



Excellence in Innovation Awards Program

Alexander County Health Department- Behavioral Health Clinic

Bria Marlowe, LeeAnne Whisnant, Billie Walker, Ashley Moretz,
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Summary

Alexander County Health Department was able to obtain grant funding to start and open a behavioral health program within its medical facility. Our program is unique in that our clinician is a full time employee, and is embedded directly within the facility making her accessible to other programs and staff if a need should present. This integrated program reduces or eliminates many barriers our patients have to care, specifically accessing mental health services.

Problem

- Alexander County has a tremendous need for mental health services, as well as other health clinicians. We are a medically underserved rural community. We have seen an increase in substance abuse, death by suicide, and domestic violence within our county.
- Many are unable to access counseling or treatment services for themselves and/or their family when experiencing a mental health crisis or life-changing event due to many barriers.
- The suicide rate in Alexander County during the years 2011-2015 was 19.1 deaths per 100,000 residents, making it one of the top 10 causes of death locally. Even though this is a slight

decrease from the previous years, it is still a concern because it is still significantly higher than the state average of 12.7 deaths per 100,000.

- Alexander County's rate of substance abuse and mental health-related visits to emergency departments was 2033.2 per 100,000 as compared to the state average of 1697.8 per 100,000. The rate of opiate related deaths is also higher than the state average at 64.5 deaths per 100,000 as compared to North Carolina's at 51.5 per 100,000.
- Alexander County has no hospital located within county borders. All accessible hospitals are 30 minutes away from the

town of Taylorsville and there are some areas in Alexander County where the closest accessible hospital is 45 minutes away. With the lack of transportation resources, our most vulnerable populations are often left with no means to access needed medical and/or behavioral health services.

- Expanding our Public Health programs to be more comprehensive has allowed access to treatment and to possibly help reduce the burden of mental health disease on our client outcomes.

Solution

- After securing funding by way of the Duke Endowment Grant, a physical space was outfitted to include a personal office for a clinician, as well as two separate spaces to implement therapy (one for adults and one for children).
- In August 2019, the program started the process to secure a Medicaid contract, as well as multiple private insurance contracts to help contribute to long-term sustainability for the program.
- In 2020, the team hired a Licensed Clinical Social Worker to see clients.
- Through our integrated health care services, our Family Nurse Practitioner works collaboratively with our clinician

to provide holistic care to our clients. Also, our maternity and family planning clinic saw a need for individual and family counseling that can now be addressed by our clinician.

- We eventually hope to offer parent workshops that would focus on stress that all parents experience, and how to better cope with parenting demands, as well as life's daily challenges.
- We would also like to provide family planning counseling to patients that are dealing with miscarriages, infertility, or other family-planning issues.
- By integrating care, we have helped reduce the barrier of transportation as it relates to getting to multiple appointments

at different times and locations. We have alleviated the problem of scheduling delays and inability to access appointments in a timely manner, and this has shown a great reduction in anxiety and stress with entering care with an unknown entity.

- Through our current grant funding from the Duke Endowment, we have the privilege of being able to provide services to those without a financial source.



Results

Our program is very much in its infancy stages; however, we are honored and excited to be providing a resource to Alexander County to positively impact mental health services and access. Prior to the opening of our program we were aware of only two other providers in the community, and we have been able to develop a partnership with one of them through our development to even better serve the individuals and families. One life saved makes this program a success.

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Step 9
Bria Marlowe, Health Educator, wrote and submitted BH grant to the Duke Endowment in December 2017	Met with Stacy Warren of the Duke Endowment on February 16, 2018, to discuss program details and plans.	May 8, 2018 received notice that our grant was approved.	Meetings with community stakeholders August 2018-November 2018 (meetings continue as our program developed)	Behavioral Health Forum to gather community input September 18, 2018.	Renovated office space for BH program May-July 2019.	Hired BH provider August 2019.	In February 2020 we received a full contract with Vaya Health for our Medicaid patients.	In February 2020 we were able to start seeing our first patients.



Excellence in Innovation Awards Program

The Energy Innovation Task Force Buncombe County

Brownie Newman, Julie Mayfield, Jason Walls, Robert Sipes, Sam Ruark-Estes,
Sophie Mullinax, Bridget Herring and Jeremiah LeRoy

Summary

The Energy Innovation Task Force (EITF) was created as a joint effort between Buncombe County, the City of Asheville and Duke Energy Progress. The creation of the EITF was a direct response to Duke Energy's Carolinas Western Modernization Plan, with the primary goal being to delay or avoid the construction of an additional peaking plant. The EITF engaged in a multi-year campaign to determine the energy reduction needed, and to enhance and create programs to address energy efficiency and peak demand reduction.

