

News & Updates

SEPTEMBER | 2025

Valdese Public Housing Hosts School Supply Giveaway



A Heartwarming Community Collaboration

Families at Western Piedmont Council of Governments' Valdese Public Housing (WPCOG - VPH) were the grateful recipients of a generous back-to-school donation, thanks to a community service initiative led by the Valdese Elementary feeder pattern—including Drexel Elementary, Heritage Middle School, Hallyburton Academy, and Draughn High School. During their summer leadership institute, school staff were challenged to make a difference in their community. Rising to the occasion, they collected and donated new backpacks and school supplies to support VPH families for the 2025–2026 school year.

Supplies were delivered to the VPH office, and staff reached out to families with school-aged children to ensure everyone could participate. On Tuesday, August 5, the Falls Road Terrace Community Room was transformed into a supply station where children selected items from their school lists—just in time for the first day of school on August 25.

Impact at a Glance:

- 40 children benefited from the giveaway
- Families expressed deep gratitude for the support
- Smiles and excitement filled the room as kids prepared for the new school year

“It was such a joy to see the kids so eager to be ready for school this year,” said Peggy Silver, VPH Administrative Assistant. “I was surprised and touched when I got the call asking us to be part of this effort.”

This initiative provided more than just supplies—it offered encouragement, care, and a sense of community. The VPH team is thankful for the partnership and looks forward to continuing to support their families.

For more information, contact:

Peggy Silver

peggy.silver@wpcog.org | 828.874.0098

Article by Chasity Houck and Peggy Silver

Honoring Grandparents Who Step Up: A New Chapter in Caregiving



Each year, National Grandparents Day—celebrated on the first Sunday in September—pays tribute to the love, wisdom, and guidance grandparents bring to their families. While traditionally marked by shared stories and joyful moments, for many, this role has evolved into full-time parenting due to unexpected life events.

A Growing Reality in North Carolina and Beyond

According to the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, over 93,552 grandparents in North Carolina are raising grandchildren under 18. Nationally, that number exceeds 2.5 million. In our four-county region, approximately 5,872 grandparents serve as primary caregivers.

These caregivers come from all backgrounds, stepping into parenting roles during a time they had envisioned for retirement or relaxation. Often prompted by challenges such as substance use, incarceration, mental health issues, or financial hardship, these grandparents offer not just shelter—but stability, emotional support, and unconditional love.

“I never imagined I’d be raising kids again at 67,” says Linda, who adopted her three grandchildren. “They needed me—and I needed them more than I realized.”

Support Makes a Difference

Throughout September, the Area Agency on Aging (AAA) Family Caregiver Support Program honors these unsung heroes.

“It’s not easy, but you’re not alone,” shares James, raising two grandchildren.

“I had to learn how to parent in a digital world,” says Maria, who now attends tech literacy classes.

The Rewards and Realities

Despite health concerns, financial strain, and generational gaps, many grandparents report stronger bonds and a renewed sense of purpose.

“This wasn’t in my retirement plan,” says one grandmother, “but I wouldn’t trade this time for anything.”

“We’re not just raising children—we’re healing families,” adds Deborah, a kinship caregiver and advocate.

How You Can Help

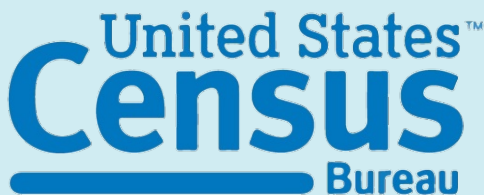
This Grandparents Day, let’s celebrate not only the joy of grandparenting but also the courage of those stepping into parenting again. Whether by volunteering, sharing a meal, or simply listening—your support matters.

Resources & Support:

Visit www.wpcog.org/caregiver-support for more information.

