

Think Babies™ NC

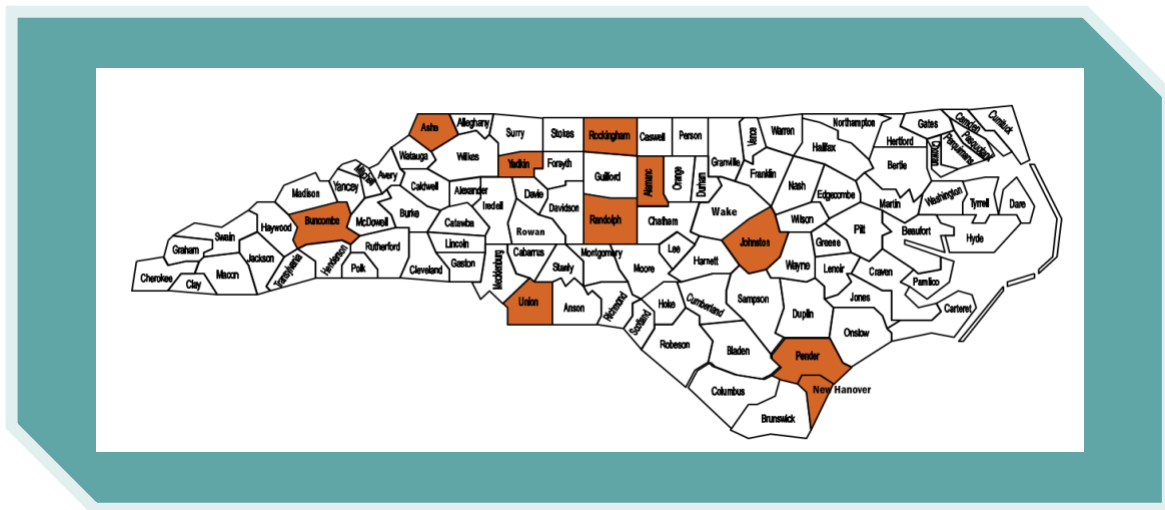
2020 Community Partner

Micro-Grant Summary



As a part of its Think Babies™ NC project, the NC Early Education Coalition awarded micro-grants of up to \$2000 to ten 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 micro-grants in 2020 were:

- Alamance Partnership for Children
- Alliance for Children (Union County)
- Buncombe Partnership for Children
- Partnership for Children of Johnson County
- Partnership of Ashe
- Randolph Partnership for Children
- Rockingham Partnership for Children
- Smart Start of New Hanover County
- Smart Start of Pender County
- Smart Start of Yadkin County



These community partners' efforts included conducting research to learn more about the needs of and supports for families of infants and toddlers, raising public awareness about the importance of infant-toddler care and development, and improving advocacy skills to impact policy. The community partners utilized a variety of virtual and in-person methods to engage families and other community stakeholders through a year marked by unprecedented challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. The community partners navigated these challenges by creatively employing social and traditional media methods to connect, including: 51 virtual interviews with parents and families; 34 paper family surveys; at least 10 Zoom presentations and discussions; two virtual tours of child care programs; three live events (drive-through and/or socially-distanced); and a digital billboard campaign. Additionally, several publications were created, including 40 letters to elected officials, three reports, one op-ed, and two videos shared via social media, printed publication and television.

Community Partner Project Summaries

Alamance Partnership for Children engaged in an interview-based research project to learn more about perinatal services, lactation support, maternal mental health and how to strengthen participation in Family Connects, a nurse visitation program for parents of newborns. Interview results were summarized in two

reports that were widely shared with stakeholders through presentations, which inspired discussion and motivation for individuals to become *“champions... taking direct action to help fund and implement Family Connects.”* Additionally, the project team came to recognize the participating families as an “untapped resource” for informing and participating in future work on building the Family Connects program in Alamance county.

