

DOGWOOD HEALTH TRUST GRANT REPORT

Capacity Building for Stronger Communities

WNC Honors Program 2021 - 2023



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Introduction

The community development clubs in WNC Communities' membership are a backbone of community resilience across 18 counties of Western North Carolina and the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians. These community centers work to provide for the unmet needs of their rural and underserved populations, offering a wide range of services such as food pantries, health programs, internet, educational programs, business incubation, and fun opportunities for neighbors to socialize. By building the capacity of these all-volunteer organizations throughout the region, we provide a key resource for community resilience across health, economic, and social dimensions. This became even more apparent during COVID when our member communities quickly responded to our call to help with food distribution in the Farmers to Families program. Building on this success, we wanted to find a way to better support these backbone organizations, help them to thrive and reach their full potential, and thereby create greater vitality and resilience for our beloved mountain region.

The three year grant from Dogwood Health Trust enabled WNC Communities to hire staff to provide much needed direct assistance to our communities. Based on the findings from the community assessment we did with the ION Grant in 2020, we created offerings to address their most pressing needs.

At the top of their list were stronger financial standing, greater volunteer involvement, governance know-how to run nonprofits, ways to attract more community engagement and younger volunteers to replace aging leaders, and avenues to make needed repairs to their buildings.

To address these needs, we:

- created an assessment with WNC Honors Levels to score the communities' capacities and serve as an educational tool;
- developed brand new offerings to educate, share best practices, and convene leaders; and
- restructured our annual WNC Honors Awards to highlight best practices and raised more funds to give out as awards.

Between 2021 - 2023, we worked with an average of 66 community centers each year to strengthen their organizational foundations. *As a result, these community clubs were able to increase their incomes, strengthen their governance, get more volunteers, better understand how to run their nonprofits, improve their leadership skills, and collaborate with other community centers to accelerate their learning.* By helping these organizations keep their doors open and run more effectively, we enabled them to positively affect over 70,000 households.

Susan Garrett
Community Programs Manager



Overview of Results

WNC Honors Level Advancements

With the restructured WNC Honors Program, communities were assessed each year and assigned a level of Trillium (intro level), Mountain Laurel, Redbud, or White Oak (highest level). Moving up a level represents a club's improved sophistication across six categories of capacity that enable the clubs to be stronger organizations:



Good Governance – bylaws, frequency and openness of meetings, strategic planning



Leadership Excellence – board composition, board training, leadership development



Financial Stewardship – sophistication of budget, level of fundraising/grant writing/income



Volunteer Recruitment & Retention – numbers of volunteers, youth volunteers, and volunteer hours



Community Programs – variety and impact of programs, innovation, level of volunteer and youth involvement, community surveys, self-assessment



Collaboration – number of community partners, level of assistance to other member communities

Twenty-two communities, or 1/3 of our membership, advanced to a new level:



Trillium



Mountain Laurel



Redbud



White Oak

4 from Mountain Laurel to Redbud

15 went from Trillium to Mountain Laurel

2 from Mountain Laurel to White Oak

1 went from Trillium to Redbud

Overview of Methods

We used five primary methods for capacity building in our WNC Honors Program:

- The **WNC Honors Awards** to educate about best practices;
- **Coffee Hours** wherein we facilitated community leaders to network and engage in peer teaching on capacity-building topics;
- The **WNC Honors Learning Center** to facilitate collaboration and provide how-to information;
- **Webinars and Workshops** on strengthening boards, volunteer practices, strategic plans, and grant writing; and
- **Site Visits and Convenings** to build relationships, listen, understand needs, and connect community leaders to each other for mutual support.



Laurel Community celebrates their new Strategic Plan as part of the Strategic Planning Pilot Project.

The following sections give highlights on each of these methods.

Our Methods

WNC Honors Awards



Shiloh Community Association receiving Redbud Best in Class Award

In 2023, we celebrated our **74th year of the WNC Honors Awards** with 270 leaders and volunteers from 55 of our 67 member communities. Over the three years of this grant, we:

Gave out a total of **\$158,700 in cash awards** to our community centers;

Increased our fundraising from \$44,800 in 2021 to give to 65 communities, to \$60,000 given to 67 communities in 2023;

Highlighted **communities' accomplishments** and best practices with our awards; and

Connected community leaders to each other and to new ideas. We highlighted promising, replicable programs in our new Best Practices Gallery, which is a poster session where Ambassadors from 10 chosen communities share their best practices with event attendees.