Problem

Need to lessen the **dependence on fossil fuels** to address the current climate crisis

Duke Energy's Carolinas Western Modernization Plan included an **additional natural gas "peaking" plant**

This additional peaking plant would cost utility rate payers over **\$100 million**

Findings

Approx. 17 megawatts of demand reduction needed to eliminate the need for the additional peaking power plant

The primary driver for peak energy usage in the county was **high residential demand on the coldest winter mornings** (unusual for the Southeast US)

Solution

Buncombe County and its partners convened the **Energy Innovation Task Force** (EITF)
EITF core members **identified other community stakeholders** that should be part of the team

Through partnerships, the Blue Horizons Program provided **basic improvements and weatherization**, such as weather stripping and insulation, LED bulbs and air sealing, as well as **deep retrofits**, such as HVAC upgrades, mold remediation and home repairs

Results

The efforts produced Duke Energy pilot program that uses a **verified energy savings model** versus the estimated deemed energy savings traditionally offered in current utility efficiency programs

Duke Energy has **removed the additional Peaking Plant** from its long range plans

- Saving the rate payers of Buncombe County millions in cost recovery fees from the utility
- Preventing the need for additional fossil fuel infrastructure in the region

Funding approved to increase the number of residences weatherized to 300 per year in FY21

- The total weatherization clients served by the Blue Horizons Energy Upgrade program totaled **330** (130 more homes than initially planned) 150 single family and 180 mobile homes
- Collectively saving these households an estimated **\$55,000 annually** in utility costs and **10,000 MT of CO2**
- Increase of **59%** in Duke's EnergyWise for Home participation
- Increase of **253%** Energy Efficiency participation in Duke's multifamily demand side management program
- Increase of **133%** for Duke's Residential Home Assessment Program

"This investment will help avoid the need for the peaker plant while at the same time enabling more renewable energy deployment onto the grid."
- Brownie Newman, Buncombe County EITF rep. and the chair of the Board of Commissioners

"You can imagine somebody heating their home with a space heater and not realizing the [equivalent of a] window is open just because of all the cumulative leaks."
- Jonathan Gach, manager of Blue Horizons

Step 1

E-Lab Accelerator at Rocky Mountain Institute: County, City and Duke Energy participated in a program which resulted in the formal creation of the Energy Innovation Task Force (EITF) to address the desire to avoid construction of a new gas powered peaking plant to be built in Asheville in 2023.

Step 2

Duke Energy hired a consulting firm to assist in creating a campaign around the goals of the EITF to reduce energy demand, increase demand side management and promote energy efficiency - resulting in the Blue Horizons Project.

Step 3

Hired a full-time Project Manager for Blue Horizons - salary for the position was shared between Buncombe County and the City of Asheville

Step 4

Coordinated meeting between all local service providers and Duke Energy program managers from across the Southeast to increase understanding and collaboration among partnering agencies.

Step 5

Buncombe County applied for and received a grant from the Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund, \$300,000 for two years, to enhance the efforts of the Blue Horizons Project and increase services for County residents

Step 6

Hiring of a full-time Project Manager for weatherization and energy upgrades for low moderate income resident of the County

Step 7

Creation of a unified process for intake, assessment, service provision and data access among local providers and the utility



Excellence in Innovation Awards Program

Library to Go Catawba County

Siobhan Loendorf, Suzanne White, Greta Caldwell, Kelly Sigmon and Sarah Sherfey

Summary

We understand that to truly turn outward and serve everyone we must get outside of our library building to meet people where they are. Beginning in 2018, in alignment with the county's strategic initiatives, the Catawba County Library established our version of a pop-up library we call the Library to Go. This new service has expanded the library's capacity to build relationships, target areas of need, and partner in the community to bring services, materials, programs, technology resources, and internet access beyond the library walls and to the people that need them the most, especially to non-traditional locations and underserved audiences.

