

Impact Report



Resilient
Leaders
Initiative

powered by Rural Opportunity Institute

Cohort 1 — 2021

Our Team

Who We Are

Administrative Staff

Vichi Jagannathan
Co-founder

Naomi Marsh-Suleiman
Director of Operations

Seth Saeugling
Co-founder

Tyra Hines
*Local Chapter Program
Manager*

Accountability Board

Chandra Green
*Therapeutic Counselor,
Methodist Home for
Children*

Kimberly Hickerson
*Program Director,
Down East
Partnership for Children*

Lee Grissom
*Counselor, North Carolina
Wesleyan College*

Victor Jones
*Licensed Clinical
Social Worker*

Kelly Andrews
*Pastor, Eastern Star
Missionary Baptist Church*



ROI's work exists underneath the fiscal sponsorship of Area L AHEC, a 501c3 non-profit that has served our community since 1973. Area L provides and supports educational activities and services with a focus on primary care in rural communities and those with less access to resources to recruit, train, and retain the workforce needed to create a healthy North Carolina. Located in Rocky Mount, Area L AHEC is one of nine centers in the NC AHEC Program and serves Edgecombe, Halifax, Nash, Northampton, and Wilson counties.



Vichi Jagannathan & Seth Saeugling Co-Founders, Rural Opportunity Institute

Dear Community,

ROI supports youth, organizations, and communities in rural North Carolina to interrupt the cycle of generational trauma and design innovative solutions for healing & resilience. We are grateful to be based in rural Eastern North Carolina, and more specifically in Edgecombe, Nash, and Wilson counties. We are humbled and inspired by the deep assets in our community, and the history and legacy of fighting for justice that has run deep in our community for centuries.

We are thrilled to share the outcomes and results of Cohort of the Resilient Leaders Initiative program, which took place from March to November of 2021.

We believe that the answers to our most pressing questions exist, and they exist in the wisdom of community members with lived experience of what is currently not working. Five years ago, our community led a systems-mapping process that engaged over 1,000+ community members to identify the challenges they wanted to better address. Unaddressed trauma was the issue that parents, providers, essential workers, and community members lifted up again and again. The strategy that the community built has three parts: 1 - Learn, 2 - Heal, 3 - Connect. The biggest idea from this process was that we, as a community, needed to shift away from punishment and towards healing

and rehabilitation. This is our community's definition of becoming "trauma-informed."

Social accelerators are communities that help organizations build better products and grow, through access to resources, coaching, and world-class knowledge.

The Resilient Leaders Initiative is the first-ever social accelerator model to be based in the rural Southern United States, which invests in public agencies (not startups), and is focused on helping organizations pilot programs and policies that are trauma-informed.

A core value at ROI is to share what works (and doesn't) freely and open-source, for leaders in other communities to use and learn from, to build off the assets that exist in their community. Cohort 1 had great results, which we can't wait for you to learn from.

So please dig into this report, and then get in touch and let us know how we can support you on your journey to helping your organization better respond to the stress and trauma that your staff & clients face, to build upon the resilience and strength that exists inside of all of us.

**Vichi Jagannathan and Seth Saeugling
Co-Founders**

“The program has totally shifted how we think about the people we serve and given us funds & expertise to pilot new practices.”

