

WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2024



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Celebrating National Caregiver Month & Beyond

Article by Mary Mitchell

Every November we celebrate National Caregiver Month, a time dedicated to recognizing and honoring the incredible contributions of family caregivers across our region, as well as across the nation. These selfless individuals play a vital role in the lives of their loved ones, often sacrificing their own needs to provide care and support.

Family caregivers are the backbone of the healthcare system of our nation, providing essential care to a friend, relative, parent or spouse. The days of a caregiver are often filled with medication management, assisting with daily activities, medical appointments and offering emotional support, most often without any formal training. Their dedication as caregivers ensures that they honor their loved ones with respect, care and comfort.

Today, more than one in five Americans (21.3 percent) are caregivers, providing care to an adult or child with special needs. This translates to an estimated 53 million caregivers across the United States. These caregivers come from all walks of life, spanning across multiple generations and many are often attempting to juggle caregiving responsibilities while also working full-time or part-time jobs. The challenges they face are immense, including coordinating care for their loved one, managing their own health, and dealing with the emotional toll of caregiving.

In North Carolina, caregivers play a vital role in supporting the state's aging population and those with disabilities. The Family Caregiver Support Program is supported by federal and state funding and offers a range of services to assist caregivers, including resource information, support groups, and respite care.

The 2024 theme for National Caregivers Month was **#I Care** and was not only to recognize caregivers but to raise awareness. Many caregivers work tirelessly behind the scenes, their efforts unseen and unacknowledged by the broader community. November served as a reminder of the vital role caregivers play and the challenges they face.

We can all show appreciation and recognition to caregivers in our community with a small kind gesture shown to the caregiver.

- **Express Gratitude:** A simple thank you can make a huge difference in the life of a caregiver. Let the caregivers in your life know how much you appreciate their hard work.
- **Offer Support:** Whether it's providing a listening ear or helping with errands, small acts of kindness can make a big difference.
- **Educate Yourself:** Learn about the challenges caregivers face and the resources available to support them.
- **Respite Care:** Offer to take over caregiving duties for a few hours or arrange for professional respite care to give them a much-needed break.
- **Care Packages:** Assemble care packages with items like snacks, self-care products, and comforting items to show you care.
- **Support Groups:** Encourage them to join support groups where they can share experiences and gain emotional support from others in similar situations.

Communities can play a significant role in supporting caregivers. Local organizations can offer respite care, support groups, and educational resources. By coming together, we can create a network of support that ensures caregivers are not alone in their journey.

We recognize caregivers throughout November, but let's continue to honor the dedication and compassion of family caregivers. Their tireless work often goes unnoticed, but it is invaluable. Let's shine a light on their contributions and ensure they receive the recognition and support they deserve.

The State of North Carolina encourages people to acknowledge and support family, friends, and neighbors who help those who are aging or have disabilities; and support of family caregivers is not only the right thing to do, but an essential investment in a better future for North Carolina's older adults and individuals with disabilities. (North Carolina Governor Roy Cooper, Governor's Proclamation 2024—National Family Caregiver Month)

For additional information, visit WPCOG Area Agency on Aging website: www.wpcogaaa.org or call The Family Caregiver Support Program at (828) 485-4256.

Homelessness Response Lends Support for Residents Affected by Helene

Article by Paul Teague

After Hurricane Helene impacted Western NC on September 28, the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) Homelessness Response team has been actively supporting displaced residents.

Working alongside the Red Cross and other agencies, the Homelessness Response team provided essential resources at local shelters in order to help families and individuals affected by the storm.

During operation hours at the Red Cross shelter locations in Burke and Caldwell counties, there was one individual who was displaced from out-of-state. Another was from Buncombe County - beyond WPCOG's usual service area. The individual was transferred to a shelter in Hudson, receiving vital support and guidance for next steps.

The shelter in Hudson, which served an average of 15 to 24 residents daily, closed on October 29. Leading up to this closure, WPCOG's Homelessness Response team visited the Red Cross shelters two to three times a week, addressing immediate needs and planning for long-term placements. Two residents are currently in a temporary stay at a local hotel while permanent arrangements are finalized.

"Our team's dedication and strong partnerships have given residents a clear path forward," said WPCOG Homelessness Response Manager Chasity Houck.

The Homelessness Response team remains committed to ensuring displaced residents have access to stable, secure placements as they transition forward.



