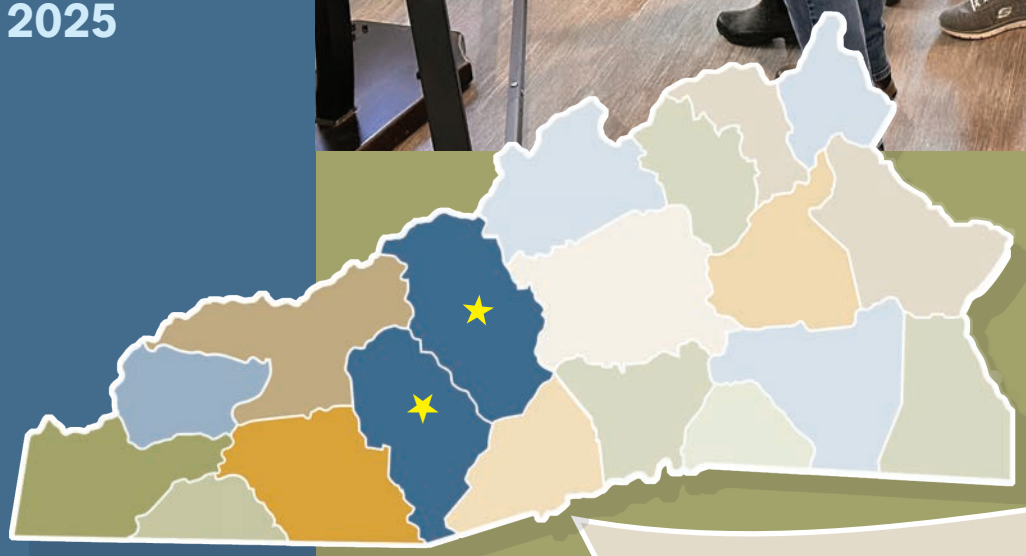
Mountain Projects

Community Action Agency Serving Haywood & Jackson Counties

Annual Report **2025**



Empowering Lives, Strengthening Community

60 Years Highlights from our Journey …

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On the cover: Current Executive Director Si Simmons and members of the Mountain Projects team prepare to canvas a Haywood County community after Hurricane Helene.

1965

First Executive Director Gerald Davis supports incorporation. Mountain Projects is chartered as a non-profit & begins its Head Start program.

From the Director

Dear Friends of Mountain Projects,

Since 1965, Mountain Projects Community Action Agency has been a steadfast partner in Haywood and Jackson Counties, **empowering individuals and families toward self-sufficiency, resilience, and hope** during challenging times.

With a focus on essential human services—ranging from early childhood Head Start and housing assistance to senior programs, transportation, and emergency supports—we have grown into a vital lifeline, serving tens of thousands across our mountain communities.

This past year, thanks to the **dedication** of our staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters, we expanded affordable housing, **strengthened our safety net programs,** and answered the call for **recovery and resilience**.

As you explore this annual report, we invite you to celebrate our milestones and recommit to the work of **lifting every neighbor** toward dignity and prosperity.

Best, Si Simmons

A Legacy in our Community

Mountain Projects began in 1964 with a $52,000 grant from President Lyndon B. Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act, launching early efforts such as a summer Head Start program, a Medicare Alert program, and a Neighborhood Youth Corps. More programs quickly followed, and by 1994 we were engaging hundreds of community volunteers.

Today, Mountain Projects has an annual budget of more than $22 million, a staff of 140, and provides a wide range of services that touch thousands of lives each month. Many of the people we serve are disabled, disadvantaged, living in poverty, or elderly. We believe every client deserves a safe, healthy environment, and our programs work daily to support their social, economic, educational, emotional, and physical well-being.

Did You Know?

In its early years, Mountain Projects helped spearhead efforts to push telephone service into remote areas of Haywood and Jackson Counties.

Who We Serve

59% female

24% reported living with a disability

89% identified as White

85% of households lived below **100%** of the Federal Poverty Guidelines

20% of adults were employed full-time or part-time

26% of households were single-parent families

Over **40%** of adults were not in the labor force due to caregiving, disability, or retirement

Approximately **8%** of households experienced homelessness

60%+ of households included children

481 households received SNAP (Food Stamps)

182 households received SSI or SSDI

1966-69

Lady Bird Johnson visits the Little Canada area of Jackson County in support of the formation of the Teachers Corps. Mountain Projects begins a Family Planning program.

Year at a Glance

Combined Total Donations to Mountain Projects: **$365,802.82** distributed for Emergency Needs, Flood Funding & Share the Warmth.

Resale stores revenue from Sylva and Waynesville: **$359,086.71.**

Intake & reception assisted **hundreds** of individuals and families with housing, clothing, transportation, and emergency bill support.

Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership (SMHP) received a new USDA 523 grant to support **13** future homes, and **5** Section 8 voucher holders became homeowners.

Weatherization & Housing Rehabilitation served **180** homeowners.

HUD/Section 8 served **880** families and made rental payments to **271** landlords of **$7.1 million.** Was named **HUD High Performer.** Rehoused **19 of 22** affected families after disaster.

Haywood Senior Resource Center received **5,981** member visits of all types.

38 Senior Companions volunteers provided 32,113 hours serving **170** clients.

4,026 hours of In-Home Aide Services were provided to **72** clients.

29 Foster Grandparents volunteers provided **25,400** volunteer hours.

Head Start served **195** children, provided preventive dental care for **151** children and age appropriate immunizations for **179.49** Head Start children received specialized disability services.

WIOA supported **11** participants and graduated **6** into high-demand fields.

GetCoveredWNC interacted with **3,175** clients and enrolled **619** in Marketplace or Medicaid for a total value impact of **$6.4 million.**

Mountain Strong Prevention Services reached **2,147** people directly and **160,743** indirectly, educated **269** retailers, distributed **895** lockboxes, **976** alcohol locks and **1,304** Naloxone kits.

Food services drove **15,000 miles** to provide **21,600** with **zero** foodborne illness incidents and a **100%** on-time delivery rate.

