



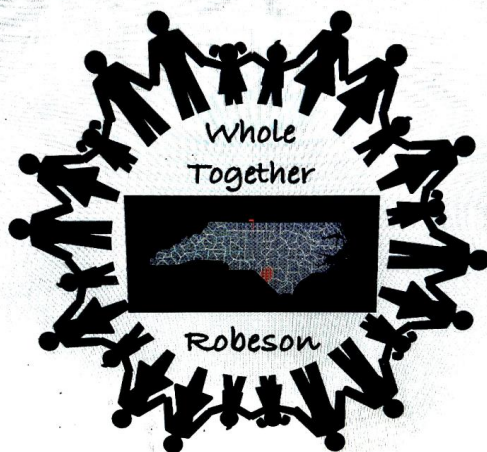
THE UNIVERSITY  
of NORTH CAROLINA  
at CHAPEL HILL

Health Equity for Rural  
Mothers and Families  
**HER LAB**

## ***Community Voices and Whole Robeson Together: Community Based. Participatory Research to Promote Rural Maternal Emotional Health and Wellbeing.***

Sarah E. (Betsy) Bledsoe

Presenting on behalf  
of the MI-PHOTOS,  
Community Voices,  
& Whole Together  
Robeson Teams



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# Acknowledgements



This work would not be possible without the partnership of the HER Lab Community Advisory Board formerly (MI-PHOTOS, Community Voices, and Whole Together Robeson CABs), as well as agency, community, and academic partners past and present. Those include Healthy Start Robeson, Jada Brooks, Cherry Beasley, Joey Bell, Ronny Bell, Darlene Gold, Brooke Lombardi, MI-PHOTOS Mothers, Robeson County Health Care Corporation, Robeson County Health Department, Robeson County Nurse Family Partnership, Kim Pevia, and the research staff who have supported of our work.

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Most of all we would like to acknowledge the partnership of mothers and providers living and working in Robeson County. Without their generosity and trust, their constant and tireless work to improve the lives of families in their community and their unrelenting dedication to giving their child and other children living in rural Robeson County and other rural communities the best chance at maximizing their potential, we would have no partnership. Our hope in all of this is to honor their wishes for themselves, their families and their community.



# Conceptualizing the Problem

## **Increasingly large numbers of children are affected by childhood traumatic stress**

By the time children in the U.S. turn 18:

- 62-68% of U.S. children are exposed to a potentially traumatic event (PTE)
  - Over 50% are exposed to two or more PTEs
  - 41% experience clinically relevant impairment
  - 12% meet criteria for Acute Stress Disorder
  - 16% meet criteria for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

## **Maternal health and wellbeing impact risk and resilience for child health and wellbeing**

Beginning in the perinatal maternal health and wellbeing impacts immediate and lifelong risk for negative health outcomes

Many mothers and children experience negative outcomes associated with the fundamental causes of racial discrimination and poverty

Maternal mental health impacts how children experience and process potentially traumatic events

**Residing in a rural area increases the risk for experiencing inequities in health and wellbeing for mothers and children**

# Community based participatory research (CBPR)

## GOALS

- Active partnerships
- Sustainability
- Generates rich knowledge
- Equitable progress

## CHALLENGES

- Power and privilege
- Community consent
- The role of research in social change
- Community's ownership of the project

# Brief Experiential Exercise

Things You Like Best About Yourself

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Things You Like Least About Yourself

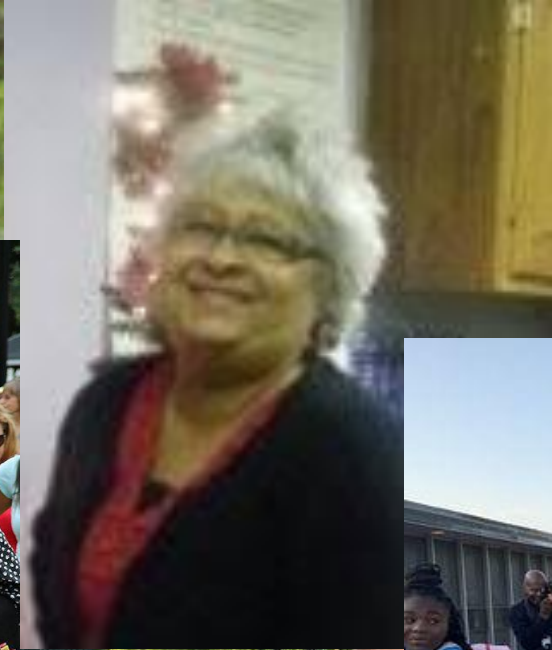
- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

