



# SNAP/FNS EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMS:

The Potential of a Whole-Family Approach to Economic Mobility

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Introduction: Embracing new tools for economic well-being** 3

### **PART I: FNS EDUCATION & TRAINING PROGRAMS**

**Creating strong partnerships** 5

**Structuring for the agency’s capacity** 8

**Supporting childcare for participants** 8

**Relying on existing models and advice** 9

### **PART II: CASE STUDIES**

**Buncombe County** 10

**Chatham County** 14

**Moore County** 18

**Wilson County** 22

### **APPENDIX A**

**Interview Guide** 26

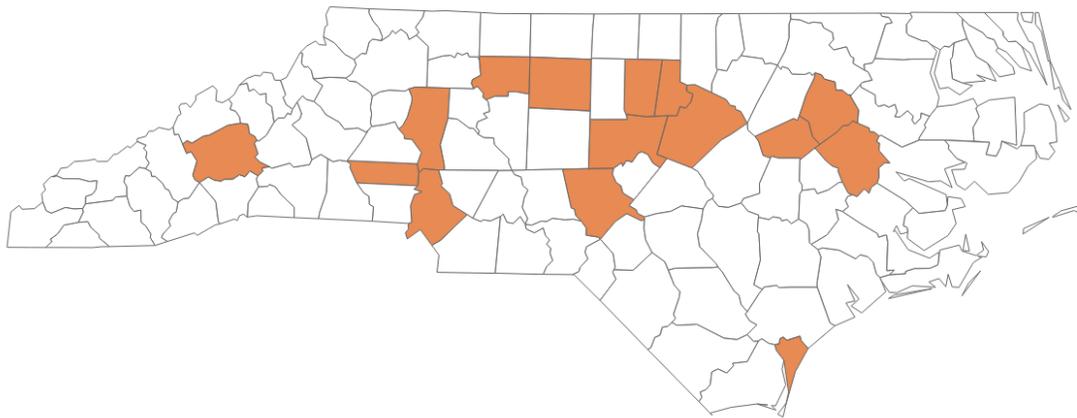
# SNAP/FNS Employment and Training Programs: The Potential of a Whole-Family Approach to Economic Mobility

By **SABINE SCHOENBACH**,  
with **ALEXANDRA FORTER SIROTA**, Budget & Tax Center Director

**W**ith economic mobility in North Carolina ranking among the lowest in the country and the persistent challenges of low-wage work, communities across North Carolina are embracing new tools that can remove barriers to employment and support the whole family as it strives for economic security and well-being. One such tool is an employment and training program offered to households that qualify for food assistance or SNAP/FNS (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program/Food and Nutrition Services, as it is called in North Carolina). The program works by drawing down federal money to support the services that can lead to successful employment in better paying jobs due to the acquisition of credentials and participation in skills training (see Breakout Box for detailed program description).

The program's success nationwide has led to an increasing number of states developing more ambitious plans to leverage the program for economic security goals. North Carolina is one of those states, and since 2015, it has been a recipient of the SNAP to Skills technical assistance program from the US Department of Agriculture to support the expansion of the voluntary program in more counties across the state.<sup>1</sup> The results have been clear — the state began 2016 with just 9 counties engaged in the program and as of Fiscal Year 2020 will have 18 counties in the program.<sup>2</sup>

FNS E&T programs across North Carolina share a goal of reducing hunger while building a better-trained workforce. North Carolina's county-by-county approach, however, means that each county structures its E&T program, its partnerships, and its supports slightly differently to reach that goal. Some differences stem from disparities in county needs — programs in rural counties, for instance, might allocate more funding for transportation support. Other differences relate to

**Figure 1:** Counties Currently Operating SNAP E&T Programs

Source: Special Data Request to DHHS, September 2019

existing regional community partnerships and the organizational and staff capacity within each county.

While the flexibility of North Carolina’s county-by-county approach allows for innovation and customization, the lack of one standard “guide” to creating a county program also brings its own challenges to counties that may already be working with scarce resources and time.

As an initial step to building greater awareness of the opportunities and barriers counties may face in planning and implementing successful FNS E&T programs in North Carolina, we spoke with agency staff and community partners in a range of emerging and existing programs across the state. In November and December 2019, we conducted a series of 12 interviews across six counties, asking DSS staff, Education Navigators, and community stakeholders about their experiences around program planning, design, implementation, and future orientation (see Appendix A for the Interview Guide).

The following themes and takeaways are not meant to be generalizable but instead are insights into particular local experiences that we hope will help to inform future planning processes.

## Removing Barriers to Employment and Training Improves Household Well-Being

BY BRIAN KENNEDY II

SNAP E&T is a program that seeks to provide skills training and employment supports to SNAP participants. States decide how and where they will place SNAP E&T programming and what services they will provide. Most programs nationally are administered by non-government organizations that provide vocational education, work experience opportunities, job search and retention support, and other work activities.

In order to eliminate potential financial costs to the states for providing SNAP E&T, the federal government offers grants to help offset administrative and program costs. There are two types of federal funding that could help to improve existing state E&T programs: E&T Program Grants and 50 Percent Reimbursements.

**PROGRAM GRANTS** — Known as “100 Percent Money,” these grants are intended to pay for the development, administrative, and operational costs the state may incur in creating and implementing E&T programs.

**50 PERCENT REIMBURSEMENT GRANTS** — If the state spends more than its grant money on the development and administration of E&T programs, it can be reimbursed for 50 percent of its existing costs. SNAP regulations require North Carolina to reimburse E&T volunteers and participants for costs related to participating in E&T programs. These expenses may include childcare, transportation, or educational materials.

The Food and Nutrition Service Employment and Training program (FNS E&T), North Carolina’s version of SNAP E&T, is supervised by the state but administered by individual counties.

