

2023-2024 ANNUAL REPORT

**Building equitable access to healthy foods and opportunities to
be physically active in communities across North Carolina**



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The UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention's Food, Fitness and Opportunity Research Collaborative (FFORC) aims to build economic security, improve health outcomes and contribute to community-based research to address those affected by inequity in North Carolina.

We do this through nutrition education and community-designed programs, working alongside local community partners to increase access to nutritious food, opportunities for physical activity, and community well-being.

OUR TEAMS

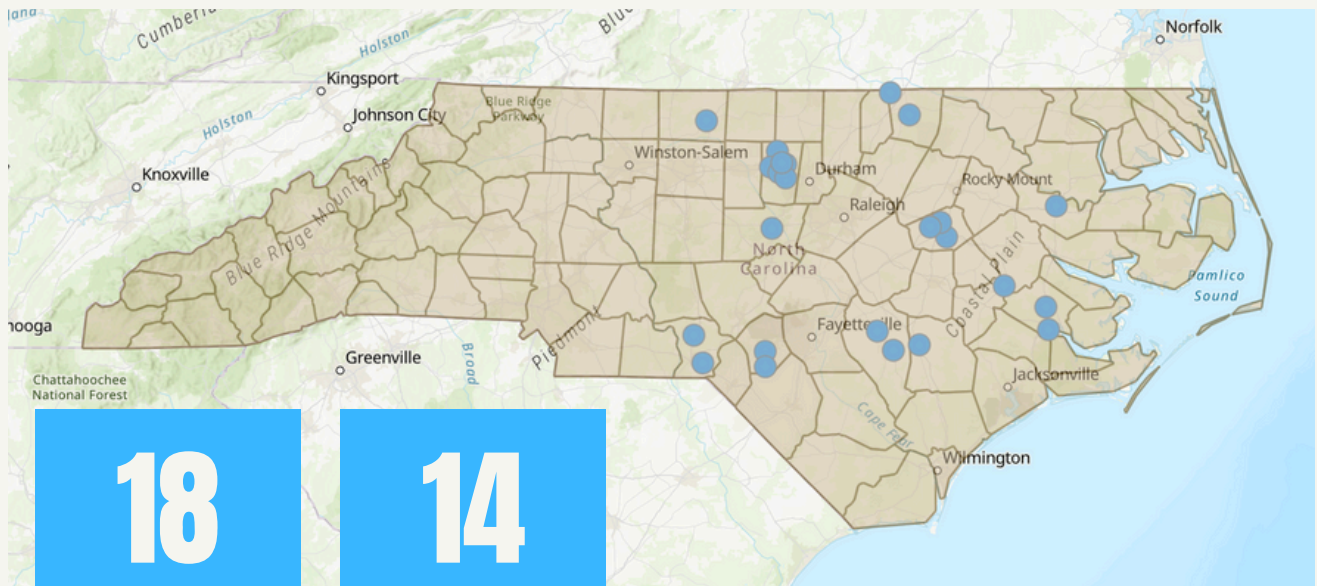
Community-Based Programs

Our community-based programs are designed and driven by communities. We enjoy working with local partners to make changes to policies, systems, and environments to address socioeconomic barriers and improve community health.

Child Nutrition Project

The Child Nutrition Project, led by the Carolina Hunger Initiative, focuses on increasing access to healthy foods for kids and their families.

image: Below is a map of where our community-based projects took place this fiscal year. We support programs in 18 Counties across North Carolina and provide free nutrition education resources and online classes statewide!



18

COUNTIES WITH
COMMUNITY-
BASED PROJECTS

14

COLLABORATING
COMMUNITY
PARTNERS

*Our Child Nutrition Project works Statewide

PROJECT UPDATES

A note from our Director, Molly De Marco:

In this our ****fourth**** year-end newsletter, we'd like to take the time to thank our community partners and the organizations who fund this work. Over 2024, we were again proud to partner with many of you to open opportunities for North Carolinians to eat healthy food and live active lives. We launched our first grant making process that shifted decision-making power more fully into the hands of our community garden partners. We started our first project to help people pursue more active ways of getting around. Our Carolina Hunger Initiative partners continued to provide nutrition classes while also launching a program to connect college students to SNAP benefits. See below for more details on all of the projects and more.