# Robeson County, NC

- Rural
- Median Income: \$32,407
- Majority-minority community
- Health inequities:
  - 15% of mothers experience postpartum depression
  - Infant mortality rate = 14 per 1,000 live births
  - Highest reported death rate for infants 28 days to 1 year in NC
  - 83% of mothers receive Medicaid
  - 64% receive WIC
  - 68% are unmarried
  - 18% report smoking during pregnancy
  - American Indian Mother fare worse than other racial/ethnic groups



# Robeson County, NC





Our Beginnings: Mothers  
Improving Pregnancy and  
Postpartum Health Outcomes  
Through stOry Sharing (MI-  
PHOTOS)



# The Community Advisory Board

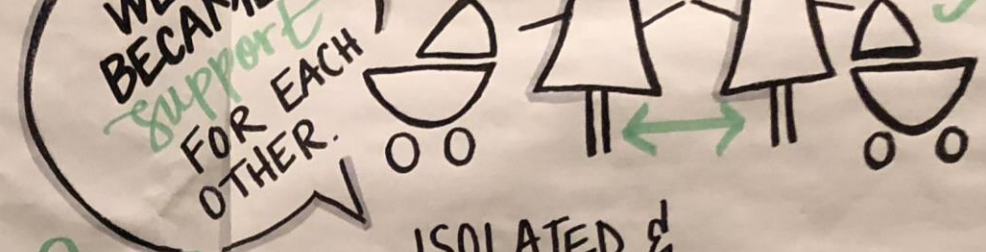
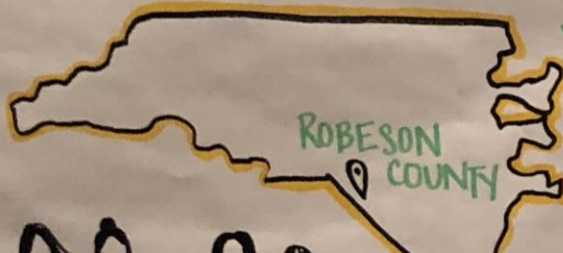


# Objective

- MI-PHOTOS' aim was to listen to mothers' stories and develop an understanding of their challenges and strengths related to having and raising infants and toddlers in their community. MI-PHOTOS focused on building foundational knowledge to advance sustainable social change and health equity for rural mothers and children

# Story Sharing as Community Engagement

MI-Photos PROJECT



HAVE TO SAY?



ISOLATED & RANDOM BUT meaningful

TELL A STORY ABOUT A PERSON, DAY, OR EVENT THAT CHANGED YOUR LIFE

CONNECT THROUGH Emotion

THERE IS Power IN ARTICULATING OUR STORIES.

WE MOVE AT THE Speed of Relationship

NOTHING FOR US WITHOUT US!

OUR STORIES connect

Story of Whole Together Robeson: Mothers Improving Pregnancy and Postpartum Health Outcomes Through stOry Sharing (MI-PHOTOS)

A VISUAL APPROACH • 1.24.2020

#CETrural

AND WHERE CAN WE fill gaps?

# PhotoVoice

A participatory approach in which academic researchers and community members work together to build a deep and genuine understanding of the community's experience through photography.



# PHOTOVOICE

1. Uses photography to engage community members as co-investigators
2. Juxtapose realities to construct new knowledge about how the community issue is part of a system of power and authority
3. Reach influential advocates with this new knowledge to generate action steps to effect change

# Photovoice Session Prompts

1. What are the daily challenges of being pregnant and a mother in this community?
2. Where do mothers get stress and support in this community?
3. What do mothers in this community need?
4. What is the most important issue for you since you learned you were going to have a child?
5. What can we do to help mothers in this community?