Problem

Need to drive new models for **improving information access and delivery** and expand the reach of library services beyond the physical walls of the building

- In 2015, 23% of the county population received food and nutritional services and, in 2014, approximately 23% of the children in the county lived in **poverty**
- A large percentage of the population is **65+**, of those 26% live alone, have less than a high school diploma and are vulnerable to social isolation and another 37% have a disability that restricts their activities
- **Lack of transportation** is a huge barrier to access for many who reside in our mostly rural community

Results

The program is very **cost-effective** as organizations and citizens across Catawba County have benefitted from the access to the **shared** library resources and technology

2 school districts, the township of Catawba, senior centers, childcare centers, after school programs, etc. benefit from full library services and access to books and technology at **no cost to them**

Helped to **reshape attitudes** about library outreach being the job of one designated person to a mindset of **outreach and community engagement** throughout the system

Solution

The Library to Go and the Librarian to Go **take a vast array of resources, skills and empathy outside the library walls** to populations that do not currently have library services and are not able to access online resources and tools for learning and job-seeking

Examples of outreach:

- Provides library services twice a month at **2 local high schools** that don't have an in-school library; the Librarian to Go builds important **relationships** with the students
- The library worked in collaboration with the Corner Table Soup Kitchen and a private business to host **lunch-and-learn sessions** adjacent to a mobile home community and at a neighborhood park

Staff at all 7 library locations began partnering more in the community, with the number of library partners up year over year from **172 to 255 partners**

In 2019, the Library to Go conducted **242 outreach events** reaching over **10,000 citizens** with access to powerful information tools and resources. When verbally surveyed, **100%** of participants said they learned something

Virtual reality equipment is one of the most popular technology tools on the Library to Go, with 100% of people who used the equipment saying they learned something new.



Step 1

Identified the need to reach people in the community where they are to serve those who are not able to take advantage of existing library services

Step 2

Identified partner organizations in the community including Hickory City Schools, Catawba County Schools, Centro Latino, Public Health and their Farmers Market program, municipalities, and childcare and senior centers

Step 3

Secured grant funding through a State Library grant to purchase, configure and brand a Pop-Up Library vehicle

Step 4

Hired a full time librarian to be the Librarian to Go

Step 5

Developed robust collection of books, audiobooks, technology and STEAM resources for the Library to Go resources

Step 6

Librarian to Go began to build partnerships and conduct outreach and Pop Up Library stops at community organizations with crates of books, traveling in their personal vehicle

Step 7

Library to Go Sprinter Van delivered and outfitted with resources

Step 8

Community outreach and engagement to partner organizations and community events expanded



Excellence in Innovation Awards Program

Make Your Recycling Efforts Count! Catawba County

Jack Chandler, Amy McCauley, Paul Foster, Jonathan Greer, Nathalia Queen,
Amanda Kain

Summary

The main objective of the project was to encourage current recyclers to be better recyclers by removing contaminants from their single stream recycling efforts. Thus, ultimately recovering a cleaner recycling stream and adding value to the recyclable materials. Additionally, the goal was to create an effective educational campaign that could easily be used and/or replicated by other jurisdictions, as it was produced 100% in-house at no cost.

Problem

Contamination of the county's single stream recycling program

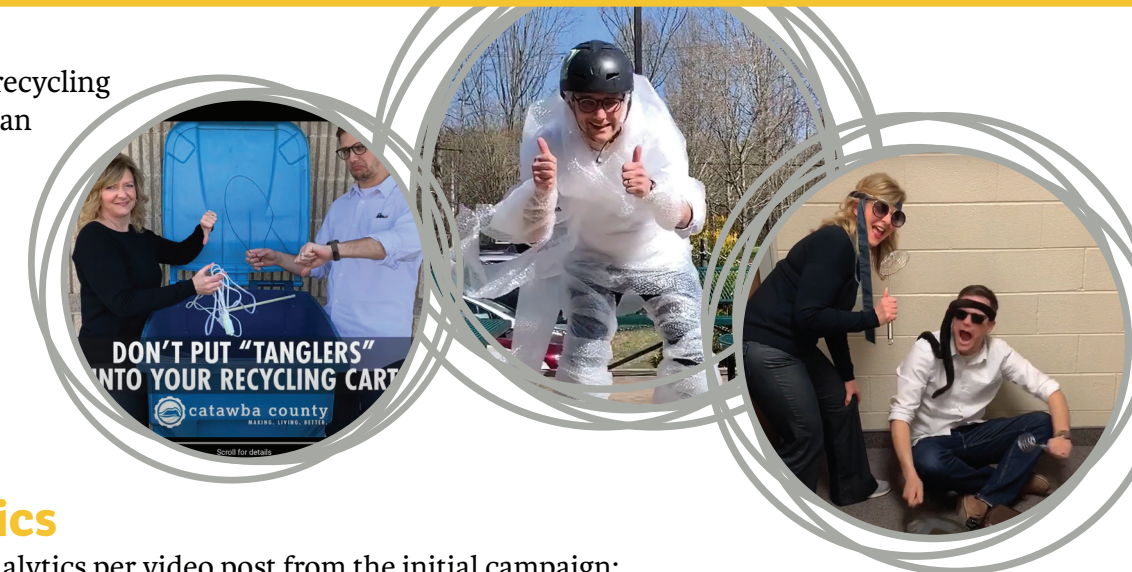
Lack of public education on how to lessen the contamination of their own recycling efforts

