

# ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021

Blue Ridge Community Action, Inc.





**STEPHANIE ASHLEY**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Who would have thought in 2020 that the COVID-19 Pandemic was going down in history as a lifetime memory? The horrific loss of loved ones and suffering were felt globally. The loss of jobs was massive and created economic hardships for, not only our already vulnerable families, but working and middle class families as well. The support for, and opposition to, the COVID-19 vaccination further divided our communities. The term “doing business as usual” changed the daily operation of businesses to include some businesses shutting their doors permanently. We, at Blue Ridge Community Action, Inc. (BRCA), remain on the front-lines and are dedicated to helping our communities, families, and individuals who are in need of help.

The challenges faced in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic strengthened our

commitment to provide services and support to persons who were in need - virtually, drive up & curbside, home delivery, or safely in person. The pandemic and election heightened social injustices that brought to the forefront the inequities embedded in our culture and the need for stronger and continual advocacy by BRCA.

The Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA), Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (CARES), Duke Endowment, and the Blue Cross Blue Shield Healthy Home Initiative Program funding allowed us to expand our programs and increase our assistance to meet the need of our communities. Some of the expanded services included:

- *Providing emergency services such as rental and utility payments to an additional 265 family members*
- *Providing 77 homes with health centered repairs with the goal of increasing overall health outcomes*
- *Starting the Virtual Volunteer Program for the Foster Grandparents working virtually by using iPads and classroom monitors*
- *Providing 13,563 meals for waitlisted home delivery meal clients*

- *Running a summer Head Start program*
- *Regularly disinfecting our centers through electrostatic cleaning*

As we look back on the 20-21 fiscal year with the constant and fluid changes, we were able to accomplish the above mentioned highlights and other goals because of our strong and dedicated staff. Often you see the signs that say “**HEROES Work here!**”, we truly have heroes working at BRCA. We thank each and every one of our team members for your hard work and willingness to help others. We will continue to break down barriers that prevent people from thriving and becoming self-sufficient.

Kind Regards,

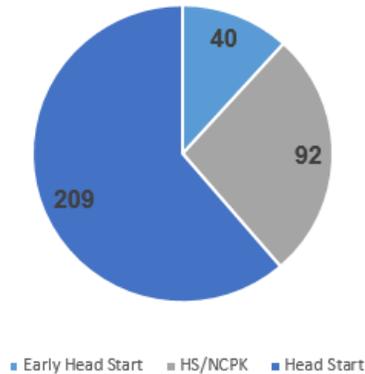
*Stephanie Ashley, CCAP  
Executive Director*

*C. Inita Smith, Board Chair*



**C. INITA SMITH**  
BOARD CHAIR

# CHILD DEVELOPMENT



As the pandemic continues, the BRCA Child Development Department serves Head Start, Early Head Start and Day Care children in-person at our three centers in Burke and Caldwell Counties. The staff continues their tireless efforts to maintain a clean and safe environment for children and families.



Child Development Program

Temperatures are taken each morning and only essential adults are allowed in the buildings. In addition to face-to-face learning, staff have connected with parents through phone calls/texts, Zoom, WebEx meetings, Class Dojo and Facebook Live to maintain the school/family partnership. Parent meetings and Policy Council meetings were held virtually and business was conducted as usual.

All staff and older children wore masks, buildings were electrostatically cleaned on a regular basis, soft toys and items that are not easily cleanable remained out of the classrooms. Children had individual bags of crayons and playdough to limit cross-contamination. These precautions have resulted in very limited classroom closures, allowing children to learn in-person and parents to work.

