

### Think Babies™ Community Partner Mini-Grant Summary: May 31, 2019

As part of its Think Babies™ NC project, the NC Early Education Coalition awarded mini-grants of \$2,000 to eight organizations to support county-level activities that raised public awareness; engaged infant, toddler, and family advocates; and informed policymakers about the importance of focusing on infants, toddlers, and their families. The Coalition was able to support these Community Mini-Grants with its own grant funds received from the Pritzker Children's Initiative and ZERO TO THREE. The organizations that received mini-grants in 2018 were:

- The Alliance for Children (Union County)
- Ashe County Partnership for Children
- Montgomery County Partnership for Children<sup>1</sup>
- Partnership for Children of Johnston County
- Randolph County Partnership for Children
- Rockingham County Partnership for Children
- UNC Greensboro (Guilford County)
- UNC Pembroke (Robeson County)

These community partners hosted 20 activities between October 2018 and March 2019 to promote public awareness and advocacy skill-building to support infants, toddlers, and their families (see attachment 1). These activities included forums on issues impacting young children; breakfasts and roundtable discussions for policymakers, business leaders, and community members to discuss the needs of infants and toddlers; tours of child care centers; and advocacy training for parents and child care providers.

#### Community Engagement

Each of our community partners engaged diverse groups of community stakeholders in their activities. For example:

- *In Union County, the Alliance for Children held three targeted breakfast events to reach as wide of an audience as possible: business and community leaders, early educators, and parents. This diverse group of stakeholders was able to amplify the message of "Think Babies™" more strongly than the Alliance would have been able to do on their own. Because of this amplification, the Alliance reported, "By the time we had conversations with legislators, they already knew what we were about to say!"*
- *The Partnership for Children of Johnston County held a Think Babies™ bus tour of child care facilities for a group of business leaders and local policymakers. In between stops, speakers shared their personal stories. An early childhood teacher shared a heartfelt story about her lack of health insurance for her and her son and a pregnant mom of a toddler spoke about the importance of reasonable workplace accommodations for pregnant and new mothers.*
- *The University of North Carolina—Pembroke held an advocacy training for parents and community members. Facilitators presented on childhood trauma, advocacy skills, and ways for participants to continue their engagement. Now, after the event, all of the participants have joined a follow-up advocacy group to continue to support infants and toddlers in their county.*

In total, our eight community partners engaged 603 community members through events, including:

- 48 policymakers (listed in following section)

- 19 agency representatives
- 99 business leaders
- 150 child care providers and early childhood teachers
- 110 k-12 educators and higher education professionals
- 40 parents
- 137 other community members

### **Policymaker Engagement and Action Taken by Policymakers**

A key goal of the activities was to increase awareness and understanding about infant-toddler issues among state and local policymakers. Each of our community partners engaged their local and state policymakers in different ways. For example:

- *The University of North Carolina—Greensboro held a series of advocacy trainings culminating in a job shadowing event, where policymakers and community leaders visited early childhood classrooms. Representatives Ashton Clemmons and Pricey Harrison attended the event, as did the mayor, city council members, school board members, and a representative from the office of U.S. Representative Mark Walker.*
- *The Randolph County Partnership held seven roundtable discussions around the county to highlight the issues impacting infants, toddlers, and families. Representatives Allen McNeill and Pat Hurley each attended a roundtable, as did 5 mayors, city councilmembers, county commissioners, school board members, and an alderwoman. U.S. Senator Thom Tillis was unable to attend, but provided a letter of support and encouragement for each of the roundtables that was donated to the libraries where the roundtables took place.*
- *The Rockingham County Partnership for Children held an Eggs and Issues Breakfast focused on infants and toddlers for their elected officials. Representative Jerry Carter attended the breakfast, as did county commissioners, school board members, judges, mayors, and city and town councilmembers. The partnership reported that policymakers seemed receptive to the information discussed: “Conversations have stemmed from the event and momentum is building locally around the issues that impact infants and toddlers.”*
- *The NC Early Education Coalition asked each of our eight community partners to reach out to their legislators about a bill supporting the early childhood workforce in North Carolina, sponsored by representatives from two of our mini-grant communities. After local partnerships and their networks of advocates reached out, five additional representatives from our mini-grant communities signed on to co-sponsor the bill. The bill passed in the House unanimously.*

