



Drawing from the rich data, reflections and key findings of WNCSource's May 2019 Community Assessment, the following twelve recommendations were put forward to improve services for children and families served by the agency. WNCSource has made significant progress integrating the recommendations into their work and continue to use them as a guide to strategically advance their future progress.

## WNCSource Recommendations

**Recommendation 1. Review WNCSource program design to determine the best ways to increase the number of full-day/full-year center-based slots for birth to five (particularly infants and toddlers) and maintaining home-based slots for families who need them.**

**Progress:**

- Completed and received approval for a Home-Based slot conversion to reduce EHS Home Based slots and increase classroom services for eight Early Head Start children, in order to best meet the evolving needs of the community.
- Used expansion grant, unrestricted Covid, and foundation funding to acquire property (Tebeau Street) and began renovations of property to include five EHS and three NC PreK/HS classrooms.
- Applied for disaster relief and 1303 funding to replace the Columbus site that was lost due to flooding. Approximately \$273,000 awarded for soft costs to date.
- Created additional partnerships with Polk County Public Schools (PCPS) to replace space lost due to flooding and slots added through the EHS expansion grant for three classrooms within Sunny View Elementary (only one classroom is operational due to staffing shortage in 2021 - 2022). Additionally, collaborating with Polk County Schools to provide four private pay slots for the PCPS teaching staff, as the area is a child care desert.
- Converted the large Community Room at King Creek into a NC PreK/HS classroom.
- Placed half walls at Hillview and Flat Rock to add two EHS classrooms.
- Acquired an additional classroom from East Coast Migrant and converted to two EHS classrooms at Sugar Hill.
- Acquired a new leased property in Rutherford County, with renovations set to be complete by 4/2022. The three classrooms made possible through the EHS expansion grant.
- Closed three standalone WNCSource sites that had just one classroom each, due to the outdated model and facilities; leased a property with three classrooms, allowed for optimization of staff available to offer extended day care.

**Our work moving forward:** Work to finalize renovations of new properties and recruit staff. Continue strategic planning and partnership efforts to be responsive to the demonstrated community need. Consider implications of waiting list data.

**Recommendation 2. Continue to build upon strong community partnerships to increase access to comprehensive services in WNCSource sites. This will alleviate transportation issues by bringing health, mental health, and social services into locations where children and families regularly gather.**

**Progress:**

- In response to survey and outreach efforts, and in order to be more responsive to families, Family Advocates have been relocated from one site into program sites, which has improved engagement. Feedback regarding this change has been positive and indicated stronger connections with WNCSource teachers, team members, and families.
- Increased ability to communicate with others in languages other than English by hiring a Bilingual Family Services Coordinator and Family Advocates that are on-site in the communities with the most Spanish-speaking families, in order to provide immediate translation services.
- All ERSEA staff are bilingual.

**Our work moving forward:** Continue to communicate and brainstorm solutions with local resource providers and enrolled families to monitor the pulse of ongoing and one-time family needs as pandemic-related funds and services potentially reduce or expire.

**Recommendation 3. Formalize a process for reaching outside the WNCSource service area to access additional services including mental health, substance misuse, adult health, developmental disability, and other social services.**

**Progress:**

- Staff are serving on key local community Councils and Boards to build internal and external awareness of services in the service area, including, but not limited to: Juvenile Crime Prevention Council, GetSet READY!, PCPS & Trans Co.-NC PreK Committee, WNC-EC Advocacy Coalition Committee BRCC Ed. Advisory Committee, Local Interagency Community Council, Innovative Approaches, Mental Health RoundTable, Transylvania Childhood Education Project (WNCSource/Brevard College Partnership), Rotarian Reading to Children, Adolescent Parenting Program (APP) with CFRC, Family Education and Support Council with CFRC, WNCSource Recruitment Committee, HCPS /WNCSource Coordination of Services for Families, Henderson County for Activity and Nutrition, Family Connects Advisory Committee, GetSet: Kindergarten Readiness Rally Committee, BRCC Early Education Advisory Committee, READY! Sub-Committee: Early Childhood Education Coalition and WNCSource/Brevard College Intern Partnership.
- Due to a lack of resources in the past, contracts have been improved and formalized with Mental Health providers to increase providers.
- A Volunteer and Recruitment Coordinator has been hired for outreach to community partners to promote WNCSource programs and to learn more about resources and programs in the service area that serve the same population.

**Our work moving forward:** Volunteer and Recruitment Coordinator and other staff will continue exploration and relationship building outside of the WNCSource Service area to better connect enrolled families to extended resources.

