

Changing Systems to Ensure High Point Children are Ready for School

Ready for School, Ready for Life

Summary

Ready for School, Ready for Life is a collaborative effort to build a connected, innovative system of care for Guilford County's youngest children and families. Ready Ready's goal is to ensure every child born in Guilford County enters Kindergarten on track in key areas, including physical development, language and communication, social-emotional development, cognitive development, and approaches to play and learning. Since 2015, funding from the Foundation for a Healthy High Point has been used to ensure the initiative targets underserved populations in the High Point area.

Highlights

- Funding from the Foundation for a Healthy High Point was essential to leverage \$32.5 million in investments from Blue Meridian Partners for Phase 1.
- Ready Ready has brought together over 100 local, state, and national partners to improve outcomes for High Point children from prenatal through third grade.
- Nine of Ready Ready's board members live or work in High Point, including several who are also connected to the Foundation for a Healthy High Point, helping the initiative remain focused on High Point families.
- While all of Ready Ready's staff are attentive to equity of access across Guilford County, Ready Ready has one staff member whose role is to explicitly elevate the system issues impacting High Point families.

Funding

Since 2015, the Foundation for a Healthy High Point has provided a total of \$220,000 in support to Ready for School, Ready for Life, helping to leverage more than \$30 million in funding from other funders to support the initiative.



The Foundation for a Healthy High Point encourages, supports, influences, and invests in efforts that improve the long-term health and wellness throughout Greater High Point. We accomplish this by examining health issues and identifying and investing in evidence-based practices.

Need

Ready Ready's effort to build a system of care aims to ensure that all children in Guilford County enter Kindergarten developmentally on track and literacy ready. Today, just 51 percent of children meet or exceed language and communication proficiency milestones by the time they reach Kindergarten. For Black and Hispanic students, the numbers drop to 47 percent and 33 percent, respectively. We know that these numbers could be far worse due to the pandemic. We need all children to be successful students by third grade, as it's a powerful indicator for high school graduation and success in life. We are educating our future leaders and workers. Children who start behind have a difficult time catching up. A child's prospects are still largely determined by the circumstances of their birth. Most children in low-income families will remain at the bottom of the economic ladder. A child born into a family at the bottom 25% of income in the Piedmont Triad region of North Carolina, home to Guilford County, has a less than five percent chance of progressing to the top quartile as an adult—one of the worst rates of upward mobility in the nation.

Project Description

Ready for School, Ready for Life is leading a collaborative effort to build a connected, innovative system of care for Guilford County's youngest children and families. The Ready Ready backbone organization was started in 2015 as an initiative within the Guilford County Partnership for Children and established its 501(c)(3) status as an independent nonprofit in 2019. In 2017, The Duke Endowment selected Guilford County from among 60 communities across the Carolinas to focus on building strong prenatal to age eight systems in a county-wide effort called the Get Ready Guilford Initiative. In April 2018, Blue Meridian Partners awarded \$32.5 million to support the initiative's first phase.

Ready Ready is the backbone organization leading a county-wide systems-change effort to strengthen the effectiveness and capacity of organizations serving young children. The goal of the initiative is to improve outcomes for Guilford County children in five areas:

- (1) planned/well-timed pregnancies; (2) healthy births;
- (3) on-track development for infants, toddlers & preschoolers; (4) school readiness; and
- (5) success at the end of third grade.

Ready Ready brings together over 100 local, state, and national partners to improve outcomes for Guilford County and High Point children from prenatal through third grade. The collaborative has six priorities: 1) developing a navigation system to connect families with effective services, 2) expanding and integrating proven programs to meet community needs, 3) building a culture of continuous quality improvement, 4) building technology to support data-informed decisions, 5) conducting rigorous evaluation and building suitability, and 6) building public will for early childhood priorities.



Ready Ready collaborates with the following key partners in High Point to achieve its work, many of which received funding from the Foundation for a Healthy High Point's Healthy Beginnings initiative: Guilford County Department of Health & Human Services (Every Baby Guilford, Family Connects Guilford Program, Care Management for High Risk Pregnancy, WIC), Guilford Child Development (Nurse-Family Partnership program), Children's Home Society (Community Navigation, HealthySteps Program, Wise Guys), High Point University, United Way of Greater High Point, Foundation for a Healthy High Point, YWCA of High Point, Faith Leaders in High Point, Guilford County Schools, Culp Inc., Atrium Wake Forest Baptist, Cone Health, The Duke Endowment, Family Services of the Piedmont, and Business High Point.