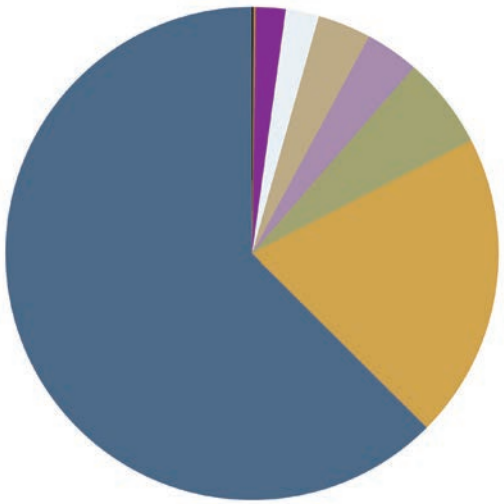
4,865 congregate meals were served to **164** clients.

Haywood Public Transit provided **42,000** trips and maintained **100%** service continuity despite increased demand.

Financial Profile 2024-2025

The Finance Department's goal is accurate and timely financial information to monitor fiscal activities. We assess costs and provide full accountability to internal management, the Board of Directors, funding sources, and the public.

Revenues (Unaudited)



		% ROUNDED
Federal	$15,343,977	63
Other	$4,916,427	20
County/Towns	$1,478,382	6
Donated Services	$864,275	4
Local	$859,455	4
Fees	$535,396	2
State	$481,278	2
Contributions	$40,134	>1
Investments	$17,931	>1

$24,537,255

Expenses (Unaudited)

		% ROUNDED
Children's Services	$4,372,520	19
Senior Services	$529,486	2
Housing Development	$2,021,553	9
Volunteer Services	$439,449	2
Rental Assistance HCV	$8,703,141	38
Employment & Eligibility	$288,430	1
Transportation	$1,554,958	7
Food Service/Local/Fundraising	$1,908,608	8
Other Services-Youth, Navigator, etc.	$3,329,031	14

$23,147,176

Finance Team

Joni Elkins
Chief Finance Officer

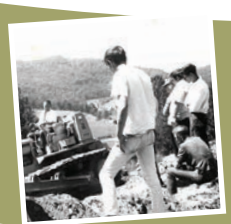
Hanna Davis
Asst. Finance Officer

Alex Aumen
Accountant

Dianne Gray
Finance Assistant

Private Grant Funding Sources

- Community Foundation of WNC
- Dogwood Health Trust
- Duke Energy
- Evergreen Foundation
- Great Smokies Health Foundation
- Haywood Health Foundation
- Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust
- NCSECU Foundation
- The United Way of Haywood Co.
- VAYA Health
- First Citizens Bank
- Canopy Housing Foundation
- Legal Aid of North Carolina
- Jackson County, NC
- Haywood County, NC
- Town of Bryson City



1970-74

We begin operating a Neighborhood Youth Corporation, a congregate meal program for seniors, and offering free tax services for low-income families and senior citizens.

1975-79

Mountain Projects launches a Meals on Wheels program, a Section 8 Rental Assistance program in Haywood County, and receives a grant to begin home weatherization projects.

Mountain Projects Resale Stores

Supporting Community Services Through Sustainable Giving

Locations: Waynesville (MP Resale) and Sylva (Sylva Linings)

Program Overview

The Mountain Projects Resale Stores provide affordable goods to the community while generating revenue that supports vital agency programs. Both stores serve as essential hubs for sustainability—recycling usable items, reducing waste, and connecting residents in need with household goods and clothing at no cost, often through coordinated referrals with Mountain Projects' social service programs.

Annual Output & Impact (FY 24-25)

Together, the Waynesville and Sylva stores generated $359,086.71 in total revenue:

Waynesville (MP Resale): $178,808 | Sylva Linings: $180,279

This marks a steady performance year for both stores, reflecting ongoing community support and strong volunteer engagement.

Volunteer Services

Volunteers play a critical role in operations, donations processing, and client support:

Waynesville: 2,241.75 volunteer hours | Sylva: 1,558.50 volunteer hours

Community Assistance

Clients Assisted (Waynesville): 48 households refurbished
Pickups Completed: 263 (131 in Waynesville and 132 in Sylva)
Recycling: $1,992.23 in recyclable materials diverted from landfill

Key Achievements

- Maintained high client service levels while navigating fluctuating donations.
- Expanded recycling efforts and furniture pickup routes.
- Boosted collaboration between stores to share inventory and streamline work.

Volunteers logged almost 4,000 hours of work at our resale stores in Sylva and Waynesville during the last fiscal year.

Intake & Reception

Gateway to Mountain Projects Services

Central Intake is the entry point for most Mountain Projects programs, connecting individuals and families to essential programs and emergency resources. Central Intake helps people move from unsafe to stable living conditions and supports families in improving their quality of life.

Key Highlights

- Assisted individuals and households in crisis with housing, clothing, transportation, and bill support.
- Responded to ongoing emergencies caused by major business closures and severe flooding.
- Saw an increase in need, met with strong local support.
- Strengthened internal coordination and cross-department teamwork to improve client response.

Intake specialists Pat Bennett, Samantha Moore, Josie Rodiguez and Manager Peter Mudge

Front Desk Receptionist Mary Jane Messer

1980-84

We open our Food Service Division, receive a grant to begin job placement and training programs and set a state record for the most homes weatherized in a single month.

1985-89

Sara Q. Brown becomes our fifth Executive Director. A grant helps us begin our Foster Grandparents Program and the RSVP Program (Retired and Senior Volunteers).

Head Start & Early Head Start

Building Bright Futures for Children and Families

Christie Paxton
Head Start Director

Program Manager: Christie Paxton
Service Area: Haywood & Jackson Counties
Staff: 50

Program Overview

Mountain Projects Head Start provides comprehensive early childhood education and family support services for children from birth to age five. The program focuses on school readiness, health, nutrition, and family engagement—helping children and families build a strong foundation for lifelong success.

Annual Output & Impact

In FY 2023–2024, Head Start served **195** children across Haywood and Jackson Counties, including **130** preschoolers (ages 3–5) and **65** infants and toddlers in Early Head Start. The program remained dedicated to maintaining full enrollment and staffing to meet federal standards.

