

OUR FAMILY SUPPORT SYSTEM IN DURHAM COUNTY

VISION: We envision Durham as a place where all children grow up confident and resilient in safe, stable, and nurturing families, schools, and communities. We envision a family support system that ensures all children grow up in families, schools, and communities where basic needs are met and where families are supported, empowered, and knowledgeable about child development.

The Family Support System in Durham refers to all the people, institutions, and resources that support families' social-emotional health and access to basic needs in a society that does not allocate resources equitably. Transitioning to parenthood is hard for anyone and presents new financial, social, and emotional challenges that can cause stress. This can be particularly true for grandparents, young parents, single parents, parents with a disability, parents with an incarcerated partner, and parents with mental health challenges who have primary caregiving responsibilities. It is important for our family support system to keep in mind the diversity of family structures in which young children are raised to ensure that supports are available and accessible to ALL families.

A comprehensive family support system works to both prevent stressful experiences for children and respond to many different types of adverse childhood experiences,¹ while buffering those negative experiences with positive childhood experiences. There are four types of adverse childhood experiences: individual adversity and household trauma; community adversity and collective trauma; atrocious cultural experiences/historical trauma (e.g. slavery, forced relocation, family separation, etc.); and chronic stress and secondary trauma.² ⁱ

Parents seek out support in different and varied ways. This support can come from friends, neighborhoods, faith communities, or online and in-person support groups. Parents may also

¹ See the [Durham ECAP Glossary](#) ("8. Glossary") for definition of "Adverse Childhood Experiences."

² See the [Durham ECAP Glossary](#) ("8. Glossary") for definition of "trauma."

seek out public assistance or support through community-rooted organizations, nonprofit organizations, and public agencies to meet basic needs or find social-emotional support.

The types of supports available in Durham include:

- Support with families' **basic needs**, including:
 - [Economic security](#)
 - [Reliable access to affordable, nutritious and culturally relevant food](#)
 - [Safe, affordable, healthy housing](#)
 - [Access to basic family essential supplies](#)
 - Accessible, affordable, anti-racist, and culturally affirming healthcare (see "[5b. Our Maternal and Child Health System](#)")

- Support with children's **social-emotional health** in the context of family and community, including:
 - [Efforts to promote community safety and wellness](#)
 - [Social-emotional and mental health support for parents and families](#)
 - [Social-emotional and mental health support for children](#)



“Everything is calm when needs are met and it becomes angry and agitated when they’re not.” - Durham parent

“Families are overwhelmed with providing the basic necessities such as housing, food, and healthcare.” - Durham parent

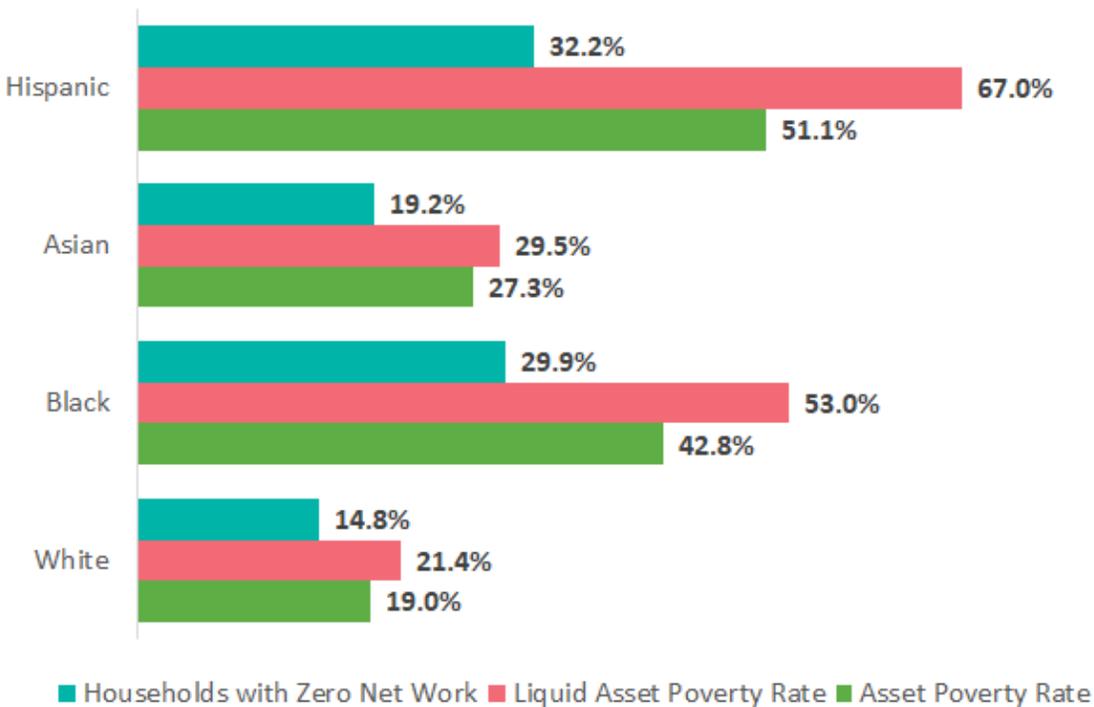
FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Economic insecurity is a root cause of nearly every early inequitable childhood outcome and perhaps the most important factor underlying families' and young children's ability to thrive. A child's health, development, educational opportunity, safety, wellness, and social-emotional health are all highly connected with a family's household income.

Access to economic power depends on access to: well-compensated jobs with benefits, accommodations, and mobility; credit, loans, and investments; post-secondary education; and owning land and building wealth. BIPOC communities continue to face barriers and discrimination to building wealth.

In Durham, there is a significant racial wealth gap. While data are not available for Durham's families with young children, specifically, Figure 1 shows the deep racial disparities in savings and assets among all Durham County residents.

Figure 1: Racial Wealth Gap - Savings & Assets of Durham County Residentsⁱⁱ



While providing access to food, housing, and family essential supplies is important for families, these efforts cannot replace efforts to build economic power in communities. Building economic power is not about temporary Band-Aid solutions, but about ensuring long-term sustainable wealth-building through jobs, investment tools, business ownership, land

ownership, and more. While we envision a liberatory society in which wealth, land, and power are shared; within the confines of capitalism, we believe that families who have historically been denied opportunities to accumulate wealth, own land, and build economic power should be compensated for past harms and have the opportunity for economic prosperity.

Strengths

Community Organizations Provide Financial Support to Families

Durham is fortunate to have several community-based and community-rooted organizations who provide direct financial assistance to families. For example, Refugee Community Partnership, El Centro, Communities in Partnership, and Together for Resilient Youth (TRY) responded to families' financial needs during the pandemic to provide access to emergency response funds. Equity Before Birth provides supplemental income for Black moms and birthing people in the Triangle through 18 months postpartum.

Challenges

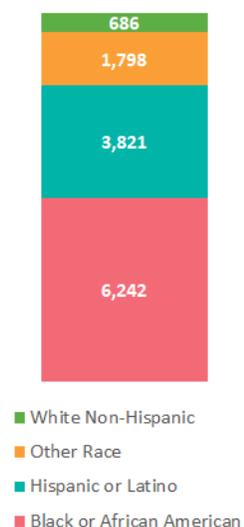
Money is a Major Source of Stress for Durham Parents

Repeatedly, parents and caregivers cited lack of sufficient money as the primary source of their stress. In the 2019 Community Health Assessment, approximately **41%** of Durham residents identified finances as their primary source of stress and was the most common response overall.ⁱⁱⁱ This stress is at the root of so many other challenges—paying for housing, food, healthcare, childcare, and other critical essentials to raise a young child in Durham.

- **46%** of Durham County's young children aged 0-6 live below 200% of the federal poverty level.^v
- More than a quarter of Durham's young children (**26%**) live in a home where the head of household's income is at or below poverty level.^{vi}
- Poverty rates have stark racial disparities: **37%** of young children aged 0-8 who are Black and **36%** who are Hispanic live in homes at or below poverty level; whereas only **8%** of young white children in Durham live in poverty.^{vii}
- The annual average unemployment rate in Durham County in 2020 was **6.5%**.^{viii}

Figure 2: Number of Children Under 18 Living in Areas of Concentrated Poverty in Durham County

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"We don't need support groups we need more money, people providing childcare paid living wages, and a UBI [universal basic income]. Stop paying social workers to yell at people and just pay people. It's that simple." - Durham parent

"Many families have to choose which basic need to spend limited income on. Rent, food, or diapers?" - ECAP participant

"Many parents have to sacrifice in order to work multiple jobs and still struggle with meeting basic needs" - ECAP participant

"Black and brown communities are always the last to get resources, are last to find out what is going on, lack the finances. So we have to begin at the earliest ages to build them up financially." - Durham parent

"Good employment for parents because if mom need 2 jobs to take care of kids how can she invest in her child's education as well." - Durham parent

"As early educators we are dealing with issues that are directly related to poverty. Often families are in difficult situations and early childcare educators fill in the gaps that gov isn't filling." - Durham Early Childhood Educator

Disrespectful Customer Service When Accessing Economic Supports

Families in need of cash assistance and other financial support expressed feeling judged, discriminated against, and treated poorly when accessing these supports.

