

WESTERN PIEDMONT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2021



CONTENTS

- Launch of Caldwell Steering Committee to Explore Potential New Bus Service
- WPCOG Staff Assists Cancer Survivor and Grandmother with Housing Repairs
- Success Story from NCWorks NEXTGEN!
- How to Move from Rental Assistance to Homeownership: REACH Graduate Shares Story
- When is it Time? Elders Home Alone
- Fall EIN Highlights Hickory Metro Census 2020 Population Results

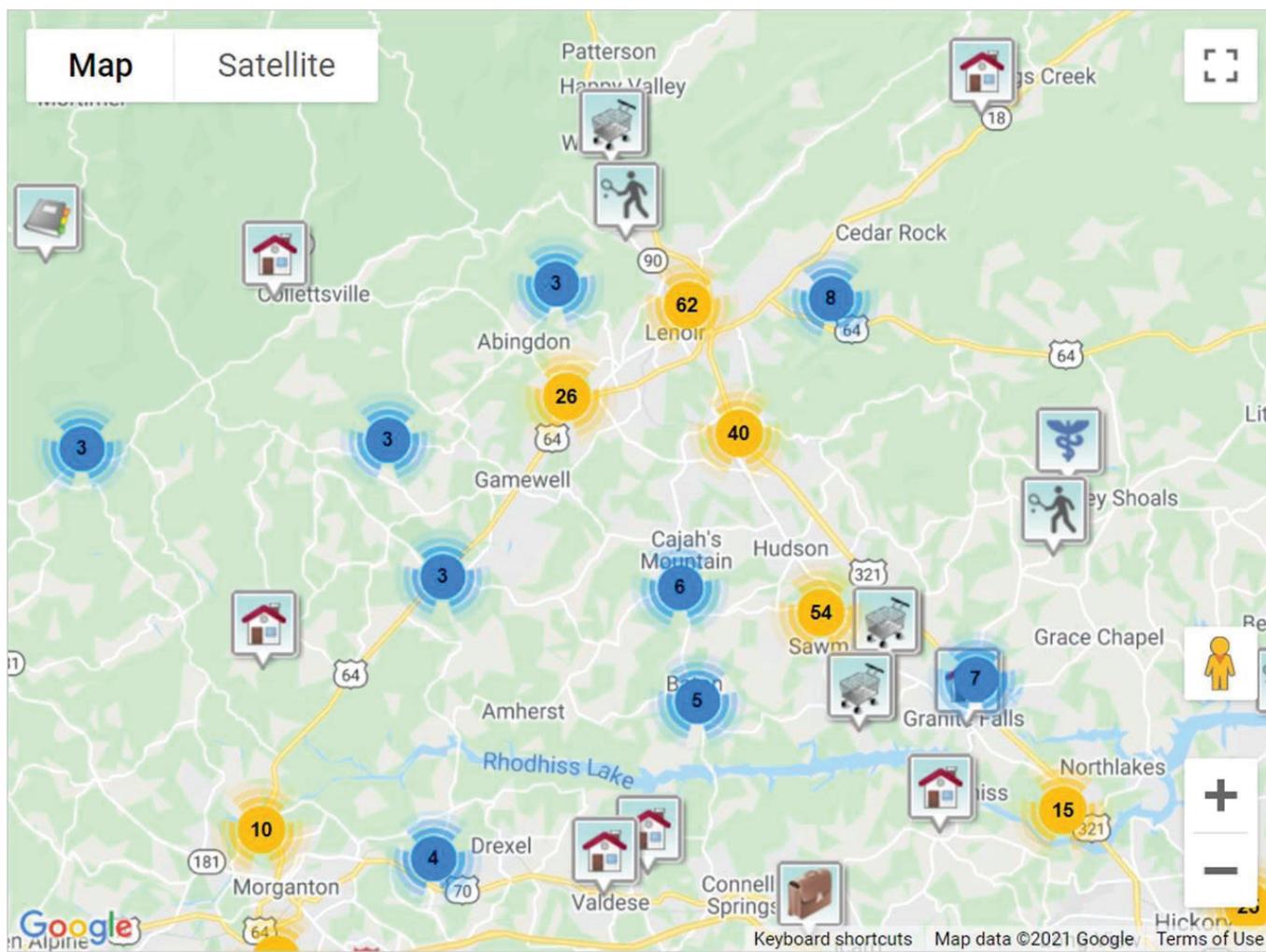
Launch of Caldwell Steering Committee to Explore Potential New Bus Service

