

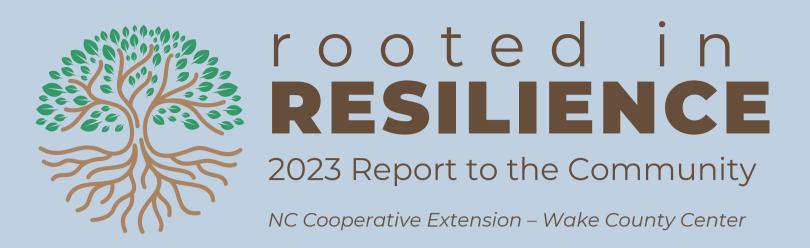
# rooted in **RESILIENCE** 2023 Report to the Community

NC Cooperative Extension - Wake County Center



### NC COOPERATIVE

(919) 250 - 1100 wake.gov/coopext wake.ces.ncsu.edu



NC Cooperative Extension – Wake County Center, works to improve the lives, land and economy of all people in Wake County. We utilize research-based information and partner to co-create solutions that matter.

# **2023 HIGHLIGHTS**





Allocated for food security initiatives





26

Recidivism rate for youth in juvenile crime prevention programs



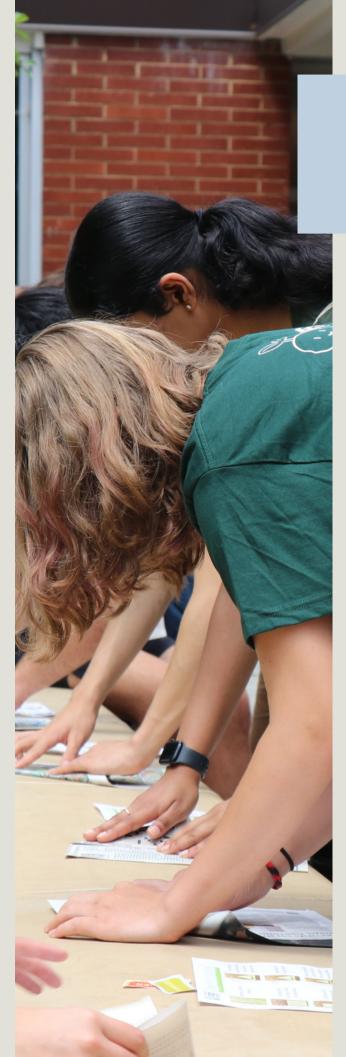
New Teammates joined Wake County Cooperative Extension since 2021!











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# rooted in RESILIENCE

### 2023 Report to the Community

NC Cooperative Extension – Wake County Center

# THEME OVERVIEW

As we reflect on the past year, our theme, '**Rooted in Resilience**,' indicates our organization's mission is evolving in harmony with a changing world, and as we welcome new employees and adapt to the shifting cultural landscape, we remain committed to **equipping our community with the tools and knowledge to foster resilience**. Our vision is to build a resilient system of care that can seamlessly fill in gaps when they appear, ensuring the well-being of our community.



# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

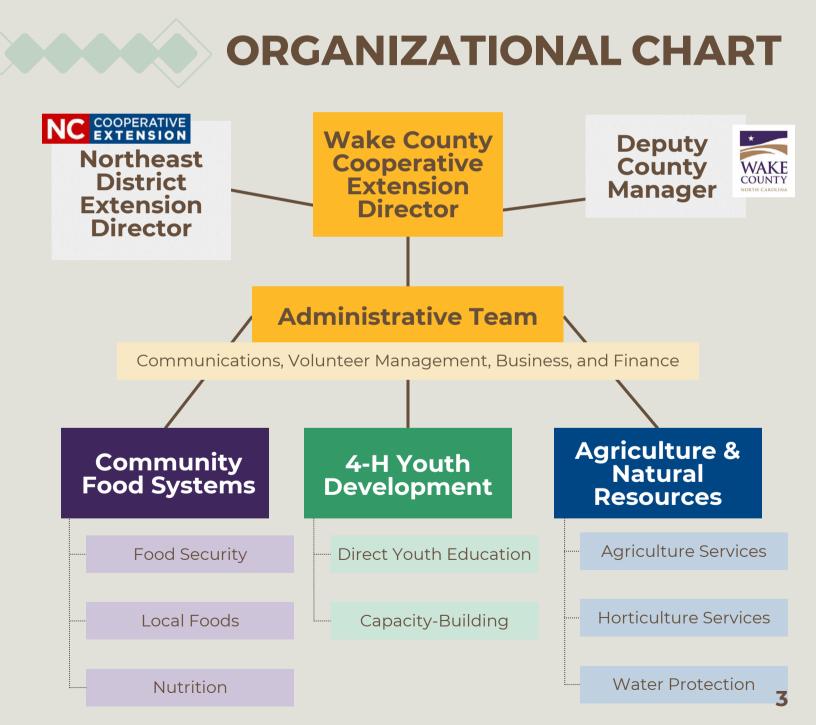


"I am incredibly proud of our team! We have a talented and diverse staff who demonstrate strong commitment to service, partnership, collaboration and results. They foster important connections with youth, families, and communities and provide research-based information to help solve problems. **Our staff are ambassadors who carry the hopes and voices of our young people, families, farmers, partners and community leaders with them to remain relevant and responsive to local needs.**"

Katherine Williams, County Extension Director

# **ABOUT OUR TEAM**

**Rooted in resilience**, N.C. Cooperative Extension at Wake County Center stands as a vital community resource, specializing in **Community Food Systems**, **Youth Development**, and **Agriculture and Natural Resources**. We lead strategic discussions with our network of partners, build capacity to address local priorities and deliver research-based education and programming to empower the community. In 2023, we emerged as a standalone county department, embracing **resilience** through collaborative business planning and cultivating new leadership within our program areas.

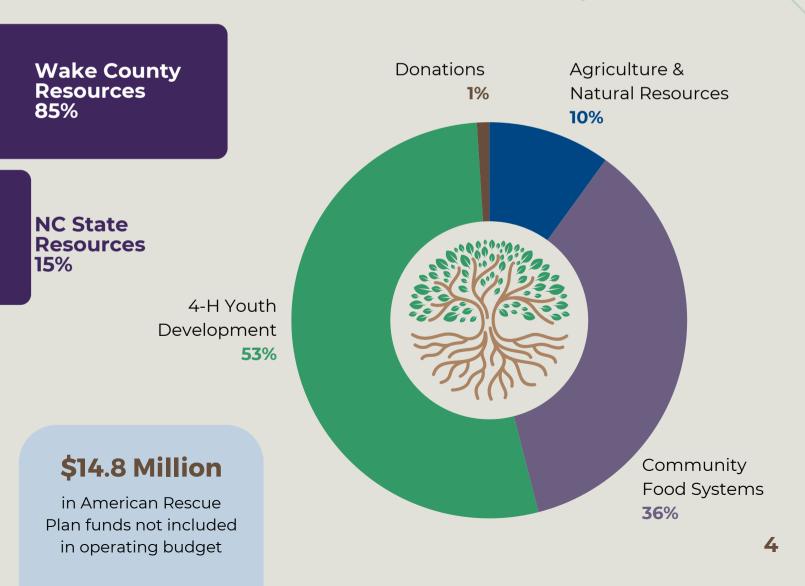


# FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

In 2023, our financial overview reflects a significant and growing public investment of \$14.8 million in grants, and an operating budget of \$2.72 million. Notably, we have expanded our team with the addition of 7 new positions since 2021, enhancing our organizational capacity and impact.



# **BUDGET: \$2.72 MILLION**



#### WAKE COUNTY

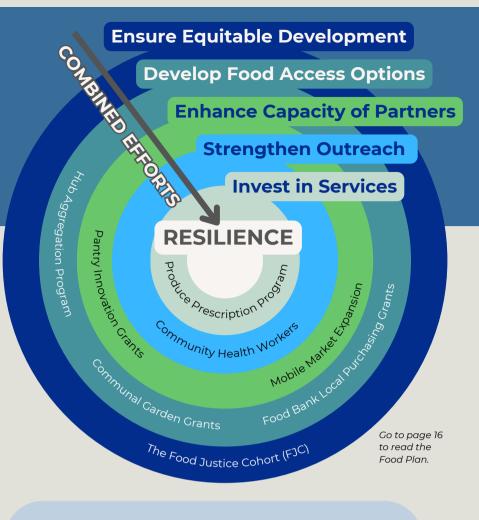
### 2023 FOOD PLAN UPDATE

#### Transitioning from Food Relief to Resilience: \$7.2 Million Invested

On March 20th, 2023, the Wake County Board of Commissioners allocated \$7.2 million to support food security strategies outlined in *Moving Beyond Hunger: Creating a Resilient & Equitable Food System*, an update to the 2018 Wake County Food Plan.