We look forward to continuing to partner with you in 2025!

Molly De Marco



image: FFORC team picture at 2024 Walk Fairview Day in Hillsborough, NC.



image: CHI team picture from NC Child Hunger Leaders Conference



**ALSO! Check out FFORC's
NEW website at:
foodfitnessopportunity.org**



NC SNAP-ED



UNC

**CENTER FOR HEALTH
PROMOTION AND
DISEASE PREVENTION**



FFORC
Food · Fitness · Opportunity
Research Collaborative



**CAROLINA
HUNGER
INITIATIVE**

CAROLINA HUNGER INITIATIVE (CHI)

The Child Nutrition Project, led by the Carolina Hunger Initiative, focuses on increasing access to healthy foods for kids and their families. Activities over the past year included offering in-person and online nutrition education, developing new nutrition education resources, and providing training, technical assistance, and support to school and summer nutrition programs.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Expanded Nutrition Education Offerings

- The Child Nutrition Project expanded their nutrition education offerings to include the Grow It, Try It, Like It! Curriculum, which they offer to Head Start students, and the Food Smarts Curriculum.



image: Head Start students enjoying a spinach tasting lesson from Grow It, Try It, Like It! classes!

NUTRITION EDUCATION

316

PEOPLE RECEIVED
NUTRITION AND
PHYSICAL
ACTIVITY
EDUCATION

64%

INDIVIDUALS
IMPROVED ABILITY
TO PLAN, EASY
HEALTHY MEALS
AND CHOOSE
HEALTHY SNACKS

11

UNC STUDENT
INTERNS HELPED
LEAD NUTRITION
CLASSES & SUPPORT
COMMUNITY
PROJECTS

79%

INDIVIDUALS
SHOWED
IMPROVEMENTS IN
MAKING HEALTHY
FOOD CHOICES



CAROLINA HUNGER INITIATIVE (CHI)

MORE PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

NC Child Hunger Leaders Conference

- The Carolina Hunger Initiative hosted the 13th annual NC Child Hunger Leaders Conference in February 2024. The conference theme was "You Are the Champions." The event brought together over 300 individuals from across North Carolina to learn about strategies for addressing child hunger.

SummerPalooza! Summits

- The Carolina Hunger Initiative partnered with the NC Department of Public Instruction to host three regional SummerPalooza! Summits in November 2024. This year marked the 10th year of the annual summits which celebrate and provide training to Summer Nutrition Programs across the state. It also provided training on creating awareness around all of the new USDA SUN Summer Nutrition Programs for Kids branding. Nearly 200 individuals attended.

New Nutrition Education Resources

- The Child Nutrition Project created numerous new nutrition education resources over the past year, including a variety of Olympic-themed recipes and activities in both English and Spanish.

A Growing Team!

- As CHI's scope expands, so does their team. Thompson Bertschy joined our team as a Program Specialist in November 2024!



image: Head Start student from a Grow It, Try It, Like It! class trying spinach!



image: Carolina Hunger Initiative (CHI) and NC Department of Public Instruction staff at SummerPalooza ~ Everyone dressed up as a fruit or vegetable!



image: An illustration from their Olympic-themed recipes and activities resource - "Taste the Victory: Coloring the Olympic Fruit Rings"

COMMUNITIES ON THE MOVE (COTM)

COTM addresses barriers to active living by building residents' capacity to become leaders and change agents and creating opportunities for healthy eating and physical activity.

The COTM initiative encompasses several separate but complementary projects, including The Fairview Community Garden, Fairview Youth in Action Internship, Educational Workshops, and Women on the Move.

This year, **COTM** invested significant time in planning and strategizing to strengthen and coordinate its programming across all project focus areas and in alignment with the *Activate!* plan. This included an intentional effort to increase the visibility and communication of the programs to all partners and community members. This was done through regular newsletters, informational program brochures, social media updates, and shared information at Community Watch meetings. Regular communication and making the small wins visible helped staff and the community see the incremental progress and make connections across all projects!

