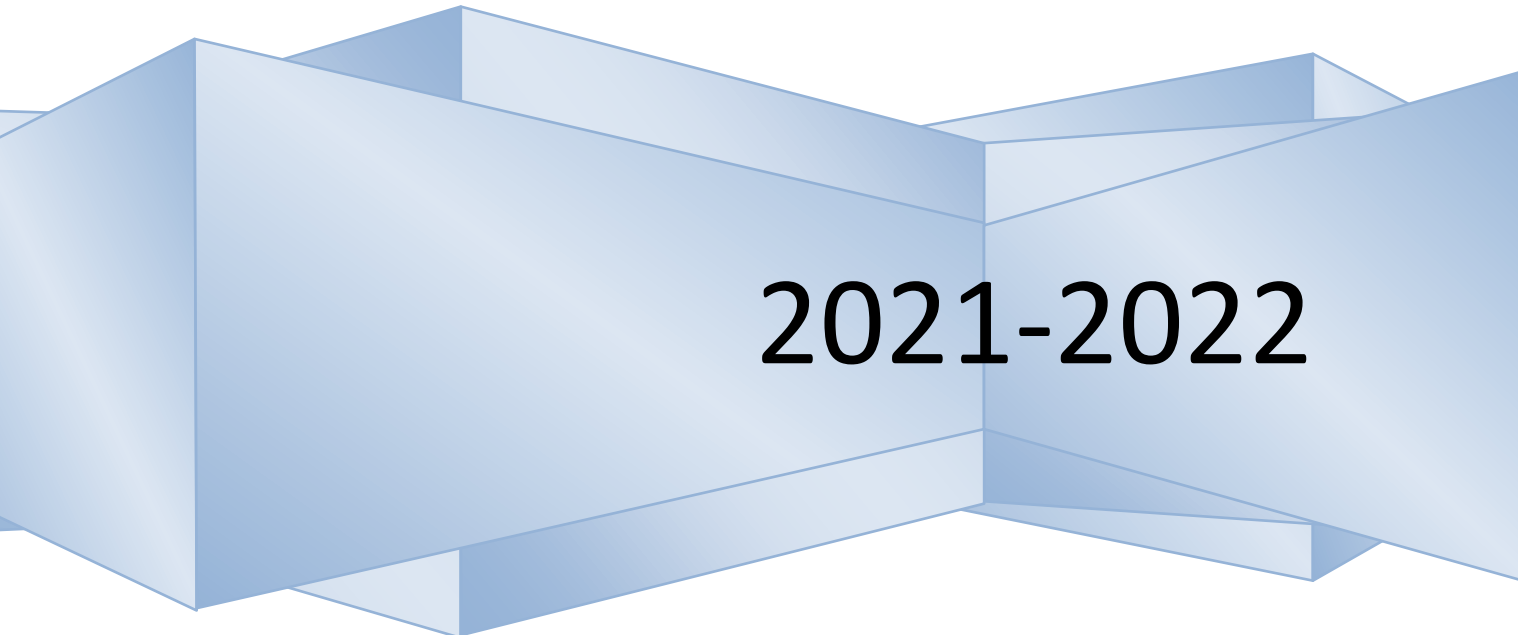


# Community Assessment

Year 4 of 5

Approved by Policy Council: 2/2019; 2/2020; 2/2021; 2/2022

Approved by MPP Board: 2/2019; 2/2020; 2/2021,2/2022



2021-2022

# COMMUNITY ASSESSMENT

## INTRODUCTION

*Macon Program for Progress (MPP) is in the business of empowerment. The mission of the agency is to increase self-reliance and improve the quality of life for individuals and families in Macon County, North Carolina. The aim is to lessen the causes of poverty by focusing on available resources, coordinating efforts to meet the needs of low-income families, developing programs that meet the critical and ongoing needs of low-income individuals. This community assessment process serves to identify population characteristics and defines the target populations served by Macon Program for Progress 0-5 Head Start.*

## MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of Macon Program for Progress is to increase self-reliance and improve the quality of life for individuals and families in Macon County.

It is MPP's mission in partnership with parents and communities to protect, preserve, and promote healthy growth and learning in children, families, and ourselves.

## PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

1. The Head Start program is a comprehensive child development program designed to meet the needs of eligible preschool children and their families.
2. MPP supports the belief that children are unique individuals who learn at different rates and in their own ways.
3. MPP acknowledges the role of parents as the primary teachers and nurturers of their children. Parents are an integral part of the child's learning process.
4. MPP cultivates partnerships within the community.
5. MPP 0-5 Head Start Program is based on the premise that all children share certain needs and can benefit from a comprehensive development program.

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## General Area Description

### Proposed Services Area

Macon County formed in 1828 from Haywood County. It is in the mountainous western section of North Carolina bordered by the state of Georgia and Clay, Cherokee, Swain and Jackson counties. The present land area is 515.4 square miles and the estimated population in 2020 was 37,014, which increased by 1,156 from 2019's population estimate. The first court was held in the town of Franklin, and Franklin continues to be the county seat.



Nearly half of Macon County is within the Nantahala National Forest. The forest is comprised of over a half-million acres of unspoiled beauty; this magnificent forest is the largest of the four national forests in North Carolina.

Currently Macon County consists of eleven townships: Burningtown, Cartoogechaye, Cowee, Ellijay, Flats, Franklin, Highlands, Millshoal, Nantahala, Smithbridge and Sugarfork.



### Racial and Ethnic Composition

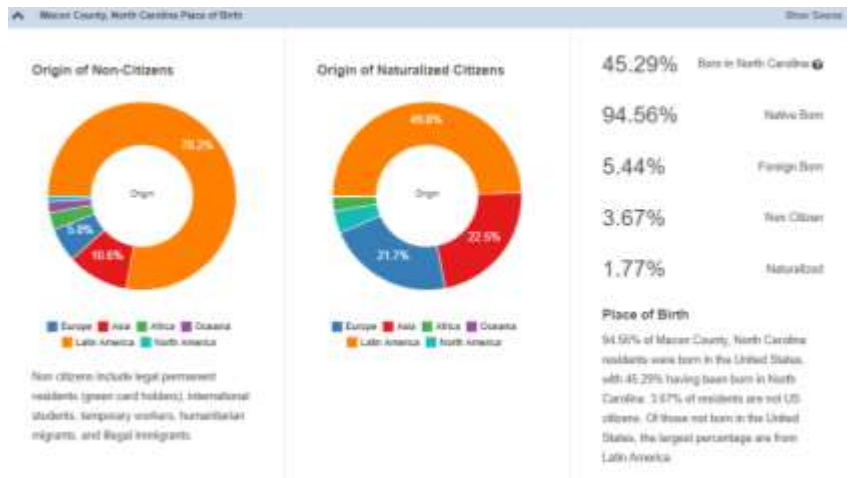
Macon County is 95.1% white and approximately 1.7% black. The remaining 3.2% is other or multiracial per U.S Census data of 2019. Without adjusting for poverty, it is expected that the program will serve a sizable white population. However, when poverty is brought into the picture, the racial breakdown of both Head Start and Early Head Start varies only slightly from the overall breakdown of the county. Given the information presented above, it is observed that the program serves a large number of white children.

Approximate Racial Information for Macon County	Number	As a % of Total Population	'20-'21 HS, Number and %	'20-'21 EHS, Number and %
<b>One Race</b>	35,393	98.8%	136 95.1%	143 95.3%
<b>White</b>	34,101	95.1%	105 73.4%	97 64.6%
<b>Black</b>	610	1.7%	1 <1%	0
<b>American Indian/Alaskan Native</b>	323	.09%	1 <1%	2 <1%
<b>Asian</b>	359	1%	0	0
<b>Two or More Races</b>	430	1.2%	7 4.8%	7 .5%

The next largest category of children is those determined not by racial characteristics but by language and heritage, and that is the Hispanic group. The table below documents the estimated numbers of people of Hispanic origin in Macon County projected by the U.S. Census for 2017. The figures presented may be low due to the under reporting of individuals without citizenship status by the U.S. Census.

Hispanic Figures	Macon County <sup>1</sup>	% of Total Population <sup>1</sup>	Head Start 20-21	EHS 20-21
<b>Hispanic or Latino (of any race)</b>	2,654	7.4%	30%	44 30.7%

Percentages of Hispanic or Latino children enrolled at MPP 0-5 Head Start are much higher than projected census data, though the figures have decreased since the 2018-2019 school year for Early Head Start and for Head Start. However, the percentage of Hispanic or Latino children at MPP HS is still dramatically higher than the overall county population percentage. When looking at the figures presented by the program, it is apparent that the program serves a high percentage of Latino families. Based upon the figures it is reasonable to believe that there is a continued need for MPP 0-5 Head Start to have staff that speak Spanish both in the classroom and in family services.

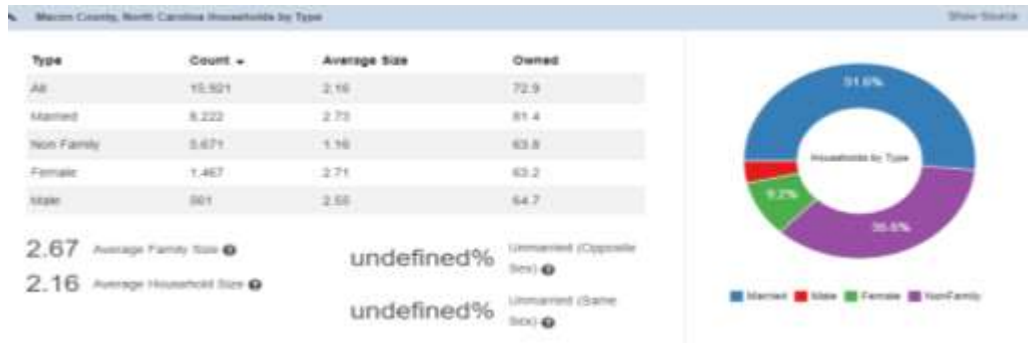


### Gender and Ages

U.S. Census data reports that 4.8% of persons are under the age of 5 equating to 1,721 children; 18.4% of persons under 18 years of age equating to 6,598 persons; 28.9% of persons 65 years and older equating to 10,363 persons. Also that 51.5% of the population of Macon County are Female equating to 18,467 persons.