### 1. Creating strong partnerships between agencies and community partners — and between the program staff — is key to creating a successful FNS E&T program.

Consistently, across all county programs we contacted, stakeholders noted that a **strong relationship** between DSS and the primary partner — most often the community college — is top of list in creating a successful program. An essential component of build-



ing a strong relationship is the mutual **commitment** to the mission and potential of the program prior to implementation. Whether the idea of bringing FNS E&T was brought to the table by DSS staff or by the local community college, interviewees agreed that all parties needed to be fully bought into the program and to the partnership before moving forward.

Multiple stakeholders also pointed to the importance of **open and frequent communication** between the primary partners. Some interviewees noted that building this process can take time but is well worth the investment. Not surprisingly, the emphasis on the primary partners' relationship translated to the importance of **individual staff relationships**. In more than one county, the success of the program was primarily attributed to the positive working relationship formed between program staff at DSS and the Education Navigator. On the flip side, some of the counties that have not yet established programs also noted the lack of strong relationships could be “the biggest stumbling block going forward.”

“The close partnership with Buncombe County DHHS and our college budget and finance office [was the most important element in getting this program off the ground]. Without these two working together we could not have launched the program as successfully as we did.”

— *Shelley White,*  
formerly of AB -Tech,  
Buncombe County

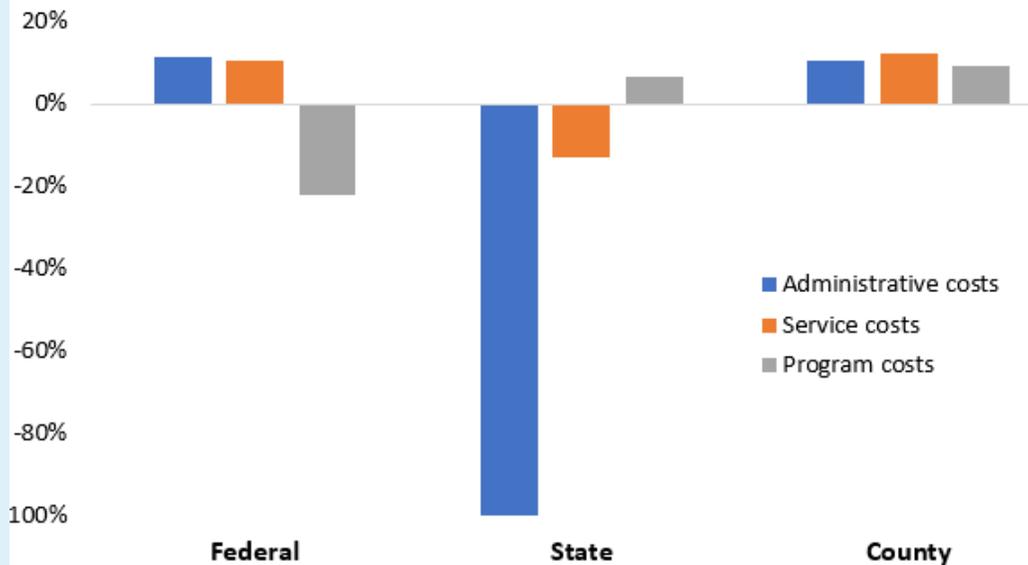
## Underinvestment in Social Services Persists

BY SUZY KHACHATURYAN, BTC Policy Analyst

State investment in Department of Social Services matters for the ability of these county offices to manage caseloads and pursue new and innovative partnerships. Reports of the impact of austerity budgets on DSS offices has suggested that cases per case manager continue to increase and that technology upgrades have not streamlined processes as promised. From Fiscal Year 2016 to Fiscal Year 2021, state investments have been brought to almost zero, leaving counties and federal funding sources to carry a greater load in ensuring that people can access services to move to greater economic security.

**Figure 2:** State funds for social services have mostly fallen, placing a greater burden on county DSS offices

Percent change from FY 2016 to FY 2021



Source: Analysis of NC DHHS State Total Reports, FY 2019-20

Because of the major emphasis on staff buy-in and relationship building, **staffing consistency** can play a major role in moving the program forward or stalling the process. In some counties, the initial staff invested in the program moved on, which caused delays and required additional resources to re-create momentum.

Interviewees across the counties also cited the importance of buy-in and relationship building amongst a broad spectrum of **community partners** — county agencies and local nonprofits. Whether these relationships existed prior to the FNS E&T program or not, staff noted that these relationships grew through the program and were essential for referrals and counter-referrals.

## 2. Agency capacity can be a primary barrier; some counties are structuring their programs to account for this.

County DSS administrators spearheaded some of the earliest FNS E&T programs in North Carolina. In some early-adopting counties, DSS staff members were primary drivers of bringing FNS E&T to their counties and actively sought out the partnerships with their respective community college and community partners.

In other counties that are just now exploring programs or planning programs, stakeholders — both DSS staff and community partners — noted that the **lack of capacity within DSS agencies** is a barrier to program creation. To be clear, **lack of capacity is not equated with lack of interest**. Rather, due to the immediate demands placed upon DSS staff, taking on a primary role within a new program is often not feasible. In one county DSS office, a staff member noted, “When we look at what we are mandated to do and graded on, we have to focus on those things. We can only do this if a community partner can do the lion’s share of the work. DSS in other counties are also in the same predicament.”

Some county programs have structured their primary partnerships by indeed delegating the “lion’s share” of the work to the community college and community partners. While partners within these counties were uniformly satisfied with the lopsided division of labor, this type of arrangement also **assumes greater capacity and funding provided by the community partner**, which may not exist in all counties.

“Our county staff in the human service sector are so overloaded, there isn’t the capacity from a human standpoint to make things work.”