19th Annual Women's Leadership Conference

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

On November 13, 2024, staff from the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board and NCWorks attended the 19th Annual Women's Leadership Conference, Presented by Catawba Valley Health System. The event was held at the Hickory Metro Convention Center and hosted by the Chamber of Catawba County. The Women's Leadership Conference was a full day forum where individuals from all levels of business had the opportunity to foster strong connections, while gaining essential tools to unlock their full potential towards accomplishing their professional and personal goals.



Annual Veterans Job Fair

Article by Trey Hedrick

On November 6th, 2024, Appalachian State University (ASU) Hickory hosted the Annual Veterans Job Fair. The Veterans Job fair was a partnership between NCWorks, HKY4VETS, and ASU Hickory. Over 25 employers and 100 job seekers attended the event. NCWorks was represented by Russ Vickers, who organized the event, Labon Hester, Beverly Galloway, and Patrick Webber. Mr. Vickers, Ms. Galloway, and Mr. Webber are Veterans and were excited to share services to job seekers at this event.



Annual Foothills Veterans Helping Veterans Winter Stand Down

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

The 9th Annual Foothills Veterans Helping Veterans Winter Stand Down took place on November 7, 2024, at the J.E. Broyhill Civic Center in Caldwell County. Thirty-seven organizations were available to provide support to over 220 military veterans. The event was a huge success in providing materials and resources to veterans, including those affected by Hurricane Helene.



Career Quest at Western Piedmont Community College

Article by Trey Hedrick

On November 7th, staff of Western Piedmont NCWorks Career Centers attended the Western Piedmont Community College Career Quest. Career Quest was designed for students to briefly speak with workforce professionals to discover how they chose their current profession. The event is an interactive way for students to learn about potential career interests. Students engaged in one-on-one conversations with various professionals to gain insight into different industries.



NCWorks Shares Amazing Work on KICKS 103.3

Article by Trey Hedrick

On November 8, 2024, Kimberly Anderson, Career Center Manager with NCWorks - Caldwell and Trey Hedrick, Business and Virtual Services Coordinator with the Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board, along with Bryan Moore, President and CEO of The Caldwell Chamber, visited KICKS 103.3 to share all the amazing work and no cost services that NCWorks Career Centers provide every day.



NCWorks Veterans Career Advisor Rodney Woody Receives Quilt of Valor

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

During the 2024 Annual Foothills Winter Stand Down, members of the Quilts of Valor organization presented four Quilts of Valor to select veterans. NCWorks Career Advisor, Rodney Woody, was one of the recipients. A Quilt of Valor® (QOV) is a quality quilt that may be machine or hand quilted. It is awarded to a Service Member or Veteran who has been touched by war.

The quilt is an expression of gratitude to the service member. It is presented to honor the service member for leaving all they hold dear to serve, whether in time of crisis or in time of peace.



OPT-IN Internship Program Receives Outstanding Innovative Partnership Award

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

The NCWorks Commission held their quarterly business meeting at the Catawba Valley Community College, Workforce Solutions Complex in Hickory on November 13, 2024. At the November NCWorks Commission Meeting, the OPT-IN Internship Program was awarded the 2024 NCWorks Governor's Award of Distinction for Outstanding Innovative Partnership. This partnership between Western Piedmont Community College, Work in Burke, Burke County Public Schools, and Western Piedmont NCWorks Career Centers has been integral in the development of young adults entering the workforce.



Welcome Kimberly Anderson

Article by Charity Patterson Hamber

Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board would like to welcome Kimberly Anderson to the Western Piedmont NCWorks Team!

Kimberly Anderson joined the NCWorks-Caldwell team on October 1, 2024, as the NCWorks Career Center Manager. Kim has worked with the Division of Workforce Solutions for 6 years as a Business Services Career Advisor, a Working Smart Instructor and most recently as the Assistant Center Manager for Alleghany, Ashe, and Wilkes counties. She also has over 10 years of experience in retail management and human resources. Kim holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from Appalachian State University and is the proud parent of one son, Matthew.

In her new role, she plans to focus on building lasting relationships with staff, partner agencies and the Caldwell County community to showcase all the important services that NCWorks has to offer!