### Household Composition

Macon County households have the following characteristics: In 2019, there were approximately 15,921 households in Macon County. The average household size was 2.67 people. Families made up 68.8% of the households in Macon County. This figure includes both unmarried and married-couple families (81.4%).



According to the American Community Survey for Macon County, there are an estimated 404 grandparents responsible for their grandchildren. As illustrated in the graph above, 18% of these grandparents are raising the children without the parents present, and 27% of the grandparents are responsible for the children, but the parents are present in the household.

Data shows that 42.2% of grandparents are responsible for their grandchildren, under the age of 18 years old, in Macon County. What this continues to mean for Macon Program for Progress is that there is an interesting dispersion of age. The overall population of the area tends to be older, yet there is still a small but viable population of younger people who are in child rearing ages. There was a grandparent support group addressing unique issues related to this, but the group is not currently active. MPP HS has one grandparent who act as the child’s primary caregiver for the 2019-2020 program year. EHS has four grandparent(s) who act as the primary caregiver for the child.

### Median Income Level/ Employment

Franklin city limits, with a population of approximately 4,000, is also the location of Macon County Public health, Angel Medical Center and most of the county’s physicians, dentists and other professionals. Franklin is

home to most of Macon County's industry and non-service employment. In the past Macon County boasted prominent manufacturing, but in recent years most of those have closed and/or relocated out of state. A software development business, small manufacturing and a floor finishing business provide most of the county's employment opportunities. The US Census estimated 2019 median household income in Macon County was \$45,507, which was a decrease rate of 1.5% from 2018.

With the current (October 2020) 5.2% unemployment rate, poverty remains a problem in Macon County. This dissimilarity is particularly noticeable when contrasted with the extreme wealth found in some resort areas of the county. According to Feeding America's "Map the Meal Gap" study, Macon County has a 14.5% food insecurity rate (4,760 food insecure people), which is a lack of access, at times, to enough food for an active, healthy life. COVID-19 has affected our community North Carolina has experienced a 6000% increase in UI claims during this COVID-19 pandemic. From March 15 – April 20 there have been 593,235 UI claims related to COVID-19. There are 9-daycare/Pre-K centers throughout Macon County, not including Pre-K and after-school VIP within the Public School System. In July, only 2 centers were open for day care services in Franklin, NC.

Tourism- As small business bailout loans (PPP) have come to a halt as the funds have been expended, many business owners are filing for UI benefits and laid off employers have done the same; contributing to the 6000% increase in NC Unemployment Insurance claims.



Harrah's Cherokee Resort & Casino has closed to the public and reported a 2 week paid closure for employee's effective March 18, 2020 and remained closed through mid-May. Effective April 16, 2020 a majority of their 3,000 employees were furloughed. Many of these furloughed employees are residents of Macon County.

In 2019 Macon county Tourism revenue was 191,420,000 a 7.31% increase from 2018. The effects of COVID-19 on the tourism have yet to be calculated but estimates are that the area was impacted greatly in the financial aspect. That spending, in turn, drives employment. Department of Commerce stats say that more than 520,000 North Carolinians were employed in the leisure and hospitality sector of the economy in 2019. In our western counties of Haywood, Jackson, Macon and Swain, there were almost 13,000 employed in that sector. There appears to have been a -4.8% drop in sales tax in Macon county from March 2020 to July 2020 with some months reporting up to a -21.9% change from previous year at that time. (nc department of revenue)

### Persons Below Poverty Level

The poverty rate is the percent of the population (both individuals and families) whose money income (this includes job earnings, unemployment compensation, social security income, public assistance, pension / retirement, royalties, child support, etc.) is below a federally established threshold (also known as the "100%-level" figure). The 100%-level poverty rate in Macon County was 14.4% in the 2005-2009 periods, and rose to 16.9% in the 2006-2010 periods; this change represents an increase of 2.5% in the percent of persons living in poverty. The 100% poverty level rate in Macon County was 14.3% in the 2015-2019 periods with a 2.6% decrease in the percent of persons living in poverty from previous time period. The poverty rate of the United States is 13.4% meaning the number of persons living below the poverty level in Macon County is higher.

The 200%-level poverty rate in Macon County was 37.1% in the 2005-2009 periods and rose to 39.4% in the

2006-2010 periods, an increase of 6.2%. In WNC, the 200% poverty rate was 36.6% in the 2005-2009 periods and rose to 37.3% in the 2006-2010 periods, an increase of 1.9%. Statewide, the 100%-level poverty rate rose from 15.1% to 15.5% (an increase of 2.6%) and the 200%-level poverty rate rose from 35.0% to 35.6% (an increase of 1.7%) over the same time frame. In 2013, the estimated total population of Macon County with income below poverty level in the prior 12 months was 7,092, which was a growth rate of 0.2% from the previous 12 months.

## ***Head Start- Eligible and Enrolled Children and Families***

### **Recruitment Area**

Of the estimated 37,014 residents of Macon County, approximately **1,721 are children under five**. In 2018, there were approximately 332 live births to Macon County residents per NC Child data. With the total live birth count from the 5 years prior totaling within Macon County 1,703 live births, it can be assumed that there will be an average of 340 live births and/or pregnant women within Macon County in any given year.

<b>Macon Program for Progress Locations/Addresses</b>	
<b>New Horizons I Center for Children &amp; Families 26 East Orchard View Lane Franklin, NC 28734</b>	<b>New Horizons II Center for Children &amp; Families &amp; Administrative Offices 82 East Orchard View Lane Franklin, NC 28734</b>
<b>New Horizons III Center for Children &amp; Families 110 East Orchard View Lane Franklin, NC 28734</b>	<b>New Horizons Training Annex 215 East Orchard View Lane Franklin, NC 28734</b>
<b>Pruett House Family Center 185 Forest Avenue Franklin, NC 28734</b>	<b>Mailing Address for All: P.O. Box 700 Franklin, NC 28744</b>

The program serves a diverse population of 301 children and their families in center and home-based environments. Program enrollment includes 150 preschool children and 151 infants, toddlers and pregnant mothers. MPP Head Start delivers services at two sites in the county, Pruett House and New Horizons Center. There are 10 preschool classrooms for Head Start and 18 infant and toddler classrooms for Early Head Start. Early Head Start also maintains a home-base option for parents.

MPP HS/EHS operates two center-based options and a home-based option. The first center option is a traditional center-based program that provides services for children in the school environment for 1080 hours per year HS and 1200 hours per year for EHS.

The second center-based option is the provision of center-based services through the extended day option. This aspect of the program provides learning opportunities for the children whose families need and qualify for state funding. This option is available up to four and half hours a day in addition to the HS/EHS hours.

The third center-based option is to aide families where adequate transportation is a concern. Bus transportation is made available to children enrolled in our New Horizons I Center who do not have siblings in other buildings.

The home-based option currently serves six to eight EHS families through a parent educator. Children receive services primarily in their home and through group socializations. The parent educator is bilingual in English and Spanish. The Hispanic families represent the highest percentage of children accessing home based services.

Most parents want and need the center-based services that MPP HS provides. Community recruitment efforts did not yield enough income-eligible available students for sites in Highlands or the Nantahala communities,

though MPP HS continues to reach out to these communities. The rise in the number of Hispanic families necessitated the need for home based services since these families often lack transportation and need services in order to combat social and cultural isolation.

## Languages Spoken

Another trend that continues to affect the program and the provision of services is the increase in the Latino population in the service area. It is believed many of these individuals are under-reported in official estimates. As a result, the program expects applications from a larger segment of this population. This table also indicates that in terms of cultural awareness the teachers and home visitors need some understand the norms and cultures of families who are first generation immigrants. In addition, the program will need to continue strong partner relationships with organizations that provide services to the Latino community of Macon County and Western North Carolina. Language spoken at home 7.1% language other than English spoken at home in Macon County.



## Housing and Homelessness Concerns

In 2020, Macon County had a total of 25,608 housing units. The median property value in Macon County is 165,800 and homeownership rate is 72.8%. The median gross rental cost is \$759. (datausa.io/progile/geo/macon-county-nc) The wealthy enclaves are sitting vacant, while there are a large number of low-income families needing homes.

There is virtually no movement in HUD housing vacancies except for evictions for program violations. As of December 2020 HUD was able to help 171 tenants in some way with rent with 10 outstanding vouchers waiting on completion. For the year of 2020 and average of 175 tenants were on the HUD rosters. 224 tenants is the max potential for Macon County HUD but due to housing shortage and lack of follow through the rosters are not full. In Macon County there are 5 apartment complexes with a total of 254 units. HUD has tenants equalling 90 of those units. Of the total housing units as of 2016, 18% are mobile homes, 13% of the housing units were built before 1959.