In total, 48 policymakers participated in community events. They included:

- 7 state representatives (Representatives Jerry Carter, Ashton Clemmons, Pricey Harrison, Pat Hurley, Craig Horn, Allen McNeill and Ray Russell)
- 6 mayors
- 11 county commissioners
- 6 city councilmembers
- 6 school board members
- 4 judges

- 1 representative from the office of U.S. Representative Mark Walker
- A letter of support from U.S. Senator Thom Tillis
- 6 other local policymakers (aldermen, district attorneys, registers of deeds, and clerks)

### Advocacy Skill-Building

Another key goal of the activities was to increase participants' knowledge, skills, and confidence to become more effective advocates. Our community partners accomplished this goal by providing trainings, increasing participants' knowledge and comfort speaking about these issues, and providing opportunities for advocates to speak with policymakers. For example:

- *The Ashe County Partnership for Children focused on providing key information to participants at their two "State of the Child" forums. Representative Ray Russell spoke about the importance of the early childhood workforce and others spoke about child care subsidy, home visiting programs, quality care and education, and workforce compensation. The number of participants who reported feeling knowledgeable about these issues increased 41 percentage points between a pre-survey before the event and post-survey after the event.*
- *The Johnston County bus tour increased advocacy skills of speakers and attendees. Partnership staff worked with early educators to invite attendees into their classrooms and to share their stories with the community leaders and policymakers on the bus tours. In turn, these stories increased the knowledge of attendees. After the tour, 89% of participants agreed they learned more about the importance of a child's early years.*
- *The series of advocacy trainings in Greensboro built skills among early childhood educators. A survey of participants showed that their beliefs in their ability to advocate and in the power of their stories increased over the course of the training sessions. For educators unable to attend events in person due to work constraints, the organizers collected pictures of their feet to display around the room in solidarity (see attachment 2). Participants also started a Facebook group to encourage more early childhood educators to practice sharing their stories. As stated by Ashley Allen with EQuIPD, "The focus on the role of early childhood providers as advocates will benefit future advocacy efforts in Guilford County and help extend this project's work."*
- *Four of our community partners, Guilford, Johnston, Randolph, and Robeson counties, attended and brought teams to our Strolling Thunder Advocacy Day to meet with their state legislators in Raleigh. Advocates from Guilford met with six representatives to speak about early childhood workforce education and compensation. Advocates from Johnston met with two representatives to speak about child care subsidy, the early childhood workforce, and home visiting. Advocates from Randolph spoke to two representatives about current bills that would impact early care and learning. Advocates from Robeson spoke to their representative about issues impacting families with young children.*
- *49 people across our mini-grant communities have taken the Think Babies™ Pledge, promising to make every baby's potential our priority in North Carolina. In the pledge they indicated the actions they're willing to take to engage in advocacy (posting on social media, contacting policymakers, collecting stories, etc.) so we can contact them directly and share opportunities for advocacy more purposefully.*

## Public Awareness

The third key goal of activities was to increase public awareness about the issues facing infants and toddlers in each county. Communities increased awareness in a variety of ways, from sharing local data to launching social media campaigns and facilitating media coverage of events. For example:

- *Ashe County organized a photo shoot with infants and toddlers to connect faces to these important issues. They shared the photos on social media (see attachment 3), presented key messages at a televised County Commissioners meeting, and had March declared “Think Babies™ Month” by the county commissioners in order raise public awareness.*
- *The Alliance for Children launched a social media campaign focused on infants, toddlers, and their families. They also shared monthly Think Babies™ updates in their newsletter, appeared as guests on the WDZD-FM morning radio show to talk about Think Babies™, and wrote a letter to the editor of a local newspaper about why babies should be the number one priority (see attachment 4).*
- *As part of their activity, the Rockingham County Partnership for children launched a public awareness campaign: “Birth to Three: Invest in Me.” As part of the campaign they created a logo, distributed t-shirts and coffee mugs, and launched a social media campaign. They also created a handout with key messages and statistics to increase awareness about issues facing infants and toddlers at the local level (see attachment 5).*

Combined, our partners reached 31,674 additional people through social media outreach and local news coverage of their activities.