"A social services department that doesn't hate human life." - Durham parent

"I had a horrible experience at social services. Finally a social worker gave me an interpreter. The social worker was complaining because my child was crying and she couldn't hear me and the interpreter on the phone left. Then someone came over who spoke Spanish and was able to help but I still didn't get the issue resolved. Then another woman was able to help me but the person in charge seemed to just get agitated and said they already told me what was what. It was a terrible experience." - Durham parent

Workplaces That Do Not Support Parents With Young Children

In order to meet many of the NC ECAP goal areas, parents need flexibility, financial security, and accommodations from workplaces in order to:

- Financially support their families
- Ensure their children are safe and learning while they are working
- Bond and spend time with infants
- Take young children to healthcare appointments
- Attend to their own mental health and wellness

"Maybe models like [nido coworking](#) where your child can be nearby (e.g. for breastfeeding) with a shared teacher but still have a quiet remote workspace with adjustments for accessibility may help? I'm convinced it's not just subsidies but restructuring work that is needed." - Durham parent

"PAID PARENTAL LEAVE FOR BOTH PARTNERS FOR 6 MONTHS." - Durham parent

"I think we primarily need broad systemic change that allows for more family leave and lets parents better balance careers and parenting." - Durham parent

Challenging for Parents to Continue Their Education

Parents shared their challenges to continuing their education after they have children, which impacts their future earnings and mobility. Barriers to pursuing higher education can negatively impact children's health, social, and academic outcomes. Young moms, in particular, shared their challenges with minimum wage jobs and struggles to finish high school within Durham Public Schools. Parents of all ages shared their challenges continuing education, citing barriers such as child care, transportation, and lack of money to cover the expenses.

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 7. Advocate for workplaces that understand and support the needs of families with young children.
- 8. Ensure families with young children have economic security and opportunities for wealth-building and long-term economic prosperity.

SUPPORTS TO ACCESS AND GROW NUTRITIOUS AND CULTURALLY RELEVANT FOOD

There are racial inequities at all levels of our food system that are deeply rooted in the founding of this country—a founding which depended on land theft, indigenous genocide, and forced labor of enslaved African people. The distribution of land, resources, and capital has historically determined who has access to healthy, nutritious food and who decides what food is grown and which neighborhoods have access.^{ix x}

Strengths

Community-Rooted Efforts Focused on Food Justice

Durham is home to community-rooted organizations working to promote food justice and decolonize our food systems. These programs include Communities in Partnership, Tall Grass Food Box, SEEDS, Earthseed Land Collective, the FED UP food drive, and more. In addition, there are several local examples of child care homes and directors modeling food justice initiatives within their early childhood education programs.

Cross-Sector Collaboration to Identify and Address Food Needs

Families reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their families' ability to afford food, and have appreciated the donations of food items and community support. The Durham community is strong and comes together to support neighbors who need additional food or supplies. Parents feel grateful for community organizations, Durham Public Schools, and other child care sites and programs working to prevent food insecurity for children in Durham.

"The Durham Public School System is doing a great job providing meals for kids." - ECAP survey strengths

"DPS school lunch existing during covid-19 school closures." - Durham parent

"We are new to the area but I have been very impressed with the covid response to the problem of how to feed all of the children who are on free or reduced lunch, specifically the DPS families while in school instruction is not an option." - Durham parent

"At this point in my community we are doing social distance. But in this community we help each other out with food." - Durham parent

"Everyone coming together to feed Durham's children during the pandemic and school closures." - Durham parent

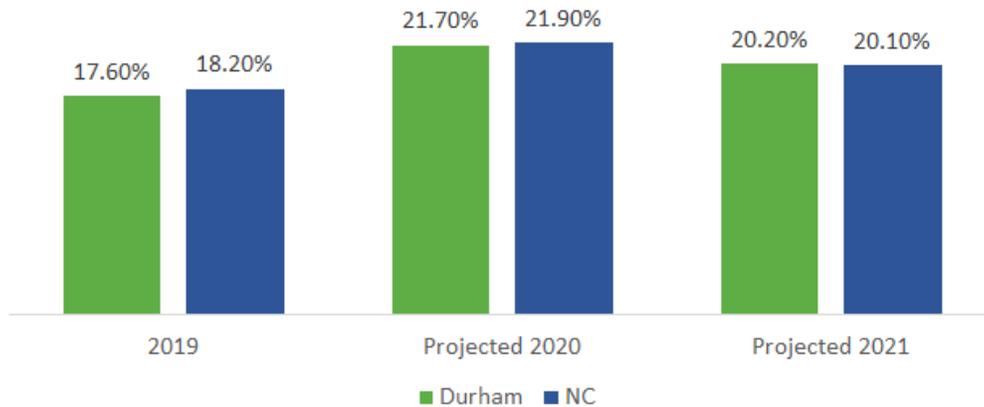
"I thank all the organizations that support us with food for our children." - Durham parent

Challenges

Too Many Children and Families in Durham are Facing Food Insecurity

As of 2019, **17.6%** of children under age 17 in Durham faced food insecurity.^{3 xi} We know that food insecurity has only worsened as a result of the pandemic and resulting family economic security.

Figure 3: Child Food Insecurity Rates^{xii}



While parents felt the Durham community's support during the pandemic was a strength, the increased need for food support was a major stressor and challenge for families with young children during the pandemic. Members of the County's Food Security Taskforce report that food pantries have seen about a 50% increase in demand for food assistance since the pandemic started. The Food Bank of Central and Eastern North Carolina reported a **38%** increase in need of food.^{xiii}

"It's expensive to make sure we have healthy food in the house and I have a two-income household. Everyone is just trying to get the basics right now like soup." - Durham parent

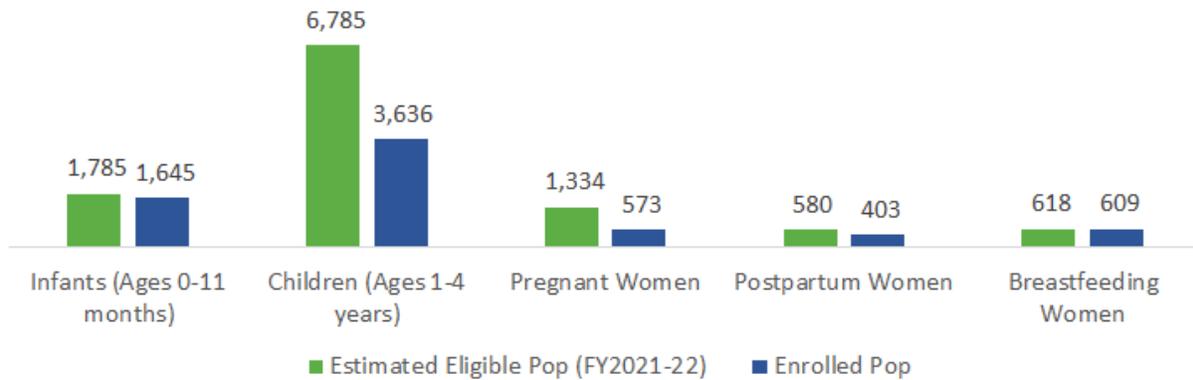
³ A household is defined as food insecure if the respondent answers affirmatively to three or more questions from the Core Food Security Module (CFSM) in the December supplement of the Current Population Survey (CPS) conducted by the United States Census Bureau. Source: Feeding America. "Map the Meal Gap 2021 Technical Brief." (2021). Retrieved from: <https://www.feedingamerica.org/sites/default/files/2021-05/Map%20the%20Meal%20Gap%202021%20Technical%20Brief.pdf>.

Enrollment for Public Food Assistance is Challenging, Stigmatizing, and Not Available to All in Need

Parents shared that enrolling for food support benefits can be a difficult and delayed process and many parents reported running into eligibility, language, and navigation barriers. In focus groups, parents shared examples of negative experiences with the staff administering SNAP and WIC at a time that is already very stressful for parents.

