



Kate B. Reynolds
Charitable Trust
Investing in Impact

Healthy Places NC: 10 Years That Changed the Way We Work

Executive Summary

A Note from Trust President Laura Gerald, MD, MPH

The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust launched an ambitious place-based program in 2012 to improve health in rural communities around our home state of North Carolina. Over the last decade, the Trust worked with residents to develop community-driven strategies to improve health outcomes in 10 rural counties, providing more than \$100 million in grants and support to these communities.

This report looks back at this work and offers key findings about what the Trust and Healthy Places NC counties accomplished. It identifies challenges and provides lessons for other funders interested in rural place-based work. We hope this 10-year evaluation serves as a resource to others investing in long-term community-led change.



Resourcing Rural North Carolina

Approximately 14 percent of the population lives in rural areas, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but only about seven percent of grantmaking goes to rural areas.¹ Many of these communities have faced long-term disinvestment yet are critical to the overall health of our state and country.

I am from one of these rural counties. I know the opportunity and power that exists there. Growing up, I was surrounded by hard-working, committed people who gave their talent and time to our community, and to me. As president of the Trust, it has been an honor to spend time in these communities, to learn from the people living and working there, and to amplify their voices.

I want to thank our community partners, technical assistance providers, and Trust staff—current and former—who poured their hearts and souls into Healthy Places NC. I want to acknowledge our colleagues in the philanthropy community whose pioneering work in place-based funding shaped this work. Finally, I want to thank the evaluation team, led by Trust Director of Learning & Impact Kristen Burwell Naney, PhD, for leading this retrospective.

While historic inequities continue, there is hope and persistence for a more equitable future. And that hope and persistence are at the heart of Healthy Places NC.

Healthy Places NC and the Trust

The launch of Healthy Places NC marked a radical shift in how the Trust operates to make a long-term impact. Program officers left their offices, spending time in communities, so they could really listen. We focused our grantmaking on amplifying the power of grassroots organizations and people of color to lead the changes they wanted to see in their communities. Along the way, we deepened our commitment to racial equity and partnered with amazing individuals and organizations committed to systemic change. Together we accomplished a great deal, but there is so much more we can do together.

Mrs. Reynolds asked us to improve the health and quality of life of people with low incomes across North Carolina when she established the foundation in 1947. Today we know that the largest disparities in health, education, and economic outcomes exist by race and place, so our commitment to rural North Carolina and communities of color remains steadfast.

Looking Back

Our vision for thriving, equitable communities is one of the reasons we decided to reflect on what we have learned from 10 years of Healthy Places NC. It is our greatest example of evolving from a charitable funder supporting good work, to a community-driven funder focused on changing systems. As we spent time in communities, we heard that the past is still present, and healing has not occurred.

That is one of the reasons that, during our [75th anniversary](#) in 2022, we acknowledged where our foundation has caused harm. We were transparent about the fact that the money we invest in North Carolina today came from tobacco profits and inherited funds originally earned from the sale and labor of enslaved Black people. We are now divested from tobacco and have committed more than \$100 million to community-led businesses that benefit North Carolinians. Our decision to be transparent and to change our investments, together with our trustee, Wells Fargo, signals our commitment to the people we serve and our acknowledgment that to truly make a long-term impact, we must start with ourselves. In 2023, we released an [Equity Framework](#) to explain how we got here, where we're going, and why there is no credible route to systems change that does not go through racial equity.

Working Forward

Moving forward, we are regionalizing this rural work and investing in Healthy Places NC communities poised to change policies locally and at the state level. We believe that centering racial equity and investing in systems change efforts—partnering with community members, grantees, and committed colleagues—is the only way to decrease persistent disparities. We know we cannot do this work alone.

We encourage other funders to amplify the power of communities that have been historically, and often intentionally, marginalized. Systems change is a team sport, and we hope others will commit to this vital, long-term work.

Join us in creating a just, equitable society where everyone in North Carolina thrives.



Executive Summary

The Trust launched Healthy Places NC in 2012 to improve the health of residents in our state's rural and vibrant, yet under-resourced communities. Investments helped build residents' power and capacity to address health issues impacting the communities and advocate for change at the local, regional, and state levels. This 10-year evaluation report details the initiative and what the Trust learned from this deep, long-term work.

The 10 counties involved in Healthy Places NC include:

- | | |
|---------------|--------------|
| 1. Beaufort | 6. Edgecombe |
| 2. McDowell | 7. Nash |
| 3. Halifax | 8. Bladen |
| 4. Rockingham | 9. Columbus |
| 5. Burke | 10. Robeson |



The Trust used a cultivation model to activate and support local stakeholders to take concrete steps to improve community health and health equity. Before providing grants, the Trust's program officers spent time in communities, listening to—and learning from—residents about opportunities and challenges facing rural areas.

