

FFORC 2021 Year in Review

Letter from Molly

I'm sure many of us didn't anticipate that we'd be living through another year with this pandemic. At FFORC, we are proud to say that despite (or maybe because of) this tumultuous time we have been able to grow in strength, connectedness and partnership and we are richer because of this. Below, we provide some highlights of our work during 2021. We were able to figure out how to safely do some activities in person while also getting better and better at connecting virtually. The first story we share, from our Communities on the Move partnered study, will give readers an idea of how we were able to overcome pandemic restrictions to remove barriers to physical activity. The second story illustrates how we were able to adapt our, usually in-person, community garden trainings for a virtual venue. Be sure to check out the fabulous film created by two of our students, which documents FFORC's history of partnership on community gardens. Our Carolina Hunger Initiative colleagues also share a story of their good work to address gaps in childhood food insecurity during the pandemic. We are proud to provide brief updates on all our projects and highlight just a few of our community partners. We've had several new faces at FFORC. You can learn more about them below.

Rachel Cominsky is the new Communications Strategist & Program Manager for the FFORC team. She works across all programs to strategize, create, and manage communication and share information in easy to understand and engaging ways. She received her MPH from UNC Chapel Hill and her BSPH at Tulane University.

Nayeli Duckworth is a junior biology and public health-nutrition major with a chemistry minor at the Gillings School of Global Public Health. She is working on the Warren County-Colonial Lodge collaborative project. She is passionate about nutrition equity and food access in underserved communities and hopes to continue this work after graduation.

Ivonne Headley is a Gillings Merit Scholar and second-year student in the master's in public health nutrition program with Registered Dietitian training. At the Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, Ivonne is the SNAP-ED Toolkit Coordinator. She plans to pursue a PhD in Population Health Sciences following her master's degree and hopes to keep people and communities at the center of her work.

Shamiso Kodzai is a Nutrition Health and Society major at Gillings School of Global Public Health and is working on the Community Storytelling project in Duplin County with Diversity Nurtures Achievement. She also helps support the FFORC social media accounts.

Most of all, we want to thank our long-term and newer partners for sticking with us.

News



Walk Fairview Day

Walking around the neighborhood is a great way to add physical activity to your day and improve your health, but what if there are barriers in your environment to physical activity? The built environment, which includes sidewalks, streetlights, traffic signs and crosswalks, can promote or discourage physical activity in a neighborhood. In the Fairview Community in Hillsborough, residents are limited by a lack of sidewalks along busy roadways, crosswalks and traffic signs, shelters and benches at bus stops and clear pathways connecting community points of interest.

In partnership with [Habitat for Humanity Orange County](#) and the Fairview Community Watch, FFORC team member Judit Alvarado assisted a group of 6 young adults in identifying barriers to walkability in their community through walking audits and a *'mapping my community'* activity, a tool to engage the youth in community planning. With assistance from [Mobycon](#), a Dutch inspired mobility firm from Durham, the youth learned and implemented a tactical urbanism strategy to identify low-cost, temporary solutions that highlighted ways walkability could be improved and more inclusive. Strategies included creating signs indicating distances from community landmarks, temporary road signs indicating where crosswalks and sidewalks should be installed, make-shift bike racks in the community park, rest stations to provide shade for residents and a place to sit for residents to wait for the bus and chalking sidewalks with motivational messages and images.