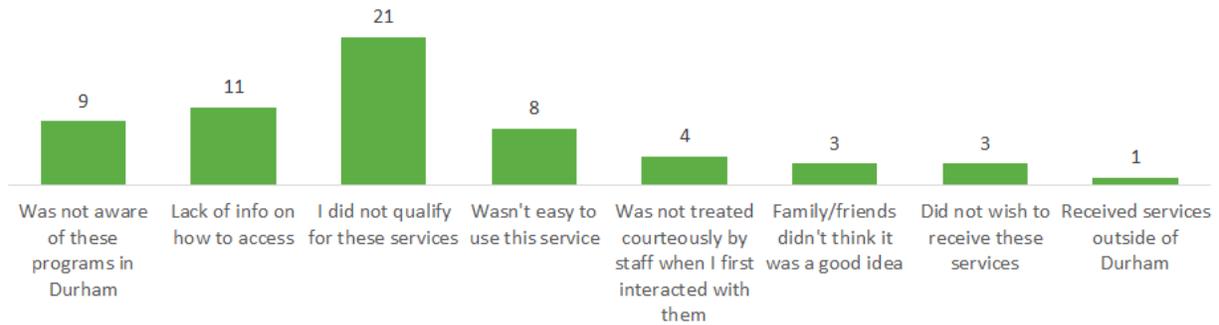
Improving access and customer experience will be critical to increasing the percent of eligible families receiving state and federal supplemental food and nutrition assistance benefits (an NC ECAP sub-target). In Durham, there are an estimated 11,102 people eligible for WIC, however less than 7,000 are enrolled.^{xiv} In addition, there are many parents who are undocumented and therefore ineligible for WIC.

Figure 4: Eligible Individuals in Durham County Receiving WIC^{xv}



Parents who completed the Durham ECAP parent and caregiver survey also shared frustrations with trying to access services but being ineligible due to certain criteria. Of parents who identified food insecurity as a challenge for their family but who were not able to access services, **21 of 47** parents (47%) reported that they did not access food support because they did not qualify.^{xvi}

Figure 5: Reasons Why Parents in Need of Food Support Were Unable to Access^{xvii}



"Recently applied for SNAP but was unable to receive it because I'm living in my mother's household. But even people I know living alone are unable to get it." - Durham parent
"They don't listen to us. When we ask questions they say things like, 'these are not my guidelines', 'I just work here.'" - Durham parent/caregiver
"The staff were rude when I went to the food bank and I won't go back." - Durham parent/caregiver
"Not just access, but easy and non-stigmatized access to meals/food." - ECAP participant
"Stigma around accepting food supports." - ECAP participant

Students and Parents Want Children to Have Access to Healthy, Culturally Relevant Food in Learning Environments

51.65% of children in Durham Public Schools receive free or reduced school meals^{xviii} and many early care and education programs provide food for children as well. Parents and children report that the food in learning settings is not high-quality, culturally relevant, or healthy. The community and programs providing food do not always share the same definition of high-quality and healthy either.

"Let's be honest most kids do not eat or do not want their lunch food because of what's in it. They give you bad quality of food. We know that kids have developing brains and all that stuff. It's better if we start in the beginning with elementary kids. So that once they grow by then when they become adults they already have strong, healthy minds and have more access to everything and probably help their own communities as well." - 9th grader in Durham Public Schools"

Short-Term Fixes to Systemic Challenge of “Food Apartheid”

Too often our approaches to addressing child food insecurity focus on access to quality food, rather than prioritizing communities’ local ownership of land and capital in order to truly address the issues of economic inequality and systemic racism at the root of an unjust food system. We often use the term “food desert” to refer to neighborhoods with limited access to grocery stores which force families to depend on places like gas stations with less nutritious options. However, the term food desert brings to mind a naturally occurring phenomenon, when the reality is far from it. We choose to use the term “food apartheid” to recognize the economic, political, racial, and social systems that are “man-made” and result in neighborhoods with low access to fresh, healthy, culturally relevant food.^{xix} **16.3%** of children aged 0-17 in Durham have low access to healthy food⁴ in North Carolina.^{xx}

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 10. Ensure families with young children have access to enough affordable, culturally relevant, healthy food every day.

⁴ Low access to healthy food is defined as living more than half a mile from a supermarket, supercenter, or large grocery store in urban areas (using a 2019 directory of supermarkets) or 10 miles for rural areas.

SUPPORTS TO ACCESS SAFE, AFFORDABLE, AND HEALTHY HOUSING

Housing is a foundational need and should be a right for every person. Access to safe, stable, secure, and healthy housing is particularly important for young children during this period of rapid development. Housing with environmental contaminants (such as lead, dust, and mold) disrupts healthy brain development and can cause physical, social, and behavioral challenges for children. Unstable housing leads to instability in a child's life and schooling. And the stress of housing affordability puts pressure on a family and takes resources away that could otherwise go towards food or child care.

Unfortunately, Durham is and has been in the midst of an affordable housing crisis that has only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Stark racial disparities persist in housing access. These racial disparities in access to affordable housing have pernicious, historical roots beginning with the denial of 40 acres and a mule to the survivors of American slavery; carried on through the era of land loss under Jim Crow; and cemented by the racist redlining policies.⁵ Formerly redlined neighborhoods are now more vulnerable to burgeoning housing costs and displacement caused by urban revitalization and resulting gentrification.^{xxi} These forces replicate deep-seated racial inequities.

Strengths

Dedicated, Community-Rooted and Community-Based Affordable Housing Groups and Organizing

There are a number of organizations and grassroots groups working to keep Durham families in their homes and advocating for more affordable options in the midst of an affordable housing crisis that has worsened as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a vast network of community-rooted efforts and nonprofits providing rental assistance to families, tenant organizing, eviction diversion, and more.

There is also strong resident organizing within Durham Housing Authority's housing and local leadership advocating for safe, stable, humane housing conditions, particularly in the wake of the McDougald Terrace crisis in 2020 that displaced hundreds of residents due to carbon monoxide leaks.^{xxiii}

Resources to Address Lead Remediation

Durham has several organizations and government partnerships working to address lead in homes, especially in homes of families with young children, including PEACH Durham,

⁵ See the [Durham ECAP Glossary](#) ("8. Glossary") for definition of "redlining."

Reinvestment Partners, and the Department of Public Health. Durham is currently the recipient of a lead grant to build capacity of lead remediation firms.

City-Funded Initiatives Focused on Housing and Homelessness

While homelessness is a persistent and pressing issue for Durham, there are a variety of initiatives aimed at offering shelter, support, and prevention for those dealing with or facing the possibility of homelessness. One of those programs approved for additional funding of \$500,000 by the Durham City Council in 2020 was the [Durham Eviction Diversion program](#), which is a partnership between Legal Aid of North Carolina and the Duke Civil Justice Clinic. The funding went towards additional staff to provide legal representation to residents and families with low-wealth and low-income who are facing eviction with a goal of moving toward a universal right to counsel in eviction cases.

Challenges

Unsafe and Unhealthy Public Housing Puts Kids At Risk

Parents with experience living in public housing administered by the Durham Housing Authority cited unkempt conditions and infrequent and inconsiderate maintenance. Persistent challenges with safety and health remain and were brought to center stage during the carbon monoxide crisis at McDougald Terrace in 2020 which led to displacement, sickness, and further trauma. Unsafe housing with fungal or mold growth, lead, pests, and lack of ventilation for gas appliances can cause developmental and learning delays, behavioral issues, asthma, and other conditions in young children.

