



# Communities on the

IMPROVING ACTIVE LIVING IN RURAL NORTH CAROLINA

# MOVE

A REPORT OF THE



BlueCross BlueShield  
of North Carolina

Foundation



## Introduction

**BIGGER IS NOT ALWAYS BETTER.** This is certainly the case in the United States where more than two-thirds of adults are overweight or obese<sup>1</sup>. The statistics are more disturbing in North Carolina where not one of the state's 100 counties has an adult obesity rate lower than 61 percent. In rural North Carolina, adult obesity rates reach as high as 72 percent, and less than half of the adult population is meeting the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommendations for daily physical activity<sup>2</sup>.

Taking note of the alarming disparity surrounding obesity and inactivity in rural North Carolina, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) Foundation initiated a multi-year grant program aimed at addressing physical inactivity in five rural North Carolina communities. Through a partnership with Active Living By Design—a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation—the initiative integrated a multi-layered approach to eliminating barriers to and promoting physical activity.

**Communities on the Move** summarizes the Fit Together Grant Program, which concluded in 2009. By detailing the impetus for the project, outlining key insights resulting from the initiative, and documenting each of the five rural Fit Together projects in case study format, this report is designed to assist rural communities as well as funding organizations interested in addressing obesity and promoting active living.

1 Prevalence and Trends in Obesity Among US Adults, 1999-2008 (Journal of the American Medical Association: January 2010)

2 North Carolina Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey (2007)





# COMMUNITIES ON THE MOVE

Improving Active Living in Rural North Carolina



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## The Fit Together Grant Program

**IN 2003**, Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina partnered with the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission to create **Fit Together**, a statewide campaign designed to raise awareness about the dangers of unhealthy weight and, more importantly, to equip individuals, families and communities with the tools they need to address this very serious health concern. Related to this effort, in 2006, the separate and independent Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) Foundation established the Fit Together Grant Program, committing \$750,000 over three years to support five rural North Carolina communities that sought to improve community health by implementing innovative and integrated strategies to increase physical activity.

North Carolina Governor Bev Perdue, former Chair of the Health and Wellness Trust Fund Commission, recognizes the challenges facing her home state and the importance of focusing on rural communities.

“So much is at stake, especially in rural areas where many of the problems from obesity are showing up in doctor offices and hospitals,” said Perdue. “Together we can prevent childhood obesity and reduce adult obesity with the kinds of healthful lifestyle changes promoted by Fit Together.”

The BCBSNC Foundation defined rural communities as any of the 85 counties identified as such by the North Carolina Rural Economic Development Center. The attention to rural areas grew out of understanding that among other issues facing these communities—including access to primary health and dental care—daily physical activity is in many cases inaccessible.

“Rural communities face a particular challenge in providing opportunities for physical activity,” said Kathy Higgins, president of the BCBSNC Foundation.

“Sidewalks and walking trails may be hard to find, and in some cases people have to go to the next town or even county to find a park or greenway.”

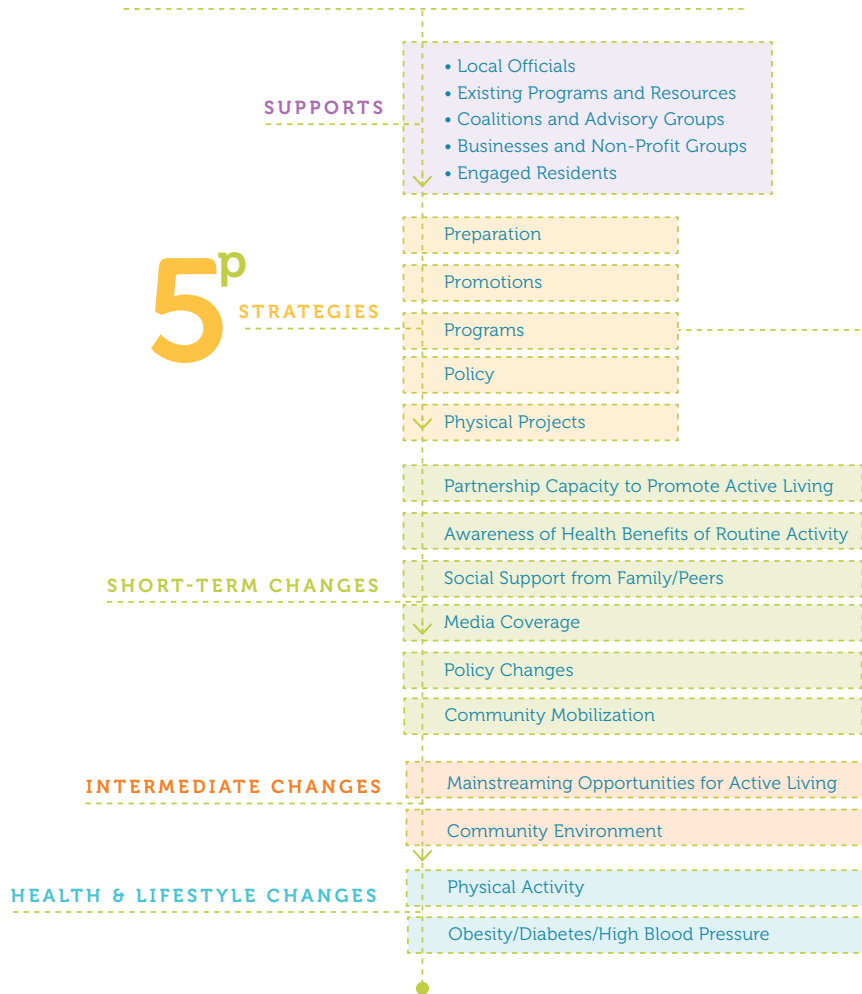
Fit Together grantees were selected based on the following: demonstrated need, strength and capacity of the proposed partnership; innovation and integration of multiple strategies; likelihood that the proposed project plan would result in increased physical activity in the project area; and commitment of the partnership to sustaining the initiative beyond the three-year grant period.

