

# CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS

INDEPENDENT, IN-DEPTH & INVESTIGATIVE  
REPORTING FOR NORTH CAROLINA



2017 ANNUAL REPORT



# REPORTING WITH DEPTH & IMPACT

Throughout the year, Carolina Public Press produced more than 100 news reports on a range of topics, including state government and the actions of the N.C. General Assembly; mental health; domestic violence; school and education; crime; pay rates for elected officials; issues with child protective services; and the adult care home system, which is the de facto system used by North Carolina to house those with mental illness.

We wanted to offer you at least four short-term and six long-term in-depth and investigative reporting projects, and we reached that goal. Here is a look at the reporting fitting within those specific categories:



# INVESTIGATIVE REPORTING IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

- Government transparency and open government reporting on the use of text messaging by elected officials to conduct official business as part of a statewide media coalition project that also included WRAL News, The Associated Press, The (Raleigh) News & Observer, the Greensboro News & Record, WECT, The Charlotte Observer and Time Warner Cable News. Carolina Public Press was both the only news organization in Western North Carolina and the only nonprofit news organization in the state to participate in this collaboration.

- Crime reporting on the action and inaction of local and federal officials when a Tryon school counselor faced federal charges after signing up students as phony private patients and then billing Medicaid.

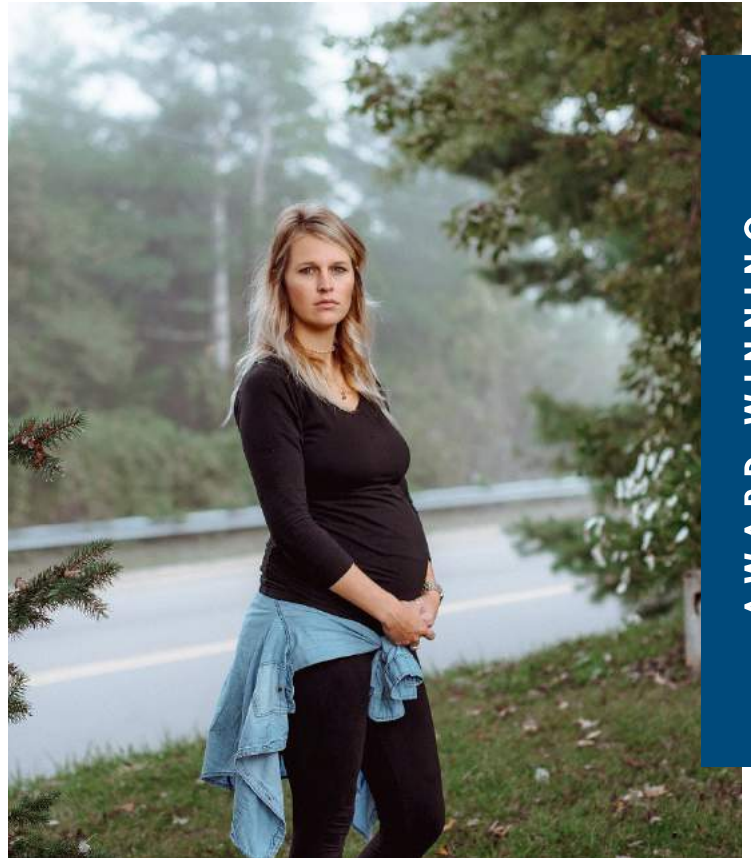
- Education reporting on how the state's school bond proposal and "isolated schools" legislation will impact Western North Carolina school districts.

- Family reporting on a mother, formerly of Hendersonville, who sued her son's father over alleged abuse during visitation. North Carolina courts ruled against her and ordered the restoration of visitation with the father. But she has said that she believed the courts misinterpreted powerful evidence of abuse and any further contact would result in additional serious harm against the young child. So she fled to Ontario. The Canadian courts looked at new evidence that the father had altered the evidence presented to the North Carolina courts and ruled in McDowell's favor.

- Economic reporting on understanding how state officials categorize counties through the tier system, and why it can and can't work for economic development in rural North Carolina.

- Access to health care reporting on how a standoff between state's largest health care insurer and Western North Carolina's largest health care provider impacted residents.