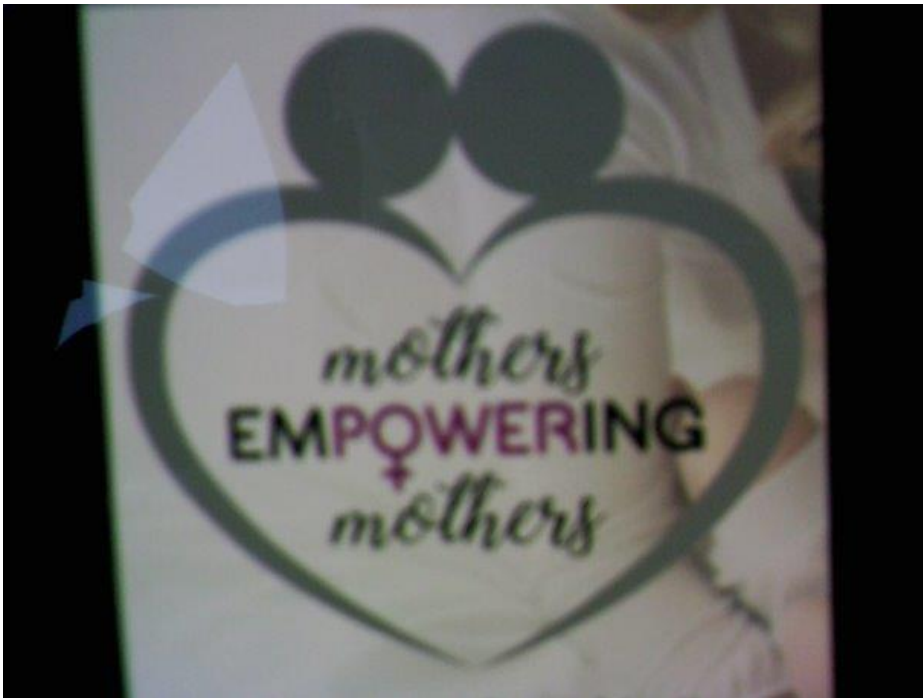
RESEARCH	<p>S - What do you <u>see</u> here?</p> <p>H - What is really <u>happening</u> here?</p> <p>O - How does this relate to <u>our</u> lives?</p> <p>W - <u>Why</u> does this concern, situation or strength exist?</p>	NEW KNOWLEDGE
DISSEMI NATION	<p>E - How can we become <u>empowered</u> through our new understanding?</p> <p>D - What can we <u>do</u>?</p>	CHANGE

# Themes

- “A mom community”: MI-PHOTOS as a Social Support Group
- “We can’t hardly make it”: Community & Family Dynamics
- “They Do Everything”: Professional Support Programs



# “A mom community”: MI-PHOTOS as a Social Support Group



“I mean something like...where we can get together and express [how] we feel so somebody else can hear us, so somebody here knows how we feel...maybe somebody needs to take a stance so we can actually put something into action here.”

# “A mom community”: MI-PHOTOS as a Social Support Group

“These girls are working, they’re going to school, while we – some of us have been dealt a bad hand...I want people to be aware that...our area is all types of people here, as well as we were a diverse group of moms...at the end of the day, we’re all raisin’ our children...with the best means that we possibly have... I think that’s important for people to recognize and then see - ‘but these were the challenges they were faced with, we still came out on top.’”

# “We can’t hardly make it”: Community and Family Dynamics



“They don’t have nothing around here for our kids to do”

“Kids who are going through problems, like a recreation center...like it would be nice to have kids who are going through trouble...something to stabilize them.”

# “We can’t hardly make it”: Community and Family Dynamics



“We all know how it is to be a struggling mom, you know, the dryer breaks down, you have to use coat hangers, constantly have to clean up.”

# “We can’t hardly make it”: Community and Family Dynamics

“My step-father and my mother [are] a big huge support in my life... My mother...took me back in her wing because she know, she been through it before, my step-father, he has been such a huge support, helping me take care of [my daughter].”

“[My daughter’s father] was the only person that I really depended on and now I have to do everything by myself.”