In addition to grant funding, BCBSNC Foundation also supported each Fit Together partnership throughout the initiative’s three years with technical assistance, which was provided by Active Living By Design (ALBD). Active Living By Design is a national program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and is part of the North Carolina Institute for Public Health at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill. ALBD was selected as the key partner based on the success of their work across the country to create community-led change in the area of active living. Technical assistance included coaching and facilitation, resources, education and training, as well as support for project development, implementation and evaluation.

Each of the five communities implemented ALBD’s Community Action Model and 5P strategies as the framework for their Fit Together initiatives.

The model depicts how multiple strategies can be integrated concurrently within a community to increase the likelihood of success, understanding that one strategy on its own (e.g., building a trail, promoting healthy living, offering a walking program) will not have the same impact or sustainable effect on increasing routine physical activity.

## FIT TOGETHER THEORY OF CHANGE\*



\*Based on the Active Living By Design Community Action Model

Each of the 5P strategies involves specific tactics. **Preparation** includes partnership development, assessment and sustainability planning. **Promotions** tactics involve targeted communications with project audiences and policy makers. **Programs** are organized, ongoing activities that encourage routine physical activity. **Policy** strategies inform, influence and implement policies and practices that support active living. **Physical projects** directly improve the community environment and/or remove existing barriers to routine physical activity opportunities. While this model had been implemented in more urban communities, the Fit Together partnerships were the first to implement ALBD's approach exclusively in rural settings.



## Insights on Community Change

The experiences of the Fit Together partnerships yielded valuable insights and lessons learned that can help communities and funders identify some of the essential components necessary for success in implementing active living community-based initiatives.

**A comprehensive, multi-layered approach to community change (such as the ALBD Community Action Model and 5P Strategies) is both valuable and challenging to implement.**

- Projects that integrate multiple strategies, and include policy and environmental changes, are better positioned for comprehensive and lasting impact. Integration and implementation of a comprehensive approach is feasible and valuable, and requires assistance during all phases of a project, particularly in rural settings.
- Partnership leaders value ongoing guidance while applying this approach within the context of their projects and communities.
- Partnerships in rural communities possess both unique challenges and assets. Challenges relate to dispersed populations and destinations, as well as cultural and political factors. Assets in many rural communities include well-established grassroots social networks from which to build community engagement and advocacy for active living.

**Multi-disciplinary partnerships are the cornerstone of successful, comprehensive community change initiatives.**

- Individual partners tend to gravitate toward those strategies with which they have the most experience or those which are better aligned with their organization's mission. For example, Cooperative Extension Service partners traditionally provide programming, and local government staff can help lead efforts to affect policy. Effective partnerships efficiently utilize each partners' assets.
- Successful partnerships understand and reflect the community they serve. Meaningful and mutually beneficial involvement of target audience members best informs project efforts.





**Partnerships must meet and reach people where they are in order to effectively engage them.**

- Clearly defined target audiences that include community members who are ready for change increase an initiative’s potential for success.
- Venues in which people already gather, such as worksites and churches, often provide organizational and social support, thereby increasing their value in supporting and implementing active living strategies.
- Projects utilizing a comprehensive approach are more easily implemented in single settings and with one target audience at a time. Multiple settings and audiences put a partnership at risk for managing separate projects rather than a single cohesive one.

**In rural areas, if you build it and make it inviting, they will come.**

- The quality of an environment can serve as an incentive or disincentive for its use. Complementary amenities such as shelters, lighting and benches can encourage use of parks, trails and sidewalks.
- Community events and programs in active living-friendly environments provide a powerful combination of social and physical support to motivate people to be physically active.
- Physical projects and special events can carry increased significance in rural communities where opportunities for places to go or things to do are less readily available as compared to urban areas.

**For successful community leaders it’s a way of life, not a job.**

- Effective community and project leaders are those whose motivation is personal. Their enthusiasm for and commitment to improving their communities are what compels them to continue their efforts over time.
- Community-based partnerships typically rely on volunteers and in-kind supporters who often have competing priorities. It is critical for partnerships to find ways to provide meaningful incentives to help ensure that project work remains a priority and is not unduly delayed.
- Active living champions and partners can come from a variety of settings and fields. It is important to look for leadership potential in private as well as public organizations, and from areas in which physical activity is not the primary expertise, such as youth programs and churches.
- Informal leaders, those without formal or official titles, can lend important support and credibility, particularly in rural communities. Partnerships that engage members who are viewed by the community as “trusted pillars” and “movers and shakers” are often more effective in building personal trust and commitment.

