

# At Work

## Wake County: Helping Youth Thrive



### Rapidly Growing Population & Disparities

Wake County, the capital county of North Carolina, is the 46th largest county in the United States and surpassed 1 million residents in August 2014. This includes 245,705 children under the age of 18, who constitute 10% of the state's total population of school age children. In Wake, a disturbing 15% of these children are living in poverty. Many of our children are doing well, but significant disparities exist. On-time high school graduation rate is 83%, which is close to the state average, but subgroups have significantly different graduation rates: 91% for White/Caucasian students, 74% for Black/African American students, and 68% for Hispanic/Latino students. Disparities in juvenile justice, health and well-being measures are also present among sub-groups.

### North Carolina State's Extension Efforts in Wake Demonstrate a Commitment to Youth Success

In Wake County, Extension's 4-H Youth Development Program is committed to building citizen leaders with

marketable skills to succeed in today's global society. 4-H empowers all youth to reach their full potential. This bold goal can only be accomplished by implementing strategies at multiple levels to provide meaningful opportunities that promote thriving in all youth

- **Systems** - Achieving Systemic Change through Collective Impact: **Youth Thrive**
- **Community** - Capacity Building for Thriving Communities: **Step-It-Up-2-Thrive**
- **Youth** - Volunteer and Staff-led Groups for Thriving Youth: **iThrive Academy**

### Systems - Achieving Systemic Change through Collective Impact: Youth Thrive

Addressing complex problems requires a collective impact approach that engages cross-sector partners in creating a systemic response for addressing problems and disparities. Extension has played a critical role in creating and implementing Youth Thrive, a collective impact initiative aimed at addressing the needs of youth in grades K through 12. In July 2014 Youth Thrive grew, from a steering committee structure which formed in 2011, to a 28 person board of directors. Extension staff helped this group build a strong infrastructure that produced a Youth Well-being Profile and implemented a Youth Service Providers Network that conducted best practice training for 527 individuals from 83 youth serving organizations in the last year. Youth Thrive, now a Ready by 21 pilot site for a shared data platform developed by Statistical Analysis System (SAS), will be working over the next year to produce a Youth Master Plan and shared measurement system to align cross sector planning and attain greater outcomes for young people.

### Community - Capacity Building for Thriving Communities: Step-It-Up-2-Thrive

Wake County Extension 4-H staff provide training and technical assistance that builds the capacity of youth serving organizations to integrate research based best





practices in positive youth development and the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive curriculum into their existing programs. The curricula design emphasizes helping youth find their spark, develop a growth mind-set, attain life skills associated with thriving and setting their global positioning system (GPS) to set goals, pursue strategies and strategize to overcome obstacles. During 2014, 65 youth-serving professionals from 15 organizations received training on this innovative curriculum designed to help adolescents reach their full potential. Data from the initial organizations implementing the curricula indicate that 95.6% of youth exposed to 20 or more hours of programming demonstrated growth in at least one of the six indicators of success; 80% demonstrated growth in at least two areas. Building the capacity of a wide variety of community partners to implement this curriculum maximizes outreach and impact with youth from various geographies, backgrounds, and life experiences.

**Youth - Volunteer and Staff-led Groups for Thriving Youth: iThrive Academy**

Extension staff in Wake county integrated the Step-It-Up-2-Thrive curriculum into summer programming open to youth enrolled in volunteer led 4-H clubs, staff-led groups, and teens interested in building skills over the summer. These six-session iThrive Academies were held in four locations throughout Wake County. Eighty-seven percent of high school participants reported that being involved with this program helped them become better at setting goals and planning. Staff and volunteers continue to work throughout the year with the participants who want to grow their thriving skills. Additionally, 4-H staff are working to integrate an e-portfolio for use with these young people who are developing personal plans and receiving group and individual coaching for success.

Through implementing direct service programs in urban communities, serving as a resource for other youth-serving agencies to implement effective programming, and remaining actively involved in building and supporting

community-wide collaborations, North Carolina State's Extension program in Wake County is helping our citizens, young and old, generate solutions that make a real difference.



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