

**WESTERN CAROLINA COMMUNITY ACTION, INC.**  
**SELF-ASSESSMENT REPORT**  
**2022**

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## **Section I: Introduction**

### ***Program Description***

WNCSource is a Head Start (HS), Early Head Start (EHS), and EHS-Child Care Partnership (CCP) grantee serving pregnant women and children ages birth to five across four counties in western North Carolina. WNCSource serves families through center-based and home-based options. Center-based options include stand-alone classrooms, located in elementary school and community settings, as well as WNCSource facilities dedicated to early childhood education. Cumulative enrollment for the 2021-2022 program year was 180 in EHS, 146 in HS, and 107 in CCP.

### ***Program Goals and Objectives***

Between our grants, WNCSource has identified five BROAD goals and SMART objectives that relate to school readiness, family engagement, and coordinated program services. Our 5-year program goals and objectives include:

Enhance school readiness by providing high quality early education and child development services to all children enrolled that is inclusive of those with disabilities and dual language learners and promotes children's growth across each domain of development.

- Raise the educational levels of 10% of Early childhood teaching staff.
- Curriculum is implemented and taught to model fidelity across all programs by up to 75% of all teaching staff.
- 75% of WNCSource sites will have planned and designed Outdoor Learning Environments (OLE). Staff will be trained in the optimal utilization by children with alignment to classroom curriculum.
- WNCSource will use HOVRS (Home Visiting Rating Scales) and the team will achieve an average HOVRS rating of 5 or higher to exemplify a high-quality program.

In partnership with parents and community agencies, meet the health, oral health, nutritional and mental health and social emotional needs of children that support their optimal growth and school readiness.

- 100% of Children's Services Managers will participate on a local task force with community partners to address service challenges and form strategic partnerships.
- Create a program wide focus on mental health by establishing and completing up to 88% of action plan to implement Trauma Informed Care practices.
- Develop a behavioral support system that serves teachers & children utilizing CCP Coach and behavioral intervention support.

Build strong, effective partnerships with families and community agencies that supports school readiness for children enrolled in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs.

- Increase use of WNCSource website resulting in 40% of enrollment applications being submitted online.
- Have an active Parent Committee at 100% of WNCSource centers.
- Encourage parent or guardian attendance in Policy Council meetings by 75%
- Increase Non-Federal share generated by family involvement by 30% including growth through family/child activities taking place in the home

- 100% of FSW and Home-based staff will be trained in Family Development Model to maintain a strength-based approach to working with families.
- Provide 6 educational opportunities per year to support families of children with disabilities to inform them of their rights, resources available and make them better advocates for their child's needs.

Provide high-quality services to the children and families in our community to support school readiness

- Hire qualified staff to ensure all classrooms remain open to provide high quality services to families.
- Add 4 Family Child Care Homes in Transylvania and Polk County to our options for children's care in the Early Head Start program.
- Use a responsive pathway program to support at least 15 community or family members in gaining the skills and experiences to be successfully employed in Children's Services.
- Curriculum is implemented and taught to model fidelity by 75% of all teaching staff.
- 100% of Family Services Staff will be trained in the Family Development Model to maintain a strength-based approach to working with families.

Create a culture of wellness that improves staff and family wellness so that they are able to be present and responsive to the needs of the children and each other.

- A task force will implement strategic steps to promote the wellness of Head Start staff reflecting the Information Memorandum received from the Office of Head Start September 2021.
- Build an organizational culture that reflects Head Start's philosophy on diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- Families of our Head Start program make up at least 25% of our Health Services Advisory Committee and guides supports provided to meet the physical and mental wellness needs of the families.

### ***Context of the 2022 Self-Assessment***

Self-Assessment occurred during the Summer of 2022 which is a natural break in WNCSource's program years. Two grants run July to June and one runs August to July. This allowed the team to review year-end data from the program year. The team also reviewed previous self-assessment recommendations and our program goals and chose two focus areas to review with our families and community partners. We invited community partners and families to join our staff in digging deeper into the focus areas while reviewing and reflecting on quantitative and qualitative data from the program year.

## **Section II: Methodology**

### ***Timeframe***

#### **May 2022**

- Management team began to look at data and develop a staff survey.