"People deserve a better place to live than neighborhoods that have mold, are unkempt, violent. this breeds violence and negativity." - Durham parent

"Maintenance is an issue with Durham housing authority. Our toilet backed up at the same time and there was feces in the tub. I had to advocate for myself or it would've been that way for a week. Maintenance said, 'Be thankful your sink works.'" - Durham parent

"Lots of people are living in the projects in units that aren't getting updated." - ECAP participant and Durham parent

"...I have gone several times to the housing office because it is very difficult to pay the rent and they have never let me in to speak with a representative and to advise me on what programs or aid exist for families with children with special needs." - Durham parent

Childhood Lead Poisoning and Exposure to Contaminants

Across the County, children are living and playing in environments where they are exposed to lead. Lead poisoning disproportionately impacts children of color and children from families with low-incomes who are more likely to live in substandard housing and polluted communities with higher risk of lead exposure.^{xxiv} 0.22% of children in Durham tested for lead poisoning had elevated blood lead levels, which is similar to the state at .28% and similar counties like Guilford at .22%.^{xxv}

“There is no Durham agency that enforces lead safety in homes with children.” - ECAP participant

Unaffordable and Overcrowded Housing

Housing remains unaffordable for many Durham families. Rent in Durham has risen by nearly 19%, from median rent of \$1,106 in 2017 to \$1,315 in 2021.^{xxvi} **19.6%** of households spend at least 30% of their income on housing.^{xxvii} Renters can be more vulnerable to the fluctuating market than homeowners. 49% of renters in Durham families have difficulty affording their homes and 9,441 families faced an eviction filing in 2019.^{xxviii} These figures have very likely increased as a result of the pandemic and the ensuing economic insecurity.

In an effort to increase affordability, housing units can become crowded.^{6 xxix} As of 2017, 15% of young children in Durham ages 0-8 lived in homes that were overcrowded, and Latinx children were more likely to live in households with more crowded conditions.^{xxx} Families can find themselves needing to share housing in the face of expensive housing, language barriers, and eligibility barriers to accessing affordable housing supports. First and foremost, we must address the housing affordability crisis in Durham. While access to safe, affordable, housing that is not overcrowded benefits everyone, it is particularly important for young children early in development as research has shown that living in overcrowded housing in early childhood is associated with diminished cognitive development.^{xxxi}

As a result of housing insecurity, families with young children are facing homelessness. In the 2019-20 school year, 356 children in Durham Public Schools kindergarten through third grade were served under McKinney-Vento. The McKinney-Vento Program meets the needs of homeless students attending Durham Public Schools by addressing academic challenges and family issues affecting their success in school. There are stark racial disparities in student homelessness: over 80% of students served under McKinney-Vento in 2019-20 were Black.^{xxxii}

⁶ Crowdedness in housing is measured by the number of persons in the housing unit divided by the number of rooms in the housing unit. A housing unit is considered crowded if there is more than 1 person per room."

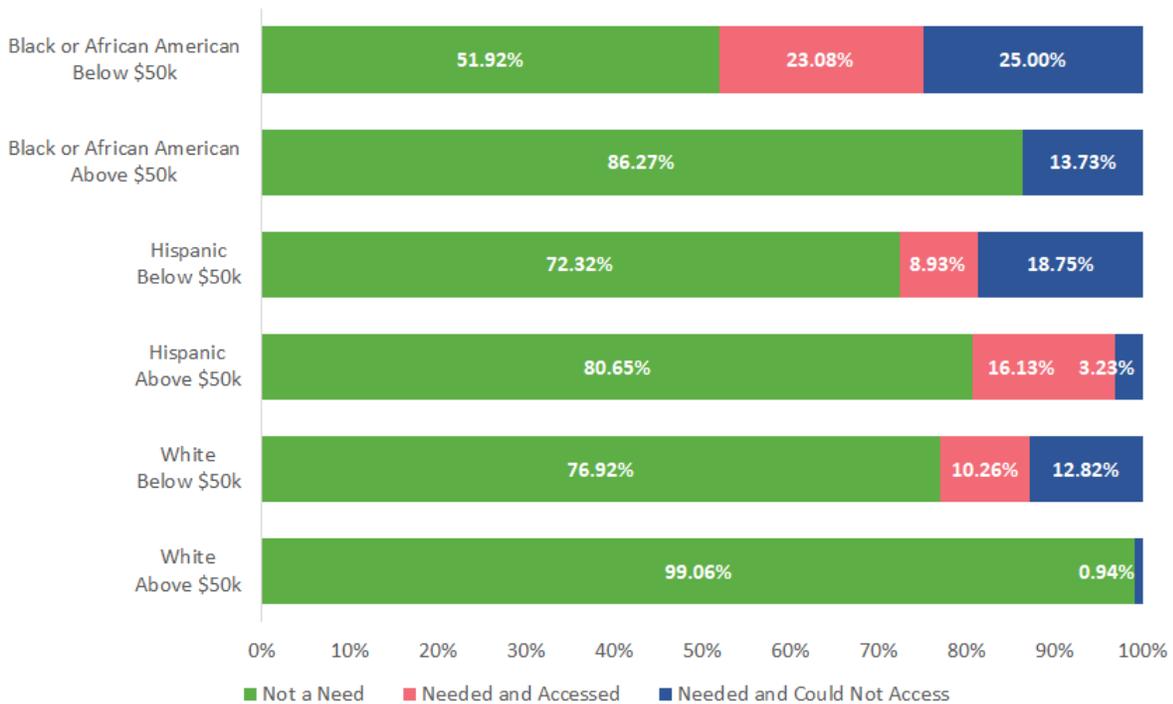
"Difficult to get housing. Even a 1 bedroom is unaffordable." - Durham parent
 "I think stable, safe, affordable and healthy housing is important because it's important to have good housing so you don't get hurt or have problems with your house. It's also hard to buy or pay rent for housing." - 7th grader in a Durham Charter School
 "Adequate service and resources for children experiencing homelessness." - ECAP participant

Housing Assistance Eligibility Requirements and Confusing Process

Parents expressed a desire for more and better options for affordable, income-based housing, and lower requirements for rent assistance.

Of parents who responded to the Durham ECAP parent survey, nearly half of Black parents with low incomes needed housing assistance in the past month, and only half of them could access it. Hispanic and white parents with low incomes also struggled to access housing assistance when needed.

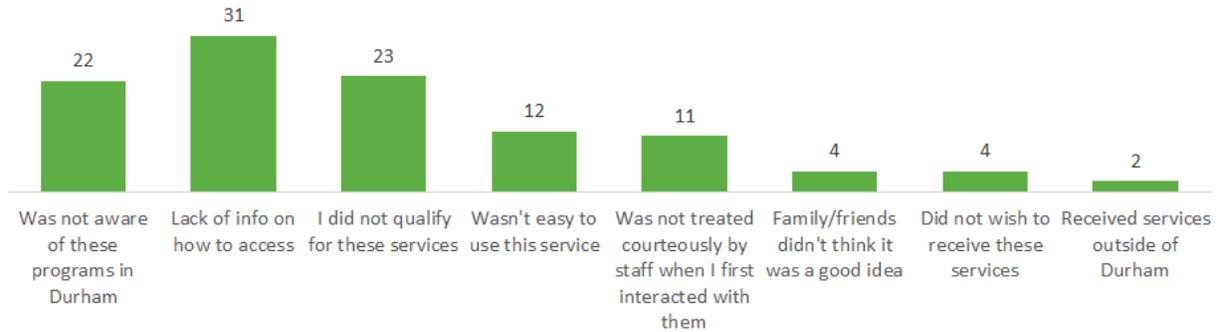
Figure 6: Need for Housing Assistance in the Last 12 Months^{xxxiii}



Of parents who identified housing insecurity as a challenge for their family but who were not able to access services, **31 of 72** (43.1%) parents reported that they did not access because they did not have information on how to access and **23 of 72** (31.9%) reported that they could not access because they did not qualify. Many parents shared their frustration with the benefits

cutoff that means working families who make just enough do not qualify and end up in a worse financial situation than those who receive housing subsidies. **22 of 72** (30.6%) indicated that they were not aware of programs that could help them with their housing challenges.

Figure 7: Reasons Why Parents in Need of Housing Assistance Were Unable to Access^{xxxiv}



"More resources for families of young children that do not qualify for public/government assistance." - ECAP participant

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 9. Promote access to safe, stable, affordable, and healthy housing for families with young children.

SUPPORT WITH BASIC ESSENTIAL FAMILY SUPPLIES

Caregivers and new mothers in Durham emphasized the need for family essential supplies such as car seats, diapers, beds, clothing, bottles, and breast pumps for all families with young children. While Durham has a strong community support system to connect families with supplies, there is not enough funding available to sustainably meet this need. Awareness is also a barrier as there is no centralized place to learn about where or how to get family essential supplies.

Strengths

Resources in Durham to Support Essential Needs

Many resources and parent support networks are available for families in need. Parents and caregivers cited the Durham community as a major strength that comes together for each other. There is significant grassroots organizing happening in Durham to get families what they need. This happens through social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and NextDoor, through in person giving closets or clothing swaps, and through community-rooted organizations.

There are also several community-based programs, like the Diaper Bank of North Carolina and Welcome Baby, and community-rooted programs, like MAAME and Equity Before Birth, helping families access essential family supplies.