**Recommendation 4. Identify service area transportation successes and challenges in order to enhance overall quality of services for families. Use previous experiences with Apple Transportation to identify solutions. Identify partnerships with Medicaid transportation services to coordinate better systems for collaboration. Work with families to better understand the Apple Transportation system.**

**Progress:** WNCSource has three parents enrolled as students at Innovation High School on the Blue Ridge College campus, with children enrolled at the Flat Rock Children's Center. WNCSource works collaboratively with the high school counselors, Children Family Resource Center's Adolescent Parenting Program and other local agencies to support these families. Due to the pandemic induced bus driver shortage, WNCSource has been working with local nonprofit agencies to assist these displaced high school students, to plan for transportation. One strategy utilized was to purchase gas cards for those who can drive the students to school. This short-term measure is meant to fill a gap as the pandemic has had a stark impact on transportation.

**Our work moving forward:** Continue to develop systemic transportation strategies to overcome challenges created during the pandemic.

**Recommendation 5. Ensure WNCSource representatives participate on local task forces with community partners to address identified challenges and develop strategic plan for partnerships. Focus of the committee could include housing, job training/availability, immigration issues, child welfare/foster care, and substance misuse. As appropriate, also identify possible advocacy action steps each partner can take. Coordinate all WNCSource members of the Task Forces to communicate and strategically plan community-wide efforts that impact program families and activities.**

**Progress:** The most current community focus has been the pandemic and its impact on children and families. The WNCSource Health and Nutrition Coordinator participates in the community COVID working group, coordinated by the Partnership for Health (local hospital, state health department) to remain informed of current health metrics, vaccination and testing information, and other related information. The coordinator has worked diligently to implement state guidance to determine and implement health and safety protocols for WNCSource sites. The Children's Services Director is a member of the WNC Early Childhood Coalition focused advocacy at State and Federal levels around early care and education. WNCSource is also collaborating with Connecting Families for professional development training of teaching staff on strategies for supporting children with prenatal exposure to alcohol and drugs made possible through a grant award. The Director is also a member of Transylvania County GetSet! and Henderson County Ready! initiatives.

**Our work moving forward:** Continue to work with local partners to ensure children and families are supported appropriately through the pandemic and continue networking to ensure representation in the community to work toward the creation of solutions to effectively support enrolled children and families with the most difficult barriers they face, beyond the pandemic.

**Recommendation 6. Create a Task Force related to services for Pregnant Women and Young Children (birth-5) that focuses on the wide range of issues that impact them in a way that builds upon the Transylvania Task Force Model.**

**Progress:** A Task Force was created and an internal review was conducted to identify services needed, in addition to an assessment of the available resources. Smart Start/Family Connect nurses are available to work with families, and WNNC Source Administrators serve on the Advisory Committee. The program is still being refined and very good progress is being made. The service needs of pregnant women and young children were clarified, methods for counting pregnant mothers were determined, and the implementation plan is in progress.

**Our work moving forward:** Continue to refine the understanding of the evolving needs of pregnant women and young children (birth-5) in the service area, and planning and implementation efforts to meet those needs.

**Recommendation 7. Continue to develop and communicate clear policies and procedures to staff, families, and partners regarding program operations. Ensure all stakeholders understand all program operations, the process for using vouchers and child care subsidy, referral and follow up roles and responsibilities, and communication strategies (both formal and informal).**

**Progress:**

- Strengthened policies and procedures regarding Eligibility, Recruitment, Selection, Enrollment and Attendance (ERSEA) and Family Advocates. Created strong policies and have implemented staff training. Created a family handbook in both English and Spanish.
- Have strong relationships with subsidy providers: Smart Start and DSS in Henderson County and DSS in Transylvania, Rutherford, and Polk counties. Communications and understanding regarding subsidies processes are consistent and the hours of care and wrap around care have been clarified. Extended hours have been added and now offer care 7:30 a.m. - 5:30 p.m. at all sites.

**Our work moving forward:** Continue to work with all stakeholders to ensure policies and procedures are clearly understood and followed consistently.

**Recommendation 8. Continue to create a program-wide focus on mental health supports for families, addressing challenging behaviors, and using trauma-informed practices. Integrate resources from national, regional, and statewide resources to enhance social and emotional supports in each center and home visiting setting.**

**Progress:** Through the Infant-Toddler Trauma-Informed Care (ITTI Care) Project, “Building Capacity for Trauma-Informed Infant & Toddler Care: A Professional Development Framework,” WNC staff received training, consultation, and coaching using a trauma-informed approach to promote culturally responsive, relationship-based practices.

Built around promotion of adult capacity for self-regulation and co-regulation, this model centers workforce wellness as the fundamental component of high-quality early childhood education. ITTI Care works closely with teachers and administrators at all levels of early childhood infrastructure to identify individualized changes in policy and practice at the classroom, center, and systems levels, always prioritizing relationships as a central driver for teacher well-being.

