



RUTHERFORD COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

ANNUAL **REPORT**

July 1, 2023 - June 30, 2024

Table of Contents

Message From The Director 3

Our Purpose 5

Financial Information 6

Budget - Programs 8

Budget - Administration 9

Child Welfare Services 10

Adult Services 14

Economic Services 15

Child Support 20

Our Accomplishments and Challenges 22



Rutherford County
Department Of Social Services
389 Fairground Rd . Spindale NC 28160 . (828) 287-6165



Message From The Director



Dear Commissioners, Colleagues, Community Members, and Partners:

As I reflect on this past fiscal year, I am filled with a profound sense of pride and gratitude for all that we have achieved together. This year has been one of significant progress, highlighting the strength, resilience, and unwavering dedication of our agency and the communities we serve. In the face of evolving challenges, our team demonstrated exceptional leadership. Despite staff shortages, we proactively sought solutions through close collaboration with state and community partners, while adopting innovative strategies to ensure that every individual in our

community received the critical support they needed. From expanding healthcare access through Medicaid Expansion, enhancing food assistance to supporting families in crisis, and protecting our least vulnerable population, our programs had a significant impact on the lives of countless individuals throughout our county. Some notable accomplishments include the high marks received on state reviews and audits, the elimination of children sleeping on cots in our offices through strategic community partnerships, and the awarding of grants that will further enhance our work and empower families to achieve self-sufficiency.

While we celebrate these achievements, we remain mindful of the challenges we faced. Staffing shortages, economic pressures, and the lingering effects of previous years tested us in ways we could not have anticipated. Yet, through it all, our dedicated staff, community partners, and volunteers rose to the occasion. It is their tireless work, passion, and unwavering commitment to our county that enabled us to overcome these obstacles and continue delivering the essential services upon which our community relies.

As we look toward the future, I am confident that the strong foundation we have built this year will continue to strengthen. Our focus remains clear: to provide compassionate, high-quality services that uplift and support every resident. Together, we will continue to innovate, collaborate, and meet the evolving needs of our community with resilience and determination.

Thank you for your continued partnership, trust, and belief in the work we do. I am excited about the opportunities ahead and optimistic about the future we are building together.

Respectfully,

Delores S. Hunt
Delores (Dee) Hunt, MA

DSS Director

Meet Our Board



Leon Godlock
Board Chair



Bryan King
Vice Chair



Joseph Maimone
Member



Georgia Steele
Member



David Herndon
Member



Our Purpose

Who We Are and What We Stand For

OUR MISSION STATEMENT - To support, protect, and enhance the quality of life in Rutherford County by partnering with families and the community to provide needed services and meaningful opportunities for our citizens.

OUR VISION STATEMENT - Rutherford County DSS is an agency that partners with all county citizens to promote a safe, healthy, self-reliant, economically secure community where citizens are empowered to improve the quality of their lives.

CORE VALUES

SERVICE	FLEXIBILITY	ACCOUNTABILITY	INTEGRITY	DIVERSITY
To provide services in a prompt and respectful manner that are responsive; ethical; effective; fair; and consistent with governing laws, rules and policies while utilizing county resources in a most effective manner.	To always look forward and adapt service to the ever-changing needs of the community and provide consumers with the information to better serve those needs.	To accept responsibility for our actions and behaviors and be accountable to each other, consumers, and to the community for professional conduct and the responsible use of taxpayer dollars.	To always serve the community and employees with honesty, fairness, and respect.	To recognize and respect differences and values among all people without regard to race, gender, religion, age, sexual orientation or disability.

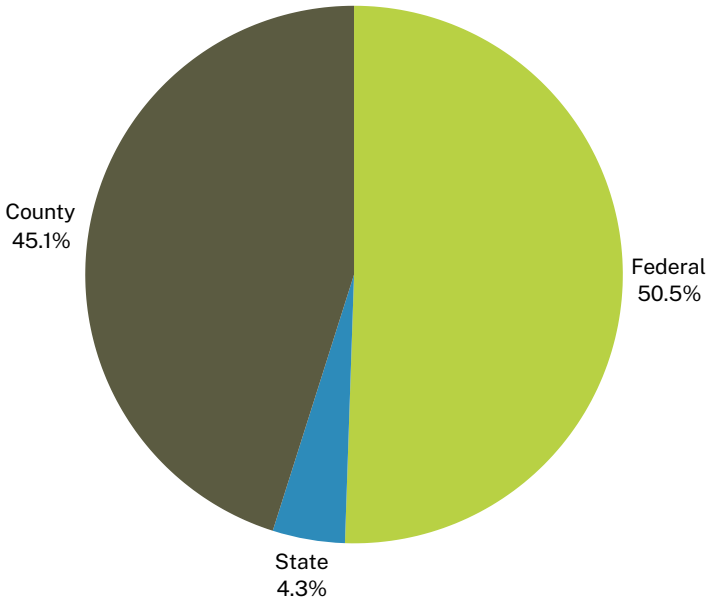
OUR GOALS

SERVICE	Ensure the highest quality of services to clients while developing and adhering to best practice standards.
PERFORMANCE	Use sound fiscal management, develop and implement a long-term strategic plan, and establish meaningful performance metrics to measure success.
VISIBILITY	Increase agency visibility through public speaking engagements, local events, and collaborative partnerships.
DEVELOPMENT	Foster a safe, secure, and welcoming workplace environment that supports agency staff and encourages professional development.
ACCESS	Champion social services with policymakers and other stakeholders, to promote increased access to services.
EXPANSION	Expand access to services and resources to underrepresented and underserved populations.
ADVOCATE	Advocate our mission and the rights and well-being of the client served by the agency.
COLLABORATION	Promote interagency collaboration to strengthen service delivery throughout the community.
TRANSPARENCY	Create an agency culture of accountability and transparency throughout all aspects of operations.
GOVERNANCE	Oversee the development and implementation of sound policies and procedures.