— *Community Partner*

## 3. Childcare support is crucial to the success of many participants; counties are structuring these supports differently, according to available resources and funding.

The need for childcare assistance was clearly expressed across all FNS E&T programs. All programs that we contacted screen for childcare assistance needs and are committed to trying to cover their participants, but often that is where the similarities end.

Some FNS E&T programs rely on the NC Childcare Subsidy Program and place their participants on a **priority list** to ensure they have access to vouchers. Other programs partner with the Subsidy Program but do not provide their participants with priority on the wait list and therefore also rely on **community partners** for assistance. A few programs have built childcare **funding directly** into the FNS E&T program plan. Even when childcare needs are covered for the duration of the program, however, there are concerns about maintaining coverage once the program ends.

Note that **transportation** assistance also varies by program, with the most common theme being that participants in rural counties will understandably need more robust assistance.

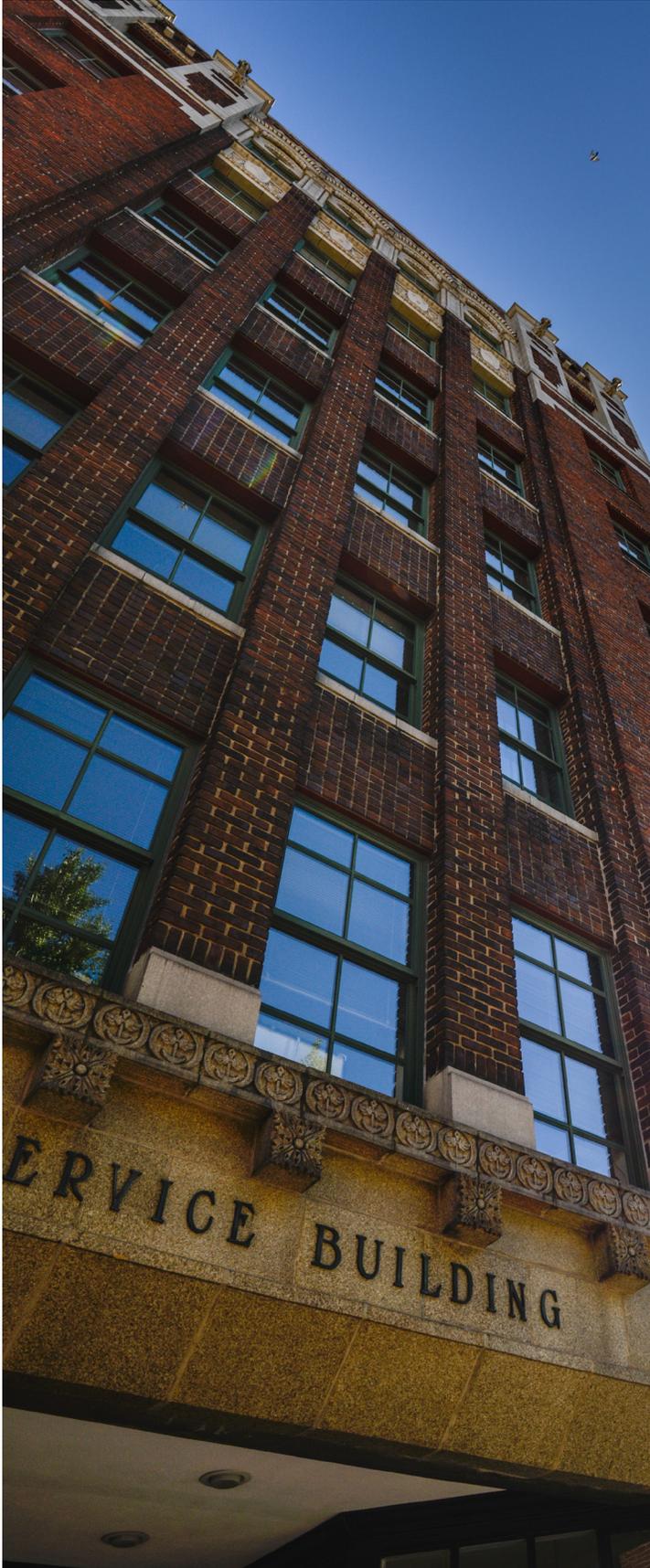
#### **4. All emerging and existing programs relied on existing models to inform program design (in state or out of state) and are willing to pay this advice forward.**

The original implementing counties in North Carolina did not have the benefit of in-state models and looked to promising models from other states. The next generation of FNS E&T programs, however, relied heavily on **informal and formal information sharing and advice** from current program staff in existing North Carolina programs. The generosity amongst this community was noted multiple times, and many interviewees were eager to share their own experiences with counties that are considering establishing FNS E&T Programs.

When asked what specific piece of advice they might provide to a county considering exploring FNS E&T, two major themes emerged. First, counties with current programs strongly believed in the **value the program has brought to their county** and urged other counties to explore the possibilities. Second, most advice specifically centered on the **importance of establishing partnerships** between agencies and community partners.

As North Carolina seeks to advance solutions to its greatest challenge of high levels of economic security, the FNS Employment and Training program presents an opportunity to create a system that supports the whole family's economic success. The lessons in the state's recent expansion period provide important insights for counties considering the program and for the state as it seeks to support local innovation and effectiveness.

**This program helps build our community by allowing people to become more self-sufficient and support themselves and their families. We would urge any county to give it a try.**



## Case Study: FNS E&T in **BUNCOMBE COUNTY**



“This program gives you an opportunity to improve services for the people you are already serving and allows you to help employers in your community. It’s a win across the board.”