These updates are the result of an equity-based steering committee, partner- organization workgroups, and research-based analysis of models. similar The steering committee was composed of community members with lived experience of poverty and/or strong advocacy roles in the community, well as as practitioners actively working in food system roles.

The 2023 Wake County Food Plan indicates strategies and outcomes to maximize the \$7.2 Million awarded by Wake County and transition our current food security model from food charity to food resilience. As seen in the bullseye chart, the strategies are designed to work as a cohesive effort and build on one another to achieve this goal. Key to the plan is the investment in a Food Justice Cohort and Food Hub Support.



During the COVID-19 pandemic, Wake County Cooperative Extension and partners swiftly responded to the revealed need for emergency food distribution.



**20,330,979** MEALS DISTRUBUTED MAR 2020 - DEC 2023

This initiative not only addressed the immediate challenges but also stimulated the local economy by sourcing and purchasing food from local suppliers. Heightened awareness during the pandemic led to increased funding and volunteer support. Now, as we transition towards building a resilient food system, our new Wake County Food Plan aims to sustain and expand these efforts, ensuring a lasting impact on food security.

#### Suppliers:

- The Produce Box
- Server Grocers
- Freshpoint
- Gabor Farms
- Ward's Produce
- McLamb's Meats
- Ford's Produce
- 4M Farms
- Pride of the Month
- Pine Knot Farms
- Carlie C's
- FBCENC
- Compare Foods

#### WAKE COUNTY

### 2023 FOOD PLAN UPDATE

### Enhancing Funding Equity and Community Leadership in the 2023 Food Security Plan

Image: Second state of the second

The Food Justice Cohort (FJC) is made up of BIPOC and grassroots leaders from the local food system community to guide equitable access and distribution of available funding. Members are compensated for their time and assist with the development of requests for proposals and rubrics for projects outlined in the plan. The FJC is funded for three years in partnership with Community Food Strategies and the Wake County Manager's Office - DEI Division.

# **FOOD JUSTICE COHORT MEMBERS**



D. Terrill Debnam Young Farmers & Ranchers in Wake County



Erin McClellan Fertile Ground Food Co-op



Erica Porter Southeast Raleigh YMCA



**Crystal Taylor** Black Farmers Market



Elke Weil Consultant in Latinx & refugee communities

The project aims to **increase equitable access to funding** for BIPOC and community-led organizations, enhance the capacity of small non-profits to navigate government funding, and provide recommendations for funding policy changes to promote equitable access. Ultimately, the goal is to **direct funds to communities in need** and empower community-led organizations to take the lead in improving their communities.

WAKE COUNTY

### 2023 FOOD PLAN UPDATE

### **Farmer-Partner**

#### Food Hub Aggregation Program

Community Food Lab and Seeds of Change Consulting conducted a Food Hub Feasibility Study in 2022 and questioned, **"What strategic investments in local food aggregation and distribution will best enhance and expand our local food supply chain while growing equity for BIPOC communities and increasing effectiveness for emergency food distribution?"** 

The study utilized a BIPOC Advisory Council, compensated for their time and knowledge, as well as key interviews, a farmer survey, and research into viable models deployed elsewhere. Based on market analysis and producer and distributor feedback, the council identified key needs:

Local Purchasing	Product Aggregation	Expanding Markets
streamlined purchasing logistics and options based on unique community needs	enhanced transportation and storage, especially cold storage for larger amounts of produce without a decrease in quality	increased staffing and education for staff to support building local and institutional markets for long-term demand

68%	

### \$4,981,000 OF INVESTMENT IN LOCAL FARM BUSINESSES

68% of the total \$7,267,253.00 is for direct purchasing from farmers that will build the local demand for farm products, or farm aggregation infrastructure

# WAKE COUNTY 4-H SOCIAL ACTION

Teens advocate for a resilient future



### **GROWING MINDS: 4-H YOUTH LEADING MENTAL HEALTH ACTIVISM AND REDUCING STIGMA**

In Extension, we emphasize the pivotal role of youth in shaping a resilient future. At Wake County 4-H, we prioritize engaging with young minds, recognizing their concerns, and actively integrating their innovative ideas into our services. We empower them to have a meaningful voice in their community, a testament to their exceptional leadership capabilities. The youth population of Wake County has shown a remarkable dedication to mental health activism, contributing significantly to creating safer а environment for their peers. Through participation in various initiatives, such as engaging in discussions with Health and Human Services professionals, developing interactive resources on the impact of COVID-19, and hosting an annual Walk for Mental Health fundraiser, the teens in 4-H are playing a vital role in driving positive change. Their commitment and passion are truly commendable, and we take great pride in their achievements.