Article by: Brian Horton

Currently, Caldwell is the only county in the WPCOG four-county region lacking local bus-route transit. Greenway Public Transportation provides demand-response service in all four counties, including Caldwell. Greenway operates bus routes in Hickory, Conover, Newton, Morganton, Drexel, Valdese, Rutherford College, and Taylorsville. WPCOG was awarded a US Economic Development Administration grant to develop a community-led bus-service plan for community partners in Caldwell County. In partnership with Greenway Public Transportation, WPCOG will facilitate three Steering Committee meetings to look at area needs and develop potential service scenarios.

Earlier this year, over 200 survey responses were collected from Caldwell County residents, businesses, and visitors on area transit needs. Many of the needs identified by the survey are located within Lenoir and along the 321 and 321A corridors between Lenoir and Granite Falls. These survey results were shared at the December 14th launch of the Steering Committee. Committee members include representatives from Lenoir, Hudson, Sawmills, Granite Falls, Caldwell Chamber of Commerce, Caldwell Community College and Technical Institute, Caldwell Senior Center, NC Works Career Center, Senior Tarheel Legislature, and UNC Health. The committee will meet two more times before Summer 2022 to help guide the bus-service strategies and recommendations.

To learn more about this and other regional transit initiatives, visit the WPCOG Public Transportation page at: <https://www.wpcog.org/public-transportation>. For more information please contact, Brian Horton at 828-485-4225 or brian.horton@wpcog.org.



- Home
- School
- Work
- Shopping
- Recreation
- Social Servi...

Map Styles
MetroQuest Icons

WPCOG Staff Assists Cancer Survivor and Grandmother with Housing Repairs

Article by Paul Teague

WPCOG Staff recently assisted a Sawmills resident and her three adopted grandchildren by making needed renovations to their home and removing hazardous lead-based paint.

The assistance through the Essential Single-Family Rehabilitation (ESFR) program funded by the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency and administered by the WPCOG came through for Karen at an opportune time. A six-time cancer survivor, Karen got married in 2017, only to have her husband die nine days later.

A former furniture worker, Karen turned to waiting tables in restaurants after she lost her manufacturing job. Along the way, she formally adopted three of her grandchildren.

In need of repairs for her home, Karen contacted the WPCOG and asked if there were any programs that could assist her. Upon determining her eligibility, the WPCOG inspected the home and came up with an estimate of the repairs. The project was sent out for public bid and awarded to the lowest responsible contractor.

"I could never have gotten all the needed work done to my house on my own," Karen said. "I now have a great home to raise my grandchildren in, and I am forever thankful for that."

The ESFR program is an income-based program that typically provides up to \$25,000 in repairs. Other eligibility criteria are age and disability status.

For more information about the program, contact Lisa Helton (Burke and Caldwell counties) at 828-485-4281 or lisa.helton@wpcog.org or Laurie Powell (Alexander and Catawba counties) at 828-485-4249 or laurie.powell@wpcog.org.



SUCCESS STORY

NCWORKS NEXTGEN—CAREER GUIDERS!

NCWORKS NEXTGEN INTERNSHIPS!

Who: Ashley

What: Ashley was interested in a career of Dental Assisting.

When: 2020-2021

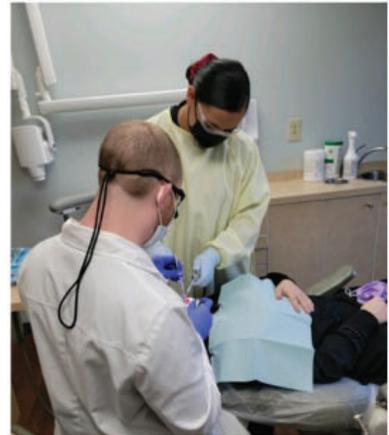
Where: NCWorks Career Center—Catawba County

How: Ashley was enrolled into the NEXTGEN program during her junior year at Hickory High School in Spring 2019. At the time, Ashley was indecisive about her career pathway. She was stuck between Nursing and Dental Assisting. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19, Ashley earned her High School Diploma in May 2020. While in the program, Ashley would also complete a paid internship with Greater Hickory CCM where she was a clinical assistant. With hands-on experience, Ashley could find her passion with Dental Assisting.