The fair market rent price for a 2-bedroom unit in Macon Count is \$694 per HUD standards. The current concern is that there are not enough housing units in Macon county to withstand the population of potential renters. Many people are staying with friends or family until something comes available. Currently there are 120 applications on waiting list for HUD. 60% are staying with friends or family. At least 2 are homeless families with

County or Township	Total Occupied Housing Units	% Mobile Homes or other type of housing	% Built in 1959 or earlier	% without complete plumbing facilities	% without complete kitchen facilities	% with no vehicle available	% with no telephone service	% heating house with fuel oil, kerosene, coal, coke, or other fuels	% with no heating fuel
Macon	15,215	18.1	13.3	0.0	0.5	5.7	3.3	16.6	0.7
Burningtown	287	21.6	29.6	0.0	0.0	3.1	0.0	27.2	0.0
Cartoogechaye	1,036	12.8	6.6	0.0	1.4	0.9	0.0	14.4	0.0
Cowee	942	30.8	10.6	0.8	0.8	3.9	5.3	9.9	0.0
Ellijay	1,305	20.0	17.6	1.0	0.7	8.3	7.0	18.3	2.1
Flats	198	24.7	6.1	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	69.7	0.0
Franklin	6,291	17.0	14.8	0.0	0.0	6.6	2.9	12.5	0.9
Highlands	1,628	4.0	15.1	0.0	1.7	4.4	0.0	19.0	0.2
Millshoal	1,179	20.0	11.7	0.0	0.0	10.0	7.0	18.8	0.0
Nantahala	355	25.4	21.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	34.1	0.0
Smithbridge	1,803	26.7	7.2	0.0	0.8	5.1	5.5	17.9	0.8
Sugarfork	191	5.2	6.3	5.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	33.5	0.0



active vouchers that have not been able to find housing.

The median monthly housing costs for mortgaged owners was \$1,035, nonmortgage owners \$311, and renters \$756. 72.6% of housing units are owner-occupied. (census.gov) This trend expects to run through the Head Start population. Housing affordability is a measure of the housing cost burden placed on households. Specifically, if a household pays more than 30% of their gross income on housing, including utilities, they are cost-burdened.

In Macon County, the percentage of rental housing units costing more than 30% of household income was 31.7% in the 2005-2009 period and 35.8% in the 2006-2010 period, an increase of 12.9%. In WNC, the comparable percentage was 38.9% in the 2005-2009 period and 40.5% in the 2006-2010 period, an increase of 4%. These percentages correspond to state figures of 43.0% and 44.0%, respectively, with a state-level increase of only 2%. In Macon County 28% of households are cost burdened in the 2021 year.

This means that the program may need to explore the provision of workshops dealing with budgeting, renters' rights and responsibilities as well as job readiness and employability. There is a continuing clear need for housing assistance in Macon County.

Another aspect of housing and population trends is the increase in the number of homes that are seasonal or vacation use. In Macon County, the 2010 Census indicates this figure to be 36%. This figure reflects a population that has little need for Macon Program for Progress' services but could indicate people to target for volunteering activities.

### Children Experiencing Homelessness

The 2020 Point in time County by Continuum Care of NC estimates that the number of homeless individuals in North Carolina is approximately 8,359. According to the NCCEH, there are approximately 82 homeless people currently in Macon County. They estimate that 11 are children under 17 years of age. The U.S. Census conducted a special study of people in emergency and transitional shelters in 2010. In this study, the total number of homeless individuals who registered in emergency or transitional housing in North Carolina was 4,844.

Homelessness Point-in-Time Count, Macon County, NC													
Year	Homeless Families with Children					Homeless Adults without Children				Total Homeless People	Locations		
	Total Households	Total people	Children 17 and under	Adults 18-24	Adults age 25+	Total Households	Total People	Adults 18-24	Adults 25+		Emergency Shelter	Transitional Housing	Unsheltered situation
2021	5	18	13	1	4	5	5	0	5	23	23	0	
2020	6	20	11	0	9	57	62	5	57	82	4	6	72
2019													
2018	7	27	18	3	7					65			
2017	15	51	36	1	14					70			
2016	6	23	15	1	7					46			

<https://www.ncceh.org/media/files/files/fl26b136/2021-bos-pit-summary-by-county.pdf>

This is only one segment of the homeless population and is not a count of the total homeless population. Macon County conducts a point-in-time homelessness count every January. The results of the 2011 study were not significant and relied on individuals self-reporting. For the 2020-2021 program year, there were 9 children enrolled with the status of homeless in Early Head Start and 6 in Head Start.

In terms of homeless being served by the combined program (HS and EHS) the services are often provided to the "hidden homeless" who are staying with family or friends for a period and then moving on to other family and friends after a while. These hidden homeless require that the staff assisting them have a solid understanding of the availability of resources to aid these families and have a firm knowledge of how to work around

Number of Homeless children Enrolled at MPP	
Head Start 20-21	6
Head Start 19-20	11
Head Start 18-19	7
Head Start 17-18	5
Early Head Start 20-21	9
Early Head Start 19-20	16
Early Head Start 18-19	10
Early Head Start 17-18	4

the mental health issues that can arise from these situations. The chart above shows a marked increase since 2017-2018 program year.

The data is particularly grim as it comes while many schools in the United States have fewer and fewer resources to devote to the problem. In the majority of states, school spending has declined, in many cases sharply.

According to the National Center on Family Homelessness, North Carolina ranks 29<sup>th</sup> in the nation in child homelessness, with one being the best and 50 the worst. This rank is based on a composite of the number of children currently homeless in the state, an assessment of how children are faring in various domains (e.g. education, health, etc.), the risk of children becoming homeless, and the state’s policy and planning efforts.

The National Center on Family Homelessness has classified North Carolina’s state planning efforts regarding homelessness as “moderate”. In 2001, North Carolina established an Interagency Council for Coordinating Homeless Programs to prevent and end homelessness in the state, and the Council is chaired by the state Governor. In 2005, the Council created a draft of the *North Carolina Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness*, and fourteen counties have created their own local ten-year plans; however, all of these local plans are still in the implementation or development phase, and the overall Plan still only exists as a draft.

### Children in Foster Care

On average in Macon County for the year of 2020, there are approximately 74 children in custody of the Department of Social Services. In the last 4 years there has been a marked increase in the yearly average of children in foster care in Macon County with a increase from 52 children in care in 2017 to 74 in 2020. It should be noted that the data is not yet in for the months of November and December 2020 and that the number could increase. See graph below for Macon County yearly average since 2017 as well as yearly total of North Carolina since 2016.

Yearly number of children in foster care in NC			
2016	2017	2018	2019
15,978	16,658	17,029	17,039

MPP Foster Care Enrollment			
Head Start 2020-2021	8	Early Head Start 2020-2021	9
Head Start 2019-2020	15	Early Head Start 2019-2020	10
Head Start 2018-2019	11	Early Head Start 2018-2019	16
Head Start 2017-2018	8	Early Head Start 2017-2018	16
Head Start 2016-2017	9	Early Head Start 2016-2017	13
Head Start 2015-2016	7	Early Head Start 2015-2016	14

Due to Head Start national standards, children in foster care are given priority when it comes to enrollment in a Head Start or Early Head Start classroom.

### Number of Children Living Below Poverty

In Macon County 25.2% children under 18 years of age live in poverty this is a greater rate than the national average of 18.5%. This means it can be concluded that with a population of approximately 35,858 that there are around 9,036 children under 18 years of age living below poverty in Macon County. It can also be concluded that with a population of children under the age of 5 being 1,721 that there are approximately 434 children under the age of 5 living in poverty.

Yearly Average Number of Children in custody of MCDSS	
2017	52
2018	63
2019	66
2020	74
2021(Jan-June)	72

The program has historically been able to serve all the slots available for HS and EHS. As COVID-19 has affected our county as it has our country our center has not been fully enrolled during the 2020-2021 school despite valiant efforts to enroll all slots. Families are not comfortable enrolling children in a center setting. As of December 2020, there is a wait list for Head Start of 3 children and 3 children for Early Head Start who are over income. A shortage of licensed childcare capacity exists in Macon

County. Currently (December 2019), there are only six licensed childcare centers, including Macon Program for Progress, that serve ages 0-5 in Macon County.



### Number of Public Assistance recipients

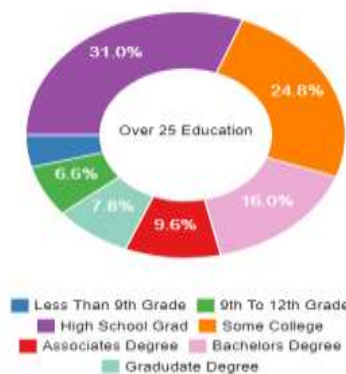
Number of Macon County Households receiving SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) in 2021 ie food stamps benefits is 2,385. Number of Macon County residence receiving Medicaid Benefits are 6,444 Number of Macon County residence receiving TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) Benefits are 9.

### Education Needs of Eligible families

#### Education levels and Adult Educational Attainment

According to the 2015-2019 U.S. Census estimates, 89.3% of people 25 years and over in Macon County have graduated from high school and 23.8% of people have a bachelor's degree or higher. Macon County's graduation rate for 2020 was 91%, while the state average is 86%. As of the 2014-2015 school year, the dropout rate

Education Attained	Count	Percentage
Less Than 9th Grade	1,079	4.11%
9th to 12th Grade	1,741	6.64%
High School Graduate	8,136	31.01%
Some College	6,506	24.80%
Associates Degree	2,527	9.63%
Bachelors Degree	4,192	15.98%
Graduate Degree	2,054	7.83%



for Macon County sits at 1.03%, making it one of the lowest rates in the state per DPI. The total school enrollment in Macon County was 4,387 for the 2019-2020 school year. Based on statistics released by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction.

Educational attainment is fairly high in the Macon County service area. However, there is still a sizeable gap between the number of adults who stopped attending school prior to graduating high school (24%) and those who obtained a high school diploma or better. This gap in education is indicative of the changes that are taking place in the rural area discovered as a retreat from other urban areas of the Southeast. As more people obtain homes or second homes in the area, the education level is impacted. Census results indicated most people moving into the area have higher education degrees.

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Quickfacts, retrieved from <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html>

<sup>2</sup>Dropout Prevention and Intervention, retrieved from <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/students-families/student-support/dropout-prevention-and-intervention>  
<https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-counties/nc/macon-county-population>

With a segment of the population lacking education, these citizens in Macon County are caught in a diminishing cycle. It is difficult to lure industry that pays well since employers in these fields are increasingly in need of a

highly educated workforce. Without these higher paying jobs available, there is little incentive for potential employees to complete higher education. Many still choose to leave the area to find work.

