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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Transylvania County Receives \$100,000 Early Childhood Grant

BREVARD, NC – The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina has awarded Smart Start of Transylvania County, in partnership with United Way of Transylvania County, a \$100,000 grant over two years to benefit the county's early childhood population.

"This generous grant has the potential to dramatically improve the lives of our county's youngest citizens," said Deborah Tibbetts, executive director of Smart Start of Transylvania County.

The two-year grant will enable Smart Start to recruit staff to implement the Smartly United Early Childhood Collective, a collaborative initiative between Smart Start and United Way that utilizes the resources of several community organizations. The aim of the collective is to provide increased accessibility, quality and affordability of early education in order to improve pre-K readiness.

"This grant will greatly increase the capacity to realize the goal our organization has set of having all children prepared to enter kindergarten," said Steve Pulliam, chief executive officer of the United Way of Transylvania County.

### **Building on "The State of the Young Child"**

The grant follows on the heels of an Early Childhood Initiative (ECI) by Transylvania

County government to focus attention on early childhood development and school preparedness.

In 2015, a “State of the Young Child” report by the ECI, based on seven months of research, determined that 77% of Transylvania County children performed below kindergarten readiness standards.

That report spurred a concerted effort by the county and multiple social service providers and organizations to focus their attention on this deficit, resulting in a number of new programs.

For example, the Transylvania County Library helped sponsor a kindergarten readiness rally. The Transylvania County Parks & Recreation Department created structured playtime for small children and their parents. Transylvania County Schools made more pre-K classroom space available and created an enrichment program for four-year-olds from lower income families.

In the first year, the effort yielded a 12% improvement in kindergarten readiness.

“What’s gratifying about this improvement is that we did it all with existing resources,” said county commissioner Page Lemel who, along with county manager Jaime Laughter, spearheaded the ECI.

“We collaborated with other organizations, shared resources and shared ideas to create this outcome,” said Lemel.

Local officials are also working to effect change on childhood issues at the state level. Lemel participated in a panel with the Institute of Emerging Issues in February entitled, “Kidonomics: The Economics of Early Childhood Investment.” Additionally Lemel has reached out to a several state representatives and agencies.

“Our efforts don’t stop at the county line,” said county manager Jaime Laughter. “We believe we have a role to play at the state level as advocates to shine the light on these issues and help shape how North Carolina’s early childhood services are organized and allocated. Ultimately, what we’re doing at the state level will benefit us here in Transylvania County.”

### **Facilitating Success**

The Early Childhood Grant will allow Smart Start to hire a facilitator to help coordinate and enhance the services currently provided by the county’s many community partners and to establish a measurement system of early childhood profile indicators.

“We appreciate the Community Foundation’s faith in what we’re doing,” said Tibbetts. “They understand how important it is to have the human resources to

make things happen.”

Additionally, United Way of Transylvania County has pledged \$100,000 in matching contributions that will be used to help fund special projects of the Early Childhood Initiative as their mission develops.

Community leaders are hopeful that the Early Childhood Grant and United Way’s commitment will lead to even more significant improvements in kindergarten readiness.

“The awarding of this grant was particularly remarkable when considering the Smartly United Early Childhood Collective only formed in November of 2016,” said Pulliam. “They were able to organize, apply for and receive this grant in only four month’s time. Thanks go to all the members of the Early Childhood Initiative and the data from The State of the Young Child report that set the stage for that achievement.”

### **Investing in the Future**

According to research, programs targeted toward the prenatal and preschool years provide a substantially greater return on investment in human capital than at any other age, with proven better outcomes in education, health, sociability, economic productivity, and reduced crime.

Today, there are approximately 1,500 children age five and younger who reside in Transylvania County. Of those children, 66% do not attend pre-school. Transylvania Regional Hospital reports that 49% of mothers who accessed the birthing center in 2016 recorded a positive drug screen.

“Early childhood education is absolutely critical to the future of our county,” said Laughter. “Research has proven that quality early education reduces crime rates, teenage pregnancy and job training costs. More importantly, it gives our youngest citizens a much better chance to succeed in school, in work and in life.”

“It’s a community’s responsibility to give opportunities to the youngest and most vulnerable,” said Lemel. “We believe that the grant from The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina, the organizational strength of Smart Start and the United Way, and the dedication of our many community partners will help Transylvania County become a leader in childhood development and a model that others can follow.”

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## **The Community Foundation of Western North Carolina**

The Community Foundation is a nonprofit serving eighteen counties in Western North Carolina. The Foundation is a permanent regional resource that facilitated \$18.9 million in charitable giving last year. CFWNC inspires philanthropy and mobilizes resources to enrich lives and communities in Western North Carolina. More information can be found at [www.cfwnc.org](http://www.cfwnc.org).

## **Smart Start of Transylvania County**

Smart Start of Transylvania County is part of the North Carolina Partnership for Children, a nationally recognized and award-winning early childhood initiative designed to ensure that young children enter school healthy and ready to succeed. For more information, go to [www.smartstarttransylvaniacounty.org](http://www.smartstarttransylvaniacounty.org)

## **The United Way of Transylvania County**

United Way of Transylvania County serves as a community leader through resource development and resource allocation to commit Transylvania County residents to 1) help children and youth achieve their full academic potential 2) a healthy lifestyle and appropriate healthcare and 3) a financially stable household. To learn more, go to [www.unitedwaytransylvania.org](http://www.unitedwaytransylvania.org)