

## Think Babies™ NC 2019 Community Partner Mini-Grant Summary

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 organizations that received mini-grants in 2019 were:

- Chatham County Partnership for Children
- Lee County Partnership for Children
- Mecklenburg Partnership for Children
- Partnership for Children of Cumberland County
- Partnership for Children of Wayne County
- Smart Start of New Hanover County
- Smart Start of Pender County
- The Enola Group, Inc. (Burke County)

These community partners hosted 28 activities between May and October 2019 to promote public awareness and advocacy skill-building to support infants, toddlers, and their families. These activities included screenings and panel discussions on the film *Resilience* (15 activities), roundtable discussions and presentations for community members (7), a tour of a child care center (1), advocacy trainings and policy forums (2), participation in two large-scale community events (2), and an extensive public awareness campaign focused on infants and toddlers.

NC Early Education Coalition staff supported community partners by facilitating a community of practice to foster the cross-sharing of ideas and resources between counties, providing county-level data to each community, and conducting individual policy check-ins to discuss which Think Babies™ policy priorities are most relevant to each community. Coalition staff also put together a toolkit of resources to accompany *Resilience* screenings and provided buttons, postcards, stress balls, T-shirts, and printed fact sheets and infographics to each community partner.

### Community Engagement

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

- *The Chatham County Partnership for Children held 10 small group screenings and discussions of the film, Resilience. Four screenings were open to the general Chatham community and six were targeted for specific groups: the Durham Children’s Developmental Services Agency, Chatham County Sheriff’s Office, Chatham County School Resource Officers, Chatham County Board of Commissioners and County Managers’ Office Staff, Chatham County School Administrators, and the Chatham Health Alliance. These targeted screenings allowed the Partnership to tailor their remarks to issues most pertinent to each audience, while the public screenings engaged the broader community. They tied the film to infants and toddlers by discussing how policies such as paid family leave and child care subsidies can increase resilience in babies.*
- *The Partnership for Children of Wayne County held a community forum and led a tour of a five-star child care center that serves infants and toddlers. Participants included early educators from*

*the community and the Air Force Base, ECE students, nonprofit and community leaders, health department staff, and policymakers. Attendees shared their concerns about issues facing young children and their families in Wayne County, including the need for additional subsidy funding, the limited availability of infant and toddler care, and the need for additional advocacy in the county.*

- *Smart Start of New Hanover County presented about Think Babies™ to students at Cape Fear Community College and to their own Smart Start Board members. The presentations at Cape Fear Community College informed students about the importance of these issues at the beginning of their careers, while the presentation to the Smart Start Board built on existing knowledge about the importance of early education and family support. According to Smart Start staff, **“The topic is an easy sell. We were excited to talk about infants, toddlers, and families who might need support during this time. Everyone we talked to was receptive and eager to learn more.”** Since the grant ended, Smart Start of New Hanover County has formed an ad-hoc Infant/Toddler Committee to examine issues surrounding infant/toddler care and family support in their community.*
- *The Lee County Partnership for Children hosted a continuing education course on stress and the developing brain for infant-toddler teachers and presented on the importance of early intervention and quality child care at the Kiwanis Club. In order to inform the broader community about the importance of quality child care and social-emotional development, they also hosted an educational booth and story time at the Lee County Regional Fair. According to the Partnership, **“The people we reached now have a greater understanding of the importance of those early infant and toddler years ... this will enable them to advocate for the support of this critical issue.”***
- *The Mecklenburg Partnership for Children held a public advocacy forum to engage members of the community and make the business case for implementing family-friendly workplace policies, such as paid family leave and access to child care. The event targeted business and community leaders and provided them with the knowledge and resources needed to make changes within their own companies and to advocate for family-friendly policies at the state level.*

In total, our eight community partners engaged 616 community members through events, including:

- 25 Policymakers (listed in following section)
- 55 Agency Representatives
- 34 Business, Community, and Faith Leaders
- 40 Nonprofit Leaders
- 108 Child Care Providers and Early Childhood Teachers
- 63 Public School Administrators, Teachers, and Staff
- 6 Higher Education Administrators, Teachers, and Staff
- 35 ECE Students
- 250 Parents and Community Members

