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*Project: Transformation Zone Early Literacy*

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### **Summary**

The North Carolina Partnership for Children (NCPC), in partnership with Motherread, Inc. and Reach Out and Read, implemented a set of literacy strategies in the four Transformation Zone counties in North Carolina (Beaufort, Bertie, Chowan and Hyde). Through the Transformation Zone literacy strategies project, counties implemented three Motherread, Inc. programs: Story Exploring, Motherread/Fatheread, and Birth and Beginning Years (B.A.B.Y.). Counties also implemented Reach Out and Read.

### **Successes**

Beaufort County identified all of the county's resources for maternal and child health. To connect these community organizations with people who need their services and recruit new and expectant mothers for B.A.B.Y. classes at Washington Pediatrics, the Literacy Coordinator organized a B.A.B.Y. Shower for potential participants. Each community organization advertised the shower to their clients and attended the shower to provide information about their services. Mothers who expressed interest in attending a B.A.B.Y. class were contacted after the event by the Literacy Coordinator with more information about the class.

Bertie County successfully lobbied the Board of Commissioners for funds to develop the Kid Find Project. The purpose of the project will be to develop a system for identifying Bertie children from birth to improve recruitment of parents into B.A.B.Y. and other family support programs, including those piloted in the county as part of the Transformation Zone.

When Chowan County's needs assessment determined the library was not open to the public on the weekend, the County Leadership Team elected to use Transformation Zone grant funds to open the library for half a day on Saturdays. Since the spring of 2015, library staff have been keeping track of Saturday usage to support a request to the County Commissioners for more library hours.

Although Hyde County was unable to find a partner to offer B.A.B.Y. classes to new and expectant mothers, the Literacy Coordinator collaborated with the coordinator of another Transformation Zone strategy, Family Connects, to put together "baby baskets" containing infant board books and other community literacy information for distribution to new mothers.

External evaluation results showed that when implemented with fidelity, even with the challenges of implementing these programs in rural communities, all four of them showed evidence of positive outcomes, especially those that touched the most children – Story Exploring and Reach Out and Read.

### **Challenges**

Initial and full implementation was difficult for some of the strategies in these rural communities. Transportation was the challenge cited most often in the four counties as a barrier to participation in parent education programs like Motherread/Fatheread and B.A.B.Y. Even in Chowan County, where more than half of the population lives in and around the town of Edenton, lack of transportation affected parents' ability to attend classes regularly.

In small, rural communities, there are fewer service providers from which to recruit community partners, and there are smaller pools of parents from which to recruit program participants. Beaufort was the only

county to find partner organizations to implement the B.A.B.Y. and Motherhead/Fatheread programs and result in sufficient registration and regular attendance. There are no pediatricians in Bertie County, and nearly all babies are born out of the county. This poses problems both for the implementation of a program like Reach Out and Read, but also for any other program that is intended for very young children and their families. Hyde also has only a few medical providers and only six child care providers, including NC Pre-K and Head Start, on the mainland and Ocracoke Island combined.

### **Lessons**

Each county's unique experience taught us something about how to manage implementation of four literacy programs at the same time. Beaufort demonstrated the value of "start small, get better." They treated each program like a pilot and considered how to allocate their time so each would receive adequate attention at the right time. They vetted potential program sites on multiple dimensions of capacity and selected only those that met their criteria.

Bertie's experience with repeated turnover in the Literacy Coordinator position underlined the importance of consistent coordination to get all four programs started and provide the support needed for them to develop to the point of being sustainable. Each former Literacy Coordinator left behind unfinished business in the recruitment of participants and potential program partners. And each new Literacy Coordinator needed training in one or more of the Motherhead programs before they could engage meaningfully in their work.

Chowan showed the need for lead agencies to pace themselves, to delegate responsibilities to partner organizations (e.g., center directors), and to hold out for viable partners rather than trying to do it all by themselves.

In Hyde, we learned that every program does not fit every community, some populations are simply too small and spread out to implement extended group parent education classes like B.A.B.Y. and Motherhead/Fatheread.

### **Closing Thoughts**

The four Transformation Zone counties and purveyors have committed to working collaboratively to explore joint funding opportunities, specifically with Vidant Hospitals.

When Albemarle Regional Health Services (ARHS) was looking for a way to improve maternal and child health outcomes, Chowan County's Implementation Coach persuaded them to adopt B.A.B.Y. – a health education program with a literacy "twist" – in its seven-county region, including Chowan. Chowan has applied for multiple grants to support a literacy coordinator position, books, and Story Exploring expansion to neighboring Perquimans County. Bertie has received funding allocation through their county commissioners which will allow for some level of early literacy sustainability.

Hyde County Schools will be encouraging Head Start and NC Pre-K classrooms to continue implementing the Story Exploring curricula. The county has engaged in several book drives to gather gently used books for literacy rich waiting room development in public service offices, such as DSS. Since most Hyde parents take their children to neighboring counties for pediatric care, Hyde is in talks with Beaufort County on ways they could assist parents with transportation costs to attend B.A.B.Y. classes as Washington Pediatrics.

Beaufort has secured funding for their literacy coordinator through June 30, 2017. The literacy coordinator will focus her support to Story Exploring and ROR sites. If additional funding is secured, the literacy coordinator will also continue to support current Motherhead and B.A.B.Y. sites.

Through the RTT Early Literacy project work, NCPC has built a resource toolkit and strengthened relationships with purveyors for future Motherhead and Reach Out and Read training and technical assistance provision. NCPC is exploring ways to incorporate RTT-ELC lessons learned by: Strengthening the capacity of staff to support local partnerships in the identification, selection, and implementation of EB/EI; providing responsive TA in alignment with a typical activity lifecycle, and; strengthening feedback loops between local partnerships and NCPC.