The Trust provided support for leadership development, facilitation, and strategic planning, as well as projects that helped participating organizations build trust locally.

Substance misuse, adverse childhood experiences, equitable food systems, and access to recreation were the primary focus, with grassroots organizations and leaders of color later leading the charge to activate community change.

About the Trust

The Kate B. Reynolds Charitable Trust works for equitable access to quality health care, education, and economic opportunity for every resident of Forsyth County and across North Carolina. We work in partnership with communities for racial equity and systems change, as data show that too many people are marginalized by race and place.

More than 75 years ago, Kate B. Reynolds founded the Trust to improve the quality of life and health for residents with low incomes. Today, we're examining the root causes of the issues Mrs. Reynolds cared about and addressing them through a contemporary lens. We are amplifying power and capacity of residents to make the change they want to see in their communities and state.

Healthy Places NC: Stages of Development

The 10 years of work can be divided into two evolutionary stages. A process evaluation was performed to document how the initiative was implemented and the impact that was achieved within Healthy Places NC communities.

STAGE 1: 2012 - 2015

LAUNCHED SEVEN COUNTIES: Beaufort, Halifax, McDowell, Rockingham, Burke, Edgecombe and Nash

PRIMARY FINDINGS:

Community capacity to address health issues increased.

Surveys conducted by an evaluation team from Duke University's Division of Community Health found that, on average, local stakeholders in the earliest four Healthy Places NC communities reported increases in leadership skills, ability to collaborate with diverse groups, understanding the community's health issues, and ability to use resources to develop new solutions.

Networks expanded to include individuals from outside the health sector.

Through grants and counsel from regional support organizations (RSOs), a variety of interagency coalitions and networks working on local health issues became more functional and strategic. New networks formed and existing ones expanded membership and participation. This often involved bringing individuals and organizations outside the traditional health sector.

Trust grants enabled organizations to do deeper, more effective work.

Grants from the Trust allowed nonprofit organizations—many of which had been overlooked in the past—to develop more effective programming, reach more people, raise visibility, and connect with other organizations with shared interests.

2016: Shifting our focus

As a result of both learning and changes in staffing at the Trust, Healthy Places NC sharpened its focus on racial equity, systems change, and building the power of grassroots groups beginning in 2016. This led to shifts in how local stakeholders were supported, as well as the *types of groups* that were supported.

STAGE 2: 2019 - 2022

LAUNCHED THREE ADDITIONAL COUNTIES: Bladen, Columbus, and Robeson

PRIMARY FINDINGS:

Focusing on grassroots groups broadened the work.

An explicit focus on engaging grassroots organizations allowed a broader range of organizations to be supported and strengthened by Healthy Places NC. The emphasis on grassroots community empowerment and shifting systems required a change in technical assistance partners, but also led to stronger connections between local and state-level health improvement efforts.

Amplifying power on the ground became central to the long-term initiative.

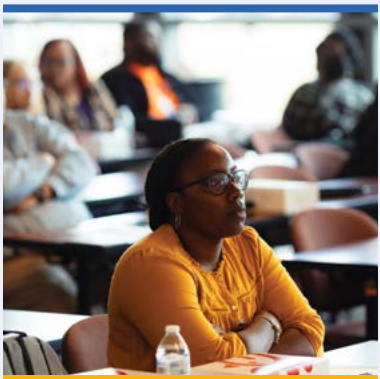
To advance health equity, some of the groups supported by the Trust and Rural Forward NC began paying more attention to power dynamics in their communities. In a limited number of instances, these groups were able to influence how policy, programming, and resource allocation decisions were made. Some grassroots leaders advocating for equity stepped forward to run for elected office.

Some systems began to shift at the local level.

While Healthy Places NC prompted only the beginning stages of large-scale systems change, most communities saw some improvement in more specific systems involving recreation, food, and public health.

2022 Reaching our \$100 million commitment

Healthy Places NC has expanded regionally, with a special focus on Eastern North Carolina, as data show that the largest health disparities exist by race and place in the eastern part of our state. The design of Healthy Places NC evolved over the course of the 10 years to address challenges that arose in the early years and to incorporate the perspective and wisdom of people who joined the initiative. Much was learned about using place-based philanthropy to advance equity in rural communities. This report presents detailed descriptions of challenges that arose and key lessons for funders.





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