## Conclusion

Through these mini-grants, our goal was to increase public awareness and advocacy skill-building across the state. Engaging community partners to host local activities was an effective use of funding and allowed us to reach more diverse stakeholders across a larger geographic region than we could have on our own. The activities reached 603 community members in person and 31,674 people through social media, increasing community engagement and public awareness of issues impacting infants, toddlers, and families. The activities directly reached 48 policymakers, including 7 state representatives. Most importantly, the activities created an engaged network of advocates across the state who will continue to advocate for infants, toddlers, and their families in the future.

---

<sup>1</sup> We are still waiting on the final report from the Montgomery County Partnership for Children, so this summary is based on the other 7 community partners.

## Attachment 1: 2018 Mini-Grant Recipients

### Think Babies™ NC Community Partners Mini-Grant Recipients – 2018

**Alliance for Children** addressed issues impacting young children and families in Union County through a public awareness and media campaign, as well as a series of community forums to engage community leaders, business leaders, parents, grandparents, early childhood educators, social workers, direct service providers and other stakeholders.

**Ashe County Partnership for Children** held two community forums to engage and educate community leaders, elected officials, business leaders, parents and early child educators about early childhood policies, while also addressing current and emerging issues in the community that impact the lives of infants and toddlers.

**Montgomery County Partnership for Children**, in collaboration with the Montgomery THRIVE Task Force, held a community screening of the documentary *Resilience*. This screening took place as part of a community resource fair and was followed by a guided panel discussion of the film.

**Partnership for Children of Johnston County** invited state-level policymakers, local businesses, civic, education and government leaders to take part in a Think Babies™ Bus Tour, lunch, and conversation with parents and early childhood educators to highlight the disparities in accessibility to high-quality child care throughout the county.

**Randolph County Partnership for Children**, serving as the lead agency for the county's KidsReadyNC Initiative, held roundtable events at local libraries for policymakers, parents and the general public to discuss issues impacting young children and families. A tour for policymakers and community leaders was also coordinated to showcase high-quality child care programs and facilitate conversations with parents and educators.

**Rockingham County Partnership for Children**, as part of the STRIVE Initiative, conducted a Family Perceptions Study to engage community members and learn about their experiences with early education and family support. This assessment was shared with policymakers and community leaders at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Eggs and Issues breakfast, which served as the launch for a county-wide campaign to raise awareness about the importance of early childhood education.

**University of North Carolina at Greensboro** increased awareness of the needs of the early education workforce by facilitating a range of activities, including focus groups with infant and toddler teachers, a public awareness and advocacy campaign, and a strategic job shadowing event that allowed policymakers and other leaders to learn about infant/toddler development and gain first-hand experience in high-quality infant and toddler classrooms.

**UNC Pembroke Foundation** increased public awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) among policymakers and key stakeholders through a community forum and conversation with policymakers and local leaders about how to address the prevalence of ACEs in their community.

YOUR PRESENCE IS IMPORTANT, BUT  
SOMETIMES WE MAY NOT HAVE A CHOICE.



To choose a time most policy makers could attend, this conference occurs during the day when some people who want to attend may not be able to. As a visual representation to show policy makers the people and voices NOT in the room, I am asking you to send a picture of your feet - at work, in the classroom, doing what you do. These will be used to create a display showing how some people are not there physically - but we are not missing the event by choice.



Our feet will be on the floor, going down the halls, to let decision makers know we care even if our bodies cannot be there. If you would like to participate in this way, you can text your photo to (336) 580-0648, or email it to [ashleyallen@uncg.edu](mailto:ashleyallen@uncg.edu). These can be completely anonymous if you choose.

Photos will be collected through March 12, and please remember to take photos when you are not considered in ratio with young children. Please share with others, too!