Solution

Create and disseminate 6 **short, fun educational videos** on how to re-use/properly dispose of contaminants on the County's Facebook page

Each video **targeted** one of the six top contaminants in the County's recycling stream: bagged recyclables, tanglers, plastic film/grocery bags, scrap metal, textiles & food waste.

Reinforce the videos with additional social media messaging



Results

The social media campaign received a **consistent level of engagement** that was significantly higher than the County's usual day-to-day Facebook analytics, proving effectiveness in connecting the video messages with the community

As of May 11, Republic Services reports an increase of **2,125 new recycling carts delivered** to residential customers in Catawba County since the videos were published

Feedback from the Republic is that the **recycling stream from Catawba County is among the cleanest** material that comes into their facility and Catawba County's recycling program has **ranked in the top five programs** in the state

Analytics

Facebook analytics per video post from the initial campaign:

	People Reached	Video Views	Reactions, Comments & Shares
Bagged Recyclables:	6,927	3,218	214
Tanglers:	6,216	3,269	176
Plastic Films/Grocery Bags:	4,219	1,903	84
Food Waste:	3,907	2,142	109
Scrap Metal:	3,499	1,563	94
Textiles:	2,761	1,223	38

Step 1

Meeting to formulate the creative plan

Step 2

Meeting with Republic Services to determine top 6 recycling stream contaminants

Step 3

Development of video production agenda and timetable, and Marketing Plan

Step 4

Developed/made/gathered props for use in videos

Step 5

Shot and edited videos

Step 6

Campaign Kickoff on April 22, 2019 (Earth Day)

Step 7

New video released each Monday beginning April 22nd running through end of May, 2019.



Excellence in Innovation Awards Program

Behavioral Health Navigation for Inmates at Henderson County Detention Center Henderson County

Lowell Griffin, Steve Smith, Captain Todd McCrain, Judith Long, Bill Lapsley,
Amy Brantley, Tina LaFoy and Andres Ruiz

Summary

The Henderson County Department of Public Health and Henderson County Sheriff's office are partnering with a local nonprofit, The Free Clinics, to provide comprehensive "discharge planning" for inmates at the county detention center. The particular focus is on those inmates dealing with substance use disorder.

Problem

12+ overdoses/100,000 persons in the county from 2011-2015 (NC Medical Journal)

2x the number of emergency department opioid overdose visits since 2010

2x+ number of EMS naloxone administrations from 2010-2017

"Opioid high risk" county

Findings

Largest concentration of those with substance abuse disorder located in Henderson County Detention Center

Most inmates are in detention center a short time: most successful treatment approach would be to **initiate within** the center and **ensure access after** release

Overdose rates are extremely high upon immediate release from a detention center.

Solution

Funds were allocated to create a pilot navigator position to be based at the Detention Center, contracted through the Free Clinics

Goals

- Meet with **75%** of the detainees in HCDF during their detention
- That **20%** of the former detainees in HCDF after the end of their detention will actually follow up with referrals to appropriate care

"When individuals pursue mental health and substance use recovery, families and communities also benefit."

- Brian Ingraham, CEO, Vaya

"These new services at the jail and in the community will help ensure inmates with behavioral health concerns are afforded a more seamless transition to care once released from detention."

- Judith Long, Executive Director, The Free Clinics

"At the Henderson County Sheriff's Office, our goal, by virtue of this partnership, is to provide an opportunity for individuals with behavioral health challenges to regain and manage their lives with hope and purpose."

- Sheriff Lowell Griffin

Results

Over the past five months of the pilot program...