WNC Honors Awards, 2023

Our Methods

WNC Honors Awards

Every community receives a base level cash award at this event. Within each WNC Honors Level, we give additional cash awards to those communities that demonstrate outstanding services to their residents and/or excellence in growing their organizational capacity. These **Best in Class Awards** boost the clubs' confidence and give them much needed funds to address their most pressing needs:

Trillium - \$250

Mountain Laurel - \$500

Redbud - \$1000

White Oak - \$2000



Clockwise: Williamson Creek Community receiving a Trillium Best in Class in 2023; Impact Award plaque made by local Leicester artist; and Big Y Community Club receiving a Mountain Laurel Best in Class in 2023.

Presidential Awards

This award recognizes the dedication of clubs who have been active with us in WNC Honors for 25 or 50 years.

Calico Cats Awards

The Calico Cat Sr. and Jr. awards are given annually to the clubs, which through their volunteer and fundraising efforts, have made the most significant improvements and renovations to their community centers over the past year.

Impact Award

This new award is given to one club that has led a new initiative which has had a significant, measurable impact on the well-being of their community.

One of our biggest takeaways from the Best in Class Awards was that it wasn't about how big your Community Center building may be, or how wealthy your community center might be. It is purely about what impact and services your Community Center has on its community members.

We took copious notes on what worked for these award-winning Communities and plan to discuss and implement what works best for our community members. Your luncheon provided such inspiration for our group and we learned so much. Many, many thanks!

~ Cedar Mountain Board Member

Our Methods

Coffee Hours

Our monthly, one-hour, online Coffee Hours continue to accomplish three aims:

- Give communities **targeted learning** on topics they have requested by highlighting capacity-building best practices within the membership.
- Give community leaders an opportunity to **share their best practices**, thereby building a sense of pride and awareness of where the communities' strengths are.
- Encourage and facilitate communities' **collaboration** with one another by creating a network and a regular venue for leaders to connect, build trust, and learn from each other.

The Coffee Hours have provided an essential way of learning what other community centers are doing. They provide an opportunity for future collaboration, as well as identifying things that have worked for others. For the most part, the challenges and opportunities we face are more similar than dissimilar.

~ Bruce Larson of Sandy Mush, Buncombe County

A total of **41 communities** have participated in our **21 Coffee Hours** between their start in late 2021 through December of 2023. A **total of 22 different communities have led a session** during our Coffee Hours to share their best practices.



Fairview Community giving tips at the Rental Income Coffee Hour

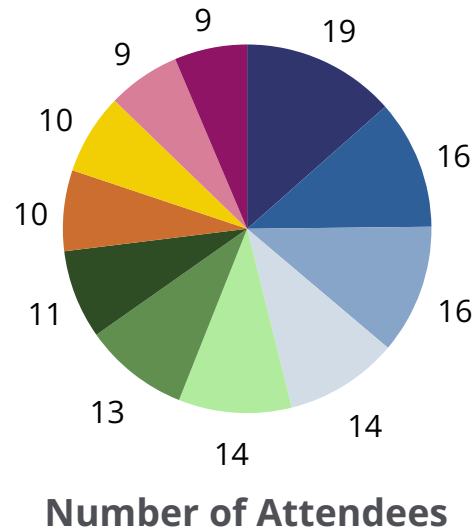
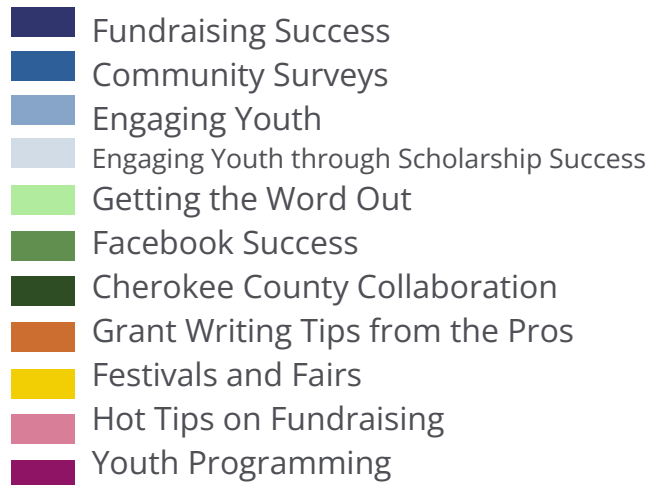