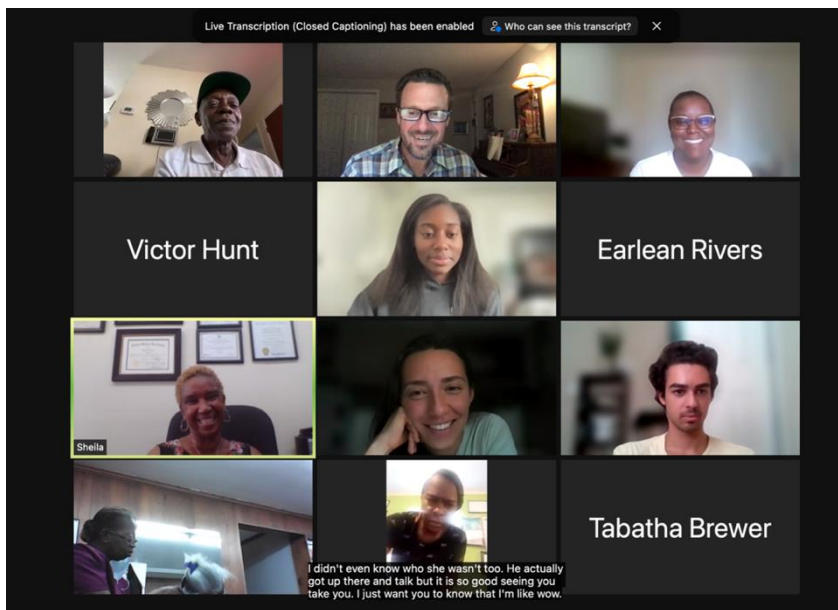


The youth then invited community members and local and county policymakers to a culminating Walk Fairview Day event on September 18, 2021. They led 44 participants on either a 1 mile or 2 mile walk through the community where they discussed their tactical urbanism approach, pointed out barriers and community landmarks including the park and community garden, and answered questions. Policy makers in attendance were exposed to the barriers firsthand and were encouraged by the youth to invest in their community.

As a result of this event, policymakers expressed their desire to implement permanent fixtures like sidewalks, trails, and bike racks in the Fairview community. Conversations around built environment change in the Fairview community have continued since the event. In 2022, we are excited to continue

building strong relationships for meaningful impact with the youth and in the Fairview community.

Community Garden Managers Sustainability Training



Community Gardens serve as a tool to improve food insecurity and nutrition education as well as strengthening community relationships. These communal spaces have been especially important during the COVID pandemic, to allow an opportunity for connection and provide an activity that can be meditative and restorative.

FFORC Project Manager Brett Sheppard organized a series of 4 Sustainability Trainings for community garden leadership

across 9 counties to elaborate on management skills and expose the leaders to funding and support opportunities. Our community garden partner leaders take on enormous responsibility and provide an opportunity for community members to become empowered through self-sustainable gardening and nutrition skills. Previously, the sustainability training was hosted in person. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this year's training had to be adapted to a virtual space and was held over Zoom.

It was important to make the training engaging and encourage collaboration, as it is one of the few opportunities garden leaders have to connect with each other and share best practices. To make the training engaging, it was separated into 4 different sessions during the months of September and October. The sessions included a presentation by AmeriCorps program officers about the myriad opportunities they offer to support community initiatives through service-based programming, a workshop on developing a mission statement hosted by Alyssa McKim of NC A&T University, an orientation on Goal Setting and Sustainability Planning, and the premiere of our Community Garden Sustainability Video featuring many of the remarkable community garden managers. The video can be viewed [here](#). Attendees included 13 community garden leaders in addition to guest speakers. Each community garden leader also developed one sustainability goal for Fiscal Year 2022 to work towards with the support of the UNC-CH SNAP-Ed team.

Carolina Hunger Initiative



Carolina Hunger Initiative (CHI) is continuing to find new ways to expand access to good nutrition in North Carolina, despite the challenges of the pandemic. Since March 2020, when schools first closed because of COVID-19, CHI and its partner program No Kid Hungry NC have distributed more than \$1.5 million in grant funding to schools and community organizations across North Carolina that are providing healthy meals to kids at no

cost. These dollars have helped fund a range of needs, from vehicles that transport meals, to equipment, to staffing support.

CHI kicked off 2021 by hosting its first ever virtual version of the NC Child Hunger Leaders Conference. More than 900 attendees joined for two days of motivational speakers, special performances, and stories of overcoming emergency conditions to make sure children had food. CHI also spent 2021 partnering with the NC Department of Public Instruction's (NCDPI) School Nutrition Services team to support and evaluate the Summer Nutrition Program statewide, with a focused approach in 10 rural counties. This project will expand in summer 2022. And finally, CHI's popular Cooking Matters series of nutrition education classes have moved



online, including a new partnership with the NC Virtual Public School to reach kids learning remotely. Learn more about our work and what we have planned for 2022 at CarolinaHungerInitiative.org.