— Philip Hardin,  
ES Division Director, BCHHS

### COMPONENTS AND ESTIMATED 2020 PARTICIPATION

Job Search	10
Job Search Training	5
Job Retention	10
Foundational Skills/ Basic Training	10
Vocational Training	30
On the Job Training	2
Work Experience	2

Source: NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC FY 2020 Plan

## Program Overview

Buncombe County Health & Human Services (BCHHS) works together with Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech) and community partners to conduct assessments of eligible STEP participants, develop education and employment strategies, and provide support until participants obtain sustainable employment or no longer receive FNS benefits. Services are open to all unemployed or underemployed clients registered within the FNS program.

### PRIMARY PARTNERS

Buncombe County Health & Human Services (BCHHS) and Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College (A-B Tech) work together with a number of community partners such as the county's WIOA program, Green Opportunities, and Goodwill.

### EDUCATION NAVIGATORS AND STAFFING

The program began with two Education Navigators, yet the need for more capacity grew the program to three (the state funds two positions, and the county funds the third). All three are based in the BCHHS location. BCHHS also collaborates with A-B Tech for an E&T support position within the STEP Career Center, located close to the main college. Career Center staff assists participants with job search materials and strategies; provides resources to assist participants in overcoming employment barriers; and coordinates workshops and job fairs.

### PARTICIPANT REIMBURSEMENT

Funds are available to support participants in a variety of job readiness activities. If no other funds are available, the county will reimburse participants for such expenses as fees, specialized equipment, and enrollment fees.

- **Transportation:** Transportation reimbursement is available to all participants. Participants are reimbursed in the amount of \$5 after the E&T assessment has been completed and then receive a monthly stipend of \$75 for transportation costs.
- **Childcare:** STEP participants are placed on a priority list for childcare assistance. When participants require childcare, Navigators refer them to the HHS childcare staff to complete an application for vouchers. Philip Hardin, ES Division Director at BCHHS noted, "We've been lucky. We've been able to serve everyone in STEP with childcare. There was statewide freeze on childcare in effect in March. While this has now been lifted, we had enough money prior to the freeze that we never had to put anyone on the wait list."

## Timeline: Establishing FNS E&T in Buncombe County

Buncombe County DSS started exploring FNS E&T in 2015, and Buncombe became one of the first counties in North Carolina to implement its program, called STEP (Skills Training and Education Program). As one of the first counties in the state to explore a new iteration of FNS E&T, DSS staff looked to models outside of the state. When North Carolina became a pilot state for a new USDA grant, E&T program staff from other states — especially Washington state — shared their expertise. The vital partnership with A-B Tech was modeled after a program in Florence, South Carolina. Early on, DSS staff invited Florence’s program director to Buncombe County to meet with A-B Tech and local stakeholders. More robust conversations with the state community college system ensued.

Below are some of the elements identified by STEP staff as challenges and opportunities during the stages of planning, implementation, and looking toward the future of the program.

### PLANNING

Early on, the memory of the E&T program of the early 2000s was a barrier for launching a new program. Institutional memory held the previous E&T program in low regard, providing little benefit to the local community. As such, DSS staff had the job of convincing partners that this new E&T program was different. In addition, the administrative burden was substantial in the beginning, which limited the program to counties that had the staffing capacity to meet administrative need. Staff said the state has worked to simplify this process, and more counties should be able to get involved.

### EMERGING

Buncombe County DSS is unique in that it has always worked hand-in-hand with community partners across the county. “We contract out to partners with expertise in almost anything we are not mandated to do ourselves,” said Philip Hardin. As such, building a robust network of community partnerships was less of a lift than it might be in other counties. The strong nonprofit community in Buncombe is well connected to the STEP Program and is now the primary means of outreach and reverse referrals.

## ESTABLISHED

The Buncombe County FAST team noted that “this is one of the best programs we’ve ever run through DSS. It offers a lot of flexibility, gives you an opportunity to be innovative, and to be nontraditional.” One innovation currently in the works is a plan to create an Economic Opportunity Center. Housed in the DSS building, it would allow multiple community partners to have an on-site presence to serve E&T customers and more easily make referrals. The Center would include an on-site, supervised job-search component staffed by STEP employees.



**BUNCOMBE COUNTY**

## LOOKING AHEAD

A goal for the program is to look into adding apprenticeships to be able to offer a solution that allows participants to get paid while they are learning. As program staff noted, most people can’t afford to quit their jobs, get reskilled, and then find another job. Apprenticeships would also allow the program to build relationships with area employers and work toward getting greater employer buy-in for the program. Program staff is open to exploring ways to partner with employers to help connect participants and defray costs through E&T dollars.

There is also an opportunity to look at the ability to serve people through this program through a retention lens. Philip Hardin explains: “We will serve people for three months after they start working. But once they go off food assistance, the funding goes away. If they get a living-wage job, I’m limited in the services I can provide. That doesn’t seem fair. It’s like getting people to almost the top of the mountain and then letting them fall back as opposed to getting them to the summit. We’ve done case management follow-up, but we run out of options once folks are ineligible for the program. We would like to have more options to support our participants.”



## Case Study: FNS E&T in **CHATHAM COUNTY**



“Childcare is the biggest barrier for participants, other than transportation. I see both on a weekly basis. When I ask, ‘What challenges do you have?’ participants will say, ‘I have no one I trust to watch my child ... or ... I would love to go back to school to earn a credential, but don’t have the funds to pay the daycare.’ ”

— *Nikia Jefferies,*  
*Education Navigator, CCCC*

### **COMPONENTS AND ESTIMATED 2020 PARTICIPATION**

Job Search	24
Job Search Training	24
Job Retention	12
Foundational Skills/ Basic Training	12
Vocational Training	
On the Job Training	
Work Experience	12

Source: NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC FY 2020 Plan

## Program Overview

Chatham County DSS (CCDSS) and Central Carolina Community College (CCCC) work together with community partners to provide FNS E&T participants with opportunities to improve skills that can assist with career development and financial independence. Services are open to any FNS recipient.