*The goal of the child development program is to provide a safe, loving environment for children, as well as to ensure that all children are healthy and ready to learn when they enter the public school system.*

*All centers are 5-STAR centers with superior sanitation ratings.*



## CHILD DEVELOPMENT - HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START



*My name is Joan and my great granddaughter has been in Head Start for 1 1/2 years. We are an older couple raising her. The time in Head Start is a respite for us. We have benefited from this program very much.*

*Cost of regular daycare is something we could not afford so this has helped us be able to have her in a facility where she is taught appropriate Pre-K academics. She is learning her numbers, the alphabet, shapes, and colors. She is also learning about science, nature and art.*

*She has learned about manners, sharing, and to clean up. She has become potty trained while in Head Start.*

*Thank you for this great program!*

Head Start and Early Head Start is a federal program for children from low-income families. The Head Start/Early Head Start program is operated by local non-profit organizations in almost every county in the country. Children who attend Head Start and Early Head Start

*My son was enrolled in day care. I was not able to renew my voucher and my son could have lost services for a month. The staff helped me apply for CARES funds and this paid for my child care so I was able to continue working. He is now enrolled in Early Head Start and I am able to continue working while my son is in a rich learning environment. EHS works great with my work schedule!*

*A. Williams – Quaker Meadows Generations parent*



participate in a variety of educational activities. They also receive free medical and dental care, have healthy meals and snacks, and enjoy play — both indoors and out — in a safe setting.

**249 Children Served**

# SENIOR SERVICES - FOSTER GRANDPARENTS



## AmeriCorps Seniors

Foster Grandparent Program

The Foster Grandparent program provides one-on-one mentoring, nurturing, and support to children with special or exceptional needs, or who are academically, socially, or financially disadvantaged.

**43 Program Participants**

Many Foster Grandparents were unable to work in person due to site restrictions and site closures. BRCA received funding to create a **“Virtual Volunteer”** program using iPads and classroom monitors at the three BRCA centers. Volunteers were trained in the use of the equipment and logged in to interact with children. They read stories, played games, and helped with pre-school activities. When there were campus restrictions at JIRDC, volunteers worked virtually and prepared activities, made items for individuals and cottages/homes, and when allowed, worked with individual clients. BRCA and Enola Group volunteers worked in person, as allowed by sites. Public school volunteers were not permitted to be in classrooms. All volunteers were eligible to receive a temporary allowance that paid their stipend even if they were not working.



Health and safety practices were required at all open sites which included masks, temperature checks and social distancing.

## SENIOR SERVICES - ADULT DAY SERVICES

"Wow! What a year it has been." Adult Day Services persevered even amid all the chaos since 2019, when the pandemic hit. Families continued to reach out to us, needing assistance with their loved ones during the most challenging time in our nation. Daily operations changed significantly from implementing safety measures, such as wearing masks, conducting daily health screening, and running our older adult activities. Moving forward in a new direction, we modified the everyday social, cognitive, and physical activities to ensure participants remained safe and healthy. Our older adults have done an outstanding job complying with wearing masks and following all Adult Day Center safety protocols.

Our services assist both the participant and the primary caregiver, giving them respite services and the ability to remain gainfully employed. Being a caregiver is very demanding and part of our service is to provide care for both the client and the caregiver.



*The Adult Day Program was a life saver for myself and my entire family. My husband and I both needed to work, and having a safe environment for my mother to go to was necessary. The program helped us to remain employed, and my mother loves going there to see all her friends and participating in the daily activities."*

*Participant's Daughter - Adult Day Services*

Our hats go off to our caregivers for the outstanding job they do!

Several funding options are available to assist clients with the daily cost of Adult Day Services. Payment methods include private pay, Medicaid, Veterans Affairs, and the Home & Community Care Block Grant (HCCBG). Throughout the year, 25 clients received benefits from the HCCBG covering their daily cost of services.

We are so proud of all our older adults, and each one is a success story. As we end one year and look ahead, we will march on to better serve our clients, caregivers, and those that need our services. The future is bright so keep on smiling!