“Mothers donating milk, formula, and baby food on social media.” - Durham parent
“Parents and families supporting each other locally through swap meets.” - Durham parent
“Many great sharing and swapping sites to benefit all.” - Durham parent
“La Leche League and other breast feeding support.” - Durham parent
“There are lots of programs to support a variety of things a new parent needs from help with breastfeeding, clothes, books, toys, diapers and groceries.” - Durham parent
“Durham Connects for newborns, Welcome Baby providing clothing for people with young kids.” - Durham parent
“We have a diaper bank. Many communities in NC and across the country do not.” - ECAP participant

Challenges

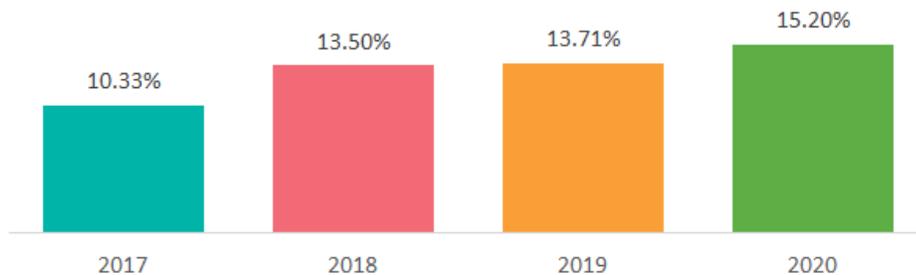
Not Enough Funding to Meet the Need

While there are many organizations and communities working together to supply essentials to families with young children, these have largely depended on informal networks of individuals who do not receive funding or through community-based organizations who have waiting lists.

Some providers also lack storage space, making it hard to have family essential supplies readily available for families.

Across the United States, 1 in 3 families struggle to afford diapers, and in Durham County that number is closer to 1 in 2.43.^{xxxv} Currently in Durham only **15.2%** of the need for diapers is met.^{xxxvi}

Figure 8: Percent of Diaper Need Met in Durham County^{xxxvii}



“Access to diaper bank for new moms in need.” - ECAP participant

“More resources for families of young children that do not qualify for public/government assistance.” - ECAP participant

Awareness of Programs

While Durham has many resources available that provide family essentials, such as diapers, car seats, formula and other supplies, many parents do not know where to go to receive this support.

“Can’t think of any program that gives food, clothing, shelter on a daily basis. If there’s a program they do a poor job of promoting it.” - Durham parent/caregiver

“Need better communication on the information to reach the folks it needs to reach.” - Durham parent

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 11. Ensure families have the essential family supplies needed to support pre- and post-partum health and to care for babies and young children.

COMMUNITY WELLNESS AND SAFETY

True community wellness and safety cannot be achieved without repairing the financial, physical, and psychological harm that comes from decades of oppression and the ongoing disruption of entire cultures and communities. Examples of this oppression that need to be named begin at the founding of this nation all the way up to the present. These include:

- The trauma that has come from American colonization
- The genocide of indigenous peoples, and enslavement of Africans
- The federally-subsidized disruption of Black economies and support systems (e.g. Hayti and Black Wall Street in Durham)
- The denial of opportunities for land ownership and wealth-building through redlining, the GI Bill and other policies of the mid-20th century
- The prison industrial complex and mass incarceration
- The medical industrial complex and high rates of deaths of BIPOC pregnant people
- The constant threat of deportation for immigrants
- The over policing and police brutality in communities of color
- Present day gentrification and displacement in Durham

These are just a few examples and are only the tip of the iceberg of the violence that Black, Brown, and Indigenous communities have faced and continue to face. These are the underlying conditions that disrupt community wellness and safety.

To foster the social-emotional, mental health and resilience of young children and their families we must recognize that families grow and nurture their children in the context of community. Families do not exist outside of the community and what happens to the community happens to families and those who support them. Durham's youngest children are directly harmed, physically and emotionally. This harm can have lasting impacts on health, wellbeing, education, and relationships.

Strengths

Many People and Organizations Promoting Community Wellness and Safety

There are many people and organizations in Durham fighting for justice, liberation, and community wellness. Some are providing a safe space to process domestic violence, others are organizing against police brutality, and others are preserving cultural heritage and honoring history.

Parents appreciate spaces that feel inclusive and welcoming.

"The one bright spot is a space like Nolia (family friendly, black owned coffee shop). Nolia is representative of what I think Durham should feel like for families. Welcoming, centering diversity, kid friendly, affordable." - Durham parent/caregiver

Challenges

Parents and Children Not Feeling Like They Belong as Durham Grows and Changes

Parents and caregivers expressed a desire for more diversity in small businesses and opportunities for adequate representation by communities of color in Durham. Young children are rapidly absorbing information about the world and who they see around them in public spaces matters. Parents expressed a desire to diversify the power to own land and space so that all children know they belong in our community. A sense of belonging is critical to a child's positive sense of self. As Durham grows and changes, we often talk about the physical displacement of long-term residents (especially residents of color and low wealth residents who have been harmed by institutional racism in the rental market and with home ownership), but must also acknowledge the cultural displacement as well and the broader impact on community wellness.

"Give grants to minority owned, family-centric/family-friendly businesses!" - Durham parent
"Downtown Durham is starting to feel inaccessible/unfriendly to those who are not affluent and white. That's unfortunate. When I first moved here, it seemed a lot more of a melting pot. But it's becoming exclusive b/c of unattainable housing costs and a downtown scene that's no longer catered to everyone. It doesn't feel like a place for me and my family." - Durham parent

"People being dislocated from where they grew up in - that's trauma in itself when you're put in another section of town based on politics, gentrification, etc." - Durham Parent

Community Violence Stemming from Poverty

Gun violence and interpersonal violence are a symptom of a complex, intentional web of oppressive factors associated with poverty and racism. The trauma is ongoing. Parents living in public housing complexes, in particular, cited gun violence as a major concern for them as they raise young children. Families want more funds, resources, and community-rooted solutions to prevent gun violence and violent crimes in general. A neighborhood look at violent crimes per square mile can be viewed [here](#).^{xxxviii} The number one top community issue identified by Durham County residents in the 2020 Durham County Community Health Assessment was violent crime.^{xxxix}

"Currently my family and I live in Oxford Manor. 15 min of shooting at 6:30 PM in a neighborhood filled with families." - Durham parent

"Community violence (early traumatic impact)." - ECAP participant

"We need to talk about where Head Start centers are located. Maybe it is because Head Start is for people with less resources and that is why they are located in low income areas. Maybe it is to mitigate the fact that they don't provide transportation for families. But the centers are in dangerous places." - Durham parent/caregiver

"Where I live, we hear bullets all the time. And it makes you think that it's not safe." - Durham parent

Over Policing, Mass Incarceration, Police Brutality and the Impacts on Communities of Color

We do not know the exact percentage of children aged 0-8 in Durham who have an incarcerated family member, but with a statewide incarceration rate of 639 per 100,000 people we can assume many children in Durham have lost a family member to incarceration.^{xi} Statewide, more than **179,000 kids** have a parent who has served time.^{xii} The problem of mass incarceration in Durham, as with the rest of the state and nation, is an issue of racial injustice. Black residents make up 22% of the state population,^{xiii} but **55%** of the state's prison and jail population.^{xliii}

In the face of over policing in communities of color and the very real risk of police brutality, parents of BIPOC children, particularly parents of Black boys, expressed concern that their children will fall victim to police brutality.

"Just a couple of days ago, my son was playing with a nerf gun. Went outside to go check the mail and his mom lost it. We had to have a conversation about being aware about how things are perceived. We shouldn't even have to have a conversation. Even on my property with a bright, orange nerf gun." - Durham parent

"I've been excited seeing him take his first steps and seeing him meet his milestones, but then you see what's going on outside and you need to be more prepared and hypervigilant." - Durham parent

"It's imperative that a kid who loses their parent to incarceration is in a program with positive energy around them." - Durham parent/caregiver

"Want to see some type of program or initiative for [incarcerated] fathers to get legal help to have rights to see their kids. They can't afford attorneys to help them get visitation. Most of the time they just want to see their kids and be part of their lives. [Children] have to continue to pay for that over and over." - Durham parent

Systemic Racism Continues to Directly and Indirectly Traumatize People and Communities

Experiencing racism in and of itself is a traumatic experience.^{xliv} Parents shared that the stress of living within systemic racism and witnessing individual acts of racism is extremely stressful and impacts them as parents.