# “They Do Everything”: Professional Support Programs

“Yes, this is...my support. I mean, I’ve still got my partner, but these people basically are my support...I can talk to them about my husband, but you can’t talk to your husband about your husband...my [nurse] has...helped me through so much, with school, with being a first-time mom...it’s difficult...trying to find support here.”



# “They Do Everything”: Professional Support Programs

“After that support’s gone, then what? What are you supposed to do?”

“Why isn’t there one place to go where [people can] share all this information? Like why do we have to dig, dig, dig, dig?”

# “They Do Everything”: Professional Support Programs

“I like my nurse and I talk to her about stuff, but I know...where I can stop, like...if I feel depressed, because they ask you, like, are you depressed?...I know you can't talk to them about it...I'm not 'bout to tell you this and then you go from here and then have to go through all this other mess because they're gone say, 'well you might not be good for your child if you're depressed.'”



# Takeaways

- Multi-faceted social support
- Mental health stigmatization
- Bridging peer, professional, and confidential support

hospital-advocates  
churches experiences pediatricians  
share current involvement peer community  
officials **daycare programs** growth  
virtual **providers** schools mentors provides  
medical meet **support** father positive  
chats **mental** **groups** health  
program.networking organizations forums centers.  
spanish-speaking parks colleges therapists  
exist promote directors  
sidewalks town



Lessons Learned Initiating Community Based  
Participatory Research in Partnership with a  
Diverse, Rural Community

# Exploratory, Qualitative Case Study

## Autoethnography: Initiating CBPR

- Benefits
- Challenges
- Paradoxes

## Triangulation

- Data
  - Researchers
- Member checking

## Self-reflection

- Writing
- Discussion

## Content analysis of notes and minutes

- Project meetings
- Community stakeholder meetings
- Gatekeeper meetings
- Community Advisory Board Meetings
- Community cultural events

# Themes

- Rejecting the Disparities Lens – focuses on the harm of approaching and defining communities based on disparities
- “One Step Forward, Two Steps Back” – related to the challenges of pacing and engaging the community
- “Nothing about us without us” - focused on hearing messages coming from the community
- “From vs. Of vs. In the community” - focused on the challenges of identifying the community, stakeholders, and the identified population;
- “Identity Matters” - focused on cultural humility, navigating racial/ethnic differences, and working from an “outsider” versus “insider” perspective;
- “Building Trust on the Edges” - related to the process of building the basic knowledge and presence in the community required to move forward with CBPR.

# “Building Trust on the Edges”: The Harm of Approaching Communities with a Disparities Lens

Understanding Perinatal Health Experiences Among **Native American Indian Mothers** in rural NC



