



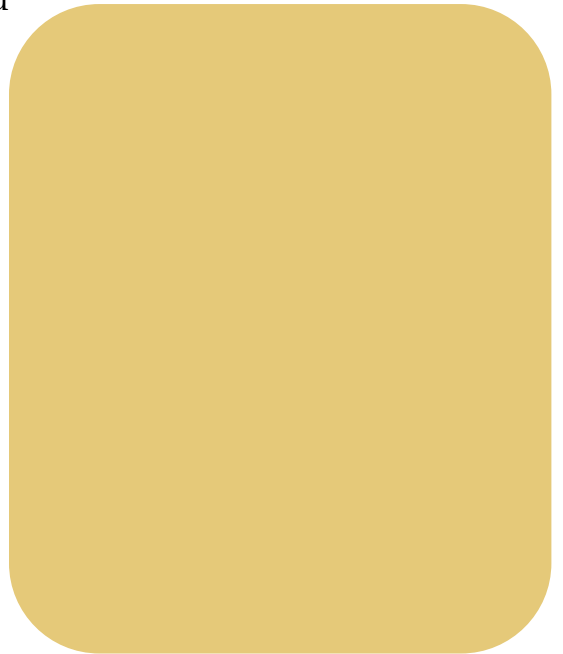
2020 Community Child Protection Team Annual Report

Community Child Protection Team 2020 Annual Report

Overview

The Community Child Protection Team (CCPT) is an interdisciplinary group of community representatives who meet regularly to promote a community-wide approach to the problem of child abuse and neglect (NCGS 7B-1406). CCPTs are North Carolina's response to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requirement to have "citizen review panels." CAPTA charges citizen review panels with the responsibility to 1) review Child Protective Services (CPS) practices, policies, and procedures; 2) make public comment on the impact of CPS procedures and practices; and 3) recommend improvements to state and local CPS agencies.

Every county in NC has a local CCPT, many of which are merged with the local Child Fatality Prevention Team. The Chatham County CCPT and CFPT merged in 2018 and meet jointly every quarter on the first Friday of the month. The primary goals of the meetings in 2020 were to review complex CPS cases and to work toward addressing the priority areas identified in the 2019 CCPT Annual Report. Any team member may recommend a case to be reviewed by CCPT, regardless of CPS involvement.



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Members

NCGS mandates that certain individuals serve on the CCPT. Additionally, the County Board of Commissioners has appointed five additional members to serve on the CCPT. The following individuals served on the Chatham CCPT in 20120 with double asterisks denoting the state-mandated members and single asterisks denoting members appointed by the Board of Commissioners:

Jennie Kristiansen, Director, CCDSS, Co-Chair of combined team**	Scott Meulendyke, Chatham County Sheriff's Office **
Layton Long, Director, Chatham County Public Health Department, Co-Chair of combined team**(January-May)	Rodney West, Chatham County Sheriff's Office **
Michael Zelek, Director, Chatham County Public Health Department, Co-Chair of combined team** (June-December)	Anne Chapman, Coordinator, Chatham County Child Victim Services*
Kayley Taber, Assistant District Attorney**	Shirille Lee, Communities in Schools Chatham County*
Marcella Trageser, Assistant District Attorney**	Deborah Flowers, UNC Beacon Program*
Tracy Fowler, Director of Student Services, Chatham County Schools**	Natasha Elliott, Central Carolina Community Action Agency **
Thomas Droke, Chatham County Board of Social Services**	Carissa Brown, Center Director, Daymark Recovery Services*
Jessica Maas Jurek, Cardinal Innovations Healthcare**	Courtney Pope, El Futuro*
Nickie Siler, Guardian ad Litem Supervisor, Guardian ad Litem Program District 15-B**	Della Richardson, Telamon Head Start**
Dr. Susan Pitts, Pediatrician, Piedmont Health, Moncure Health Clinic**	Caitlin Howison, CPS Supervisor, CCDSS
Lora Rinaldi, Chatham County Sheriff's Office**	Cim Brailer, Program Administrator, CCDSS

Demographics of Children and Families in Chatham County

Given the CCPT's charge to promote a community wide approach to child abuse and neglect, information is included on factors that affect the well-being of children and families including county demographics, child protection, and access to behavioral healthcare.