Photo provided by Trudy Crowe of Big Y (EBCI) for their Coffee Hour presentation on Preserving Cultural Identity on June 7th, 2023

Our Methods

Coffee Hours

The top 10 most popular topics for live attendance in 2023 were:



Every coffee hour that I was able to watch was very helpful. We've used ideas from several for our club and other clubs. The idea of sending by mail the activities and fund raisers was very good. Each subject covered gives you inspiration and makes you want to try to make your club better!

~ Nancy Helms of Grape Creek, Cherokee County

The Coffee Hours and other outreach programs have been informative and helpful. We feel like we can contact WNC Communities with any questions we have, and the staff will help us and get us started in the right direction. We appreciate all you do!"

~ Carol Clayton, President, Balsam Grove

Fundraising

Event	Income	Estimated Hours
Yard Sale	\$3229	300+
*Bluff Mtn Festival	\$1449	150
*Car Show/ Pie Contest	\$1214	200
*Christmas Bazaar	\$ 749	100
*July 4 fireworks	\$ 495	40
*Fireman's Fair	\$ 250	20
Year end newsletter	\$1500	10

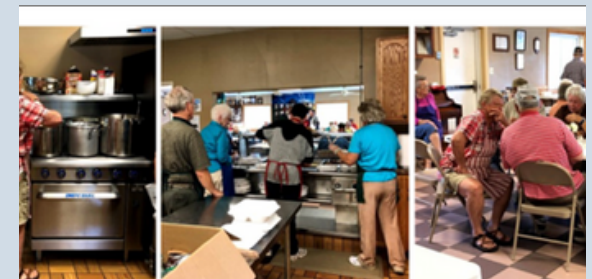
*Raffles and dessert sales require less individual time and get good return.
Newsletter is best return on investment

Slide from Alice McVey of Spring Creek's presentation at the Coffee Hour on "Fundraising Success" highlighting the best return on investment of time.

"We get by with a little help from our Friends..."



Slide from Norma Baynes of Shiloh on her presentation at the Coffee Hour on "Engaging Volunteers"



LEICESTER WELCOME TABLE

Slide from Marie Whitener of Leicester Community Center on "Strengthening Community through Food"

Our Methods

WNC Honors Learning Center



WNC Communities created this **new website** as a platform to facilitate collaboration and best practices sharing among the communities. It houses **educational videos**, grab-and-go **templates**, inspiring best practice **stories**, how-to **articles**, and a searchable **Members Directory**.

Members can look at other communities' profiles to learn about their programs, and search by best practices or programs, such as "food pantry," "rental income," and more. We launched the site in May 2023 and already have 60 clubs signed up with member profiles!

60 Community Clubs
have created member profiles on the site

We are pleased with the variety of resources that are available through the coffee hours and the new Learning Center. Thank you!

**~ Carol Dodson, President,
Dunn's Rock**

You guys offer so much and it is exactly what we need.

~ Cane Creek Board Member

WNC Communities has provided an awesome menu of subjects for its members to choose from.

**~ Michael Burleson, President,
Tipton Hill**

Our Methods

WNC Honors Learning Center

Our 21 Coffee Hours, 8-part Transforming Board Practices, How to Write Great Bylaws, and Grant Writing Prep videos all got additional views by having them available on the new website. The top viewed ones so far are:

How to Write Great Bylaws – **625 views***

How to Do Community Surveys - **47 views**

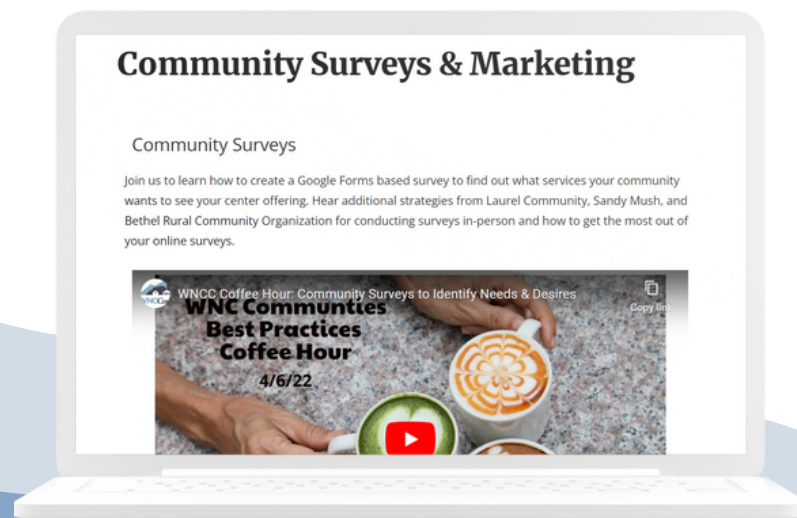
Hot Fundraising Tips – **39 views**

Rental Income - **18 views**

Fundraising Success – **17 views**

*this is the only video that is publicly listed. All other videos are privately listed for our members only through the password-protected website

We are still getting the word out that this new website exists. We anticipate greater viewership as we continue to promote it and move forward with digital literacy efforts in 2024 and beyond.



WNC Communities has already provided some of the resources we need in past Coffee Hours and workshops, like grant writing, strategic planning, board training, rental contracts, etc. We simply need to educate our officers and board members where these resources can be accessed and continuously encourage them to utilize them.

~ Kim Pullen, Secretary, Pumpkintown

Our Methods

Webinars and Workshops

Online, we conducted:

- 2 webinars called The Joy of Community, providing a snapshot of our membership's successes and challenges based on the original assessment we performed with the ION Grant. **38 Attendees**
- an 8-part series of 1-hour training videos on Transforming Board Practices. **19 Communities attended**
- Grant Writing Prep Workshop **14 Attendees**
- The Cannon Foundation Grant Info Session. **13 Attendees**
- 2 Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Workshops **28 Attendees** *representing 38% of our member communities*

In person, we provided:

- Expanding Board Leadership Workshop **4 Communities attended**
- Volunteer Recruitment and Retention **19 Communities attended**

Site Visits and Convenings:

Our aim is to create a culture of togetherness, wherein our member clubs are eager to help each other. We have used every workshop we held in person or online as an opportunity to help community leaders get to know each other by conducting breakouts or pair work. The following events already mentioned above had networking components:

2 Cherokee County convenings

13 Online Workshops

21 Coffee Hours

8 in-person workshops with county-wide or multi-county participation

WNC Honors Awards' Best Practices Gallery (**3 years**)



*Additionally, we conducted **32 Site Visits**. Pictured above: site visit to Pumpkintown.*

Our Results

Overview

Thanks to the Dogwood Health Trust grant, over the past 3 years, we have been able to help our member communities improve across 5 capacities:



Good Governance



Leadership Excellence



Financial Stewardship



Volunteer Recruitment and Retention



Collaboration

Our Results

Capacity Building in Good Governance



Bylaws Advancements

21 Clubs reviewed and improved their bylaws

501c3 Status Advancements

12 Community Clubs Gained their 501c3 or Fiduciary Sponsor

Strategic Planning Advancements

11 communities either created a simple strategic plan from scratch or revisited the one they had and updated it

6 communities that had no plan at all created goals

57 leaders representing **12 communities** attended our Strategic Planning Workshops to learn the basics

4 communities benefited from Strategic Planning Pilot with focused, extensive planning events



Strategic Planning Workshop for Madison County clubs at Spring Creek

The Laurel Community Center enjoyed the Strategic Planning Workshop presented by WNC Communities and hosted by Spring Creek. We had good attendance from our community and were able to get a better understanding of many of the components around long-term planning, how to strengthen our mission statement as well as collaborate with others who are doing the same.

~ Cheoah Landis, Laurel Community in Madison County

The Strategic Planning & Bylaws Workshop at EBCI provided clarity for us, which gave us confidence to amend our strategic plan. We added goals because several projects were not progressing according to plan and other projects became priorities for us. We just had a meeting and an election situation resulted in a need to refer to our bylaws and that resolved the situation. We are now reviewing our bylaws near the beginning of our fiscal year.