This year, COTM facilitated three **Traffic Calming Workshops (Educational Workshops)** to over 55 community members. Fairview residents have made significant strides in learning about and addressing traffic safety concerns through a series of community-led Traffic Calming Workshops. With continued collaboration and a clear action plan, Fairview residents are making meaningful progress toward safer streets.



image: Fairview neighbors attending a Town Board meeting to discuss safety improvements to Rainey Ave.



image: Molly, facilitated an activity and discussion for the Youth in Action interns on what impacts health and how these factors differ based on human characteristics (Social Determinants of Health)

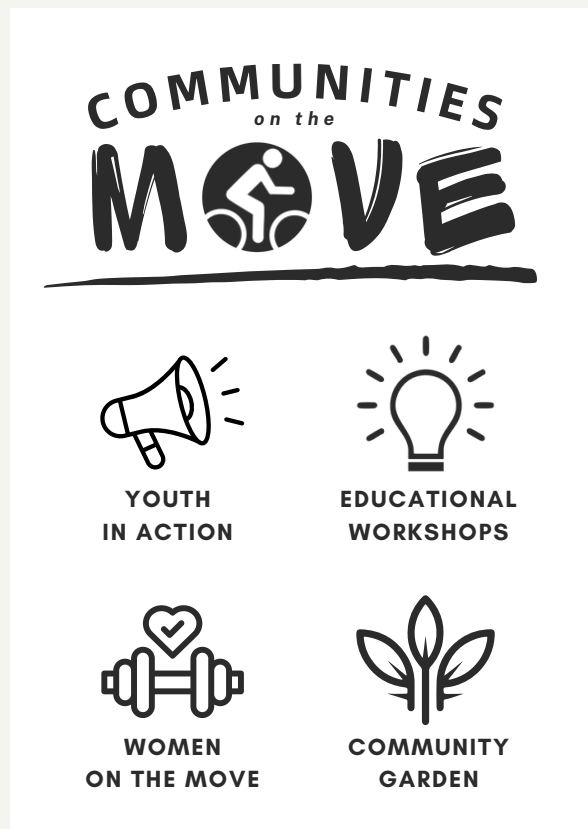


image: The Fairview Communities on the Move initiative includes four separate but synergistic projects.

COMMUNITIES ON THE MOVE (COTM)

COTM Project Updates Continued!

The Youth in Action (YIA) internship program had a transformative year, with 8 youth interns and 2 young adult coordinators—both alumni—leading impactful initiatives in their community. Throughout the year, YIA hosted 4 community presentations, where local leaders shared valuable knowledge on topics such as Fairview Community Watch history, food security with PORCH-Hillsborough, and oral histories with Sayoko Kawabata.

Youth interns participated in a Photo Voice activity, capturing images to showcase their appreciation for Fairview and identify opportunities for improvement in safety, beauty, and accessibility. Their photos aligned with research topics, including revitalizing natural landscapes, adding cultural identity through art, reducing litter, promoting recycling, and reclaiming the community's beauty and opportunity.

A key achievement was the launch of the YIA Club, designed to maintain momentum and keep youth engaged in their advocacy work throughout the school year.

All the interns' hard work, including their Photo Voice project, was seen at the **4th Annual Walk Fairview Day** on August 10th, which had over 75 attendees again this year! Youth interns shared their proposals for a safer, healthier, and more vibrant Fairview and lead a guided walk around the Fairview neighborhood with pop-up demonstrations describing their proposed built environment changes.



image: The 2024 cohort of Youth in Action interns and several local and state policymakers at the Walk Fairview Day event held in August.



image: In partnership with Orange Habitat and our local Carrboro and Chapel Hill bicycle coalitions, we hosted a Bike Rodeo in the Rogers Road neighborhood for their summer camp where youth bikes were tuned up, helmets were fitted, and bike drills were conducted to practice biking skills.



image: All Photo Voice pictures and beautification suggestions were compiled into a booklet and shared with the Fairview community and local policymakers!

COMMUNITY GARDENS PROGRAM

We work alongside community partners to grow and harvest healthy foods while promoting local economies and creating economic opportunities for small farmers.