Chatham County is a large, rural county with approximately 70,000 residents and spanning over 700 square miles. According to the American Community 2019 Survey (5-Year Estimates), White children represent 57% percent of the child population, Black or African American children 9.2%, and Hispanic or Latino children 24.5% in Chatham County.¹

Chatham County has a number of strengths in terms of overall economic indicators that are beneficial for families; however, many of these indicators overshadow significant disparities across the county. The median household income of Chatham County in 2019 was \$67,031,² however, the median household income of Siler City was 54% (at \$38,222) less. While this does reflect a 5% increase from 2018, it does not take into account the decreased wages and lost jobs in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.³ According to the NC Department of Commerce, Chatham County was ranked among the top five counties with the lowest unemployment rates in the state (4.5%) in November 2020 (up from 3.2% last year most likely due to the ongoing pandemic).⁴ For workers over the age of 25, 42% had a four-year degree compared to 31% for the state as a whole.⁵

At the same time, Chatham faces a number of challenges, including that 10.2% of adults (up from 8.7% in 2018) and 15.7% of children live in poverty, with those rates roughly doubling for Siler City (21.8% and 28.2% respectively).⁶ Approximately 8,300 people (11.6% of the population) are without health insurance.⁷⁷ Of the 5,400 renters in the county, 34.7% spend 35% or more of their monthly income on rent.⁸ According to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology living wage calculator, a single parent with two children in Chatham County needs to earn \$62,978 before taxes to support their family.⁹⁸ Poverty disproportionately impacts children and families who are African American and Hispanic. Specifically, 17.7% of African American residents and 21.5% of Hispanic residents live in poverty compared to 7% of the Chatham County's White population.⁹

Status of Child Welfare in Chatham County

Child Protective Services

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In 2020, Chatham County CPS accepted 281 reports of child abuse, neglect, and dependency, with an unduplicated count of 555 children (some parents or caretakers were the subject of more than one CPS investigation). This is a 20% decrease from 2019, which is most likely resulting from decreased access to children by school system reporters due to virtual learning during the pandemic. There were 20 babies born substance-affected who were referred to DSS for Plans of Safe Care in 2020. Substance use continues to be a factor in CPS assessments, with at least 35% of investigated parents or caretakers reporting drug or alcohol use. The most common substances used were marijuana, alcohol, methamphetamines, cocaine, and opiates.

Foster Care

Chatham County DSS served 172 children in foster care in 2020 (three more children than in 2019) and 53 children entered care in 2020. 40% of the children in DSS custody entered at age 5 and under, and five infants entered custody in 2020. Parent or caretaker severe substance and alcohol use disorders continue to be a driver of child placements in care. 66% (113) of children in care in 2020 were placed with parent or caretaker drug or alcohol abuse as a primary factor. 54 children exited foster care or voluntary placement in 2020, with only 14 achieving reunification with their parents. Of the 34 children legally available for adoption, 15 children were adopted in 2020. Most removal homes were in the western part of the County, clustered in Siler City.

Disproportionality

An ongoing concern in child welfare is the phenomenon of disproportionality, where Black and Hispanic children make up a larger proportion of children in foster care and children's services than White children. Despite African American children only comprising 9.2% of Chatham County's child population, they comprised approximately 27% of the children in foster care in 2020 (see Figure 1 below). The percent share of White children in foster care was 60%, and Hispanic children at 5%. Disproportionality was also present in 2020 CPS reports: CPS reporters within the community made a disproportionately higher number of reports for Black and Hispanic children than White children (who had disproportionately lower reports made), despite reports made for White children more likely to be substantiated. Additionally, only 19% and 11% of Black and Hispanic children in care (respectively) achieved permanency compared to almost 32% of White children in care in 2020.