Alliance for Children hosted an online forum attended by a member of the NC House of Representatives and several local community members to discuss Think Babies™ policy priorities and the local impact of implementing these policies, allowing participants the *“opportunity to learn about aspects of our county and how we care and support children age 0-3 that they may not have otherwise known.”* As a part of this forum, attendees participated in video tours of two local child care centers. Through these tours, participants heard the providers’ perspectives on the importance of high-quality infant-toddler child care and how to support the workforce to provide this level of service. Each forum attendee then selected one or two policy priorities to develop short talking points for sharing with others. Attendees were sent evaluations of their experience and 100% reported gaining knowledge of early childhood development and programs.

Buncombe Partnership for Children collected “story data” from 13 parents of young children through interviews which were transcribed and analyzed for common themes and community needs. A report and presentation of the data were produced and shared with community stakeholders to inform them of families’ changing perspectives on the needs and safety of child care, and implications for recruiting and retaining early childhood educators. Project participants (families, presentation attendees and the project team) gained knowledge about Think Babies™ policy agenda and resources, expressed gratitude, and challenged assumptions about child care programs and the reasons behind parents’ choices regarding care for their children.

Partnership for Children of Johnston County rented a digital billboard for four months to display messages promoting Think Babies™ and highlighting issues faced by infants and toddlers, their families, and caregivers. A simultaneous social media campaign occurred to further disseminate these messages. Additionally, individuals engaged in discussion to share data, information, and advocacy strategies, and to encourage the writing of op-eds for publication. One op-ed was published during the project period, with hopes for more forthcoming. The billboard campaign is estimated to have reached approximately 151,000 people per month, and the 25 social media posts had an average reach of 228 each, with topics such as workplace pregnancy accommodations, developmental screenings and early interventions being among the most popular.

Partnership of Ashe produced two videos and hosted two Zoom meetings to share and discuss issues brought forth in the videos. The videos were also made available through the agency website, Facebook page and a local television station, which has approximately 8,000 subscribers. One of the videos addressed the need for more high-quality child care in Ashe county, while the other focused on the high cost of child care and low pay providers receive. The videos provided statistics to inform viewers about local child care issues and directed community members to ways they could participate in creating solutions.

Randolph Partnership for Children conducted a letter writing campaign in which family participants received guidance on how to contact and communicate effectively with public officials. The participants sent more than 40 letters in which they communicated concerns, questions, and personal stories, which *“added rich context to birth to three issues.”* Recipients of the letters were invited to participate in a Zoom meeting to further discuss the topics raised in the letters. This meeting was attended by two state legislators, a representative of a U.S. Congressman, and a local school board member.

Rockingham Partnership for Children created a Family Stakeholder Advisory Council and engaged parents in four skill-building sessions where participants developed advocacy, leadership, and engagement skills. Think Babies™ NC and NC Early Education Coalition advocacy materials were utilized to guide the sessions

and build capacity among the family participants. The skill-building sessions were recorded and short clips from the sessions were shared with local community partners to increase awareness of issues facing infants, toddlers, and their families. The goal of the skill-building sessions was *“elevating family voice and building capacity with parent advocates.”* Pre- and post-session evaluations indicated participants increased their knowledge and confidence to use tools of advocacy.

Smart Start of New Hanover County conducted outreach to families to encourage them to make videos sharing what was important to them in meeting the needs of their children. These videos showed families in authentic home settings and allowed families to share stories in their own words. The connection with families was of great value to the project planners, who believe the “home-made” nature of the videos is a powerful tool to increase public awareness of infant-toddler needs. The videos continue to be shared through social media, the agency website, and connections with other community partners.

Smart Start of Pender County performed a needs assessment through electronic and paper surveys sent to participating families to discover how the COVID-19 pandemic was affecting parents and children’s lives. Families were recruited via social media, phone calls and a drive-through Read for the Record event. The project allowed them to *“reconnect with families that have otherwise been disconnected from the organization due to the pandemic”* as well as to gain insight into impacts of the pandemic on local families. The participating families received resources to share their stories and further advocate for their needs.

