

NC RURAL CENTER 2023 SUMMER ROAD TRIP



The NC Rural Center hosted our annual Rural Summit in March 2023, and more than 600 participants joined our staff and board to network and learn about [Forces Driving Change in Rural North Carolina](#) and hopeful solutions to these influences and challenges. The Center decided it was key to engage directly with the people we serve in their home communities and following the Summit, we embarked on the Summer Road Trip. We are grateful for the participation in each of the 12 communities we visited and are excited to share our findings and more in this report.

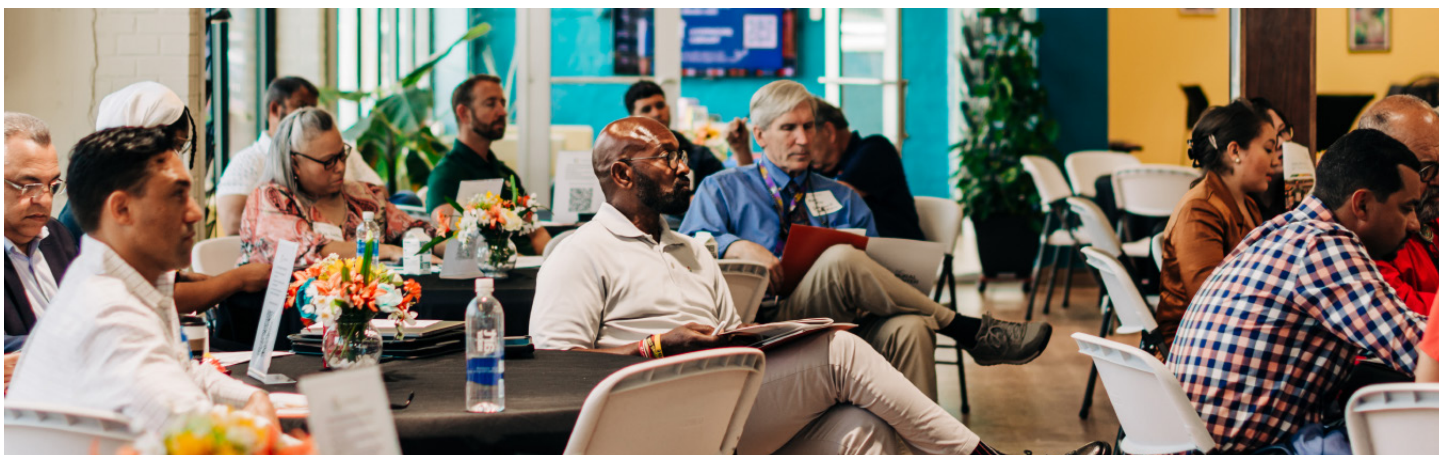
We set three goals for our 2023 Summer Road Trip: 1) To engage with our partners and learn about how we can best collaborate with them; 2) To share research and new initiatives from the NC Rural Center; 3) To hear from our partners about successful projects in their communities.



We achieved each of these goals.

1. More than 350 people - including elected officials, government staff, nonprofit leaders and dedicated volunteers - participated in the Summer Road Trip. The most common suggestions for how the NC Rural Center can partner included:
- Convening rural people and communities to facilitate discussion
 - Sharing information about our programmatic work, relevant data and research for rural communities, and successful strategies rural communities have employed
 - Supporting advocacy efforts for rural North Carolina
 - Identifying and supporting grant applications





2. Program participants verified that the *Forces Driving Change in Rural North Carolina* research accurately reported the major influences in the state. And while the Rural Center did not rank the drivers by order of importance, our partners had clear ideas about what they considered the biggest issues in rural North Carolina. These are:

- Rural healthcare (Driver 2)
- Infrastructure (Driver 5)
- Sustainable leadership (Driver 4)
- Postsecondary education (Driver 1)

3. We heard about many of the successful strategies and programs in place in rural North Carolina. This report highlights several of these notable strategies and community success stories, but there are many more that could be shared to illustrate how the people of rural North Carolina are meeting the challenges they face.





Moving Forward

The Rural Center will use this feedback to refine our work and programs. We have already taken some specific steps that align with what we heard during our tour.

We have been longtime advocates of the coming Medicaid expansion and will closely monitor the implementation scheduled to start in December 2023.