### PRIMARY PARTNERS

CCDSS and CCCC work together with community partners including: WIOA, Vocational Rehabilitation, National Caucus and Center on Black Aging Inc., Telam-on Corporation, Central Piedmont Community Action, Pathways of Hope, and the Salvation Army.

### EDUCATION NAVIGATORS AND STAFFING

The E&T Education Navigator position is housed at CCCC with the program funding for the position flowing through NCDSS. One-third of the DSS E&T Lead Worker position is funded through the program.

### PARTICIPANT REIMBURSEMENT

Participant Reimbursement: Funds are available to support participants in a variety of job-readiness activities. If no other funds are available, the cost of vocational training and education will be reimbursed up to \$650 per participants enrolled in Continuing Education programs and up to \$1250 for Curriculum students. This may include the cost of allowable expenses — including tuition, books, and required supplies — and may continue to be reimbursed during the 90-Day Retention Period.

- **Transportation:** Expenses may be paid up to \$600 per participant per month to include any combination of mileage reimbursement, gas cards, transit vouchers, car repairs, and/or arranged transportation. Once employment has been secured and a participant has transportation available, gas cards may be issued to cover travel expenses for a 90-Day Retention Period.
- **Childcare:** Participants are first referred to DSS Childcare Subsidy to determine eligibility for vouchers. If vouchers cannot be utilized, childcare expenses will be reimbursed up to \$1700 per participants (or family) per month. Childcare rates are limited to the Childcare Subsidy program approved rates, and hours of childcare provided should align with participant's work and/or educational hours.

## Timeline: Establishing FNS E&T in Chatham County

Chatham County is in its second full fiscal year of its FNS E&T program. Chatham County DSS (CCDSS) staff initially learned about the program through a statewide DSS convening on E&T programs, which featured speakers from models in Washington State and early adopters in North Carolina. Staff was encouraged to explore the program due to the program flexibility and the additional resources available to help serve Chatham County's FNS population more effectively. Community meetings to determine existing resources and service gaps followed as well as reach-outs to the established programs in the state. As a result of this effort, CCDSS established a new partnership with Central Carolina Community College (CCCC).

Below are some of the elements identified by staff as challenges and opportunities during the stages of planning, implementation, and looking toward the future of the program.



### PLANNING

Learning about existing models in the state was key; yet, county differences called for creative solutions. For example, a primary community partner in some established counties did not have a presence in Chatham. Structuring the right partnerships was important and took time.

Securing funding for childcare was a key component in the planning process, knowing that childcare, in addition to transportation, is often the largest barrier for clients' success. "It didn't occur to us to do it otherwise," said Jennie Kristiansen, CCDSS Director.

### EMERGING

Staffing turnover at CCCC delayed the implementation process, but the Community College was invested as a whole, and the turnover did not derail the process.

Outreach was an early concern, but referrals and cross-referrals have created robust participation. Staff noted that participants have seen the program working and are now jumping on board.



## ESTABLISHED

Communication is critical to the success of the program, including:

- Regular, coordinated communication between the community college and DSS.
- A direct line between the county program and the state resources.
- A communication network to refer and cross-refer with community partners.
- Coordinated communication systems (between WIOA and E&T) for participants.