### Attachment 3: Ashe County Facebook Posts

January 17<sup>th</sup> Post

It is so important for parents to talk to their children and read to them. Did you know that starting early sets children up to be reading on grade level by 3rd grade? Learn more about this important fact and more at our State of the Child Event: Think Babies™...Because Success Starts Here. Call 336-982-4588 for more information!



January 18<sup>th</sup> Post

Our State of the Child Event is next week!!! Tell all your friends. We want everyone to Think Babies™!!



January 18<sup>th</sup> Post

Run, don't crawl to make sure your voice is heard! We want our elected leaders to Think Babies™!





January 22<sup>nd</sup> Post

It's here!!! Our first forum is tonight at 5:30. Learn some valuable information about the care and well-being of infants and toddlers. Come join us to for our State of the Child event, Think Babies...Because Success Starts Here.



January 22<sup>nd</sup> Post

Our first forum for our State of the Child event, Think Babies™...Because Success Starts Here, was a success. We were very excited to have Ray Russell pay us a visit and our speakers brought some valuable information concerning the health, education and well-being of infants, toddlers, and their families.

Thank you to all of the folks who attended tonight. If you missed it, don't worry you still have a chance. Our last forum for our State of the Child event is tomorrow morning at Jefferson United Methodist Church Fellowship Hall. Networking & refreshments are from 8:30am until 9am and our information session will be from 9am until 11am. Hope to see you there and remember to Think Babies™!!



*Pictured: Representative Ray Russell with Ashe County Partnership Executive Director Kim Barnes*

# Hope springs eternal for civil discourse

Spring has finally arrived in all its glory.

In Pittsburgh, the weather has warmed, the trees are blossoming and the birds are singing cheerfully.

Sure, we Pittsburghers get plenty of rain this time of year, but as English poet Thomas Tusser reminds us, "Sweet April showers do spring May flowers." (The Pittsburgh version of Tusser's memorable line is just as uplifting: "April showers bring May showers.")

With winter behind us, new life erupting daily outdoors fills us

Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt.

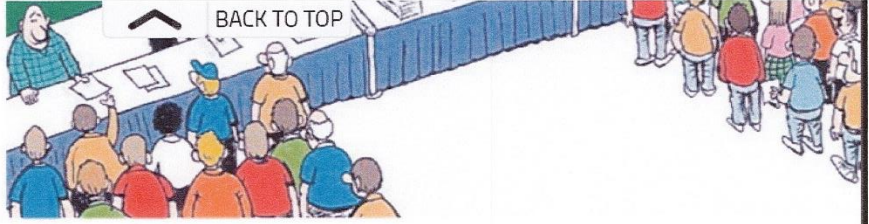
"In the name of emotional well-being, college students are increasingly demanding protection from words and ideas they don't like," write the authors.



TOM PURCELL

This is a worrisome turn of events. As the authors point out, universities are supposed to teach students how to think, not what to think.

"The idea goes back at least as far as Socrates," they write. "Today, what we call the Socratic method is a way of teaching that fosters critical thinking, in part by encouraging students to question



## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Babies should be our No. 1 priority

We need to make children, birth to age 3, our number one priority. Our investment in them now, will pave the way for our future generation.

Did you know ... Our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than at any later point in our lives, forming more than one million new neural connections every second. The latest science shows us that healthy relationships with trusted adults, as well as quality nutrition, nurture babies' developing brains; teach them

who they are and how the world works; affect how they trust and interact with people; and give them the confidence to explore and learn — laying a strong foundation for the rest of their lives. When babies don't get what their growing brains need to thrive, they don't develop as they should. This leads to life-long developmental, educational, social, and health challenges.

Giving all babies a strong start in life must be a priority in our community and among our elected leaders. When babies thrive, we all benefit. Just a few of the obstacle's babies and their families face are quality

infant toddler care, child care availability, the need for early intervention screenings and reasonable accommodations pregnant employees. Think babies! Our future depends on it!

For more information and tips, check out Think Babies™ at [www.thinkbabies.org](http://www.thinkbabies.org) and <https://www.ncearlyeducationcoalition.org/think-babies.html> to contact our elected officials.