Best Practices: NCWorks NEXTGEN program provides career services and paid internships for eligible youth between 16–24 years old.

Client Testimonial: “As a First-Generation family member to extend my education and a person of color, the lack of representation in educational and work institutions often causes a sense of “imposter syndrome”. We often find ourselves in challenging situations because of this social stigma along with other barriers and obstacles. Education and knowledge are empowerment sources to strive as a community. NCWorks helped guide me every step of the way, from transportation assistance to help with funding two certification programs in health care: Pharmacy Technician and Dental Assisting. I believe in progress, not perfection, and strive to lead by example.”

“Keep up the good work Ashley!”



Visit it one your local NCWorks
Career Centers for more info or
www.westernpiedmontworks.org



www.ncworks.gov

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Alexander
604 7th St., SW, Taylorsville, NC | (828) 632-4631
NCWorks Burke
720 East Union St., Morganton, NC | (828) 438-6161
NCWorks Caldwell
1909 Hickory Blvd, S.E., Lenoir, NC | (828) 759-4680
NCWorks Catawba
403 Conover Station, S.E., Conover, NC | (828) 466-5535



www.westernpiedmontworks.org

How to Move from Rental Assistance to Homeownership: REACH Graduate Shares Story

Article by Kim Duncan

A difficult beginning, followed by several twists in a tale that ultimately ends happily could be defined as a fairy tale or it could describe one REACH participant's path to homeownership.

By her own admission, Justina Chandler felt like she was on the verge of a meltdown when she enrolled in the REACH program in the spring of 2018. At the time, she was unemployed, uncertain what career path to pursue, and struggling to navigate through life following the loss of her father who was her support and role model.

For about 18 months, Justina tried to decide what career path to pursue. She explored ideas for self-employment from starting her own business to getting her real estate license. Then she realized she already had valuable skills from prior work experiences, so she found work in property management.

Employment brought a new set of challenges that initially felt overwhelming – childcare expenses, rent increases, plus clothing and travel costs for the new job – but Justina overcame them. Once she realized she could juggle all the responsibilities of a working mother of three, her focus turned to finding a home for her family.

Good credit is key to homeownership, so in the spring of 2020, Justina began credit counseling with Operation HOPE. "This program is awesome. I didn't have the knowledge to get to where I wanted to be before this," she said.

Credit counselors say that credit typically isn't damaged overnight and can't be repaired that quickly either. Justina learned how to budget and to clean up old debts, while also paying her bills on time and gradually her credit score improved. Justina also took a homebuyer education workshop where she learned all the steps it takes to become a homeowner. She said that workshop "pushed me to pull up my credit and to follow all the rules to get to where I wanted to be."

Next Justina searched for a lender who would work with her and the different types of assistance she was eligible to receive – first-time homebuyer funds through the Unifour Consortium and mortgage assistance through the Regional Housing Authority. She was pleased with her mortgage experience because she felt her lender had "a good heart and he loves to help." On July 28, 2021 Justina became a homeowner, fulfilling a dream she had been working toward for years.

"I was exhausted from the stress of everything that had to be done, but happy and thankful," she said.

What are the steps to move from rental assistance to homeownership?

Contact a certified housing counselor who will guide you through the following:

- **Credit counseling** – Mortgage companies like to see a minimum credit score above 580. However, the better the score, the better the possibility of having a lower interest rate. Potential homebuyers can receive free credit counseling through trustworthy agencies.

- **Saving money** – All homebuyers will need some funds for upfront expenses such as a down payment assistance contribution, home inspection, and a deposit when making an offer on a home.

- **Homebuyer education** – A workshop or training with a HUD-certified housing counselor provides knowledge on the steps involved in the homeownership process.

- **Lender** – Finding a lender who understood the types of assistance she had was key to Justina's home buying success.

- **Realtor** – Choose a realtor who works with homes in the eligible price range and keeps up with new listings.

For more information about homeownership, contact Elizabeth Moncrief at elizabeth.moncrief@wpcog.org or 828.485.4244. For more information about the REACH program, contact Kim Duncan at kim.duncan@wpcog.org or 828.485.4299.