— RLI Participant

Our Vision

What We Do

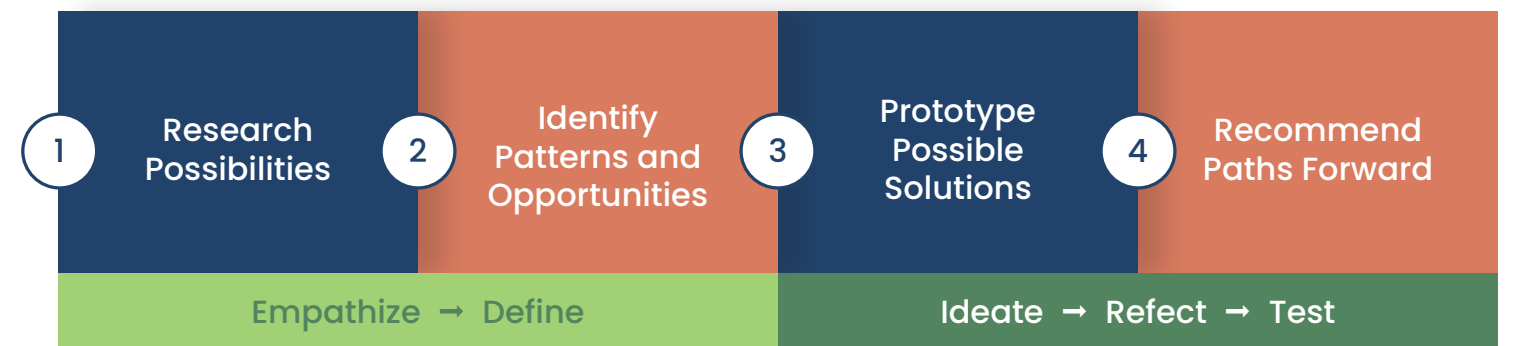
The Resilient Leaders Initiative is a nine month program that supports local organizations to create resilient futures for rural communities. Our mission is to support public agencies in Edgecombe County to implement trauma-informed policies and practices to better support the health, safety, and well-being of public agency staff and community members

Through this program, the four participating agencies in the inaugural cohort:

Conducted empathy interviews to learn from community members and identified a challenge that they planned to address

Received hands-on support from experts in human-centered design, systems thinking, program implementation and evaluation, as well as training in trauma-informed practice and anti-racism

Designed and piloted new organizational policies and practices that lead to healing, and accessed seed money to implement these innovative ideas



ROI collected data from all RLI participants at four points throughout the program (above), with the goal of understanding the processes and outcomes associated with RLI participation.