“We keep so much stuff on us internally that it starts to eat us up internally with different diseases and things that are happening. Stress is real. The pressure to make sure we always have to do X, Y, and Z is tiring. It’s exhausting. Not to mention the fact that when we wake up in the morning we’re thinking I’m a Black man, I gotta make sure I wear this right, look like this, don’t have this facial expression, make sure I do that.” - Durham parent

Parents Have Had Traumatizing Experiences with Social Services

The Department of Social Services Child Protective Services is intended to prevent child abuse, and to step in to protect a child who is being harmed, abused, or neglected. The most recent data show that 2.32 out of 1,000 children in Durham County aged 0-6 and 2.51 out of 1,000 children in Durham County aged 7-12 are victims of maltreatment.^{xlv xlvii}

Durham has approximately 1,400 reports of neglect and abuse requiring investigation and 440 children in foster care yearly with Black children overrepresented as both reported victims of maltreatment and in foster care^{xlvii} (60% and 68% respectively, when Black children in Durham are only 38.76% of the population).^{xlviii} Parents expressed deep concern that the child welfare/child protection system itself criminalizes poverty, is racist, and disproportionately harms BIPOC families, causing separation and harming children in a critical time of development.

Parents strongly felt that there is a need to recognize the harm and intentional design of the child welfare system and the long history of systemic oppression within the system.^{xlix} To create change, they feel we cannot simply innovate on existing systems, but need to rethink the purpose of child protective services and the ways we can accomplish those goals in a different way. Providers agree that there is a need to “move upstream” to address the root causes like access to economic opportunity, safe housing, and mental health support.^l

“The goal here is family safety and [DSS] is not functioning in that way, but as a source of stress, fear, trauma and racial inequities.” - ECAP participant

"The narrative around CPS needs to change. Re-education for social workers on supporting families and not just causing child separation." - Durham parent

Mental Health Care Can Be Attended to in the Context of Community

Parents shared opportunities to gather and support one another in ways that build community and ultimately support our collective social-emotional health. Ideas that were shared include bringing programs to people's homes and creating safe spaces for mentorship and gathering.

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 8. Ensure families with young children have economic security and opportunities for wealth-building and long-term economic prosperity.
- 13. Promote preventive and responsive approaches to foster social-emotional, mental health, and resilience of young children and their families.
- 14. Reimagine Social Services and Child Protective Services to become more trauma-informed, anti-racist, and focused on prevention.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Every person who is parenting needs social-emotional support. Parents may find this support through their personal relationships and communities, formal support groups, or individual counseling. However, not all parents and families have sufficient, culturally affirming support.

In seeking to address harm and transform systems and culture, we must promote a culture of connectedness and caring within our communities. We need to be able to see ourselves in our neighbor, particularly those who are from a different part of Durham. Together we can learn about how we each wish to be treated and engage one another in ways that better care for our community. Our social-emotional and mental health are wrapped up in connectedness and community. We must support the whole community to meet the needs of parents and families as the primary influence on their children.

Many parents requested developing community-building programs and support groups for parents and children to connect, have emotional support, and learn together to support their social-emotional health and wellbeing. Parents consistently shared their struggles around time management, work-life balance, and parental self-care.

"There are moments when I feel like I'm going crazy not being around adults and keeping up with school, night shifts at work, and getting support for my youngest with a developmental delay. My own mental health is a big barrier." - Durham parent

"More support for parents, especially for mental health needs." - Durham parent

Strengths

Parents Support One Another Through Informal Networks like Social Media

Parents and caregivers shared how helpful many online and in-person networks and support groups have been for them to make friends, get questions answered, learn about resources, and feel supported as they navigate parenthood. Families in the community are willing to help each other, which is a major strength cited by parents in Durham.

Some of the groups called out by respondents include: Parents of North Durham Facebook Group (POND), SoDu Parent Posse Facebook Group, Durham Mothers Club, Triangle Area Parenting Support (TAPS), and La Leche League.

"Neighborhood listserv with people willing to help, swap items, give items, and provide advice." - Durham parent

"Active online parents' group." - Durham parent

"lots of mother and parents groups on Facebook." - Durham parent

"I've been invited to join a facebook group where I can connect with other moms." - Durham parent

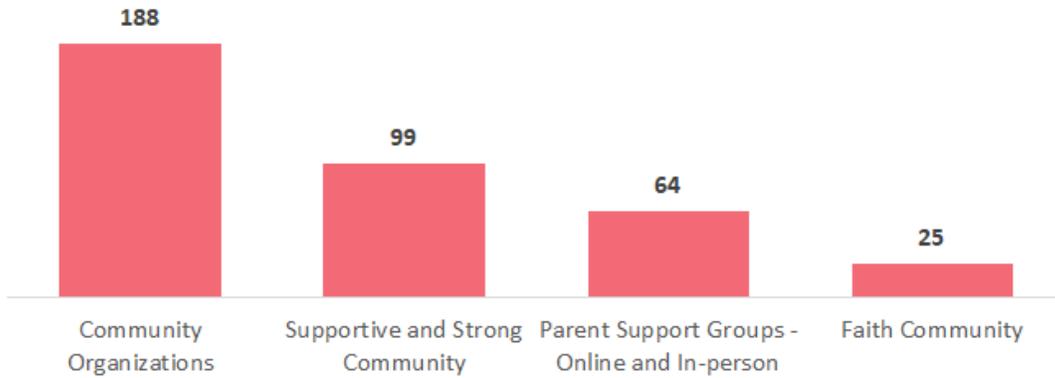
"Other parents willing to help each other." - Durham parent

"There are community support groups on social media." - Durham parent

Supportive and Strong Community Organizations and Informal Groups Supporting Parental Social-Emotional Health

When asked "what strengths do you see in your community that support families with young children," parents cited the many ways that they find social-emotional support through community, parent support groups, online social media groups, family friendly spaces for gathering in Durham, parenting programs, and more. The most common themes of parents' responses are found in figure 9.

Figure 9: Key Themes of Responses to the Question, "What strengths do you see in your community that support families with young children?"ⁱⁱ



"When we were busy, the community helped us take care of our children and taught us a lot of parenting knowledge." - Durham parent

"In these pandemic times I have seen how the Durham community has been supporting many families, and that makes us as a family feel supported that we are not alone in this situation." - Durham parent

"lots of young families and opportunities to socialize. Socially aware and progressive community that cares about helping others." - Durham parent

"Wide reaching awareness of the racial disparities and inequities with beginning work to address them." - Durham parent

"Our community, to a large extent, helps our young parents, because we need to work, the community will help us take care of the children temporarily, and protect the children's safety." - Durham parent

"The free weekly hangouts at Emerald Doulas was a huge support and safe space for me as a new mom." - Durham parent

Strong Two-Generational Approaches like Home Visiting in Durham

Two-generational approaches work with both the child and parent from the same household to combine parent and child interventions that support education, financial security, social capital, health and well-being. Durham has a wealth of evidence-based home visiting programs including: The Center for Child and Family Health's Family Connects Durham, Healthy Families Durham, and Durham Early Head Start Home Based Program; Exchange Family Center's Family Support Program; Durham Children's Initiative; Welcome Baby; and more.

“Strong home visiting programs (EFC, CCFH, CDSA, etc.)” - ECAP participant
“Universal home visiting program for new moms and babies.” - Durham parent

Challenges

Parents are Struggling with their Mental Health and Coping Mechanisms like Substance Abuse

In the 2020 Community Health Assessment, mental health is the 2nd top health problem identified by Durham County residents.^{lii} Parental mental health and substance use concerns are particularly critical to address during the early childhood period. Such challenges can interfere with the development of safe, stable, and nurturing relationships for young children, and impede children's health and development.

Rates of such challenges are concerning. The NC Department of Public Health annually conducts a population-based survey of mothers who have recently given birth. In 2018, **11.7%** of all mothers (and **17%** of Black mothers) reported that they always or often felt down, depressed, or hopeless or had little interest or pleasure in things following their baby's birth. Extrapolating these figures to mothers giving birth in Durham (4,158 in 2019),^{liii} this would amount to **486** mothers experiencing significant postpartum depression symptoms after birth.^{liv}

In the same 2018 survey, **9%** of mothers reported having drunk alcohol during the last 3 months of their pregnancy, which could reflect a health risk. This would correspond to **374** Durham newborns exposed to alcohol in utero. Services to support families with these concerns during pregnancy and early childhood are indeed needed.