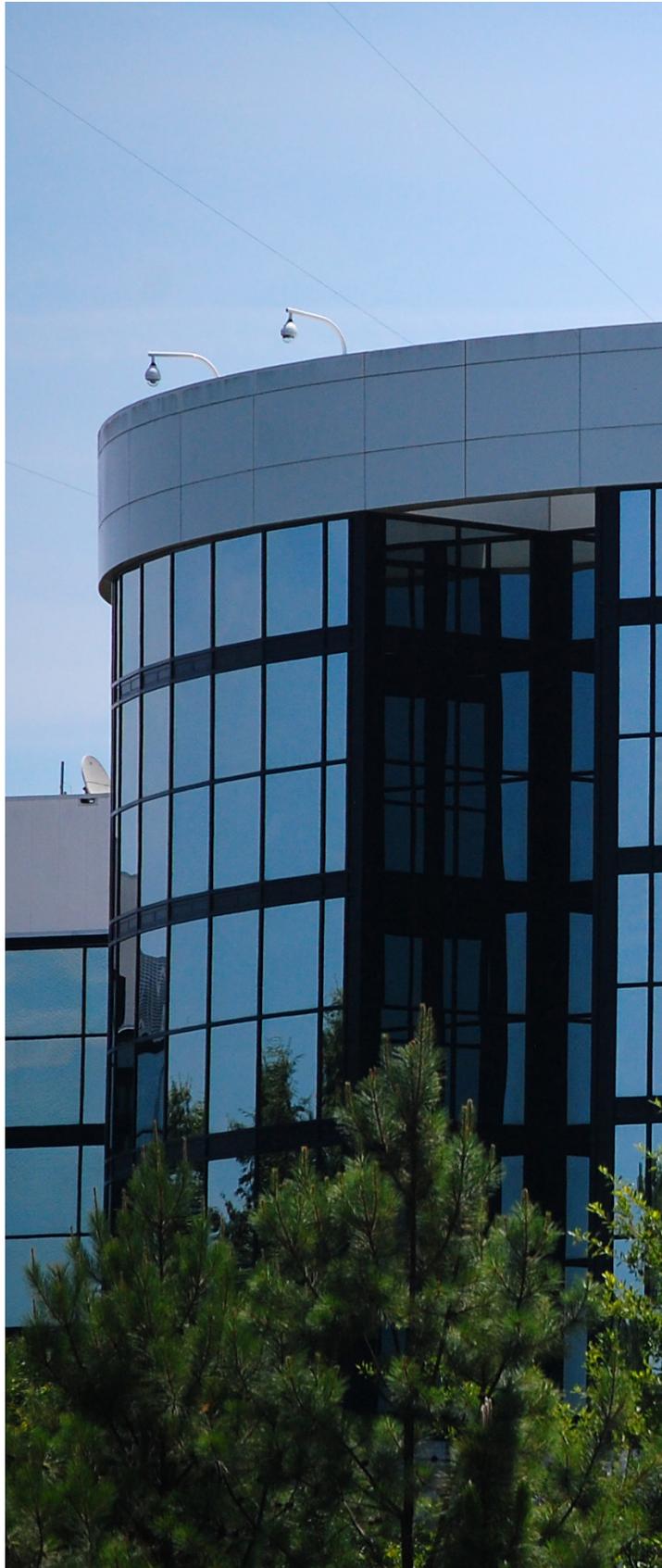


## LOOKING AHEAD

Funding for childcare is woven into the Chatham County E&T plan, but the budget isn't sufficient to fund childcare for the number of people the program could serve. In addition, there is a concern about what happens when participants leave the program. E&T participants are not on a priority list for childcare vouchers. As such, when the participants move from E&T to an employment situation, they may find themselves on the wait list without access to subsidies. Chatham County is exploring options for addressing these needs.

While the program has not been operating long enough to draw conclusions from outcome data on wages, staff look forward to analyzing longer-term trends. Tracking wage shifts before and after the program would allow for the identification of success factors and the targeting of program improvements.

CHATHAM COUNTY



## Case Study: FNS E&T in

# MOORE COUNTY



“A recent participant, a single Mom with four kids, had been unemployed for five years. She had wanted to work, but didn’t have the money or resources to get what she needed to move forward. We helped her take two classes ... She ... landed a full-time job as a Certified Medical Administrative Assistant. For first time in five years, she had a full-time job. When I check in on her — she says, ‘I use everything I learned in my classes for this job.’”

— Maria Campbell,  
Education Navigator, SCC

### COMPONENTS AND ESTIMATED 2020 PARTICIPATION

Job Search	8
Job Search Training	13
Job Retention	2
Foundational Skills/ Basic Training	4
Vocational Training	5
On the Job Training	1
Work Experience	2

Source: NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC FY 2020 Plan

## Program Overview

Moore County DSS (MCDSS) and Sandhills Community College (SCC) work in partnership with the NC Works Career Center to provide FNS E&T services to eligible recipients. All work-registered clients within the FNS program are eligible.

### PRIMARY PARTNERS

MCDSS, SCC, and NC Works work in partnership with other agencies, including Sandhills Community Action Program (SCAP), Vocational Rehabilitation, and community partners such as the Moore County Coalition, local food banks, and the Partnership for Children and Families for referrals and reverse-referrals.

### EDUCATION NAVIGATORS AND STAFFING

Moore County's FNS E&T Program employs one Education Navigator position funded by DHHS and through the North Carolina Community College System. The Navigator splits her time between the DSS office (2 days per week), the Community College (2 days per week), and NC Works (1 day per week). If a client is dually enrolled, staff works together to manage cases.

### PARTICIPANT REIMBURSEMENT

Funds are available to support participants in a variety of job readiness and education activities, including tuition, books, class materials, and required supplies. All funding is channeled through Sandhills Community College.

- **Transportation:** Gas cards are available for clients who need transportation assistance for either education or employment.
- **Childcare:** If a client needs childcare assistance, the Navigator will refer them to the Childcare Subsidy Program. If a client needs emergency childcare, the Navigator will work with other agencies to try to find a solution.

## Timeline: Establishing FNS E&T in Moore County

Moore County's FNS E&T program is in its second full year. Initially, staff at Sandhills Community College discovered the program through a community college resource network and soon after began exploring the idea with the former interim director at MCDSS. NC Works was brought into the conversation, and with resources from the State as well as advice from established partners in other counties, the planning process began.

Below are some of the elements identified by staff as challenges and opportunities during the stages of planning, implementation, and looking toward the future of the program.



### PLANNING

As part of the planning process, the initial table of partners assessed the need in the county. "In my previous role at the community college in Basic Skills, I knew that students were having challenges accessing and affording going to school to get a better job. DSS was hearing the same thing and so was NC Works. People wanted to find a job or a better job but didn't have the skills necessary to do that. We were all seeing more and more that people were working 2-3 minimum wage jobs and trying to support a family. We felt that this program could be helpful to our collective clients," Maria Campbell, Education Navigator, explained.

Funding was the initial barrier for MCDSS in exploring the program. A partnership with Sandhills Community College shifted the financial burden. Sandhills also takes on the programming work in Moore County. "Our program is unique — almost everything in this program lies on the college end. If it wasn't for Sandhills, we wouldn't have this program," noted Monica Ward, MCDSS FNS Lead Worker.



## EMERGING

Taking stock of existing resources in the county and locating the gaps in services was another important step in the planning process. “[Prior to the establishment of SNAP E&T in Moore] WIOA had an E&T program, and SCAP had an E&T program. Previously, however, we didn’t have a connector [navigator] — someone who can follow the client through all the services. This has been the key for this program. I can help connect resources and avoid duplication of services so a client can complete his or her classes and be successful,” noted Maria Campbell.



MOORE COUNTY

## ESTABLISHED

Buy-in of the program and relationship building with partners has been critical to the success of the program.