We have expanded our collaborative broadband work into 18 western North Carolina counties and support a number of efforts to bring broadband to rural communities.

We have made a renewed commitment to increasing capacity for our two rural leadership training programs and are updating our curriculum.

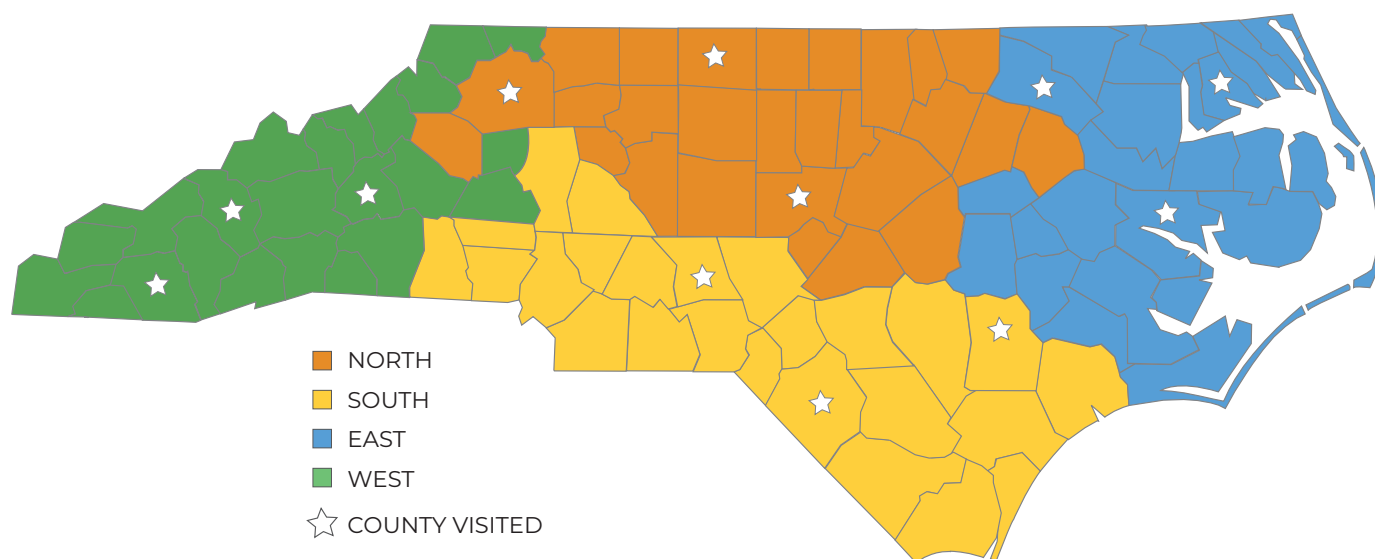
We continue to support and partner with community colleges and rural universities when there is opportunity.

The Rural Center commits to convening our partners in a variety of ways and places to discuss common concerns and advocating for solutions. This includes sharing success stories, grant opportunities, and information about our own programs and how to engage.

CONVENINGS

Meeting locations were selected to ensure geographic diversity and to capture unique strategies from different regions. The map below shows the regions and the three locations we visited within each region. We visited the Southern Region (gold) in May; the Eastern Region (blue) in June; the Northern Region (orange) in July; and the Western Region (green) in August.

FIGURE 1. RURAL ROAD TRIP REGIONS AND COUNTIES VISITED

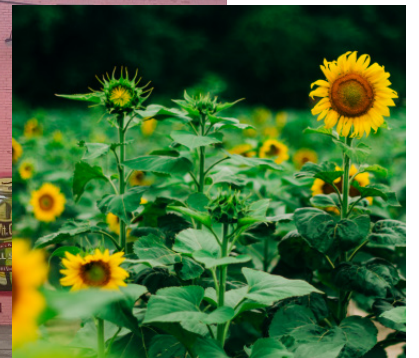
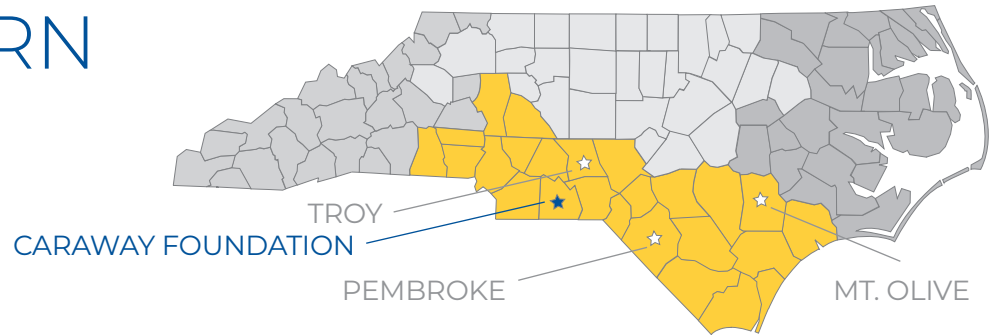