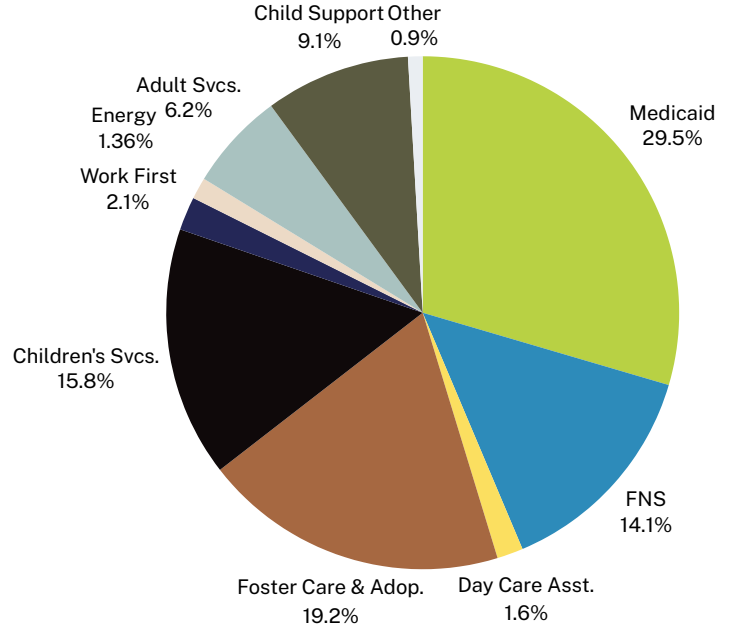
Fiscal Year 2023-2024

Financial Information

Total **ADMINISTRATIVE** Revenues



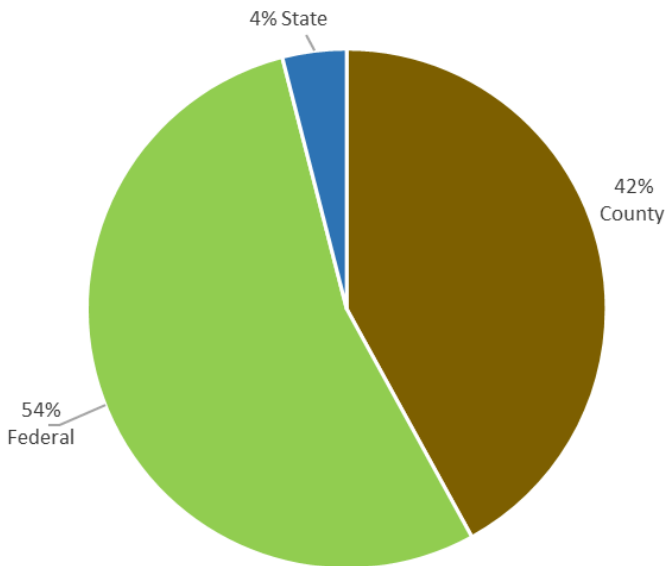
Total **ADMINISTRATIVE** Expenses



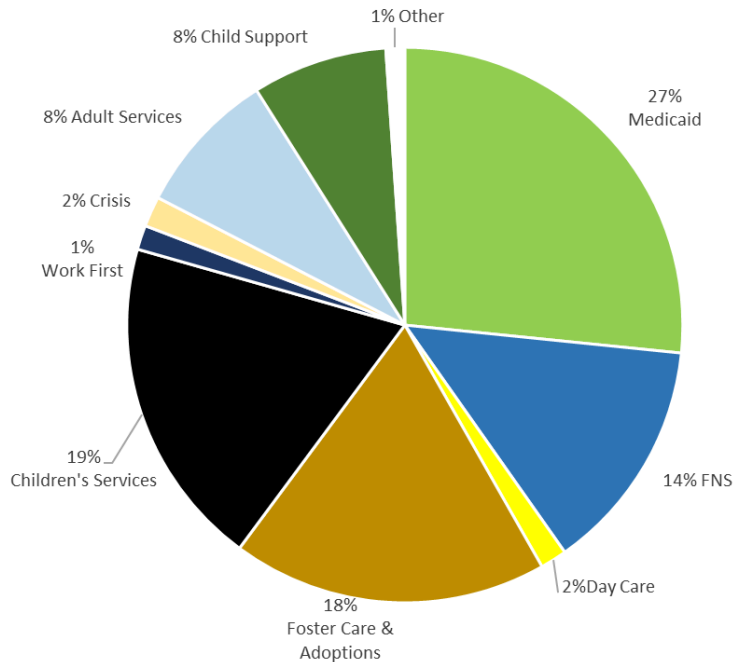
Fiscal Year 2022-2023

Financial Information

Total **ADMINISTRATIVE** Revenues



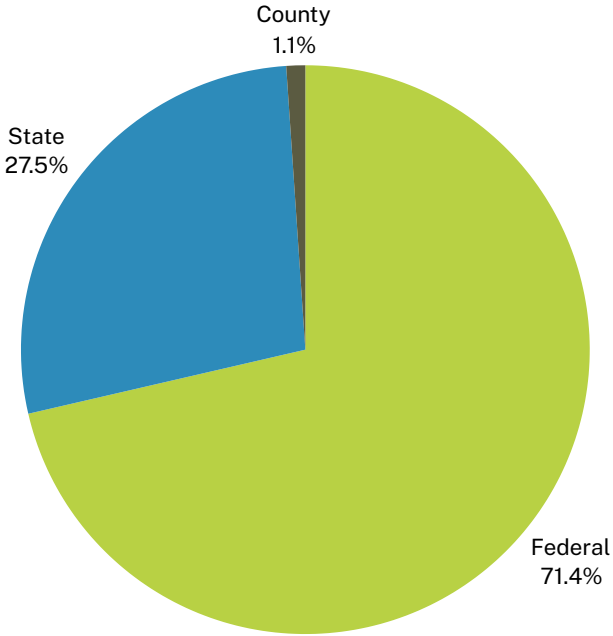
Total **ADMINISTRATIVE** Expenses



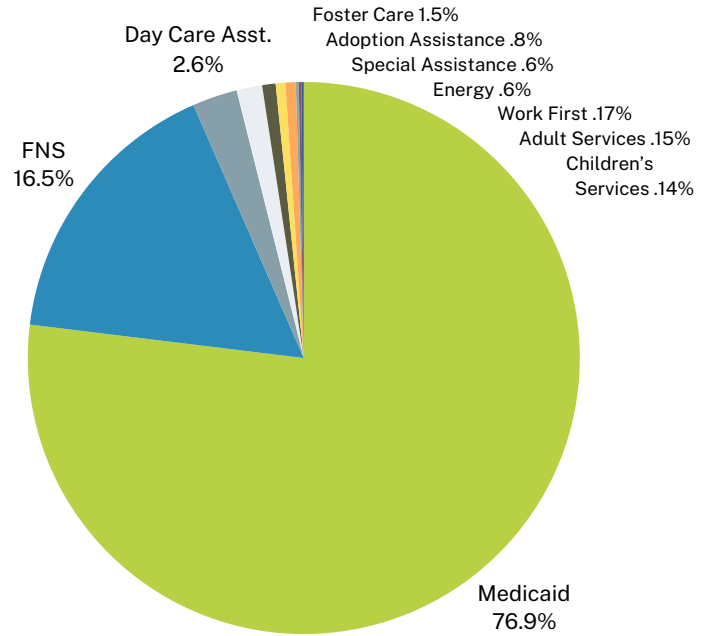
Fiscal Year 2023-2024

Financial Information

Total **PROGRAM** Revenues



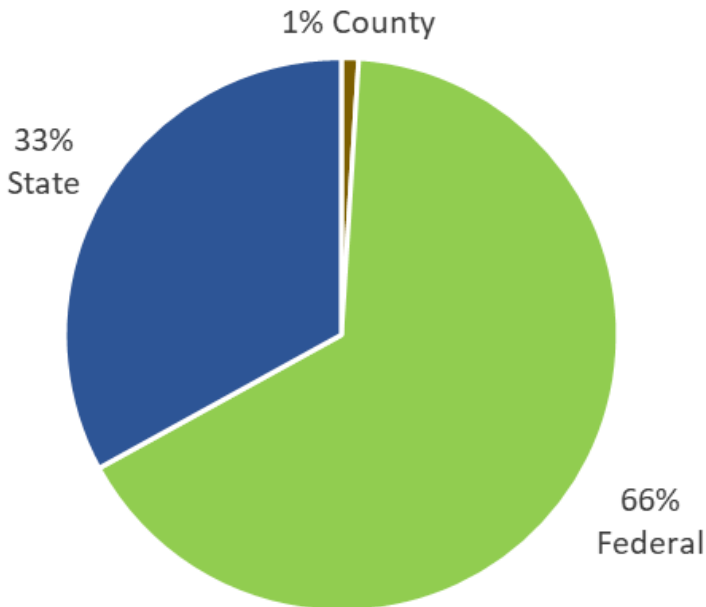
Total **PROGRAM** Expenses



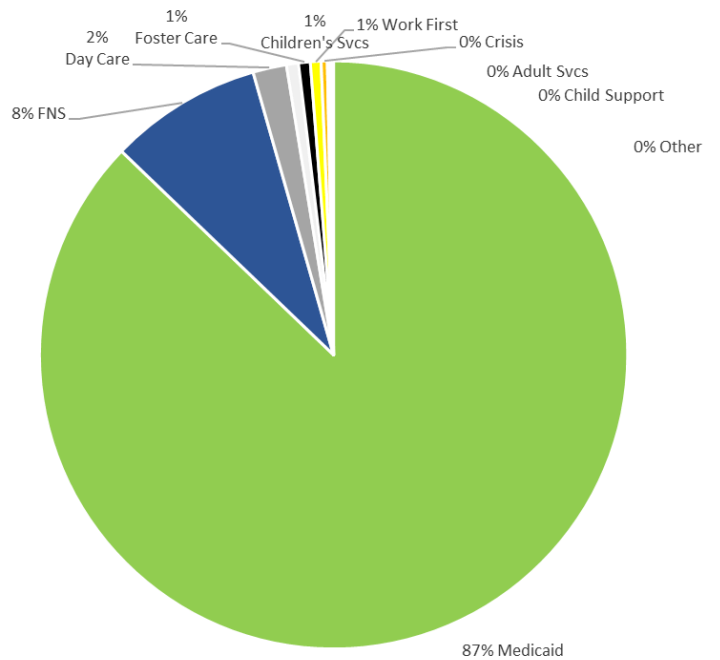
Fiscal Year 2022-2023

Financial Information

Total **PROGRAM** Revenues



Total **PROGRAM** Expenses



Program Budgeted Costs

Fiscal Year
2023 - 2024 vs 2022-2023

Revenues



	FY 23-24 VALUE	FY 23-24 %	FY 22-23 VALUE	FY 22-23 %
FEDERAL	\$ 108,020,115	71%	\$121,692,025	66%
STATE	\$ 41,680,379	28%	\$ 60,591,464	33%
COUNTY	\$ 1,625,252	1%	\$ 925,828	1%
TOTAL REVENUES	\$ 151,325,746	100%	\$183,209,317	100%