## SENIOR SERVICES - SCSEP



# Center *for* **Workforce Inclusion**

powering opportunity for older adults

*The SCSEP program is important because it taught me time management skills, on-the-job training, and how to be a team player. SCSEP has helped me financially*



*and mentally and keeps me motivated to stay busy. I have been on this program for almost three years. I feel that an employer should hire me because I have shown teamwork, dependability, a positive attitude, and willingness to learn new skills and other job duties. I hope other older adults take advantage of this program and enjoy it as much as I have.*

*Hattie P. - SCSEP Participant*

Center for Workforce Inclusion continues to transform low-income job seekers age 55+ by providing part-time work-based job training and unsubsidized employment placement. **BRCA's Senior Community Service Employment (SCSEP) program served 74 participants** by assisting with developing skills and experience that led to employment in Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, and Rutherford counties.

During the COVID Pandemic, SCSEP Participants were allowed to accomplish at-home training and participate in webinars. They continued to receive a wage through the Emergency Paid Sick Leave, allowing them not to lose any income during this difficult time.

Once they were allowed to return to the Host Agency, we at BRCA set forth rules and guidelines to ensure all participants were safe and protected.

SCSEP is an excellent program that offers training to older workers who may have been in a field for years or have not been employed for several years. It allows the older adult to receive training in different areas and learn other job skills.

## CONGREGATE NUTRITION AND HOME DELIVERED MEALS

Home delivered meal participants continuously received a nutritious meal Monday - Friday. Eight community volunteers assured meals were delivered using a pandemic modified delivery process, protecting the participant and the volunteer. Participants also received self-stable and frozen meals in addition to their daily meals - **Families First Coronavirus Response Act funded 4,575 meals, and the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) provided 3,190.** Additional items distributed included masks, in-home activities, COVID-19 information, and nutritional education material.

Congregate nutrition sites remained closed for fiscal year 2020. Despite the closure, participants received self-stable and frozen meals to assist with their dietary needs. **Families First provided 4,547 meals, and CARES funded 3,065.** We remained in contact with all congregate participants by conducting periodic health and wellness check-in calls. Many clients appreciated the extra attention and nutritional meals we distributed.

*"I loved receiving the frozen meals while the congregate sites were closed. When the pandemic hit, I got sick myself and was having a hard time paying for groceries. I was so thankful when BRCA notified me about receiving some free meals. They really helped out when I needed it the most. Thank you."*

*Frances O. - Congregate Site Participant*

BRCA provided 13,563 additional meals this year with the assistance of Families First and CARES funding. These funds also assisted with serving 38 home delivered meals waitlisted clients. Food insecurity is a growing problem among the older adult population, and these extra meals helped during an unprecedented time. Several of our home delivered meal clients appreciated not only the meals but also the check-in it provides.

*"As a disabled veteran, I do not get out or see anyone very often, which causes me to have lots of depression. The meals are delicious, but what I love the most is the visit by the home delivered meals person. BRCA helps me eat better and improves my emotional health."*

*James G. - Home Delivered Meals Participant*

**CONGREGATE NUTRITION**  
**8,006 Meals and 90 Adults Served**

**HOME DELIVERED MEALS**  
**16,354 Meals and 118 Adults Served**  
**1,144 Volunteer Hours**



## HOUSING SERVICES - WEATHERIZATION



*I would like to thank you and Blue Ridge Community Action for the wonderful job you did on my home. It can be very hard for a single mother to keep up with all repairs that are needed for a home. With your help, my home is more comfortable, energy-efficient and something I am proud of. Everyone from intake to inspectors were hard working, knowledgeable, and most importantly kind. With all the issues going on in the world today, it's good to know that caring hearts still exist.*

**THANK YOU VERY MUCH!**

**SHERRY HOWIE - Weatherization Client**

### **Weatherization**

The Weatherization Assistance Program reduces energy costs by improving the energy efficiency of a home. These services reduce the average annual energy costs by \$300 per home.

**216 Homes Benefitted  
429 Persons Assisted**

### **Duke Energy**

This program is designed to assist low-income customers with managing their energy costs by making energy efficient improvements at the customer's residence.