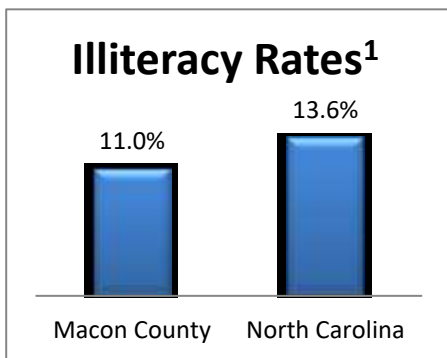
2016-2017, 2017-2018, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 MPP PIR figures above indicate that the parents may need assistance in completing their GEDs and Associates degrees. The education levels also serve as an indicator for literacy levels of the Head Start / EHS families.

	HS 20-21	HS 19-20	HS 18-19	HS 16-17	EHS 20-21	EHS 19-20	EHS 18-19	EHS 16-17
<b>BA or Higher</b>	5.6%	4.4%	3.1%	4.3%	11.5%	4.7%	2.5%	5.3%
<b>Some College</b>	19.2%	16.4%	6.3%	22.3%	13.7%	12.9%	6.4%	21.9%
<b>High School or GED</b>	54.4%	48.1%	14.1%	42.6%	43.5%	45.8%	14.1%	47.7%
<b>Less than High School</b>	29.6%	24%	36.5%	27.1%	32.3%	24.7%	24.3%	21.9%

This affects the family partnership process and should affect how services are planned and delivered. This will be accomplished through providing referrals for Adult Basic Education programs and linking parents into the GED program where needed. Attention will be placed upon assisting families where the parent has completed some college or technical school. As part of the family support mechanisms established under the family partnership process, Macon Program for Progress Head Start will continue to assist these families in turning their education and training into marketable skills tied to job requirements.

### Information on Functional Literacy Rates

During the early years, children develop competency in language and literacy not through a set curriculum, but through interactions and experiences with the adults around them. Research indicates that family expectations and involvement are also important factors influencing later school achievement in young children. Families who support and believe in their children’s ability to learn are promoting their school readiness.



In Macon County, the rate of illiteracy, is around 11% of the population (see chart at left)<sup>1</sup>. While this rate is low, and over 2% lower than the state rate, it is estimated that nearly “51% of Macon County’s adult populace...[has] functionally low levels of literacy”<sup>2</sup>.

The University of NC at Chapel Hill reports that the Health Literacy Score data for Macon County represents individuals who are at or below basic understanding of material is approximately 36.15% of the population.

MPP utilizes the Parents as Teachers program, which is an in-home, individualized program that assists families with positive interaction, literacy and Kindergarten readiness. By using a program that puts a strong emphasis on literacy. MPP 0-5 Head Start hopes to continue to see literacy improvement, both with children and parents.

## Health and Social Service Needs of Eligible Families

### Incidence of Child Abuse and Neglect

The table showing child abuse points out the fact that it is far more prevalent toward young children. It should be noted that the information for November and December are not yet available. During the months of April and May reports made to the Department of Social Services went to nearly zero. Per DSS the reason for this is that children were not in school or in the community due to the lockdown restrictions. Community Child Protection Teams reviewed over 1,005 cases statewide in 2010. This includes 425 Child Welfare cases and over 370 fatalities.

Investigated Reports of Abuse and Neglect in Macon County	
Year	Number of accepted reports
2018	304
2019	336
2020	322
2021(Jan- June)	177

In July 2001, the North Carolina General Assembly passed the Safe Surrender or Infant Homicide Prevention Act (G.S. 7B-500) that makes it legal for a parent to surrender an infant less than seven days old to a responsible adult without fear of criminal prosecution. This law is intended to provide a safe alternative to mothers without the necessary resources to care for the child an option to insure the well-being of the child.

In accordance with this law, Macon County EMS follows a detailed protocol if an infant is surrendered to an employee or if the infant is found on the property.

### Incidents of Domestic Violence

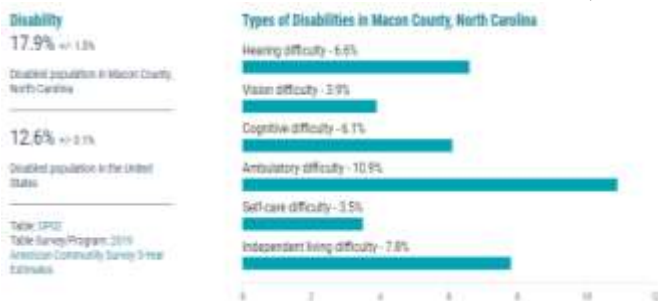
Per Reach of Macon County, the Domestic Violence advocates of the county, between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020 there were 624 reported victims of DV. Of the reported victims, 333 were adults and 291 were children; 453 were female, 170 were male and 1 other orientation. REACH provided 5509 sessions and 38,313 services to residence of Macon County. The REACH shelter housed 153 individuals of DV.

Also in Macon County there were 222 reported victims of Sexual Assault. Of those reported, 118 were adults and 104 were children; 171 were female, 50 were male and 1 other orientation. REACH of Macon County provided shelter to 90 of these victims, 1094 sessions and 10,832 services.

Human Trafficking in Macon County is also a concern. In this same time frame there were 46 reported victims of Human Trafficking, of those reported victims there are 27 adults and 19 children and of those 35 were female and 11 were male. REACH provided 25 of these reported victims shelter, 1208 sessions and 8,732 services.

In total REACH shelter provided 4,941 shelter nights in Macon County.

### Number of Children with Disabilities, Including Types of Disabilities



Disabilities by Type	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021
Developmental Delay	24	29	30	38
Hearing Impairment	1		1	0
Speech & Language	4	4	5	3
<b>Head Start Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>41</b>

The table above provides the types of disabilities observed by the Head Start program and the total number of

children with disabilities served. What this table means for the program is that it is reasonable to expect that a large percentage of the children with disabilities will require services for development and in speech and language.

MPP currently has 8 Early Head Start with IFSP and 21 Head Start children receiving disabilities services for the 2020-2021 year. The program will need to continue to assist the teaching staff with more classroom support to assist in delivering service for the children. Macon County Public Schools has a preschool program that serves children with disabilities. This has influenced MPP's enrollment in recent years.

Macon County Schools reports that they are serving 685 total children with documented disabilities Below is a chart with type of disabilities in Macon County k-12 school.

Autism (AU)	55
Developmental Delay (DD)	110
Emotional Disability (ED)	32
Hearing Impairment (HI)	8
Intellectual Disabilities-Mild (ID)	26
Intellectual Disabilities-Moderate (ID)	8
Intellectual Disabilities-Severe (ID)	1
Multiple Disabilities (MU)	9
Orthopedic Impairment (OI)	6
Other Health Impairment (OHI)	76
Specific Learning Disability (LD)	241
Speech-Language Impairment (SI)	112
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)	3

CDSA (Child Developmental Services Agency) is an available resource for children under the age of 3. COVID-19 has affected the provision of services for both the CDSA and Macon County Schools. The ability of those staff to enter schools and child care facilities due to safety protocols for COVID-19. Many meetings are taking place via zoom or other virtual arenas.

## Number of Children Born to Addicted Mothers

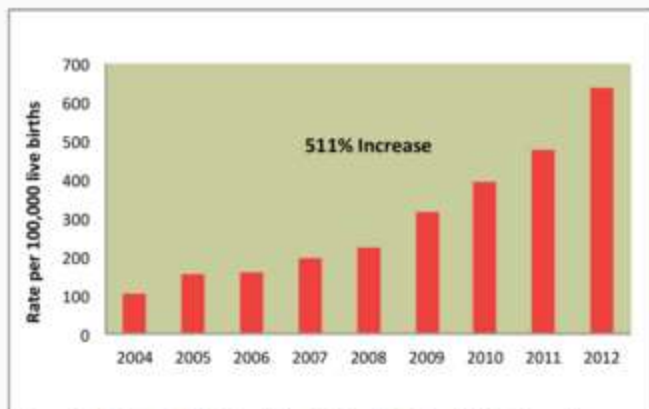


Figure 2. Rates of Infants Identified with Drug Withdrawal Syndrome by NC hospitals, per 100,000 Live Births. Adapted from North Carolina State Center for Health Statistics, Injury Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit (2014).<sup>17)</sup>

The chart to the left identifies the drastic increase in children born to addicted mothers in North Carolina. Between 2004 and 2012 there was a 511% increase in NC alone.

## Infant and Child Death Rates

Per NC Child Data Snapshot of 2020 the child death rate for Macon County is 61.3 per 100,000 a decrease from 70.8 per 100,000 in 2017. The infant mortality rate for area is 6.2 per 1,000 live births in 2018 decreased from 6.6 per 1,000 in 2017. North Carolina has an infant mortality rate of 6.7 per 1,000 live births per the CDC.

Macon County Public Health Child Fatality Task Force in past has met quarterly to discuss the any child death of a Macon County residents. However, due to COVID-19 the Taskforce did not meet in 2020, for the first year since 1991. Below are statewide statistics for Child Fatalities from 2018 included in the Annual report of 2020. (<https://www.ncleg.gov/DocumentSites/Committees/NCCFTF/Reports%20and%20Data/Annual%20Reports/CFTF%202020%20Annual%20Report.pdf>)

Throughout the 2018 calendar year, the State Center for Health Statistics (SCHS) reported 1,255 children died in North Carolina. Many of these deaths were expected and included children who died from a known natural

disease or illness. The North Carolina Medical Examiner system investigated the cause and manner of death for 482 children. The cases investigated by the Medical Examiner system included a number of natural deaths, as well as accident, homicide, suicide, and deaths for which no cause and/or manner of death could be determined.