- Navigator has met with **86%** of the inmates
- **40%** of those with substance use disorder who have expressed interest in recovery have been placed in treatment programs
- Applications have been completed for another **50%** of those with SUD interested in treatment (awaiting acceptance into programs and/or release from detention).

08/2018-02/2019

Commissioner Bill Lapsley convened a Substance Abuse Task Force to examine issues of Substance Use Disorder in the community

05/2019

The SA Task Force presented its findings to the Board, including a funding request for a navigator for the Detention Center as a pilot program

06/2019

Henderson County Board approved \$50,000 to the Dept of Public Health for pilot program

Fall 2019

County Health Director, Asst. County Manager, Commissioner Lapsley and The Free Clinics Director Judith Long met to explore program design for the pilot

01/2020

Memorandum of Understanding created among Henderson County DPH, Sheriff's Office, and The Free Clinics for the pilot, with projected outcomes identified

01/2020

The Free Clinics and Detention Center Administrator address specific program plans

01/2020

The Free Clinics hires and trains navigator and places staff in the Detention Center

01/2020

Under a separate contract with Vaya Health, The Free Clinics hires, trains, and places behavioral health clinician at the Detention Center

Spring 2020

The Free Clinics Patient Health Navigator and Clinician work with County Detention Center team to assess, evaluate, and engage inmates in their needs and create "discharge plans" for inmates



Excellence in Innovation Awards Program

No Wrong Door Macon County

Diana Mashburn, Derick Jones, Sheila Jenkins, Samantha Brawley, Howard Dowdle, Rev. Mike Barres, Joey Gibson, Dale West, Patrick Betancourt, Commissioner Ronnie Beale

Problem

Like all Counties, Macon County was in desperate need of a facility that would fill the void of **those in need of help with substance abuse and mental illness**, and also provide help for the families that have a loved one that has a substance abuse issue or mental illness. This was a community effort from the beginning. The county did not have the resources to **provide counseling and help to our most vulnerable citizens**. In less than a year, No Wrong Door has become an organization that the community relies on for help in many ways, including counseling and finding places for some to go that need advanced care for substance abuse and mental illness. In addition, No Wrong Door was selected as one of 5 programs in the U.S. to start a veterans suicide prevention program.

Solution

No Wrong Door immediately **started a peer support group for substance abuse** and held classes to enhance the number of peer support specialists, as well as started the Advanced Jail Second Chance Program. These two programs alone have had great success. Macon County has seen the number of those arrested a second time that completed or are currently in our programs drop significantly, **which is a huge savings for our county**. No Wrong Door works closely with local probation and parole office to help those individuals become a part of the Community by helping with job placement and housing. These are just a few of the programs No Wrong Door has started, and sometimes we feel overwhelmed until you see how people do change and become a totally different person. Funding is always a issue, as the demand continues to grow for the services our program provides.

Results

No Wrong Door averages around 15 individuals and families a day in need of help in some way. The program is committed to help each individual that contacts us, and according to Sheriff Robert Holland, the savings to the county has been in the thousands because of the jail program. No Wrong Door also has a follow up program for everyone that we have contact with. This program is led by Macon County EMS, and Joey Gibson, who works in EMS and is a board member of No Wrong Door, is in charge of this program. We have seen the admissions to the emergency room for IVC's and VC's drop by over 40% since our follow up program was started. These are just a few of the programs we are working on to not only save money, but more importantly save lives - all of which benefits our community.



Step 1

Community meetings
(x3 over 9 months)

Step 2

Finding a location for
No Wrong Door
(2 months)

Step 3

Establishing No Wrong Door as
501(c)3
(2 months)

Step 4

Getting wonderful volunteers
(1 week)

Step 5

Hiring a director
(3 weeks)

Step 6

Community donations
(3 months)

Step 7

Started program



Excellence in Innovation Awards Program

LIEAP into the Community Scotland County

April Snead, Joy Hine, Nicole Yarborough, Richard Ramsey, Frances McLean, Antonia Rainer, Mary Bender and Falana Jackson

Summary

The LIEAP program has been underutilized in Scotland County for a number of years. To reach the senior citizen and disabled population, outreach events were organized and held in senior living complexes. The events were successful, providing for more utilization of the program.