## Policymaker Engagement

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:

- *In Burke County, the Enola Group held a Resilience screening and panel discussion, featuring remarks by leaders in the fields of early education, family support, and health. Representative Josh Dobson (R), a budget leader in the NC House of Representatives, introduced the evening, speaking about the importance of focusing on infants and toddlers at the state level (photo right). Representative Hugh Blackwell attended the event with his family, and Morganton City Council Member Wendy Cato attended and then stayed after the event to discuss local infant-toddler issues with members of the event planning group.*
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- *One Resilience screening in Chatham County was held specifically for County Commissioners. This event was extremely effective in increasing the Commissioners' awareness of issues facing families with young children. According to Partnership staff, **"The County Manager staff was requested, as a result of our screening, to investigate options for providing Paid Family Leave for county government employees."** Since the screening, MomsRising has been in touch with county staff to discuss options for providing expanded family leave for county employees.*
  - *The Partnership for Children of Cumberland County engaged policymakers through the participants at their advocacy training. The infant-toddler advocacy training for child care providers and directors included a call-to-action for participants to reach out to their policymakers about issues facing infants, toddlers, their families, and their educators. Staff helped attendees identify their own legislators and provided sample messaging for them to use in their advocacy efforts. Since the event, participants have reached out to Senator DeViere, Representative Lucas, Representative Floyd, and U.S. Senator Tillis to engage them on infant-toddler policy issues.*
  - *While no state policymakers were able to attend Wayne County's presentation and child care center tour due to the legislature being in session, staff from the Partnership for Children of Wayne County have followed up with policymakers since the conclusion of their activity. Partnership staff met with Representative Raymond Smith to discuss early childhood programming, advocacy for children and families, and the importance of child care for the workforce. They had a similar meeting with Billy Strickland, a candidate for the NC Senate.*

In total, 25 policymakers participated in community events. They included:

- 2 State Representatives (Representatives Josh Dobson and Hugh Blackwell)
- 8 County Commissioners

- 10 County Managers and Directors
- 3 City Council Members
- 1 Superintendent
- 1 Sheriff

## 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:

- *At Smart Start of Pender County's Resilience screenings, they had a Think Babies™ advocacy corner at each event where participants could learn more about how to effectively advocate for infants and toddlers (photo right). According to Smart Start staff, "Our Think Babies™ corner provided participants a point of reference for them to find advocacy information about various policies and infant/toddler statistics specific to Pender County."*
- *The Partnership for Children of Wayne County's event focused on local data and specific infant-toddler policy issues, giving participants the knowledge needed to become effective advocates. During the Q&A session, many participants asked how they could take action at the state level to improve the lives of young children and their families in Wayne County. According to evaluation surveys of the event, 93% of participants found the resources, information, and presentation useful.*
- *The Partnership for Children of Cumberland County surveyed participants after their advocacy training and 100% responded positively to feeling confident in their ability to apply the advocacy skills gained through the training. After the event, two family child care home operators decided to create a local advocacy group in Cumberland County for family child care home providers to continue advocating for infant/toddler issues.*



## 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 launching social media campaigns and TV commercials to participating in community events. For example:

- *Smart Start of New Hanover County's public awareness campaign included social media posts, a TV commercial on [WWAY TV](#), and participation in Smart Start's 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Family Festival. All of these activities shared information about the importance of the early years and the supports that families with the youngest of children need. The commercial in particular raised public*

*awareness of infant-toddler issues, reaching over 39,000 households according to projections from WWAY.*

- In addition to their Resilience screenings, Smart Start of Pender County is continuing to raise public awareness of Think Babies™ through their ongoing Ready Readers program. Smart Start of Pender County created a Think Babies™ book label (photo attached) to attach onto every 0-3-year-old book in their Ready Readers monthly book distribution program to share information about Think Babies™ with parents of young children.*
- Lee County Partnership for Children participated in the Lee Regional Fair to raise awareness about issues impacting infants and toddlers to a broad audience. They hosted a booth at which they distributed information about the needs of infants and toddlers in Lee County and read children's books at the fair's story time. The story time at the fair was attended by 450 people. Participating in the fair allowed the Partnership to engage community members who ordinarily would not have been exposed to this information.*

