In 2007, the US DHHS Administration on Children, Youth, and Families funded 53 regional partnership grants across the country with a goal to increase collaboration between child welfare, substance abuse treatment providers, the court system, and other health care agencies, in order to improve family well-being and reduce out-of-home placement for children. The North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services used the award to start the Robeson County Bridges for Families (RCBF) program, a collaborative effort between state and county leaders, families, the Lumbee Tribe, and other church and community members. Staff from local agencies—prevention specialists, treatment providers, social workers, and judges and court staff—attended training together in order to implement evidence-based practices such as the Strengthening Families Program, motivational interviewing, the Matrix Model of intensive outpatient treatment for methamphetamine abuse, Seeking Safety, and trauma-focused cognitive based therapy; as well as, family drug treatment court best practices.

For families that have participated in the RCBF program, changes have occurred in the re-entry rate for social services due to a recurrence of maltreatment and in the number of days that children were in custody or DSS placement authority. Among all families that have participated in the RCBF program, 1.80% of children re-entered foster care within 12 months of the most recent foster care entry date. Over a similar time period, the average re-entry rate over the past 12 months of the most recent foster care entry date was 4.52% for NC, 4.98% for medium- or similar-size counties in NC, and 4.49% for Robeson County. This reduction in recurrence of maltreatment and re-entry to foster care appears to be a strong benefit from the collaborative effort. From July 2007 to June 2011, the annual median number of days that children were in custody or DSS placement authority was 400 days for Robeson County, 435.5 days for NC, and 393 days for medium- or similar-size counties. For families participating in the RCBF program, the median number of days that children remained out of the home before reunifying with their caregivers or until discharge was 299 days.

As of June 2012, the RCBF program served 112 families, 119 adults, and 215 children. In addition to a shorter length of stay for children in social services custody and a lower re-entry rate into social services custody as a result of subsequent maltreatment, families have benefitted from evidence-based prevention and treatment interventions. Child and parent affectional bonds have been improved; parenting skills have increased; child behavior and communication skills have increased; and parents have achieved success in their own recovery from addiction and other mental illness and successfully taken their rightful place as leaders of healthy families.

Through the regional partnership grant, the community has accomplished the following:

- established and maintained a thriving family drug treatment court
- increased referrals to treatment for parents with substance use problems
- trained community professionals to work effectively with families affected by addiction
- secured licensing for eight apartments for residential treatment where mothers can have their children live with them;
- established, with funding outside of the Bridges grant, a men’s residential treatment program where children can have visits while their fathers are in treatment; and
- established and maintained outpatient evidence-based treatment programs and a successful parenting program.

The RCBF program has been funded for a two-year expansion grant from October 2012 to September 2014. For more information about the Robeson County Bridges for Families program, please contact Dr. Sherri Green at sgreen@email.unc.edu.