# **YOUTH HEALTH COUNCIL**



The Wake County 4-H Youth Health Council, in collaboration with El Centro Hispano, Southeast Raleigh Promise, and Health and Human Services, empowers high schoolers to address public health issues. Formed during the pandemic, the volunteer leadership group educates members about COVID-19 safety and, in 2023, shifted its focus to the pandemic's impact on mental health. At an August award ceremony, the council showcased initiatives, including a QR code-linked "Zine" with mental health tips.

This past year, the Youth Health Council recruited and trained teens to raise awareness about COVID-19 while also delving into mental health issues. The ceremony highlighted diverse projects, including PSA videos promoting the 988-suicide crisis lifeline on public TV and a reflective YouTube video with Raleigh Promise. The Wake County 4-H Youth Health Council exemplifies youth leadership in addressing pressing public health concerns.



# WAKE COUNTY 4-H SOCIAL ACTION

Teens advocate for a resilient future





### TEDXYOUTH

Through partnership with City of Raleigh, Alliance Health, and NC State #PassTheMic Youth, our team provides an annual platform for youth to share their voices.

The inaugural TEDxYouth@ChavisWay event, held in March 2023, revolved around the theme "Inspiring Change."

More than 40 young individuals auditioned, and our team carefully selected 11 outstanding speakers, each with their own unique take on the theme. The event featured a wide array of presentations, touching on topics like climate change, civic involvement, the arts, healthcare, and mental health. These talks demonstrated the remarkable **power of young voices** driving positive change within our community.



In case you missed any of the performances—or if you want to relive the experience—our friends at NC State put together a recap and a link to their videos! Scan the QR code to watch past talks and stay tuned for future TEDXYouth@ChavisWay events!

"My interest in social activism all started with my mom. She is a social worker, so growing up I was always learning to care for others and the earth. I began to realize that social activism is really just learning to be nice to people, and it naturally grew with me."

### **Alyvia Banks**

Sophomore, Garner Magnet High School 2023 TEDXYOUTH Cohost



# WAKE COUNTY 4-H SOCIAL ACTION

Teens advocate for a resilient future



"I want [Mental Health Walk participants] to come away with the fact that there are so many people around them that care about an issue that they might feel like they're alone with right <u>now.</u>"

### Niko Wiguna

Junior, Green Level High School 4-H Teen Council President

### **3RD ANNUAL WALK FOR MENTAL HEALTH**

The annual Walk for Mental Health is organized by the Wake County 4H Teen Council and all proceeds benefit the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI).



Students and residents gather annually to raise awareness and support for youth mental health. The event aims to bridge the gap between young individuals and the mental health assistance they may need. With suicide as a significant concern, the Walk for Mental Health focuses on breaking stigma, fostering conversations, and providing resources to create supportive environments.



According to NAMI, 1 in 6 U.S. youth aged 6-17 experience a mental health disorder each year

# WAKE COUNTY 4-H SUMMER CAMP 2023



**Resilience in Programming:** Each year, Wake County 4-H Coordinators host free or affordable camps for all ages and interests! Our favorite programs returned for 2023!



# **STEAM CAMP**

Using a university-backed curriculum around science, technology, engineering, arts, and math, participants engage in learn-by-doing experiments to reduce summer learning slide and expand life skills.



# FARM TO FORK CAMP

Youth learn where their food comes from and how to prepare meals using fresh items from the farm. Participants monitored chicks hatching, visited local farms, and cooked new meals every session!



# **BETSY-JEFF PENN CAMP**

This residential camp in Reidsville, NC offers one of the best values in the state for a high-quality summer camp experience with horseback riding, team building, archery, arts, crafts, music, swimming, and more!