Volunteer Engagement

Community members contributed an estimated **39,548 volunteer hours** through classroom support, events, and parent involvement.

Key Achievements

- Provided education incentives to help staff meet federal credentialing mandates.
- Maintained consistent school readiness progress through data tracking and individualized learning plans.
- Strengthened family engagement through collaborative goal setting and self-sufficiency planning.

Community Collaboration

Partnerships with KARE, Haywood County Schools, and Jackson County Schools supported children's mental health and developmental services. Numerous community donors—including Anna's Kiddie Korner, Balsam Mountain Preserve, Mountain Federal Credit Union, Haywood Rotary, and others—provided food, clothing, and holiday support for enrolled families.

Head Start Graduation at Southwestern Community College

Challenges

Like many early education programs, Head Start faced budgetary, staffing and enrollment challenges this year. Despite these obstacles, the team remained resilient and focused on quality care. A highlight was the outpouring of community support during the Christmas food box drive, which demonstrated deep local commitment to the program's mission.

Looking Ahead

For FY 2025–2026, Head Start will focus on maintaining full enrollment, recruiting and retaining qualified staff, and continuing to foster strong relationships among children, families, and educators.

1985-89

We receive USDA Housing Preservation Grant. Bob Leatherwood becomes our sixth Executive Director.

1990-94

We open Haywood Public Transit, open the Haywood County Volunteer Center, and receive a grant to operate a Jackson County Affordable Home Ownership Program.

Tabitha Justice
Education & Mental Health Coordinator

Beth Lewis
CACFP Coordinator

Laura Passmore
Health & Nutrition Coordinator

Missy Gibson
ERSEA Coordinator

Key Service Data

	Early Head Start	Head Start
Funded Enrollment	121	56
Children Served	130	65
Children from Homeless Families	11	4
Children in Foster Care	6	4
Over-Income Families	13	1
Dual Enrolled (Head Start & NC Pre-K)	20	0
Transitioned to Head Start	0	28
Transitioned to Kindergarten	53	0
Specialized Disability Services	29	20
Mental Health Services (Children & Families)	17	7
Preventive & Primary Healthcare	130	65
Age-Appropriate Immunizations	118	61
Preventive Dental Care	103	48

Mountain Projects administers five Head Start centers in Haywood and Jackson Counties.

Did You Know?

On April 13, 1966, Mountain Projects launched two pilot Head Start programs in Haywood County. The program offered early education, nutrition, and health services to 30 preschool children. The pilot's success was clear, and Mountain Projects has administered Head Start in our region ever since, eventually expanding into Jackson County.

1990-94

Our Family Self-Sufficiency Program is launched, and we begin Section 8 Rental Assistance in Jackson County and sponsor our first VISTA project.

1995-99

We begin a Christmas Box Project for seniors. Patsy Dowling Davis becomes seventh Executive Director.

Housing Rehab & Weatherization

Creating Safer, More Efficient Homes for Local Families

Vivian Bumgarner
Program Manager

Program Manager: Vivian Bumgarner, Housing Rehabilitation Manager
Service Area: Haywood and Jackson Counties
Staff: 3 Full-Time

Program Overview

The Weatherization & Housing Rehabilitation Program improves the safety, comfort, and energy efficiency of homes for low-income residents in Haywood and Jackson Counties. By repairing roofs, installing heating systems, replacing windows and doors, insulating and air-sealing and adding accessibility features. The program helps seniors, families, and people with disabilities remain safely in their homes.

Annual Output & Impact

In FY 2024–2025, the team served **180 households**, providing essential repairs and energy-efficiency upgrades that lowered utility costs and improved living conditions.

Volunteer support from Haywood Baptist Men and Tuckasegee Wesleyan Church contributed more than 150 hours, enabling the construction of multiple handicap ramps for residents with mobility challenges.

Community Impact

Through critical home repairs and weatherization, families experienced lower electric and fuel bills, safer heating systems, and healthier living environments.

Challenges & Responses

Funding reductions presented a major challenge, resulting in the loss of one staff position and limiting capacity to meet community demand. As one staff member shared, "We didn't know if we'd have jobs at one point, but we kept going and did the best we could for the families who needed us most."

Outcomes & Effectiveness

- All clients experienced measurable reductions in power bills following weatherization work.
- Leveraged funding helped reduce the program's waitlist and stretch resources further.
- Continued partnerships allowed more projects to be completed despite staff and funding challenges.

Vicky Ferguson, *Housing Rehabilitation Specialist;* Vivian Bumgarner, *Program Manager;* Kevin Queen, *Construction Assistant*

Looking Ahead

The Weatherization & Housing Rehabilitation team remains committed to helping as many clients as possible with available funding. Priorities for FY 2025–2026 include:

- Leveraging every funding source to maximize service impact.
- Maintaining Duke Energy and other essential grants, which make many projects possible.
- Planning for future funding stability to sustain staffing and meet rising demand for home safety and energy-efficiency improvements.

Program Manager Vivian Bumgarner, Housing Rehabilitation Specialist Vicky Ferguson and a Jackson County client.

Kevin Queen measures for a repair.

Mountain Projects' weatherization and home rehabilitation services are supported by a mix of stable and uncertain funding sources. Core programs such as the federal Weatherization Assistance Program and state-administered NC DEQ funds provide reliable, but fluctuating support, year after year. Other resources, including LIHEAP and various special repair grants, shift with federal budgets and competitive funding cycles, creating some uncertainty for households that have qualified for support.

2000-04

USDA-funded Self-Help Housing Program is launched. We began Wood Cutting & Delivery Program, and open Kneedler Child Development Center on the WCU campus.

2000-04

Senior Companion Program expands. We begin a GED Lab in Jackson County & complete 18 houses for first-time homeowners in Clyde.