Problem

Over several years, the Scotland County Department of Social Services has struggled to disperse all Low Energy Assistance Program (LIEAP) funding

- Lack of awareness and travel constraints
- Often, the elderly and disabled do not have or cannot access transportation to visit DSS and apply for services

Solution

Drew on internal resources and **cost neutral** external resources

Community **outreach events** were planned and held on site at each of the four apartment complexes housing only the elderly and disabled in Scotland County

Promotions:

- Flyers were distributed the week before by property managers
- A local radio station, WLNC, made daily announcements leading up to the event and showcased the event in a morning show interview with a DSS staff member
- DSS reached out through the local newspaper, the Laurinburg Exchange
- Announcements on the Scotland County DSS Facebook page

At the events:

- Medicaid representatives were present to take Medicaid applications on site
- Social workers presented information, gave handouts and answered questions about services offered through the Adult Services Program
- Residents were educated and **applied for services on site**
- Staff assisted clients with filling out applications when literacy, vision or disability prevented them from completing them, as well as making house-calls for shut-ins and those with mobility issues



Results

In December 2018, only \$71,000 was paid to heating vendors on behalf of citizens. In December 2019, **\$123,000** was paid to heating vendors to ensure citizens remained warm in their homes.

While at the sites, **79 applications** were taken for the LIEAP program

Feedback was **grateful, welcoming, and optimistic** for the next year

The Department **plans to continue the outreach events annually** in order to provide ongoing services to those most vulnerable citizens of our community

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8
Identify the need to increase LIEAP beneficiaries (over previous years)	Explore barriers to beneficiaries (one week)	Contact housing communities for elderly and disabled (two weeks)	Educate staff on outreach events and gather staff input (one week)	Advertise (throughout November 2019)	Host outreach events (two weeks)	Gather data and analyze (one week)	Plan for annual outreach (ongoing)



Excellence in Innovation
Awards Program

Fungi Demonstration Project

Transylvania County

Kenn Webb, Leif Olson, Dwayne “Smitty” Smith, Aaron Cash, Eric Newman,
Chris Lendway, Kevin Green

Summary

Transylvania County Solid Waste operates a Sub-Title D Landfill in the headwaters of the French Broad River. Erosion control and slope stabilization is difficult due to poor soil quality and steep, mountainous terrain of the Blue Ridge escarpment. A remedy was identified by utilizing fungi to expedite the natural decomposition of wood waste discarded by the public creating beneficial soil amendments.

Problem

Need for **erosion** control on steep slopes (landfill and otherwise)

Need for long-term increased **nutrient levels** in soils to allow for vegetative cover

Need to utilize **woody debris** in a manner to decrease department costs long term (need topsoil)

Added challenge: Transylvania County has an **average annual rainfall of 90 inches**. Common storms include 4-5” of rain in a matter of hours. Any solution must take this challenge into account.

Solution

Perform a pilot study on **utilization of mushroom fungi** to breakdown wood mulch in a manner to expedite the natural process of **wood degradation** while creating **erosion control berms** on slopes.

Fungal spawn would grow into the wood chips and jute mat utilizing the organic substrate as food sources while developing their threaded network of mycelial tissue (“roots”).

This mycelium creates a threaded network with high tensile strength to hold wood chips together during high volume rain events.

+

The mycelium will break down wood chips into mulch and ultimately into topsoil with time.

As the decomposer fungi completes this natural degradation, microorganisms and other nutrients are deposited in the soil beneath to create a more suitable planting medium for perennial grasses.

Six plots were tested with varying conditions.

Results

- **Abundant fungal growth** was found in most of the plots with most abundant growth in control plots that had no fungal spawn added. This suggests that native fungi proliferated in the wood chips.

- Cowpea was effective in growing in the woodchips developing an **extensive root system** around and through the woodchips and into the soil. Further investigation on the Cowpea also found nitrogen fixing pods typical of legumes that were able to establish in soils during the Pilot Study.

- The Brown Top Millet was found to be opportunistic as it washed out of the Test Plots and the Bioswale and sprouted in the existing soil.

- **Erosion benefits** of wood chips confirmed.

- Difficult to measure full effect, but **trends were positive** (see table to right).

