



Strengthening North Carolina Families

Acknowledging that parents are a child's first teacher, Smart Start offers evidence-based and evidence-informed, family-focused programs that increase parent knowledge of development, enhance parent confidence, and increase positive parenting practices. Through established relationships with caregivers, Smart Start is also able to connect families with other community resources to ensure they have the relational and concrete supports they need to thrive.



Why is Family Support so Critical?

There are tremendous long-term benefits of family support, parent education, and home visiting programs. Studies of these programs have highlighted improved maternal and child health, increased maternal employment, and improved school readiness. With only about a quarter of North Carolina's children under 5 in licensed child care, providing parents and caregivers with the tools to help their children develop and learn is important for future success.

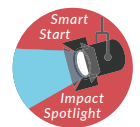
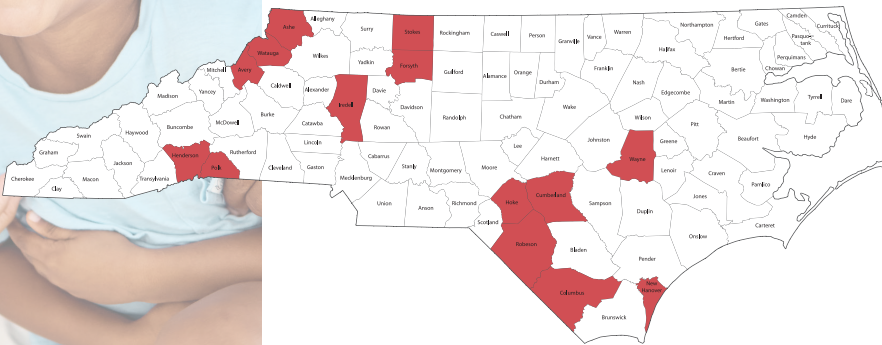
Smart Start supports parents and families by:

- Increasing parental resilience
- Creating needed social connections between families and others in their community
- Increasing knowledge of parenting and child development
- Improving access to basic needs for families
- Enhancing social and emotional development for children

65 Smart Start Local Partnerships provide at least one family support program or service to support children and their families.

Family support programs supported and administered by the Smart Start Network include Parents as Teachers, Kaleidoscope Play and Learn, Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), Circle of Parents, Nurturing Parenting Program, and Nurse-Family Partnership among others. These programs may take the form of playgroups, home visiting and parent education, and more.

Spotlight on:



Additionally, increased stress on families and children during the COVID-19 pandemic made support for families more important than ever. Health concerns, economic uncertainty, and a decrease in early education options have pushed families with young children to their limits. Parent and caregiver stress cascaded down to young children in ways science shows can be toxic, threatening their long-term well-being and development.

Smart Start of Forsyth County (SSFC) received a grant from the Reynolds American Foundation to bolster unconventional family structures. SSFC launched a male-centric program to promote active caregiving and engagement among single first-time fathers, uncles, and grandfathers. This initiative seeks to create a stronger support network with goals to diminish family violence, enhance child development, and reduce crime and incarceration.



Robeson County Partnership for Children administers a county program which supports caregivers and kids up to kindergarten through weekly play and learn groups. Using the Kaleidoscope curriculum, facilitators teach parenting skills and provide developmental education. Participants improve their social skills and gain a better understanding of the role of play in school readiness. Last year, over 243 people attended!



In Iredell County, a young girl changed custody after experiencing child abuse. Her father received custody and reached out to the **Iredell Partnership for Children** for support. He enrolled in Parents as Teachers (PAT), a home visiting program, where a home visitor recognized several developmental delays. The home visitor connected the toddler to an early intervention service for further support. She is now walking, effectively feeding herself, and moving toward her goals!

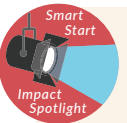


Smart Start of New Hanover County implements Circle of Parents (COP), a program which provides a supportive environment with trained facilitators for parents and caregivers to receive support. Evidence of the impact was seen in New Hanover, where a young parent received needed social support and is in a better mental space to navigate life's struggles. Because of this support, she is now back to working part-time and is hopeful about her future!



At **Stokes Partnership for Children**, a mother enrolled in Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) after losing custody of her child. She was experiencing substance-abuse, anxiety, and post-partum depression. After completing substance abuse treatment and improving her parenting assessment scores through NPP, the mother regained custody of her child. Using additional Partnership resources, she is now on a stable career path and equipped with the skills to address financial and personal challenges head-on!

Home visiting programs provide unique support to help new parents and parents-to-be with access to education, information, and resources. For every dollar invested in home visiting, as much as \$5.70 is saved in long-term costs. Home visiting programs improve prenatal health and birth outcomes, as well as child health outcomes, by increasing immunization rates and by decreasing emergency visits and rates of abuse and neglect. NCPC has played a leading role in North Carolina's Home Visiting and Parenting Education (NC HVPE) System Collaborative, which aims to build a coordinated system to provide all families access to a range of parenting education supports.