Article by Mary Mitchell, Family Caregiver Support Administrator

2024 (1-Year) American Community Survey Data Now Available



On September 11, 2025, the U.S. Census Bureau released the 2024 (1-Year) American Community Survey (ACS) data for communities with populations over 65,000. This release includes insights across more than 40 topics, such as:

- Educational attainment
- Housing and employment
- Commuting patterns
- Language spoken at home
- Nativity and ancestry
- Monthly homeowner costs

Where to Access the Data:

- National data: www.census.gov
- Regional summaries for the Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir MSA, Burke, Caldwell, and Catawba Counties:
- www.wpcog.org/regional-data

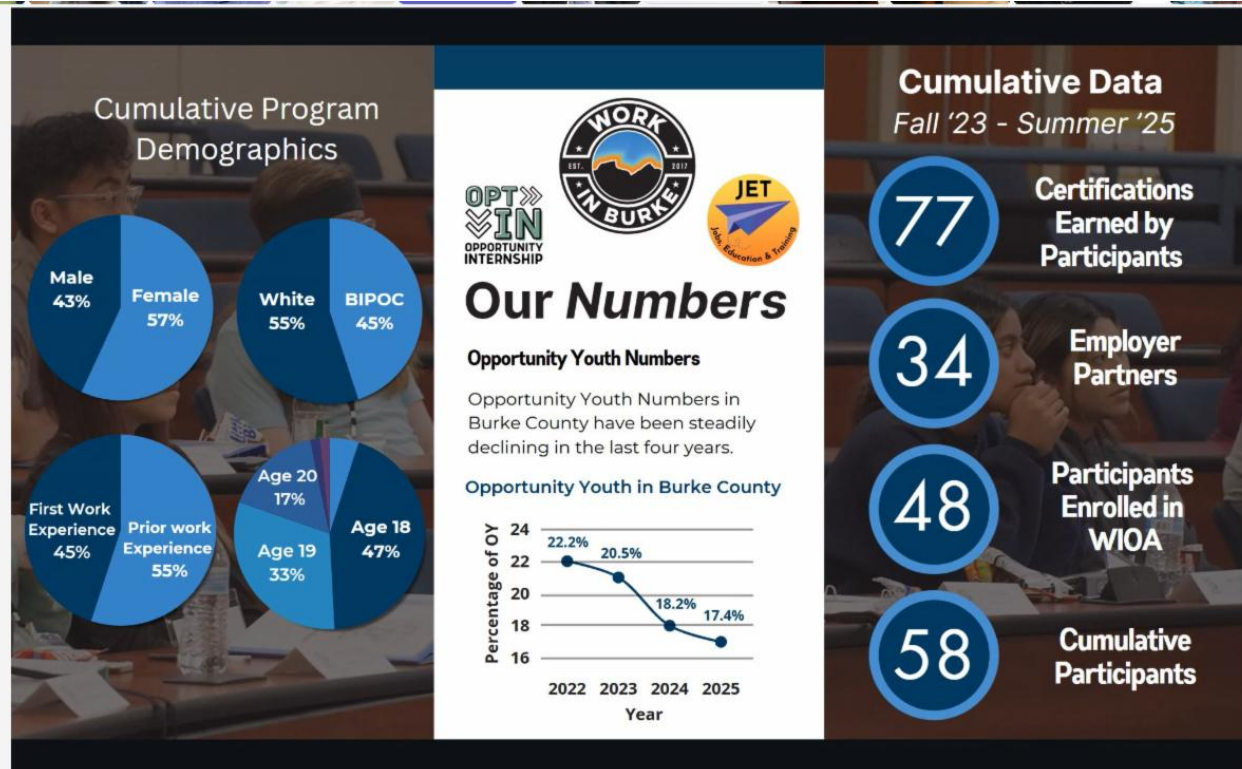
Coming Soon:

The 2020–2024 ACS 5-Year Estimates for all areas in our region are scheduled for release in December 2025.

Questions?

Contact Taylor Dellinger, Senior Data Analyst
taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org | 828.485.4233

Innovation Grant Comes to a Successful End



The Innovation Grant, a collaborative initiative led by Work In Burke, Burke County Schools, Western Piedmont Community College, Burke Development Inc., NCWorks Career Center-Burke, the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, and numerous local partners and businesses, has successfully concluded—leaving a lasting impact on Opportunity Youth in Burke County.