There were 126 deaths that were certified as undetermined manner. Of those, 122 deaths were certified as unknown means, one death was certified as an asphyxiation, one death was related to toxin, and two deaths with other means of death. Of the undetermined manner, 118 children were under 1 year of age, seven children were ages 1-4 years, and one child was age 15-17 years. As is the case for most of the infants with an undetermined manner, when a known risky or potential unsafe sleeping situation is noted, the possibility of asphyxiation as a result of suffocation cannot be entirely excluded which leads to the certification of an unknown means of death.

There were 52 children who died at the hands of another in 2018. Infants, children under 1 year of age, accounted for 10 deaths. Children between the ages of 1 year and 17 years accounted for 17 total deaths. Regarding means, asphyxia accounted for five deaths, blunt force trauma for 10 deaths, firearms for over half the total child homicides at 32 deaths, three deaths by other means, one death by motor vehicle and one unknown means.

In 2018, there were 76 vehicle related deaths. Majority of these deaths, 44, were passengers, while 18 deaths were of drivers, and 14 deaths were of children outside of a vehicle/pedestrian.

### Number of Low Birth Weight Babies

According to NC Child Data Snapshot 8.7% of babies born in Macon County in 2018 were indicated to be of low birthweight. This is a marginal increase from 2017. 10.9% of babies born to Macon County Residence were pre-term, a decrease of 2.4% decrease from 2017. North Carolina is ranked 11<sup>th</sup> in the nation on Low Birth-weight Rates per the CDC.

### Teen Pregnancy Rates

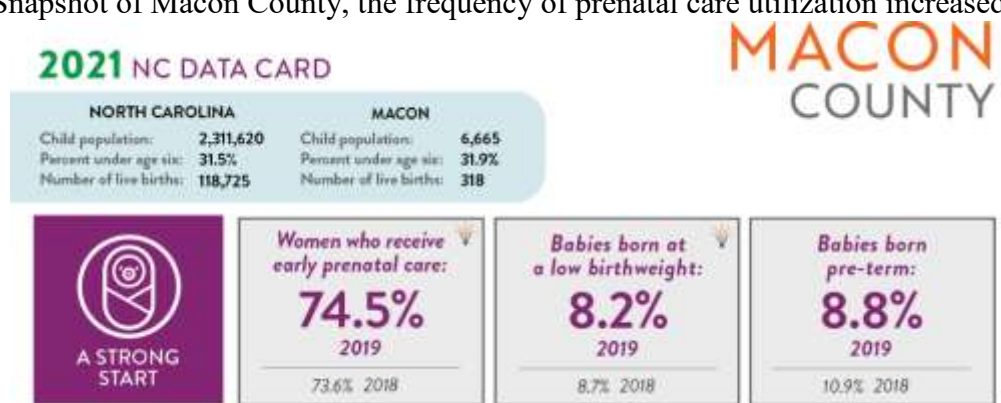
The pregnancy rate for women ages 15-44 in Macon County has been lower than or equal to the comparable state rate and higher than the mean WNC rate from 2006-2010. Pregnancy rates in Macon County decreased by 39% from 2017. Shiftnc.org reports that in 2018 that the number of pregnancies among 15-19-year-old girl's equals 24. Macon County as 35<sup>th</sup> out of 100 counties in North Carolina for teen pregnancy per shiftnc.org.

North Carolina Teen Birth rate is 18.7 births per 1,000 females 15-19 years of age per the CDC.

### Women Receiving Prenatal Healthcare

According to the NC Child Data Snapshot of Macon County, the frequency of prenatal care utilization increased from 2017 to 2018 (+1.8%).

The frequency of early prenatal care utilization was higher in WNC than in the state as a whole every year, but the comparable percentages for both the region and the state decreased from 2001-2009, by 2.7% in WNC and by 1.7% in NC. This puts both baby and mother at a higher risk for pregnancy complications or poor birth outcomes.



### Immunization Levels Among School Children

In September 2014, Macon County Health Department worked to keep Macon County's immunizations among the highest in the state. In 2013, the statewide average for immunization compliance was 68%; Macon County

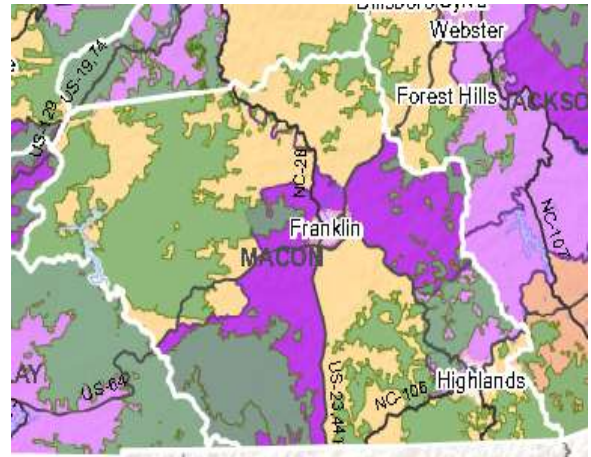
Health Department has placed the rate among their clients at 90%, almost 30% higher than the state. 92% of the children in the county are up to date on immunizations<sup>1</sup>. Last year at MPP, 96% of children in Head Start and 87% of children in Early Head Start were up-to-date on the state’s requirements<sup>2</sup>

COVID-19 impacted maintaining children’s up to date immunizations as Doctor’s offices were only open for emergencies and then when reopening they only had limited availability.

The COVID-19 vaccines had a late distribution date in Macon County. The first vaccine provided in the USA was on or about 12/14/2020. Macon County did not begin its vaccination phases until 1/19/2021 for phase 1.

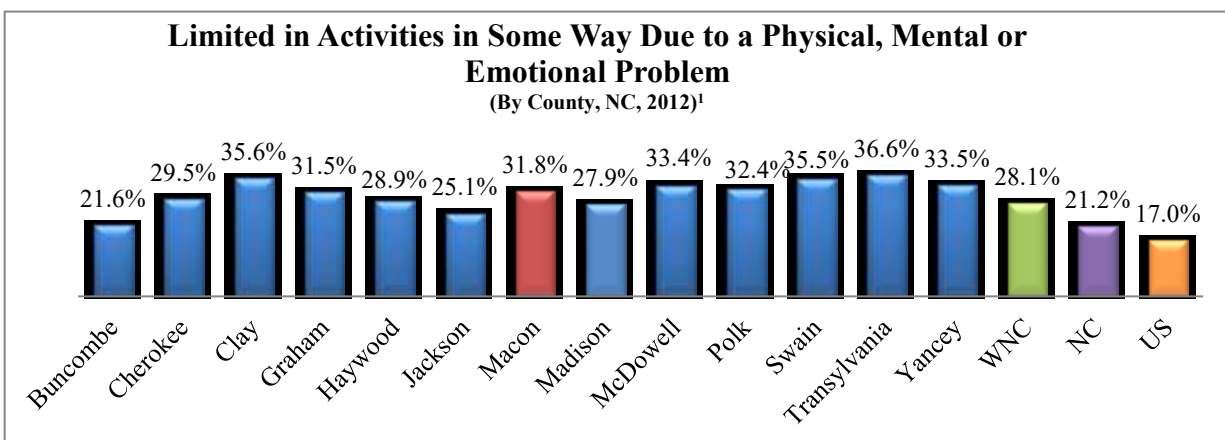
**Prevalent Health Problems**

Health Issues- To help measure health status, Mountain Wise, which works with the eight westernmost counties of North Carolina to provide opportunities for physical activity, access to local fresh fruits and vegetables, provide support for tobacco-free places and access to services for chronic-disease management, has created a “Hot Spot” map, which was created to identify pockets of poor health at the census tract level. On this map, located to the right, indicates a higher prevalence of poor health indicators by a darker color.



Currently there are no Labor and Delivery Services being offered in Macon County as Mission Health has discontinued their services at our hospital. Families requiring Labor and Delivery are to travel to Harris Regional Hospital in Sylva North Carolina, 19.2 miles or 26 Minute commute. In addition to Labor and Delivery Services being discontinued physicians are also leaving the area making primary care physicians difficult to attain.

As displayed in the graph, about 31.8% of Macon County residents find themselves limited in activities in some way, be it due to a physical, mental or emotional problem. Comparing the above graph with the one below, one of the biggest correlations exists between activity limitation and having very low income.



For the 2019-2020 year, Macon Program for Progress completed Health Plans for all enrolled children. Two children had asthma care plans, one child had hearing problems, and 16 had vision problems.

Health insurance or lack thereof is a concern in Macon County. 13.3% of residence go without health insurance in Macon county vs National average of 8.8% Medicaid eligibility, Based on the 2016 population, 24.4% of people in Macon County were Medicaid eligible in SFY 2017. The expenditure per eligible person is estimated



at \$4, 902. Those eligible for Medicaid has been on a slight increase since 2014. The Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) has the greatest number of eligible people with 1, 927 people followed by Infants and Children with 1, 748 eligible people. As of December 2017, there are 7, 113 total people eligible for Medicaid in Macon County. (<https://www.maconnc.org/images/healthy-carolinians/Macon%20CHA%202018.pdf>)

Obesity and Diabetes- Those with their eye on the health of the community worry about a growing culture of obesity, especially among children and young adults. The problem is exacerbated by poor dietary choices, a lack of exercise and perhaps a lack of understanding of weight gain and life changes that lead to better health.

There is a need for increased emphasis on exercise and eating smart. Among children, pediatricians and schools are important factors in the educational effort. Parents are an important part of the effort as well, although many parents also suffer from increased weight.

Youth also recognize there is an obesity problem. Teenagers participating in focus groups said they would like to see a greater emphasis on exercise at school, recreation opportunities in the community and changes in their school lunches.

Angel Medical Center and Macon County Public Health continue to sponsor Diabetes-Self Management Education programs. Macon County Public Health Sponsored a Diabetes Expo and Blood Glucose Screenings at the Macon County Fair and during National Diabetes Month. Over 134 individuals were screened and provided with education and/or referrals.