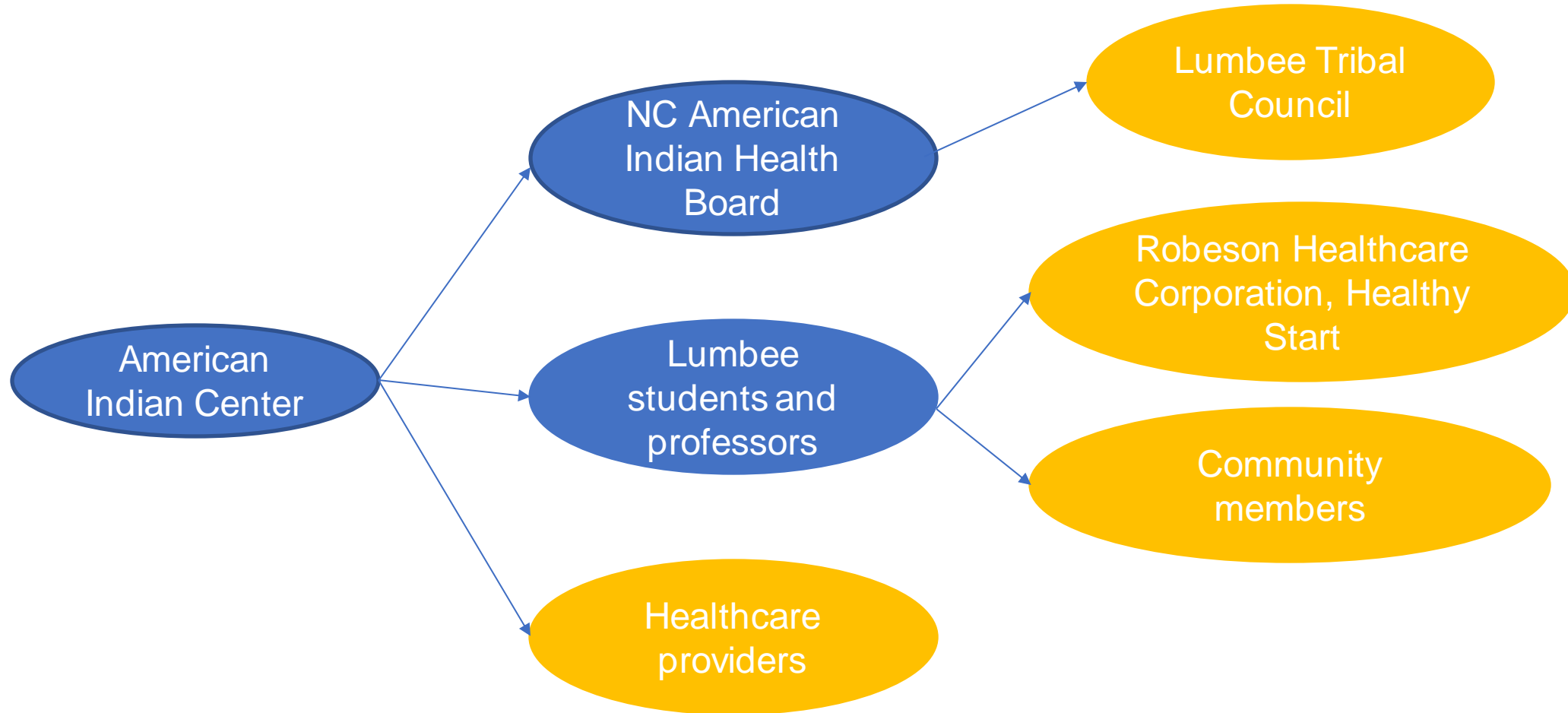
Understanding Perinatal Health Experiences Among **Mothers** in rural NC

Community – University History

# “One step forward, two steps back”

- Pacing mismatch
- Doctoral/Graduate Students
- Deadlines, funding, and momentum