A W A R D W I N N I N G

## In-depth explanatory journalism that matters

- Carolina Public Press's first statewide investigative series focused on the regulatory, public policy, business and access to health care issues facing the state's adult care home system. Our investigative reporting staff reviewed three years of public records for the more than 1,200 adult care homes operating across North Carolina; interviewed dozens of advocates, regulators, facility managers and others; and traveled to facilities across the state. The series began publishing in July and revealed and detailed the vast inconsistencies and troubling issues facing the regulation and oversight of these private, for-profit facilities, which, in North Carolina, serve as the primary source of housing for residents with mental illness who need access to 24-hour care. We published 10 stories in the ongoing series in 2017 .
- Health care and social issue reporting on the impact of opioids, including the diversion of pain medications from those with mental illness living in adult care homes and how local governments are signing onto lawsuits against drug manufacturing companies.
- Reporting on access to health care, including mental health care in Western North Carolina and the decrease in labor and delivery services at rural hospitals.
- Environmental reporting, through the ongoing Forest Lookouts series, providing continuing analysis of how federal efforts to rework management plans for the Pisgah and Nantahala national forests will impact the region's economy, culture, environment and wildlife management and conservation efforts.
- Child and government accountability reporting on the troubles and questions facing the child protective services department at the Transylvania County Department of Social Services.
- Government transparency and open government reporting on the pay rates for public officials, including for superintendents, school boards, city managers and county managers.



# The Welfare of WNC's Children January 26, 2017



Watchdog Reporting provides Western North Carolina with independent, in-depth and investigative reporting and analysis on state government. The Watchdog series brings journalists, community organizations and the public together to go beyond the headlines and uncover the truth about some of the most important issues facing our state.

WNC PUBLIC PRESS

## Watchdog reporting at the local, regional and statewide level strengthened in 2017, and included reporting on:

- Attempts by the N.C. General Assembly to enact district-based voting in the city of Asheville
- Budget negotiations and the impact of the state budget on Western North Carolina
- House Bill 2, breaking news analysis on impact of legislation on all anti-discrimination efforts
- Redistricting: How it impacts Western North Carolina and efforts to redraw maps and legal and legislative challenges to redistricting
- Attempts to change how judges are elected in North Carolina
- Voter access and results, including status of elections boards and results of municipal elections
- Legislative efforts to overhaul the state's child welfare system



## STATE & NATIONAL COLLABORATIONS

Our reporting was shared, republished and cited by media organizations across North Carolina, from TV to print to radio. We also partnered with a leading national online news organization, HuffPost, to jointly report on the decrease in labor and delivery services in rural hospitals, work that was viewed and shared by thousands of people in North Carolina and across the country.

## AWARDS

We earned recognition from community advocates, specifically from Friends of Residents in Long Term Care, who awarded us a statewide media award for our series related to North Carolina's oversight of adult care homes.

We also earned recognition from our peers. The North Carolina Press Association awarded us seven awards for work done in 2017, including its highest recognition -- first place for general excellence among the state's online news organizations. Additionally, we were recognized for:

- First place for investigative reporting
- First and second place for city/county reporting
- First place for appearance and design
- Second place for headline writing
- Third place for lede writing



Throughout 2017, Carolina Public Press worked hard to reach our goal to offer forums and other opportunities, as a model of engaged journalism, for readers to increase the free flow of information on critical issues and to build opportunities for civic and civil dialogue. We believe that these efforts encourage democratic engagement; increase understanding of local, regional and statewide issues; and provide opportunities of the public to participate in shaping public policy – no matter their political points of view.

As a result, we worked hard to bring seven free and public forums to our audiences and communities, including a forum held in collaboration with HuffPost. Those forums focused on topics including:

1. The well-being of Western North Carolina children (January)
2. Food deserts and food policy (February)
3. Renewable energy (April)
4. Higher education and the WNC economy (May)
5. Housing for those with mental illness (July)
6. Domestic violence (August)
7. Access to labor and delivery services in rural WNC (September)

More than 400 people participated throughout the year, whether in person or through a live stream. These forums exceeded expectations in almost all aspects, from community interest; the quality and quantity of conversation, both from panelists and community members; organizational development opportunities that included introducing Carolina Public Press to new readers and potential sponsors and potential individual donors; and the impact on our journalism, including deepening and strengthening our reporting processes, sources and questions.

**ENGAGED JOURNALISM THAT PAYS ATTENTION TO  
YOUR IDEAS, OPINIONS AND CONCERNS**

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It is our consistent, and constant, goal to make sure Carolina Public Press is strong, vibrant and financial secure and accountable for the long-term. As such, the board of directors and staff undertook a strategic planning process in the spring of 2017 that resulted in the creation of a strategic plan - a working document that sets out our goals through 2020.

A major point of our work in 2017 was thinking about whether Carolina Public Press should expand across North Carolina. In February 2018, we made the announcement that we would, and work is underway to scale up our independent nonprofit news organization's model of in-depth and investigative reporting for all North Carolinians.

We're excited about what we've accomplished since we launched in 2011, and we're ready. Now is the time to move forward, increase our impact and be the news organization North Carolina deserves.

INVESTING IN CAROLINA PUBLIC PRESS  
FOR THE LONG HAUL