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# News Release

December 8, 2014

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## **Wake County SmartStart Receives BCBSNC Foundation Grant to Increase Physical Activity for Young Children Through Changes to Child Care Outdoor Learning Environments**

RALEIGH – [Wake County SmartStart](#) (WCSS) has received a \$5,000 Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation equipment grant to expand and further advance outdoor learning environments for young children in child care. The funding supports the work of Preventing Obesity by Design in Wake County (POD-Wake), a program of The Natural Learning Initiative (NLI) of NC State University's College of Design, in collaboration with WCSS. POD-Wake works to increase children's activity outside and to promote the incorporation of healthy, local fresh produce at child care centers serving children from low-income families. The program's goal is to reduce the obesity rates among young children. According to the North Carolina Nutrition and Physical Activity Surveillance System (NC-NPASS) 2012-13 data, 14.5% of Wake's low-income children ages birth to 5 are obese. About 25% of Wake County's young children are enrolled in regulated child care where they receive most meals and snacks five days per week, year round.

The BCBSNC Foundation equipment grant will benefit young children who attend ABC Land and Primary Beginnings #1 child care facilities in Wake County. Both are five star POD-Wake demonstration sites that serve low-income children. ABC Land will use the funding to build a greenhouse and a fruit/vegetable production garden. Primary Beginnings #1 will purchase trikes and helmets for use on a recently constructed trike path along with materials to build a storage shed for the trikes. The two centers combined serve 191 children with 165 receiving Child Care Subsidy support for their care (86%). POD-Wake will support Wake County SmartStart by offering specialized technical support through interactive design sessions, symposia, and on-call consultation for site layout and affordable design solutions.

"This funding provides the opportunity to deepen the impact of POD-Wake at urban and rural demonstration sites in Wake. Children's health will be improved at the same time the joy of childhood play will be nurtured. We have already seen the success POD-Wake can bring to centers in changing the way children eat and play" shared Pamela Dowdy, Executive Director for Wake County SmartStart.

NLI partnered with the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) Foundation to provide almost \$100,000 in Healthy Living Equipment Grants to 19 institutions (14 local Smart Start Partnerships for Children and five community colleges). "The Natural Learning Initiative is a longtime partner dedicated to providing training and design best practices to support children's active engagement in outdoor environments" said Kathy Higgins, president of the BCBSNC Foundation. "The Healthy Living equipment grants will help Wake County SmartStart to develop projects that will increase and sustain young children's active play, which sets the stage to establish a lifetime of healthy behaviors."

Media tours of demonstration sites are available upon request by contacting Phyllis Barbour, Director of Community Relations, at (919) 723-9271 or via email at [pbarbour@wakesmartstart.org](mailto:pbarbour@wakesmartstart.org).

### **About BCBSNC Foundation:**

The Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation is an independent, nonprofit organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of North Carolinians. The Foundation's focus areas include: Health Care - improving health outcomes of populations served by safety net organizations; Healthy Living - increasing physical activity and access to healthy local foods; and Nonprofit Leadership - increasing the effectiveness of nonprofit organizations and their leaders. BCBSNC Foundation invests in programs and services in response to grant requests

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and proactively creates initiatives or partners with organizations to address specific needs. Since its founding in 2000, the BCBSNC Foundation has invested nearly \$100 million into North Carolina communities through more than 750 grants. More information is available at [www.bcbsncfoundation.org](http://www.bcbsncfoundation.org).

### **About Wake County SmartStart**

Wake County SmartStart works to ensure children, birth to five, are prepared for success in school and in life. This mission is carried out in four goal areas; children are in safe, supportive home environments, children are in high quality care that contributes to positive child outcomes, children are healthy and ready for school and children and families are supported by a strong, diverse integrated early childhood system. To learn more about our mission, visit [www.wakesmartstart.org](http://www.wakesmartstart.org).

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