Wayne County Partnership for Children provided parenting support through the Positive Parenting Program (Triple P). One father remarked, "When I first started the program, I really was stuck in a hole - the routine of work and home. Now, I see myself spending more time with my kids and wife, even communicating more."



Family Connects Universal Newborn Home Visiting Pilot Sites

Smart Start and Family Connects International, an evidence-based universal newborn home visiting program, launched a 3-year pilot program in eight counties to serve families of newborns in October 2021. In FY 22-23, continuing pilot participants included **Watauga, Ashe, Avery, Cumberland, Hoke, and Robeson.**



Through the program, families have access to comprehensive support to ensure healthy development of their newborn. Funded by the federal Preschool Development Grant (PDG) B-5, the pilot sites combine the benefits of the Family Connects model and Smart Start Local Partnerships with key community relationships and the ability to coordinate locally. The pilot sites offer a regional approach (covering multiple counties), specifically targeting rural areas where access to health care resources is often challenging.

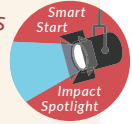
From the 2021 launch to June 2023, 2,941 families were served through 4,716 visits.

These pilots create change by meeting families where they are, at a vulnerable time after the birth of a baby. Nurse home visitors share valuable information with families about the care and development of their newborn, create critical connections to resources in their community, assess and offer social-emotional support to families, and share mental health resources. Referrals are made for children and families to agencies and programs in their community. In fact, **over 88% of the families who received one or more referrals to support services and completed a post-visit call reported at least one successful connection to a service!**

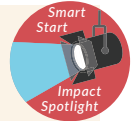
The Family Connects-Smart Start Pilots also make a difference at the community level by identifying health and medical trends or resource gaps and working with the local cross-sector Community Advisory Board to determine solutions. By utilizing Family

Connects as a home visiting model while leveraging the impact of the Smart Start Network, children and families are receiving the support they need to thrive, right from the start.

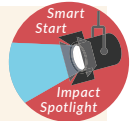
Family-Connects Smart Start Pilot sites provide vital connections between parents and mental health resources. At one site, a nurse provided valuable education on the signs and symptoms of postpartum depression for a caregiver. When these signs appeared, the caregiver contacted their nurse home visitor and received immediate support in securing a mental health appointment!



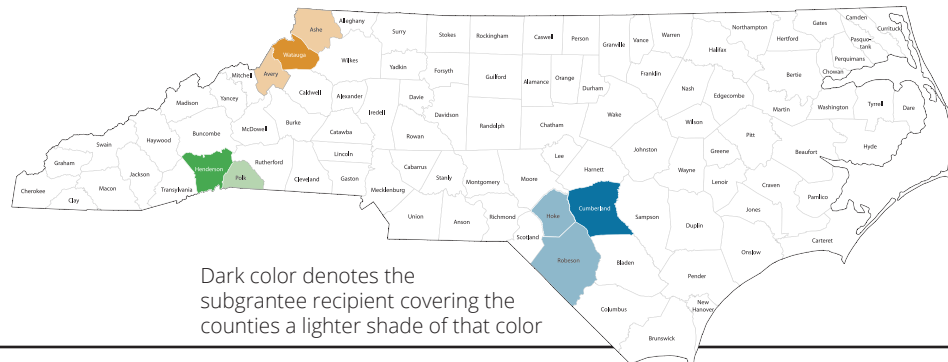
At one Family Connects-Smart Start Pilot site, staff recognized a need for a local birthing hospital to adjust their lactation support. The hospital is now working with the site to gather more data from birthing families about post-discharge lactation needs, with a shared goal of the hospital funding another lactation consultant as an outpatient service!



A Family Connects nurse provided critical support to a mother by recognizing concerning health symptoms and encouraging the mother to make an appointment with her doctor where she received continued monitoring and medication for her health concerns.



Family Connects Subgrant Recipients and the Counties Covered





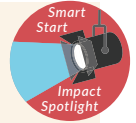
Smart Start's Focus on Family Engagement and Leadership

Smart Start is working to create change locally by intentionally expanding the roles that families play when it comes to programs and services in their communities. Family leaders are invited and welcomed to tables where decisions are being made that affect children and families. With PDG B-5 funding, NCPC worked with Local Partnerships, **providing over one hundred technical assistance opportunities to partnership staff**, hosting monthly Community of Practice meetings, and supporting Local Partnerships in building family engagement and leadership efforts. NCPC also hosted 10 training sessions focused on building local capacity, with over 30 Local Partnerships attending these sessions to improve family engagement and leadership in their communities.

NCPC also collaborated with MomsRising to create Starting Strong, a comprehensive set of tools to support agencies as they develop cross-sector coalitions and center family voices. Additionally, NCPC partnered with CounterPart Consulting to provide training and coaching explicitly and intentionally centered on racial equity, as requested by Local Partnerships.