# PASS THE MIC CAMP

This program encourages students to share their stories through various mediums, such as podcasts and spoken word, to celebrate and amplify the power of youth voice and explore social justice issues.





external dollars generated in 2023



4-H youth enhancing their knowledge of plant & animal science in 2023

# WAKE COUNTY 4-H SUMMER CAMP 2023

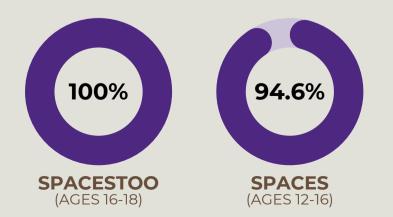
# 4-H SPACES AND SPACESTOO DRONE CAMP

The 4-H SPACES and SPACESTOO programs offer opportunities for youth in the juvenile justice system and at-risk individuals. Hosted by Wake County Cooperative Extension and funded by the Wake County Juvenile Crime Prevention Council and Wake County government, many participants were referred by court counselors or the juvenile justice system, but all children ages 12-16 can join. The impact of these programs has been transformational, inspiring some participants to consider new career paths. Beyond traditional classroom education, the programs promote critical thinking, decisionmaking, and life skills, facilitating introspection among the youth. The Wake County 4-H SPACES and 4-H SPACESTOO programs have expanded the horizons for these young individuals by focusing on drone technology, a rapidlv evolving field with diverse applications. The curriculum covers drone operation, regulations, and various applications, enriched by handson training and field trips to Elizabeth City State University. Upon completion of the week-long camp, each participant receives a certificate, symbolizing their new skills and perspectives. "Drones offer both educational and career prospects, making them a highly effective approach," says Charlenzo Belcher, Wake County 4-H Youth Development Supervisor.

### **YOUTH IMPACTS**

### Recidivism Rate for the 2022/23 School Year

(Members with no new offenses reported since their admission date)



# WAKE COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION VOLUNTEERS



Models of Resilience: Recognizing Excellence in our Long-Standing Programs



collective hours worked by all volunteers



total dollar value of volunteer services

### **Extension and Community Association**

The North Carolina Extension and Community Association in Wake County empowers individuals and families to improve their quality of living through continuing education, leadership development, and community service. In 2023, community clubs collaborated to organize **"Unity Around the World," an International Festival promoting diversity and awareness of other cultures.** Attendees "travel" to countries all over the world and try cultural food dishes, view artifacts and traditional attire, listen to music performances, and more!

Over 200 people attended the event, including friends and families, Wake County employees, military personnel, 4-H youth, and local media!



### Participating Clubs and Countries:

- Cary ECA: North America
- Driftwood-Fellowship ECA: South America
- First Friday ECA: Europe
- Raleigh Willing Workers: Asia
- Shotwell ECA: Africa

# WAKE COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION VOLUNTEERS



#### Extension Master Gardener Volunteers (EMGVs) In 2023, Wake EMGVs contributed 12,604 hours amounting to \$377,490!

### Wake EMGV Therapeutic Horticulture Program

Celebrating the power of **Therapeutic Horticulture**, defined by the American Horticultural Therapy Association, our program engages in plant-based activities to enhance well-being in various healthcare, rehabilitative, and residential settings. According to **program chair, Nancy Crites,** activities include apple tasting, flower arranging, and planting gardens, as well as community gardening and more! On September 21, 2023, the program received the Fred Barber Legacy of Service Award, named after the founder of Healing Transitions, a local recovery program and long-time partner of Extension. As a Community Manager from Crossings at Heritage Senior Apartments, expressed: **"Residents eagerly anticipate these monthly visits, where they thrive on the thoughtful attention from volunteers. It's truly a blessing, and one I hope you will continue every year for them."** 

### **AmeriCorps VISTA Food Security Program**

ENSURING ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL & SHELF-STABLE FOOD ITEMS



Pantries are placed in crucial community locations, such as a Salvation Army, elderly and disabled adult living complex, community garden, and child daycare.

In June 2023, 50 young people aged 13-18 gathered for the annual Youth Food Security Summit, organized by the Wake County Food Security AmeriCorps VISTA Program with support from 35 adult volunteers. This event empowered youth with knowledge and practical skills related to food security. Attendees painted mini-pantries, public food storage units made from recycled furniture. mini-pantries, installed These by AmeriCorps VISTAs, can hold up to 42 canned goods, are about 25 lbs when empty, and feature plexiglass windows and magnetic latches.