# “From” Versus “Of” Versus “In” the Community

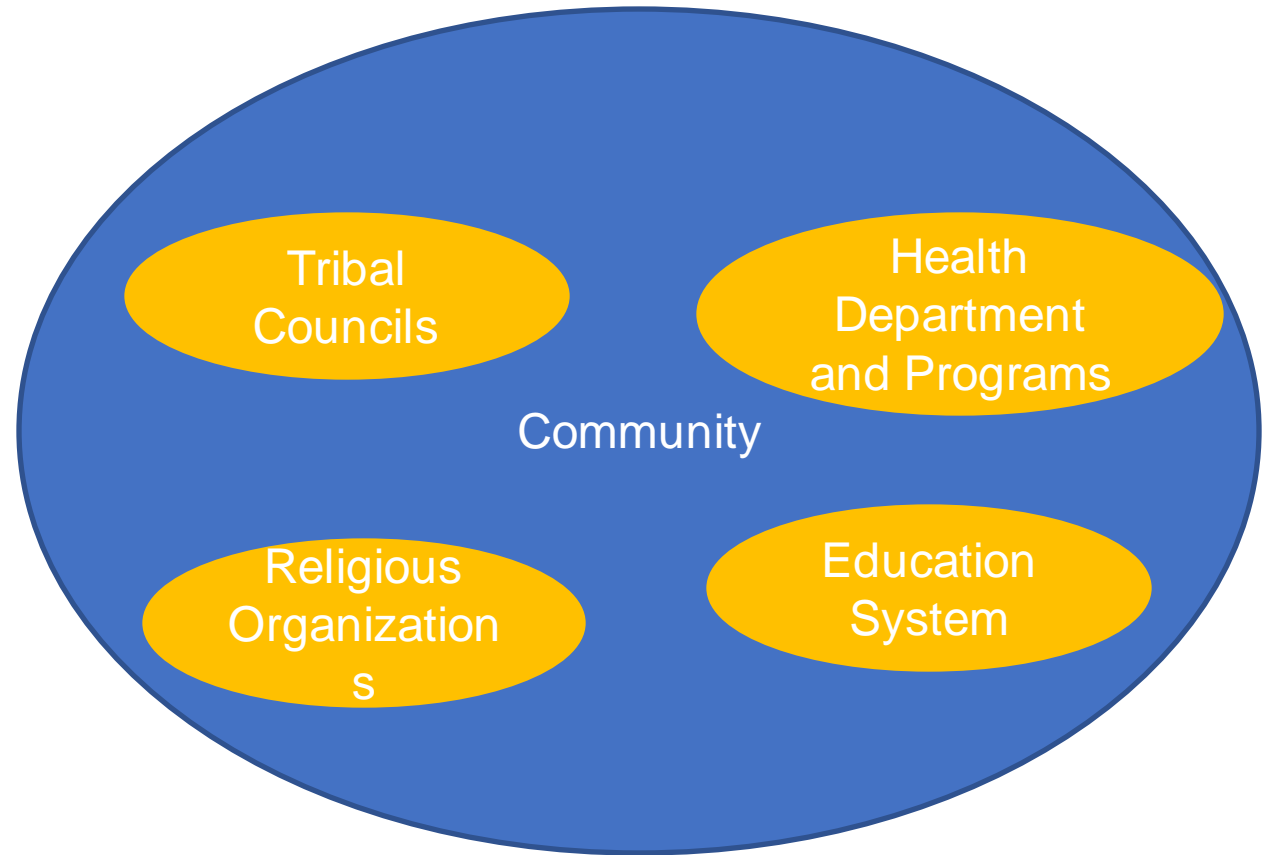




# Nothing About Us **Without** Us is For Us

- Incorporation of the community
- Benefits to the community

# Identity Matters – Power Dynamics



# Facilitating Community Engagement

- Examine existing relationship with the community
- Identify who to work with
  - Key Informants
  - Cultural Insiders
- Develop a strategy
- Be flexible
- Be patient

# Discussion and Recommendations

- Early partnership and engagement with community members
- Awareness and transparency of researchers' positionalities
- Co-creating research topics and questions
- Integrating a CBPR approach into research methods

# Current Projects

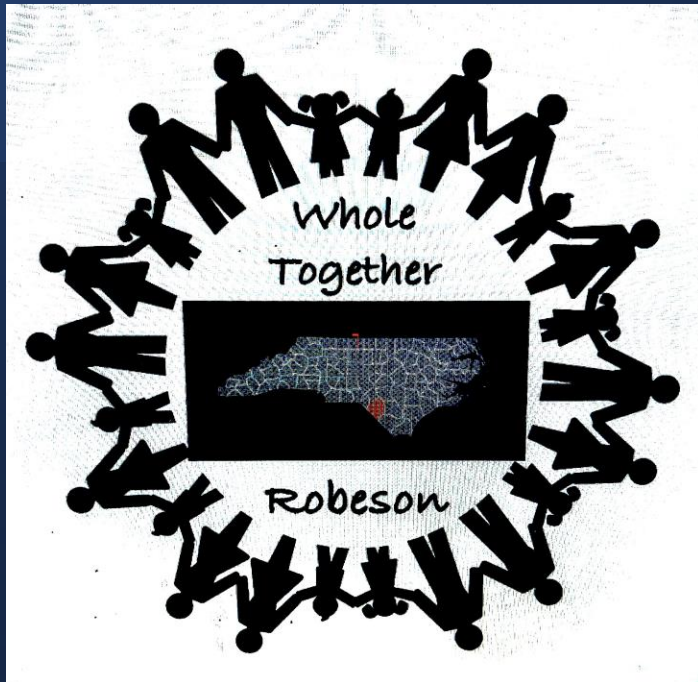


# Community Voices

- Mixed Methods Study of Mothers and Service Providers
- Individual surveys, qualitative interviews, and focus groups with mothers who are pregnant or mothering infants and toddlers and the providers who serve them
- Inform the co-creation (with the community) of an intervention to meet unfilled needs for rural pregnant mothers and mothers of young children grounded in the strengths and needs of the community