Supporting Tenants After Helene

Article by Kim Duncan

On September 27, 2024, Tropical Storm Helene struck western North Carolina, impacting the four counties that Western Piedmont Council of Governments' Regional Housing Authority (RHA) serves – Alexander, Burke, Caldwell and Catawba.

The RHA began addressing needs by providing resource information to our Housing Choice Voucher tenants as soon as staff returned to work on Monday, Sept. 30. Information on receiving funds for SNAP card holders to replace lost food as well as FEMA information on how to apply for assistance due to power loss was shared. As resource information continued to come into the RHA from numerous sources – such as disaster unemployment or D-SNAP sign-up notices, the RHA staff was made aware and all participants in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program, in particular, were notified directly.

"I sent out a notice to make sure all my participants were okay. Thankfully everyone was fine, but the replies were interspersed with worried questions on how to replace ruined food or what to do about jobs that were paused or lost due to the storm. The information my partners shared helped me guide my people so they could get the help they needed." The Valdese Public Housing Authority lost power for two days due to the storm. Valdese PHA staff member Peggy Silver was on site beginning Friday, Sept. 27, checking on residents and making sure they had what was needed until the power was restored.

"I was very proud of the tenants gathering together their resources, cooking out, and taking care of each other," Silver said.

In addition, two units were damaged by falling trees that impacted the structure but did not harm the residents. One of the tenants was able to return to her unit after it was determined to be structurally sound. The tenant in the significantly damaged unit was moved to a new unit, but they hope to return to their former place when repairs are completed.

"The VHA staff, Peggy, Harrison and Roger, care about the Valdese tenants and worked diligently to help them during the difficult time after the storm. I am proud of the kindness and thoughtfulness all my staff have shown our tenants and residents especially with the uncertainty and concern some had about power, food, and jobs," said RHA Director, Stephanie Hanvey.

For more information about post-Helene resources, contact Kim Duncan, FSS Coordinator, at kim.duncan@wpcog.org or 828 485 4299 as well as agencies such as DSS or your local United Way.

WPCOG Transportation Engages Public on Regional Transportation Safety

Article by Daniel Odom

As part of developing the Western Piedmont Transportation Safety Plan (WPTSP), the Western Piedmont Council of Governments (WPCOG) transportation team, in collaboration with consulting partners, conducted a series of public engagement events throughout the region in September and October. These events allowed local residents to share feedback on transportation safety concerns in their communities.

The engagement efforts began on September 19th at the 42nd Annual Morganton Festival in downtown Morganton, followed by the Hickory Oktoberfest on October 12th. Additional outreach occurred at the 34th Annual Taylorsville Apple Festival and the Lenoir Wood, Fire, and Smoke Festival on October 19th.

More than 130 participants contributed valuable insights, identifying specific areas within their counties and municipalities with safety needs. Key safety themes raised included speeding, distracted driving, the need for enhanced pedestrian infrastructure, and traffic congestion.

Moving forward, the planning team will incorporate this public feedback alongside regional safety data to develop a comprehensive strategy for addressing and prioritizing transportation safety needs across the Western Piedmont region. The Western Piedmont Transportation Safety Plan is expected to be completed by Spring 2025. Upon its completion, the safety projects identified and documented within the plan will become eligible to compete for over \$2 billion in federal construction funding through the "Safe Streets for All" program.



Community & Economic Development Caps Off Strong Year in Grant Funding

Article by Kyle J. Case

In 2024, WPCOG Community & Economic Development (CED) staff developed applications that resulted in grant funding for 13 projects totaling \$5,612,552. Three additional project applications totaling \$10,323,696 are anticipated to be awarded before the end of 2024.

Funding for these projects comes from a variety of sources

- including the N.C. Commerce Building Reuse Program, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC), Rural Downtown Economic Development Grant Fund, Golden LEAF Foundation, NC Housing Finance Agency, and multiple Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) programs.

In addition to new applications, the team continued to administer more than 80 grant projects this year.

Grant highlights include \$2,236,775 in CDBG-Infrastructure funding for water system improvements in the Triple Community of Burke County, \$510,280 in ARC funds to extend new waterline along Houston Mill Road in Conover, more than \$2 million from the Rural Downtown Economic Development Grant Fund to support downtown improvement projects, and \$50,000 in Golden LEAF funds to support due diligence activities at the future Foothills Regional Airport Industrial Park site.