Haywood Public Transit

Connecting People, Places, and Opportunities

Christie Morrow
Program Manager

Program Manager: Christie Morrow
Service Area: Haywood County, with routes to and from Buncombe & Jackson Counties.
Staff: 17

Program Overview

Haywood Public Transit provides reliable, affordable transportation for Haywood County residents, ensuring access to essential services and community resources. The program offers rides for medical and non-medical appointments, employment, shopping, and other daily needs—helping residents maintain independence and stability.

Annual Output & Impact

In FY 2024–2025, Haywood Public Transit provided more than **42,000** trips across Haywood County and surrounding areas—a **13% increase** in total ridership. Urban routes also experienced a **13% rise,** demonstrating growing community reliance on transit services. Each trip represents more than a ride—it's a connection to work, healthcare, education, or community life that might otherwise be out of reach.

Haywood Transit employs several veterans, including Jerry Keller, David Wilson, Richard Smith, Roger Fernandez and James Baker, shown here on Veterans Day.

In addition to longtime services, Haywood Transit provides emergency response transportation, medical transport and emergency food box deliveries. Haywood Public Transit now offers regular, daily bus routes for residents of Haywood County.

Martha Grasty, Transit Driver

Key Achievements

Increased total and urban trips by **13%,** reflecting improved accessibility and growing community trust.

- Maintained safe and timely service despite limited resources and increased demand.
- Strengthened coordination with Mountain Projects programs, community agencies, and local government partners to meet diverse transportation needs.

Challenges & Responses

Rising demand for transportation services continues to outpace available grant funding. Additionally, staffing levels have remained steady or slightly reduced even as trip volume increases. The Transit team continues to innovate by adjusting routes, improving scheduling efficiency, and cross-training staff to maintain high-quality service delivery.

Looking Ahead

In the coming year, the department will focus on:

- Enhancing customer service and maintaining the highest standards of safety.
- Strengthening collaboration with local agencies and regional partners.
- Exploring new funding sources to support rising demand and sustain expanded service capacity.

2000-04

We open Aviemore Village, a 24-unit apartment complex in Clyde for elderly and disabled citizens & we launch a HUD Home Ownership Program.

2005-09

Construction begins on Barefoot Ridge affordable housing development, & we launch a "Safe at Home" program. 29 homes are completed with the second Self-Help grant.

Section 8 Housing

Expanding Access to Safe, Affordable Housing

Amanda Singletary
Program Manager

Program Manager: Amanda Singletary
Service Area: Haywood and Jackson Counties
Staff: 5 Full-Time, 1 Part-Time

Program Overview

The Mountain Projects HUD/Section 8 Program fosters strong, inclusive communities by providing quality, affordable housing to low-income households in Haywood and Jackson Counties. Through the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) and Mainstream Voucher programs, families, seniors, and individuals with disabilities gain the stability necessary to improve their quality of life and achieve greater financial security.

Key Achievements

- Rehousing After Disaster: Following Hurricane Helene, 22 occupied rental units were destroyed. Despite this loss, all but three affected families—who relocated outside the service area—were successfully rehoused.
- National Recognition: HUD designated Mountain Projects as a High-Performing Public Housing Agency, meeting or exceeding standards in 14 categories including compliance, efficiency, and housing quality inspections.
- Stable Operations: Maintained a 90% lease-up rate and 100% HQS inspection completion rate, ensuring high performance despite funding shortfalls.

Community Impact

The Section 8 Program strengthens local stability by helping families remain housed and supporting landlords with guaranteed rental payments. Stable housing leads to improved health, employment, and educational outcomes for participants.

This year, several residents with disabilities moved into more accessible homes, improving mobility and independence. One participant with autism secured safe housing near support services, allowing him to live independently for the first time. These success stories highlight the life-changing impact of access to affordable housing.

Challenges & Responses

Two major challenges shaped the year:

1. HUD **Funding Shortfall:** Temporarily halted new voucher issuance.
2. Housing **Loss from Hurricane Helene:** Reduced local availability and displaced families.

To address these, the team utilized Mainstream vouchers and secured HUD disaster relief to offset shortfalls. Staff also coordinated closely with landlords to repair units and maintain stability for tenants whenever possible.

Performance & Effectiveness

Despite economic pressures, the Section 8 Program:

- Maintained high landlord retention and 100% on-time reexamination rate.
- Secured **$849,747 in HUD set-aside funding** to mitigate losses.
- Managed and expanded waitlist of **500+ households, a 175% increase** over last year, reflecting growing regional housing needs.
- Achieved a PIC score of 100%, confirming top-level compliance with HUD standards.

Partnerships & Collaboration

Collaboration remains at the heart of the program's success.

- Partnered with Mountain Projects' HOP program to help clients with security deposits, furnishings, and food.
- Worked with Centers for Domestic Peace to secure housing for 6–10 survivors of domestic violence.
- Coordinated with local officials, FEMA, and Housing Rehab teams to address urgent post-disaster needs.

Annual Output & Impact

Vouchers Available: 933
Mainstream Vouchers (Non-Elderly Disabled): 75
Families Served: 880
Children Served: 325
Seniors (60+): 642
Landlords (Haywood & Jackson): 270
Rental Payments to Landlords: $7.1 million

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is the federal agency that supports safe, stable, and affordable housing in communities nationwide. Section 8, or the Housing Choice Voucher Program, helps low-income families, seniors, and people with disabilities afford private-market rentals by covering a portion of their monthly rent.

2005-09
In partnership with GEM Management, we complete construction of The Havens, a 24-unit apartment complex in Jackson County for disabled citizens and individuals over 60.

2005-09
We receive a grant to begin the Haywood Community Connections program and begin sponsorship of a of Crisis Intervention Program, and a grant to increase public transportation.

Section 8 staff: Nicole Parton, Oscar Vazquez, Amanda Singletary, Anne Velez, Paula Robinson and Chad Hall.

Donor & Funder Recognition

- Canopy Housing Foundation – $5,000 grant for rent and utility assistance to prevent eviction.
- North Carolina Coalition Against Domestic Violence – grant funding to assist survivors of domestic violence in partnership with Centers for Domestic Peace.