Expenses

PROGRAMS	FY 23-24 VALUE	FY 23-24 %	FY 22-23 Value	FY 22-23 %
MEDICAID	\$ 116,422,946	76.94%	\$ 159,720,154	87.2%
FNS	\$ 24,998,454	16.52%	\$ 15,402,428	8.4%
DAY CARE ASST.	\$ 3,981,106	2.63%	\$ 3,385,651	1.8%
FOSTER CARE	\$ 2,267,101	1.50%	\$ 1,203,329	.7%
ADOPTION ASSISTANCE	\$ 1,189,027	0.79%	\$ 1,183,735	.6%
SPECIAL ASSISTANCE	\$ 855,897	0.57%	\$ 1,074,691	.6%
CRISIS/LIEAP/LIHWAP	\$ 911,431	0.60%	\$ 623,289	.3%
WORK FIRST	\$ 258,071	0.17%	\$ 292,972	.2%
ADULT SVCS.	\$ 227,522	0.15%	\$ 123,316	.1%
CHILDREN'S SVCS.	\$ 214,191	0.14%	\$ 199,752	.1%
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 151,325,746	100%	\$ 183,209,317	100%

Administrative Budgeted Costs

Fiscal Year
2023 - 2024 vs 2022-2023

Revenues



	FY 23-24 VALUE	FY 23-24 %	FY 22-23 VALUE	FY 22-23 %
FEDERAL	\$ 7,293,885	50.54%	\$ 6,606,138	54.17%
STATE	\$ 627,788	4.35%	\$ 490,247	4.02%
COUNTY	\$ 6,510,232	45.11%	\$ 5,098,812	41.81%
TOTAL REVENUES	\$ 14,431,905	100%	\$ 12,195,197	100%

Expenses

PROGRAMS	FY 2023-2024 VALUE	FY 23-24 %	FY 22-23 VALUE	FY 22-23 %
MEDICAID	\$ 4,264,307	29.55%	\$ 3,244,883	26.61%
FNS	\$ 2,033,255	14.09%	\$ 1,662,676	13.63%
DAY CARE ASST.	\$ 237,759	1.65%	\$ 188,116	1.54%
FOSTER CARE & ADOP.	\$ 2,774,158	19.22%	\$ 2,238,916	18.36%
CHILDREN'S SVCS.	\$ 2,275,135	15.76%	\$ 2,348,817	19.26%
WORK FIRST	\$ 304,443	2.11%	\$ 173,198	1.42%
ENERGY	\$ 196,957	1.36%	\$ 214,836	1.76%
ADULT SVCS.	\$ 893,238	6.19%	\$ 1,031,366	8.46%
CHILD SUPPORT	\$ 1,319,975	9.15%	\$ 958,625	7.86%
OTHER	\$ 132,678	0.92%	\$ 133,764	1.10%
TOTAL EXPENSES	\$ 14,431,905	100%	\$ 12,195,197	100%

Child Welfare Services

Child Protective Services

Child Protective Services (CPS) responds to abuse, neglect and/or dependency to ensure the safety of children in Rutherford County. CPS aims to protect children from further maltreatment and to support and improve parental/caregiver abilities to assure a safe and nurturing home for each child.

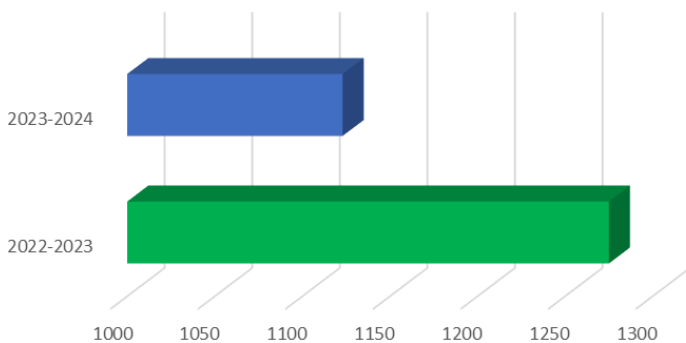


Intake

Child Protective Services (CPS) Intake is the initial stage in the child welfare process where reports of suspected child abuse, neglect, or dependency are received, assessed, and documented. During this phase, social workers gather critical information from reporters—who can be anyone from concerned citizens to mandated reporters like teachers or doctors—about the child's situation.

The intake process involves determining the credibility and urgency of the report, assessing the potential risk to the child, and deciding whether the allegations warrant a formal assessment or investigation.

Children's Services - Intake (Reports Received)
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023



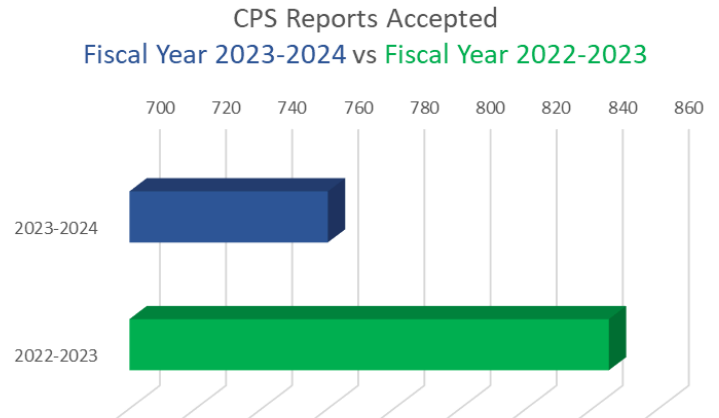
The goal of CPS Intake is to accurately assess potential dangers to ensure that children who are at risk receive immediate protection and support, while also ensuring that families receive appropriate services and interventions if needed. Intake workers are also knowledgeable about community resources for cases that warrant referrals only.

CPS ASSESSMENTS/INVESTIGATIONS

Child Protective Services (CPS) Assessments/Investigations are a crucial step in ensuring the safety and well-being of children who may be at risk of abuse or neglect. Once a report is deemed credible during the CPS Intake process, a formal investigation is launched to thoroughly assess the child's living conditions, the family's circumstances, and any potential harm or danger to the child. This investigation typically involves interviewing the child, parents, and other relevant individuals, as well as conducting home visits and reviewing records.

The primary objective of the CPS investigation is to determine whether the allegations of abuse or neglect are substantiated and, if so, to decide what protective actions are necessary.

This could range from offering support services to the family, to removing the child from the home if they are in immediate danger. Throughout the investigation, DSS works to balance the child's safety with the goal of keeping families together whenever possible, always prioritizing the best interests of the child.