**Partnership changes are to be expected.**

- All of the Fit Together partnerships experienced key changes in staffing or partners during the three-year grant period. Successful partnerships plan for potential turnover and have systems in place to manage such changes.
- The transition of new project staff and partners ideally includes the sharing of information and experiences from stakeholders at all levels (e.g., local partnership, funder, technical assistance provider, etc.).
- Project staffing may be vulnerable to turnover, but less so when staff members have strong support from their organization and partnership.

## Insights on Community Change

(continued)

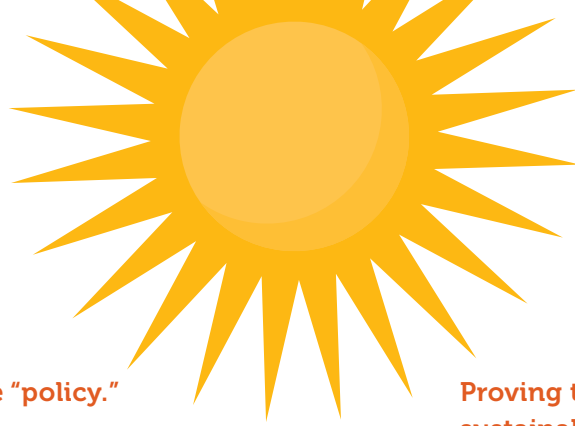
### Highly engaged funders and ongoing technical assistance are assets to success.

- Community change work is dynamic and it is important that funders are engaged in discussions, understanding of project revisions, flexible and accepting of change.
- One of the most valuable elements of technical assistance is having a consistent contact to provide an informed yet objective perspective, and an outlet for grantees to discuss both successes and challenges.
- Regular communication with the technical assistance provider helps grantees stay on course, remain motivated and receive timely support.

### The support and assistance provided to partnerships should be tailored to address needs and gaps.

- Most of the project partners were more familiar and comfortable with the concepts of physical activity and recreation versus routine active living. It is important to provide ongoing guidance to partnerships to keep their sights on routine active living rather than focusing on traditional physical activity programming and other strategies that tend to be less sustainable.
- Partnerships and communities in North Carolina value their uniqueness and may not readily see how examples from other communities may apply to them. Models and best practices that enable partners to glean relevant principles and apply them in their communities are helpful.





### **There are many ways to define “policy.”**

- Policy strategies are often the most difficult for partnership and community members to understand and implement. Providing clear guidance up front about expectations for policy change within funded initiatives and technical assistance on how to achieve policy change are critical. Partnerships also need support to translate policy work in ways that are relevant to community members.
- When defining acceptable policy change strategies, community context and time frames should be considered. These factors determine the level of policy change that is most appropriate for a community.
- Partnerships should be encouraged to consider less formal forms of policy strategies such as changes in institutional and organizational practices and guidelines, rather than focusing solely on or feeling daunted by passing or changing laws or ordinances.

### **Proving the case is often necessary to achieve sustainable change.**

- Grant funding is helpful in supporting pilot programs that help demonstrate feasibility and effectiveness without financial risk to the local government partners. Results of such pilots can help convince decision makers to provide continued support through staff positions, financial support for programs, policy changes and capital investments in the form of equipment, infrastructure and environmental change.
- Matching existing state or federal dollars can help lead the completion of major physical projects. For example, the park in Camden County was able to leverage existing funds from the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund.
- Data that demonstrate the impact of projects, in addition to personal stories from community members and constituents, are powerful advocacy tools.



## Elements of Success

The Fit Together partnerships achieved several active living community changes over the three-year grant period. Key factors that made the portfolio of projects successful are summarized in this section.

**The ALBD Community Action Model and 5P Strategies provided a holistic approach to create sustainable active living changes in the communities.**

The 5P approach required the creation of multi-disciplinary partnerships to carry out the project work. As a result, new community partnerships were formed that will continue with future initiatives. For example, the Fit Together project provided the venue to develop or strengthen relationships between public and private sector organizations, and between and within government agencies (e.g., planning, public health, recreation and parks departments). In addition, the 5P approach added new dimensions to efforts at the local level to improve community health, affecting both short-term objectives (programs and promotions) and longer-term sustainable objectives (physical projects and policy change).

**Personal contact and audience-centered communication outlets were highly effective in garnering support from community members and policy makers.**

Community events and programs were effective in engaging community members in the projects. This was particularly important at the beginning, as policy and physical project strategies required more time to implement. The partnerships also used face-to-face contact and word-of-mouth communications to successfully reach their target audiences and influence policy makers. Specific strategies included door-to-door visits, church bulletins, local newspapers, and other trusted communication sources and outlets. These methods of communication are particularly meaningful in rural communities where Web-based or online communication is not a primary source of information for community members.



**The combination of three-year investments of funding and technical assistance helped the partnerships attain meaningful and sustainable active living achievements.**

Partnerships found initial success in engaging community members through promotional and programmatic strategies. These strategies allowed for community buy-in to the project on the front end while partnerships worked on preparation and planning that would lead to more sustainable policy and physical changes toward the end of the project period. The three-year grant period provided the time and support the partnerships needed to manage construction and other physical project delays, as well as to conduct reassessments that led to improved project plans. Some of the partnerships were also able to take advantage of unanticipated opportunities that arose during the grant period, further serving as a testament to the time required for comprehensive and sustainable initiatives.