Community Partner Highlight

As a team, we are fortunate to work with so many wonderful organizations across the state. We asked two of our community partners to share a little about their programs, successes, challenges, and advice! You can use our new [Community Partners](#) portal on the FFORC website to connect with more of our community partners and learn more.

Diversity Nurtures Achievement

Picture of Earlean and DNA picture

Located in Duplin County, DNA provides focused learning opportunities, including summer camp and after school support. Despite the challenges the pandemic has brought, they have been able to pivot their programming to continue providing year-round support through their community garden, agricultural programming, and academic enrichment. We talked to Earlean Rivers, Executive Director of DNA, who shared a little about her year. Learn more about DNA [here](#).

What have been your greatest successes and challenges in 2021?

The greatest successes in 2021 were that we were able to continue focusing on the most immediate needs for our children: ongoing education access, nutrition, and social support. The main challenge was not knowing how the youth would adjust after remote learning for a school year.

What advice do you have for other people doing similar work?

While COVID could never be mistaken for a blessing, it was a wakeup call to come together for our children and our community. That's what a village does. We need to lift each other up when there are obstacles too large for one of us.

What are you looking forward to in 2022?

In 2022 we are looking forward to continuing to provide support to our children: our future leaders who will confidently rise to every occasion wherever they may go. DNA is

also looking forward to providing resources and possible solutions to issues that affect our community.

Pier View's Golden Journeys Healthy Eating Active Living (H.E.A.L.) and the Green Duke Community Garden Partnership

During 2021 Pier View and Green Duke Community Gardens embraced challenges and continued developing their partnership in Warren County. Pier View and Green Duke worked in tandem to develop and deliver activities and distribute produce with a focus on helping to alleviate the stemming tide of frustration, anxiety, fears, and discomfort brought on by the pandemic and its circumstances. Jane Ball-Groom at Pier View and Victor Hunt at Green Duke shared their year with us. Read the more about their partnership [here](#).

What have been your greatest successes and challenges in 2021?

The greatest challenges have been motivating community members to move from isolation to inclusion; creating safe spaces; meeting rising costs; finding new recruits; and developing safe, effective, and informative venue platforms. In 2021, our success has been working together and developing strategies for programs like THE GREEN WALK – Culture and Collards. Under adverse conditions our community garden cultivated, seeded, and harvested leafy green vegetables, delivered, and provided access to areas and residents in need, and helping to overcome food insecurity. The Pier View H.E.A.L. program delivered nine events focusing on engaging, resetting, and building resilience and hope in times of hardship, culminating in the September 2021 'Gift of Giving' where 45 self-care bags were delivered to forty-five residents in an affordable housing community.

What advice do you have for other people doing similar work?

It's important to become involved with an organization already engaged in foods, wellness, healthy eating active living related programs. Understand the issues and educate yourself on new and working trends. Be adaptable to changing environments and social narratives. Depending on your career status, make sure you can allot time needed to get the job done. Organize a core community group to serve as branches to the greater community, especially in rural, underserved, densely populated areas. Know and be able to express the skills you have to offer to others. Overall, the priceless gift of this work is bringing you – your hearts, humor, empathy, and enthusiasm to the work. Know and care about people, stay aware of your community's needs, and think outside the box!

What are you looking forward to in 2022?

During 2021 and the hard and sobering lessons of 2020 there is a critical need to maintain the human chain of goodness and serving community. Within this context, we look forward to the continued growth of the Green Duke Community Garden and Pier View' H.E.A.L. activities, continuing to grow, build capacity and sustainability thereby enabling greater opportunities for people to live healthy and active lifestyles. We are also looking forward to growing the Green Walk!