#### **June 2021**

- Staff survey was distributed via Survey Monkey through Human Resources
- WNCSource leadership meeting held to review the Head Start Management Wheel
- Management team met to reflect on data gathered and narrow focus to 2-3 areas/questions. Plans were made to recruit staff, families, and community partners to join the process.

#### **July 2021**

- Self-Assessment Gatherings held to engage in conversation and building of recommendations for WNCSource's implementation in the coming program year.

#### **August 2021**

- Management team reviewed and developed final recommendations.

#### **September 2021**

- Report completed.
- Report presented for approval to Policy Council and WNCSource Board of Directors.

#### **October 2021**

- Adjust report, if needed, as advised by Policy Council and WNCSource Board of Directors.
- Communicate insights shared with stakeholders and staff
- Create Improvement Plan

### ***Self-Assessment Design***

Through review of monitoring data, classroom observations, facility walk-throughs, family services data, child assessment data, health and safety reports, and antidotal information received from families, staff and community partners, a couple of additional areas of additional focus were identified. The self-assessment leadership team, with input and approval from Policy Council and Board of Directors, chose the primary areas related to our family engagement and qualified staff program goals. Two gatherings were held to focus on the different topics.

The first gathering involved families of our program in conversation around wellness, school readiness and our parenting curriculum. The prompting questions brought to families included:

COVID has brought to light the need to focus on our personal wellbeing through physical and mental health. They were issues before COVID that have been made worse with COVID related stress. As a result, we have a new program goal: Create a culture of wellness that improves staff and family wellness so that they are able to be present and responsive to the needs of the children and each other. How can WNCSource support your family's mental and physical health? What are ways that you could support our staff's wellbeing?

As a part of Head Start we provide a parenting curriculum to support your skills as a parent. We want to build active partnerships with our families to support the children who are enrolled in our programs. One way we do this is to provide a parenting curriculum to

support your skills as caregivers for your children. Participation has been low in using Ready Rosie and My Family App this program year. What has been your experience with Ready Rosie and My Family App? Why is participation low? What can we do to improve?

School readiness is providing the spaces for our children to grow and thrive so that they are ready for Kindergarten and life. We have noticed that the children are not meeting expectations like we would hope. While we believe the pandemic has played a major role in this (absences, changing classrooms, home disruptions) we would like to see if there are other factors that we are not aware of. We provided School Readiness Kits to Head Start children headed to Kindergarten to participate in learning over the summer before Kindergarten. Did you receive one? How was it used? How can we as an agency help include you better in your child's math and literacy learning?

Our second gathering involved community members in conversations around wellness and school readiness. The prompting questions we brought to this group included:

Early Childhood Educators across the nation are struggling with the combined factors of a pandemic and the great resignation. Our staff are in crisis. We have a new program goal: Create a culture of wellness that improves staff and family wellness so that they are able to be present and responsive to the needs of the children and each other. This past year we have offered a wellness program to earn PTO with low participation, our second-annual wellness afternoon, wellness emails every other week, and one on one support in the classroom from our support staff (coaches, early intervention team). What are some ways that you are supporting your staff in your agencies? What are some ideas that we might be missing?

The impact of COVID on the children in our program has been noticeable in our child assessment scores which are lower in literacy and mathematics than pre-COVID. It is important to note that the children who are headed to Kindergarten have not had access to a 'normal' early childhood classroom since they were 2 or 3 years old. As an agency we are supporting our staff in implementing our curriculum to fidelity and training new teachers as seasoned teachers are leaving the classroom. We are a part of the NC state initiative to support language skills through training this spring in the LETRS program (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling). What resources are available in our community that could support our children, teachers, and families?

Through our conversations with both groups we further examined data, identified areas of growth and developed recommendations.

### ***Team Members***

The self-assessment team was composed of internal and external stakeholders and community partners to ensure a comprehensive assessment of our program.