MPP 0-5 Head Start, at enrollment, conducts height-and-weight checks on all children, and, when needed, the Nutrition Specialist compiles care plans and/or special diets.

	<b>Underweight (&lt;5 Percentile)</b>	<b>Healthy Weight</b>	<b>Overweight</b>	<b>Obese (&gt;95 Percentile)<sup>3</sup></b>
<b>Head Start 2016-2017</b>	6	106	43	37
<b>Head Start 2017-2018</b>	7	114	23	38
<b>Head Start 2018-2019</b>	7	121	31	35
<b>Head Start 2019-2020</b>	6	89	25	37
<b>Head Start 2020-2021</b>	8	91	21	23

Dental Issues- Major improvements have occurred in the nation’s oral health, but some challenges remain and new concerns have emerged. One important emerging oral health issue is the increase of tooth decay in pre-school children. A recent CDC publication reported that, over the past decade, dental caries (tooth decay) in children ages two to five have increased.

Lack of access to dental care for all ages remains a public health challenge. There are also social determinants that affect oral health. In general, people with lower levels of education and income, and people from specific racial/ethnic groups, have higher rates of disease. People with disabilities and other health conditions, like diabetes, are more likely to have poor oral health. In November of 2012, Macon County Public Health received approval from the Macon County Board of Commissioners to expand their Adult Dental Clinic. This expansion included re-location to a new facility and an increase in the number of dental chairs.

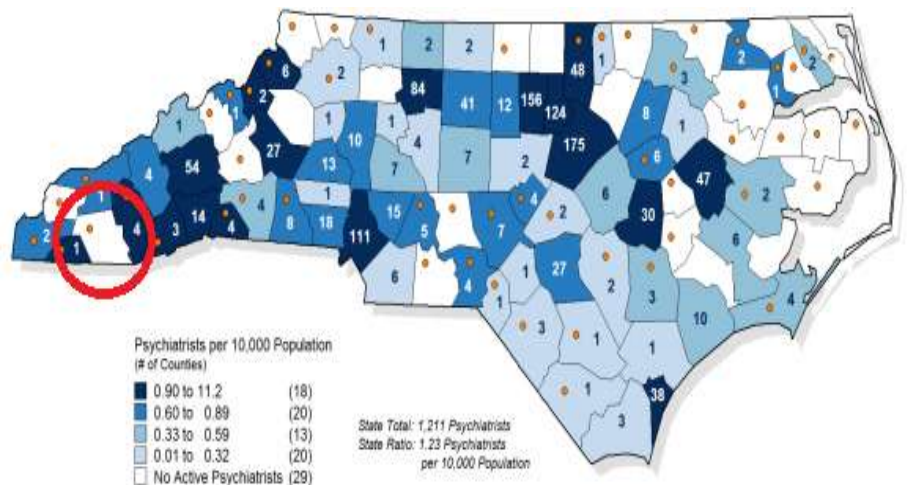
NC Oral Health Care Region 1 Snapshot provided statistics for Macon county and 7 surrounding areas of western North Carolina. 13% of kindergarten children have untreated tooth decay vs 15.3% state wide; 48.8% of adults have access to dental insurance vs 56.2% statewide; 36% of pregnant women have untreated tooth decay vs 30.3%; only 1,633+/- children aged 6-14 years received sealants by Medicaid dental providers; 17.9% of the population is on public water systems receiving fluorinated water vs 79.4% statewide; 52.1% of adults aged 18+

have had permanent teeth extracted vs 45.5 % statewide; 47.9% of Medicaid eligible children aged 1-20 years received preventive dental services vs 52.1% statewide; 6.4% of middle school students and 19.5 % of high school students use e- cigarettes vs 6.1% and 20.9% respectively statewide; 44.7% of Medicaid eligible children aged 1-2 years received preventative oral health services vs 51.3% statewide; 23.3% of adults currently smoke cigarettes vs 18.5% statewide and 16.3% of adults last visited a dentist 5 or more years ago vs 13% statewide. ([https://publichealth.nc.gov/oralhealth/docs/OralHealthSnapshots\\_12.22.20-Region1.pdf](https://publichealth.nc.gov/oralhealth/docs/OralHealthSnapshots_12.22.20-Region1.pdf))

Due to Macon County only having 1 public health dentist provider Molar Roller funded through the Macon County Health Department, 4 general practice dentists and 1 orthodontics and dentofacial orthopedic offices many dental health concerns go untreated. The Molar Roller is a dental bus that moves to different locations in the community mostly schools to make access more readily available to outlying communities.

COVID 19 has affected our community in this area as the Molar Roller was closed from May 2020 until October 2020. Other dental offices in the community also had extended periods of time without opening their doors to the public.

Mental Health Concerns- Access to mental health services, especially for children and dual-language learners as well as for those without insurance or adequate resources to pay for care, has been a long-standing issue in Macon County, as it has been across the rest of the state. It is difficult to find mental health clinicians locally that are willing and able to treat preschoolers. Another barrier to mental health is the lack of clinicians that speak Spanish. Resources that are available are very limited and mostly located out of county.



Healthy Carolinians of Macon County (HCMC) has been part of a task force meeting to explore options to improve mental health services, but solutions are difficult. Limited state funding and restrictions on benefits, even among the insured, restrains access to mental health care. Access to child mental health services is especially a problem in Western North Carolina with families at times having to drive outside of their county for services.

According to the North Carolina Health Professions Data System, there are no licensed, practicing psychiatrists located in Macon County, thus forcing those with prevalent need to travel outside out the county. Western North Carolina as a whole has a severe lack of assistance in regards to psychiatry (*see graphic*)<sup>1</sup>.

The 2010 HCMC State of the County Health (SOTCH) report revealed that access to a psychologist rate in Macon County is 1.3 versus 3.0 for NC. The suicide rate is rising with an increasing split between male and female. Results of a telephone survey reveal access to care barriers<sup>2</sup>.

The Community Care Clinic of Franklin has now expanded to include behavioral health services. Current information from the Macon County Task Force states that involuntary commitments to mental health facilities in Macon County this year are up 36% from last year. The number of officers needed to accomplish the transport has increased 305% and the total hours per process have increased 291%<sup>2</sup>.

There is a great working relationship between the Macon County Sheriff's Office and Angel Medical Center. This mutual relationship is beneficial for the residents of Macon County.

There is still a problem with schoolchildren who have no paying source for mental health services that are not covered by Medicaid or private insurance. A member of the task force expressed there is a need locally for an adolescent substance abuse program and there is currently no funding source to start one.

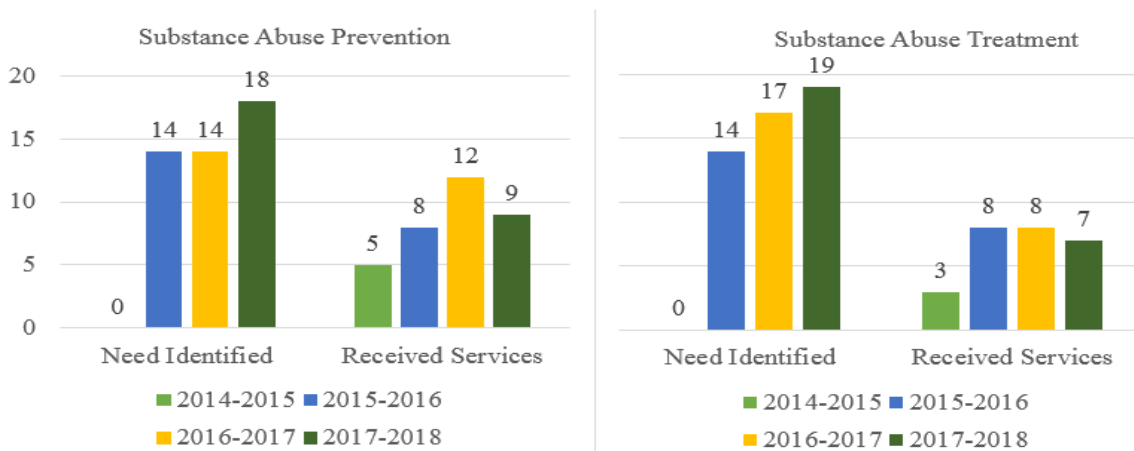
In the 2018-2019 program year, the MPP Mental Health Consultant provided consultations to staff on 19% of Head Start children regarding mental health or behavioral concerns; 36% of this number received 3 or more mental health consultations; of these children, <1% were referred to outside mental health services. The Mental Health Consultant provided consultations to staff on 22% of Early Head Start children regarding mental health or behavioral concerns; 22% of this number received 3 or more mental health consultations.

Macon County Health assessment reports that Mental health and physical health are closely connected. Mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety, affect people’s ability to participate in health- promoting behaviors. In the online key informant survey, mental health was a leading health issue found critical to address. In 2018, 12.3% of people said that they were unable to obtain needed mental health services in the past year; this has increased from 8.4% in 2015. Concerning days of poor mental health, 21.5% said that they experienced more than 7 days of poor mental health in a month (WNC Health Network, 2018). When asked how dissatisfied they were with life 8.9% of respondents said “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied.” Respondents who said that they “always” or usually” get needed social and/or emotional support decreased from 83.2% in 2015 to 69.6% in 2018 (WNC Health Network, 2018).

COVID-19 has affected mental health concerns for the community as for months’ services were minimal during the lockdown, many offices turning to telehealth sessions instead of face to face meetings. For the younger children tele appointments are ineffective. The true effects of COVID-19 and mental health are not yet known.

Substance use and related concerns- A prevailing crisis in Macon County is the dominance of opioid and drug abuse within the community. In 2015, there were more than 1,100 opioid-related deaths in North Carolina, which is a 73% increase from 2005. Of these, there were two opioid-related deaths in Macon County in 2005, which increased to four in 2015. While these numbers on their own do not seem inherently significant, these four opioid-related deaths account for 1% of the total deaths in Macon County in 2015. In 2016, the number of opioid-related deaths in Macon County jumped to 11, and then to 16 in 2017. As of October 2018, there have been 19 opioid-related deaths in Macon County, an increase of 375% from 2015. According to the last four years’ Program Information Report (PIR) data for MPP 0-5 Head Start, substance abuse prevention and treatment has been steadily increasing for the families that are served by the program.