Positive Outcomes

Since the grant's launch, the percentage of Opportunity Youth in Burke County has dropped from 22.2% in 2022 to 17.4% in 2025—a significant improvement.

Key Achievements

- 77 certifications earned by participants
- 34 employer partners actively engaged
- 48 participants enrolled in WIOA programs
- 58 total participants served

This initiative highlights the power of collaboration across education, workforce, and business sectors, and reinforces the community's commitment to expanding opportunities and building brighter futures for Burke County's youth.

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber, Workforce Development Board Director

**Can't make it to a Western Piedmont
NCWorks Career Center? No problem!**



We're committed to making career support accessible across the region—with multiple in-person access points and virtual services available. No matter where you are, we're here to help you move your career forward.

Find Your Nearest Access Point:

- Caldwell County Library – Lenoir
Wednesdays | 1:30 PM – 4:30 PM
- Hickory Public Library – Ridgeview
Wednesdays | 1:00 PM – 4:30 PM
- Bethlehem Branch Library
Thursdays | 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM
- Sherrills Ford – Terrell Branch Library
Wednesdays | 1:30 PM – 4:30 PM
- Valdese Public Library
Wednesdays | 1:30 PM – 5:00 PM
- CB Hildebran Library
Fridays | 9:00 AM – 11:00 AM

Prefer virtual support?

Call us today to schedule your virtual appointment. Let's move your career forward—together.

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber, Workforce Development Board Director

**Western Piedmont NCWorks Career Centers
Receive Center Certification**



On August 13, the Western Piedmont NCWorks Career Center was officially awarded its NCWorks Career Certification during the NCWorks Commission meeting in Raleigh.

This recognition places Western Piedmont among certified NCWorks Career Centers across all 20 local workforce development board areas in North Carolina. Each center met the Commission's rigorous standards for delivering high-quality, consistent customer service and ensuring accessibility for all.

Congratulations to the Western Piedmont Workforce Development team and all local and regional NCWorks partners! Their dedication to serving both jobseekers and businesses highlights the vital role workforce professionals play in strengthening North Carolina's economy.

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber, Workforce Development Board Director

Greenway Public Transportation Adopts Updated Locally Coordinated Plan

Greenway Public Transportation has officially adopted the 2025 update to its Locally Coordinated Public Transportation Plan (LCP)—a key document that guides how regional transit services are planned, funded, and delivered to meet the needs of transportation-disadvantaged populations.

The LCP is a federally required plan that ensures services funded through programs like FTA Section 5310 (Enhanced Mobility of Seniors and Individuals with Disabilities) are developed collaboratively. It identifies service gaps, unmet needs, and opportunities for coordination among agencies and providers, helping ensure that limited resources are used efficiently and equitably.

Highlights of the 2025 Update

- Adoption Date: September 18, 2025
- Lead Agency: Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG)
- Collaborators: Greenway Public Transportation, local governments, community organizations, and regional stakeholders
- Community Engagement: A regional survey gathered input from riders, residents, and partner organizations
- Steering Committee: Met quarterly to guide the update process
- Workshop: Hosted for surface transportation providers to share feedback and explore coordination strategies

This update ensures that regional transit providers and applicants remain eligible for federal funding and that strategies reflect current community needs and priorities.

Why Regular Updates Matter

Federal guidelines require LCPs to be updated every four to five years. These updates ensure the plan remains responsive to changing demographics, evolving transportation priorities, and the latest stakeholder input. Keeping the plan current is also essential for maintaining eligibility for federal funding.

Greenway's adoption of the updated LCP marks a continued commitment to improving mobility for seniors, individuals with disabilities, low-income residents, and others who rely on public transportation.

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber, Workforce Development Board Director

Western Piedmont Council of Governments
www.wpcog.org



Western Piedmont Council of Governments | PO Box 9026 | Hickory, NC 28603 US

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