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## **Catawba County wins two statewide awards**



**NCACC Outreach Associate David Nicholson (left), presented an NCACC Outstanding County Program Award for Social Services' Educational Advocate Initiative Program to Amy Herman Program Manager (center) and Adrienne Overby, Educational Advocate (right).**



**Nicholson , presented an NCACC Outstanding County Program Award for Social Services' Community-Based Crisis Intervention Program to Jo Sloan, Family Support Program Manager, (center), and Karen Heffner, Social Worker Supervisor III.**

Catawba County has been recognized with two 2009 Outstanding County Program Awards from the North Carolina Association of County Commissioners. The Outstanding County Program Awards have been handed out each year since 1991 by the NCACC. The intent of the program is to recognize and share information with other counties about innovative programs that address common problems faced by many counties. A team of judges selected four winning programs in each of three categories: General Government, Human Services and Public Information/Participation. Catawba County won two of the awards in the Human Services category for its Community-Based Crisis Intervention Program and its Educational Advocate Initiative.

Like many counties, Catawba County relies on local nonprofit organizations to help provide critical services to struggling families who find themselves in a crisis situation. In 2009, the county combined forces with three local nonprofits – the Salvation Army of Hickory, the Greater Hickory Cooperative Christian Ministry and the Eastern Catawba Cooperative Christian Ministry – in a Community-Based Crisis Intervention Program to help citizens in need of temporary assistance with heating/cooling bills.

The nonprofit agencies and the Catawba County Department of Social Services (DSS) each operated programs to help citizens with this need. Catawba County DSS received federal funds for this purpose, but had no county staff dedicated to processing the intake needed for the

program. The nonprofit agencies had the staff to handle the administrative part of the program, but often found themselves short of funds because of their small operating budgets.

The agencies have access to a state-operated, Web-based eligibility system that tracks the benefits given to individual clients. Because the system is real-time, it can prevent a family from getting CIP assistance at one agency and then attempting to get help across town at another, and it also assures that no family exceeds the annual maximum benefit of \$600. By combining forces, the county and nonprofits get more funds into the hands of more citizens, with less money being spent on program administration. For more information on the Community-Based Crisis Intervention Program, contact Program Administrator Jo Sloan at (828) 695-5667.

The Educational Advocate Initiative helps children stay on track academically when they transition into foster care. Children entering the foster care system often find themselves uprooted completely from their familiar surroundings – going to new schools, learning new routines and developing new relationships.

To try to make this transition as easy as possible and to minimize the school moves, Catawba County started an Educational Advocate Initiative aimed at improving educational continuity and stability for children in foster care. The Educational Advocate works with each of the 44 schools in the county for all of the children in foster care and focuses on: 1) establishing communication channels and standardizing communication protocols between DSS and the school systems; 2) minimizing school moves for children in foster care; 3) developing timely enrollment procedures; and 4) tracking school placements and educational progress of children in foster care.

This position allowed one staff person rather than 13 foster care workers to serve as the primary contact with administrators in three school systems and designees in 44 schools. It enabled better communication and response to requests, led to a better understanding about the roles and mandates of each system, contributed to an increase in overall productivity for staff and reduced the number of school moves for children entering foster care. For more information on the Educational Advocate Initiative, contact Special Projects Coordinator Dawn Wilson at (828) 695-5702.

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***About the NCACC:** The North Carolina Association of County Commissioners (NCACC) is the official voice of all 100 counties on issues being considered by the General Assembly, Congress and federal and state agencies. Founded in 1908, the Association provides expertise to counties in the areas of lobbying, fiscal and legal research, communications, intergovernmental relations, information technology, field visits and risk management services.*