2021 Snapshot

SNAP-Ed Toolkit

We conducted a user survey to gather insights on how we might redesign the Training section of the Toolkit to fit users' needs. We launched a new section with a search feature to make finding the right training easier for you! In addition to organizing and tagging all trainings, our team rewrote descriptions to help users find relevant content. Check it out [here!](#)

Design Thinking for SNAP-Ed

In 2021, we wrapped up our work with Cooking Matters and nearly 60 stakeholders, including people who are SNAP eligible, to develop three intervention models to engage caregivers of young children in grocery stores, early childhood education centers, and healthcare offices. Our team is looking forward to sharing our design thinking knowledge by helping other SNAP-Ed Implementing Agencies incorporate design thinking in their plans! Learn more about our new [fee-for-service opportunity](#) on our website.

WAGE\$

The WAGE\$ study moved into its fourth year of follow up appointments with people earning low wages in Raleigh, NC. The WAGE\$ team successfully completed virtual appointments with 329 participants, 66.8% of the people who originally enrolled in the study in 2018. The study aims to evaluate how increasing the minimum wage affects the health and wellness of low wage workers. Updates on the WAGE\$ study as we move into the 5th year can be found on our [project dashboard](#).

Student Basic Needs

We presented our work on our [Student Basic Needs Project](#) in 2021 at the NIH Food Insecurity, Neighborhood Food Environment and Nutrition Health Disparities Conference. This project provided a space for students struggling to meet basic needs to share their stories and gathered data on how colleges across NC are addressing food insecurity on their campuses.

Community Garden Video

In 2021, FFORC maintained and supported 15 community gardens in nine counties that provided 42,819 pounds of fresh fruits and vegetables to 2,479 people who are SNAP eligible. In addition to the Community Garden Manager trainings, our team also created and premiered a Community Garden Sustainability Video. Take an inside look at the community gardens that partner with FFORC across North Carolina as our partners share a little about their gardens, successes, challenges, and goals in this video [here](#).

Food Councils

In 2021, the Warren County Food Council continued their work supporting local farmers and community gardens and improving food access. The Orange County Food Council began working with community experts to conduct a food access evaluation to inform county policymakers on what is and is not working in our county food system and how marginalized communities have been impacted by money and policy decisions. Both food councils will be continuing their work into 2022.

Needs Assessment

In 2021, we conducted an organizational survey and key informant interviews as part of our needs assessment process to understand current programs and services offered in counties and explore potential partnerships with community-based organizations. The organizational survey received a 33.7% response rate, and organizations expressed the most need for services addressing healthy food access, financial literacy and food budgeting and community gardens while some barriers were funding and staff or volunteer capacity. We are looking forward to continuing our needs assessment in 2022 and sharing out results!

A Look Into 2022

As we move into 2022, we are looking forward to all the new programs, events, and opportunities that the year brings. Take a look at some upcoming events and stay tuned to our FFORC social media accounts to learn more!

Warren County 40th Anniversary of Environmental Justice Movement

September 2022 marks the 40th anniversary of the 1982 PBC toxic landfill protests and the birth of the environmental justice movement in Warren County. To commemorate the PCB protests, The Warren County Environmental Action Team and community members will host a series of events and plans throughout the year. They will also be recording and sharing the stories and reflections of those who participated in the protests. FFORC team member Reverend William Kearney coordinates the Warren County Environmental Action Team and is working with community leaders and other partners to organize a remarkable year of commemoration and celebration.

2022 NC Child Hunger Leaders Conference

This year marks the 11th annual NC Child Hunger Leaders Conference, a day of celebration and inspiration for anyone working in our state to make sure kids have access to healthy food. The conference, which will be held virtually for the second time, features messages from statewide leaders, stories from people working on the ground, local entertainers, and moments of fun and reflection. This year's agenda will also highlight more approaches to equity, nutrition education, and advocacy opportunities.