# WAKE COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION **PARTNERS**

#### SUPPORTING A RESILIENT NETWORK OF CARE

Cooperative Extension thrives on vital partnerships, leveraging university research and resources for data collection, establishing community hubs county-wide to host diverse programs, and fostering collaborative efforts to maximize their impact on the communities they serve. **These partnerships facilitate integrated services and contribute to building a resilient care network.** 



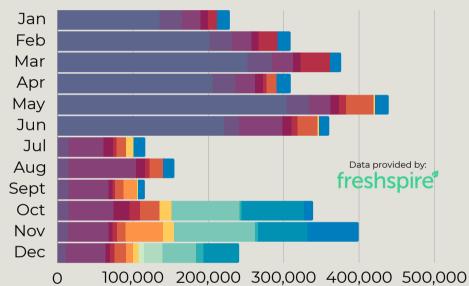


### JLBC COMMUNITY ALLIANCE

Juniper Level Baptist Community Alliance illustration serves а prime of the as community-anchor model. This church plays a pivotal role by providing a home for various Cooperative Extension programs. Notably, it hosts programs like 4-H Youth Development, acts as a Food Hub Partner Site, offers EFNEP (Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program) classes, and delivers valuable consultation and educational support for community gardening. In doing so, Juniper Level Baptist not only strengthens its own community but also embodies the essence of Cooperative Extension's collaborative outreach.

# WAKE COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION **PARTNERS**

### MEALS DISTRIBUTED BY COMMUNITY FOOD PARTNERS IN 2023



Since 2020, Wake County has teamed up with over 55 organizations and community groups to tackle food insecurity. Together with our food partners, we've delivered a total of 20.3 million meals from March 2020 to December 2023. This commitment, born out of the initial COVID emergency response, has persisted. In 2023, our partners distributed an impressive 4,424,615.70 meals, detailed in the chart. This chart breaks down monthly impacts and showcases all food partners involved in the 2023 food distributions, providing a clear look at the significant scale of our collaborative efforts in addressing food insecurity.







The advancement of food security in Wake County relies on the indispensable support of our partners. Scan the QR Code to access the 2023 Wake County Food Plan and explore our strategies.

# WAKE COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION **PARTNERS**

### OUT OF SCHOOL TIME (OST) STUDY

The Wake County Out-of-School Time Study, a collaboration between N.C. Cooperative Extension, Wake County Center, and North Carolina State University, is strengthening the system of after-school programs for K-12 children. The study, motivated by a nationwide after-school options, lack of seeks to comprehend the demand for Out-of-School Time (OST) programs in Wake County. Through comprehensive surveys of parents and providers, study the assesses program availability, accessibility, activities, and barriers faced. Gathering insights from 336 programs, reaching nearly 11,000 youth across 181 sites, it reveals that 78 programs are free, while others range from \$42 to \$350 per month per child. These data points contribute to the creation of a resource map and recommendations for providers and families, addressing crucial questions about program availability and the developmental benefits they offer.



of providers said that low salaries and high burnout rates are major reasons for staff turnover



of parents and caregivers said that academic support, enrichment activities, healthy living activities, and activities that promote social skills were important to them

#### **OST Study Steering Committee**

- Boys & Girls Clubs of Wake County
- YMCA of the Triangle
- City of Raleigh Parks & Rec
- Communities & Schools of Wake County
- NC Center for After School Programs
- Poe Center for Health Education



### MINDFULL FAMILY WELLNESS

Our 4-H Youth Development and EFNEP (Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program) collaborated with Wake County Social and Economic Vitality to offer a free, six-week family wellness and nutrition program designed to promote holistic wellbeing. Each session is a unique experience, featuring hands-on cookina demonstrations. nutrition lessons, family dinners. and meaningful discussions centered on a different dimension of wellness each week - which include Emotional. Physical, Social, Spiritual, Intellectual, and Occupational wellness. MindFULL Family Wellness is an innovative program promoting family health and well-being, addressing various aspects of life in an engaging way.



# WAKE COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION NEW EMPLOYEES

Planting "Seeds" in Resilient "Soil": Welcoming 26 New Employees Since 2021!