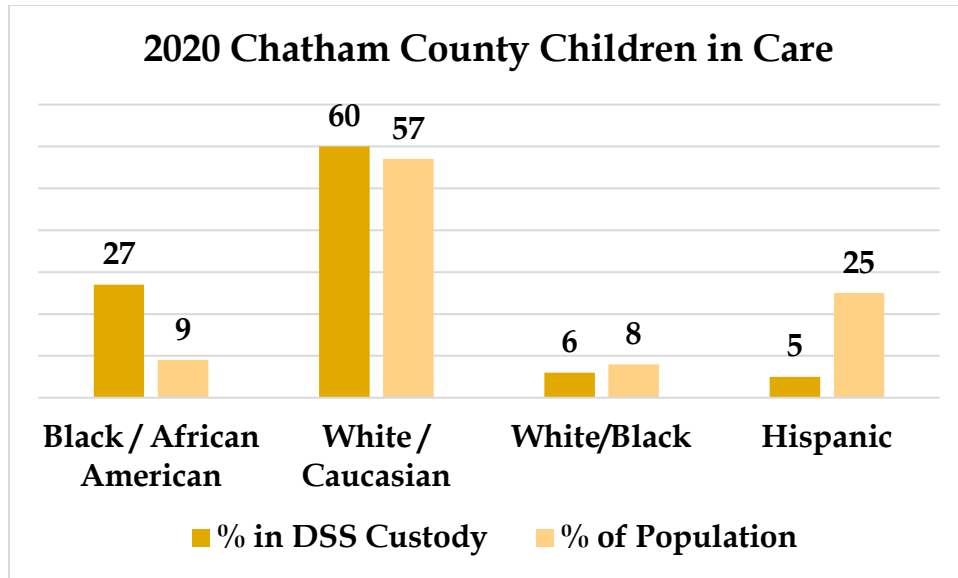


Figure 1: Comparison of Percent Share of Children in Custody Versus Percent Share of Child Population by Race

Behavioral Health

Families and children involved in CPS and foster care are at greater risk of behavioral health issues which can range from developmental disabilities to severe behavioral health disorders. Trauma is too often a factor in the lives of children and their parents or caretakers alike. A study of 60 Chatham County children who exited foster care (fifty entered permanent placements and 10 aged out or terminated their voluntary placement program) in FY19-20 found that 65% had behavioral health issues noted, which included trauma, depression, substance abuse, and behavioral issues. There was also an even higher prevalence of behavioral health concerns for the parents and caretakers from whom these children were removed, the majority of which involved substance use disorders combined with other diagnoses of anxiety and depression. Only 13% (8 adults) had no known behavioral health concerns or diagnoses.

2020 Community Child Protection Team Summary

Prior to 2020, the CCPT-CFPT met in person for quarterly meetings, however, a challenge for the year was moving to a virtual platform where confidential case reviews could be conducted. During the four meetings held during 2020, the team reviewed three active child welfare cases involving nine children. Serious substance use, domestic violence, and medical neglect were the primary reasons for removal of the children from the custody of their parents. In all three families the children were either placed with family or kin and the permanent plan was either guardianship or adoption with the same placement providers. Lack of engagement in substance use disorder and mental health and treatment, criminal justice system involvement (including protective order violations and prison sentences) were complicating factors in the children being reunified with parents.

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In the case reviews the following gaps were identified:

- The required Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children, while designed to provide protection and support for children moving across state lines, is time consuming and can result in longer wait times for placement.
- Access to behavioral health care, economic supports and transportation are needed for parents involved in the child welfare system.
- Access to health insurance for children who are undocumented is not available while awaiting immigration proceedings.

As a result of the gaps identified in case reviews, the following recommendations were made:

- More effective “fast tracking” of Interstate Placement agreements so that children can be placed without delay across state lines, especially when being placed with known family/kin.
- Supports for families who are new immigrants and Spanish speaking.
- Improved access for uninsured or underinsured parents who have substantial behavioral health needs.

In addition to case reviews, the team heard presentations and participated in discussion on the following topics:

- Review of the Child Fatality Intensive Review with Kathy Hitchcock from NC DHHS.
- Review of legislative changes regarding the reporting of child abuse and neglect.
- Impacts of COVID 19 pandemic
- Safe Kids Chatham

Successes

Trauma-Informed Communities Grant

Chatham County was awarded a Trauma Informed Communities Grant in 2019 which was extended through June of 2021 to provide ongoing training and support for communities throughout the pandemic. Hundreds of professionals in Chatham County have attended the trainings and contributed to a needs assessment to determine future training needs. Training topics have included an introduction to trauma, historical and racial trauma, and secondary traumatic stress.

