

Children's Services Program Director Report

November/December 2021

Linda Carter

Covid Updates: Seven classrooms shutdown in November and December due to children exposed to Covid. Three classrooms shutdown due to staff with Covid exposure. Sixteen classrooms shutdown during the two months due to a lack of staff. Hiring continues to be a challenge and we are 58 staff down, not counting the new sites, Forest City and Tebeau St., Hendersonville, yet to come on line. We lost three children due to 11/29/2021 federal mask mandate for children ages 2 and older, but had two children return due to the required mask mandate. The agency Staff Recruitment Committee met on December 16th and is working together to brainstorm ideas, and identify and elevate issues and barriers in hiring qualified staff.

With the staff vaccine mandate enforced on November 8, 19 staff were unable to return to work on November 9. The Children's Services Management Team were quick in response and outreach to staff and families to help minimize the overall impact. The total classrooms closed was five. Approximately 18 children were asked to relocate to another site and 15 children were placed on hold, not currently receiving classroom services. Due to this staffing shortage, the children without child care received a "care-backpack," a special collection of items that included a cute animal puppet, a soft pillow, books, crayons, art project, and a hand-knitted hat in a clear backpack with their name on it. Each child needed to know that they are still a part of our WCCA Head Start family. The care packs included thoughtfully chosen items to help support their learning at home. By the end of December, the total Children's Services staff lost due to the vaccine mandate was 14. Three office staff are working remotely and two teaching staff chose the vaccine and returned on 12/1/2021.

Facilities Update: Letter of Intent has been issued to the contractor 12.10.2021 for the renovations at Tebeau Street locking in pricing with work forecasted to start in January. The contractor signed the contract and work at Forest City should start soon. We are still awaiting final word on our 1303 approval for the center to be built in Columbus. Discussions with Gateway Foundation and Town of Rutherfordton are continuing regarding the possible donation of land and infrastructure in Rutherfordton for a future children's center.

Head Start/NC Pre-k Update: NC Pre-K site administrators completed the NC Pre-K "Site Monitoring Tool" for classrooms on November 15 and submitted them to WCCA management with documentation. Next steps include site visits for all thirteen classrooms for validation during January 2022. All verified monitoring tools will be submitted to the state by January 31, 2022. LETRS planning continues in collaboration with HCPS and Voyager Sopris Learning group, which was mandated for NC Pre-K funded classrooms by NC DPI. Initial kick-off event for early childhood educators / administrators is scheduled for January 4, 2022. WCCA will have 13 lead NC Pre-K teachers training as well as 5 administrators. Additional training will take place Jan-May & Sept-Dec 2022.

Early Childhood Environmental Rating Scale assessment (ECERS), conducted by the state once every 3 years was completed. Clear Creek Children's Center achieved a score of 5.95 and Main St. Children's Center achieved a score of 6.1, which will initiate issuance of our permanent license for each site.

In November, we applied for the HS "Gro-More Good Garden Grant" (\$2,500-\$5,000) for improvements to our Main St. center, natural outdoor learning environment. Decisions will be announced mid December 2021. WCCA is also the recipient of a St. James Charities grant of \$2,500, to use at our Main St. location. Amy Smith, NC Pre-K / HS Program Service Manager is presenting at National Head Start "Parent and Family Engagement Conference" in Orlando, FL December 13-16, 2021. Presenting on the "Natural Outdoor Learning Environments: Re-connecting Children to Nature".

Family Services Updates: In the months of November and December, we had 377 participants enrolled across all of our programs. Enrollment for the Early Head Start/Head Start Grant is at 50% enrollment with Early Head Start being 58% enrolled and Head Start being 45% enrolled, including Dual Enrolled Children. In our NC Pre-K program, we are currently at 57% enrollment. In the Home Visiting Program, our overall enrollment is at 56%, without Early Head Start Home Based being at 48% enrolled and our Head Start Home Based at 80%. We are at 60% enrollment for CCP and 3% for the EHS Expansion Grant. Throughout the months of November and December, the ERSEA team has received and processed 58 new applications for enrollment and have enrolled 38 new children.