**Fit Together grant funds helped local communities leverage additional financial support to yield broader impact and community changes for active living.**

More than \$1.2 million in matching funds was leveraged by the grantee partnerships to complement their Fit Together projects. This amount well exceeded the grant program's 50 percent match requirement. Complementary support came from a variety of sources including in-kind and cash support from lead agencies and their partners as well as other resources such as, the North Carolina Parks and Recreation Trust Fund, the Land and Water Conservation Trust Fund, county recreation revenues, and in-kind contributions from local businesses.

**The partnerships were able to focus on project goals and implementation as a result of the BCBSNC Foundation streamlining grant administration and management.**

The processes for annual project planning and reporting were significantly changed after the first year of the Fit Together grant program. Forms and templates were simplified, and reporting requirements decreased from semi-annual to annual terms, thereby requiring less time and fewer resources. These changes were designed to decrease time spent in grant administration and increase time available for partnerships to focus on project outcomes.

**Flexibility provided by the BCBSNC Foundation throughout the grant period enabled the partnerships to achieve outcomes that reached beyond their original project plans.**

All of the grantees described the flexibility in using Fit Together funds as an asset, and one that enabled them to support other funded efforts that had more restrictions, such as those related to construction and cash incentives. The nature of community change work is dynamic, and giving the partnerships freedom and support to reassess and revise their projects during the grant period helped increase the likelihood that their work would be sustained once the grant period ended.





CAMDEN COUNTY

STOKES COUNTY

JACKSON COUNTY

CHATHAM COUNTY

PITT COUNTY

# Case Studies



# CAMDEN COUNTY:

## Gateway to Healthy Living

### COMMUNITY QUICK FACTS\*

#### CAMDEN COUNTY

POPULATION:  
9,680

RACE/ETHNICITY:  
81% White  
17% African American  
2% Other

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME:  
\$47,296

\*Community Quick Facts for each case study are from U.S. Census Bureau data (2000) and information provided by the grantee partnership.

“**ROOT, ROOT, ROOT** for the home team” was once an unsung chorus amongst Camden County residents. The lack of programs and places for activity forced children and adults to travel out of the county to be physically active. A desire to help residents be active within their own community, and the burden of increasing costs associated with outsourcing parks and recreation services to a city in a neighboring county, led to the vision of the Camden County Fit Together project.

The partnership knew that the county’s community park was an underdeveloped asset and as a result, focused on developing it into a community gathering place. Several additions were made to the park including a walking trail, a playground, a picnic shelter and lighting. Strategically located within walking distance of the county government office as well as the primary and intermediate schools, the partnership took advantage of the park’s proximity to these destinations and implemented programs to encourage employees and students to use the park and participate in physical activity.

The 12-week Lose to Win weight loss challenge was offered several times during the grant period, providing

county employees opportunities to learn about and participate in physical activity and wellness sessions. Walking programs were also successful in engaging more than 120 adults and children, in addition to nearly 1,000 children through 30 area classrooms.

As residents and policy makers saw the positive changes occurring within their community, the partnership garnered support that led to the establishment of the county’s first parks and recreation department. According to project director and Camden County Planning Director, Dan Porter, “The Fit Together program provided a catalyst to enable us to no longer rely on volunteers and help from the neighboring

### CONTINUING COMMUNITY CHANGE



Further enhancements have been made to the Camden County community park including an information center, benches for athletic fields, and timber and mulch for the playground. A sailboat has also been made available for community members to be physically active on the county’s blue ways.

These changes were supported through a supplemental equipment grant from the BCBSNC Foundation.







city to provide physical activity opportunities in our own county.” Since its establishment in 2006, the department quickly grew from one to three full-time county-supported staff members, and now offers a variety of recreation programs, resources and events for residents of all ages and abilities.

While remaining true to its original vision of the Fit Together project, the partnership also seized opportunities that arose throughout the three-year grant period. Two significant policy changes involved the adoption of a joint use agreement by the County Commission and Board of Education to maximize use of recreational facilities, and the inclusion of a checklist with Smart Growth indicators in the county’s residential development application to encourage walkability and open spaces in new neighborhoods. With a moratorium on residential development being lifted in 2007, Camden County saw an opportunity to

#### CAMDEN COUNTY

TOTAL AREA:  
306 square miles

INCORPORATED MUNICIPALITIES  
AND TOWNSHIPS:  
None

PROJECT AREA:  
Camden County in  
northeastern North Carolina

PROJECT POPULATION:  
County employees, school  
children, faculty and staff

LEAD AGENCY:  
Camden County Government

PROJECT PARTNERS:  
• County planning department  
• County parks and  
recreation department  
• School system  
• Hospital community  
outreach program

available on the Camden County’s Parks & Recreation Department Web site ([www.camdencountync.gov](http://www.camdencountync.gov)).

