



Smart Start of Forsyth County Receives \$25,000 Winston-Salem Foundation Grant Investment will strengthen the provider-led Forsyth County Early Childhood Network

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. — Smart Start of Forsyth County (SSFC) has received a \$25,000 Community Power Building grant from The Winston-Salem Foundation to support the Forsyth County Early Childhood Network, a provider-led membership organization created by local early childhood providers, educators, and teachers.

The Network has adopted its own bylaws, elected officers, and established a governance structure through which providers determine priorities, meetings, activities, and advocacy direction. It currently represents 152 early childhood facilities serving more than 5,300 children across Forsyth County.

“This investment recognizes that the people who care for and educate young children every day bring essential knowledge to the decisions affecting children, families, and the early childhood workforce,” said Casandra Gullick, Treasurer. “Our role is not to speak for providers, but to help create the infrastructure that allows providers to speak, organize, connect, and lead together.”

Grant funds will support provider-led convenings; advocacy and civic-engagement training; participation supports; communications and outreach; translation and interpretation; listening sessions and surveys; and administrative infrastructure. These activities will help providers strengthen relationships, identify shared priorities, develop leadership skills, and participate more effectively in community and public decision-making.

SSFC will serve as fiscal agent and administrative support partner, including providing meeting space and logistical assistance. The Network’s officers and members—not SSFC—will determine its priorities and advocacy direction. This structure preserves the Network’s independent, community-led governance while providing the operational support needed for long-term sustainability.

The investment comes as Forsyth County’s early childhood system continues to face challenges involving child care access and affordability, workforce compensation and stability, staffing shortages, and rising operating costs. SSFC’s grant application notes that only 21.4% of children under age six are reached by the county’s formal early childhood system.

“The Network gives providers a place to learn from one another, identify what matters to our community, and bring those experiences directly into the conversations where decisions are made,” said President Lisa Ferguson.

About Smart Start of Forsyth County. SSFC promotes equitable access to quality, comprehensive early childhood development and education. Each year, its work reaches more than 20,000 children, families, educators, organizations, and partners across 20+ Forsyth County ZIP codes.

To learn more about the ongoing work of Smart Start of Forsyth County, visit <https://smartstart-fc.org/>

Media Contact: Marvin Fulwood III, Chief of Staff | 336-995-4779 | marvinf@smartstart-fc.org

Smart Start of Forsyth County, Inc.

155 Sunnynoll Ct. Suite 300
Winston-Salem, NC 27106
Office: 336.725.6011 • ssfc@smartstart-fc.org

Smart Start of Forsyth County is a registered 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization,
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