



# Ready for Impact 2021

Dear Ready Ready Supporters,

At Ready for School, Ready for Life (Ready Ready), we know it's more critical than ever that we bolster early childhood with smart investments for children prenatal to age 3. The science is clear. During this time when 80 percent of brain growth occurs, children's experiences have substantial effects on both long and short-term outcomes for learning, physical and mental health, and social and emotional development. Every child deserves a strong start in life.

During this time, children's relationships with caregivers and early experiences build the foundations of brain architecture. These experiences, both positive and negative, impact their ability to learn, their behavior, and their overall health. We must support parents and babies early so caregivers can prevent their children from the prolonged stress that can disrupt healthy development.

It's not just babies, toddlers, and their families who benefit when we start early. It's the whole community. When we invest in the first three years of a child's life, we can reduce the need for more expensive interventions later. The foundations for lifelong health are built in early childhood.

The Covid-19 pandemic resulted in disparate impact on lower income families in our area and particularly families of color. Countless infants and toddlers of these families suffered and fell behind as a result of family stress, isolation, shortages of quality childcare, and economic hardships. These conditions exacerbated the already high-risk situations many of these children faced during their most critical years of development.

Thousands of parents who want to be in the workforce face a common barrier: lack of child care according to a North Carolina Justice Center study. Parents with young children need to get back to work to support their families and want to do what's best for their children's development. This year in Guilford County, there are 116,200 children, and 32 percent – 37,184 – are under age six.

Research focused on high-quality early childhood programs have found that for every \$1 spent in early care and education, there is a \$4-\$9 return to society over the course of a child's life.

We must act now to ensure that families have the support they need in their children's earliest years to recover and build a strong foundation for a healthy future.

Building a county-wide system of care with Ready Ready as the backbone provides a good foundation; yet, we must ensure that child-care is a critical component of the system. Guilford County is at its best when we recognize that children, particularly our youngest, are our greatest resource. We cannot expect a healthier and more prosperous population in the future if we don't invest in our children now. Thank you for your support and dedication to these goals and values.



Susan Schwartz  
Executive Director  
Cemala Foundation



Ed Kitchen  
Chief Operating Officer  
Joseph M. Bryan Foundation

# Our Priorities



Watch our video showing how we transformed these rooms by scanning this QR code with your smartphone, or enter this link in your browser <https://readyready.link/ILC>



## Build Public Will for Early Childhood Priorities

The North Carolina state budget includes \$1.2 million in funding for Ready Ready and our mission of early childhood development. Our Legislative Action Subcommittee worked with the Greensboro and High Point Chambers of Commerce to educate lawmakers about our work to build a connected, innovative system of care for Guilford County's youngest children and their families.

With a focus on The Basics Guilford, we created the Interactive Learning Center at J.C. Morgan Homes with the Housing Authority of the City of High Point. There are two rooms, aimed at families with children ages 0-3 and 3-5 with age-appropriate furnishings, toys, and information about The Basics Guilford.

We have trained more than 550 people in The Basics Guilford, including Department of Social Services employees, service providers, and parents whose children attend Guilford County Schools.



## Develop Navigation Systems to Connect Families with Effective Services

In 2021, we have created partnerships with 14 of the 16 OB practices in Guilford County which greatly increases our reach. Our partners at Children's Home Society have added staff members to support expanded prenatal Navigation.

Our Community Alignment Team has shared an Agency Finder portal with select partners who will use it to refer families to resources for their child's healthy development while testing the system and suggesting improvements.



## Expand Proven Programs to Meet Community Need

We have created a Medical Home Advisory Team (MHAT) to share best practices in their work with implementing Navigation, Family Connects, HealthySteps, Nurse-Family Partnership, and Reach Out and Read. Insights from these peer practices continue to inform and support shared development strategies.

Our proven programs have hired staff to increase capacity and report quality referrals from the work the family advocates we call Navigators are doing with prenatal clients.



## Build a Culture of Continuous Quality Improvement

We are collaborating with our partners at UNC-Chapel Hill to host a webinar for Cohort I programs. This webinar will focus on the "Model for Improvement," a powerful tool that organizations can use to accelerate improvement.

We are planning the launch of a second cohort of programs which will double the number of programs engaged in CQI in our community.



## Conduct Rigorous Evaluation and Build Sustainability for System-building Work

MDRC and Ready Ready teams initiated a process to document implementation plans for each component of Ready Ready's work. These efforts will prepare Ready Ready and its partners for the evaluation.