Thanks to the vision, work and commitment of the Camden County Fit Together partnership, residents now have a “home” to be physically active and gather within their own community.

encourage active living features in communities. Although the checklist is not required, developers are using it, and it is having a positive impact. One developer, who initially received a low score, used the **Smart Growth Checklist** criteria and made many changes to the development plan including adding more open spaces and walkable areas. As a result, the rating increased. Residents in existing neighborhoods were also supported in being physically active as the partnership used geographic information system (GIS)\* technology to **map walking routes** in 16 different neighborhoods and made the maps



Please see Resources (page 24) for more information.

\*A geographic information system (GIS) integrates hardware, software, and data for capturing, managing, analyzing, and displaying all forms of geographically referenced information.

# CHATHAM COUNTY:

## Fit Families of Chatham

### COMMUNITY QUICK FACTS\*

#### CHATHAM COUNTY

POPULATION:

49,329

RACE/ETHNICITY:

74% White

17% African American

9% Hispanic/Latino

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME:

\$42,851

\* Community Quick Facts for each case study are from U.S. Census Bureau data (2000) and information provided by the grantee partnership.

**"WE DECIDED** to throw the party where people are," according to Megan Bolejack, project coordinator of the Chatham County Fit Together partnership. "There's not a whole lot to do in rural areas. Giving people something to do is important," said Bolejack who also serves as the Health Promotions Coordinator for the Chatham County Public Health Department.

The southwestern area of Chatham County, where many of its African American and Hispanic residents live and work, lacked a place for community recreation until Southwest Community Park was opened in 2005. Due to lack of funds at that time, the park did not have adequate facilities to attract community members. The Fit Together partnership sought to

enhance the facilities at the park as a means to create a more inviting place for area residents to gather and be physically active. Improvements were made to the existing walking trail, and a shelter was constructed with a kitchen, restrooms and picnic tables. These improvements enabled the partnership to leverage funds for further park enhancements, including lighting supported by the Chatham Parks Foundation.

As Southwest Community Park transformed, the Chatham County Fit Together partnership hosted special events and programs to draw people to the park. Attendance at the annual Family Fun Day grew from 150 community members in the first year to 425 in the second year. Praise in the Park and Move with Movies were other successful initiatives. The Fit Families program was offered as a way to support and engage community members in routine physical activity. The 12-week program included wellness education and physical activity sessions. It was offered at Southwest Community Park during each year of the project and targeted audiences including Hispanic community members, families living and working near Southwest Community Park and the faith community. Conducting assessments at various times throughout

### CONTINUING COMMUNITY CHANGE



Accessibility at Southwest Community Park has been improved with a sidewalk leading to the park shelter, restrooms and parking facilities.

These changes were supported through a supplemental equipment grant from the BCBSNC Foundation.





the three-year project was key in enabling the partnership to identify community audiences that were the most interested and ready to participate in the Fit Families program each year.

The faith community received further support from the Fit Together partnership in the areas of programs and policy. The partnership helped to connect churches with the Light Way Wellness Ministry, a spiritually-based health program of the county's public health department. The program is designed to assist churches in developing a wellness ministry, implementing health programs, and instituting healthy church policy. Four-area churches established a health ministry and one implemented a healthy eating policy by the end of the Fit Together grant period.

Creating an inviting and accessible place to gather has increased physical activity among community members and reaped other benefits as well. Tracy Burnett, Fit Together project director and Chatham County Recreation and Parks Director, said, "The park brought unity and a sense of pride to the diverse community in southwest Chatham. Residents say, 'that's my park.'"

## CHATHAM COUNTY

TOTAL AREA:  
709 square miles

INCORPORATED MUNICIPALITIES  
AND TOWNSHIPS:  
Four

PROJECT AREA:  
Chatham County in central  
North Carolina

PROJECT POPULATION:  
Families living and working in  
southwest Chatham County

LEAD AGENCY:  
Chatham County Government

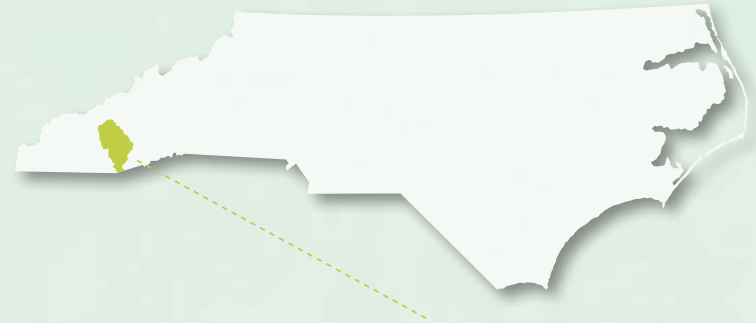
PROJECT PARTNERS:

- County parks and recreation department
- County public health department
- Local faith community
- County Cooperative Extension Service
- Local YMCA



# JACKSON COUNTY:

## Walking to Jerusalem



### COMMUNITY QUICK FACTS\*

#### JACKSON COUNTY

POPULATION:

33,121

RACE/ETHNICITY:

86% White

10% Native American

2% African American

2% Other

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME:

\$32,552

\* Community Quick Facts for each case study are from U.S. Census Bureau data (2000) and information provided by the grantee partnership.

**JERUSALEM OR DILLSBORO**—no matter the destination, the Jackson County Fit Together partnership was determined to make the route walkable for community members. A key component of the Jackson County Greenway Master Plan involved the development of a trail to connect the county seat of Sylva with the Town of Dillsboro located on the county's western border.