Groundwater

Chatham County Schools and Chatham Organizing for Racial Equity (CORE) hosted a Groundwater Presentation for all DSS and Health Department Employees in addition to many staff from the school system. The Groundwater Presentation serves as a powerful introduction to racial equity using stories and data to demonstrate how structural

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racism is pervasive in our society and how inequities prevail regardless of age, income, and education.

District Permanency Collaboratives

Chatham County is engaged in a District Permanency Collaborative with Orange County that includes representation from DSS, Guardian ad Litem Program, and the District Court Judges Office to study child permanency rates for children in foster care with the goal of reducing time to legal permanency. In 2020, both counties collected data on children exiting DSS custody to better understand what factors contributed to delays in achieving federal permanency standards and served to guide future work of the collaborative. Data indicated that most parents whose children exited in foster care had prior CPS involvement, significant behavioral health issues, and were single parents.

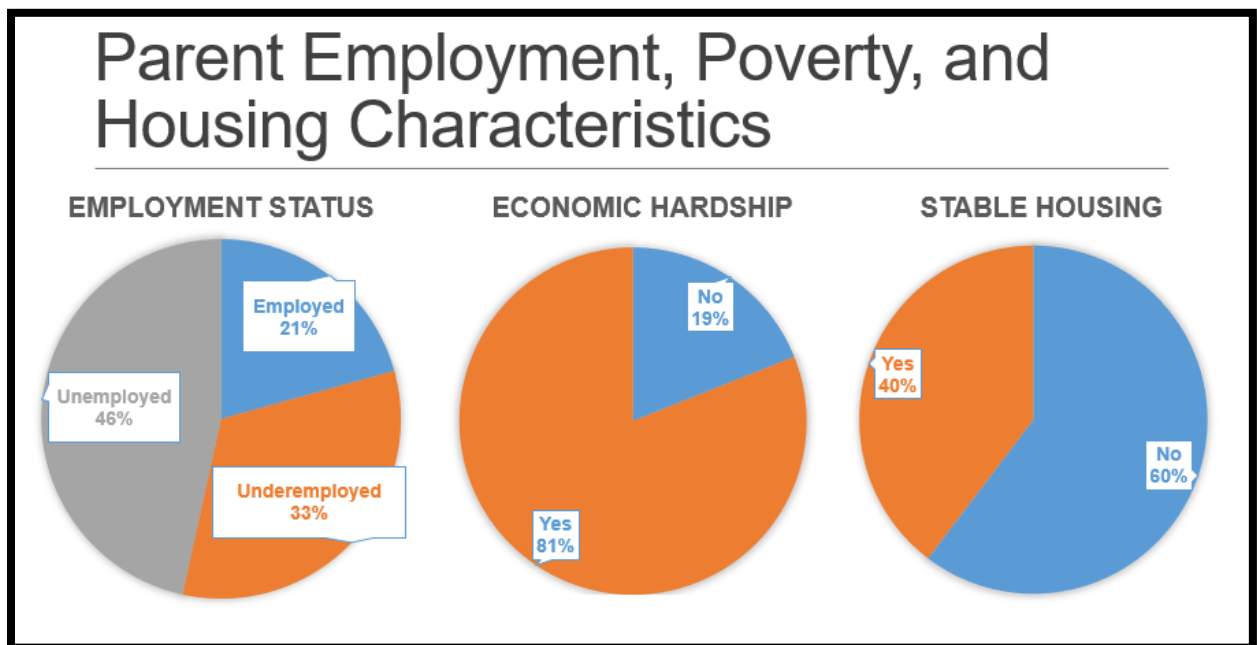


Figure 2: Data from Chatham County FY19-20 Permanency Profile

Diligent Recruitment and Retention

Chatham County DSS created a Recruitment and Retention workgroup to improve foster parent recruitment and retention. In Fiscal Year 2020, accomplishments included a mapping project to identify priority areas for recruitment of foster families that would be geographically closer to where children who are in foster care live to better maintain school and community connections when children enter care. Other accomplishments were the development of a tracking tool to measure the length of the foster parent licensure process. The plan for 2021 includes the development of additional virtual training and increasing the number of family placement providers who go through the licensure process. Between May 2020 and November 2020, 25 prospective foster

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families completed the 30-hour foster parent training course, 44% of whom were relative and kinship providers. This represents an 66% increase in training rates over the prior year and a 120% increase in number of kinship families who completed training compared to 2019.

