



HISTORY

The **United Agenda for Children** has been developed over a period in excess of 18 months. It was initiated by a request from the County Commissioners to update a 2002 Strategic Plan for Children report which gathered data to analyze the 'state of the child.' A small group, including representatives from the Children and Family Resource Center, Department of Public Health, Smart Start of Henderson County, and the Alliance for Human Services held multiple meetings to update the original data. These discussions led to a commitment to look at the broader issues facing children in Henderson County and to use state and national data for comparison and insight.

More importantly, the group decided they wanted their efforts to go beyond an updated needs assessment and began to research successful community models that addressed fundamental issues impacting children and ways to impact systemic change. The group identified a reporting mechanism used in Polk County, Iowa, a report on children's health issues from Santa Clara County, CA, and a United Agenda for Children project in Mecklenburg County, NC as models. The Mecklenburg County project included a citizen engagement process as a tool to involve their community and identifying priorities which we have incorporated into our project plan.

On September 12, 2006, the planning group for the United Agenda for Children hosted a breakfast for our community leaders including our North Carolina State Representatives, key agency heads and their board chairs, and local commissioners to present our idea and request their support and guidance. We asked that each of these leaders commit a member of their respective staffs to join our steering committee and to help guide the process forward. Since September, we have held bi-weekly meetings with representatives of 41 different agencies to receive input and guidance and assistance. We have also conferred with members of the Lee Institute who provided leadership to the Mecklenburg County project and recently met with Steve Wyatt, Henderson County Manager, to review our plan and begin the process of submitting a county funding request. For a complete list of coalition members and supporting organizations, return to "About" page and click on "Who's Involved."

In November, 2006, we developed the following mission: ***To unite our community so that the health, safety, education and overall well being of our children are ensured.*** This collaborative model of working with key organizations that provide children's services needs to be animated and guided by a community engagement process. The community engagement process will include an event (Speak Out for Kids) that is attended by a demographically representative group of citizens who will take part in the process and actively participate in the action necessary to realize the project's objectives.

The primary objectives of the United Agenda for Children are:

1. To create systemic change in the way key systems and organizations address the broad issues associated with the well being of children in Henderson County through the development of a **shared vision and a collaborative, synchronized plan** with measurable results.
2. To incorporate the use of a **dynamic, ongoing community engagement process** that will contribute operational priorities for all agencies and organizations engaged in providing youth services in Henderson County.
3. To form an institutionalized collaboration that is **accountable for community wide progress** towards objectives that ensure the health, safety and education of our community's children using a standardized mechanism for reporting and measurement.

In June 2007 the county approved a County of Henderson Strategic Plan 2007-2011. Included in that plan is support for the United Agenda for Children (Goal 3, Strategy 3.5 Objective A). This support, along with Henderson County Community Foundation, Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, Smart Start, allowed planning to progress toward a crucial part of this initiative a community gathering, **Speak Out for Kids**

A core value of the United Agenda for Children is that ordinary citizens, given good information, can make decisions regarding the important issues that face their children and are capable of finding solutions. (A complete list of Core Values is listed at the end of this document.) **Speak Out for Kids will happen on October 20, 2007** where three hundred people will speak out and work together to make sure every child is healthy, safe and well educated.

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The primary objectives of **Speak Out for Kids** are to:

1. Generate buy-in to shared vision for future of children and youth in the county.
2. Identify most important barriers facing community in reaching its vision.
3. Prioritize goals for addressing barriers within the context of limited resources.
4. Begin to assign responsibility within the community for moving elements of the United Agenda forward.
5. Mobilize participants and secure commitments to taking action on behalf of the community's United Agenda.

The design and content of this community gathering, **Speak out for Kids**, is contained in a participants guide. This guide will contain the data and information gathered and vetted for the past 18 months by staff, intern researchers, local experts and service providers, along with coalition members. The data and information within the participant guide then had to meet rigid standards of a group of highly respected independent citizens. This design content group worked from April to July of 2007. The participant guide is available to all participants and the public prior to Speak Out for Kids. It will also for the basis for discussion the day of the event. (click here to download a pdf of the participant guide)

Using technology, big screen TV, and key pads and live video, Speak Out for Kids participants will see in real time the results of the discussions and priority-setting that day. They will leave with a preliminary report. A more detailed summary of findings and priorities under health, safety and education will be published and disseminated.

Implementation of these priorities will take place for the subsequent 18 months. Outlining action step and responsibilities and accountability will be a part of implementation. Reporting back to the community will occur at regular intervals.

HISTORIC TIMELINE: UNITED AGENDA FOR CHILDREN

1999: Children and Family Resource Center (CFRC) is established to address need for coordination and collaboration among children's services

2000: County Commissioners request the Children and Family Resource Center (CFRC) to complete a Strategic Plan for Children.

2001: CFRC works in cooperation with Juvenile Crime Prevention Council and Smart Start to identify risk factors and protective factors, gaps in existing resources and prioritize actions and outcomes.

2002: Strategic Plan for Children published, presented to interested audiences and widely disseminated in print.

2003: Improvements for children occur but key systems still working in isolation. Plan falls short in these areas: inadequate strategies for addressing issues and achieving desired outcomes; no action plan for implementation; no system for evaluation and accountability.

2004: State reorganizes early childhood services and mental health undergoes statewide reorganization. CFRC and CDSA form a coalition of child service leaders.

2005: County Commissioners become a partner in developing 2nd Strategic Plan and encourages all county department and agencies to participate. Coalition broadens to include stake holders in government, civic, business and service providers.

2005: Coalition studies successful community planning and engagement processes across the state and nation. Coalition adopts three year process that will inform, engage and account for the health, safety and education of all Henderson county children. First grant received. Intern data collectors and trained staff begin data collection to quantify where our children stand today on same and additional markers of quality of life and life potential.

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2006: CFRC assumes project management role. Project takes name, United Agenda for Children. Mission and Core Values are adopted. Central to process is civic engagement. Group determines it will hold a community gathering based on America Speaks model of civic engagement. At this event citizens set priorities for children in areas of health, safety and education. Group tentatively calls this gathering a Children's Summit.

December 2006: Key community leaders meet to hear plan, all commit to working on the process.

2007: Design Content Committee organized. Data and research compiled into descriptive report, community leaders identify content and design of the report and the day of the community gathering. Children's Summit is renamed Speak Out for Kids.

2007: Demographic study commissioned and presented. Speak Out for Kids attendees/participants will represent demographic of community. Recruitment begins.

2007: County commits funds. Municipalities commit funds.

2007: Speak Out for Kids community gathering date set for October 20, 2007.