Mental Healthcare is Unaffordable and Not Always Culturally Affirming

The same challenges with access to health insurance that are discussed in the Durham ECAP Report "[5b. Our Maternal and Child Health System Overview](#)" impact parents' ability to access mental healthcare.

Parents would like to be able to access mental health counseling but shared that there are major barriers like cost and language. Parents also cited the need for more programming and community support where they live and work. This need included opportunities to connect with other neighborhood families with similar lived experiences around a program or service that benefits all community members.

"Unable to go to therapy or counseling because it's not covered by my insurance." - Durham parent

"All the Spanish speaking providers were much too far away. So all the nearby doctors would not be able to understand when I told them about my problems. There was one bilingual counselor who I really liked but it wasn't covered by my insurance. It was very frustrating." - Durham parent/caregiver

"Counseling is unaffordable." - Durham parent

Waitlists and Lack of Funding for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Resources

When a mental health or substance abuse issue arises, it can create a crisis for a family. When a family is ready to seek services to assist, they need a comprehensive and responsive system at the ready. However, there are often waitlists for these types of intensive clinics and programs, creating frustration, increasing the sense of crisis, and even justifying any prior distrust in the healthcare system. Moreover, parents interacting with Child Protective Service may be mandated to access these services by the courts, and then this under-resourced system further delays reunification if a child has been separated from their biological parents.

Stigma Around Mental Health

Parents shared that there is a stigma that prevents them from accessing needed mental health supports or reaching out to their communities for informal support. In particular, fathers shared that there is a need to challenge perceptions of manhood and what it means to support one another as fathers. Having community in this process and knowing you are not alone is important to heal and especially important for Black men dealing with the impacts of systemic racism and a perceived need to appear resilient at all times. There was a particular emphasis on informal networks of support rooted in community.

"On call therapy would be huge - a lot of Black folks are against therapy and say they don't need it." - Durham parent

"We have so much pressure on us as fathers, as husbands, as brothers, as uncles...we just don't talk about our pressure." - Durham parent

"We're all having to shift our understanding of manhood and what it means to be a man. There are two brothers who I talk to regularly and we talk about once a week. Like you all, I'm glad I have somebody to say I'm not ok. I've watched some other brothers struggling through all this but they won't say anything because that's what they've been told a man does." - Durham parent

"How do we take care of ourselves? I hope we continue to have these conversations and

more brothers join us. These conversations help to get things off our chest so we don't get beaten down. We don't need to explode because of all the pressure. We need to relieve the pressure. If we don't take care of ourselves, we can't take care of anyone else." - Durham parent

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 8. Ensure families with young children have economic security and opportunities for wealth-building and long-term economic prosperity.
- 13. Promote preventive and responsive approaches to foster social-emotional, mental health, and resilience of young children and their families.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL AND MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN

How our children are doing is a reflection of how we are doing as a society. Children are impacted by the environment around them and adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), like experiencing racism, living in poverty, and experiencing homelessness, can be traumatic events for children that may impact mental and physical health. "The negative consequences of ACEs can be counteracted with support, care, and appropriate intervention. Through positive relationships, children learn to develop crucial coping skills. They know they are not alone, and they adopt healthy ways to process stress."^{iv}

Strengths

Collaboration and Resources Around Early Childhood Mental Health

At the community level, parents feel like there are places they may bring their children to gather and practice key social-emotional skills. At the system level, there are several organizations and institutions that are explicitly focused on early childhood mental health and support child care providers and other early childhood professionals to attend to children's social-emotional health in their day-to-day practice. There is also cross-sector collaboration happening through groups like the Durham ACEs and Resilience Taskforce and the Durham Early Childhood Mental Health Taskforce.

Some Screening for Social-Emotional Health, ACEs, Resilience and Protective Factors

Screenings for social-emotional health, ACEs, resilience, and protective factors can help families connect to supports and services sooner. It is particularly important to the Durham community to focus on resilience, positive childhood experiences, and protective factors. Together for Resilient Youth helps family-serving organizations integrate resilience into measurement and

practice. The READY Project, housed at the Center for Child and Family Health, is currently undergoing an effort to better understand the social-emotional screening tools in use across providers in Durham to ensure that children can be referred to needed services sooner.

Existing Efforts to Support Social-Emotional Health in Learning Environments

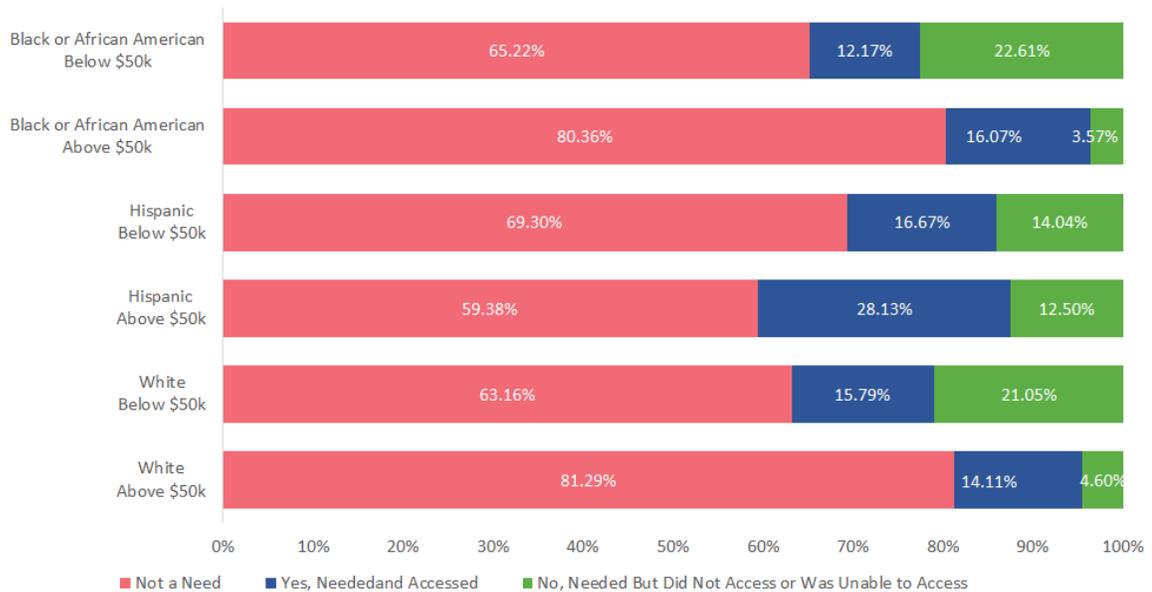
Durham is home to many culturally affirming, innovative programs and resources focused on positive racial identity development in childhood. These include [we are](#), [Village of Wisdom](#), [EPiC](#), and [ISLA](#), among others.

Challenges

Barriers to Accessing Mental Health and Social-Emotional Supports for Children

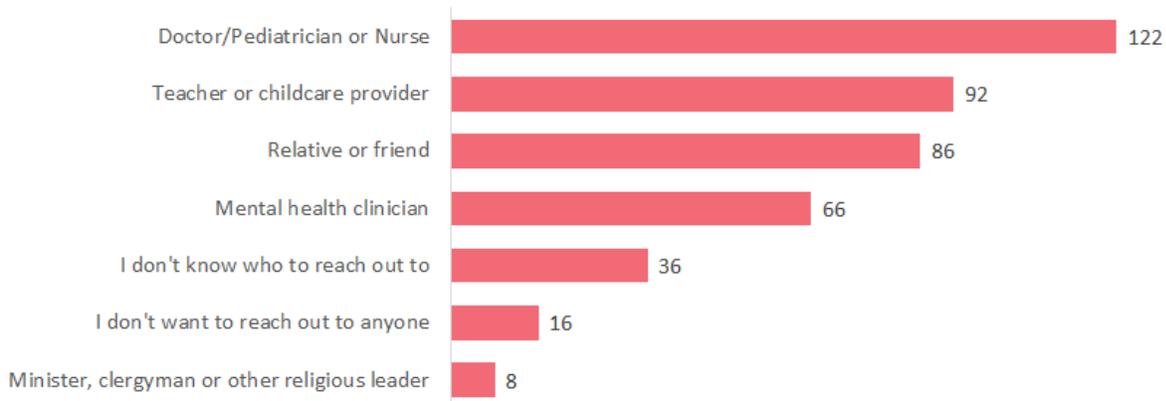
10.77% of parents surveyed in the Durham ECAP parent survey reported needing therapy for their child’s behavioral or mental health issues and not accessing or being unable to access services.^{lvi} Parents with low incomes, particularly Black parents with low incomes, were more likely to report needing access to therapy for their child’s behavioral or mental health issues and not accessing or being unable to access services.

