



**Social Services  
Institute**  
- 2023 -

**August 2-4**

Hickory Metro  
Convention Center

Welcome Social Services Institute Participants,

The 2023 Social Services Institute, sponsored in partnership with the NC Association of County Directors of Social Services, NC Department of Health and Human Services, and NC Association of Boards of Social Services, is finally here. We hope your travels were safe and that you brought an eagerness to learn and an openness to innovative ideas and new opportunities.

The theme for the Institute this year is **“Stronger Together.”** Now that we have “normalized” being back in our offices with our lobbies open, we have the experience of gathering once again. Being together, working together, committees and Boards are meeting to address significant changes happening across our service spectrum. Community engagement is back – alive, well, and in person. When we gather - we are stronger; when we work together - we can do good things – more than we can do alone. And when we gather and work and ensure diversity and inclusivity in those gatherings - we can accomplish remarkable things. We need “Stronger Together” for our social services system today more than ever.

“Stronger Together” has been a slogan used by many organizations and even presidential contenders to reinforce the need for people to come together. Here are three such examples:

The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) and the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB) launched a Caribbean communication campaign to promote mental well-being and positive coping strategies during the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 hurricane season. The campaign will also aim to reduce the stigma about seeking mental health and psychosocial support and convey the basic principles of Psychological First Aid (PFA). “Stronger Together” encouraged people to connect to feel calm, safe, and helpful – using one another for social, physical, and emotional support.

“The International Olympic Committee (IOC) today launches “Stronger Together,” a global Olympic campaign that celebrates athletes by showcasing their journey to the Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 and how they kept moving even when the world around them stopped. The story celebrates their strength, resilience, and determination to bring hope, unity, and inspiration to people around the world.”

Pepsi has an entire global effort focused on “Stronger Together,” where they support community-focused programming that leverages the expertise of Pepsi and its partners, such as the Washington Wizards, Miami Heat, and the Shaquille O’Neal Foundation, to facilitate conversations, bring people together, and create smiles in communities in need.

At this Institute, we will celebrate “Stronger Together” by recognizing some of the innovative work of our counties. This year’s Innovation Awards will recognize counties for their work in two categories.

**Category #1- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:** At the heart of all social services programming, we work to enhance well-being, show respect for the inherent dignity and worth of all people by helping meet basic needs of adults, families, and children — especially those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty.

**Category #2 - Community Engagement:** We do not work in isolation. We work collaboratively within our counties to address issues affecting the well-being of those we serve. The issues are vast and complex. Examples include expanding Medicaid, Unwinding of PHE, increased families facing food insecurity, homelessness, children experiencing foster care without placement, and adults with disabilities needing increased community supports to remain living independently, just to name a few.

While we will recognize a few counties, all counties deserve recognition. We hear more often what we did not do or did not get right or should have done better but we know and see every day the people we serve, and we know the good we do. Keep doing good.

This year's Institute will provide opportunities to network and build relationships with colleagues from across the state. Please take advantage of those opportunities. We will also celebrate those staff who have dedicated their careers to serving others through our county social service programs. Many of them are here. Thank them for their service, and if you are new to the system, have a conversation with one of them. Ask them to share about their commitment to this work; my guess is you will hear amazing stories.

The Planning Committee for the Institute has done a phenomenal job, and I would like to thank each of them. A lot goes into planning this event. It is truly a yearlong effort.

It is truly an honor and privilege to have the collective knowledge, expertise, and passion of so many social services professionals here. You make a difference in the lives of many North Carolina residents each day!

Sincerely,

*Angela C. Ellis*

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Director - Martin County Department of Social Services

President – North Carolina Association of County Directors of Social Services

Chair - 2023 Social Services Institute