**It's Time to Think Babies™**  
**The First Three Years Shape All the Rest**  
The science is clear that our brains grow faster between the ages of 0 and 3 than at any later point in our lives. These early connections have a lifelong impact on how babies learn and grow. Building this early support increases graduation rates, improves health, and reduces crime.  
Learn More & Take the Pledge at:  
[www.ncearleducationcoalition.org/think-babies-nc/](http://www.ncearleducationcoalition.org/think-babies-nc/)



Overall, our partners reached 40,126 additional people through public awareness campaigns, 39,176 from the WWAY TV commercial, 500 from Smart Start of New Hanover's social media campaign, and 450 from story time at the Lee Regional Fair.

## Conclusion

Through these mini-grants, our goal as the NC Early Education Coalition was to increase public awareness of and advocacy skill-building for issues affecting infants and toddlers 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 1,066 community members in person, 616 of whom attended community partner-hosted activities and 450 of whom attended story time at the fair. One partner reached an additional 39,676 people through social media and a television commercial, increasing community engagement and public awareness of issues impacting infants, toddlers, and families. Twenty-three local policymakers and two state representatives participated directly in activities, and newly trained advocates and partnership staff continued to reach out to policymakers after the activities concluded. 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.

## Attachment 1: List of Community Partners

Meet our 2019 Think Babies™ NC Community Partners!

**Chatham County Partnership for Children** built on their existing work of the Chatham Action for Resilience Initiative by holding 10 small group sessions for key community leaders to view and discuss the film, Resilience. The forums included small groups of policymakers, child care directors, first responders, caregivers, educators and judges to increase the awareness of ACES among the people who make and influence decisions in their community.

**Lee County Partnership for Children**, in collaboration with Central Carolina Community College Early Childhood Education Department, promoted the importance of quality child care and social-emotional development for infants and toddlers through a series of events, continuing education and presentations throughout Lee County that engaged child care providers, early childhood education students, health educators, social workers, business leaders and policymakers, including an educational booth and presentation at the Lee County Fair.

**Mecklenburg Partnership for Children** hosted a series of Coffee and Conversation forums featuring medical professionals speaking about early brain development and toxic stress. These community conversations were targeted to reach state legislators, business leaders, and neighborhood groups. They also hosted a public policy forum to engage and educate policymakers, community advocates, business leaders and public officials on the economic and social benefits derived from supporting the parents of infants and toddlers.

**Partnership for Children of Cumberland County** presented an infant-toddler advocacy training for child care providers. The training included a call-to-action for each participant to inform policymakers about the importance of focusing on policy issues impacting infants, toddlers, their families, and their educators. Facilitators continued to engage participants to offer support and guidance for connecting with policymakers.

**Partnership for Children of Wayne County** held a community forum and bus tour focused on the issue of infant and toddler child care availability in their county. The forum shared information on the current demographics and provided advocacy strategies to advance policies and programs that support infants, toddlers and families in the community. A tour for policymakers and community leaders of a local child care program highlighted the need for additional infant toddler spots and increase awareness of the overall importance of early childhood education.

**Smart Start of New Hanover County** implemented an extensive, multi-step public awareness campaign focused on infants and toddlers. They formed a county-level collaborative to focus on infants and toddlers to lead the campaign, which included local radio and television, social media, and other promotional materials. They also held an advocacy training for students in early childhood education programs at local colleges and universities.

**Smart Start of Pender County** hosted a series of trainings around the Resilience documentary for child care providers and community partners. With information from a 2018 community health assessment, the hosts focused on the top three issues identified by residents affecting quality of life in the community. The trainings drew connections between toxic stress facing infants and toddlers and the identified issues of alcohol, drug or medication abuse, low income/poverty, and child abuse and neglect.

**The Enola Group, Inc.**, an Early Head Start partner in Burke County, hosted a Resilience screening and discussion panel. Their goal was to raise awareness of ACES and how they affect the development and overall needs of infants, toddlers and their families. Community partners assisting with this event included local institutions of higher education, the local Smart Start Partnership, as well as the regional CCR&R agency.