

APRIL 2025

KICK-OFF RECAP

FOSTER CARE PARENT RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PILOT PROGRAM



Celebrating a Successful Launch

On April 14, 2025, we brought together an inspiring mix of county leaders, university researchers, and foster care champions in Sylva, NC for the official launch of our Foster Care Parent Recruitment and Retention Pilot Program.

The event marked a major milestone, laying the groundwork for transformative partnerships aimed at addressing critical issues in foster care parent recruitment and retention.

The kick off event welcomed teams from Rowan, Rutherford, Clay, and Jackson County alongside research partners from Duke University, East Carolina University, and The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and in just one day, participants engaged in collaborative sessions to:

- Build strong research-practice-policy partnerships with shared goals
- Identify and solve pressing problems of practice in each participating county
- Strengthen cross-county partnerships

Pictured above is the Historic Jackson County Courthouse in Sylva, NC with landscaping decorated with blue pinwheels in support of Prevent Child Abuse America's Pinwheels for Prevention campaign.

A Partnership with Purpose

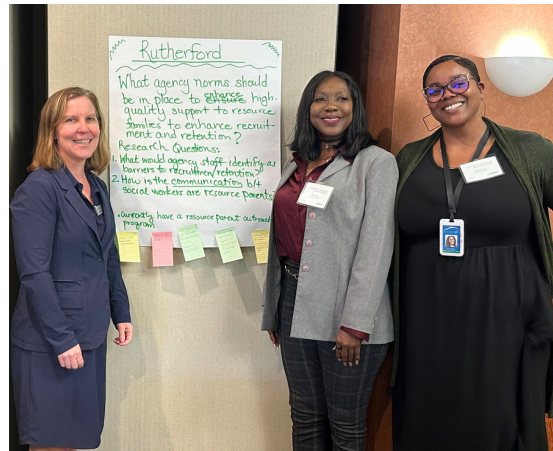
This initiative is a first of its kind to embed local agencies as co-designers of research projects that directly impact practice and policy. By grounding inquiry in the experiences and expertise of frontline workers, the program aims to generate actionable findings and foster sustainable improvements. The day was designed to move from inspiration to action and included inspiring sessions with featured speakers Dr. John DeGarmo of the Foster Institute and Dr. Nick Carnes from Duke University, both of whom emphasized the power of partnership and practical research.



Pictured above is Dr. Jeff Warren of the North Carolina Collaboratory presenting during the launch meeting.

Rutherford County Spotlight

Rutherford County teamed up with Beth Gibson from Duke's Sanford School to explore challenges in maintaining engagement with families during the recruitment process. Together, they investigated how staffing capacity and support systems influence the quality of support provided to foster families. By the end of the day, they had honed in on a central question: "What agency norms need to be in place to ensure high-quality support for foster families?" To guide their next steps, the team developed a preliminary logic model to better understand the nature of this complex issue.



Pictured above (left to right) are Beth Gibson from Duke University and Rutherford County partners Dee Hunt and Jovan Baccus.

“
Thank you
for making us
feel heard.
”

Rutherford's Preliminary Logic Model

Inputs

- Staff training
- Foster parent training
- Staff time / FTE
- Agency culture and norms
- Current foster parent feedback

Outputs

- Smooth transition from social worker to foster family
- Next day follow-up with foster family
- Recruitment efforts are actively supported by all staff

Short Term Outcomes

- Foster families feel well supported
- Foster youth feel well supported
- Agency is highly visible and well regarded within the community

Long Term Outcomes

- Agency norms to provide high quality support are fully embedded
- Foster families recommend agency to potential foster families
- Ability to hire additional staff to support more families

Participant Feedback



felt they had meaningful opportunities to connect with others at the kick-off event

“
I thought it was a great launch to the partnership. We are just getting started and there is a lot more to do but I feel confident our team will work together to address our identified issue.
”

Identified Problems of Practice

The table below outlines the county partner, research partner, and the problem of practice they identified for investigation.

County Partner	Research Partner	Preliminary Problem of Practice
Clay County	East Carolina University	Some populations are more difficult to place: Clay will focus on recruitment and retention of foster parents as it relates specifically to teenage populations and populations that have greater medical or mental health needs. They want to investigate strategies to increase placement rates with an emphasis on reducing out-of-county placements.
Jackson County	University of North Carolina (Team 2)	Lack of staff capacity to recruit and retain foster families: Jackson will focus on examining policies and procedures relating to recruitment and retention of staff dedicated to supporting foster families at the county and state-level. They'll also be exploring public-private partnerships as a possible solution.
Rowan County	University of North Carolina (Team 1)	Current foster families are unwilling to take placements: Rowan will be focused on placement utilization. They'll investigate ways to help increase placement rates within their current foster parent pool while also emphasizing the role of kinship care. They will also examine ways to help recruit new foster parents and kinship caregivers in ways that better prepare them to address the complex needs of children in the system.
Rutherford County	Duke University	Agency role in recruiting and retaining foster parents: Rutherford will focus on what agency norms should be in place to successfully recruit and retain foster parents. They will examine outreach programming, barriers to recruitment and retention, and how communication between agency stakeholders and families help to recruit, retain, and support foster families.

Where We're Headed

We are now entering a two-month planning phase, during which teams will:

- Finalize their problem of practice
- Plan a series of inquiry cycles to better understand the problem of practice
- Continue to build momentum by identifying additional short-term wins and preparing for implementation support
- Prepare to share successes, challenges, and topics for broader collaboration at the next in-person meeting.

Near-Term Timeline

Planning Phase: April - June 2025

Proposal Review: June 2025

Research Support Begins: Summer 2025

Thank You!

We're so proud of the collaborative energy and dedication shown by every team member. Your contributions are laying the foundation for a stronger, more responsive foster care system in our communities.

With questions, please contact:

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