Soil Sampling Summary

Favorable Trend Initial Testing: May 21, 2019
Unfavorable Trend Final Testing: November 13, 2019

Analyte	Initial	Final	Ideal Value
Total Exchange Capacity (M.E.)	1.6	2.5	>5
pH	5.2	5.6	5.8-7
Organic Matter (%)	1.5	1.47	>3

Analyte	Initial	Final	Ideal Value
Sodium (lbs/acre)	48.1	19.7	<40
Phosphorous (lbs/acre)	31.3	44.5	>250

Analyte	Initial	Final	Ideal Value
Sodium (% Base Saturation)	6.4	1.7	0.5-3
Magnesium (% Base Saturation)	8.7	10.8	10-20
Calcium (% Base Saturation)	30.6	35.5	60-70
Potassium (% Base Saturation)	8.8	18.4	2-5

Analyte	Initial	Final	Ideal Value
Zinc	1.63	2.36	6-20
Copper	0.32	0.4	5-15
Iron	51.3	54.5	100-150
Manganese	30.4	46.8	25-120
Boron	0.26	0.22	1.2-5
Sulfur	18.2	14.8	25-50

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6	Step 7	Step 8	Step 9	Step 10
Identification of issues with establishing vegetative cover for slopes (1 year)	Formulate ideas for remediation of soil by improving nutrient levels (6 months)	Perform site review for Pilot Study location (1 day)	Detailed plan for Pilot Study by Contractor (3 months)	Cut trees and chip hardwood for Pilot Study (1 day)	Coordinate delivery of all materials necessary for construction of Test Plots (2 weeks)	Construction of Test Plots of woodchips with fungal spawn (3 days)	Pilot Study including initial sampling/analysis, routine monitoring, final sampling analysis (6 months)	Final Report Received (1 month)	Implementation of positive findings and observation of results (ongoing)



Excellence in Innovation Awards Program

Behavioral Health Collaborative Union County

Christina Neal- Program Manager
Ashley Lanz- Division Director

Summary

Union County partnered with the public school system to place school social workers and behavioral health therapists in the school system to serve students across all socio-economic demographics. Serving more than 5000 students and their families in the first year, Union County is improving student outcomes by intervening earlier with students experiencing mental health issues and connecting students with community support services that meet their basic needs.

Problem

Behavioral health issues and **unmet basic needs** across socio-economic demographics were negatively impacting learning within schools across the county

Issues ranged from **anxiety, hunger and uncertainty**, that distracted students from learning, to **suicidal ideation and planning**, which were life threatening

Lack of resources and expertise in the school district to either provide services or help students and their families find services already available in the community

Solution

The county hired 16 employees, **providing social workers and behavioral health therapists** in the 8 school clusters that previously had no support in these areas

Based on results of initial hires, the Board of Commissioners doubled the size of staff in their FY20 budget

"I cannot begin to thank you enough for being there for my child. Thank you for being there for all children. To my family, you mean everything."
- Union County Public Schools Parent



Results

Anecdotal:

- **Immediate results**
- School social workers were able to **connect eligible families to Medicaid**, and help families receiving Medicaid **find health care providers** who accepted it
- Improved **educational outcomes**
- Proactive engagements **lessening the need for reactive interventions**

Quantitative:

- **95 suicide interventions**
- The staff has **served more than 5000 students** and worked with more than 5000 parents over the course of the year
- More than **100 referrals each month** for service
- **Attendance issues dropped** from an average of 40 students per month in the first 4 months of the year to just 15 students per month in the last 4 months of the year

BHC Stats

2019 BH Collaborative Stats	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	TOTAL
Students Served	194	460	516	834	782	290	385	400	293	367	726	600	5847
Parents Served	220	293	465	388	583	370	448	719	288	533	385	397	5089
Referrals Received	167	202	167	139	109	20	5	70	28	206	181	117	1411
Community Resource Referrals	146	91	95	67	96	29	17	61	88	185	199	169	1243
Check-Ins	139	209	214	177	262	65	85	48	125	217	295	288	2124
Discharge Transitions	7	12	20	7	11	20	2	1	9	12	12	10	123
McKinney Vento	2	1	2	2	13	2	0	14	3	2	8	0	49
Attendance Issues	40	43	43	37	16	2	1	15	14	23	10	13	257
Child Protective Services	3	2	8	8	7	0	0	0	3	8	3	4	46
Suicide Intervention Tool protocol intervention	4	7	9	9	14	0	0	6	11	8	12	15	95
Child & Family Team Meetings	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Home Visits	1	10	8	6	22	14	19	23	22	49	16	16	206
Therapy Discharge	0	1	17	0	1	20	8	0	0	0	3	0	50
Intake/Comprehensive Clinical Assessment	0	57	50	77	16	12	12	7	31	32	32	19	345
Individual Counseling/Therapy Session	24	132	298	247	268	140	85	104	126	331	330	321	2406