~ Carmaleta Monteith, Yellowhill Community, EBCI

Our Results

Capacity Building in Good Governance

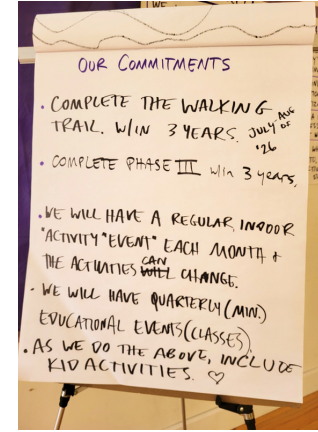


How We Helped

These all-volunteer community centers typically don't have written goals, action plans, or accountability. To help address this, we completed a **Strategic Planning Pilot Project** with 4 communities over two years. The goal was to determine what level of planning is both helpful and realistically doable to help their boards and other volunteers get engaged, get on the same page, and move forward with an actionable plan. The Pilot consisted of 3 parts: a Strategic Planning Workshop, a community survey, and a Strategic Planning Event.



Strategic Planning Event for Spring Creek 2023



Strategic Planning Workshops

We worked with:

- Bethel and Fines Creek of Haywood County in 2022
- Laurel, Spring Creek, Greater Ivy, Revere-Rice Cove, Upper Laurel, and Walnut Creek of Madison County in 2023
- Big Cove, Big Y, Yellowhill, and Wolfstown of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians in 2023.

Strategic Planning Events

We spent 8 or more hours with community leaders deciding on priorities and preparing for 4-hour, on-site planning events with their boards. At the events, we used participatory processes to get everyone's ideas to make 6-month or 1-year plans. Three months after the events, we did a 90-Day Check-in to see how things were progressing. We worked with:

Bethel Community	16 attendees
Fines Creek Community	7 attendees
Laurel Community	15 attendees
Spring Creek Community	17 attendees

We had never done a community survey. We started with WNC Communities' template, worked hard to get 237 responses, then were not sure how to organize all the responses into something actionable. The strategic planning process WNC took us through helped us prioritize and organize our communities' ideas into a one-year plan and identify leaders willing to take on next steps over the first 90 days. As a result, we've already been able to move forward with brand new classes, get a major grant application completed, and work through site planning for our new walking trail – just to name a few things!

The process also brought us together with a shared vision of what we were trying to accomplish, and that helped people both stick with it and stick together to support each other when things got challenging in people's personal lives.

~ Alice McVey, Secretary at Spring Creek

Our Results

Capacity Building in Leadership Excellence



Advancements in Board Development

16 leaders from 4 clubs attended our in-person Expanding Board Leadership workshops
19 communities attended our Transforming Board Practices series, presented in collaboration with NC Cooperative Extension
22 clubs reported increasing the amount of training their boards received.
8 clubs increased their types of training

Advancements in Board Composition

Between 2022 and 2023:

26 communities reported getting new board members 1 out of the 2 years
23 communities reported getting new board members 2 out of the 2 years
15 communities reported getting 4 or more new board members over the 2 years

How We Helped

- 32 Site Visits to learn community needs and offer targeted support
- Expanding Board Leadership Workshops

Transforming Board Practices

This 8-part webinar series was offered by Becky Bowen, JD, through our collaboration with NC State and NC Cooperative Extension. The series is designed to help boards deal with their most challenging issues:

- **Foundations**
- **Legal and Recruitment Best Practices**
- **Governance and Board Structure**
- **Enhancing Board Engagement**
- **Constructive Conflict**
- **Thinking Strategically**
- **Asking the Right Questions**
- **Board Meeting Communication**

Live Zoom sessions were attended by **19 different communities**.



Above: Site visit to Otto Community. Below: Expanding Board Leadership Workshop at Beaverdam

Thanks again so much for all that you've done to help us over these last months. You'll be happy to hear we've filled several committee seats and hosted a fall festival where we met and "groomed" 20 new neighbors! We're working hard to get the next generation of community involved here and your support gave us the push we needed.

~ Aimee Sylvester, Beaverdam Community Development Club

Our Results

Capacity Building in Financial Stewardship



Increased Fundraising and Financial Stewardship

From '22 to '23, for the 58 communities who provided data both years:

- **35 communities (60%)** increased their overall income
- **34 communities** increased their fundraising year over year
- **45%** overall increase in fundraising income
- **65%** of communities that rent their space increased their rental income
- **\$6,383 average increase** in rental income



Upper Laurel's hot fundraiser: Blackberry Festival

Why Hunt for Grants?