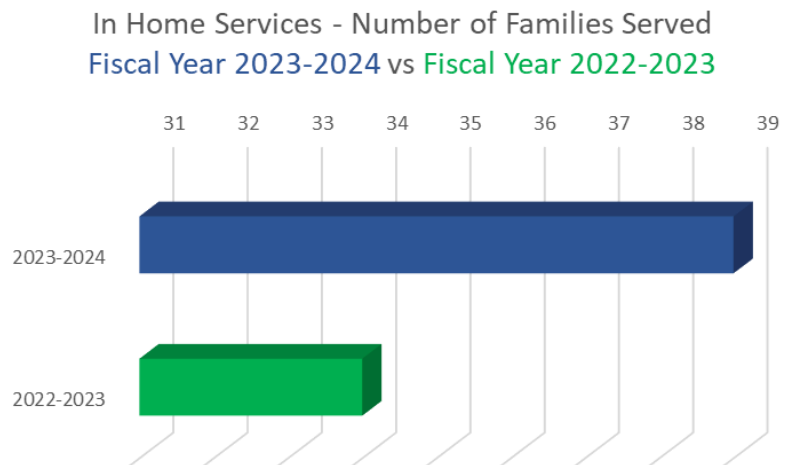


In Home Services

Child Protective Services (CPS) In-Home Services is mandated and designed to support families where concerns of abuse or neglect have been identified but where the child can remain safely in the home with the appropriate interventions. These services are initiated following a CPS investigation that determines the child is not in immediate danger but that the family requires assistance to address underlying issues and prevent future harm.

CPS In-Home Services include a range of supports, such as counseling, parenting education, substance use/misuse treatment, and assistance with accessing community resources.

The goal of these services is to strengthen the family's ability to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing environment for their children while reducing the risk of future CPS involvement. DSS social workers work closely with the family, regularly monitoring progress and adjusting services as needed to ensure the child's well-being remains the top priority.



Permanency Planning

Permanency Planning services consists of children that have been placed in the Department's custody through a court order. When a child comes into the Department's custody, the primary goal is reunification. Within the Permanency Planning section of the Department, there is one unit specifically designed to license foster parents. To become a licensed foster parent, you must attend a 30-hour course as well as go through interviews, records checks, and home inspections. Our need for foster parents is critical.

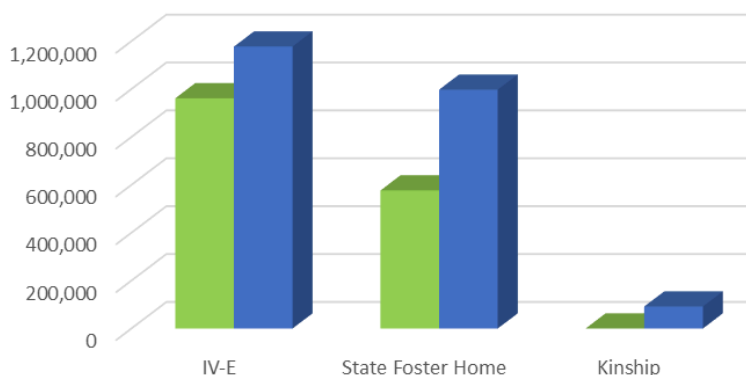
	FY 2023-2024	FY 2022-2023
AVERAGE CHILDREN IN CUSTODY	176	149
AVERAGE LICENSED FOSTER HOMES	21	30
AVERAGE NEW FOSTER HOMES LICENSED	7	7

Foster Care

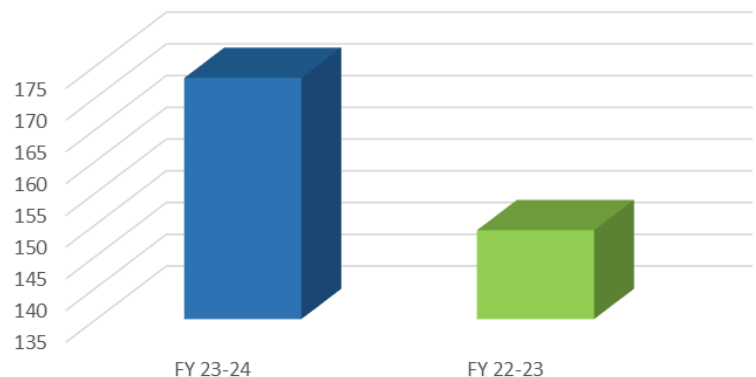
Foster Care is a temporary arrangement where children who cannot live with their birth families due to issues like abuse, neglect, or other safety concerns are placed in the care of trained and licensed foster families. The primary goal of foster care is to provide a safe, stable, and nurturing environment for these children while efforts are made to resolve the issues in their birth families that led to their removal.

DSS is responsible for overseeing the placement process, ensuring that foster families meet the necessary requirements, and providing ongoing support to both the children and the foster parents. While Foster Care is meant to be a temporary solution, it can sometimes lead to other permanent options including adoption, if reunification with the birth family is not possible.

Foster Care Dollars Spent
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023

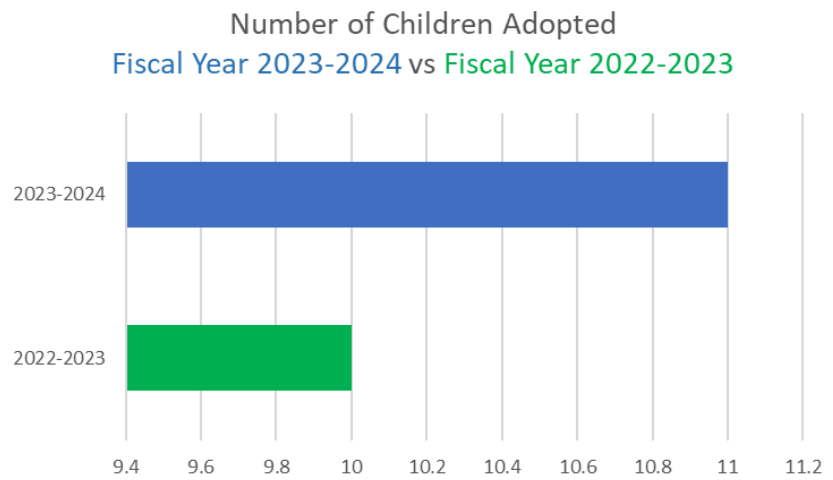


Average Number of Children In Foster Care
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023



Adoption

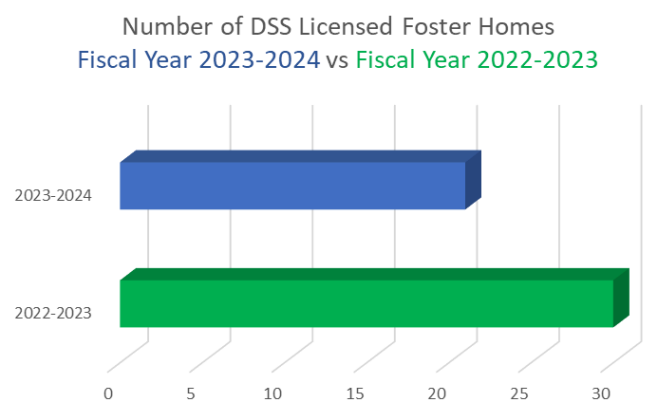
Adoption refers to the legal process by which a child's parental rights are permanently transferred from their biological parents to adoptive parents. This process is often facilitated to find stable, loving homes for children who cannot remain with their birth families due to circumstances such as abuse, neglect, or the inability of the biological parents to provide proper care. DSS plays a crucial role in evaluating potential adoptive families, ensuring they meet the necessary criteria, and supporting both the child and the adoptive parents through the transition. Adoption is designed to prioritize the child's best interests, providing them with a safe, forever home environment where they can thrive.



Licensing

Foster Care Licensing is the process by which individuals or families are evaluated, trained, and approved to become foster caregivers. This licensing process is essential to ensure that foster parents are capable of providing a safe, nurturing, and stable environment for children who need temporary care due to circumstances like abuse or neglect in their birth families.

DSS conducts thorough background checks, home inspections, and interviews as part of the licensing process, along with providing mandatory training to prepare prospective foster parents for the unique challenges of caring for foster children. Once licensed, foster parents are supervised and supported by DSS to ensure they continue to meet the standards required to provide quality care.