Program Leaders / Facilitators

Yvette Richardson
Barton College,
MC / Moderator

Puja Balachander
Devie, Human-centered
Designer

Christina Heitz
Cambiar, Change
Management

Mysha Wynn
PRIME Collective,
Anti-Racism

Bailey Goldman
Engaging Inquiry,
Systems Thinking

Paul Collie
CoEffect, Data & Evaluation

Melvin Jackson
PRIME Collective,
Anti-Racism

Jenny Jacklin
Storytelling &
Visioning With Art

Program Leaders / Coaches

Malliron Hodge
Digital Promise,
Coach Team #1

Heidi Austin
NC DPI, Coach Team #3

Melissa McCoy
World Tabernacle Church,
Coach Team #5

Jonathan Santos Silva
Liber Institute,
Coach Team #2

Chuck Price
DSS/Child Welfare Leader,
Coach Team #4

Anna Zheng
Dapper Duck Design Firm,
Storyteller

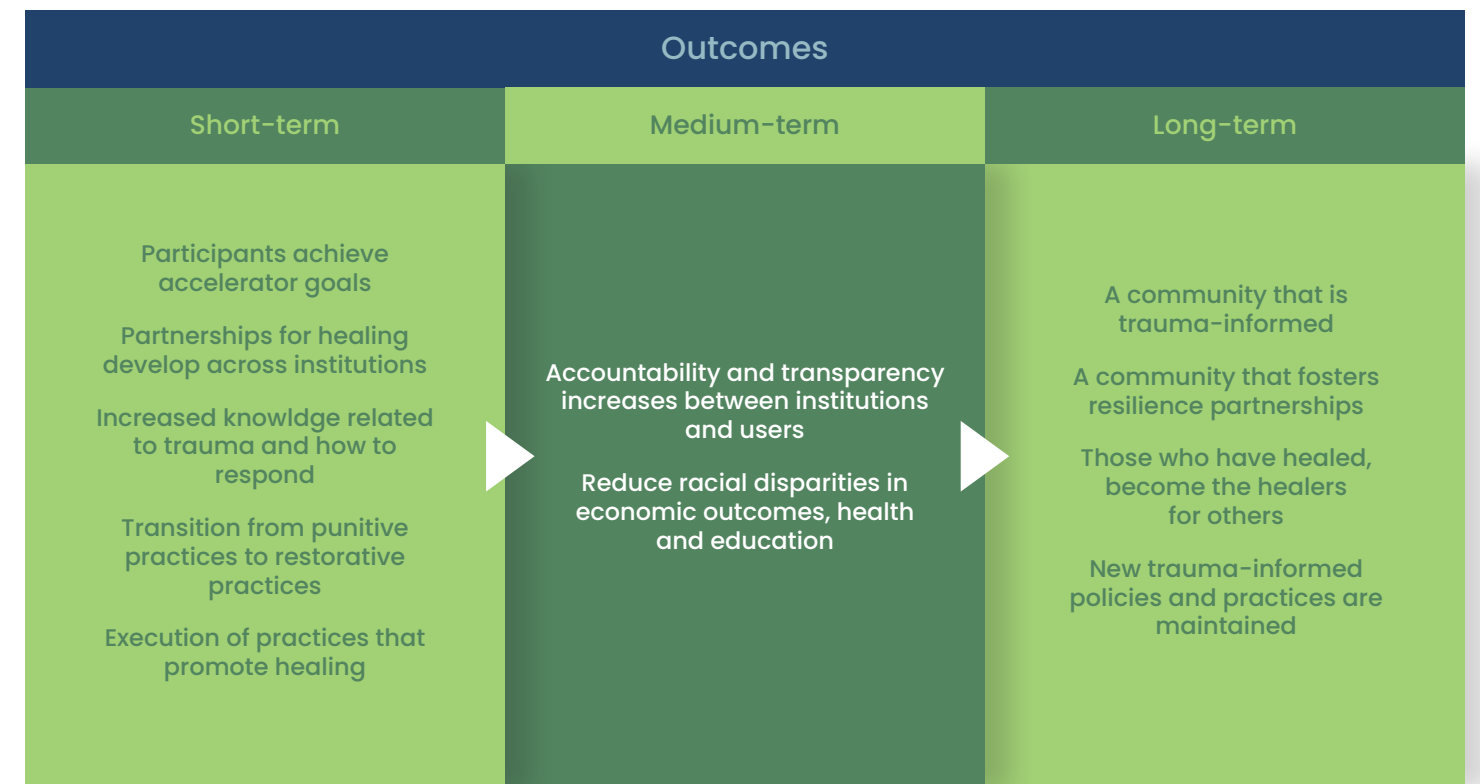
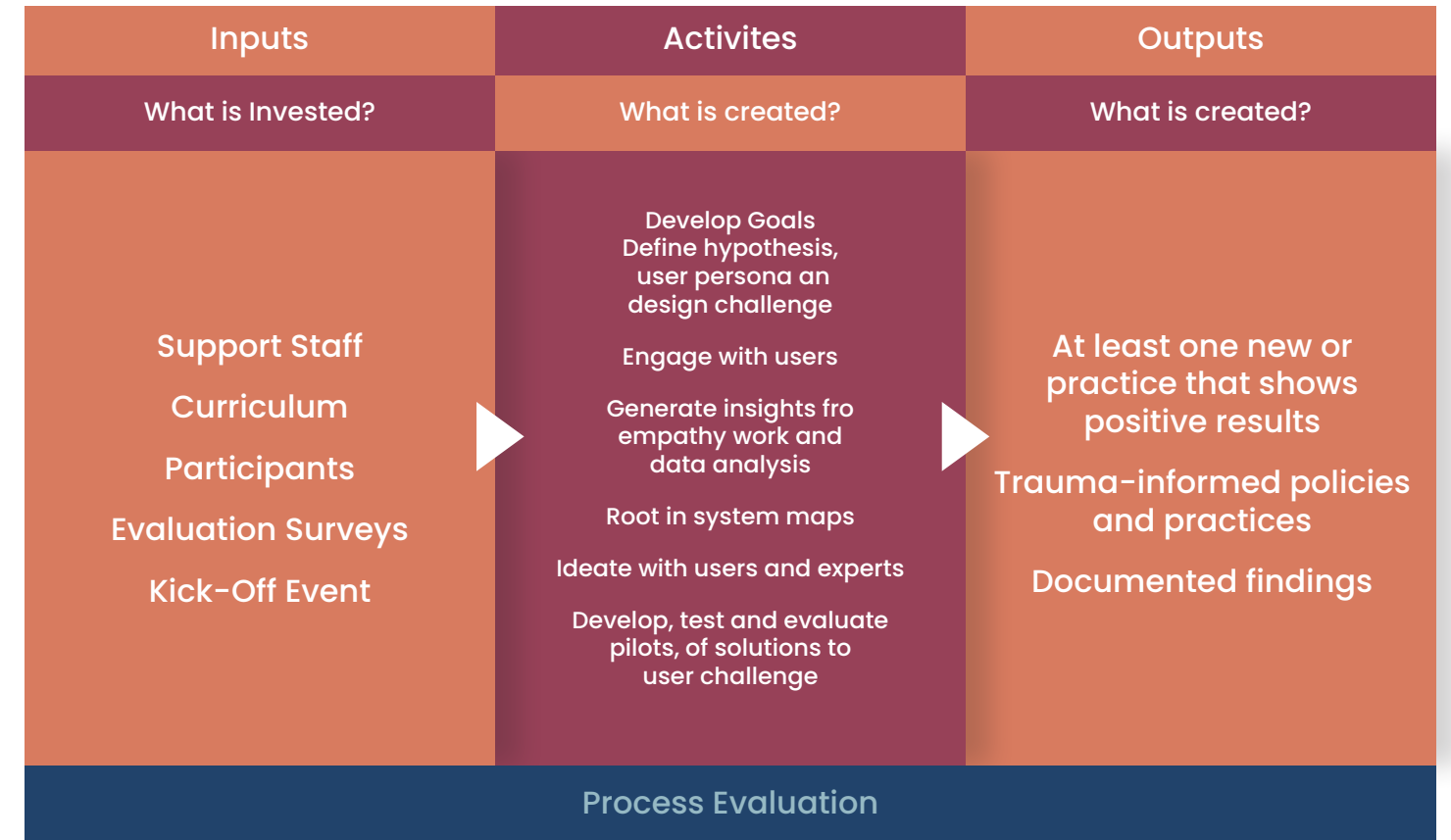
“I always feel supported. There’s a constant, ‘Is there anything you need? Can we help you with backup? What do you need from us?’ They’ve always been very open and welcoming, and available to help us however we needed help.”