When is it Time? Elders Home Alone

Article by: Karen Phoenix



The numbers of our elders who have Dementia is increasing. An estimated one in six people over the age of 65 have some cognitive impairment. Many people progress and have Dementia onset, others may not have ongoing concerns and others may have ongoing and progressing safety concerns. Of those identified with progressing cognitive impairment, one of three live alone. The concerns turn toward safety and questions about the right time to step in to help negotiate the independence of our family member, and make decisions regarding their health and safety.

One of the first functions affected by cognitive impairment is the decision making. This change affects brain function related to judgement, ability to reason, lack of empathy, forgetting steps to task completion, and other functions of daily life. These are perceptions that affect living safely alone in the home. There are many stories of seniors leaving food on the stove and starting a fire, getting lost, injuring themselves, attempting to accomplish tasks and leaving them partially undone, even early in the disease. The time may come that it is dangerous for seniors with cognitive impairment to live at home alone without assistance.

How should you evaluate when it is time for help? Here are a few key indicators to use as you make your decision. This list is not all-inclusive nor restrictive. You are encouraged to use your own judgement as you progress to making the decision.

Things to look for include:

- confusion with time or place – working to complete tasks at inappropriate times
- inability to recognize unsafe situations and call for help
- inability to use the phone to call for help
- not remembering to call 911 for identified safety issues
- not remembering their address, phone number or the numbers of others
- becoming agitated, confused or frustrated when away from home
- allowing strangers into the home
- locking themselves out of the house or vehicle
- inability to manage financial and health matters
- inability to appropriately manage medications
- wandering away from home or become lost

Once you have recognized that safety at home alone is a concern, there are safeguards to assist you in helping the senior retain independence as long as possible. Life alert type systems are an initial necessity. Technology can assist in retaining independence. There are special phones available to allow the user to push a photo to speed dial a call for help. There are many tracking devices to help with monitoring geographic safety. There are medication-monitoring systems that will supply medications on schedule and alert others to missed medications. Safety cameras can also assist. Advanced technology is available through “smart homes” to assist and alert family to any change of routine within the home.

When the time comes that products are not enough to ensure safety, there should be a meeting including the elder, family members and can include a physician. Options for consideration when it is no longer “safe” include things such as in home aide care, senior apartment dwelling, moving in with family or placement in a facility. Consideration of all choices is best to maintain safety and dignity of the elder.

For questions, consultation, or additional information, please contact:

Karen Phoenix, Project CARE Family Consultant. Foothills Region, [Western Piedmont Council of Governments](http://www.wpcog.org) at 828-485-4267 or karen.phoenix@wpcog.org

Fall EIN Highlights Hickory Metro Census 2020 Population Results

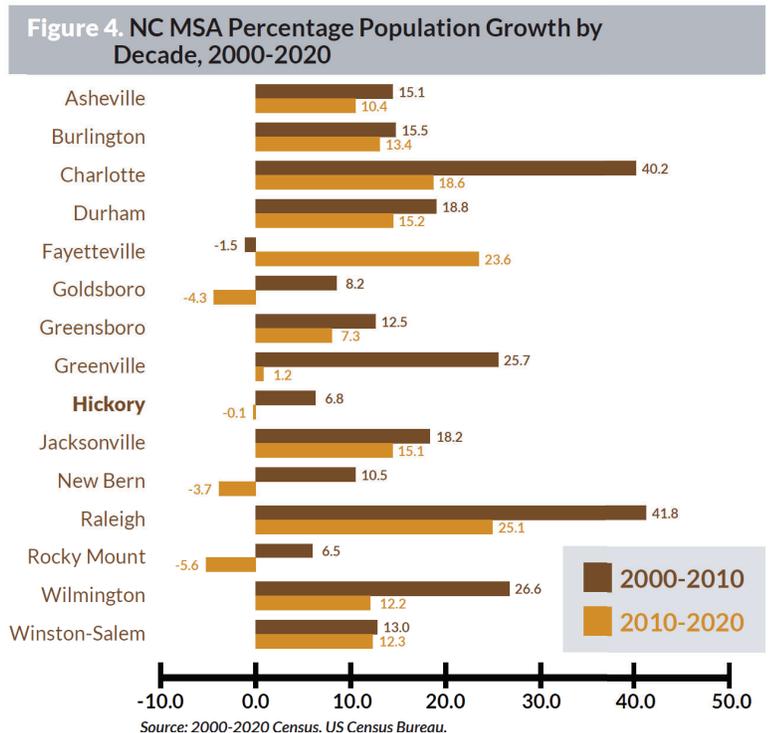
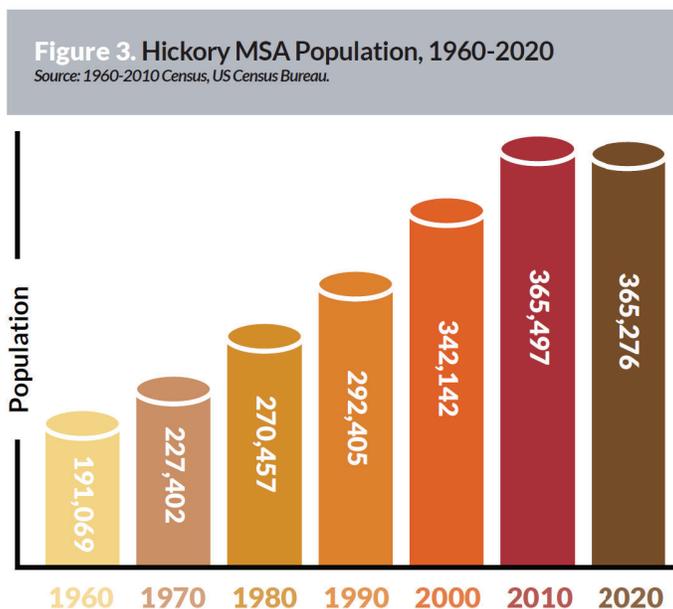
Article by Taylor Dellinger