Figure 10: Access to Therapy for a Child’s Behavioral or Mental Health^{lvii}



37% of parents surveyed had concerns about their child’s emotions and behaviors in the last 12 months. Parents with higher incomes were more likely to have concerns about their children’s emotions or behaviors in the last 12 months, regardless of race. When asked who parents had reached out to help, the following responses were most common:

Figure 11: Who Parents Reach Out to With Concerns About Child's Emotions or Behaviors^{lviii}



Of parents who shared that they had concerns with their child's social-emotional health, parents with low incomes were more likely to receive an assessment or services. Of those who were able to receive services, Black parents with low incomes were more likely to report that the social-emotional services for their child were not easy to use, that they were not treated courteously, and/or that their concerns were not taken seriously. Black parents, regardless of income level, were more likely to report that they were not provided with useful and easy to understand information. Black and Hispanic/Latinx parents were more likely to encounter late or missed appointment fees.

Of parents who were unable to have their child assessed or treated for social-emotional concerns, 94% reported that it was because they did not know where to go for help.

Parents, particularly parents of color, also anecdotally shared that there is hesitance to identify their children for extra services for fear that they are then tracked into a different classroom or educational experience. There are also concerns that their students' behaviors and emotions are perceived through the lens of each teachers' biases and that their child won't be challenged and will lose interest in education.

"Our kids need to have more access to psychological resources." - Durham parent
"I sometimes feel that my son is so emotional. I can't scold him cause he is easily frightened. I have tried music, allow him to express himself and I do not know if it is that he is stressed from being in the house." - Durham parent
"Something going through my mind constantly lately is having more social and emotional support for my kids. We have to recognize that we're going through things too as men, but

then we need to recognize what we need to do for our children in that respect. My kids are really going through it right now. It's hard, man." - Durham parent

"I think we are afraid cause of the stigma. The children will then be labeled as a child with emotional problems. We are afraid that later on when they go to high school or look for a job, they will have problems because they were labeled. So you have to decide do I do the right thing or not." - Durham parent

Awareness and Misconceptions about Early Childhood Mental Health

It can be challenging to communicate with parents, providers and other adults in a child's life about why early childhood mental health is important. As the Center on the Developing Child at Harvard explains, "children can show clear characteristics of anxiety disorders, conduct disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder and more at a very early age. That said, young children respond to and process emotional experiences and traumatic events in ways that are very different from adults and older children. Consequently, diagnosis in early childhood can be much more difficult than it is in adults." There is a need to increase awareness about the importance of early childhood mental health and early intervention.

Epidemiological studies reveal a 16–18% prevalence of mental disorders among children aged 1 to 5 years, with somewhat more than half being severely affected.^{lix} In one American study, only 11% of affected children were referred to a specialist.^{lx} Early intervention is critical and the rate of return on investment decreases with age.^{lxi lxii}

Early childhood educators have an important role to play in understanding trauma, recognizing behaviors and emotions, and referring students to needed services. Not all teachers have been trained in creating trauma-informed environments and not all school leadership has created an environment and space to support teachers to do so.

"Having the educational piece available to remove the stigma of what mental health is (depression, anxiety, other things that are mental health concerns)" - Durham parent

"Lots of teachers don't know how to handle kids with trauma" - Durham parent

Lack of Counselors and Mental Health Professionals Available in Early Childhood Educational Settings

Counselors, early childhood mental health consultants, and other mental health professionals in early care and education and K-3 settings are critical. In the K-12 setting, research shows that

high-poverty schools with a student-to-counselor ratio that meets the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) standard (250:1) have better student outcomes, such as improved attendance, fewer disciplinary incidents, and higher graduation rates.^{lxiii}

For Durham Public School students, there are **902 students** for every school social worker, **1,019 students** for every school psychologist, and **272 students** for every school counselor.^{lxiv} This far exceeds recommended ratios. The national recommendation is to have at least one social worker^{lxv} and one counselor^{lxvi} for every 250 students and one school psychologist^{lxvii} per 500 students.

Parents expressed a desire to have more counselors in schools and for those counselors to be trauma-informed and culturally congruent.

"More mental health experts are needed in DPS to help deal with trauma in a space in schools." - Durham parent

"Counselors would be helpful here [while a parent is incarcerated] to help address trauma for the kid and questions the kid may have about the incarceration happening and help the two [incarcerated parent and child] reconnect." - Durham parent

"At school there are counselors and for the community there are therapists, but I think both of them don't help much. There are a lot of students who don't even tell the complete truth to their counselors because of what the counselor might say or spill out." - 9th grader in Durham Public Schools

"I have always taught my kids about bullying since they were little so they can learn how to defend themselves like in middle school. But even if your kid is a leader, eventually they can experience it. We need counselors to help the kids have the confidence to speak up. It doesn't matter even if they are a 5-star school in Chapel Hill, bullying, drugs and more still exist. I say that because people say that Durham Public Schools are not good. Not true, it does not matter the school. What matters is that our kids are protected physically and psychologically and can talk to someone because sometimes as parents we don't know." - Durham parent

No Uniform Social-Emotional Health, ACEs, or Resilience Screening

Social-emotional skills, such as the ability to recognize and manage emotions and the ability to understand the emotions of others, are important to building trusting relationships in all environments. Many organizations in Durham use screenings to better understand and support the social-emotional health of the children they serve. However, there is not one standard tool or way to track social-emotional health population level.

"With the helpful information for children that think and act differently are more at our reach because not always the doctor pays attention of what one comments about our child." -
Durham parent

Barriers in Health Insurance Coverage of Infant and Early Childhood Mental Health Services

Evidence-based treatment services exist for infants and young children experiencing a wide variety of behavioral and mental health disorders. Yet, as a result of systemic barriers, many families are unable to access these needed services for their infants and young children.

One of the most significant barriers relates to health insurance coverage of infant and early childhood mental health services. Mental health services for children under age 3 have been funded through the state rather than through Managed Care Organizations which fund treatment for children ages 3 and older. As of the July 2021 launch of the new Medicaid Standard Plans and Prepaid Health Plans, the behavioral health of 0-3 year olds is covered by five different Managed Care Organizations.

First, this creates confusion and inconsistent procedures for mental health providers who have had to learn and navigate a separate system of authorizations, billing, and reimbursements for this 0-2 age group, and now have to negotiate contracts and rates with five different insurance plans. It also creates confusion for families as this is a very challenging system to navigate to find a relevant provider.

Second, the reimbursement rates for mental health assessment and treatment are lower for this age group and are not sustainable for clinicians and agencies, disincentivizing them from providing services to this vulnerable group. In addition, the evidence based treatments for children this young focuses on the child and the caregiver and currently family therapy is reimbursed at a lower rate than individual therapy, making it challenging for clinicians to provide the treatment that is therapeutically called for. There is a need to create parity in reimbursement regardless of a child's age.

Third, there is often a disruption to services when the child turns 3 and insurance coverage changes between systems. It is imperative that continued authorization and reimbursement for services be guaranteed as a child ages between systems. Otherwise, young children and families are at risk of premature treatment termination.

Another significant barrier is that mental health services are often sought out when something is obviously wrong with the child or family system. However, with young children, there is evidence that prevention and focus on increasing attachment between a parent and caregiver

can build resilience that will reduce effects of harm or trauma that have occurred intergenerationally or may occur in the future. By allowing billing of evidence-based treatments that can help increase resilience even if a mental health diagnosis is not evident in a young child's presentation of symptoms, reduction in future need of mental health services would be apparent.

Ideally, there would be an enhanced rate for the evidence-based infant and toddler interventions that is: based on the cost of providing an intervention focused on both the infant/toddler and their caregiver; standardized across the insurance plans; available based on risk factors instead of a mental health diagnosis. There also needs to be clear information for parents and families about the options they have for trained providers.

Opportunities

See Durham ECAP recommendations, which seek to leverage our strengths to address our challenges:

- 3. Increase resource awareness and create an easily navigable service system for families with young children.
- 13. Promote preventive and responsive approaches to foster social-emotional, mental health, and resilience* of young children and their families.
- 15. Ensure birth through 3rd grade learning environments are trauma-informed, culturally affirming, gender affirming, and focused on social-emotional health.

For questions about this report, please contact Bonnie Delaune at bonnie.delaune@dci-nc.org or Cate Elander at celander@dconnc.gov.

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