— RLI Participant

Our Process

We partnered with one of the top public health universities to evaluate the implementation of the Resilient Leaders Initiative.

Summative Evaluation



Our Program Focus Is What Makes Us Unique

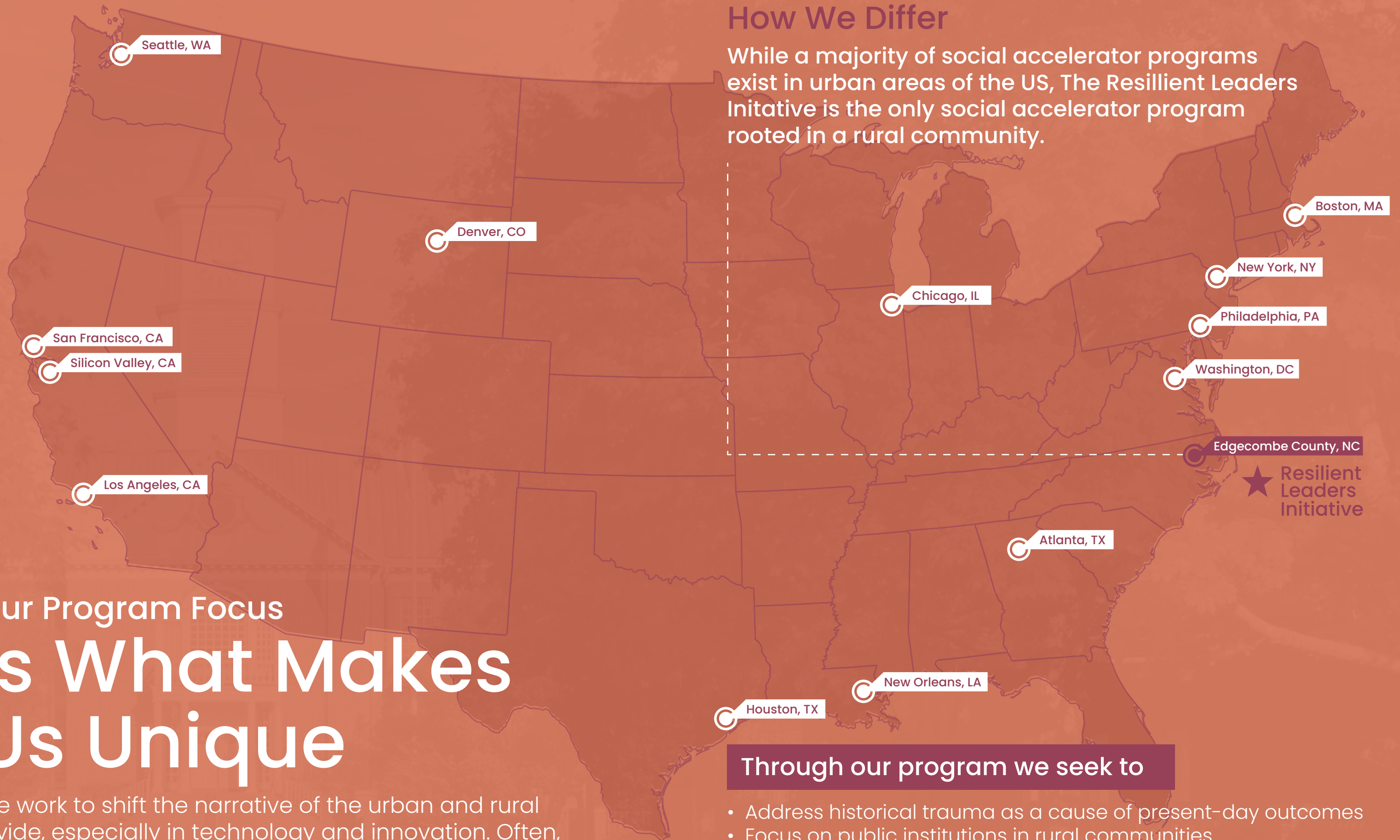
We work to shift the narrative of the urban and rural divide, especially in technology and innovation. Often, the innovation process leaves out rural communities.

How We Differ

While a majority of social accelerator programs exist in urban areas of the US, The Resilient Leaders Initiative is the only social accelerator program rooted in a rural community.

Through our program we seek to

- Address historical trauma as a cause of present-day outcomes
- Focus on public institutions in rural communities
- Be rooted in a rural community



Our Impact

Program Results

Feedback from RLI program participants was overwhelmingly positive.

92%
of participants

would recommend a friend or colleague take part in RLI.


would recommend working with ROI to a friend or colleague.

are now more knowledgeable of the extent to which individuals in their community experience trauma.

are more knowledgeable about the effect of trauma on health and well-being.

As a result of RLI participation, trauma-informed principles increased.

Most participants were more comfortable with anti-racist actions after taking part in RLI.

35% 

growth in increased comfort in taking action to combat racism in the community.

20% 

growth in organizations advancing racial equity in their projects and teams.

After conducting interviews with community members and piloting potential solutions to address identified challenges, RLI organizations worked to implement new trauma-informed policies and practices.



Across the four participating agencies, these policies are estimated to impact **275 community members in 2022.**

The majority of participants agreed that they have a clear understanding of how to evaluate and sustain their programs after the conclusion of RLI programming.

85%

of participants agreed that they have a clear understanding of how to sustain newly adopted policies and practices beyond their participation in RLI

100%

of agencies received supplemental funding, approved by the RLI Accountability Board, to implement, evaluate, and sustain their novel programs.

Little Bets Learning Journey Reports Partnership Results

One of the core short-term goals of this program was to support public agencies in our community. This was done by testing out and implementing trauma-informed ideas that can help agencies better respond to stress and trauma, that is currently holding back our collective potential.