The staff at Sugar Hill Child Care Center, including six teachers in three classrooms, were trained in trauma-informed child care to promote understanding of the impacts of stress and trauma on infants and toddlers, develop infant/toddler teacher skills to form supportive, resilience-building relationships and environments, and identify strategies to support child care provider health and well-being. Additionally, all of the center's staff engaged in a staff wellness/learning day and created a staff wellness break room to encourage wellness during the day.

**Our work moving forward:** Continue to understand and train on best practices in order to support families to address challenging behaviors, with a particular focus on behaviors emerging as a result of isolation, etc., from the pandemic.

**Recommendation 9. Continue to enhance professional development for all staff. Training should include program policies and procedures, communication systems, processes for referral to community services, inclusive practices, management or leadership development opportunities, addressing challenging behaviors, and using trauma informed practices.**

**Progress:** Career pathways have been clearly defined and the requirements for teaching staff to move forward on a promotional pathway have been outlined, and include available professional development supports to help staff move forward in their career. Any staff member can apply for assistance through a newly established Education Committee. Additionally, all positions/job descriptions were reviewed and updated to ensure they offer the necessary prerequisite skill set needed to move forward on this pathway.

The Management Team is committed to the upward growth of staff within the agency and the hiring staff is encouraged to seek and hire employees that are interested in internal growth opportunities. Children's Services has regularly hired management, site supervisors, coaches, ERESA staff, and coordinators from within the agency. For example, all four of our Children's Services classroom support coaches were former WNCSource teaching staff. The team also recognizes that the potential for mobility within an organization is a powerful factor in the retention of employees.

In 2020 and 2021, WNCSource worked with consultant company, Foundation for Families (FFF), to better standardize policies and procedures for Family Advocates, Home Visitors, and ERESA functions and staff. FFF provided extensive training for staff on all the new policies and procedures. Interwoven within the policies and procedures and training are measures for improved communication systems at all levels of the organization, as well as to families and community partners.

Children services staff were provided the opportunity to attend either Head Start trainings, webinars, or conferences. Virtual training was the primary mode used for 2020 and during upticks of Covid in 2021. Some of the staff development opportunities included trauma-informed practice, challenging behaviors, mental health, and COVID procedures. WNCSource also sent a team of Family Advocates, teachers, and management to Orlando for the National Head Start Family Engagement Conference in 2021.

**Our work moving forward:** Continue to provide comprehensive training and engage with staff to clearly outline the promotional pathways and supports available to support their continuous internal career development.

**Recommendation 10. Explore how EHS-CCP sites are utilizing supplies, materials, and supports that enhance teacher capacity and are communicating with and/or coaching the EHS-CCP programs regarding the logistical considerations related to supplies and materials.**

**Progress:** EHS-CCP sites have received supplies for outdoor learning environments and have been provided curriculum training through a coach working exclusively with EHS-CCP sites on implementation. Through a mentor program, each site has an identified mentor-teacher to help other EHS teachers, and quarterly stipends support this program. The mentor teacher supports the teacher daily to implement ReadyRosie, curriculum, and assessments. Additionally, EHS-CCP staff have taken part in professional development days provided by WNCSource and have a dedicated coach.

**Our work moving forward:** Continue to explore supports for the EHS-CCP program and materials needed to successfully support teachers to implement the curriculum.

**Recommendation 11. Compare teacher job descriptions with real-world activities to ensure job description accurately reflects job requirements in a realistic and manageable way. Continue to improve use of technology and data systems to streamline work tasks. Integrate reflective supervision as part of the process of managing expectations, job requirements, and strategies to become more time-efficient.**

**Progress:** Teacher job descriptions have been compared with real-world activities to ensure job description accurately reflects job requirements and technology and data systems are in place to streamline work tasks; these were found to reflect Federal and State requirements. Reflective supervision has been integrated as part of the process of managing expectations, job requirements, and strategies to become more time-efficient.

**Our work moving forward:** Continue to provide reflective supervision and ensure job descriptions reflect job requirements and use evolving technology to improve efficiency of work tasks.

**Recommendation 12: Review workloads and schedules for staff to identify more flexible staffing patterns while maintaining adult-child ratios. Considering rotating schedules, job shares, and longer days with shorter weeks as potential solution to flexible hours.**

**Progress:** Completed a workforce study of staffing patterns and supports across sites to ensure an equal division of support staff, based on the number and age of children and type of classrooms. Implemented new standardized formula to ensure equal coverage at all sites. Largest impacts were seen in the schedules of afterschool teachers, the cleaning schedules, and the number of floaters in classrooms. Infant classroom also received additional support to compensate for the additional staffing needed for diapering and feeding. During the pandemic, additional staffing is not available, but will return as staffing levels increase.

**Our work moving forward:** Continue to review workloads and evaluate the implementation of the formula-based staffing model to ensure equity in staffing levels across sites. As staffing levels increase, ensure pre-pandemic staffing supports and patterns return equitably.