During these sessions, NC Rural Center staff highlighted research from the Rural Center that identified eight major drivers of change affecting rural areas in North Carolina:

1. Education for Tomorrow's Labor Market
2. Rural Healthcare Inequities and Social Determinants of Health
3. A Rural North Carolina for Everyone
4. Sustainable Leadership and Community Collaboration
5. Safe, Modern, Affordable Infrastructure
6. Weather and Climate Resiliency
7. Small Business Support
8. Long-Term Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Rural People and Places

Following the presentations, participants gathered in small groups to discuss the Drivers and the role of the Rural Center, and to share existing successful strategies in their communities to address them. We published one success story from each of our four regions in this report.

SOUTHERN REGION





SUCCESS STORY

THE CARAWAY FOUNDATION

Angela Caraway started her foundation in Anson County in 2007 by distributing backpacks to kids in need.

Since then, she has expanded the Caraway Foundation beyond Anson County and beyond that first mission.

The foundation distributed 1.5 million pounds of food during the COVID pandemic, has provided more than 2,500 refurbished, low-cost computers to families with school-aged children, developed a male-mentoring program, and also supports cancer patients, survivors, and their families.

She was recognized in March as the NC Rural Center 2023 Community Advocate of the Year and accepted the award in Troy during our Summer Road Trip. She later went on to graduate from the Rural Center's Homegrown Leader program, using the opportunity to expand her knowledge and her network.

"This work is bigger than me," she said, "and to be recognized for it puts more fire under me to keep doing God's work and supporting all citizens in Anson County and beyond."

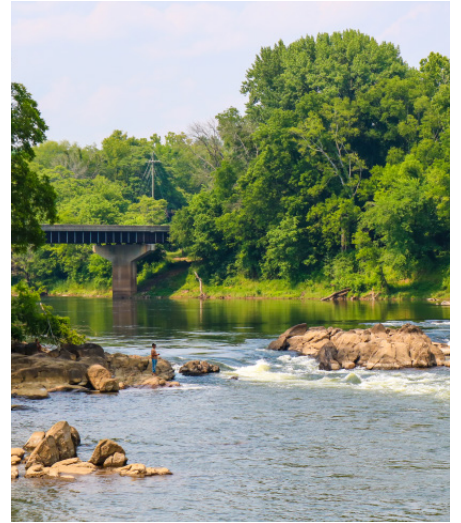
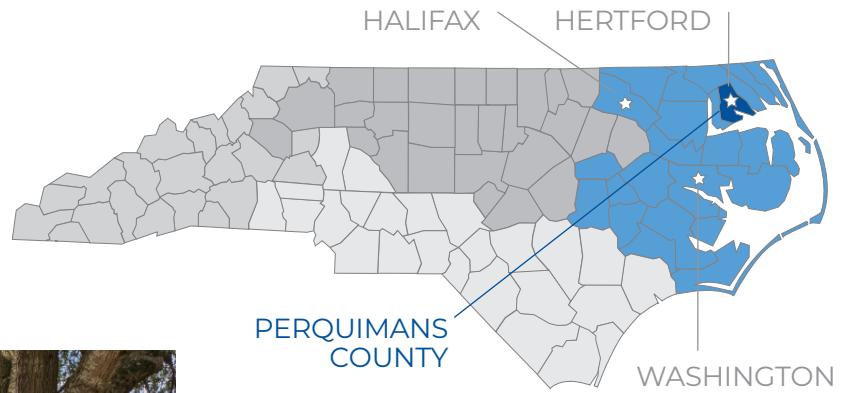


Angela Caraway (r)

"This work is bigger than me and to be recognized for it puts more fire under me to keep doing God's work and supporting all citizens in Anson County and beyond."

