



# Case Study:

## Ready Ready in Guilford

Community leaders focus on healthy development of young children to break cycles of poverty in Guilford County, North Carolina.

### What was the problem?

Guilford County, the county seat of Greensboro, is North Carolina's third most populous county. Nearly half of its 54,000 children under the age of 8 grow up in or near poverty. Community leaders traced inequities in high school graduation rates back to kindergarten readiness—highlighting that young children in Guilford County, especially those experiencing poverty, were not receiving the necessary supports early in life to build a strong foundation.

**1.3x**

higher [infant mortality rate](#)  
than the national average

**55%**

of [5-year-olds do not](#)  
[arrive at kindergarten ready](#)  
to learn and thrive

**53%**

of [third graders not](#)  
[reading at grade level](#)

### What was accomplished?

Community leaders founded **Ready for School, Ready for Life (also known as Ready Ready)**, which coordinates more than 300 organizations, community resources, and stakeholders. In 2018, it launched a 12-year initiative to improve outcomes for children in Guilford County, from the prenatal stage through age 8. This initiative focuses on five goals: 1) planned and well-timed pregnancies, 2) healthy births, 3) on-track infant and toddler development, 4) kindergarten readiness, and 5) reading success by third grade. Since its launch, the initiative has made significant progress toward its goals:

- **Connected parents to needed resources.** Guilford's **Routes to Ready** system of care encompasses evidence-based prenatal and postnatal programs—including FamilyConnects, HealthySteps, and Nurse-Family Partnership—along with the county's innovative Community Navigation program. From 2018 to 2024, the share of Guilford County families with young children receiving quality care rose from 12 percent to 27 percent. In 2023, Routes to Ready served over 21,000 families; it aims to enroll 8,500 additional families by 2029.
- **Strengthened service provider quality.** Continuous quality improvement coaching has been provided to 33 programs in Guilford County serving families with young children and pregnant individuals. This coaching shares best practices, encourages peer learning across programs, and supports data collection and analysis of service delivery and impact.
- **Supported data-informed decisions.** A new integrated data system currently connects four programs and aims to connect all programs serving children and families, allowing providers, community leaders, and the broader community to use aggregate data to determine where there are resource gaps and to inform policy decisions.

An evaluation of child and family outcomes is underway, with initial results expected in 2026. In designing the evaluation, Ready Ready engaged funders and community members to codevelop a rigorous, community-aligned approach.

### What role did philanthropy play?

In the early stages of identifying problems and developing strategies, local foundations invested approximately \$700,000 to support planning and better coordination of early childhood services. These efforts drew the attention of regional and national funders and, as of 2024, had attracted over \$160 million in philanthropic commitments, which have:

- **Funded the coordinating organization.** Early philanthropic dollars went toward creating and operating the coordinating organization, Ready Ready. Primary expenses were staff salaries; philanthropy continues to support its operations (\$14 million from 2013 to 2024).

- **Invested in technology.** Philanthropy provided the start-up capital needed to develop an integrated data system that allows the county and service providers to track families' experiences (\$11 million). Philanthropy has catalyzed nearly \$2 million in state funding to enhance the data system, helping inform policymakers' decisions.
- **Supported program expansion.** Philanthropic support funded additional staff who could expand the reach of evidence-based programs for young children and their families, including Nurse-Family Partnership, Family Connects, HealthySteps, and Reach Out and Read (\$24 million, which supplemented public funding). Thanks to philanthropic support, Ready Ready is now able to offer support to other communities, replicating its success.
- **Built the case for investment.** Philanthropy is funding a rigorous evaluation of the initiative to inform program improvement and deliver outcomes to help generate greater public and private investment (\$10 million).

## What were the key milestones?

Starting from the initial identification of the problem, implementation took nearly 10 years. Community leaders and funders will continue to monitor milestones throughout the 12-year initiative, planned for 2018–2030.

- **2007** Seeking to reduce poverty rates, a group of six to eight local funders and community leaders identified the need for better outcomes starting at birth and began discussing how to improve coordination of existing services for young children.
- **2013–14** Two local funders, The Cemala Foundation and The Joseph M. Bryan Foundation, supported efforts that led to the founding of Ready Ready. Its work began with gathering input from 250 families on what was needed for Guilford County's young children.
- **2017–18** Recognizing the momentum of collaboration and coordination capabilities in Guilford, The Duke Endowment and Blue Meridian Partners made catalytic investments to scale the effort and test its potential to be replicated across the nation. The two funders invested \$32.5 million in the first phase of Get Ready Guilford and committed to supporting the full 12 years of the strategy. In 2018, this first phase (focused on birth through age 3) launched.
- **2022** Get Ready Guilford's second phase launched, balancing the implementation of prenatal-to-age-3 strategies with the ramping up of interventions that impact children through age 5. Ready Ready also secured \$1.2 million in state funding as part of the General Assembly allocation.

## How was this achieved?

Success behind the initiative and sustained impact for young children and their families resulted from:

MAKING THE CASE	COORDINATED EFFORT	FAMILY-LED DECISIONS	CONNECTED SYSTEM OF CARE
The Get Ready Guilford initiative highlighted the economic impact of early childhood investment, building broad buy-in from stakeholders, including the business community.	Community leaders' coordination efforts attracted large funders to the initiative and continue to enable success of the system of care.	A formalized shared decision-making structure gave parents voice to amplify their firsthand experiences.	Service providers collaborated to create a more coordinated system, enhancing their connection to families, improving coordination with one another, and increasing service quality.

## Who made it happen?

A diverse, cross-sector group of actors contributed to the initiative, each bringing unique assets and roles:

COORDINATING ORGANIZATION	PARTNERS ACROSS MULTIPLE SECTORS	PARENT LEADERS
<b>Ready Ready</b> served as the coordinating organization for the initiative.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Navigators, nurses, and specialists</b> from four organizations (Nurse-Family Partnership, HealthySteps, Family Connects, and the Community Navigation program) worked in medical sites and in communities to make initial connections with all families.</li> <li>• <b>Guilford business leaders</b> partnered with the initiative on advocacy for early care, recognizing the importance of early childhood investment for later readiness for work.</li> </ul>	Families actively engaged on Ready Ready decisions through the Guilford Parent Leader Network.