# Team Leaders: Whole Robeson Together





## **Brittany D. Gordon, MA**

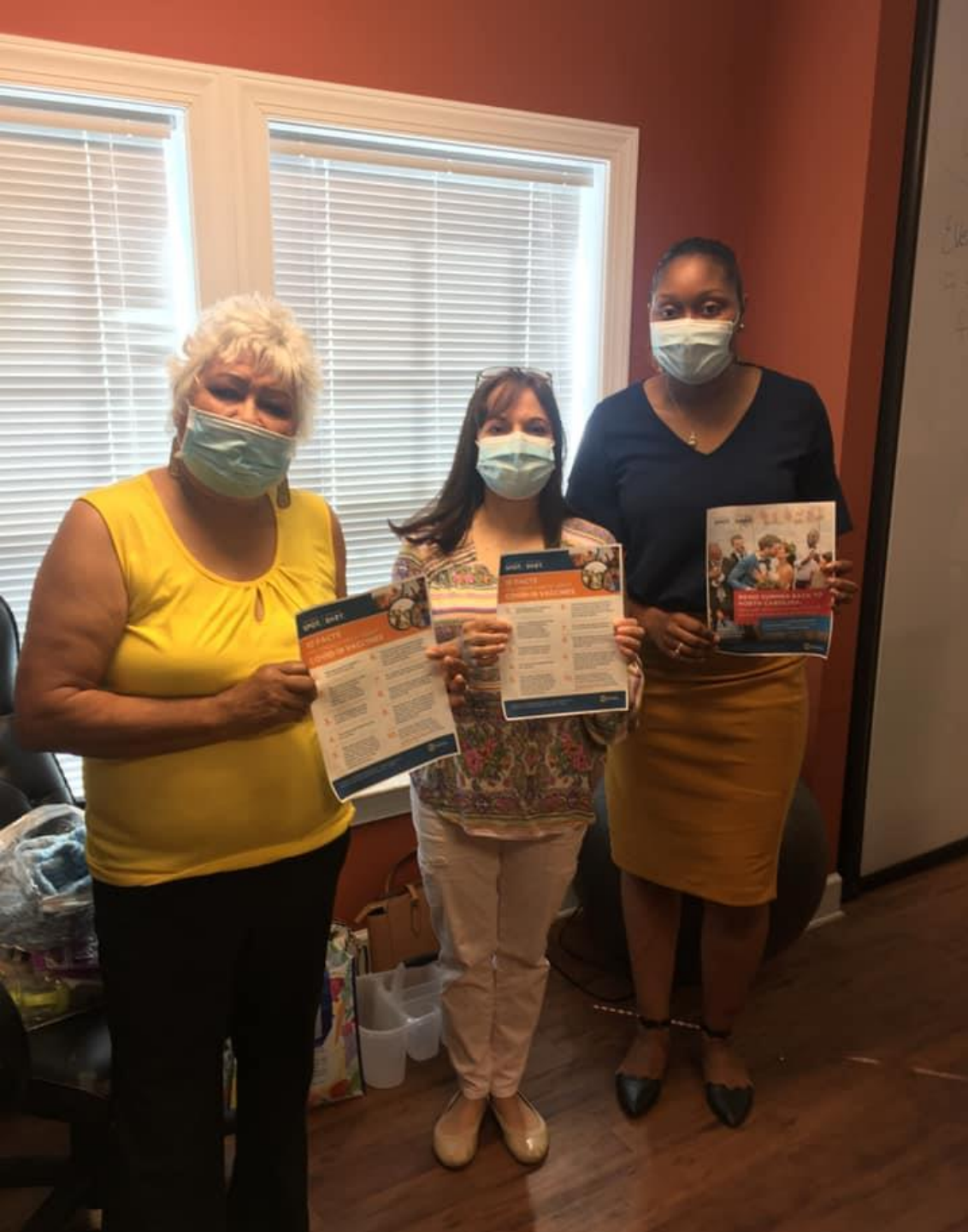
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Healthy Start Robeson at Robeson Health  
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Champion