Linda Smith, Executive Director  
Alliance for Children  
2661 W. Roosevelt Blvd.  
Suite A  
Monroe, NC 28110

## Rail transit doesn't fit North Carolina

# ADVOCATING FOR INFANTS & TODDLERS

## *Rockingham County Key Messages*

The following talking points have been created using local data, information from the North Carolina Early Education Coalition, and the results from recent surveys of early childhood educators, parents and caregivers in Rockingham County.



### All Babies Need Access to Quality Early Care and Learning Experiences

- **We must expand affordable, quality infant and toddler slots in Rockingham County.** Over half of Rockingham County parents surveyed reported having a hard time finding affordable childcare. Quality childcare, specifically for infants, is limited with only 14% of children birth to three enrolled in licensed childcare centers.
- **We must increase our focus on social and emotional learning.** 96% of local childcare teachers and 90% of directors feel meeting the social and emotional needs of children they are serving is a top priority. Over 75% of parents surveyed feel their child is getting a high quality childcare experience when their social and emotional needs are being addressed. Social and emotional development in early childhood builds the foundation for the soft skills necessary for a strong workforce.
- **We must increase teacher pay to attract, develop and retain the best teachers for our children.** Currently in Rockingham County, early childhood educators working in licensed programs account for only 0.6% of our workforce. The annual median income for North Carolina childcare workers is \$19,650. Locally, Child Care WAGES provides income supplements to 44 teachers, with 15 on the waiting list. Inadequate funding for teacher salaries, professional development, and continuing education opportunities undermines the educational development of our children-leaving them unprepared for the workforce and a successful future.



### All Babies Need Supported Families and Supportive Communities.

- **We must invest in increased opportunities for home-based visiting and parenting education programs.** Only an estimated 312 children under the age of five received evidence-based home visiting in Rockingham County, even though an estimated 6,500 children and pregnant mothers could have benefited, a gap of 95% who are not being served. The benefits of home-visiting are a proven investment that provide considerable cost savings later in life.
- **We must encourage businesses to adopt family-friendly policies.** When asked what employers could provide to help meet current and anticipated family needs, parents in Rockingham County listed flexible work schedules, time off during school closings and holidays, and paid time off as the top three policies. Family-friendly policies may include flexible schedules, support for breastfeeding mothers, paid family leave and others. Family-friendly policies increase positive health outcomes for children, especially during their first year of life, and have greater advantages for employers and businesses who benefit from increased employee morale and productivity.



### All Babies Need Healthy Beginnings.

- **We must ensure access to prenatal resources for families.** Improving women's prenatal health leads to more healthy births and mothers and a greater decline in the infant mortality rate. The maternal mortality rate has steadily increased for North Carolina from 12.1 in 2016 to 15.8 in 2018 and the rate for black mothers is over 2.5 times greater than the rate for white mothers. The infant mortality rate for Rockingham County from 2013-2017 was 8.2 and almost 2.7 times greater for black babies than for white babies.
- **We must encourage reasonable workplace accommodations for pregnant employees.** While not all women will require pregnancy accommodations, some will need small, temporary adjustments to work safely through their pregnancies. These small adjustments may include more frequent water or bathroom breaks, an option to work while seated instead of standing, uniform modifications, or relief from heavy lifting.

# Rockingham County Early Childhood Statistics

**4696**

Children under the age of 5

**59%**

of children 0-5 enrolled in DPIL

**5%**

of children receiving early intervention services

**14%**

of children 0-3 enrolled in childcare

**56**

Licensed early childhood centers

**254**

Children enrolled in Head Start

**228**

Children enrolled in NC Pre-K

**192**

Children enrolled in RCS Pre-K

**60%**

Children living in poverty

**33%**

Children 0-5 with all parents working

**53**

Children taken into foster care last year

**33**

Rate of child abuse and neglect (0-3)

**937**

Number of live births in 2018

**10%**

Babies born at a low-birth weight

**25%**

Children in food insecure households (0-18)

**Population by Race, Age 0-3**

African American: 22%  
White: 64%  
Hispanic: 13%  
Other: 1%