**Macon Program for Progress PIR**



Prevention measures are being taken into effect in order to attempt to curb these issues. In January 2017, North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper signed a new law that is aimed at curbing misuse and/or abuse of opioids. This law, called the “Strengthen Opioid Misuse Prevention (STOP) Act” is “intended to reduce the supply of unused,

misused and diverted opioids circulating in NC, reduce ‘doctor shopping’ and improve care by requiring prescribers to use tools and resources that help prevent inappropriate prescribing”<sup>4</sup>.

Macon County is home to a syringe exchange program, making it one of 21 syringe exchange programs in all of North Carolina (see map). The host site, Full Circle Recovery Center, is also a full service substance abuse prevention and treatment agency.

Counties with Syringe Exchange Programs  
As of May 24, 2017 (21 SEPs covering 20 counties)



Macon County Public Health Assessment Survey data shows that 25.9% of people in Macon County used opiates/ opioids, with or without a prescription, in the past year (WNC Health Network, 2018).

There are 99 Medicare Part D prescribers and 65 Medicare Part D Opioid prescribers in Macon County. Medicare Part D is also known as the insurance which covers most outpatient prescription drugs (Medicare Interactive). The most recent information available shows that 1, 907, 000 opioid pills were dispensed in Macon County (YTD total as of 4th Q in 2017). Change in opioid prescribing rate is 0.04 while the change in extended release opioid prescribing rate is -1.08 (2013- 2016). The change in the opioid prescribing rate is significantly different than regional, state, and national averages. (<https://www.maconnc.org/images/healthy-carolinians/Macon%20CHA%202018.pdf>)

COVID- 19 has affected Addiction services in Macon County, through Full Circle Recovery, have been suspended effective March 20, 2020. Services suspended or altered; All DWI Groups and ADETS/Prime for Life Classes were cancelled; The organization is hoping to offer online groups or individual counseling but relies on customers to have access to needed technology to support this; All assessment appointments were rescheduled; All volunteer activities were cancelled for months and then only available with social distancing and limited numbers. In a community where resources are minimal this has been a great impact.

## Communicable Disease

The current communicable disease is COVID-19 to date in January 2021 there have been 2,543 positive cases identified, and 18 deaths in Macon County. The impact of this pandemic has yet to be fully understood. Throughout this document the impact of COVID-19 in areas of employment, health, mental health, food and nutrition and other areas have been provided.

## Air and Water Quality

Air Quality- In most summers, North Carolina's weather is dominated by the "Bermuda High" pressure system. This gives calm, virtually cloudless conditions where any pollution placed into the atmosphere remains suspended for an extended period of time.

Fortunately, compared to many other states, North Carolina does not support activities, which emit great quantities of pollution. However, automobile traffic in the major cities, along with some paper producing and energy generation plants can cause local problems for short periods of time.

Additionally, with winds coming predominantly from a westerly direction, North Carolina also receives pollution from a suite of upwind states. On occasion, this can severely reduce visibility in the western mountains, and is a major contributor to the presence of acid rain on some of the highest peaks.

The Environmental Protection Agency reports Air Quality Index (AQI) measures for nine of the 16 counties in the WNC region: Buncombe, Haywood, Graham, Jackson, Macon, McDowell, Mitchell, Swain and Yancey. Primary Air Pollutants in 2017, the Air Quality Index shows that Macon County had 335 days with “good” air quality and 12 days with “moderate” air quality. Ozone was present at the level of “pollutant” on all 347 monitored days. Macon County is ranked 66th among the 85 counties reporting TRI releases. Total TRI releases were 6, 167 pounds in 2015. One manufacturing facility in the county was responsible for all of the TRI chemical/ chemical compounds released in Macon County; the TRI chemicals released by Caterpillar Precision Seals

were chromium and nickel. Western North Carolina has the highest levels of radon in the state. The arithmetic mean indoor radon level for the 16 counties of Western North Carolina is 4.1pCi/L. In Macon County, the current average indoor radon level is 2.3 pCi/L. The EPA says that “Smoking, radon, and secondhand smoke are the leading causes of lung cancer.” Other air quality data shows that in 2018, 21.2% of survey respondents said that they had second hand smoke exposure at work recently.

Water Quality- The sources from which the public gets its drinking water is a health issue of considerable importance. Water from all municipal and most community water systems is treated to remove harmful microbes and many polluting chemicals, and is generally considered to be “safe” from the standpoint of public health because it is subject to required water quality standards. Municipal drinking water systems are those operated and maintained by local governmental units, usually at the city/town or county level. Community water systems are systems that serve at least 15 service connections used by year-round residents or regularly serves 25 year-round residents.

This category includes municipalities, but also subdivisions and mobile home parks. In February 2012, a regional mean of 55% of the WNC population was being served by community water systems (*Data Workbook*). The 45% remaining presumably were being served by wells or by some other source, such as springs, creeks, rivers, lakes, ponds or cisterns.

Individual counties in WNC, however, have highly varied percentages of their populations served by community water systems; in some counties, the figure is as low as 18% and in others, it is as high as 65%. In Macon County, 19,318 of 33,922 county residents, or 56.9%, were being served by community water systems in February of 2012. Presumably, the remaining 43.1% were served by wells or other source.

Water quality appears to be high in the MPP area. However, there have been EPA violations in some of the smaller areas, which do not appear to tie into the city water system. The table from U.S. Census indicates that 53 homes lacked complete plumbing facilities, and three lacked complete kitchen facilities. This is an improvement over the previous data collected.

Community Water Systems: Community water systems in Macon County serve an estimated 21, 056 people, or 61.9% of the county population. The fraction of the Macon County population served by a community water system is 12.5% higher than the average for the Western North Carolina region.

## ***Nutrition Needs of Eligible Families***

### **Children Receiving Free and Reduced Meals**

There has been a slight decline in the number of children in the Macon County Schools enrolled in Free and Reduced Lunch. The below figure illustrates the growth and decline. According to Action for North Carolina, from 2015-2018, 15% of the total population was on SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program formerly known as food stamps).

Per Macon County Health Assessment Free and Reduced-Price School Meals for the school year 2016- 2017, the final average membership of free and reduced- price school meals was 4, 303. There were 447 reduced applications and 2, 375 free applications. There are insignificant differences between Macon County and regional averages.

### **Food Stamp Recipients**

Also in Macon County, food and nutrition services participation has steadily decreased since January 2015. In January 2015 there were 2, 944 cases with 6, 642 participants and in January 2018 there were 2,274 cases with 4, 995 participants. MPP HS and EHS programs noted that in 2020-2021 program year 123 of the 256 students were on SNAP. As well as 211 of the 256 students received WIC.

## Participants in Food Distribution Programs

MANNA Foodbank is another local resource that no longer has a Macon County facility. A recent study by MANNA found that approximately 108,280 people in the Foodbank’s 16 county service area, including 38,520 children, do not always know where they will find their next meal. In all, 15.3% of the population—more than one in four children—in Western North Carolina struggles with hunger, according to research released June 12, 2013 by Feeding America, the nation’s largest hunger-relief organization.



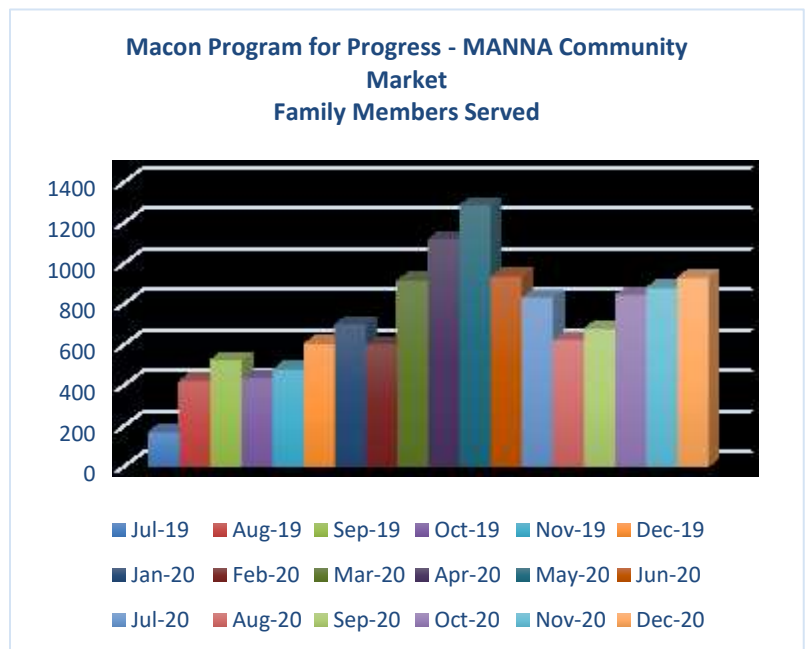
In 2018-2019, MANNA Foodbank with the help of its partners distributed 986,220 pounds of food to pantries in Macon County (see distribution map below)<sup>2</sup>. Macon County Care Network (CareNet), NC Works and Macon Program for Progress are local resources aiding the food availability situation who had the contract to partner with MANNA Food Bank. This contract was lost in 2019 by CareNet for a time being and Macon Program for Progress has been partnering with MANNA since 6/2019 providing monthly food banks in the community.

The provision of food supplies to low income families in Macon County is growing. The MPP and Manna Popup market community members served is depicted in the graph below. There was a large increase in those needing help with food insecurities when COVID- 19 hit our community in March 2020 and the monthly number of people seeking help at Popup markets continue to be high.

Despite the relative wealth of the area, this organization plus food stamps often serves as the primary source of nutrition for the families seeking assistance from MPP.