47,667
POUNDS OF PRODUCE
HARVESTED

AT LEAST
1,328
COMMUNITY MEMBERS
HAD PRODUCE DELIVERED

353
VOLUNTEERS ACROSS 13
GARDEN PROGRAMS

FFORC successfully maintained 13 community gardens, with 8 participating in the new Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) process. This initiative increased engagement by offering new opportunities for collaboration, communication, and peer-learning. Gardens were able to connect with each other, fostering a sense of community and solidarity, especially during the off-season. Site visits provided a structured way to track progress, celebrate achievements, and encourage organic conversations. The year ended with a celebration where partners shared their progress, showcasing how their ideas had turned into tangible actions that benefited their communities.



image: Rows of Blue Hubbard squash of the Mineral Springs Community Garden (Ellerby, NC), which are distributed through the Mineral Springs' Improvement Council's food pantry.

PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING

In 2024, FFORC launched its first Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) initiative, empowering communities of color to decide how funds would be allocated for garden projects. The process included submitting video proposals, reviewing and ranking them, and providing feedback. The process encouraged creativity and community-driven efforts by offering flexible funding and led to increased garden partner involvement, strengthened peer networks, and enhanced community engagement. In seeking feedback throughout and after the process and utilizing it to improve future iterations, the granting process will continue to evolve, as we continue to center those invited to apply.

See the Success Story below to learn more.



image: Coharie Community Garden proposed to revitalize their garden area and medicine wheel in the PGM process. Pictured are the completed raised beds that can be easily accessed by tribal elders and soon-to-be painted medicine wheel that can continue to be used for many tribal ceremonies.

COMMUNITY-DESIGNED PROGRAMS

Community-designed programs are initiatives developed and shaped by community members to address their specific needs, challenges, and aspirations. These projects emphasize collaboration, inclusivity, and local knowledge, ensuring the solutions are relevant and sustainable. FFORC supports three: Striving to Thrive, Golden Journeys, and Women on the Move!

STRIVING TO THRIVE

Located in Duplin County, Diversity Nurtures Achievement (DNA) Community Youth Center is a safe haven for the greater Duplin County area, providing support for local youth, their families, and the greater community.

DNA continued to implement and expand its multiple approaches aimed at improving individual health and well-being, a community garden and an after-school educational support program, Striving to Thrive.

Over the summer, the program expanded to offer nutrition classes three times per week reaching 30 youth in the summer program. By the end of the year, the classes increased to five times per week and was extended to two new sites, reaching a total of 55 youth in afterschool programs across three locations.

Youth also had the opportunity to participate in a Photo Voice activity where participants were given disposable cameras and asked to capture images of things they cared about and love about participating in the DNA program. These photos captured photos of the farm animals they care for on site, their friends, their engagement in fun activities, and much more. Overall, youth participants noted how important DNA is to them because they have opportunity to enjoy fun activities and games, learn new things through these activities and experiences, and make a lot of friends along the way.



image: DNA Youth Participant, Kemani captions her Photo Voice photo the following: *"The chickens are eating and running around, and they are also nurturing baby chickens. I like animals, and they are fun. Others should know that they should like animals and take care of them. DNA gives me a chance to meet new people, and I learned about agriculture."*



image: DNA Youth Participant, Braylen captions his Photo Voice photo the following: *"The shed is important because it keeps our toys safe and in one place. It is also something my friends and I play with when we hide behind this shed during hide and seek. At DNA, I have learned I like my friends to be nice."*

COMMUNITY-DESIGNED PROGRAMS

GOLDEN JOURNEYS

Golden Journeys is a wellness program dedicated to providing nutrition and health education to older, mixed-income Black women in Warren County.

The program has successfully transitioned its programming from the Warren Library to a new community center, equipped with meeting rooms, a dance studio, a kitchen, and a garden. This all-in-one inclusive space has revolutionized the program by offering a variety of activity opportunities in a single location. Since moving to the new location, Golden Journeys has recruited 10 new participants (total of 20 regular participants & 8 in-person sessions) and is continually expanding its reach, making a positive impact on the community.



image: Golden Journeys participants gather at their new community meeting space, where they are learning how to nutritionally and physically manage their health and connecting to one another through reflection and sharing personal histories.