**158 Homes Benefitted**

### **Heating Appliance Repair & Replacement Program (HARRP)**

HARRP provides services for those persons with inadequate or no heating system or air conditioning.

**154 Homes Benefitted  
309 Persons Assisted**

### **Blue Cross Blue Shield Healthy Home Initiative Program**

Provides funding for health centered repairs for families with the goal of increasing overall health outcomes.

**77 Homes Benefitted  
150 Persons Assisted**

# COMMUNITY SERVICE

## Information and Referral

Information and Referral program supports BRCA's centralized intake system by identifying low-income families in need of assistance and linking those families with the appropriate agency resource.

**195 Families Served**  
**334 Persons Served**

## Self-Sufficiency

CSBG Self-Sufficiency Program provides case management and other support services necessary to move families to self-sufficiency and above the poverty guidelines.

**25 Families Served**  
**34 Persons Served**  
**2 Families Gained Employment**

## Fraternal Order of Police

The local FOP and Blue Ridge Community Action have an ongoing partnership to distribute food to families for Fall and Spring.

**25 Fall Gift Cards (\$20)**  
**25 Spring Gift Cards (\$50)**

Blue Ridge Community Action launched the **BRCA NC CARES** Fund in response to the extraordinary challenges families and individuals faced brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. The fund provided much needed assistance to the residents of Burke, Caldwell and Rutherford counties who were negatively impacted by the pandemic.

Through the fund, the agency provided emergency assistance to 153 families consisting of 265 family members to help cover basic needs such as payments for utilities and rent.



*Tiffany G.* was grateful for the assistance she received from the BRCA NC CARES Fund. *She stated that ...*

*“ My children and I are so blessed and so thankful for all of your help! It truly means so much to us for all of what you are doing for our family! God is amazing and so are all of you! We enjoy making play mats and forts on our living room floor with our blankets. Thanks to you and all of your help, we can continue to have a home to be able to do so!!!”*

## VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX ASSISTANCE

BRCA offered drop-off service or “Virtual VITA” to tax clients for the 2021 tax season. BRCA prepared tax returns on site from February 1, 2021 until April 13, 2021. With specially designated parking, clipboards, one-time use pens, personal protective equipment like masks, gloves and sanitizing products, BRCA staff met clients in the parking lot of Quaker Meadows Generations, completed in-take information and returned to their desk to prepare the tax return while the client waited outside in their car.

Once completed, BRCA staff returned to the client, obtained the appropriate signatures and delivered the completed tax return. BRCA completed **712 tax returns** for families offering free tax help to people who generally make \$57,000 or less, persons with disabilities and limited English-speaking taxpayers who need assistance in preparing their own tax returns. **This was a 16% increase over the previous year.**



BRCA had 4 staff certified in Income Tax Return preparation along with 3 Western Piedmont Community College Accounting major students who volunteered for the tax season.

In addition, BRCA received an influx of clients who needed help, not only with filing their tax returns, but also with submitting key information to the IRS so they could receive their Economic Impact Payments. It was a hugely successful tax year!

**\$239,047 Earned Income Credits — \$974,738 Income Tax Refunds**

## CHDO RENTAL UNITS

### Affordable Rental Units

Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO) is a special status provided to nonprofit, community-based organizations whose purpose is to provide affordable housing for the community it serves.

**45 Units Owned**  
**81 Persons Served**

## MARY WRIGHT



Ms. Wright has been part of the Blue Ridge Community Action, Inc. and Community Action Network family for 44 years. She began her career with Blue Ridge Community Action, Inc. on April 21, 1977. Ms. Wright has consistently advocated and contributed to the growth and survival of Community Action Programs throughout Region IV. In particular, we want to highlight and celebrate Ms. Mary Wright's achievements and accomplishments. During her 44-year career, the programs under her direction included Community Services, Information and Referral, Circles of USA Program, Employment and Training, Transportation, Senior Services, Nutrition Services, and the Weatherization Assistance Program. She has been the Director of programs or indirectly responsible for program services and delivery for every program BRCA has operated. We are estimating that Ms. Wright has had an impact on 50,000 families during her 44-year tenure.