The banner features a blue header with the text "NC Child Hunger Leaders Conference" in white. Below the header, it states "11th Annual Day of Celebration and Inspiration • Thursday, February 17, 2022" and "FREE and ONLINE • Register at CarolinaHungerInitiative.org/Register". The central part of the banner contains three circular images: a young boy writing, a girl eating a red apple, and a woman in a kitchen. Below the images, the theme is "This year's theme: CELEBRATE SILVER LININGS!" followed by the subtitle "Stories of hope, innovation, and perseverance that have emerged from a challenging year of making sure kids have the healthy food they need." in a smaller font.

NC Child Hunger Leaders Conference

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This year's theme: **CELEBRATE SILVER LININGS!**
Stories of hope, innovation, and perseverance that have emerged from a challenging year of making sure kids have the healthy food they need.

The all-day conference takes place Thursday, Feb. 17, 2022, and is FREE and ONLINE, so don't hesitate to register and join us for the day of fun — or, drop in for parts when you can! Sign up today at CarolinaHungerInitiative.org/Register.

Community Storytelling Initiative

The FFORC team has been working to recognize the value of multiple forms of communication and dissemination to community partners that extend beyond the written word. One of our team approaches has been to listen to community stories through interviews and informal conversations which are being interpreted into a variety of products such as video, social media, and photo essays by our research assistants with the guidance and expertise of our community partners. FFORC research assistants collaborating with partners in Warren, Orange and Duplin County and we are excited to share these projects in 2022!

New Projects

Fairview Women on the Move

In 2022, a group of women in the Fairview community in Hillsborough will come together to learn more about nutrition education and participate in physical activity together, along with their children. The group will partner with Cooperative Extension, Children's Hunger Initiative, and FFORC team members for cooking demonstrations, Zumba, and yoga classes, among other physical activities.

DNA Striving to Thrive Program

Diversity Nurtures Achievement in Duplin County will focus on creating better informed youth through the Choose Health: Food, Fun, and Fitness program. This program encourages youth to eat healthy and increase active play through experiential learning activities. We are excited to see this program realized in the new year!

Pier View Golden Journeys Program

This group is comprised of senior members of the Warrenton community and will apply the cultural relevance of African Americans on nutrition by focusing on making traditional African American meals healthier. The group will focus on topics such as healthier options to seasonings such as salt, portion control, meal planning, among others.

Team Check In

FFORC Community Advisory Board

Lee Albritton
Jane Ball-Groom
Joseph Peele
Jenny Quesenberry
Earlean Rivers
Claudia Yerena

Staff

Dr. Molly De Marco, Research Scientist
Brett Sheppard, Project Director
Claire Sadeghzadeh, Program Manager and Evaluation Specialist
Tiki Windley, Project Manager
Seth LaJeunesse, Project Manager
Rachel Cominsky, Communication Strategist and Project Manager
Judit Alvarado, Field Coordinator
Reverend Bill Kearney, Field Coordinator
Lindy Draeger, Research Specialist
Lou Anne Crumpler, Director, Carolina Hunger Initiative
Tamara Baker, Project and Communications Director, Carolina Hunger Initiative
Helen Roberts, Program Manager, CHI/NKH NC
Andrew Harrell, Communications and Program Manager, CHI/NKH NC
Jessica Soldavini, Research Specialist, CHI/NKH NC
Tracy Dearth-Wesley, Research Specialist

Students

BSPH/undergrad

- Emile Charles, UNC
- Arjun Guidroz, UNC
- Taylor Williams, UNC
- Nayeli Duckworth, UNC

- Tatum Shamiso Kodzai, UNC
- Naira Ikram, Duke

MPH

- Isabel Lu, UNC
- Ivonne Headley, UNC

PhD

- Ximena Perez-Velasco, UNC

Alumni

Design Thinking for SNAP-Ed RAs

- Jared Bishop, MPH
- Eduardo Hernandez, MPH
- Lindsay Guge Cozon, MSW

WAGE\$ Data Collectors

- Juhi Chinthapatla
- Yuridiana Alston
- Tehya Drummond