Golden Journeys participants remarked the following about the impact that the program has had on their life. >

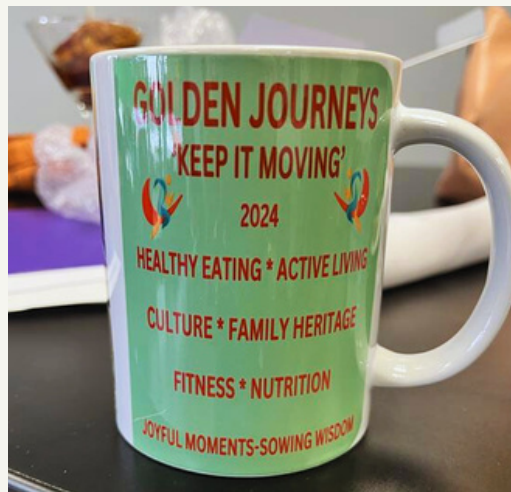


image: Golden Journeys participants were gifted this custom mug at their program celebration, as a reminder to “pour into themselves”.

Some of the topics covered this year included nutritional management of chronic diseases that are common in the older Black community, health benefits and other uses of local flora, sustainable gardening techniques that can be suitable for older populations, mindfulness activities, including nature walks, meditation, and reflections, and exploring local histories through their personal stories and genealogy.

“I find value in sharing life stories with this group.”

~ Golden Journeys participant

“[I am] Learning tools & techniques to feed my mind, body, and soul.”

~ Golden Journeys participant

COMMUNITY-DESIGNED PROGRAMS

PROGRAM 3

WOMEN ON THE MOVE

Women on the Move is a collaboration with Fairview Community Watch to offer physical activity opportunities and nutrition classes to women in the Fairview Community. The program continues to flourish in the Fairview community, with 29 women registered for the weekly physical activity sessions, and over the course of this year collectively contributed a total of 25 hours (~1,500 minutes) of physical activity.

Additionally, the Child Health Initiative (CHI) engaged about 12 children in preparing healthy snacks and participating in fun outdoor activities. This ensured that while adults enjoyed the exercise sessions, children were also learning about and tasting healthy snacks while staying active.



image: Youth readying themselves to prepare healthy snacks with CHI educators, an activity to engage the youth while their caretakers engage in the WOTM program.

1,500
MINUTES OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY



image: Fitness shoes given away at the Women on the Move & FleetFeet physical activity promotion event!

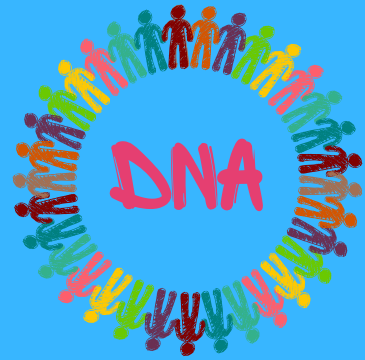
On September 6th, 2024, the Shoe Giveaway and Active Living Event drew about 72 attendees, marking a significant success for community engagement and healthy living initiatives. The event began with two exercise sessions led by local women, promoting physical activity and empowering participants with new routines and techniques. A generous shoe giveaway, in partnership with Fleet Feet, provided attendees with quality footwear to support their fitness journeys.



image: A Fairview community member trying a pair of shoes provided at the Shoe Giveaway and Active Living Event to find her perfect fit.

The program continues to foster a strong sense of community, encouraging healthy lifestyles and providing valuable resources to support ongoing physical activity!

NEW PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS



UNHEARD VOICES

Diversity Nurtures Achievement (DNA) and the Food, Fitness, and Opportunity Research Collaborative (FFORC) are working together to support foster youth in Duplin and Sampson County, NC.

Foster children are an often-overlooked population, lacking the same support as their peers, which affects their academic and personal success. Moreover, social services end abruptly when they turn 18. DNA Community Youth Center supports Duplin County youth with year-round afterschool and summer programs to help them succeed.

This intervention will engage youth aged 13-17 through group sessions, interactive modules on life skills and career planning, and off-site enrichment experiences, with evaluations to measure improvements in confidence, life skills, and preparedness for life after foster care. The aim of this project is to create a supportive space for children in foster care to get training and guidance in navigating the transition to adulthood, as well as to share their experiences and future goals.