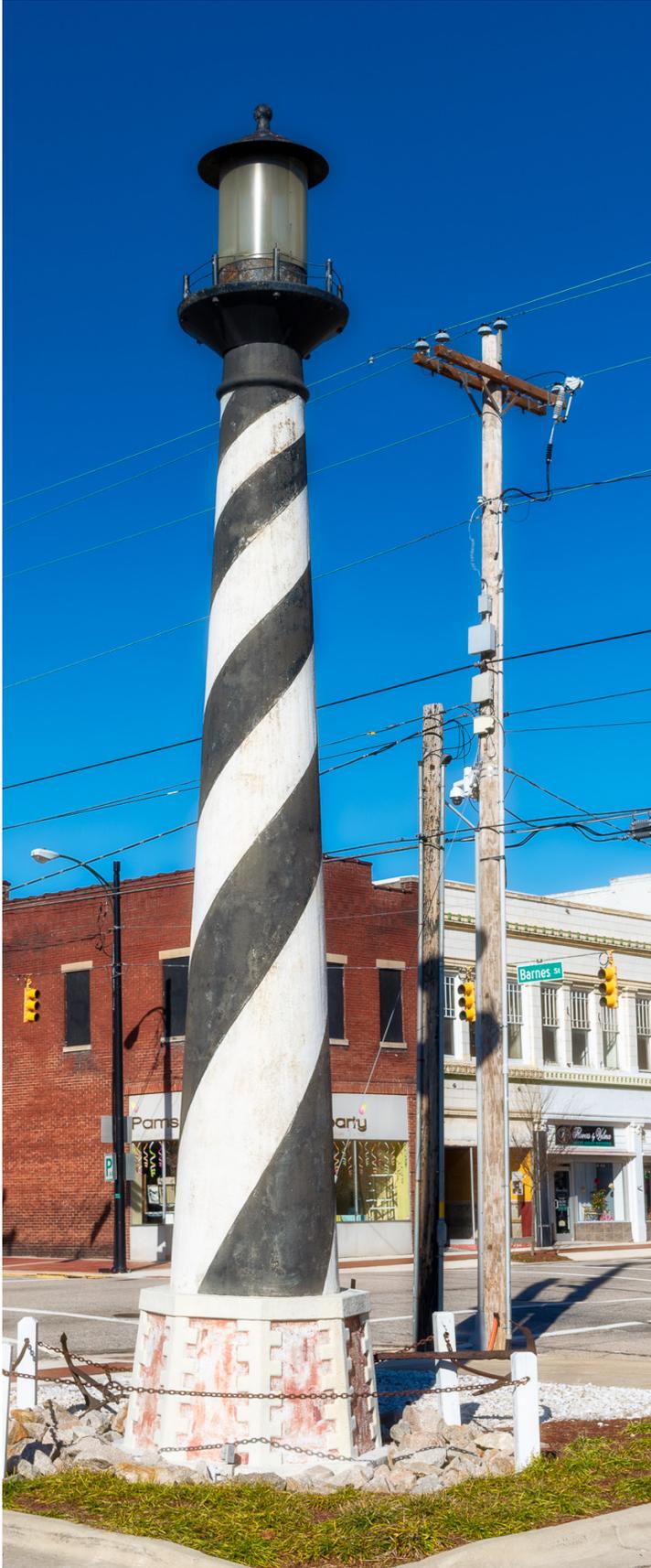
- A relationship between the College, DSS, and NC Works existed previously, but the program has made it more concrete. “One of the strengths of this county’s program is the collaboration that has been there from the beginning. Without this collaboration from the agencies, I don’t think the program could be successful,” said Maria Campbell.
- The Navigator has a direct line of communication with MCDSS caseworkers, and the DSS staff understands and has bought in to the importance of this program. Initial communication challenges of working between multiple organizations were quickly recognized and addressed.
- Referrals and reverse-referrals are established with a host of organizations and agencies, including SCAP, Vocation Rehabilitation, the local food bank, and the Moore County Coalition, which helps with emergency assistance.



## LOOKING AHEAD

Transportation and Childcare services in the evenings continue to be barriers for clients. There are few resources available in the county.

The E&T program in Moore County has quite a few participant success stories, and staff would like to explore ways to share these in order to develop additional interest. Adding additional agencies as partners and growing this program is another goal.



Case Study: FNS E&T in

# WILSON COUNTY



“Be patient and trust the process. Establish good partnerships and let the community know about your program. Once you get clients in and establish solid partnerships, the program will grow.”

— *Diamond Powell,*  
*E&T Coordinator*

## COMPONENTS AND ESTIMATED 2020 PARTICIPATION

<b>Job Search</b>	
Job Search Training	10
<b>Job Retention</b>	
Foundational Skills/ Basic Training	15
<b>Vocational Training</b>	
On the Job Training	10
<b>Work Experience</b>	

Source: NC Department of Health and Human Services, NC FY 2020 Plan

## Program Overview

Wilson County DSS (WCDSS) and Wilson Community College (WCC) work together with community partners to help FNS E&T participants attain self-sufficiency through employment. Services are open to any person receiving FNS benefits who is unemployed or underemployed, 16 years old or older, a Wilson County resident, and not receiving Work First benefits.

### PRIMARY PARTNERS

WCDSS and WCC work in partnership with community partners such as Wilson Vocational Rehabilitation, Turning Point (WIOA partner), and NC Works. The program is in the process of establishing partnerships with OIC of Wilson and NEW Re-Entry.

### EDUCATION NAVIGATORS AND STAFFING

DSS staff funded through the program include one E&T Coordinator and one social worker. An Education Navigator is employed by Wilson Community College and housed at both WCC and WCDSS.

### PARTICIPANT REIMBURSEMENT

Funds are available to support participants in a variety of job-readiness activities, and costs such as tuition, books, uniforms, and immunizations can be covered.

- **Transportation:** Expenses may be paid through transportation vouchers from the Wilson County Transit Program in the form of bus tickets or through gas vouchers in the amounts of \$25 or \$50.
- **Childcare:** Participants have priority to bypass the voucher waiting list. “[Participants] are covered for childcare. We make sure they have childcare, so they can go to work and go to class,” said Shannon Chamblee, Education Navigator.