Cross-Agency Organizational Equity Assessment

In 2019, Chatham County Public Health Department was awarded a grant to launch the *EMBRACe* project (Equity for Moms and Babies Realized Across Chatham). The goal of *EMBRACe* is to achieve equitable birth outcomes for women and infants in the county through system and service alignment across the grants' four partners, CCPHD, DSS, Chatham Hospital, and Piedmont Health Services. One of the grant's activities in 2020 was to develop and conduct an organizational equity assessment for each of those agencies, for the purpose of gaining a better understanding of each of the partners' equity and inclusion practices in areas of engagement, data collection, service delivery, hiring and staff engagement, organizational climate, and knowledge and training. A total of 221 respondents from within all tiers of the partner agencies completed the assessment. The results have provided critical insight on how these agencies can provide services more equitably for mothers and babies, as well as create a more inclusive and welcoming workplace environment for staff and leadership.

COVID-19 Initiatives

Throughout the pandemic, multiple community organizations have been involved in program planning to ensure that the needs of residents are met. The economic supports provided to families through these and other programs can be invaluable in stabilizing children and parents in crisis. The following examples are a few of the initiatives:

- In June 2020, the Chatham Health Alliance launched the Chatham Resource Hub in order to help increase access to protective equipment, and various community services during the pandemic. The Resource Hub often co-located with the food pantry programming, where consistently over 100 families were provided food, as well as masks, and various resources. Chatham DSS was one of the first agencies to have staff physically placed at the Resource Hub events. Staff provided information about accessing DSS services in general, including information about Medicaid, the Food and Nutrition Program, and other programs.
- Chatham County Manager's Office hosts twice monthly calls for non-profit agencies to share information and resources.
- DSS, Central Piedmont Community Action, and the Salvation Army administered COVID Relief Funds (CRF) in order to provide emergency assistance for housing, utility and other expenses for individuals and families impacted by COVID-19.

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- El Vinculo Hispano, in conjunction with other community non-profits raised funds to provide financial assistance through the Solidarity Fund for individuals not eligible for COVID stimulus payments.
- DSS convened meetings with agencies serving survivors of domestic violence including Court Programs, Second Bloom, County Manager's Office, District Attorney's Office, and Pathways to Change with the goal of sharing information and strategies to continue to provide services to survivors in an environment where they may be increasingly isolated and at risk.

Opportunities for 2021

Family Treatment Court

In October 2020, Chatham County was awarded an \$870,000 three-year grant to establish Family Treatment Court (FTC) in Chatham County for families involved in child welfare. This was a joint effort between Chatham County's Court Programs and Chatham County Department of Social Services and was much needed in Chatham County due to the distance from Western Chatham to the FTC in Chapel Hill which has been a significant barrier to Chatham parents' participation. The grant will support parents and caretakers with much-needed treatment and support services, including Medication-Assisted Treatment (MAT) and Substance Abuse Intensive Outpatient Programs (SAIOP) administered by Piedmont Health Services and Daymark Recovery Services. The program will also provide evidence-based parenting education, transportation and emergency assistance, and funding for their children's educational support and extracurricular activities. The program has a goal of serving 25 individuals each fiscal year.

Family First Prevention Services Act

The Family First Prevention Services Act will take effect in October 2021 and provides federal funding for evidenced based prevention services in exchange for a reduction in funding for children and youth in residential placements. This legislation represents a significant shift in the availability of supports to prevent foster care and NC aims to broaden eligibility for the program in future years. While the Prevention Plan for NC is still being drafted, it is expected that the availability of these services locally will substantially increase.