Due to staffing shortages and the COVID pandemic as a whole, we currently have 7 Early Head Start classrooms and 7 Head Start/NCPK classrooms closed. While classrooms are closed, the ERSEA team has been working diligently to continue enrollment as well as to build up the Waitlist so that we will have children to enroll once those classrooms open. We currently have 55 children on the EHS/CCP Waitlist and 76 children on the Head Start/NCPK Waitlist. In addition, some of the CCP sites are unable to accept children at this time due to staffing shortages or age restrictions. Any children that were placed on an enrollment hold, due to a classroom closing, are still receiving services from a Family Advocate and the ERSEA team has offered and will continue to offer slots to those children, as they become available.

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Program Support Services: The Program Support Services team developed a contract with a new Mental Health Consultant, Kelly Jean Tucker. She will be able to provide support to our staff and families as well as provide therapy services in the classroom for children in need. Our Behavior Specialists continue to work daily with classroom teachers and families to support the needs in the classrooms. Wellness Circles are being attended by the Site Supervisors in support of their mental health in the work they do. Teaching staff are infrequently attending these meetings.

The education and care of the children in the classrooms is key to high quality children's outcomes. To support this quality, our Coaching team was able to provide formal coaching to 33 of our classrooms during November. Teachers completed family conferences using October's child assessment data. We continue to support Site Supervisor's knowledge and monitoring of curriculum implementation. During November and December, we reviewed children's assessment data from our classrooms and home visiting program as well as scores from CLASS and Coaching to Fidelity tools to determine support needed for individual classrooms. Data Chats will begin with teaching staff in January.

The Site Supervisors, in conjunction with the Health & Nutrition Coordinator, have been updating individual site's COVID plans which will allow parents to reenter the buildings safely. With all that the Health Team is doing to support COVID protocols, we are adding a second Health Specialist to the team to support the continued growth and development of the support we offer to families and children around their children's health.

Our professional development days in December were adjusted to Optional Teacher Workdays to give more time for staff in classrooms. When we return from break in January, we will have our last 2 full days of training on the 4th and 18th. The training on the 4th will be multiple small sessions on brushing teeth in the classrooms, preparation for Focus Area 2 visit, LETRS Kick off, Supporting the Social Emotional needs of the children in the classroom, and First Aid & CPR. The training on the 18th will include our CCP sites in the afternoon.

EHS & Childcare Partnership Updates: Pearl Saddler joined our CS management team November 17th as EHS Manager. She is working with Area managers and Site Supervisors to learn our programs, staff, children, and families. Pearl brings a wealth of Head Start management experience and knowledge and will be a great asset to Children's Services. We were excited to welcome a wrap-around teacher for our Flat Rock Children's Center, a new Family Advocate, and onboard an additional Family Advocate in January 2022.

The CCP partnerships were officially included in the vaccine mandate for the first time in the 11/29/2021 Office of Head Start announcement. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) issued new Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) to outline the masking and COVID-19 vaccination requirements for grant recipient staff and the timelines, exceptions, and exemptions for each. Consistent with other HSPPS, these standards will be applied to Head Start, Early Head Start, Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership. The [Interim Final Rule with Comment Period \(IFC\)](#) is posted in the Federal Registers. CS management met with our CCP partners to review the IFC. WCCA legal counsel was available during the CCP meeting to answer their questions. WCCA Love and Learning partner decided to withdraw from the partnership due to the OHS mask and Vaccine mandate. We are working with the Director of Love and Learning to ensure a smooth transition to other school sites for the EHS children and families.

Family & Staff Recruitment: Advertising job openings:

- Posted some job ads within the feed in Facebook groups in Hendersonville and Brevard. Several people responded and one was passed on to [Kathleen McDavid](#) to explore opening a Family Child Care Home
- NC Pre-K positions advertised to area university Early Childhood Education programs
- CDA video produced and sent to Blue Ridge Community College faculty to share with early education students
- Reached out to Innovative High School Principal by email regarding their students and our CDA pathway
- Hola Carolina- Facebook and newsletter ads for bilingual staff. Communication has been challenging, they have not returned calls and are slow to follow up by email at times. They have run the ad on their Facebook page. However, we did not see the ad on their website, and are awaiting their response back.
- La Noticia- Corresponding with them to print a general hiring ad in their Asheville Hendersonville publication for 3 months. The ad will also mention we can help set up Family Childcare Homes
- Looking at possibly running ads in WNC Parent and other publications.