Looking Ahead: FY 2025–2026

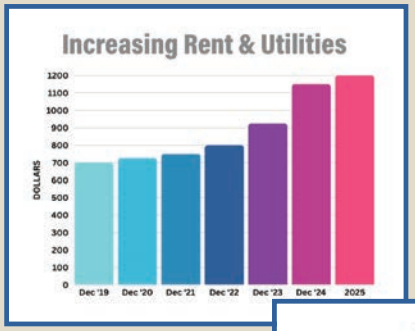
The Section 8 team will focus on:

- Partnering with the Veterans Administration to begin administering the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program in 2026. This is a significant milestone, as it directly supports efforts to address homelessness among our veteran population.
- Working with HUD's Shortfall Team to reopen the waitlist and resume voucher issuance.
- Applying for additional set-aside funding to expand program capacity.

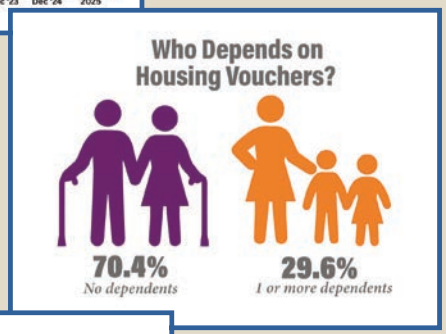
Spotlight

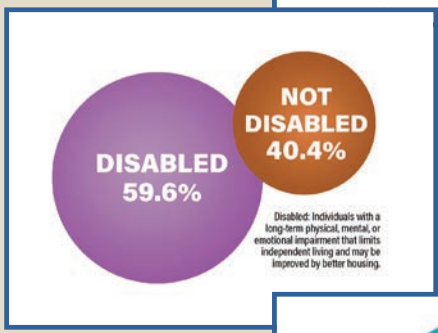
Our compassionate and dedicated Section 8 staff focuses on prompt communication and personal outreach, and go beyond administrative duties by visiting seniors at home, helping storm survivors access resources, and securing emergency items like lift chairs or replacement phones.

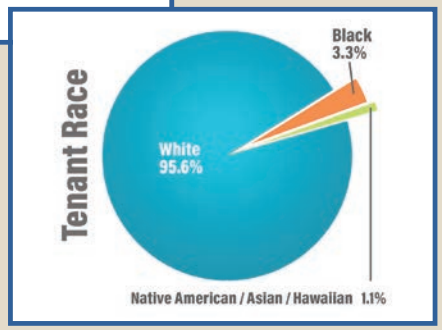
Facts That Matter From Section 8



For deeper look into our Section 8 work, visit MountainProjects.org or the Mountain Projects Facebook page.







2005-09
Coalition to Reduce Alcohol & Substance Abuse on Our Highways (CRASH) program launches in Jackson County. We recieve grant to begin an Early Head Start program.

2005-09
Mountain Projects begins a Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing program, and in partnership with the community begin our "Share the Warmth" initiative.

Senior Resource Center

Supporting Seniors with Care, Connection, and Community

Michelle Claytor
Manager

Program Manager: Michelle Claytor
Service Area: Haywood County
(select programs also serve all 7 western counties)
Staff: 4 Full-Time and 6 Part-Time

Program Overview

The Haywood County Senior Resource Center (SRC) serves as a central hub for older adults seeking connection, support, and independence. Through social, educational, and wellness programs, the SRC enhances the quality of life for seniors across Haywood County. In addition, regional programs such as the Foster Grandparent Program (FGP) and Senior Companion Program (SCP) extend Mountain Projects' reach across all seven western counties.

Volunteer Engagement

Volunteers lead many of the SRC's core programs—including Project Lifesaver, Parkinson's Support Group, Aging Matters, and the Dementia Caregiver Support Group—collectively donating an **average of 11 hours per month**. These dedicated volunteers support program consistency.

Key Achievements

- Leadership Transition: Michelle Claytor was promoted to Senior Services Manager following the retirement of longtime director John Chicoine, who continues to serve part-time supporting SHIIP and senior activities.
- Staff Recognition: In-Home Aide Roberta Houston received the Essential Piece Award from the North Carolina Community Action Association for outstanding service.
- Program Growth: Senior visits have more than doubled since 2021—from **2,406 to 5,981**—reflecting the SRC's growing role in senior wellness and engagement.

Community Impact

The Senior Resource Center provides more than programs—it offers purpose and belonging. Seniors frequently share that attending events, games, or trips is the highlight of their week. For many, SRC is a lifeline against isolation.

Annual Output & Impact

This year, the Senior Resource Center continued to grow as a vital gathering place and service network for local seniors.

- **5,981 member visits to SRC programs and activities**
- **29 Foster Grandparents donated 25,400 volunteer hours at 22 community stations**
- **38 Senior Companions provided 32,113 hours of service to 170 clients across Haywood, Jackson, and Cherokee Counties**
- **4,865 congregate meals served to 164 clients**
- **In-Home Aides provided 4,026 hours of personal care assistance to 72 clients**
- **Volunteer Center placed 71 new volunteers**
- **SHIIP served 635 clients, saving $616,688 in prescription costs**
- **Information & Assistance Desk served 6,232 clients and distributed 95 caregiver lists**

Senior Resource Center clients enjoy an outing on the Blue Ridge Parkway.

2010-14

Haywood Senior Resource Center opens. We launch a program for first-time juvenile offenders with minor substance abuse through Teen Institute & Prevention Services.

2010-14

We complete a new Haywood Public Transit facility in Clyde and receive a North Carolina Housing Award for the Barefoot Ridge community.

The Senior Resource Center (SRC) is a hub for programs that support self sufficiency of seniors in Haywood County.

Programs such as Senior Companion and In-Home Aide Services allow older adults to remain independent at home while receiving transportation, grocery assistance, and companionship. Foster Grandparents and Senior Companions benefit as well—earning modest stipends that help cover essential expenses like gas, groceries, and medications.

The Phone Assurance Program provides peace of mind for isolated seniors, ensuring someone checks in regularly to confirm their safety and well-being.

Challenges & Responses

Funding shortages threatened one senior resource coordination position. The SRC team responded by partnering with a local church, presenting the program's community impact. The congregation generously funded the position for another year—demonstrating the power of local collaboration and advocacy.