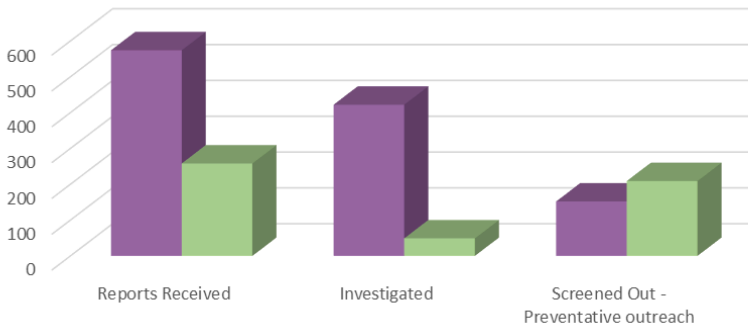
This rigorous process is designed to protect the well-being of children and ensure they are placed in suitable homes that can address their physical, emotional, and developmental needs.

Adult Services

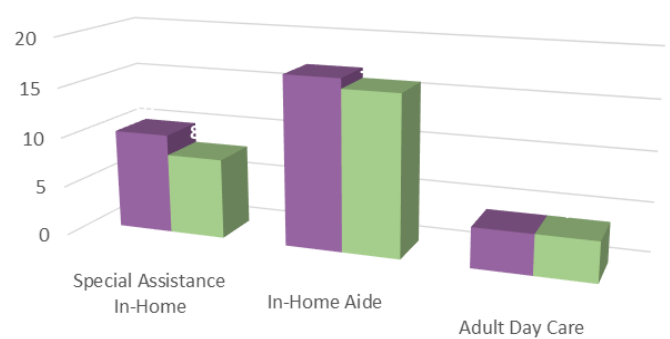
Adult Services offers a range of mandated and voluntary supportive services which intervenes and advocates on behalf of disabled adults who are at risk of mistreatment. Adult Protective Services (APS) assists adults with disabilities who may be abused or neglected by a caretaker, may be neglecting themselves, or may be exploited.

Guardianship involves the provision of services to adults deemed incompetent. It includes legal proceedings when an adult is declared incompetent by the Court and when no other adults or family members are willing or able to take responsibility for duties relative to the adult's personal affairs and/or property; the Department assumes responsibility. The nature and scope of a guardian's responsibility are determined by the Court, based on applicable provisions of the law and the circumstances of the individual case.

Adult Services
Reports for FY 2023-2024 vs FY 2022-2023



Other Adult Services Provided
For FY 2023-2024 vs FY 2022-2023



To report abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a vulnerab

During business hours of 8:30am-5:00pm please call 828-287-6165 to speak with an intake worker. After 5:00pm and on weekends, please call 828-229-7205 and ask for the emergency duty social worker.



Economic Services

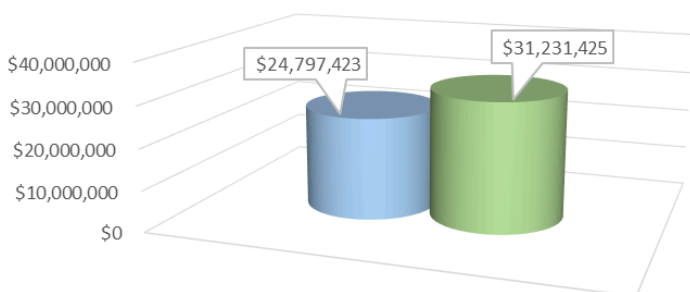
The Economic Services Division of Rutherford County Department of Social Services provides income-based economic services including Food and Nutrition, Medicaid, Subsidized Daycare, Work First Family Assistance, and the Energy Programs.



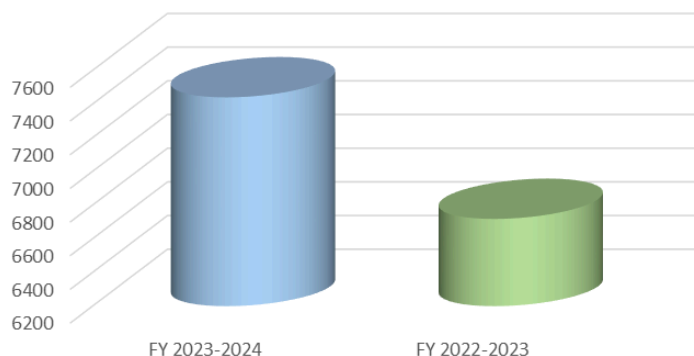
FOOD AND NUTRITION SERVICES

The Food and Nutrition Services Program (FNS) strives to end hunger, improve nutrition and health, and assist low-income households to buy the food they need. Benefits are issued through Electronic Benefit Transfer cards (EBT cards). FNS benefits are 100% federally funded; however, positions to support the eligibility and maintenance of cases are funded by local, state, and federal dollars.

Amount of FNS Dollars Paid
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023



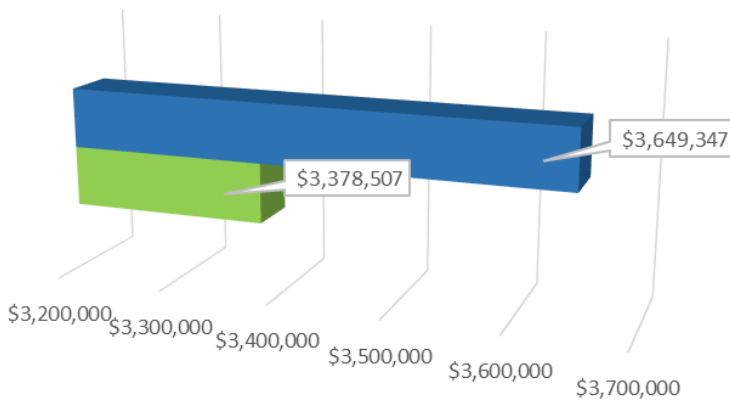
Number of FNS Households Served
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023



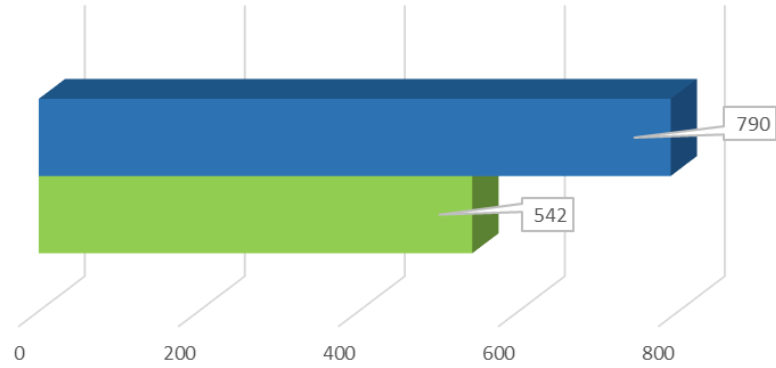
SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE

The Subsidized Child Care Program uses state and federal funds to provide financial assistance to eligible families.

Subsidized Child Care Dollars Paid
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023



Number of Children Receiving Daycare Assistance
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023

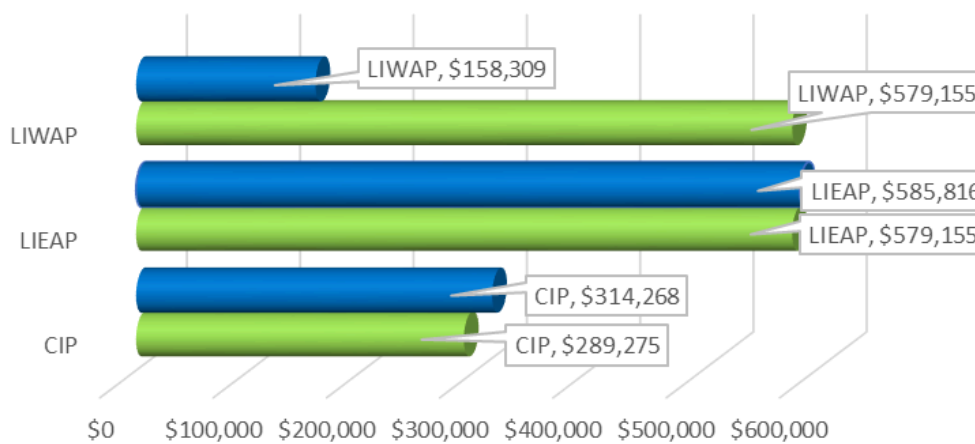


ENERGY PROGRAMS

The Rutherford County Department of Social Services administers federally funded emergency financial assistance programs to assist families with heating or cooling crises. The Crisis Intervention Program (CIP), Low Income Energy Assistant Program (LIEAP), and Low Income Water Assistance Program (LIWAP) programs pay directly to local utility companies.