Her dedication and compassion to service extends beyond her employment at BRCA. She is very active in her community and church. A few of her community activities over the years include serving on several County and City Boards and committees including the Burke County Transit Authority where she served as a member several years and chaired for one year; City of Morganton Human Relations Commission as a member and Vice Chair; Burke Council on Aging serving as the Secretary; the United Way Board; the NAACP as a member and Secretary for more than 10 years; and the Chair of the Emergency Food and Shelter Program.

Her many recognitions for her dedication to community services include the WNC Bennett College Alumnae Chapter Phenomenal Women of the Church, the NAACP President’s Award, the Lifetime Achievement Award and inducted into the North Carolina Community Action Association Hall of Fame. As a member of the American Legion Auxiliary, she has chaired several State committees including Education, Legislature, Community Services, and District President in addition to her role in the Burke County local American Legion Auxiliary. She is a member of the Unifour Assembly Order of the Golden Circle, Eastern Stars and the Mary McLeod Bethune Civic Club. As a lifelong member of Slades Chapel AME Zion Church, she has served in several capacities on the district and local church. She is currently serving as the Church Secretary, Trustee, in the choir and the Usher Board President.

She has received several other recognitions that she is proud of but not boastful. She quite often says “God has allowed me to be a blessing to others through my blessings.” She is a proud parent of three adult children and Nana to six granddaughters.