- ANGELA CARAWAY, Caraway Foundation founder/executive director

EASTERN REGION





Shown helping celebrate the grant award are (l-r) Shavonna Boone, ECU Health Chowan Hospital community health improvement coordinator; Brian White, ECU Health Chowan Hospital director of strategic operations; Brian Harvill, ECU Health Chowan Hospital president; Jonathan Nixon, Perquimans County emergency services director; and Bethany Buttram, Perquimans County emergency services Mobile Integrated Health Program coordinator.

SUCCESS STORY

PERQUIMANS COUNTY MOBILE INTEGRATED HEALTHCARE PROGRAM

Perquimans County doesn't have a hospital or an urgent care service. There are just two primary care offices to serve a population of about 13,000 and no place that provides in-person treatment for mental health or substance abuse disorders.

Much of that's not uncommon in rural North Carolina, but Perquimans County has developed a possible solution that relies on providers already living in the community.

In August, the Perquimans County Mobile Integrated Healthcare Program officially began enrolling patients. County Emergency Medical Services and Sentara Albemarle Medical Center refer patients to the service when they have an unmet health need, said Jonathan A. Nixon, director of Perquimans County Emergency Services. A local paramedic visits each enrolled patient for a physical exam and a home safety inspection. The paramedic also sets up a care plan and follows up on the patient for three to six months to monitor progress toward the plan.

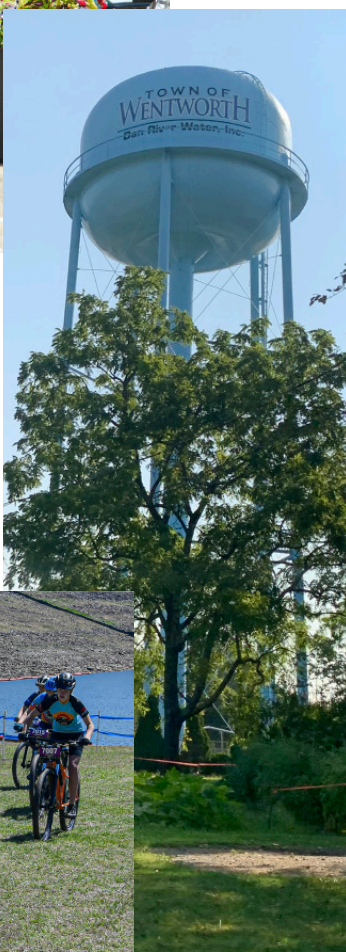
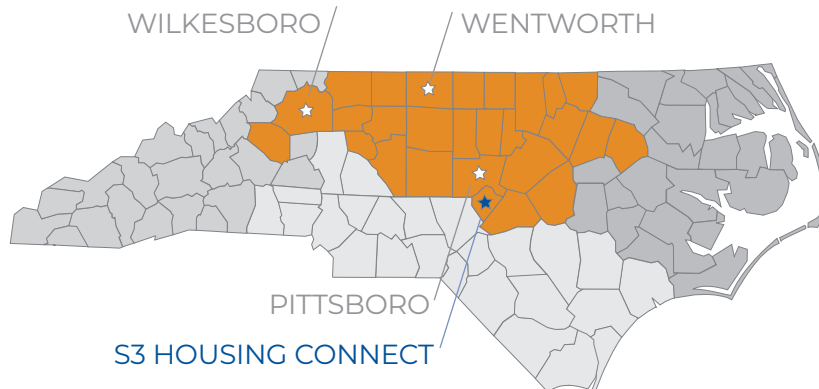
A \$335,000 grant from ECU Health Chowan Hospital allowed the program to buy equipment and to hire a full-time provider to oversee the initiative. That hospital will also eventually make referrals to the program, Nixon said.

"I'm excited about the work ... in our community and appreciate the partnership with ECU Health in making this a reality," Nixon said in July just before enrollment began. "The success of this program will include the support of our community partners working together to continue improving healthcare in Perquimans County."