The Fit Together project focused on the first of the plan's three phases to construct a connector trail between Mark Watson and Poteet parks in Sylva. Unfortunately, as the partners conducted further assessments and preparatory activities, they faced resistance from property owners along the proposed route, an increased flood plain along the corridor and environmental considerations. A combination of persistence and flexibility led to a revised physical project that would have a greater impact on walkability in the county.

In year two of the project, the Fit Together partnership learned that the Town of Sylva and the North Carolina Department of Transportation were working to jointly fund a sidewalk to connect Sylva and Dillsboro, a

distance of approximately 1.6 miles. The partnership seized this opportunity and leveraged existing Fit Together funds to secure town and state dollars to construct a trail from the end of the planned sidewalk at Mark Watson Park in Sylva to downtown where there are several public spaces. This work built upon the partnership's accomplishment in the first year, which involved construction of a bridge across Scott's Creek connecting a new park with an existing park in downtown Sylva. Another critical impetus for these changes occurred with the creation of a Recreation Project Manager position under the county's parks and recreation department, who also serves as the coordinator of the Greenway Commission.

#### JACKSON COUNTY

TOTAL AREA:

494 square miles

INCORPORATED MUNICIPALITIES AND TOWNSHIPS:

Four

PROJECT AREA:

Jackson County in western North Carolina

PROJECT POPULATION:

County employees, faith community

LEAD AGENCY:

Jackson County Department of Public Health

PROJECT PARTNERS:

- County public health department
- County greenway commission
- County parks and recreation department
- County Cooperative Extension Service

While plans and construction to create safe and walkable routes were in process, the Fit Together partnership engaged community members in physical activity through programs and promotional events. The partnership wisely reached out to community members in places where they already spend a lot of their time—church and work. Nine churches participated in the Walking to Jerusalem program in which church and community members committed to walk the equivalent of 6,313 miles from Sylva to Jerusalem.

The partnership also supported Jackson County and Town of Sylva employees in being physically active and leading healthier lives. The employee wellness component provided educational sessions and opportunities to participate in physical activity and healthy food practices at work. The program was so successful that the county agreed to provide funding to continue offering it to their employees beyond the Fit Together project period.

The institutionalization of the county employee wellness program and creation of the recreation project manager were critical to creating sustainable active living opportunities. Face-to-face meetings with key

stakeholders, including the county manager and commissioners, as well as providing data and compelling rationale for promising strategies were essential elements that drove the partnership to success.

The Jackson County Fit Together journey enhanced routes and broadened sights. Emily Elders, who serves as Recreation Project Manager of the county's parks and recreation department, sees the impact that the project has had as community members, government leaders and other partners "got interested and began talking about the greenway system, bike lanes, sidewalks and connectivity!"

#### CONTINUING COMMUNITY CHANGE



Mark Watson Park in Sylva was enhanced with the addition of benches, bicycle racks and trash receptacles. The Jackson County employee wellness program was also broadened through the provision of incentive items and health screening equipment.

These changes were supported through a supplemental equipment grant from the BCBSNC Foundation.



# BETHEL AND WINTERVILLE TOWNSHIPS, PITT COUNTY:

## Students Lead the Way to Fit Together Move More Communities

### COMMUNITY QUICK FACTS\*

#### PITT COUNTY

POPULATION:

133,798

RACE/ETHNICITY:

62% White

34% African American

3% Hispanic/Latino

1% Other

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME:

\$32,868

#### BETHEL

POPULATION:

1,681

RACE/ETHNICITY:

58% African American

40% White

2% Other

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME:

\$25,326

#### WINTERVILLE

POPULATION:

4,791

RACE/ETHNICITY:

59% White

38% African American

3% Other

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME:

\$37,230

\* Community Quick Facts for each case study are from U.S. Census Bureau data (2000) and information provided by the grantee partnership.

**EXPRESSION OF** individuality and uniqueness often flourishes during the teenage years. The Pitt County Fit Together partnership learned that valuing and respecting these qualities is equally important when working with communities. The Students Lead the Way to Fit Together Move More Communities project intentionally sought to serve and connect two communities located on opposite ends of Pitt County and outside the more urbanized city of Greenville. The towns of Bethel and Winterville were also selected based on gaps in physical activity and after-school programs.

An after-school program model was successfully established in the towns of Bethel and Winterville during the first year of the project. The program provided at-risk middle school students with a place to go after school that provided physical activity and academic tutoring in safe environments with the support of high school and college mentors. After the first year, the partnership became challenged with ongoing engagement of school and community leaders in both towns, transportation within and across towns for mentoring activities, and other issues related to sustainability of the project. The need for a new approach grew increasingly apparent.

As a result, the project leaders convened school principals, church leaders and other key stakeholders in Bethel and Winterville. They discovered that each community had different needs and desires, and realized that continuing to apply the same approach in both communities would not be effective. In Bethel, the school principal and church leaders needed an after-school program that would be well-aligned with both of the organizations' missions, as well as a space for people to walk for activity. In Winterville, the school principal had begun a partnership with the county's community schools and recreation department to provide an after-school and physical activity program, but needed a walking trail that staff, students and community members could easily access.