Students were able to prioritize their interest in learning about the following program topics:

DAILY LIVING

SELF-CARE

RELATIONSHIPS &
COMMUNICATION

HOUSING, MONEY
MANAGEMENT, &
TRANSPORTATION

WORK & STUDY LIFE

CAREER & EDUCATION
PLANNING

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

NAVIGATING THE CHILD
WELFARE SYSTEM



“ENRICHMENT BEYOND THE CLASSROOM”

NEW PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS

WARREN COUNTY FARMERS MARKET



The Warren County Farmers Market (WCFM), held at the Warren County Health Department (544 W. Ridgeway St., Warrenton), features locally grown produce, locally raised meat, eggs, baked goods, plants, flowers, body care products, handmade crafts, and more!

FFORC partnered with the WCFM this spring to support their mission to expand its existing community farmer's market to include more local vendors and be more inclusive of a diverse audience by marketing their new Double Bucks program. Funds we used to purchase tokens, tote bags, signage, and other supporting marketing materials. Tamara, the Farmers Market Manager, has worked to make the market culturally relevant, centering educational activities (planting/nutrition), opportunities for movement and dance, and other social events that are engaging for individual and families of all ages. **"My favorite part is seeing the smiles on folks' faces and supporting habits that are beneficial to their health.** This was a space that people didn't used to feel comfortable visiting, but now we have families that come every weekend with their children and residents that express gratitude for providing those (SNAP-Ed/Double Bucks) benefits to buy more fresh food."



image: Warren County librarian reading a book to a group of children attending the market.

29 TOTAL MARKET DAYS IN 2024

245

AVERAGE NUMBER OF
MARKET VISITORS

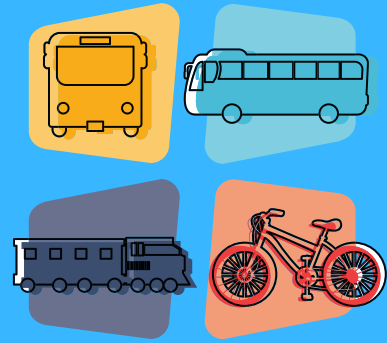
153

SENIORS & FAMILIES BENEFITED
FROM DOUBLE UP FOOD BUCKS
INCENTIVES



image: Holiday Market 2024 visitors walking & enjoying local vendors.

NEW PROJECTS AND PARTNERSHIPS



PUBLIC TRANSIT INITIATIVE

This project will encourage the use of alternate forms of transportation in communities in northern Chapel Hill, NC. The use of alternate transportation modes will facilitate opportunities for community members to more fully engage in civic life while also improving health outcomes via increasing physical activity and mental well-being.

In partnership with Habitat for Humanity of Orange County, the FFORC team received a 2-year grant to implement three sets of activities in up to five Habitat for Humanity communities in Orange County. The objective of these activities are to increase the number of trips taken using active transportation modes like biking, scooting, walking and taking public transit. These activities include travel training to help people plan commuting routes without using a car, development of a social marketing campaign to promote use of public transit and bike events to facilitate bike riding. To date, we have hired five community liaisons from the community, procured bikes for all of them and developed data Collection methods to evaluate the success of these activities. We are looking forward to continuing this community work in 2025!

Project Funder: Central Pines Regional Council

Current Partners: Habitat for Humanity of Orange County, Rogers-Eubanks Neighborhood Association, Chapel Hill Transit, Triangle Bikeworks, Fairview Community Watch ... and more to come!



images: Emily Powell, Engagement Director with Chapel Hill Transit, led a Transit 101 training for FFORC team members and staff from Habitat for Humanity of OC in preparation for working with Weavers Grove homeowners on building public transit skills, including reading a paper bus map and using a phone app.

SUCCESS STORIES

GROWING TOGETHER: FFORC'S FIRST PARTICIPATORY GRANTMAKING JOURNEY

In 2024, FFORC launched its first Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) initiative, empowering eight community gardens across North Carolina to allocate funds based on their needs. This approach, embedded within FFORC's Community Garden (CG) program, fostered equity, creativity, and community-driven decision-making.