Step 1

Received funding from the Board of County Commissioners

Step 2

Hired staff

Step 3

Staff worked with school personnel to integrate into the school community

Step 4

Staff collaborated with colleagues to discuss common issues across school communities

Step 5

Compiled results for initial 5 months of programs

Step 6

Based on results, sought and received additional funding from Board of County Commissioners to expand program

Step 7

Continue to compile and analyze data to identify most successful activities



Excellence in Innovation Awards Program

High Country Food Hub Watauga County

Dave Walker, Carol Coulter, Shannon Carroll, Watauga County Commissioners,
Deron Geouque, Robert Marsh, Jim Hamilton and Staff at Watauga County
Cooperative Extension

Summary

The High Country Food Hub was a joint project between Watauga County, Cooperative Extension, Town of Boone, and Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture. By providing local farmers with cold storage capacity and direct-sale capacity to consumers, Watauga County is broadening economic growth to our agricultural economy (our farmers) and providing a diverse selection of locally-sourced products to our citizens.

Problem

Limited freezer space to store supply for increased demand in locally sourced products

Need for additional direct-sales opportunities as there is **limited vendor space** at farmer's markets

Poverty and food insecurity are still issues despite economic stimulation

Solution

1400 sq. ft. of the Watauga Agricultural Services Center was approved to be converted into freezer, refrigerator and dry **food space to be provided rent-free** to the agricultural community

An **online marketplace** allows for direct sales from farmers to consumers

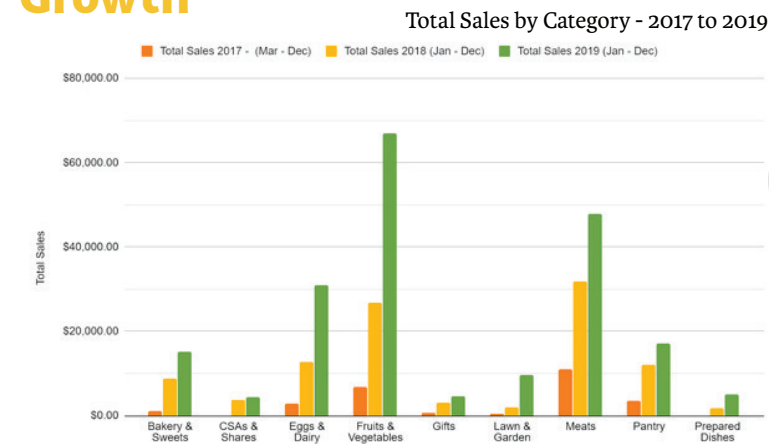
"Double-Up Food Bucks" program offered by the Food Hub **doubles the value of federal nutrition** (SNAP/EPT or food stamps)

Results

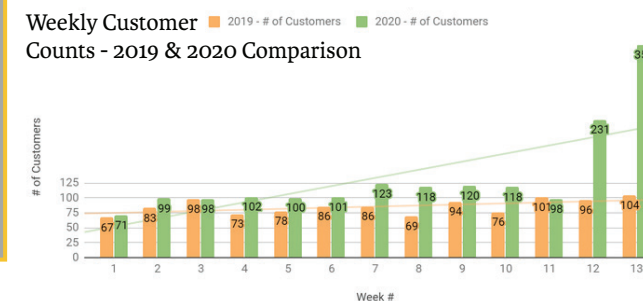
The benefits are three-fold:

- **Low-Income Consumers** have access to more healthy, locally produced food
- **Local Farmers** gain new customers thus making more money
- **The Local Economy** benefits because more food dollars stay in the local community

Growth



Weekly Customer Counts - 2019 & 2020 Comparison



Spring 2016

Blue Ridge Women in Agriculture approached Cooperative Extension looking for space to provide farmers with cold storage

Spring 2016

Cooperative Extension approached County Manager & Maintenance Director with proposal to clean out underutilized storage space in Ag Center Bldg

Spring 2016

Cooperative Extension and Blue Ridge Women in Ag made formal proposal to county for use of the space and was approved unanimously

2016-2018

Blue Ridge Women in Ag applied for and received funding to expand High Country Food Hub & created online market space

2018-2019

Food Hub expanded cold storage space with the addition of a new cooler & freezer with support from Appalachian Regional Commission

2019-2020

Food Hub continues to grow in number of producers selling through the online market place, enhanced cooler/freezer space, and increasing number of consumers each week