## Build Technology to Support Data-Informed Decisions

This year, we focused on updating the Navigation system technology to facilitate communication between Navigators and caregivers. Using feedback from our proven programs, we improved the user experience, data collection, and security. The new system went live at the end of October. Using automated email, Navigators can now share resources directly with caregivers including links to referral agencies.

Key work is progressing in data governance. It is critical to our system-building work that our providers and families have trust and confidence in the proper use of data within our Integrated Data System (IDS).

## We are ready to address structural inequalities in Guilford County

The Equity Strategies Committee of the Board of Directors sought the input of many stakeholders, including our parent leaders, staff, equity consultants, and board members, in developing our organization's official stance on equity. The Ready for School, Ready for Life Equity Statement is posted on our website, and you may read it below.



### Equity Statement

*Ready for School, Ready for Life (Ready Ready) promotes equity, justice, diversity, and inclusion which are woven through our mission, values, and principles. We stand against racism in all of its forms. Ready Ready will work with our community to address the structural inequities that drive disparate child and family outcomes and work towards an environment where equity, justice, diversity, and inclusion are core values. When we are working to address these structural inequities, Ready Ready will be bold in our actions.*

*When Guilford County Black and Indigenous children and families of color (BIPOC) feel welcomed, heard, respected, safe, supported, and valued, all of our community and our society benefit.*



### Sharing family voice

We engage authentic family voice consistently and intentionally in every aspect of our work. The Guilford Parent Leader Network (GPLN) is an integral part of the decision-making structure for Ready for School, Ready for Life. Families who participate are valued consultants, partners, and change agents who work on priorities that are important to their own families and other families in Guilford County.

In June 2021, we created a regular section in our monthly e-newsletter to share information about family voice. These updates allow GPLN members and staff to report on timely topics and parent leadership activities. This year, we have celebrated the graduation of 13 parent leaders from Community Organizing and Family Issues (COFI) Phase 1 training and 11 from COFI Phase 2. Part of this leadership training includes taking on a community project as part of a parent action team.

Nine parent leaders have completed Ready Ready's first Board/Committee Leadership Academy. Graduates will have opportunities to serve in our governance structure.



### Phase II: Ages 3-5

We have identified three strategies to move us forward into the next phase of our mission. Strategy-specific implementation teams will select practices and programs that match demonstrated needs, propose the target populations and settings for the pilot, and identify ideal characteristics of implementing agencies. To begin this work, teams will attend orientation meetings in December to prepare for team meetings beginning January 2022.

A commitment to further refine and specify the remaining seven strategies suggested by the Ages 3-5 Design Team is also part of this work.

Dear Friends of Ready Ready,

As 2021 draws to a close, I have been thinking about the journey we've been on together. Whether you joined the Ready for School, Ready for Life (Ready Ready) family a few years ago with our 100-day challenge groups or more recently, you know our mission to create a connected, innovative system of care for Guilford County families makes us trailblazers.

If you don't know much about wayfinding, psychologist Chris Girling explains it this way, "Our brains are constantly sensing information, coordinating movement, remembering the environment and planning next steps. Wayfinding is an active process and about far more than signs."

The wayfinding we're doing together is more complicated than following a map or an established track. Luckily, we have some excellent markers and navigation elements to guide us. The science is clear. A child's early experience during the prenatal period and first three years after birth shape brain development and the healthy development of all other systems in the body.

Research from the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard University shows that supportive relationships, consistent routines, and positive experiences early in life are just as important for healthy brain and body development as good nutrition and protection from environmental toxins. Negative experiences early in life can lead to long-term health problems such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and mental health challenges.

We know that every child deserves a strong start in life, but not every child starts their path from the same place. That is why we are building a system of care that works for all Guilford County children and families with programs that support parents and caregivers and give every baby the same strong start. This beginning makes all the difference for their lifelong journey.

Speaking of journeys, we are moving into the next stage of our work. Phase I focused on children prenatal to age three and now we are progressing into Phase II, ages three to five. Many guides, companions, and leaders helped us scout out this transition and we are excited to broaden our horizons.

We have excellent partners for this expedition. You, our funders, continue to demonstrate your belief and ability to help Ready Ready find novel paths to our destination of population-level change. Without you, our journey would face herculean obstacles. Thank you for having the determination to join the sojourn and your unwavering support as we aim to make a difference for Guilford County's youngest children and their families.



*Cherrin Hart*

Chief Executive Officer  
Ready for School, Ready for Life

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