

Family Connects Earns National Certification, Strengthening Support for Newborns in Cumberland County

Fayetteville, NC — [June 15, 2026] — Family Connects North Carolina – Southeastern Region, a program of the Partnership for Children of Cumberland County, proudly announces national certification of its Family Connects International program—marking a major milestone in delivering high-quality, evidence-based support to families with newborns across Cumberland County.

Family Connects is a community-wide, universal in-home nurse visiting program that provides no-cost support during the critical first weeks of a newborn’s life. The program follows the nationally recognized Family Connects International model, an evidence-based framework developed in partnership with Duke University’s Center for Child and Family Policy, the Center for Child & Family Health, and the Durham County Health Department. With certification complete, the Partnership for Children of Cumberland County strengthens its role as the regional hub for Family Connects North Carolina – Southeastern Region, ensuring consistent, high-quality services aligned with rigorous national standards. Through Carolina Collaborative Community Care (4C), specially trained registered nurses deliver home visits that include postpartum support, health checks, parent education, and connections to community resources. Services currently focus on Cumberland County babies born at Cape Fear Valley Health System.

A Proven Model with Measurable Impact

Randomized control trials conducted by Family Connects International show participating families experience:

- **Increased connections to community resources**
- **More positive parenting behaviors**
- **Safer home environments**
- **Reduced maternal anxiety**
- **Higher-quality childcare choices**
- **Significant reductions in infant ER visits and hospital stays at 12, 24, and 60 months**
- **Reduced infant mortality rates**

These outcomes demonstrate the program’s powerful impact on family well-being and long-term child health.

Leadership Reflections

Mary Sonnenberg, President of the Partnership for Children of Cumberland County, emphasized the program’s importance:

“These newborn home visits and providing supports to families from the very beginning are indeed the secret sauce to getting our youngest children off to the best start and changing the trajectory of their lives, ultimately building a stronger Cumberland County. The Cumberland Community Foundation has been a big part of our success.”

Elizabeth Simpler, Community Alignment Specialist for Family Connects, added:

“The days following birth are a vulnerable transition for every family, and every family has different needs. By reaching families early and equitably, universal newborn home visiting strengthens continuity of care, supports parental confidence, and promotes the early identification of health and social needs—leading to healthier outcomes for women and children in our community.”

A Critical Resource for a Growing Community

Cumberland County has one of the region’s highest per-capita populations of children under age five, making early support essential. Family Connects addresses this need by offering up to 12 weeks of postpartum care, including universal in-home visits and telehealth check-ins tailored to each family.

The program’s certification reflects years of work, beginning with its pilot launch in 2021 through Federal Preschool Development Grant funding. Early exploration of a universal newborn home visiting model began in 2017, supported by strong community collaboration. Initial funding from the Cumberland Community Foundation enabled the hiring of a dedicated staff member to advance implementation—laying the groundwork for today’s success.

Achieving certification required rigorous evaluation and demonstrated the program’s ability to consistently deliver reliable, positive outcomes for newborns and families.

After federal grant funding ended, the Partnership sustained the program with a strong commitment to Cumberland County families. Continued collaboration—with support from the City of Fayetteville through ARPA funding, Cumberland County Government funding, and Smart Start funds—has made **continuation** possible. Moving forward, braiding funding streams will remain essential to sustaining and growing the program.

About the Partnership for Children of Cumberland County

Since 1993, the Partnership for Children of Cumberland County has provided programs and resources that empower families, promote child well-being, and strengthen early care and education systems. Services include NC Pre-K administration, childcare resource and referral, parent education, and home visiting programs.

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