- 23 Families
- Internal WNCSOURCE staff:
  - Children's Services Director
  - Program Support Services Manager
  - EHS & CCP Program Manager
  - Education Coordinator
  - Operations & Procurement Manager

- Enhanced Program Quality & Data Manager
- HS & NCPReK Program Manager
- School Readiness Coach
- Early Intervention Specialist – Behavior
- Family Services Coordinator
- Child Care Partnership Coordinator
- Local Community College Faculty
- Local Early Childhood Organizations
  - Smart Start; Kindergarten Transition Coordinator
  - CCR&R: Children and Family Resource Center; Family Services Director
- Local Part C Provider: Child Psychologist and WNCSource Board Member
- Local Adult Literacy: Executive Director

## **Section III: Key Insights**

### ***Program Strengths***

- In the face of adversity with the pandemic and loss of staff, WNCSource recognizes the impact that these have had on staff and is striving to implement practices to support staff wellness through offering paid time off, mental health days, reflective supervision, employee assistance program, wellness circles, wellness emails, and more.
- Staff are making progress, building and maintaining positive connections with families, and looking to continue learning and growing. Families recognize staff as welcoming, caring, and devoted. The number of optional training has increased, allowing for a greater variety of professional development opportunities that align with staff needs.
- A supportive environment is provided to meet the needs of staff as they encounter situations with families that may evoke various feelings. Reflective practice and wellness groups are available to staff and supervisors. Peer-to-peer recap opportunities are available in team meetings.
- Many connections continue to be formed with other community agencies and groups to provide support to families. Examples include new relationships with trauma-informed care groups where staff have received specialized training.
- The active supervision monitoring process has been improved and revised, allowing more efficient collection of usable data.

### ***Areas for Improvement***

- COVID has limited our ability to bring families into the classrooms. Families expressed a desire to be in the classrooms and participate in activities so that they can support their child in their learning as well as support the teaching staff's wellbeing.
- Families shared needing more family engagement opportunities. During 2021-2022 we were re-building many efforts and the families shared that they missed being in person and engaging in meetings & engagements. Those who were able to participate, found the experiences rewarding and supportive for their family's wellness.
- Through in-person conversations with families, we can fully explain the many resources and support that WNCSource offers and provide a more precise understanding of those services. Newsletters, Email, telephone, and text communications were not as effective as "face-to-face" in-person communication. In person, communication was limited throughout COVID, but with this knowledge, we will be mindful of providing many modes of communication to ensure effectiveness.

### ***Findings and Discoveries***

- There are some un-tapped resources in our community to support adult literacy which then in turn will support children's growth in language and mathematics.
- There are different opportunities to support staff wellness that we could explore as the children's services department of WNCSource including a focus on the 5R's of Relationships, Resources, Recognition, Reasons, and Reflective Dialogue. There are other opportunities to support staff wellness that will take an agency wide approach.
- Ensure staff physical and mental wellness is a lynchpin for ensuring the growth and retention of employees. There are many ideas that exist on how to support our staff and yet there are many systemic barriers in place within WNCSource that are limiting the movement in some of these innovative ideas.

## Section IV: Key Recommendations

The key recommendations were developed with insight from families and community partners.

- Revamp our implementation and roll-out of Ready Rosie as our Parenting Curriculum and look at other ways to implement activities at home related to curriculum (not continue agency wide use of My Family App).
  - Focus on helping families understand the why and getting into their first few activities. Families shared that once they were in and understood the why and system, they appreciated the resource, used the learning, and interacted more with their child.
  - Rather than using another app for the curriculum tie into the home, teachers will introduce other methods (including Ready Rosie as applicable) to share activities with families that directly related to the learning happening in the classroom.
- Reframe family engagement with our families as we are now able to open our classrooms to families following COVID.
  - Provide professional development to Family Advocates and additional new staff to support their understanding of the Head Start Philosophy of the importance of families in the life of the program.
  - Re-introduce how classrooms can collect and record In-Kind with families being able to volunteer in classrooms.
- Continue to focus on the importance of communication between staff and families especially in the areas of making connections with the community, supporting referrals, and follow-up on family's use of community resources.
  - Look at the community resources around literacy support for children and families and build new partnerships to bring more resources to our children, families, and staff.
- While the open positions are impacting the level of work that needs to be completed by some positions, staffing shortages are not the staff member's responsibility and we need to find ways to support our current staff and their wellness while continuing to recruit and hire for vacant positions.
  - Pursue hiring a recruiter to support the hiring efforts in an early childhood workforce desert.
  - Increase the rate of pay for Family Advocates and Teaching Staff.
  - Continue to learn about the 5R's for Learning Leaders and implement these principles into our daily functioning to create safe spaces where staff feel recognized, supported, and able to do their work to the best of their abilities.
  - Look at how to reallocate funds to be able to spend more on the people through bonuses rather than PTO through the wellness program and wellness funds to support new initiatives.