Challenges

Substance Use

Substance use remains an ongoing issue in Chatham County, and it appears that the pandemic may be exacerbating substance usage. While county-level data is not yet available, the NC DHHS reported that opioid overdose ED visits in the state increased

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by 23% in 2020.¹⁰ Substance use continues to be one of the primary factors in CPS investigations and placements in foster care, and parent or caretaker substance addictions have been found to consistently prolong the length of time a child spends in foster care.¹¹ Chatham County's LME-MCO, Cardinal Innovations, reported serving approximately 133 individuals per month for Substance Use Disorders in FY19-20 but did see a slight drop in patients starting in March of 2020 which marks the start of the pandemic reaching North Carolina.

Ongoing Pandemic

Covid-19 has had wide-ranging impacts on children and families in Chatham County. School personnel and law enforcement, who comprise the largest share of CPS reporters, have had significantly decreased face to face access to children due to the closures of schools and transition to remote learning. This continues to be a source of concern, especially considering that many parents have been affected by unemployment, financial insecurity, and isolation, and are dealing with the added stress and responsibilities of childcare and virtual learning supervision. Additionally, Cardinal Innovations reported a sharp decrease (33%) in the monthly number of children served beginning in March through June of 2020 (data is not yet available for the rest of 2020), which indicates that there were, and may continue to be many children in need of services but not receiving them. Low-income and minority communities have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic, owing to the overrepresentation of these groups in essential jobs where they are at greater risk of exposure to coronavirus, and are often not able to take necessary time away for their families' or their own physical and emotional needs.

Conclusion

Despite the unprecedented circumstances brought forth in 2020, it has also been a year where many in the community have rallied together to provide support to the children and families who have needed it the most. While the Community Child Protection Team is charged with reviewing Child Protective Services practices, what we have come to learn is that protection is best provided by preventing maltreatment from ever occurring. The efforts made during the pandemic serve as examples of what is needed to keep families safe and together. Members of the Community Child Protection Team have led these efforts and will continue to play critical roles in advancing this work. The opportunities presented through the implementation of a local Family Treatment Court and Family First Prevention Services Act will make available much needed treatment and support to address the complex set of challenges faced by families involved in the child welfare system. While we may continue to face significant challenges in 2021, the past year has exemplified the strengths, adaptability, and dedication of the Community Child Protection Team, and we are optimistic about the future of Chatham's children and families.

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¹ "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months: Chatham County." ACS Survey 2019 5-Year Estimates. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=chatham%20county,%20nc&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S0901&hidePreview=false>

² "2015-2019 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates Chatham County, NC," <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=chatham%20county,%20nc&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1903&hidePreview=false> . Accessed Jan 14, 2021.

³ "Quick Facts: Siler City, NC," <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/silercitytownnorthcarolina>, accessed Jan 14, 2021.

⁴ "NC Dept of Commerce NC Today Report, November 2020." Labor and Economic Analysis Division https://files.nc.gov/ncommerce/documents/files/2020_11_NCToday.pdf Accessed Jan 15, 2021.

⁵ Census.gov "QuickFacts: North Carolina; Chatham County, North Carolina." <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/NC,chathamcountynorthcarolina/IPE120219> Accessed 1/20/2020.

⁶ "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months" 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Table. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Chatham%20County,%20North%20Carolina&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1701&hidePreview=false>

⁷ "Selected Characteristics of the Uninsured in the United States: Chatham County, North Carolina." 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Chatham%20County,%20North%20Carolina&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S2702&hidePreview=false>

⁸ "Living Wage Calculation for Chatham County, North Carolina," <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/37037>

⁹ "Poverty Status in the Past 12 Months: Chatham County". 2019 ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject Tables. <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=Chatham%20County,%20North%20Carolina&tid=ACSST5Y2019.S1701&hidePreview=false>

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<https://www.injuryfreenc.ncdhhs.gov/DataSurveillance/StatewideOverdoseSurveillanceReports/OpioidOverdoseEDVisitsMonthlyReports/StatewideOpioidOverdoseSurveillanceEDData-Dec2020.pdf>

¹¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3975051/>