Additionally, a \$240,000 Building Reuse grant was awarded for Steel Warehouse Company's expansion in Hickory, which leverages more than \$31 million in private investment and will ultimately create 58 new, full-time jobs. Combined with local government match commitments, CED staff assisted in project development totaling, \$6,250,206.85.



What is Project C.A.R.E?

Article by Karen Phoenix

What is Project C.A.R.E?

Project C.A.R.E. (Caregiver Alternatives to Running on Empty) is a North Carolina funded dementia-specific support program for family caregivers. The program uses a family consultant to provide comprehensive support to caregivers of those caring for someone at home with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia. Project C.A.R.E. family consultants assist caregivers with education, resources, and access to vouchers to alleviate some of the stress caregiving can create. The program's purpose is to assist the caregiver with keeping the person with dementia safe and comfortable in their home for as long as possible. The Family



Consultant receives referrals to the program and schedules in-home visits to meet with the caregiver and the person with dementia. The level of assistance varies and depends on what the caregiver needs and prefers.

In the last year, Project CARE has supported more than 200 caregivers in the region. Caregivers of any age caring for someone with Alzheimer's disease or related dementia who are not eligible to receive similar services through programs such as VA, Medicaid, etc., are available for our services. Many caregivers elect to utilize respite to provide a needed break from the constant responsibility of caregiving. We often assist those who are on the waiting lists for other programs. While there are no specific income limitations, Project C.A.R.E. prioritizes low-income, rural, and minority families.

Project C.A.R.E. Also provides education and information to the public. There are more than 200 forms of dementia. Current statistics reveal that every 65 seconds, someone is diagnosed with a form of dementia. One in 3 Seniors die with a dementia diagnosis. Estimates are that one in six people will have some form of dementia. As Time Progresses, we are all going to know, care for, or be a person with dementia. It is important for everyone to know the signs of dementia and how to help.

Project C.A.R.E. is here to help anyone caring for someone with dementia. Please call if we can assist you as you work to assist those with dementia. Remember, we will all know someone, care for someone, or encounter someone with dementia in our lifetime.

Foothills Project CARE Service Area Includes multiple counties:

Alexander, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Davie, Forsyth, Mitchell, Stokes, Surry, Watauga, Wilkes, Yadkin, and Yancey Counties.

Project C.A.R.E. services are provided at no cost. You are not alone--call for help!

To learn more, call Karen Phoenix- Project C.A.R.E. Family Consultant at 828-485-4267

RHA Hosts 11th Annual Landlord Meeting

Article by Kelley Hayward

The Western Piedmont Council of Government's Regional Housing Authority (RHA) held its 11th annual Landlord Meeting on November 20, 2024.

RHA Director Stephanie Hanvey presented an overview of the programs offered by the RHA, along with introducing her staff and sharing their roles. She also explained the RHA's July 2024 merger with Valdese Public Housing (formerly Valdese Housing Authority).

Housing Specialist Kelley Hayward presented an adapted version of the voucher-holder briefing to inform landlords about what voucher holders are told in order to receive assistance. This included the steps to get and remain on the waiting list, tenant obligations to both the RHA and the landlords, along with the ongoing requirements voucher recipients must meet to continue assistance each year.

Landlords were encouraged to access the RHA's landlord portal at <https://housing.wpcog.net>, where they can access information about their units, rent amounts, and upcoming or recent inspection information.

The presentation concluded with an open Q&A session, allowing participants to ask any questions that had not been discussed. Topics such as rent increases, inspection requirements, and pending evictions were addressed.

Following the presentations, landlords had the opportunity to visit five stations to receive one-on-one information about topics such as payment standards, inspections, and rent increases. The stations, added in 2022, have become a highly requested resource for both new and seasoned landlords to troubleshoot challenges and better understand the voucher process.

Additionally, the RHA provided each landlord with a warm breakfast bar, handouts, and a guidebook for owners, along with WPCOG RHA swag. Landlords completed an exit survey. Responses included: "Questions were answered that I didn't even think of yet," "I enjoyed being able to ask questions and meet other landlords," and that the meeting was "extremely informative."

The RHA encourages any prospective landlords to contact Grace Garnett at grace.garnett@wpcog.org or Kelley Hayward at kelley.hayward@wpcog.org to learn more about the program and its procedures. The RHA is committed to working with any landlord willing to comply with Section 8 regulations.



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