Edgemcombe County Courthouse & Greater Is Coming Ministries

Little Bet #1:
Hosted two community conversations with returning citizens, re-entry council members, transitional housing coordinators, and congregation members to discuss ways to support returning citizens.

Little Bet #2:
Presented findings on the importance of trauma-informed re-entry support at the Courthouse Community Forum.

Little Bet #3:
Connected with the NC Chief Justice's Task Force on ACEs-Informed Courts to serve as a case study for other communities to learn from.

Results:
10+ people attended their virtual community conversations and expressed interest in creating a support program together. The main need that was identified was the need for housing, but that often returning citizens do not have support to make a plan for housing until after release, which is too late. There is an opportunity for them to provide support for returning citizens pre-release.



EDGECOMBE COUNTY
PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Futures Reimagined

HOPE Learning Program

Little Bet #1:
Implemented a daily Morning Meeting where students get the opportunity to practice mindfulness breathing and build social-emotional skills.

Little Bet #2:
Created a job-skills training program where students got to practice creating a resume, interviewing for a job, managing conflict at work, and the opportunity to be hired by a local business.

Little Bet #3:
Created a Mental Health Consultant position and ran a search to find a licensed mental-health professional who can provide individualized support to students at the HOPE program.

Little Bet #4:
Worked with the state of North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and our Central Office at Edgemcombe County Public Schools to build out the capabilities for our local district to bill the state Medicaid program to provide mental health services for our students. This will make our mental health supports cost neutral to the district, thus making the services sustainable over the long-term.

Little Bet #5:
We are launching a PhotoVoice program where staff and students will learn social-emotional and photography skills by photographing and documenting the assets in their life and community.

Results:
Received \$20k in new funding for hiring a contract Mental Health Consultant for 6 months, while also establishing partnerships with two local organizations (Peacemakers and Rusty's Peanut Brittle) to employ HOPE students. They also saw a decrease in student behavior challenges through implementing Morning Meetings.

HOPE Mental Health Counseling Pilot Data Results

- HOPE provided mental health counseling to **20 students** (67% of the students who were eligible), and on average provided **5.7 counseling sessions** for each student.

Ms. Walker delivered 120 counseling sessions

- Across all HOPE students, suspension days dropped from **8.15%** in the fall semester to **5.86%** in the spring semester. **This is a 28% decrease in suspension days.**

- Across all HOPE students, disciplinary actions dropped from **21 in the fall semester to 13 in the spring semester.** This is a **38% decrease in disciplinary actions.**

- In the fall semester, **only 15% of HOPE students had a plan in place that calls for mental health support.** In the spring semester, **100% of HOPE students had such a plan in place,** thanks to Mr. Williams's work to create behavior intervention plans with all students.

- Most common topics addressed in counseling sessions included:
 - Conflict and challenging behaviors** (>22% of sessions)
 - Self-talk, self-esteem and confidence** (>15%)
 - Attitudes towards school** (>13%)
 - Awareness of emotions & triggers** (>13%)



Speight Middle School

To better understand this challenge, they interviewed parents, providers/school staff, and Latinx students at Speight. They helped them understand that Latinx students at Speight Middle School and their families have little support to process the trauma & toxic stress that they experience. Additionally, the trauma they experience is often surrounding topics that are "taboo" or difficult to talk about such as forced removal/deportation, and therefore go unsupported. In cases where support is available, often the providers are not Latinx and/or do not provide bilingual services, which presents further barriers. Based on this input, we decided to work together to answer the following question: **How might we support our Latinx learners to cope with trauma and experience more success in school?**

Little Bet #1:
Hosted an open community conversation and brainstorming session on Zoom to discuss our design challenge, and the experience of LatinX students/families.

Little Bet #2:
Designed a survey for students to gauge their interest in the Top Ideas for support that emerged from our community conversation.

Results:
1 student, 1 parent, and several school staff and community partners attended the session. The meeting also included a Spanish translator so that everyone could participate. The team was able to create a safe space on Zoom to have open discussion about the experience of the Latinx student and their family when his father was forcibly removed. Then, the group brainstormed several ideas for how Speight can better support Latinx learners to cope with trauma. We learned that the Zoom format as well as the sensitive nature of the topic may have limited participation from parents and students. In the future, we aim to host conversations like this in-person in environments that feel safe for parents and students.