### CONTINUING COMMUNITY CHANGE



Community members and students in the Town of Bethel received support to continue routine physical activity by enhancing the Bridging the Gap walking trail with benches and providing equipment for the after-school program at New Wynn Chapel.

These changes were supported through a supplemental equipment grant from the BCBSNC Foundation.



In response, the Fit Together project supported the creation of walking trails at both after-school program sites—New Wynn Chapel in Bethel and Hope Middle School in Winterville. The Fit Together partnership continued to coordinate the after-school program in Bethel, and transitioned into a supportive role as Pitt County community schools and recreation staff began operating the after-school program at Hope Middle School. Greater sustainability of the project was achieved with this new approach through the institutionalization of both after-school programs as New Wynn Chapel agreed to continue to manage the program in Bethel after the grant period.

Policy achievements also provide long-term support for physical activity and wellness. Joint use policies for the walking trails at the church and school make them accessible to everyone in the Bethel and Winterville communities. New Wynn Chapel also formalized a **Healthy Lifestyle Policy** that includes providing regular physical activity classes, healthy food choices at church functions and health promotion activities.

Please see Resources (page 24) for more information.

Respecting, listening and responding to the unique needs of each community made the Fit Together project sustainable and successful in Bethel and Winterville, a testament to the flexibility of the project leaders. According to project coordinator, Carita Powell, "(We) need to go into the community with respect and genuine interest to better the community, not just to do a job."



#### **PITT COUNTY**

TOTAL AREA:  
**655 square miles**

INCORPORATED MUNICIPALITIES  
AND TOWNSHIPS:  
**Eleven**

PROJECT AREA:  
**Two townships, Bethel and Winterville,  
located in the northern and southern  
portions of Pitt County, respectively**

PROJECT POPULATION:  
**Middle school students**

LEAD AGENCY:  
**North Carolina Agromedicine  
Institute, a University of North  
Carolina center located at  
East Carolina University**

PROJECT PARTNERS:  

- School principals and teachers
- Church leaders

# TOWN OF WALNUT COVE, STOKES COUNTY:

## Walk Walnut Cove

### COMMUNITY QUICK FACTS\*

#### STOKES COUNTY

POPULATION:

44,711

RACE/ETHNICITY:

93% White

5% African American

2% Other

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME:

\$38,808

#### WALNUT COVE

POPULATION:

1,465

RACE/ETHNICITY:

79% White

19% African American

2% Other

MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME:

\$31,944

\* Community Quick Facts for each case study are from U.S. Census Bureau data (2000) and information provided by the grantee partnership.

**THE QUEST** for a sidewalk in the Town of Walnut Cove began with Fit Together project leaders walking to meet with residents along the proposed route. Although the town had legal ownership of the property on which the proposed sidewalk was to be built, town officials and the project director knew that face-to-face conversations with community members was the right thing for them to do. “We wanted to make sure that they felt they had a say, that something wasn’t being done to them,” said Angie Cullen, project director and Healthy Carolinians of Stokes Coordinator. These conversations provided an opportunity for the

partnership to explain the benefits of the proposed sidewalk and for community members to raise questions or concerns. The process of engaging the community in the early stages of the project made all the difference in garnering overwhelming support for the sidewalk.

The need for a sidewalk was compelling, as it would create a safe route to several key destinations in the Town of Walnut Cove including the elementary school, public library, senior center and surrounding neighborhoods. Community members of all ages are motivated to use the sidewalk through partner-sponsored programs such as the elementary school’s weekly Library Walking Program, and the senior center’s bi-weekly walking club. Kindergarteners and first graders also now use the sidewalk for a tour that enables them to learn about town services with stops at the fire station, police department, town hall and post office. The sidewalk has not only provided safer routes for children and seniors, but it has also created a venue for community members to connect socially, as residents can be seen using the sidewalk on a daily basis. As walking became a popular activity in Walnut

### CONTINUING COMMUNITY CHANGE



Members of the Walnut Cove community, from children to seniors, are benefitting from equipment to engage them in physical activity (e.g., free weights and hula hoops), and maintenance equipment to help ensure that the sidewalk remains an asset for years to come.

These changes were supported through a supplemental equipment grant from the BCBSNC Foundation.





## STOKES COUNTY

TOTAL AREA:  
456 square miles

INCORPORATED MUNICIPALITIES  
AND TOWNSHIPS:  
Three

PROJECT AREA:  
Town of Walnut Cove, located  
in southern Stokes County

PROJECT POPULATION:  
Residents, senior citizens,  
and students in the London  
community of Walnut Cove