Smart Start of Yadkin County hosted two socially-distanced live events where participants viewed and discussed the film *No Small Matter*. One event was attended primarily by child care providers and the other consisted of Smart Start Board Members and guests. The film inspired discussion on the realities of the local community in areas such as increasing pay for child care providers; the importance of the early years of life; and what quality care looks like. This rich conversation guided community stakeholders to better understand the role of government and community partners in *“helping make lasting changes in our early childhood system.”*

Summary of Impact

In total, our ten community partners directly engaged over 330 individuals through their activities, including:

- 6 state and national legislators
 - State Legislators: Rep. Craig Horn, Rep. Pat Hurley, Rep. Ricky Hurtado, Rep. Allen McNeill, and Sen. Amy Scott Galey
 - U.S. Congress: representative of Rep. Mark Walker
- 9 other policymakers, such as County Commissioners, City Officials and School Board Members
- 51 representatives of non-profit and early childhood agencies
- 17 representatives of Smart Start Partnerships
- 115 parents, grandparents and guardians of infants and toddlers
- 33 early childhood teachers and directors
- 22 health care providers
- 18 systems leaders and funders
- 4 higher education representatives
- 10 K-12 education representatives
- 46 business, community and faith leaders

Additionally, several of the projects involved community awareness through traditional and social media vehicles where precise counts of the reach to the public and policymakers could not be obtained. However, estimates from these campaigns are as follows:

- 151,000 viewers per month for four months of the digital billboard campaign in Johnston County.

- 228 average reach per post for 25 Facebook posts by the Partnership for Children of Johnston County.
- 1991 families reached by Smart Start of New Hanover County through social media to solicit home-made videos.
- 8000 subscribers to Skybest TV had the opportunity to view the Partnership of Ashe videos, which aired several times per day for two months.
- 40 elected officials received letters sharing family stories, challenges and needs.

Continuing the Work

Due to the unprecedented challenges associated with the COVID-19 pandemic during 2020, many of the community partners expressed difficulty in recruiting participants, issues relating to shorter project timelines, and the necessity of creating and adapting new methods of connecting with stakeholders as projects progressed. Since early childhood is a field where work has previously occurred almost exclusively face to face, the project planners demonstrated resiliency and creativity in their response to conducting these projects within the new reality of the pandemic. Following are a few examples of how some of the community partners plan to use this work as a starting point for further advocacy and public awareness:

- The Alamance Partnership for Children will use the insights gained through their research project to drive the design of an effective Family Connects program.
- The Partnership for Children of Johnson County will extend their billboard campaign for one month in Spring 2021 to promote the Strolling Thunder advocacy event.
- The Partnership of Ashe video project spurred the formation of a task force to address local child care issues.
- The Randolph Partnership for Children continues to support family engagement with elected officials, with some participants developing on-going relationships with their representatives where they continue to maintain contact and share experiences.
- The Rockingham Partnership for Children plans to use recordings from the advocacy skill-building sessions to produce a video to share on social media and at upcoming stakeholder events.

Conclusion

Through these micro-grants, our goal as the Think Babies™ NC Alliance was to increase public awareness and advocacy efforts for issues impacting 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. Despite the unanticipated challenges of navigating the unknowns of COVID-19, our partners engaged families, communities, and policymakers and continued to build, strengthen, and diversify the engaged network of advocates across North Carolina focused on our state's babies and their families.



Think Babies™ NC Alliance

The Think Babies™ NC Alliance seeks to ensure that North Carolina's youngest children, prenatal to age 3, benefit from effective and equitable public policies, programs, and funding so that all children have what they need to thrive: healthy beginnings, supported families, and quality early care and learning experiences.

For more information:

Think Babies™ NC Alliance: Info@ThinkBabiesNC.org

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