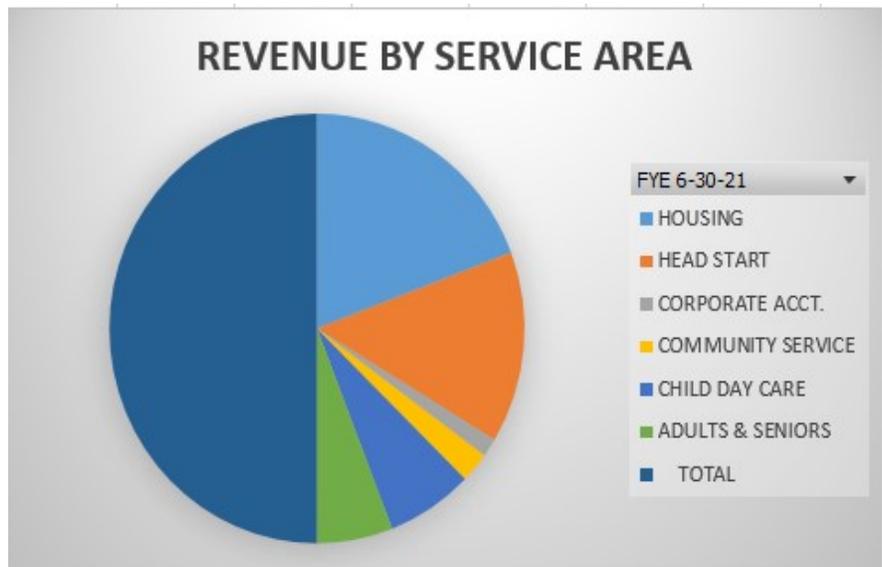


## REVENUE FOR FISCAL YEAR END 06/30/2021

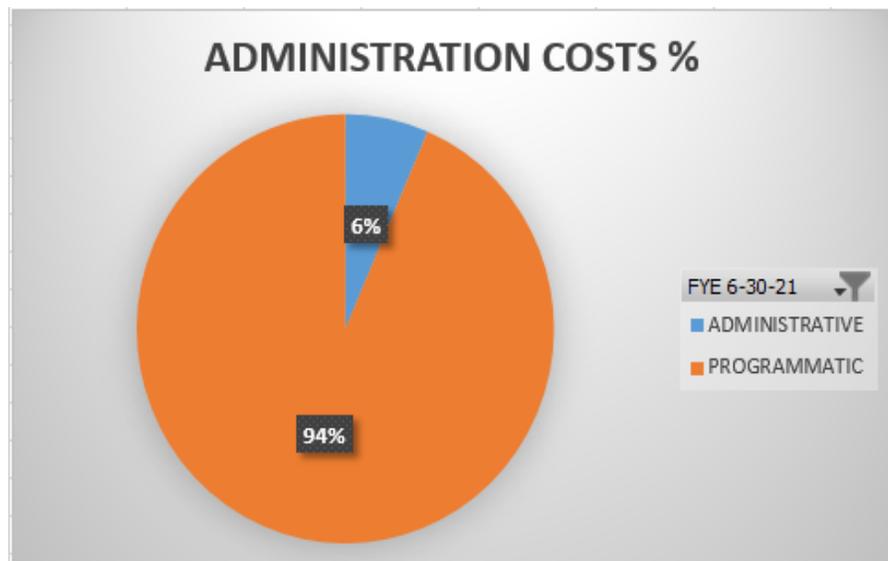
### TOTAL REVENUE

Service Area	REVENUE	%
ADULTS & SENIORS	\$ 1,265,582	10.50%
COMMUNITY SERVICE	\$ 842,320	6.99%
HEAD START	\$ 4,085,484	33.91%
CHILD DAY CARE	\$ 1,456,451	12.09%
HOUSING	\$ 3,886,456	32.25%
CORPORATE ACCT.	\$ 512,926	4.26%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$ 12,049,219</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

### REVENUE BY-SERVICE AREA



### ADMINISTRATIVE VS. PROGRAM EXPENSE



# BRCA STAFF GET VACCINATED



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Michael Cloy	Burke County
Dr. Lauri Stillwell	CCC&TI
Madelyn Russ	Open Hearts
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Annie Logan	Freedman Community
James (Al) Smith	Burke County
Allen Williams	Lenoir Community
JoAnn Woods	Forest City Community
Kandi Bridges	Rutherford County
David Martin	First Horizon Bank



# HEAD START POLICY COUNCIL

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<b>Nicole Hunter</b>	<i>Quaker Meadows Generations</i>
<b>Irma Lopez</b>	<i>Quaker Meadows Generations</i>
<b>Angela Berry</b>	<i>Circle of Friends</i>
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<b>Phyllis Scott</b>	<i>Northside Learning Center</i>
<b>Vice Chair—Amber Miller</b>	<i>Northside Learning Center</i>
<b>Al Smith</b>	<i>Community Representative</i>
<b>Board Representative—Inita Smith</b>	<i>Community Representative</i>



*Parents are essential partners in educating young children and are an important part in deciding what Head Start services can most benefit their family and other families in the community. Through the Policy Council, parents have a voice in the decisions about how the program spends money, what children do in their classroom, and how the program works with community partners.*

## BRCA STAFF



Stephanie Abernathy  
 Crystal Arellano  
**Stephanie Ashley \***  
 Thelma Brown  
 Chris Canella  
 Ana Cardona  
 Ryan Cary  
 Adrion Collins  
 Pam Cook  
**Susan Copenhaver\***  
 Mabel Davis  
 Susan Ferguson  
 Christy Galloway  
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\* Indicates Management Staff

# Providing Services, Advocacy and Support

## Serving Western North Carolina

Alexander, Burke, Caldwell, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston,  
Mecklenburg, McDowell, Rutherford, Stanly, and Union Counties

### Contact Us

Give us a call for more  
information about our  
services and programs.

#### Blue Ridge Community Action, Inc.

800 N. Green St.  
Morganton, NC 28655

(828) 438-6255

Visit us on the web at  
[www.brcainc.org](http://www.brcainc.org)

Blue Ridge Community Action, Inc. "Helping People, Changing Lives "

#### Blue Ridge Community Action, Inc.

800 N. Green St.  
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