Through a tiered funding system and network voting, partners submitted proposals via photos, videos, or presentations, engaged in peer review, and ranked projects. Garden partners' votes carried the most weight, ensuring decisions prioritized community needs. Once awarded, partners implemented their projects with FFORC's ongoing support.

Key outcomes included **financial savings**, **increased nutrition knowledge**, and **stronger community ties**. Engagement and communication significantly improved, and partners developed a deep **sense of solidarity**. Lessons learned highlighted the importance of flexible funding, cultural and linguistic support, and reducing administrative burdens.

Moving forward, FFORC aims to further center community voices by refining the voting structure, enhancing mentorship, and fostering peer learning. The initiative concluded with a celebratory gathering, reinforcing the program's success. With these learnings, FFORC is excited to refine and expand the PGM model in 2025, continuing its commitment to community-led solutions and food security.

PGM Partner Update!

Coharie Community Garden



Picture: Freshly harvested potatoes! Coharie hosted a community potato dig event in June.

PGM Partner Update!

Diversity Nurtures Achievement (DNA)



Picture: Seed sprouts of various vegetables sprouted and grown by campers. They will be able to take these home to start their home garden!

PGM Partner Update!

Entity Enterprise



Picture: Bush beans being grown by Camp Humanity, a local garden partnering with Entity Enterprise.

PGM Partner Update!

Fairview Community Garden



Picture: Fairview Community Garden volunteers harvesting various vegetables.

PGM Partner Update!

Hoke County Health Department Community Garden



Picture: New raised beds installed this year at the Hoke Co. Health Department growing cucumbers, squash, tomatoes, and more!

PGM Partner Update!

Little Bud Thorbs (LBT)



Picture: Rows of growing produce and herbs at the LBT farm.

PGM Partner Update!

Mineral Springs Community Garden



"My goal is to transform the garden." Picture: Rows being prepared for fall crops.

PGM Partner Update!

Oak Chapel AME Community Garden



Picture: Oak Chapel AME Church, a historical site, on the left, and their community garden with raised beds and greenhouse on the right.

images: FFORC staff visited each PGM Partner throughout the summer and then provided project updates on the progress each partner had made. These informational updates were provided to all partners via email and on FFORC social media!

SUCCESS STORIES

NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH FAMILIES & COMMUNITIES RISING, INC.

In Fiscal Year 2024, we partnered with Families and Communities Rising, Inc. (FCR) through the Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina to bring nutrition education to Head Start classrooms in Orange County, NC. FCR, which serves preschool children from families experiencing low income, sought a program similar to the one offered by the DINE team in Durham.

We implemented the Grow It, Try It, Like It! curriculum, engaging 46 preschoolers (ages 3-5) across three classrooms. From October 2023 to April 2024, students participated in hands-on activities, taste tests, and discussions about nutrition. Each three-week series highlighted a seasonal food—sweet potatoes, spinach, and strawberries—introducing them in raw form before pairing them with other ingredients. Most students had never tried the featured foods, but by the end, excited hands shot up when asked if they'd eat them at home.

Teachers were thrilled to see even picky eaters engage. Students learned in a fun, low-pressure environment, and families received take-home recipes to continue learning at home. Due to the program's success, we've been invited to continue at FCR locations in FY25, strengthening our impact on early childhood nutrition.



image: Cover of the evidence-based nutrition education curriculum, Grow It, Try It, Like It!



image: Head Start student trying spinach for the first time!

LEADERSHIP

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ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS

So many wonderful things happened this year and we have so little room to fit it all into one report! Here are a few more visual highlights from our work in 2024.



image: The 2024 inaugural Participatory Grantmaking (PGM) process concluded with a celebratory gathering on October 18, where we invited the first cohort of garden partners to share and celebrate this year's program successes.



image: Our team member Reverend Bill Kearney and our partner, Tamara, from the Warren County Farmers Market, were featured on CBS17 My Carolina segment discussing the importance of farmers markets and how to make them more accessible to everyone by providing SNAP EBT and Double Up Bucks food assistance vouchers!



image: Our colleague Seth, who studies highway safety, taught our Fairview Youth In Action interns how to identify barriers to active living and types of traffic-calming elements to allow for safer biking and walking.