## Availability of Low Cost Food

In Macon County the mass majority of grocery stores are located within Franklin City limits. There are three Ingles Supermarkets, one Walmart, one Food Lion and 3 Hispanic food markets. There are no additional supermarkets or grocery stores in the surrounding communities for the rest of the county. Highlands is the exceptions with one grocery store.



## Transportation and Communication

### Vehicle Ownership

The table below indicates the extent of automobile ownership in Macon County and percentages for the entire state of North Carolina. This table shows that automobile ownership is slightly worse in the county than for the state overall. It is believed that the low-income citizens of the county are the ones with limited access to automobiles.

Most of the families served by Macon Program for Progress have a vehicle for personal use. The critical reliance on personal transportation can cause instant crisis in a low-income family’s budget when the car is in need

of major repairs. The significant increase in the cost of gasoline in the past few years has put a strain on the budgets of all income levels but for low-income families, this increase is an even more significant cost burden.

Means of transportation to work ( <a href="https://censusreporter.org/">https://censusreporter.org/</a> )					
Column	Macon County		North Carolina		US
<b>Drove alone</b>	82.1%	11,357	80.9%	3,850,705	76.3%
<b>Carpooled</b>	8%†	1,107	9.2%	436,089	9%
<b>Public transit</b>	0.2%†	32	1%	48,284	5%
<b>Bicycle</b>	0%†	5	0.2%†	9,292	0.6%
<b>Walked</b>	2.3%†	312	1.8%	85,749	2.7%
<b>Other</b>	2.8%†	388	1.1%	52,475	1.3%
<b>Worked at home</b>	4.5%†	625	5.8%	276,146	5.2%

Nearly 6% of the households did not have access to a car, truck, or van for private use, but multi-vehicle households were not rare. Currently there is only one provider for public transportation, Macon County Transit. There is a fee for services, participants must make appointments for transportation and routes are limited.

### **Availability of Public Transportation Services**

Macon County Transit is the only public transportation in Macon County. The mountain gem route made loops within town every 30 minutes prior to COVID-19. At this time, they are now making a loop every hour. Out of town trips have been canceled, due to COVID, this impacts the availability of out of town doctor visits as most of the specialist are out of town.

COVID-19 effected already limited transportation services Daily ridership is down from approximately 150 trips to approximately 40 trips and as a result of decline in daily ridership, MCT is no longer using part-time employees. Limiting number of riders per vehicle to adhere to social distancing guidelines.

### **Communication**

As of 2019 it is believed that 85% of the population have a computer at home while only 75% have a broadband internet subscription. There are land areas in Macon County that continue to not have cellphone or internet access, while other areas do not have consistent cell phone or internet access. Almost 23% of Macon County’s population do not have access to internet; with public schools and local community colleges doing distance learning this is creating a deficit in learning capabilities to students without access to internet. Only 8% of the population use internet at broadband speeds (greater than 25 MBPS download speed). During school closures due to COVID-19 Macon County Schools issued hotspots however the requests for units were more than units available and families were put on waitlists. Local businesses opened up their Wi-Fi so that students and workers could complete tasks in the parking lots of businesses.

### ***Head Start Staff***

#### **Racial, Ethnic Composition**

The total number of Staff members for MPP Head Start and Early Head Start are 93 individuals. Of these the Of these One staff identify as Asian; 2+ staff identify as Black/African American; 82 staff identify as White; one staff identifies as Biracial/ Multiracial and six staff identify as Hispanic Latino.

#### **Languages Spoken**

The primary language of staff is prominently English however there are four staff with primary language of Spanish and one of East Asian Languages.

## **Educational Attainment**

The educational attainment of staff is currently as follows: 2 staff with GED only; 33 staff with High School Diploma only; 43 staff with Associates Degrees; 25 with Bachelor's Degrees; 4 with their Master's Degree and 1 as a Licensed Practitioner Nurse. The minimum allowable education is GED or High School Diploma.

## ***Relevant opinions of community needs***

### **Opinion of Parents**

Parents received surveys for data collection for this year's community assessment update. Parents were able to provide opinions on the strengths and obstacles of the Macon County community, as well as the services Macon Program for Progress provides.

One parent expressed that a big obstacle in Macon County is the limited number of opportunities afforded to those who live in poverty. They went on to say that the majority of the issues relate directly to substance abuse and/or drug distribution.

Another parent stated that the Macon County community has trouble in regards to transportation, food, and other family necessities.

A prevailing theme from the parent surveys is that there is a serious limitation for mental health services in Macon County and Western North Carolina as a whole. They expressed that Macon Program for Progress could look into expanding resources to help those with emotional problems or difficulties.

As expressed in the parent surveys, Macon Program for Progress should provide stronger outreach to outlying areas of the county as well as with young and teen moms that reside here.

### **Community Strengths:**

- Provide social connections by working together
- Willingness to help one another
- Broad scope of programs (e.g. WIC, CareNet, REACH, etc.)
- Passion and heart to help those in need

### **Community Obstacles:**

- No opportunities for those in poverty
- Not enough affordable housing
- Lack of job opportunities for those without advanced education
- Substance abuse and/or drug distribution
- Lack of mental health services (especially for teen parents and those living in poverty)
- Lack of Labor and Delivery Services in the county
- Domestic violence
- Hunger issues

## **Opinions of Community Leaders/institutions**

Community partners receive a survey for data collection on community needs, local resources and the services MPP provides to families. This survey also included a chart that allowed the institution to note whether they had seen an increase, decrease, or no change in the population they have seen.



Of those surveys returned, the community institutions noted that they have seen the following:

	Increase	Decrease	No Change	N/A
Average household income			2	3
Low-income families contacting your agency	1	1	1	2
Individuals or families slightly over your income guidelines		1	2	2
Multi-generational families you serve	2		2	1
Teen pregnancies		1	2	2
Job availability in community	2	1		2
Drug abuse in community	4		1	
Low income housing availability	1	1	1	2
Homelessness	2		1	2
Transportation needs	2		2	1
Services you offer	2		2	1

The surveys expressed that Macon Program for Progress could look into partnering/offering additional services such as mental health and behavioral supports for children, as well as provide educational or informational trainings to parents/caregivers. Also mentioned was that MPP could offer additional programs that deal with basic financial literacy, and that MPP could fully participate in community taskforces, such as those that deal with substance abuse, mental health, domestic violence, etc.

**Community Strengths:**

- Institutions that provide repair and construction for handicap ramps, etc.
- Good about uniting where there are identified needs
- Well-trained therapists to identify and address stressors
- Desire to improve the lives of others
- Community institutions are available that provide care to individuals regardless of economic status
- Dedicated staff at institutions that are committed to the overall health, safety and well-being of the community they serve

**Community Obstacles:**

- Lack of affordable housing
- Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault and Human Trafficking.
- Future limits on spending mental health services
- Access/use of illicit drugs in younger people
- Lack of transportation
- Limited time/availability for mental health providers
- Lack of prescribers in the area /Access to adult health services (primary care providers)
- Lack of a Homeless shelter in the area
- Lack of resources for substance abuse services
- Increasing number of families dealing with substance use disorders, mental health (untreated or under-treated) and family violence simultaneously
- Need for additional childcare options in the county
- Closure of labor and delivery at Angel Medical Center
- Difficult for caregivers to get off work in order to utilize important services (e.g. medical evaluations)

**LIST OF OTHER STATE LICENSED CHILD CARE FACILITIES IN MACON COUNTY, NC**

Facility Name	Contact Information	License	Age Range	Approved Capacity
Above & Beyond Child Care	3 Georgia Rd Franklin, NC 28734	Three Star Center License		
Children's Discovery Center	185 Sloan Road Franklin, NC 28734	Four Star Center License	2-12	25
Covenant Child Care	265 Belleview Park Road Franklin, NC 28744	Five Star Center License	0-5	19
Gordon Center for Children, Inc.	315 Main Street Highlands, NC 28741	GS 110-106	1-5	21
Great Beginnings Lutheran Pre-School	38 Wayah Street Franklin, NC 28734	Five Star Center License	3-12	50
Highlands Community Child Development Center	89 Church Street Highlands, NC 28741	Four Star Center License	0-12	66
Iotla Valley Preschool	1166 Iotla Church Road Franklin, NC 28734	Five Star Center License	3-5	18
Iotla VIP After School Program	1166 Iotla Church Road Franklin, NC 28734	Three Star Center License	4-12	
Macon County Schools VIP Program East Franklin School District	100 Watauga Street Franklin, NC 28734	Three Star Center License	4-12	120
Macon County Schools VIP Program South Macon School District	855 Addington Bridge Road Franklin, NC 28734	Five Star Center License	4-12	250
Macon County Schools VIP Program Cartoogechaye School District	3295 Old Murphy Road Franklin, NC 28734	Three Star Center License	4-12	250
M.P.P. New Horizon III	110 East Orchard View Lane Franklin, NC 28734	Five Star Center License	0-3	100
Mountain View Intermediate	161 Clarks Chapel Rd Franklin, NC 28734	Five Star Center License		
New Horizons Center for Children and Families	82 East Orchard View Lane Franklin, NC 28734	Five Star Center License	0-12	300
Pruett House Family Center	185 Forest Avenue Franklin, NC 28734	Five Star Center License	0-3	24
Ready Set Go Preschool Program	855 Addington Bridge Road Franklin, NC 28734	Five Star Center License	3-6	36
Stella Haire's Day Care Home	110 Emmanuel Road Franklin, NC 28734	Two Star Family CC Home License	0-12	8
The Learning Ladder Academy	1157 East Main Street Franklin, NC 28734	Three Star Center License	0-5	
Trimont Christian Academy	98 Promise Lane Franklin, NC 28734	Three Star Center License	0-6	165
Up, Up and Away: Cartoogechaye School	3295 Old Murphy Road Franklin, NC 28734	Five Star Center License	3-5	18