- Renovate old school
 - 1st graduating class in 1929
 - Closed in 1989
 - 80% renovated
 - 21,000 sq ft bldg
- Only local County building
- We are REMOTE!
- Since 1999, SCCC has raised \$1.4M



Once we have Bldg finished, we can target programs for the community

**THE
CANNON
FOUNDATION**

Building construction and
upgrades



**Grant Info
Session
2023**

Above: Slide from Spring Creek Coffee Hour presentation. Below: Cannon Grant Info Session

How We Helped

Coffee Hours on Financial Stewardship:

Hot Fundraising Tips, presented by Upper Laurel and Cedar Mountain

Rental Income, presented by Spring Mountain and Fairview

Grant Writing Hot Tips, presented by Shiloh

Bookkeeping Best Practices, presented by WNCC

Bookkeeping Q & A, presented by WNCC

Fundraising Success, presented by Spring Creek and Balsam Grove

Grant Writing Tips from the Pros, presented by Spring Creek and Big Ivy

Webinars

- Grant Writing Prep (featuring the Leverage Fund and other grants)
- Cannon Foundation Grant Info Session

Our Results

Capacity Building in Volunteer Recruitment



Increased Volunteer Recruitment

- **60% Increase in Total Volunteers** for all member clubs
- **15% Increase in Total Volunteer Hours**
- **49% increase in Youth Volunteers** (defined as 22 or under).

Increased Volunteer Impact

- With the value of a volunteer hour valued at the federal rate, these community volunteers brought in a whopping **\$11,215,000 investment of their time and talent** to improve the quality of life in WNC over the three years.

Volunteer Recruitment from 2021-23

2021

4,981

total volunteers

266

youth volunteers

111,728

total volunteer hours

2023

7,951

total volunteers

397

youth volunteers

128,456

total volunteer hours



Three recipients of scholarships from the Ellenboro Woman's Club

How We Helped

Coffee Hours on Youth & Volunteer Engagement:

Youth Programming, presented by Sandy Mush

Engaging Volunteers, presented by Shiloh

Engaging Youth through Scholarship Success, presented by Ellenboro, Peak Creek, and Deep Gap

Engaging Youth, presented by Greater Ivy, NC Outward Bound, and WNCC

How to Do Community Surveys, presented by Laurel and WNCC

Getting the Word Out, presented by Saunook, Upper Hickory Nut Gorge

Using Websites and Media Effectively, presented by Pumpkintown and Sandy Mush

Facebook Success, presented by Laurel and Cathey's Creek

Our Results

Capacity Building in Volunteer Recruitment



How We Helped (Continued)

Webinars

- Volunteer Recruitment and Retention
28 attendees representing 25 communities.

In-Person Workshops

- Transylvania 18 attendees representing 9 communities
- Watauga 15 attendees representing 5 communities
- Rutherford 14 attendees representing 6 communities



Transylvania club leaders meet for the first time at our Volunteer Recruitment Workshop.

Our club got inspired with the idea of making a Volunteer Recruitment Plan after WNC Communities' presentation. The great challenge for Ruritan Clubs nationally is recruitment of younger members aged 25-55. The average age of our Deep Gap Club members is 69 years old.

*Our target group was local businesses and their employees. As we learned in the workshop, why address recruitment one at a time when multiple opportunities exist under one roof? Using this approach in 2023 has resulted in nine new associate memberships and five full memberships. **Our current membership roll now totals fifty-two.***

Susan's presentation back in February 2023 inspired us to "think outside the box." We took the ideas and made them our own. WNC Communities is such an incredible ally for our Club, and we are most thankful for your inspiration and professionalism.