The latest issue of the Economic Indicators Newsletter (EIN) released by the Western Piedmont Council of Governments, addresses Hickory Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) unemployment rates, Hickory Metro gross collections, and Hickory MSA Census 2020 population results.

Here are a few key highlights of the EIN:

- In August 2020, the Hickory MSA's unemployment rate equaled 6.7%. As pandemic recovery continues, the region's unemployment rate dropped to 4.1% as of August 2021.
- Between August 2020 and August 2021, the estimated number of employed persons increased from 157,755 to 166,997 (9,242), while the civilian labor force grew from 169,052 to 174,193 (5,141).
- Hickory MSA State gross tax collections increased from \$171.4 million in 2016 to \$210.8 million in 2020.
- Decennial Census results reveal that the Hickory Metro area grew from fewer than 200,000 residents in 1960 to more than 365,000 in 2010. However, between 2010 and 2020, the Hickory MSA's population remained nearly unchanged, with a net loss of 221 persons (-0.1%) to 365,276.
- The more recent lack of population growth is due to an increase in deaths with a decrease in births and a lack of substantial net in-migration into the region.
- The Hickory MSA was one of four North Carolina MSAs (Goldsboro, New Bern, and Rocky Mount MSAs) that experienced a net decline in resident population between the 2010 and 2020 Census.
- The Hickory MSA's population under 18 fell by 9,239 persons while the population over 18 grew by 9,018.
- For the first time, Hispanics (or Latinos-any Race) became the largest minority group in the region in 2020 (8.6%). The region's Hispanic population grew 35.8% between 2010 and 2020 to 31,320.
- Two ethnic/race groups in the Hickory MSA experienced significant population declines between the 2010 and 2020 Census. The population of the White, not Hispanic or Latino group fell by 18,551 between 2010 and 2020 to 283,545. In Addition, the Hickory MSA's African American population also decreased between the 2010 and 2020 Census (net loss of 1,647 persons).
- Following national trends, the fastest growing ethnic population in the region between 2010 and 2020 was the "two or more races" group. The number of persons in the two or more races group grew by more than 200% to 20,932.

See the selected figures below for additional information. The EIN is produced quarterly and is a publication of the [Western Piedmont Workforce Development Board](#). To subscribe to the EIN, please contact Taylor Dellinger, Data Center & GIS Manager, at 828-485-4233 or email taylor.dellinger@wpcog.org, or click [here](#).





CONTACT INFORMATION

Telephone: 828.322.9191

Fax: 828.322.5991

Email: jason.toney@wpcog.org

Mailing: P.O. Box 9026 | Hickory, NC 28603

Location: 1880 2nd Avenue NW | Hickory, NC 28601