The Impact Academy Pre-School at Word Tabernacle Church

Little Bet #1:
Taught the 18 Resilience Skills and 10 Evidence-Based Breathing Skills to young learners, with our staff, and with families.

Little Bet #2:
Created a take-home "meal kit" that promoted social-emotional learning and healthy bonding between caregivers and children, and embedded breathing skill cards into the meal kits

Little Bet #3:
Implemented Dr. Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey's "Three R's" Model (Regulate, Relate, and Reason) to share how to intervene and support a child who is dysregulated and experiencing stress.

Little Bet #4:
They are one of the first Pre-Schools in North Carolina to use the EFgo Assessment to assess children's executive functioning skills, and give individualized games and activities to build executive skill functioning. Executive functions are the skills that enable us to pay attention, plan, remember things, prioritize, and stay on task. They are the foundation of school & career success, and lifelong health. Students will be pre and post tested so families can see and support growth in executive functioning skills. These skills can serve as a buffer to trauma & toxic stress.

Results:
88% of parents said they would use the breathing skills shared in the take-home meal kit in the home and outside of the pre-school setting.

100% of the Impact Academy staff team who participated in the Resilient Leaders Initiative said their ability to provide trauma-informed supports increased through the program.



The REACH Center at Word Tabernacle Church

Little Bet #1:
Tested different ways to onboard people to formal mental health counseling. Based on their experience, they know that most people need the support of a professional counselor, however they come to us first because it feels like a safer place to start. Their theory was that if they could make a connection, and get them to open up about their struggles, that they could refer to the professional support that they need, and they would be more likely to go because they trust them.

Little Bet #2:
Piloted virtual peer-counseling support, based on the Reconnect for Resilience curriculum which teaches 18+ resilience skills. They learned from interviews that people most trust other people who are similar to themselves.

Little Bet #3:
We applied what we've learned about trauma-informed practices and pursued a new, larger body of work are homelessness prevention and rapid rehousing. We were awarded a new grant that covers a 8 county region in Eastern North Carolina to prevent homelessness.

Results:
The REACH Center was selected as the Coordinated Entry Lead for Homeless Prevention Services.

They announce a new grant awarded through the NC Coalition to End Homelessness (NCCEH) to provide leadership around the Coordinated Entry process for the NC Balance of State Continuum of Care. Funding for this grant was allocated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) as a Supportive Services Only-Coordinated Entry (SSO-CE) grant through the Continuum of Care (CoC) Program. This funding will help improve the effectiveness of the North Carolina Balance of State Continuum of Care's coordinated entry system.

Press Articles

In the Community

Using Medicaid to Fund More Mental Health Supports for Schools

Learn how Rural Opportunity Institute for the Resilient Leaders Initiative helped strategize learning, healing, and connecting with community members.

Read full article here: ednc.org/medicaid-fund-mental-health-supports-social-workers-counselors-schools/

Edgecombe County Puts Trauma Front and Center to Heal the Community

This article discusses our practices and procedures and how it impacts our community.

Read full article here: northcarolinahealthnews.org/2022/05/31/edgecombe-county-puts-trauma-front-and-center-to-health-the-community/

Financial Support

The Resilient Leader Initiative would like to thank our dedicated supporters who allow us to continue our work.

Chrissy and Rob Barnhill Family Fund

Anonymous Trust

The Anonymous Trust focuses its grant making activities predominantly in eastern North Carolina with heightened attention to rural and under-resourced Tier one and Tier two counties. Its trustees and staff commit to providing hands-on financial and advisory support to the agencies with which it partners. It adheres to a multi-sector geographic funding strategy which spans many areas including health and human services, the arts and cultural activities, education, historic preservation, community and economic development and the environment. Its mission is to engage communities in the conversation so that all might thrive.



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Edgecombe County, North Carolina
ruralopportunity.org | info@ruralopportunity.org