*~ Jeff Stewart
Deep Gap Ruritan Club, Vice-President*



Rutherford County workshop on Volunteer Recruitment

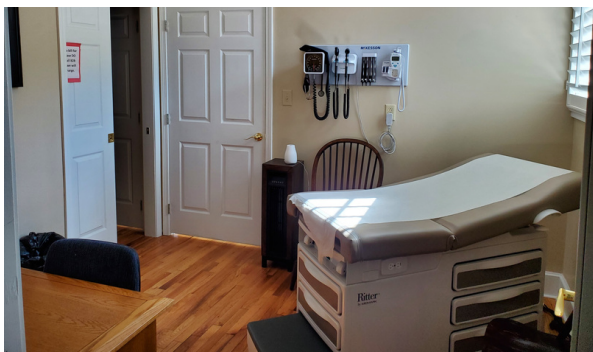


Our Results

Capacity Building in Collaboration

Increased Collaboration

- **8 clubs** in Cherokee County have begun convening regularly and jointly advocating for their needs to county commissioners and state legislators.
- **8 clubs** in Transylvania County have begun convening regularly to share best practices, discuss solutions to shared challenges, and coordinate their calendars so that their events don't overlap.
- **4 clubs** from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians convened to work on their strategic plans and learn about how to improve their bylaws.
- **8 clubs** from Madison County gathered to learn about strategic planning. Since then they have begun coordinating on county-wide efforts such as litter pick ups.



Outland Family Clinic, featured in Upper Laurel's Coffee Hour on Healthcare Access Innovations

How We Helped

Coffee Hours on Collaboration Topics:

Festivals and Fairs, presented by Balsam Grove and Holly Springs
Healthcare Access Innovations, presented by Upper Laurel
Cherokee County Collaboration, presented by Grape Creek and Commissioner from Volunteer NC

County Convenings

- **Cherokee:** We have created a collaborative network via our monthly Coffee Hours on Zoom. Each session, we do breakout rooms where people meet leaders from other communities. We talk about creating a culture of "togetherness" where we can pick up the phone and call each other to ask for help. From this idea of "togetherness," Nancy Helms of Grape Creek got inspired to convene **all 8 of our member communities in Cherokee County** - twice! We supported both events.



Cherokee County Convening



Our Results

Capacity Building in Collaboration

County Convenings (Continued)

- **Transylvania:** We taught a Volunteer Recruitment Workshop at Cedar Mountain Community Center that gathered **8 clubs**. Inspired by this first gathering, Cathey's Creek initiated a meeting of all the Transylvania County community centers to share about their programs, challenges, and hopes for the future. Building on this, Dunn's Rock hosted the next gathering. Two important outcomes were that the clubs agreed to share their calendars regularly to avoid scheduling events at the same time, and continue meeting, rotating locations so they could tour each others' community centers.
- **Rutherford:** Volunteer Recruitment Workshop that gathered **6 clubs**.
- **EBCI:** Strategic Planning and Bylaws Workshop for **4 clubs**.
- **Madison:** Strategic Planning Workshop that gathered **6 clubs**.

WNC Honors Awards Best Practices Gallery

We started a new Best Practices Gallery at the WNC Honors Awards as a way to boost community pride, showcase accomplishments, and give community leaders a chance to meet and set up collaborations. From 2021 - 2023, we've had a total of:

- **28 leaders** serve as Ambassadors for their communities to explain their best practices, representing...
- **19 communities.** From these efforts there have been many connections made among community leaders.

Best Practices Gallery Highlight



At the 2022 WNC Honors Awards, Holly Springs' Medical Lending Closet was featured in the Best Practices Gallery, and Janie Sutton served as the Ambassador. While learning about the lending closet, Shannon Brown and another member from the Crab Creek Community Club mentioned that they did not have their 501(c)(3) nonprofit status. Since Janie was responsible for acquiring Holly Spring's incorporation, she offered to help. After the awards event, Janie mailed Shannon needed documents, instructions, and the actual application she had completed for Holly Springs.

By June, Crab Creek had already received their 501(c)(3) status and gotten funds to repair their building. Janie then did the same thing for Ox Creek Community!



Conclusion

WNC Communities is grateful to Dogwood Health Trust for making these advancements in community development possible. Together we are creating a more socially connected, healthier, and wealthier Western North Carolina.

We look forward to continuing this vital work, building this network of community development clubs into an even stronger mutual support system, and providing the educational opportunities that will take them to the next level of thriving. Looking to the future, we see these community centers becoming irreplaceable, neutral grounds for neighbors to come together to collaborate across divides. By filling the gaps, quilting together the pieces needed, these clubs can strengthen the social fabric through fun events, serve in emergency storm and fire recovery, model and educate about climate change action, offer afterschool and summer havens for our youth, and incubate small businesses.

We are honored to be a part of creating this future, sitting at the quilting table with these communities, Dogwood Health Trust, and our partners, making a healthy, safe, and beautiful life possible for all of Western North Carolina.

