



## Supporting and Strengthening Families in Rural NC

### *A Newborn Nurse Home Visiting Pilot Project Connects Families to Resources*

#### Background

A relationship with a nurturing and attuned caregiver supports a child's health and development. Strengthening the local continuum of care and connecting families to community resources and service providers that meet their identified needs can create positive outcomes, both for individual families and across the entire community. These positive outcomes include:

- reduced incidence of child maltreatment
- reduced maternal depression and anxiety
- increased family-community connections
- safer home environments
- increased positive parenting behaviors

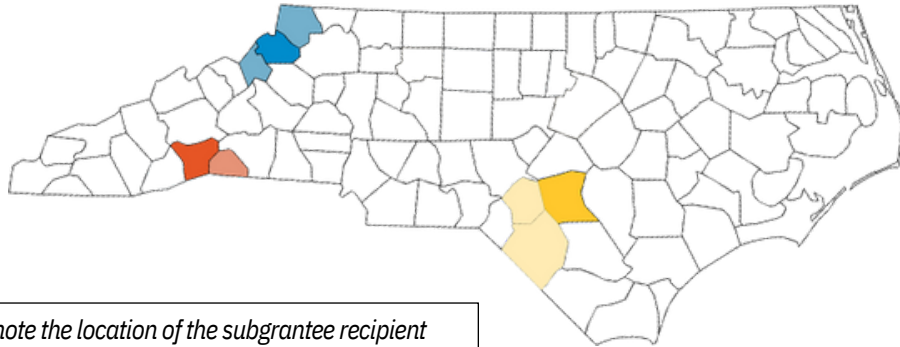
Families across North Carolina have faced stress and uncertainty during the pandemic, but the challenges are particularly acute in rural communities, where accessing resources can be difficult. Rural communities may face shortages of most types of care providers and have higher rates of substance use disorder, preventable hospitalizations, teen births and other challenges.<sup>1</sup>

#### Smart Start and Family Connects International

Smart Start and Family Connects International have partnered to expand the evidence-based Family Connects model to eight North Carolina counties, with a goal of serving 9,900 families over three years. With funding through a federal *Preschool Development Grant*, the pilot programs will leverage Smart Start's deep community connections and build on the strength of the Family Connects model. These programs will connect families of newborns with support to ensure children receive the care and nurturing they need to thrive.

The following communities were selected to pilot the Family Connects model:

- **Ashe, Avery and Watauga**
  - led by The Children’s Council of Watauga County
- **Cumberland, Hoke and Robeson**
  - led by the Partnership for Children of Cumberland County
- **Henderson and Polk**
  - led by the Smart Start Partnership for Children



*Dark colors denote the location of the subgrantee recipient that covers the adjacent counties in a lighter shade*

### Family Connects Model - Key Health Outcomes

By offering support to all families in a community, Family Connects improves health access and outcomes at the population level. Rigorous research has shown impact on important outcomes that include:

- 44% reduction in Child Protective Services investigations through child age 2 years and a 39% reduction through age 5-3
- 50% less total infant emergency medical care between birth and infant age 12 months<sup>4</sup>
- Family Connects mothers were 30% less likely to experience possible postpartum depression or anxiety<sup>5</sup>
- Family Connects mothers were more likely to complete their six-week postpartum health check<sup>2</sup>

Family Connects is built on **three components** that operate to achieve these goals:

1. Program staff work with community agencies and leaders to grow a **community infrastructure** that is committed to supporting all families at birth, providing equal access to community resources.
2. Registered **nurses** implement a universal primary system of early care by reaching every family giving birth in a community, providing **home visits** to

support families, collaborating with families to identify family-specific needs, and [connecting families to community resources](#) that meet their needs and preferences.

3. [Documentation](#) of visits is included in the family's medical record and [quality assurance](#) measures for all visits are in place.

### Preschool Development Grant Federal Funding

North Carolina was awarded \$40.2M in federal funding for a 3-year grant through the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services *Preschool Development Grant B-5* (PDG) award, creating a significant opportunity to enhance the early childhood system with a focus on rural communities. This project advances state goals and amplifies existing state infrastructure and investments by:

- Using Federal funding to advance the state's *Early Childhood Action Plan* goals of High Quality Early Learning, On Track for School Success, Supported and Supportive Families and Communities, Social Emotional Health and Resilience and Strengthening NC's mixed delivery system.
- Maximizing current investments in infrastructure through Smart Start Local Partnerships, in conjunction with local partners in rural communities, to implement the evidence-based Family Connects model of universally offered newborn nurse home visiting.
- Advancing local community engagement with the NCCARE 360 resource and referral tool.
- Supporting both alignment of and access to a local early childhood system of care in rural communities, including nurse home visits to families of newborns to identify needs, offer education and make connections that align with family needs and preferences.

This PDG project can pave the way for a stronger early childhood system across the state that maximizes an existing infrastructure and accelerates progress towards meeting the goals of North Carolina's Early Childhood Action Plan. Sustaining this investment and expanding to serve more communities can help put the state on a fast track towards a population of children who are healthy, safe and ready to succeed.

*For more information, please contact:*

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## Sources

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