CDA Pathway: Made contact with several potential candidates and trying to determine their best pathway forward; contact is often after hours; some have not returned calls; but we are tracking progress, notes and follow up. Two candidates identified as close to obtaining a CDA:

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Updating and revising client recruitment materials: Gina spoke with Bobby, Terri and Meghan regarding pamphlets and brochures and needed changes. She plans to provide revised materials to Terri by January 20th on main family/child recruitment brochures.

Other Highlights: WCCA is one of several partners signing on to be a part of Transylvania County's GetSet **application for the Hunt Institute's Data Informed Strategic Planning Initiative**. The GetSet Transylvania Coalition hopes to use this initiative to reengage coalition partners and identify new partners who want to be part in examining existing and new data sources to inform collective outcomes for young children and their families and received notification on 12/17 that the team was accepted in the initiative!

The CS team is working hard to **prepare for the OHS FA2 review**. We provided training to the Policy Council, Board, staff, and community partners, reviewing policies and procedures and aggregating data to get ready. The facilities team has been an essential part of our FA2 preparation team. They have supported our efforts by monitoring facilities, replacing tiles, painting, mulching playgrounds, and more!

Several of our CS staff traveled to Florida for the **OHS Family Engagement Conference** in December. We hope this training provides us with many resources and information to enrich our family engagement programs. Amy Smith, Head Start & NC Pre-K Program Service Manager presented on Outdoor Learning Environments at the conference and received rave reviews!

The outpouring of **support of our families and program** during this challenging time has been truly heartwarming. Toys for Tots provided many lovely holiday gifts for our WCCA family's children this holiday season. Mud Creek Baptist church donated 150 appreciation gifts to our children's service staff, and the Rotary Club donated many beautiful children's books to our families. St. John in the Wilderness provided Holiday gifts for the entire Hillandale classroom. Marilyn Mainey of the Carolina Village knitting group delivered thick and colorful hand-knitted hats for the children of WCCA. Lou Kinsler's knitting group from St. James Episcopal Church also donated many beautiful hats. We would like to recognize Nancy Davis Morton. Nancy Davis Morton, 91, of Hendersonville, died peacefully on Tuesday, January 5, 2021. Nancy led the St. James Episcopal church knitting group for many years. Nancy was a lifelong advocate for young children and donated thousands of handmade hats and mittens for WCCA children over the years. She was a great friend of our program and will be greatly missed! Many thanks to our generous and caring community partners for bringing joy and cheer to the WCCA families and children. The families have expressed how much the community's love and support have meant to them during this time of hardship and challenges due to COVID and all of the resulting impacts.

Covid Classroom Impact - 10/28-10/29, 11/1-30/2021							
Classroom	Reason	Date(s)	Day(s) Out	Staff Affected	Children Affected	Cumulative Days Out: Staff	Cumulative Days Out: Children
Fletcher 1 Classroom Closed	Staff Exposure/Symptoms	10/28-11/3	3	2	12	6	36
Etowah 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage	10/29	1	1	5	1	5
Fletcher 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage	11/5	1	1	14	1	14
Hillview 1 Classroom Closed	Child Exposure/Symptoms	11/5***-11/17	6.5	6	6	6.5	39
King Creek 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage due to Vaccination Mandate Suspensions	11/9, 11/12-11/17	5	1	6	5	30
Fletcher 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage due to Vaccination Mandate Suspensions	11/9-11/17	6	1	14	6	84
Etowah 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage due to Vaccination Mandate Suspensions	11/9-11/10, 11/12	3	1	6	3	18