In FY 2023-2024, the amount of LIEAP funds issued increased by \$6,661 and CIP funds issued increased by \$24,993. The Department was issued additional funds to ensure eligible citizens could receive financial assistance with utility bills. The State issued automated LIEAP payments to prior recipients, which reduced the number of applications to LIEAP. The LIWAP program came to an end in fiscal year 2023-2024.

Energy Dollars Paid
Fiscal Year 2023 - 2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023

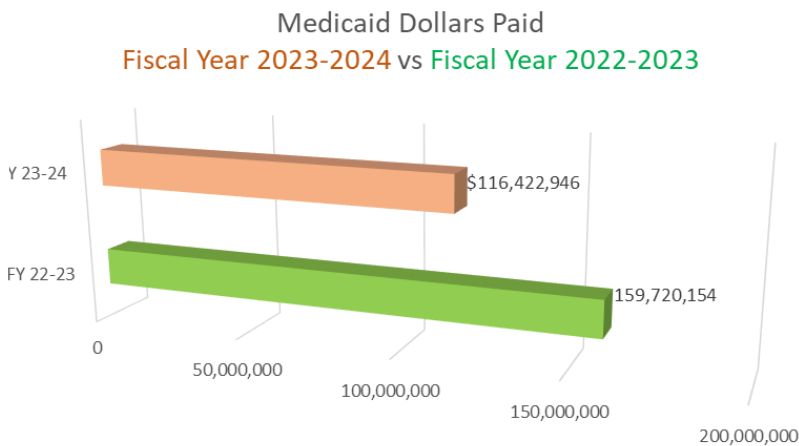


MEDICAID

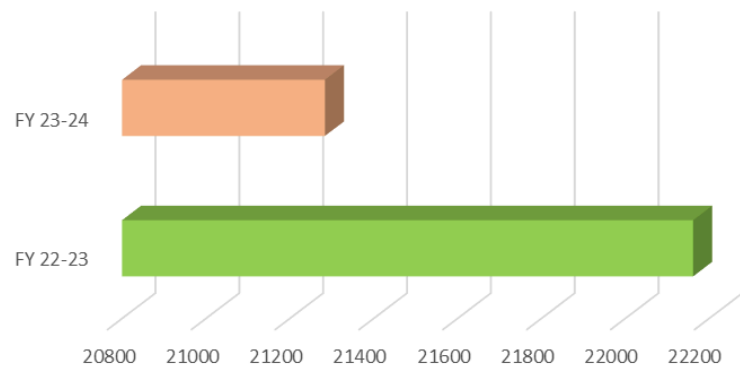
Medicaid is a health insurance program for income eligible individuals who cannot afford healthcare costs. This benefit ensures the disabled, elderly, children, pregnant women, and families get the medical attention they need. The Department administers 22 different Medicaid and sub-categories which requires evaluation of eligibility for each program.

During FY 2023-2024:

- 21,284 Rutherford County Medicaid recipients (FY 2022-2023 22,162).
- Of the Rutherford County Medicaid recipients, 43% are children, 12.5% are aged, blind, or disabled, and 6% are Family Planning only, limited service (FY2022-2023 62% Children, 23% aged, blind, or disabled, and 15% Family Planning only, limited service).
- New applications averaged 416 per month (FY2022-2023 271 per month).



Monthly Medicaid Recipients
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023

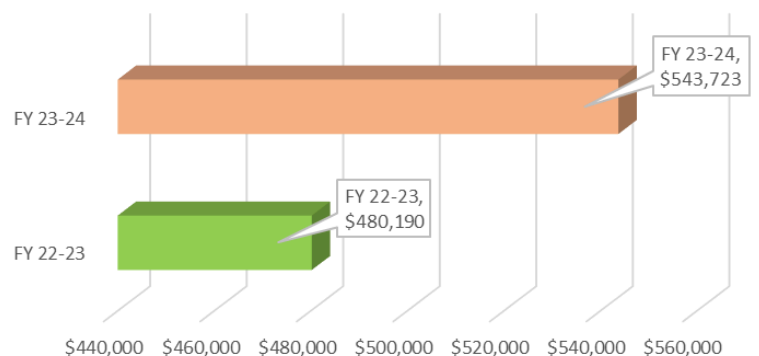


MEDICAID TRANSPORTATION

Non-Emergency Medical Transportation (NEMT) is provided to Medicaid beneficiaries who need assistance in accessing transportation to and from medical appointments. In FY 2023-2024, the Department arranged for 12,391 transports serving an average of 416 recipients per month. A total of \$543,723 was paid to the transportation providers. There were an average of 410 recipients per month in Fiscal Year 2022-2023.



Medicaid Transportation Dollars Paid
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023

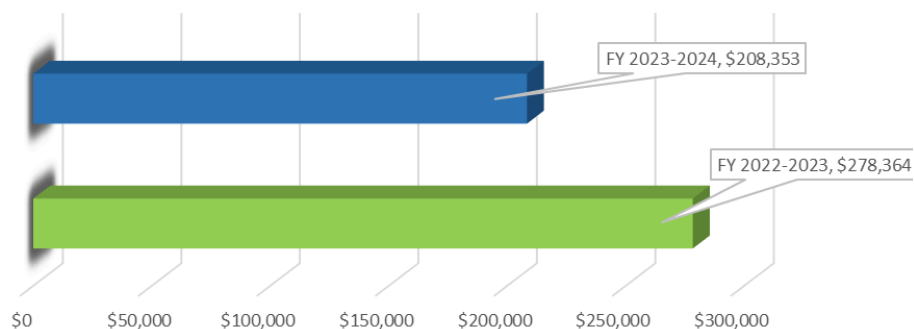


WORK FIRST FAMILY ASSISTANCE

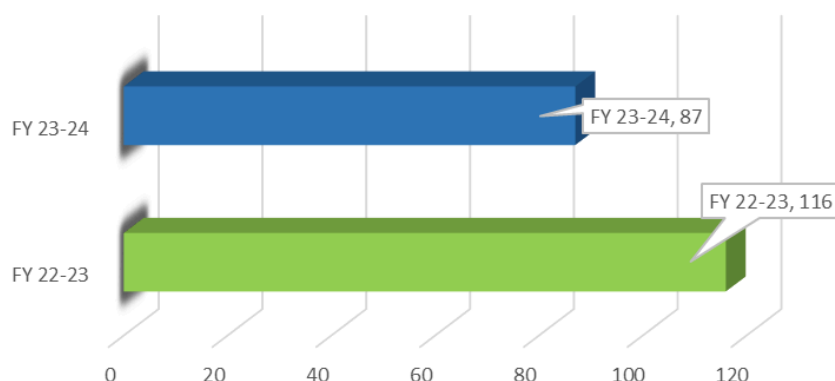
This is a cash assistance, employee-based program. Families found eligible receive a monthly check. Eligibility is based on household income and reserve. The program's purpose is to enable citizens to become self-sufficient by linking them with resources and skills that help them secure and maintain employment. Families that receive a monthly check must cooperate with Child Support Enforcement, register with the Employment Security Commission, complete a substance abuse screening, and actively participate in work-related activities leading to self-sufficiency.