Effectiveness & Indicators

- Steady increase in activity participation and waitlists, showing greater demand and engagement.
- Weekly monitoring of In-Home Aide and Senior Companion waitlists highlights a growing need for services that help seniors remain at home.
- Ongoing surveys capture feedback from participants, guiding improvements in programs and outreach.

2010-14
GetCovered WNC Navigator program is established with a $359,750 grant from US Department of Health and Human Services.

Collaborations

The SRC maintains strong partnerships with DSS, United Way, Haywood County Library, AARP, Four Seasons Hospice & Palliative Care, NC Works, and the Area Agency on Aging. These partnerships expand access to services, fund essential programs, and deliver vital education to the community. Notable joint efforts included the Elder Abuse Awareness Walk, hosted on SRC grounds, and a series of educational workshops on health, safety, and financial literacy.

Donors & Funders

The Senior Resource Center thanks the following supporters for their generosity:

- Haywood County and the Town of Clyde for operational funding and facility support
- Town of Waynesville and Town of Maggie Valley for providing facilities for Congregate Nutrition Programs
- Maggie Valley Methodist Church for funding In-Home Services - Their support helps ensure that seniors in our region have a safe, welcoming place to gather, learn, and thrive.

Looking Ahead: FY 2025–2026

The SRC will continue to strengthen partnerships, expand outreach, and enhance services that connect seniors to resources, social engagement, and volunteer opportunities. Priority goals include:

- Expanding outreach to reach isolated seniors
- Increasing community partnerships for joint programming
- Maintaining robust SHIIP and In-Home Aid services to support health and independence.

Spotlight

The true strength of the Senior Resource Center lies in its relationships—with seniors, families, and the community. Each visit, call, and meal shared reinforces the Center's mission: helping Haywood County seniors live independently, stay connected, and feel valued.

Food Service

Nourishing Our Community

Manager: Peter Mudge
Serves: Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon and Swain Counties

Food Services Manager Peter Mudge and employee Modesta Kinkaid

The Food Services program provided more than **21,000 meals this year** to Head Start students, Congregate Nutrition Center, for Seniors at Haywood Senior Center, and for others in serious need. Staff prepared **12,000 hot meals and 9,600 frozen meals, traveling over 15,000** miles to ensure food reached every recipient.

After floods hit the region, the team also prepared ready-to-eat meals for emergency workers and home home-bound seniors and individuals with disabilities, demonstrating flexibility and commitment under pressure. Despite challenges from rising food costs and the closure of a large daycare program, the program maintained 100% on-time deliveries and zero foodborne illnesses.

Looking ahead, Food Services plans to expand its catering operations to offset rising costs and continue supporting Mountain Projects' mission of health and stability for all. The dedicated staff take pride in serving with care—ensuring every meal nourishes both body and spirit.

2010-14

Circles of Hope program launches & we provide assistance with the Backpack Program for Head Start and Early Head Start children.

Circles of Cashiers/Glenville

Building Relationships. Creating Opportunity

Mary Jane Lucas
Program Manager

Program Manager: Mary Jane Lucas
Service Area: Southern Jackson County
Staff: 1

Program Overview

Circles of Cashiers–Glenville empowers families to move from surviving to thriving through education, mentorship, and strong community partnerships. The program connects participants ("Circle Leaders") with volunteer "Allies" who provide encouragement and accountability as they work toward financial stability and long-term independence.

Annual Output & Impact

In FY 2024–2025, Circles focused on expanding community impact through three major initiatives:

- Launching the Circles Car Care Initiative to assist working families in Southern Jackson County.
- Partnering with Western Carolina University to develop a housing needs survey for underserved residents.
- Rebuilding the volunteer corps through renewed outreach and engagement.

The program hosted 10 monthly meetings with 8–10 attendees each and provided shared meals at every gathering. **Volunteers donated more than 450 hours** through meeting support, mentorship, and board service. The 2023 cohort—four Circle Leaders and their Allies—successfully completed 18 months of training and mentorship, graduating in January 2025. All four participants achieved full employment, greater financial stability, and increased community involvement.

Looking Ahead

With new funding secured, Circles will launch the Car Care Initiative in partnership with local agencies, providing car repairs for families in need. The coming year will focus on volunteer recruitment, board development, and program sustainability—ensuring Circles continues to strengthen relationships and create pathways to economic independence.

Key Achievements

First full cohort graduation in chapter history.

Awarded a $10,000 Wade Hampton Donor Advised Fund grant for the Circles Car Care Initiative.

Established six new partnerships with organizations including the Chamber of Commerce, Pisgah Legal, Blue Ridge School, Boys & Girls Club of the Plateau, Big Brothers Big Sisters WNC, and the International Friendship Center.

WIOA (Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act)

Empowering Adults Through Education and Career Training

Sharon Grieco
Case Worker

Program Manager: Sharon Grieco
Service Area: Haywood County
Staff: 1

Program Overview

The WIOA program assists low-income adults in developing the skills and education needed to secure stable, well-paying jobs. Through personalized support and access to training programs, participants gain the credentials and confidence to compete successfully in today's workforce.

Key Achievements & Challenges

The program successfully guided all graduates toward credentials that lead directly to high-demand career fields. Recruitment remains a challenge, prompting proactive outreach at Haywood Community College, including weekly visits and collaboration with instructors to identify eligible students.

Partnerships

WIOA works closely with Haywood Community College and Southwestern Community College, which refer students seeking financial and career support to help them complete their education and enter the workforce.

Looking Ahead

The program aims to increase participant enrollment in the coming year while continuing to strengthen partnerships and provide hands-on guidance to help students achieve meaningful, long-term employment.

Annual Output & Impact

Supported 11 adult participants in career and technical training:

Six participants graduated, earning credentials that enhance employability and earning potential: Commercial Driver's License (CDL) (1); AAS in Medical Sonography (1); AAS in Radiography (1); AAS degrees in Nursing (2); AAS in Early Childhood Education (1).

Five participants continue their studies and are on track to complete their training in the coming year.