**Erica Little,**

Director, Healthy Start Robeson at UNC Pembroke  
2023 Whole Community Connections Champion





## **April Oxendine,**

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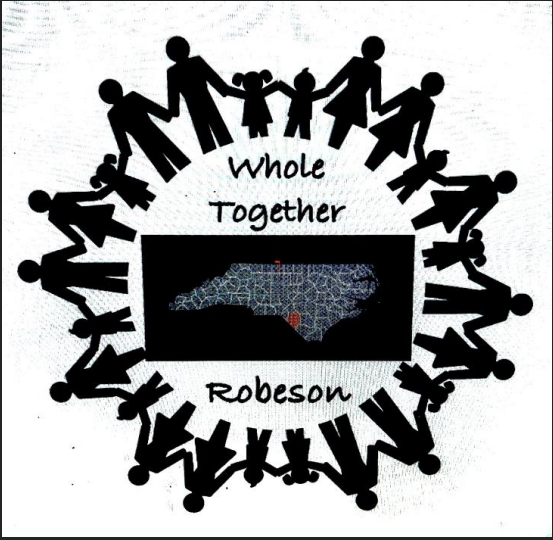
University of North Carolina at Chapel  
Hill

# Current Team - Community Advisory Board Members, University Based Partners

- Jada Brooks
- Kelly Flores
- Brittany Gordon
- Erica Little
- Alexandria Locklear
- April Oxendine
- Janice Oxendine
- Tony Locklear
- Betsy Bledsoe
- Adam Englert
- Andres Escobar
- Anna Fetter
- Caroline Martin
- Amber Waake



# Whole Together Robeson



# Whole Robeson Together

Goal 1: Develop study methods and a support group intervention to increase maternal health and emotional wellbeing in pregnant mothers and mothers of infants and toddlers in Robeson County that is culturally acceptable and feasible.

Goal 2: Test the feasibility of the support group methods including delivering the intervention to pregnant mothers and mothers of young children, recruiting and retaining mothers, and measuring changes in maternal health and wellbeing, to ensure the support group is acceptable and addresses the needs of mothers in the community.

Goal 3: Develop an implementation and sustainability plan for the intervention.

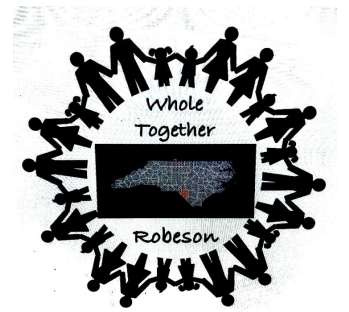
# Whole Robeson Together: Community Path Visual







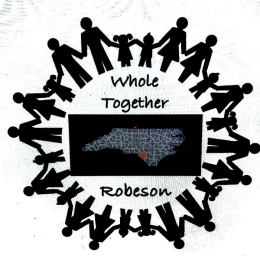
# Community Voices/Robeson Whole Together Milestones



- Recruited 34 mothers and 15 providers (survey, individual interviews, focus groups)
- 25 mothers 14 providers have completed surveys
- Interviews have been completed with 20 mothers and 8 providers
- Transcription, Coding and Analysis of Interview (underway)
- Conducted a systematic review of evidence-based support group models
- Identified 8 unique models
- Models were presented to Community Advisory Board (CAB) for feedback
- CAB selected 7 of the eight models for consideration
- Survey developed and collected from CAB for adaptation and incorporation of models for mothers in draft support group protocol
- Funding from UNC Rural received to continue work.



# We keep going – immediate next steps



## Future tasks and opportunities

- Conduct Community Voices focus groups
- Complete analysis of Community Voices Data
- Present Community Voices Data to the Community
- Develop the Support Group Manual
- Test the Feasibility of the Peer Support Group
  - Recruit and gain feedback from peer support group participants
- Present findings from Whole Robeson Together to the Community
- Continue to Grow and Develop Partnerships within the Community to Ensure Sustainability of the Peer Support Group
- Apply for external funding – presenting RFAs to CAB at Spring meeting

Thank You

Robeson Whole Together Team

<https://wcc.unc.edu/community-partnerships/whole-together-robeson/>

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The National Initiative for  
Trauma Education and  
Workforce Development



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