

## **SYNC Testimonial**

*The testimonial below is from the team leader of SYNC's pilot community. This community participated in SYNC in 2022.*

It has been a great honor to host a Strengthening Systems for North Carolina Youth (SYNC) workshop in Surry County. Our County has been identified as having a disproportionate number of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES), high substance use disorder (SUD) numbers, which both can result in the breakdown of the family unit and community in general.

Adverse Childhood Experiences, or ACEs, are childhood traumatic events, such as: maltreatment and witnessing family violence; exposure to parental incarceration, substance abuse, or mental illness; living in unsafe neighborhood, in poverty, or in financial hardship; and experiencing bullying or discrimination. More than two decades of research has shown that ACEs are a significant predictor of lifelong health, mental health, and substance abuse problems.

What we have now in Surry County is the result of ignoring this issue for too long. There has not been a community movement to do anything on a large scale. The problem has become enormous, and it has transpired throughout multiple generations. We are only now learning ways that we can work in our community to begin to mitigate the resulting negative effects.

Often, when you begin this work, it is overwhelming, and you have no idea even where to start. By working with the SYNC team, we were taught how to identify our problems and even connect them in ways that show us how they begin, by using the Causal Loop Diagramming method. We also worked together in our full day workshops to deeply discuss our community's issues and reflect on what we had determined. The benefit is having all the community sectors represented to realize the full story. Taking the time to fully discuss and digest these issues from multiple angles resulted in a holistic, or three-dimensional, view.

Once this was absorbed by the group, there could be more effective action planning, or idea brainstorming of where we should even start work in our community. The SYNC facilitators are extremely knowledgeable and experienced in community work. They can nudge us when we get stuck as a team and are not clear where our own ideas can take us. Another benefit is how they organize our material and keep us up to date on where we are in the process. Additionally, we have married the SYNC proceedings with other efforts that are beginning to emerge within the County. The action plans that are created in the SYNC program integrate nicely with other interventions that the community is creating. We believe that by interweaving these efforts, it will result in more effective and comprehensive results. This work is extremely difficult and is long-term. It is our team's hopes that we can continue this initiative and make a difference in our future.