Healthy Opportunities Pilot (HOP)

Innovating Health Through Housing, Food, & Connection

The Healthy Opportunities Pilots (HOP) were North Carolina's first-in-the-nation effort to test whether meeting basic needs—safe housing, nutritious food, transportation, and safety—improves health outcomes and lowers costs for high-needs Medicaid members. Backed by $650 million in federal and state Medicaid funding, HOP operated in three regions, including Western North Carolina, from 2022 through October 2024.

Through HOP, Prepaid Health Plans reimbursed community-based Human Service Organizations (HSOs), including Mountain Projects, to deliver non-medical services such as food boxes, housing navigation, and transportation assistance. Services rolled out in phases beginning in 2022.

Independent evaluations found that participants experienced better health and stability when basic needs were met. These findings reinforced the program's central belief: health begins where people live, eat, and work.

Despite promising outcomes, the North Carolina General Assembly did not renew funding, ending the pilot in June 2025. Mountain Projects remains proud to have served hundreds of residents through HOP and continues to pursue partnerships and funding to sustain this life-changing approach to health and community well-being.

As the Healthy Opportunities Pilot enters an uncertain future, Mountain Projects and Impact Health remain committed to the partnership, innovations, and life-changing supports that HOP made possible. Whatever comes next, we will continue advocating for solutions that improve health, strengthen families, and advance well-being across our region.

HOP Program Manager Christy Mosteller with a HOP client in 2025.

2015-25

Haywood Transit is registered as a non-emergency medical transportation provider, improving access to medical care for low-income residents.

2015-25

In 2022 we become one of the region's key partners in the Healthy Opportunities Pilot (HOP)addressing food, housing, transportation, and safety needs for Medicaid beneficiaries.

Mountain Strong

Empowering WNC Through Prevention and Education

Libby Ray
Program Coordinator

Program Manager: Libby Ray
Service Area: Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon, and Swain Counties
Staff: 3 Full-Time Employees

Program Overview

Mountain Strong Prevention Services works to build safer, healthier communities across far Western North Carolina through education, outreach, and coalition-building. The program focuses on preventing underage drinking, youth vaping, and opioid overdose deaths while promoting resilience and positive youth development.

Key Achievements

- Expanded Alcohol Secure Storage Initiative in partnership with the NC ABC Commission and local ABC stores—recognized as a model for rural prevention outreach.
- Preventionist Lorrie Ross named 2024 Clay County Champion for Children by Region A Partnership for Children.
- Hosted a faith-based resilience training with Hinton Rural Life Center in Hayesville, reaching 30 leaders and prompting multiple requests for additional workshops.

Outcomes & Effectiveness

- Reached over **90%** of tobacco retailers across seven counties with merchant education.
- Increased requests for ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and resilience trainings—**from 9 inquiries in FY 2024 to 13 in FY 2025**, reflecting growing community interest.
- Strengthened internal teamwork through a capacity-building retreat, which reinforced strategic collaboration and long-term planning.

Community Impact

This year, 16 participants completed the 12-hour Prime for Life drug and alcohol education course, reinforcing the program's impact on behavior change and early intervention. By improving access to prevention tools—such as naloxone, lockboxes, and secure alcohol storage—the program continues to reduce risk factors and promote safety across rural communities.

Staff member Lorrie Ross applies "Sticker Shock" campaign stickers, distributed in partnership with ABC stores throughout WNC. The annual Sticker Shock campaign urges ABC Store patrons to help prevent underage drinking by not providing alcohol to minors.

Annual Output & Impact

In FY 2024–2025, the Prevention Team reached communities across all seven western counties through both direct engagement and broad public education campaigns.

2,147 individuals reached through direct prevention activities

160,743 people reached indirectly through environmental strategies such as public ad campaigns and merchant education

5 community presentations on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and resilience training for 177 participants

269 tobacco retailers received education to prevent sales of nicotine products to minors

Distributed **895 medication lock boxes and 976 alcohol bottle and cabinet locks** to promote safe storage in homes

Distributed **1,304 naloxone kits** in Swain County to prevent opioid related overdose deaths

Partnered with 10 ABC stores to place **7,500 "Sticker Shock" campaign stickers** on bags to discourage adults from providing alcohol to minors.

2015-25

Uninterrupted Head Start and Early Head Start services continue through the COVID-19 pandemic despite high operational costs.

2015-25

Mountain Strong prevention services begin, offering education, training, and resilience-building programs across WNC. Mountain Projects opens a resale store in Waynesville (2022).

Challenges & Responses

Funding instability and disruptions posed significant challenges this year. The team responded by pursuing private foundation grants to sustain program continuity. Despite uncertainty, prevention staff maintained momentum, broadened outreach, and strengthened relationships with community partners.

Key Partnerships

Prevention of Underage Drinking:

- North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services (NCDHHS)
- NC Alcoholic Beverage Control Commission and local ABC Stores
- Community Impact North Carolina (CINC)

These collaborations expanded outreach, distributed prevention materials, and advanced statewide campaigns such as "Talk It Out NC" and "Talk It Up, Lock It Up™."

Prevention of Opioid Overdose Deaths:

- Restoration House
- Swain County Health Department
- Coalition for a Safe and Drug Free Swain County

Donor & Funder Recognition

Mountain Strong Prevention Services extends gratitude to:

- NCDHHS, the program's largest funder, for supporting efforts to prevent youth substance use and promote resilience.
- CINC for funding alcohol storage initiatives.
- Local ABC Boards for partnership in retail and community education.

Looking Ahead: FY 2025–2026

Next year, the Prevention Team aims to:

- Develop alternative funding sources to sustain and expand work.
- Launch a youth-focused communications campaign that amplifies positive choices and healthy coping strategies.
- Continue strengthening cross-county partnerships to build a united, resilient Western North Carolina.

Far left, Mountain Strong Program Director Libby Ray and a Behavioral Health Group employee show off a prescription medication lock box.

Left, our team partners with ABC store managers in various ways. Here, Mark Pilon sets up a display of secure alcohol storage kits. Bottle and cabinet locks help secure alcohol at home to reduce youth access, and are provided cost free through our program.