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Sugar Hill 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage due to Vaccination Mandate Suspensions	11/9-11/10, 11/12	3	1	5	3	15
Hillview 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage due to Vaccination Mandate Suspensions/Staff Training	11/12	1	1	16	1	16
King Creek 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage due to Vaccination Mandate Suspensions	11/12	1	1	13	1	13
King Creek 1 Classroom Closed	Child Exposure/Symptoms	11/19-11/29	4	2	18	8	72
Etowah 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage	11/19	1	1	4	1	4
Sugar Hill 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage	11/29	1	1	5	1	5
Dana 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage	11/29	1	1	14	1	14
Children Screened out prior to entering classroom (not already counted in classroom closings already)**	Child Exposure/Symptoms		312	0	59	0	312
Staff Out-Covid Related, but not associated with the classroom	Staff Exposure/Symptoms	29	1	1		1	
Staff Out-Covid related child care Issues	Child care issues due to public school's schedule/exposure/closures	11/17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 29, 30	7	2		8.5	
Totals:				24	197		

The following classrooms were closed "indefinitely" starting 11/15 due to the Vaccine Mandate: KCCC 3, SH 5, Etowah 3, and HV 3&5.

Students transferring from closed

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classrooms to new centers due to the Vaccine Mandate were off 11/15-11/17 & began in their new center on 11/18.							
ALL classrooms were closed November 11th for Veteran's Day and November 24th-26th for Thanksgiving.							
ALL classrooms had Early Dismissal on Wednesdays, November 6th & 20th for Professional Development.							
**This number does not include families who chose to exclude themselves.							
***Classroom shut down after started							
Some classes switch to virtual when closed. These days were still counted as being affected.							
Etowah HS closed on 11/3 (staff out)							
Hillview NCPK closed on 11/4&11/19. The only staff member in that room was out once for NC Pre-K training.							
Hillview 1 closed 11/9, 10, 12, 15-17 due to other reasons.							
Dana closed 11/12 (both staff out due to child care issues due to public schools being closed)							
KCCC NCPK closed on 11/12 (both staff out due to child care issues due to public schools being closed)							
FRCC Infant closed on 11/18&11/19 due to HVAC issues.							

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Covid Classroom Impact - 12/1-12/17/2021							
Classroom	Reason	Date(s)	Day(s) Out	Staff Affected	Children Affected	Cumulative Days Out: Staff	Cumulative Days Out: Children
Sugar Hill 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage	12/1	1	1	16	1	16
Fletcher 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage	12/1	1	1	14	1	14
Hillview 1 Classroom Closed	Child Exposure/Symptoms	12/13-12/14	2	0	16	0	32
Hillview 1 Classroom PARTIALLY* Closed	Child Exposure/Symptoms	12/15-12/17	3	0	14	0	42
King Creek 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage	12/14***	1	1	3	1	3
King Creek 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage	12/15	1	1	18	1	18
Etowah 1 Classroom Closed	Lack of Staff Coverage	12/15-12/17	3	1	16	1	48
Flat Rock 1 Classroom Closed	Child Exposure/Symptoms	12/16-12/17	2	0	7	0	14
Children Screened out (not already counted in classroom closings already)**	Child Exposure/Symptoms	64	21	0	21	0	64
Staff Out- Covid Related, but not associated with the classroom	Staff Exposure/Symptoms	10	0.5	1		0.5	
Staff Out- Covid related child care Issues	Child care issues due to public school's schedule/exposure/closures	1,2,3	3	1		3	
Totals:				7	125		
*Hillview classroom was open for the two children who had already had Covid in the last 90 days.							
Etowah opened a second EHS classroom on 12/07.							
Etowah and King Creek did not provide wraparound in December due to lack of staff due to Covid Mandate exodus and							

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reshuffling of classrooms.							
ALL classrooms were closed for Winter Break beginning 12/18. (Bruce Drysdale closed on 12/11.)							
**This number does not include families who chose to exclude themselves.							
***Classroom shut down after started							
Some classes switch to virtual when closed. These days were still counted as being affected.							
Dana closed early 12/17 (both staff out due to child care due to schools being closed for early dismissal at noon).							