## Timeline: Establishing FNS E&T in Wilson County

Wilson County started working toward implementation of the program in 2017 and hired its E&T Coordinator and Education Navigator in 2018. Wilson County DSS staff initially learned about the program through state resources and brought the idea back to the county. DSS staffing has shifted since this time, but the partnerships that were initially established remain strong.

Below are some of the elements identified by staff as challenges and opportunities during the stages of planning, implementation, and looking toward the future of the program.



### PLANNING

Learning from other counties' models was important for the design of Wilson's program. Staff in other counties served as sounding boards and supports. Even so, Wilson County staff created its own forms for intake and assessment from scratch. These forms have been acknowledged by the state and will potentially be replicated for other counties.

### EMERGING

Outreach was the most important element to getting the program off the ground. Building a caseload and establishing a clientele took time. In the beginning, staff created flyers, called and sent letters to potentially eligible clients, spoke at events, and publicized the program at the college. Since then, the caseload has grown exponentially, and much of the outreach now occurs through reverse referrals from community partners and employers and through word of mouth from existing and past clients.



## ESTABLISHED

Co-locating services as well as the relationship between staffs have been vital factors in the success of the program. From the customer perspective, being able to go to one appointment in one location provides more than convenience. Staff recognizes that transportation can be a significant barrier in the county, and co-location helps to address this challenge.

The relationship between DSS staff and the Navigator was noted as being the foundation of the program. In addition, it has been helpful to have a solid line of communication with state E&T staff and staff in other counties.

Finding the best ways to maximize retention is ongoing work. “With any new program, you have excitement and then life happens,” said Diamond Powell. Staff works hard to create good rapport with the clients and to tackle issues and barriers head-on to increase retention.

## LOOKING AHEAD

From this first year, the outcome data tells a story of health care courses being the most popular as well as being the most in-demand. The most successful demographic so far has been women with children. As the program grows, outcome data will become increasingly helpful in telling the story of how the program is working and what kinds of improvements could be made.

## Appendix A

### FNS E&T INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### Community Stakeholders Implementing SNAP E&T

1. Help me better understand SNAP E&T (FNS E&T) in North Carolina and the local context of your community.
2. Tell me more about how/why your organization/agency started exploring FNS E&T?
  - a. What connection does it have to your mission, to your existing clients (% SNAP eligible?), to your existing partnerships?
  - b. When/how did exploration begin?
3. I'd like to learn more about the process of program design and implementation in your county.
  - a. What is your role in the program? What steps have you been a part of?
  - b. How long has the program been in place?
  - c. Can you describe the design process?
  - d. Can you describe the implementation process?
  - e. From your perspective, what have been the most important elements of these processes?
4. Can you provide a big picture overview of the education and training services as well as the support services offered through FNS E&T in this county?
  - a. Support services – e.g., childcare assistance, transportation, pre-employment costs?
5. What are your program's target populations, and is there prioritization of populations in terms of outreach and services (able-bodied adults without dependents, families with children, those with criminal records, etc.)?
  - a. Are there specialized services/considerations for families with children?
  - b. Follow-up: Can you describe the screening process for childcare eligibility?
  - c. Can you describe the impact, if any, of the prohibition on the able-bodied adult time limit waiver?
6. Tell me about the program's organizational partnerships.
  - a. What role does your organization play within this partnership?
  - b. What role do your partners play?
  - c. Follow-up: Were these pre-existing partnerships, or did they grow out of this program?

## Appendix A (continued)

7. How would you define success for a SNAP E&T Program?
  - a. At what stage of evolution toward success is this particular program?
  - b. Are there pieces of the program you feel are working particularly well?
  - c. Have these pieces contributed to future decision-making processes for the program?
  - d. Is there a particular success story you could share?
  - e. What are the biggest challenges facing the program?  
Ex. Recruitment/enrollment, service take-up, staffing, etc.
8. Is there a formal or informal evaluation process to measure outcomes?
  - a. If yes, what does this look like?
  - b. If yes, can you describe how these measures are being incorporated into design and planning?
9. What are the goals for this program in the next 5 to 10 years?
10. What lessons or takeaways would you want to share with another county considering designing or implementing a program?
11. Is there a network (between counties) of programs implementing or hoping to implement a SNAP E&T program?
12. Is there anything else you feel would be important to share?
13. Are there any program reports or materials that you could share with me?

### Community Stakeholders Exploring SNAP E&T

1. Help me better understand SNAP E&T (FNS E&T) in North Carolina and the local context of your community.
2. Tell me more about why your organization/agency has started exploring FNS E&T?
  - a. How did you first learn about this program, and when did you start exploring feasibility?
  - b. What connection does the program have to your mission, to your existing clients, to your existing partnerships?
  - c. Are there existing E&T programs in place in your organization/community?
  - d. What is the specific gap in services (addressing the needs of your community) that you are hoping the SNAP E&T program could cover? Are there limits to what this program could address in context of the need?

## Appendix A (continued)

3. What has the process of exploration looked like to date?
  - a. What opportunities have you identified?
  - b. What are the barriers/challenges do you see?
    - i. Organizational capacity
    - ii. Partnerships
    - iii. More
  - c. Are there specific target populations you are thinking about in this context?
  - d. What are the ways in which the program might be made more accessible for your organization, community?
4. Who are the major stakeholders/partners who would need to be involved in order to bring this program to your community? Where are you in the conversation with these potential partners?
5. Is there a network (between counties) of programs implementing or hoping to implement a SNAP E&T program?
6. What are the goals for exploration in the next year?
7. Is there anything else that you feel would be important to share?