In recent years, our team has cultivated the fertile ground of our organization, sowing seeds of growth and resilience. As we reflect on the successes of 2023, we enthusiastically celebrate the harvest of our efforts, welcoming the diverse knowledge and expertise of our new employees.

### INTRODUCING OUR REVITALIZED AGRICULTURE & NATURAL RESOURCES (ANR) TEAM

The ANR team underwent a total restructure, which included an emphasis on developing water quality partnerships, enhancing communication with Master Gardeners and local growers, and strengthening food systems. In 2024, the team plans to build upon the connections and resources established during its first year.



Jonathan Smith Agriculture Agent



Kelsey Sosa ANR Team Lead



Deanna Bigio Horticulture Agent

"I'm very excited to serve as the new Horticulture Extension Agent and work with such a talented Master Gardener Team. **My future program goal is to expand our educational programs into under- served communities and demographics**, and I know the Master Gardeners have the drive and talent to help make that happen." - Deanna Bigio

### ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT TEAM



**Demonica Hicks** Business Manager



Olay Murphy Program Assistant



hy m



Maryann Cavino ARPA Grant Coordinator

"I have enjoyed collaborating with my team to analyze and define our processes, exploring creative and strategic adjustments to improve our office operations." - **Riley Holcraft**, Communications Specialist

# WAKE COUNTY COOPERATIVE EXTENSION NEW EMPLOYEES

Planting "Seeds" in Resilient "Soil": Welcoming 26 New Employees Since 2021!

# **COMMUNITY FOOD SYSTEMS**

#### **FOOD & NUTRITION** EFNEP EDUCATION

The Expanded Food and Nutrition Education Program (EFNEP) works with both youth and adults to teach self-sufficiency in the kitchen.



**Davida Julien** Adult Program Assistant



Ozzv Hernandez Youth Program Assistant



#### LOCAL FOOD SECURITY

Our Local Foods Agent plays a crucial role in coordinating and supporting sustainable and resilient food systems at the community level.

**AMERICORPS VISTA COHORT 2023-24** AmeriCorps



VISTAs battle root causes of food insecurity and increase food access at five locations in Wake County:

- Wake County Cooperative Extension
- Urban Ministries of Wake County
- Inter-Faith Food Shuttle
- Kirk of Kildaire Presbyterian
- Wake Forest Community Table

### **4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

#### **SPACES & SPACESTOO**





Keitra Johnson

Anthony Fairley







Michael



COMMUNITY **4-H TEAM Beverly Schieman 4-H Extension Agent** 

### STUDENT ENGAGEMENT TEAM



The Student Engagement Team (SET), a collaboration between Alliance Health, Wake County Public Schools, and Extension, tackles pandemic challenges by re-engaging students for mental well-being. Youth and Family Engagement Coaches establish positive relationships, assess needs, access resources, set goals, and monitor progress to efficiently support students and families.





Pettus



Robinson



# **NC Cooperative Extension** Wake County Center

### **4-H Youth Development**

#### **Charlenzo Belcher**

4-H SPACES Supervisor cbelcher@wake.gov (919) 250-1114

#### Carlos Moses

4-H Program Supervisor carlos.moses@wake.gov (919) 250-3977

#### **Beverly Schieman**

4-H Agent beverly.schieman@wake.gov (919) 250-1093

#### **Ruth Sutherland**

4-H Administrative Manager ruth.sutherland@wake.gov (919) 212-8380

### **Community Food Systems**

#### **Trevor Hyde**

Local Foods Agent tphyde@ncsu.edu (919) 250-1094

#### Sydney Klein Mierop

Food Security Program Manager sydney.mierop@wake.gov (919) 250-3795

#### **Paula Norris**

EFNEP Supervisor ppnorris@ncsu.edu (984) 215-1415

### **Agriculture & Natural Resources (ANR)**

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#### Jonathan Smith Agriculture Agent jonathan.smith@wake.gov (919) 250-1096

#### Deanna Bigio

Horticulture Agent deanna.bigio@wake.gov (919) 250-1113

### **Administrative Support Team**

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Volunteer Coordinator ggarcia-somuk@wake.gov (919) 231-5536 Demonica Hicks Business Manager demonica.hicks@wake.gov (919) 250-1015

#### **Olay Murphy**

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#### Esmeralda Rojas

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#### **Katherine Williams**

Extension Director katherine.williams@wake.gov (919) 250-1109

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@Wake4H