Results

The organization continues to achieve its mission of creating an early childhood system of care for High Point and Guilford County, while eliminating disparities in the community. To reach this objective, the collaborative is building a comprehensive system of care in which all families in High Point and throughout Guilford County will be: (1) assessed at five key points (prenatally to age three); (2) offered targeted high-quality interventions based on their goals and needs; and (3) provided ongoing support. This is a ten-year initiative. The milestones were achieved for Phase 1, prenatal through age 3, and Ready Ready is now in the second phase of its work, piloting and beginning programs focused on ages 3-5. The final phase of this work will begin in 2025 to extend the system of care through age eight.

During the 2021-2022 funding period, Ready Ready provided critical services to 15,000 unduplicated children through partner programs. Ready Ready's work in High Point has:



- Expanded proven programs that serve High Point families and children, including Nurse-Family Partnership (113 families served), Family Connects Guilford (424 families served), and HealthySteps (3,527 children were served in three High Point practices)
- Established Community Navigation in all obstetric offices in High Point and began field testing postnatal Navigation in one pediatric practice
- Recruited 39 High Point family serving programs in its Agency Finder, adding to 173 serving families County-wide
- Enhanced access to diapers for High Point families
- Continued implementation of High Point Children's Initiatives and expanded membership
- Ensured equitable representation of High Point residents on Ready, Ready's Board

Lessons Learned

In reports submitted to the Foundation and interviews for this report, Ready Ready staff shared that:

- **Grassroots efforts can grow into something big when they work to address community needs.** The Ready Ready collaborative began when a small group of passionate community members decided to put a stake in the ground around early childhood education and care. They started by listening to families and community partners to learn about gaps and opportunities in supporting families with young children. Through these conversations they determined a need for a strong system of care for children, prenatally through the school years. Their efforts attracted the attention of regional funders, which then sparked larger investment from national funders that allowed the work to grow.
- **Population-level change requires changes to systems.** When talking with community members, Ready Ready partners learned that an effective early childhood system was needed to ensure all children succeed in Kindergarten and beyond. Families don't always know what supports are available to ensure their children reach their potential. There were many gaps between programs and services and little coordination between service providers. Additionally, providing services in a family-centered or trauma-informed way takes intentionality, training, and resources for staff. Building a collaborative system serving families with young children is needed to support success in Kindergarten and beyond.
- **Building a system of care happens with relationships and connections.** Ready Ready is working to support opportunities for organizations to build relationships and have conversations about challenges facing the early childhood system. They work to help stakeholders to think about challenges at the system level, not just the program-provider or family level. Focusing on what can be done to change systems to work better to support families and encourage the healthy development of children is what will move systems forward.
- **The Foundation's investments are important as they demonstrate local partnership and commitment to Ready Ready's mission.** This strong partnership with the Foundation is necessary for solidifying the large-scale funding managed by Ready Ready that is invested in programs and direct services and helps ensure the initiative maintains a focus on High Point families. While Ready Ready is building an early childhood system for all of Guilford County, the initiative focuses on High Point, partly due to the Foundation's funding and staff members who advocate for High Point families. Ready Ready is examining equity issues across Guilford County but staff will often say "which High Point partners are involved in this effort" to ensure High Point is not overlooked. The Healthy Beginnings convenings helped Ready Ready staff to get to know more community partners, and the initiative knows how important these relationships are to ensuring the effort is meeting the needs of the High Point community.

- **Foundations cannot ignore the impact of systemic racism on community problems.** Ready Ready leaders believe Foundations should embark on deep conversations about race and equity. What is the racial makeup of foundation staff and board members? Is race equity being examined in all aspects of a foundation's work? While not everyone wants to talk about racial equity, given High Point's history as a manufacturing town, efforts must address who is most highly impacted when manufacturing jobs are gone. Ready Ready feels there's an opportunity for foundations to come together and challenge the nonprofit sector to address these challenging issues. Ready Ready's Board adopted an Equity Statement and Equity Action Plan that will support its efforts to be an equity-driven organization.