success for the citizens, involved departments, and the County as a whole.