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- JONATHAN NIXON, Perquimans County emergency services director

NORTHERN REGION





SUCCESS STORY

S3 HOUSING CONNECT

S3 Housing Connect, a homelessness task force based in Lee County, has built a community-wide effort to serve people who are without homes or who are in transition. The group began meeting in 2017 after 22 people were found living in an uninhabitable building.

S3 now partners in a low-barrier shelter program, an extreme weather shelter program and helps provide free medical service to people experiencing homelessness. The organization also works with nonprofits, landlords and other agencies to provide referrals, resources and education about affordable housing and homelessness.

S3 also coordinates a federally required annual point-in-time (PIT) count in January of people experiencing homelessness. On that night, volunteers don't just roam the streets. They also pack bags with donated blankets, gloves, hats, scarves, socks, canned food, and other items that they give to the people they find.

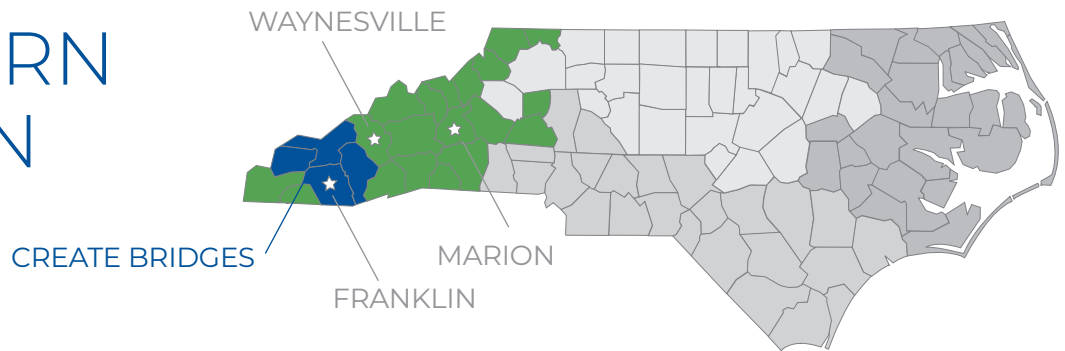
And while the numbers from that count are higher in Lee County than they are in neighboring counties, Kendra Martin, a co-chair of the Coordination, Outreach, Resources, and Engagement Committee for S3, says she believes her group produces a more accurate count since many rural communities don't have a focused task force like Lee. An estimated 157 people are experiencing homelessness in Lee County, according to the most recent data.

"Because S3 is a collaborative group, many of its service providers have formed relationships with people they encounter on PIT night, so there is a certain level of trust on the part of those being counted," Martin said. "And we are blessed in Lee County to have many community volunteers who respond to S3's call."

"We are blessed in Lee County to have many community volunteers who respond to S3's call."

- KENDRA MARTIN, a co-chair of the Coordination, Outreach, Resources, and Engagement Committee for S3

WESTERN REGION





SUCCESS STORY

CREATE BRIDGES

Six months after the COVID pandemic shut down huge swaths of the traditional economy and started to reshape how people would do business, CREATE BRIDGES was founded to strengthen the retail, tourism, hospitality and entertainment sectors in Western North Carolina.

“These sectors, which were particularly hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic, provide jobs and business opportunities that frequently boost rural economies,” said Becky Bowen, the program manager for NC Cooperative Extension who helps oversee Create BRIDGES. “Planning and training focused on these sectors is often neglected or underemphasized despite a need to strengthen it. As a result, small and large businesses alike face high worker turnover rates and a dwindling pool of ... workers.”

CREATE BRIDGES was originally one of three pilot programs in the nation funded by Wal-Mart through the Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University. Three years later, it has won broad support with programs that have drawn hundreds of people.

So far that work has included training to help employers create better workplaces for potential employees, soft-skill training for employees, an engagement survey, a secret shopper program, marketing videos, and a workforce conference.

CREATE BRIDGES partners with the N.C. Cooperative Extension and a number of other state programs and offices. The Southwest Commission has agreed to help fund the program when its original grant expires so its focused work can continue.

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- BECKY BOWEN, Program Manager ANR/CRD NC State Extension, NC State University



Thank you to the
photographers whose
work appears in this
report:

Hannah Beal, Halifax County

Brandon Brown,
Wilkes County

Erin Henson, Macon County

Samantha Lamonds,
Montgomery County

Lori Yerry, Robeson County

Caitlin VanHorn,
Perquimans County