- Average of 23 new applications per month
- Served an average of 87 families per month
- Average monthly payment was \$236
- Total expenditure for FY 2023-2024 was \$208,353
- Work First Emergency Assistance helped 114 families with shelter and utilities, totaling \$66,613.92
- \$1,584.12 was paid to assist clients in finding and keeping employment

Work First Dollars Spent
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023



Average Number of Families Served
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023



MEDICAID EXPANSION

Medicaid Expansion in North Carolina officially began on December 1, 2023. This significant change allowed more low-income adults, particularly those without dependent children, to gain access to health insurance. Under this expansion, adults earning up to 138% of the federal poverty level are now eligible for Medicaid coverage. This expansion is part of a broader effort to reduce the number of uninsured individuals in the state, improve health outcomes, and ease the financial burden on healthcare providers. Since its launch, the program has enrolled over 500,000 North Carolinians, providing them with access to essential healthcare services, including preventive care and chronic disease management.

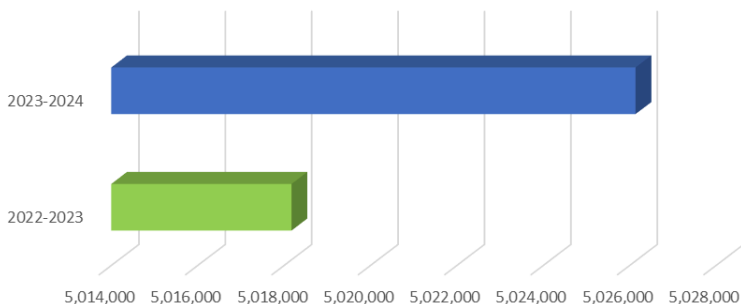
The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS) identified 4,054 individuals in Rutherford County as eligible for Medicaid Expansion and set a two-year timeframe for DSS to achieve this enrollment target. Remarkably, within just eight months, the county has successfully enrolled 4,007 beneficiaries, reaching 99% of the goal. This accomplishment is due in large part to the NCDHHS's initiative to allow certain beneficiaries to transition seamlessly into Medicaid Expansion, the dedicated efforts of our economic services department, and county partners who provided essential support with applications. This collaborative effort has been instrumental in achieving this milestone ahead of schedule. A report informing the county of the program's progress is provided monthly.



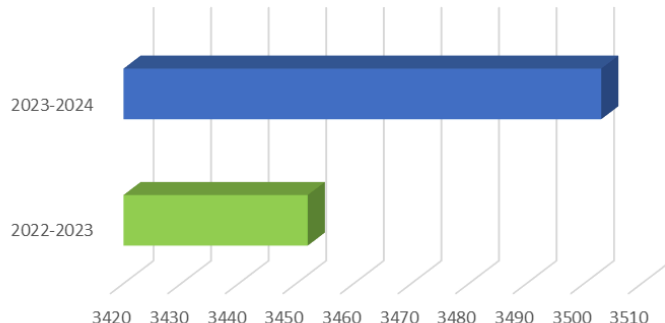
CHILD SUPPORT

The Rutherford County Department of Social Services is responsible for the provision of Child Support Services. Services can be provided to any North Carolina parent or custodian regardless of income level. Available services include location, establishment of paternity, establishment of legal obligations, collection, and enforcement.

Child Support Dollars Collected
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023



Number of Children Receiving Child Support
Fiscal Year 2023-2024 vs Fiscal Year 2022-2023



- \$5,026,139 was collected for children in fiscal year 2023-2024
- Administered 3,503 total cases
- 3,411 children benefitted from Child Support efforts
- 81.93% of cases were under a court order



DUKE ENDOWMENT GRANT RECEIVED

We are very pleased to share with you the grant award news from The Duke Endowment application we submitted earlier this year. As you recall, their Board of Trustees was to meet on May 7th. Pisgah Legal has been notified of the \$1.4 million award to pilot a pre-petition legal representation and advocacy program for children and families at risk of entering foster care be distributed over three years. This is such an exciting opportunity for us to work together on a Pilot Program with Henderson County and Rutherford County to reduce unnecessary removal and placement of children from low-income families into foster care. We are extremely grateful for your agreeing to do this work with us. We hope our work together will be a model that can be used for every county in NC.

Thank you for partnering with us to keep low-income families together and children out of foster care.

Sincerely,

Jackie

Jaclyn Kiger, JD, MSW

GRANT RECIEVED THROUGH OPIATE SETTLEMENT FUNDING

Preferred Choice Healthcare implemented a pilot program to provide Family Centered Treatment-Recovery to all families who are engaged in the In Home Services Program at the Rutherford County Department of Social Services on July 1, 2024, with particular attention to families who are impacted by substance use. This project is funded through a generous grant opportunity provided through Rutherford County Opiate Abatement Settlement funding.

Family Centered Treatment is an evidence based, trauma-specific, in home, family treatment provided to families who desire or who are in need of systemic change to build upon protective factors to increase physical, emotional, and psychological safety within the family system. Within this program, Family Centered Treatment is available to all families, regardless of insurance or ability to pay, with seamless delivery.

The literature is clear-children have better health outcomes when they are able to reside with a safe and healthy caregiver in their natural environments. If we are able to work with the family system, and not just a member of a family who may be experiencing addiction, we know that the likelihood of sustained recovery increases. Recovery is a family systems issue. If an individual experiences recovery, the experience of trauma within the family system is reduced.

In partnership with the Rutherford County Department of Social Services, our ultimate goal is to increase community safety, decrease the requirement of out of home placements for children, and improve opportunities for recovery in our community.

Since beginning services, Preferred Choice Healthcare is seeing the obvious representation of the despair caused by addiction and substance misuse. We are seeing families who have made efforts towards recovery, but who have lacked the wrap-around, systemic approach to recovery that Family Centered Treatment-Recovery provides. We are meeting with families who have a strong desire for recovery, and with children who just want to be safe at home with their families.

Thank you,

Sarah Horne, Ph.D, LCSW, LCAS, CCS

ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

- The agency is implementing strategies to improve our service delivery and increase the effectiveness and access to services.
- The agency practices data-driven decision making.
- Our workers are up to date on training and committed to professional development.
- Our fiscal management team is sound and passed their recent audit.
- The agency is committed to collaborative relationships with various community partners including United Way, Dogwood Health Trust, Mosaic Hope, Rutherford Regional Health System, Peace in the City, and various churches.
- The agency implemented a new program, RPOP, to recruit foster parents which included a kick-off banquet for prospective foster parents. We are also getting out into the community to share our need for foster parents; 'Be the Village' is our theme.
- We implemented a quarterly all-staff meeting to ensure that all staff in our three buildings can meet regularly to receive agency, county, state, and federal updates.
- Our agency was awarded a grant to build a home on our campus to temporarily house foster children awaiting placement.
- Preferred Choice Healthcare implemented a pilot program to provide Family Centered Treatment-Recovery to all families who are engaged in the In Home Services Program at the Rutherford County Department of Social Services on July 1, 2024, with particular attention to families who are impacted by substance use. This project is funded through a generous grant opportunity provided through Rutherford County Opiate Abatement Settlement funding.
- We received a grant award through Duke Endowment to pilot a pre-petition legal representation and advocacy program for children and families at risk of entering foster care be distributed over three years and will be partnering with Pisgah Legal Services.
- TICCA's/trauma screens for in-home services are now being implemented.
- Successfully implemented Medicaid Expansion and almost met our projected amount of Medicaid Expansion recipients
- Passed our REDA Audit with 98% which audited 200 cases. This was a very difficult Audit.
- Continue to meet all of our HB 630 goals (MOU) even with the challenge of being short staffed especially in FNS.
- Continue to meet cut off for the most part in FNS with the high turnover rate due to the awesome teamwork in this area.
- Medicaid continues to pass the Report card monthly ensuring the majority of our applications are processed within the state's mandated time frame.
- FNS/Energy and WFFA also continue to meet their timeliness goals.
- Zero findings on our single audit and fiscal monitoring.
- We are fully staffed in our Legal department.