2015-25

Mountain Projects receives the Mission Health Partners Community Partner Award for outstanding work addressing social determinants of health.

2015-25

We lead disaster recovery efforts following Tropical Storm Fred (2021) and Hurricane Helene (2024), providing housing assistance, case management, and long-term recovery support.

GetCovered WNC

Connecting People to Affordable Healthcare

Jan Plummer
Program Coordinator

Program Manager: Jan Plummer

Service Area: Cherokee, Clay, Graham, Haywood, Jackson, Macon and Swain Counties
Staff: 5

Program Overview

GetCoveredWNC helps residents across the seven westernmost counties of North Carolina and the Qualla Boundary access affordable health insurance through the Marketplace and Medicaid. The program's certified assisters provide free, confidential, and unbiased help to individuals and families seeking coverage options.

Susan Rose
Navigator

Jane Harrison
Navigator

Sarah Clark
Navigator

Christy Mosteller
Navigator

Annual Output & Impact

- 619 Health Insurance Marketplace and Medicaid enrollments
- 3,175 total client interactions
- $2.7 million in annualized premium tax credits secured
- $3.7 million in Medicaid value accessed
- Outreach and engagement across Haywood, Jackson, Swain, Macon, Clay, and Cherokee counties

Community Impact

By helping residents navigate the complex world of healthcare coverage, GetCoveredWNC improves access to care, reduces financial stress of healthcare costs, and strengthens the overall health of Western North Carolina communities.

Spotlight

Led by Manager Jan Plummer, the dedicated team of five Healthcare Navigators ensures that every person served receives compassionate, expert guidance on their path to affordable healthcare.

Our Consumers

Who are the customers of ACA insurance? They are individuals and families who purchase health coverage through the ACA Marketplaces—typically because they lack access to affordable employer-sponsored insurance or fall outside the income standards of longstanding public programs. On the national level, enrollment in Marketplace plans has reached a record high (nearly 24 million in 2025).

In North Carolina, the state has expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act. The expansion became effective December 1, 2023, with more than 600,000 newly eligible adults enrolled within the first year. However, the North Carolina legislature has not passed a full two-year state budget that fully funds its share of the broader Medicaid program, creating a shortfall of $319 million, jeopardizing the healthcare of qualified families, and threatening the survival of rural providers and hospitals by politicizing the right to healthcare.

For qualifying families in western North Carolina, this means that uncertainty remains about the program's sustainability. If federal Marketplace subsidies are also reduced, modest-income families—who may not qualify for full Medicaid or for enhanced subsidies—face the double risk of rising marketplace premiums and lack of healthcare coverage.

Mountain Projects Healthcare Navigators are meeting with enrollees who are experiencing this predicament and helping, as best as they can, to find affordable insurance options. Get Covered WNC Navigators are utilizing a new electronic benefit screener platform, called MyFriendBen, a project of Code the Dream, to vet consumer eligibility for other public benefit programs such as SNAP, WIC, medication assistance, and childcare. The consumer is provided the agency contact information for any program they may qualify for, and Navigators will assist with the online application process during appointments.

2015-25

Homes for Hope launched, including modular home development at the Bethel Village site for flood-displaced families.

2015-25

Mountain Projects' Jan Plummer honored locally for leadership in the Milltown Healthcare Initiative, assisting displaced workers in securing health coverage.

Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership

Building Homes, Strengthening Communities

Maggie Leftwich
Program Manager

Program Manager: Maggie Leftwich
Service Area: Haywood and Jackson Counties
Staff: 5

Program Overview

The Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership (SMHP), a program of Mountain Projects, continues to expand affordable housing opportunities across Western North Carolina—helping families achieve stability, independence, and homeownership.

Innovation & Recognition

The successful pilot of modular self-help homes drew national attention—earning Mountain Projects an invitation to present at the 2025 National Self-Help Housing Conference. This innovation demonstrates how SMHP is leading the way in creative, efficient solutions to address rural housing challenges.

Community Partnerships

In collaboration with United Way and Haywood Habitat for Humanity, SMHP launched the Homes for Hope Initiative to assist families displaced by Hurricane Helene. Through this effort, two new homes are under construction for households that lost their homes in the storm.

Looking Ahead

Pre-development is underway for two new neighborhoods—on Harkins Avenue in Canton and Little Savannah Road in Webster—that will expand local housing options and strengthen community resilience for years to come.

House placement at our Bethel Village project in Jonathan Valley.

Annual Output & Impact

- Five Section 8 Voucher holders transitioned successfully from rental assistance to homeownership.
- Three Self-help homes were completed through the USDA 523 Self-Help Housing Program, marking the first use of modular homes in the nation under this program.
- Three additional homeowners have been approved and are preparing to begin construction.
- Mountain Projects received a new USDA 523 Self-Help grant to assist 13 more households in building their own homes.
- We were invited to speak at the 2025 National Rural Housing Conference in Washington, DC

Self-help home owners at our Bethel Village project in Jonathan Valley.

Haley Griffith
Housing Counselor

Chris Stevens
Construction Supervisor

Kerry Moffat
Self-Help Counselor

Mike Medford
Assistant Construction Supervisor

Miriam Oakes
Lending Specialist

2015-25

Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership (SMHP) launched in 2019 to address the region's affordable housing crisis.

Community Action changes people's lives, embodies the spirit of hope, improves communities, and makes America a better place to live. We care about the entire community, and we are dedicated to helping people help themselves and each other.

Community Support Elevates What We Do

Any gift to Mountain Projects goes straight to work, providing tangible, life-changing support to those who need it most.

Mountain Projects is a 501(c)3 nonprofit charitable organization. Donations are tax deductible. EIN: 56-0849092

2015-25

Longtime Executive Director Patsy Davis receives the Order of the Long Leaf Pine, one of North Carolina's highest civilian honors, and we establish the Patsy Davis Legacy Fund to expand safe, affordable housing options in WNC.

2015-25

Si Simmons becomes eighth Executive Director

MOUNTAIN PROJECTS

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