Building with and not for families is impactful work that benefits communities, families and children.

Columbus County Partnership for Children (CCPC) convenes Children First Columbus, the Columbus County Family Engagement and Leadership Coalition. The Coalition realized the power of storytelling among peers and is working to build out a Parent Advisory Committee. Leaders are also stepping up into new leadership roles with one member becoming a CCPC staff member and launching a grant focused project and another becoming a Board member!



See Data and Tables on page 33



Strengthening North Carolina Families

At-Home Family Support

35 Smart Start Local Partnerships increased parental knowledge of positive parenting practices through home visiting and parent education programs.

Home Visiting Programs Implemented by Smart Start Local Partnerships	Number of parents and guardians participating
Parents as Teachers (PAT)	1743
Nurse Family Partnership (NFP)	303
Family Support Intensive Home Visiting – Other	180
Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) Parents and their Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers - Home Based	167

Parents as Teachers supported **1,743 parents and guardians** through at-home support. Parents as Teachers’ PICCOLO Assessment shows:

Increased Parenting Skills:

Assessment Area	Pre-Test	Post-Test
Affection	11.88	12.35
Encouragement	10.44	11.4
Responsiveness	10.82	11.76
Teaching	8.55	10.52
Total Assessment of Parenting Skills	41.15	45.73

Family Support in Community Environments

29 Local Partnerships provided family support programming in community environments. These programs included parent-child playgroups and parent to parent support to support parents mentally and emotionally.

- Kaleidoscope - **1,898 parents/guardians**
- Parent to Parent Support - **173 parents/guardians**
- Other Facilitated Parent-Child Playgroups - **160 parents/guardians**

Kaleidoscope Playgroups supported nearly **1,900 parents and guardians**. The Kaleidoscope Play & Learn Caregiver Feedback Form showed parents doing “a lot more” of the following:

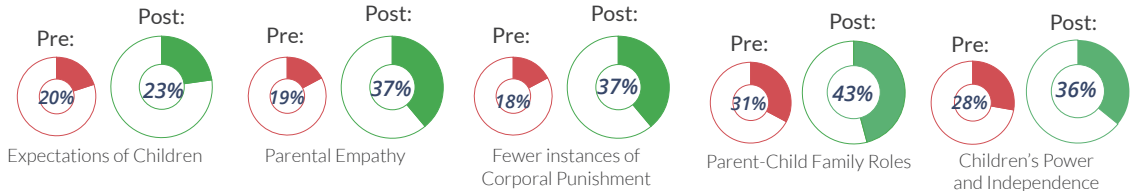
- Understanding what to expect from children at different ages - **57% of parents and guardians**
- Giving children opportunities to learn and try new things - **Approximately 63% of parents and guardians**
- Talking to or sharing ideas about caring for children with another adult - **57% of parents and guardians**

37 Local Partnerships increased parental knowledge through community family support.

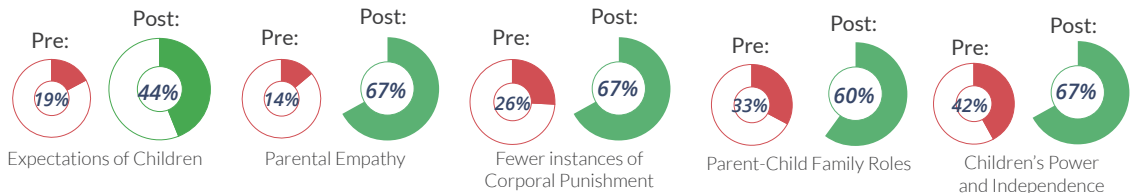
Select Family Support Programs Implemented by Smart Start Local Partnerships in Community Environments	Number of parents and guardians participating
Triple P Level 2-4	1145
Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) - Nurturing Skills for Families	249
Incredible Years (IY) - Preschool	115
Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP) - Parents and their Infants, Toddlers and Preschoolers - Group Sessions	84
Other Parent Education Programs	23

Participation in Nurturing Parenting Programs (NPP) Nurturing Skills for Families and NPP Parents and their Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers- Groups Sessions led to improvements in maltreatment. →

The Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory showed more adults at low maltreatment risk after participating in Nurturing Parenting Programs (NPP) Nurturing Skills for Families:



The Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory showed more adults at low maltreatment risk after participating in NPP Parents and their Infants, Toddlers, and Preschoolers- Groups Sessions:



Referrals and Connections to Critical Resources

16 Smart Start Local Partnerships implement family support programs that refer parents and guardians to needed resources.

Parents and guardians receiving these referrals include:

- Family Support Services Participants - **1,698 parents and guardians**
- Family Connects Participants - **1,337 parents and guardians**
- Family Intervention Participants - **362 parents and guardians**

Participation in these services has contributed to →