CHALLENGES AND CONCERNS

- High turnover rates due to burnout, heavy caseloads, emotional strain, and relatively low wages.
- Locating, hiring, and retaining qualified staff.
- Fostering ongoing employee engagement and commitment.
- Inadequate budget to retain staff or implement new initiatives.
- Fiscal restraints and limited resources.
- Substance misuse and its impact on child abuse and neglect.
- Lack of foster homes creates children awaiting placements that must be supervised by agency or contract workers until a placement is located.
- Increased petitions leading to more kids in custody.
- Employees leaving the agency to go to neighboring counties that pay more.
- Elder abuse and exploitation.
- Increasing elderly population with complex issues.
- Economic uncertainty and poverty.
- Homelessness and housing insecurity.
- Delays in the judicial system.
- Legislative and policy demands with staffing shortage.
- Need for digital transformation.
- Lack of multilingual staff creates cultural and language barriers.
- Growing demand for mental health services due to mental health and behavioral issues.
- Dental providers who do not accept Medicaid.



Rutherford County Department of Social Services Strategic Plan (2024-2028)

Our agency plays a vital role in fostering the well-being and resilience of the community. As the primary agency responsible for delivering essential social services, our mission is to ensure that every individual and family has access to the support and resources they need to lead healthy, stable, and fulfilling lives.

In an ever-evolving social landscape, the challenges we face are complex and multifaceted. To address these challenges effectively, we must remain adaptable, innovative, and focused on continuous improvement. This strategic plan serves as our roadmap for the coming years, outlining our commitment to delivering high quality services, strengthening our partnerships, and advocating for the rights and needs of those we serve.

Through this plan, we aim to enhance our operational efficiency, expand access to services, and foster a culture of accountability and transparency. By aligning our efforts with best practices and evidence-based strategies, we will ensure that our services remain responsive and impactful. Moreover, this plan reflects our dedication to building a supportive and inclusive workplace environment that empowers our staff to excel in their roles.

We are confident that, through the implementation of this strategic plan, DSS will continue to be a leader in social services, making a meaningful and lasting difference in the lives of those we serve. Together with our community partners, policymakers, and stakeholders, we will work tirelessly to fulfill our mission and uphold the values that guide our work.

Goal 1: Ensure High-Quality Services

We are committed to delivering the highest quality of services by developing, implementing, and continuously improving best practice standards. Regular evaluations and client feedback mechanisms will be instituted to ensure services meet or exceed expectations.

Key Actions:

- Develop and refine service delivery standards.
- Implement continuous training programs for staff on best practices.
- Establish a client feedback system for ongoing quality assessment.

Goal 2: Exercise Sound Fiscal Management

We will practice responsible fiscal management by creating a long-term strategic financial plan, establishing performance metrics, and ensuring that all financial decisions align with our strategic goals.

Key Actions:

- Develop a comprehensive financial strategy.
- Implement performance metrics to monitor financial health and service impact.
- Regularly review and adjust financial plans to adapt to changing conditions.

Goal 3: Increase Agency Visibility

We aim to enhance the visibility of our agency through active participation in public speaking engagements, local events, and forming collaborative partnerships. This will help build our brand, attract new clients, and foster stronger community ties.

Key Actions:

- Develop a schedule of public speaking engagements and event participation.
- Form partnerships with local organizations to co-host events.
- Increase social media and online presence.

Goal 4: Foster a Positive Workplace Environment

We are dedicated to creating a safe, secure, and welcoming workplace environment that encourages professional growth and supports the well-being of all staff members.

Key Actions:

- Implement regular workplace safety and well-being assessments.
- Develop professional development programs and opportunities.
- Encourage open communication and feedback within the agency.

Goal 5: Champion Social Services

We will advocate for the importance of social services by engaging with policymakers, stakeholders, and the public. Our goal is to promote increased access to our services and highlight the critical role of social services in the community.

Key Actions:

- Build relationships with policymakers and advocacy groups.
- Develop public awareness campaigns to highlight our services.
- Actively participate in policy discussions and forums.

Goal 6: Expand Access to Services

We will work to ensure that our services reach underrepresented and underserved populations by expanding our outreach efforts, reducing barriers to access, and developing programs tailored to the unique needs of these groups.

Key Actions:

- Identify and target underrepresented communities.
- Develop outreach programs to connect with underserved populations.
- Collaborate with community organizations to expand service delivery.

Goal 7: Advocate for Client Rights

Our agency will advocate for the rights and well-being of our clients by ensuring that our services are client-centered, and by promoting policies that protect and enhance the lives of those we serve.

Key Actions:

- Regularly review and update client rights policies.
- Provide advocacy training for staff.
- Engage in public advocacy efforts on behalf of our clients.

Goal 8: Promote Interagency Collaboration

We believe in the power of collaboration to enhance service delivery. By fostering strong relationships with other agencies, we can create a more cohesive and comprehensive support network for our clients.

Key Actions:

- Establish regular communication channels with partner agencies.
- Develop joint programs and initiatives with other service providers.
- Share resources and best practices to improve service outcomes.

Goal 9: Cultivate Accountability and Transparency

Our agency is committed to creating a culture of accountability and transparency in all aspects of operations, ensuring that our actions align with our mission and values.

Key Actions:

- Develop and implement transparency and accountability policies.
- Regularly report on agency performance and financial status to stakeholders.
- Encourage staff accountability through clear expectations and regular evaluations.

Goal 10: Implement Sound Policies and Procedures

We will oversee the development and implementation of sound policies and procedures that support our mission, protect our clients, and ensure the efficient operation of our agency.

Key Actions:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of current policies and procedures.
- Update or create new policies as needed to reflect best practices.
- Ensure all staff are trained on and adhere to agency policies.
- Managers and leaders of each program area developed goals, objectives, and activities with their team to ensure the achievement of goals of the strategic plan.

OUR EMPLOYEES

The Rutherford County Department of Social Services has 156 employees who serve the citizens of Rutherford County. We have 57 social work staff positions providing services in the areas of Child Protective Services, In-Home Services, Permanency Planning, and Adult Services. We have 73 economic services staff positions determining eligibility and arranging services in the areas of Food & Nutrition Services, Family and Children’s Medicaid, Adult Medicaid, Transportation, Emergency Assistance, Work First, and Program Integrity. We have 10 Child Support positions and three Legal support positions. Our operational support and administrative staff include 13 employees.



Looking back on this past fiscal year, we are filled with gratitude for the dedication and hard work of our team. As we navigate the future, DSS faces various challenges that require our attention and innovative solutions. We remain committed to building strong partnerships, working with our community partners, county team, board of directors, and state team to meet the needs of the communities we serve. We are determined and confident in our ability to overcome challenges and make a positive impact in Rutherford County in the years ahead.

Your DSS Leadership Team



Dee Hunt
Director



Tiffany Dodd
Program Administrator



Kandi Bridges
Program Administrator



Josh Howell
Legal



Rhonda Ruppe
Child Support



Pam Price
Fiscal Officer



Kayla Fox
Administrative Officer



Kim Murray
Executive Assistant

Our Organizational Chart

Director
Dee Hunt

Executive Assistant
Kim Murray

Administrative Officer
Kayla Fox

Finance Officer
Pam Price

Child Support Supervisor
Rhonda Ruppe

Attorney
Josh Howell

Maintenance (1)

Processing Assistants (1)
Accounting Tech (1)

Workers (9)

Paralegal (1)
Processing Assistant (1)

Children and Adult Services Program Administrator
Tiffany Dodd

Human Services Planner and Evaluators (2)

Social Work Supervisors (8)

Program Assistant (1)
Sarah Miller

Program Assistant (1)
Courtney Pickett

Economic Services Program Administrator
Kandi Bridges

Social Workers (approximately 8 workers per supervisor)

Front Desk

Mailroom Clerk

Economic Services Supervisors (6)

Economic Services Program Manager
Emily Wells

Economic Services Workers (approximately 9 workers per supervisor)

Economic Services Supervisors (3)

Economic Services Workers (approximately 8 per supervisor)



Help foster happiness
in children without
a permanent home.

Be the village

kinship ♡ foster ♡ adopt

RPOP
RESOURCE PARENT
OUTREACH PROGRAM



Rutherford County
Department Of Social Services
389 Fairground Rd . Spindale NC 28160 . (828) 287-6165