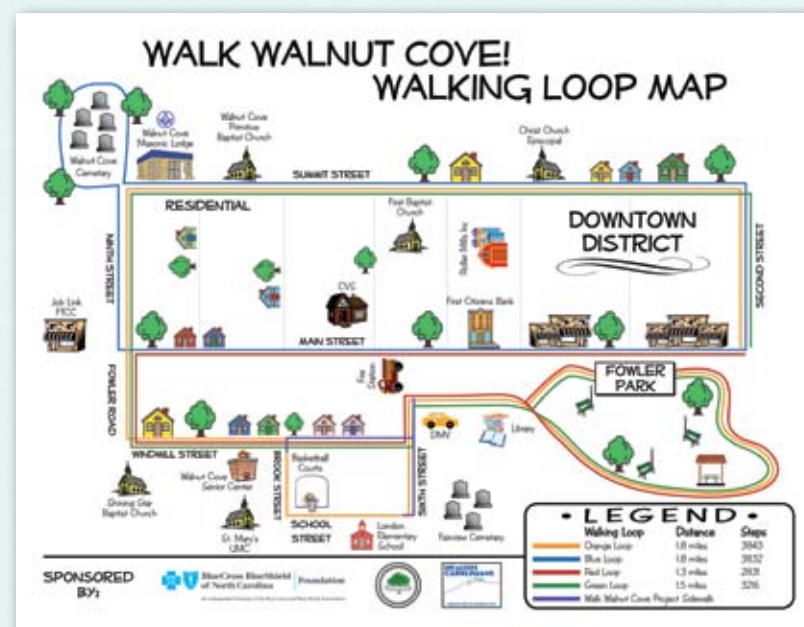
- PROJECT PARTNERS:
- Healthy Carolinians coalition
  - Town manager
  - Town public works department
  - School principal
  - Senior center staff
  - Community librarian



Cove, the partnership developed a map that shows the distances and number of steps for five different routes around the town.

Creating a sense of community unity and ownership was further supported by the Fit Together partnership's promotional strategies. A two-part campaign was launched before the sidewalk was constructed with a "teaser" billboard announcing that a gift for town residents was on its way. A second billboard posted a month later revealed that the gift was a new sidewalk that would also bring active living and good health for town residents. The pride and excitement of community members was overwhelmingly apparent at the sidewalk dedication and ribbon-cutting ceremony. The school's marching band led an impressive line of students, school staff, parents, community members, and county and town officials along the half-mile sidewalk route. The parade also served as a celebration of renewed community unity. When asked for his best advice to other rural communities and leaders, Town Manager Homer Dearmin said, "Don't just sit around and talk about it. Get everyone involved. Get on your feet, get out there and do it!"

Please see Resources (page 24) for more information.



# Resources

The five Fit Together Partnerships developed a number of distinct promotions, programs, physical projects and policies over the course of the three-year initiative. The resources outlined below may be beneficial for communities and organizations seeking to implement similar projects.

Each resource is available for download at [www.bcbsncfoundation.org/fittogether](http://www.bcbsncfoundation.org/fittogether)

- CAMDEN COUNTY—GATEWAY TO HEALTHY LIVING
- Smart Growth Scorecard
  - Camden County Subdivision walking maps

- CHATHAM COUNTY—FIT FAMILIES OF CHATHAM
- Southwest Community Park informational flyer
  - Fit Families of Chatham program flyer
  - Joint use land agreement

- JACKSON COUNTY—WALKING TO JERUSALEM
- Mark Watson Park trail plan

- BETHEL AND WINTERVILLE TOWNSHIPS, PITT COUNTY—STUDENTS LEAD THE WAY TO FIT TOGETHER MOVE MORE COMMUNITIES
- New Wynn Chapel Church healthy lifestyle policy

- TOWN OF WALNUT COVE, STOKES COUNTY—WALK WALNUT COVE
- Walnut Cove sidewalk billboard campaign
  - Walk Walnut Cove walking map



## About the Fit Together Grant Program Partners



Since its founding in November 2000, the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) Foundation has carried out its mission of improving the health and well-being of North Carolinians by investing more than \$58 million into communities across the state through more than 400 grants and special initiatives.

Through a combination of grantmaking, multi-year initiatives and signature programs, BCBSNC Foundation commits resources and time needed to support opportunities impacting the health of North Carolinians, investing in programs and services in response to grant requests and proactively creating initiatives or partnering with organizations to address specific needs.

BCBSNC Foundation's outcomes-focused grantmaking is guided by three primary focus areas: Health of Vulnerable Populations—improving health outcomes of populations served by safety-net organizations; Healthy Active Communities—increasing physical activity and encouraging healthy eating habits; and Community Impact through Nonprofit Excellence—increasing the effectiveness of North Carolina's nonprofit organizations.

More information is available at [www.bcbsncfoundation.org](http://www.bcbsncfoundation.org).



Active Living By Design (ALBD) creates community-led change by working with local and national partners to build a culture of active living and healthy eating. Established by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), ALBD is part of the North Carolina Institute for Public Health at the UNC Gillings School of Global Public Health in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. ALBD was a founding program in the RWJF's Active Living portfolio of initiatives. The vision of Active Living By Design is healthy communities where routine physical activity and healthy eating are accessible, easy and affordable to everyone.

ALBD offers tailored services based on clients' needs and goals. ALBD's level of involvement can range from targeted phone consultations to long-term coaching and capacity-building engagements, and from serving in an advisory capacity to full collaboration as a strategic partner. The multi-disciplinary staff of ALBD provides expertise in a variety of content areas.

Special thanks to Joanne Lee for her significant contributions in creating this report.

More information is available at [www.activelivingbydesign.org](http://www.activelivingbydesign.org).





**BlueCross BlueShield  
of North Carolina** | **Foundation**

Post Office Box 2291 • Durham, North Carolina 27702

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[www.bcbsncfoundation.org](http://www.bcbsncfoundation.org)

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**COMMUNITIES ON THE MOVE**  
Improving Active Living in Rural North Carolina

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