



# 2023-2024

## ANNUAL REPORT



# FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Darlington County First Steps:



**2,005 children**

were directly served in Darlington County



**1,769 parents & caregivers**

received services and support to be their child's first and most important teacher



**116 educators**

participated in First Steps training and professional development, benefitting 500+ children

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## PROVEN RESULTS

A 2019 study found that children who received First Steps local partnership services were:



**74% more likely**

to score at the highest level on the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment



**34% less likely**

to be chronically absent in kindergarten

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## THE NEED PERSISTS IN DARLINGTON COUNTY

First Steps works but we need to expand our reach to ensure that all children are ready.

**4,013**

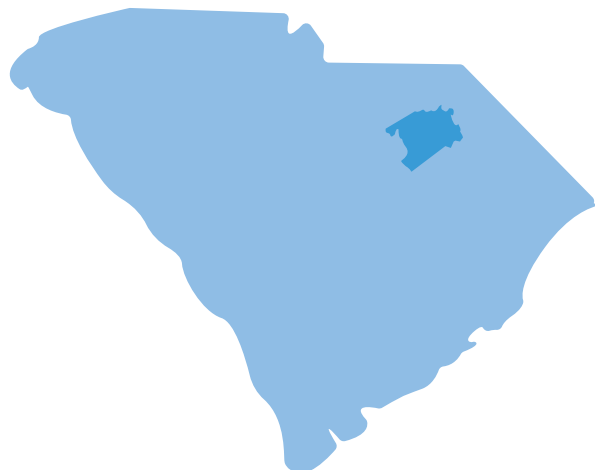
children under 6

**57%**

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

**73%**

of kindergarteners are considered "not ready" for school



# OUR MISSION

To provide programs, services and information to strengthen families and communities in Darlington County.



## Darnell Byrd McPherson

Executive Director

It takes a village. Our children are considered ready for school when they achieve a score of "demonstrating readiness" on the South Carolina Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA). This developmentally appropriate test is administered to all students entering publicly funded kindergarten within the first 45 days of the school year. The KRS determines each child's readiness level across four domains: 1. Language and literacy, 2. Mathematics, 3. Physical well-being and motor development, and 4. Social functions. The Fall 2023 KRA Results for Darlington County indicated 153 students demonstrated readiness of the 570 students tested or 27% ready! We can do better! It takes a village. All of the programs and services we offer are designed to increase parental engagement in school readiness. Please support our efforts by encouraging parents to visit our website for resources which will support them on their journey. As a taxpayer, you have the option to contribute when filing your individual SC income taxes. Help us by encouraging your affiliated groups to join our efforts and those of the 4K providers in our county to promote reading, singing and talking to young children. Help us establish Born Learning Trails in each of our communities which allow adults and children to use outdoor time as a learning time. Help us put books in Barber Shop and Salons. It takes a village. As you read this report and learn about our programs, let us know how you would like to get involved to ensure young children are ready for school success. It does take a village.

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## Serving Darlington County's children birth through age five.

"My experience in Parents as Teachers has been very meaningful. I have learned in my day-to-day life that reading books plays a major part in a child's development. The more stories I read aloud, the more words my baby will hear and be able to talk. Hearing words builds my baby's brain, and we love Ms. Jackie's visits!"

Darlington County First Steps parent



# PROGRAMS

## PARENTING

### Parents as Teachers

Offers research-based curricula that help families raise children to be healthy, safe, learning, and ready for school.

36

children served

17

group meetings  
and events

442

home visits

### Motheread/Fatheread

Offers adult literacy classes to parents of young children, with an emphasis on the importance of reading regularly as a family.

31

children served

27

families served

20

parent  
workshops

### Reach Out and Read

Site visits for home child care providers to encourage developmentally appropriate practices.

1,170

children served

2,340

book distributed

### Family Café

Parent discussion groups that promote social connections with other parents, support in times of need, learning about parenting and child development, and emotional awareness.

60

children served

38

families served

21

group meetings  
and events

## EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

### Health Services

First Steps coordinates with partners to support the health and well-being of families with young children.

105

children served

280

materials  
distributed

## SCHOOL TRANSITION

### Countdown to Kindergarten

Supports transitions into kindergarten by connecting incoming students, their families, and their teachers in a series of one-on-one sessions during the summer.

63

children served

5

schools served

378

home visits

# FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

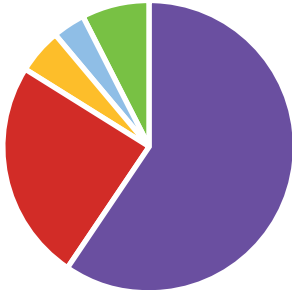


**\$1 = \$1.79**

Darlington County First Steps leveraged \$286,307.24 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$0.79 for every state dollar invested.

## EXPENDITURES

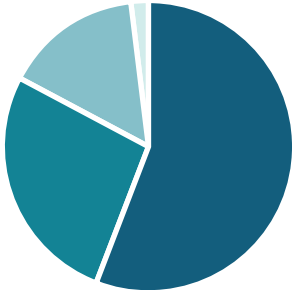
Total: \$657,941.98



- Parenting - \$391,494.90
- Health - \$161,379.45
- School Transition - \$33,476.15
- Administrative - \$22,945.61
- Core Functions - \$48,645.87

## FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$649,441.50



- State Funding - \$363,134.26
- Federal Funding - \$174,468.94
- Private Funding - \$100,796.86
- In-kind Funding - \$11,041.44

## FUNDING SUPPORT BY SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS

- State Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funding
- State READY Funding\*
- Federal AmeriCorps Service Site
- Federal ESSER Funding\*\*
- State Income Tax Check-off and Private Donations to SC First Steps

\*Resources for Early Acceleration and Development in Youth (READY) Proviso 1.105  
 \*\*American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, awarded to the South Carolina Department of Education  
 Federal AmeriCorps funding awarded to SC First Steps from the SC Service Commission at the United Way Association of SC

Note: Revenue amounts may show a difference between allocations and revenue based on penalties imposed by the SC First Steps Board of Trustees for non-compliance with organizational policies. The figures provided are based on unaudited financial statements and, as such, are subject to change.



# Howard Nettles

## Board Chair

As we celebrate and acknowledge that after 24 years of existing with a "sunset" designation, as a pilot program, South Carolina First Steps became permanent and signed into law by Governor McMaster on June 19, 2023. We extend our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to our locally elected House and Senate leaders for their support of this legislation which recognizes Darlington County First Steps as a vital partner in providing programs, services, and information which strengthen families and communities in Darlington County. While we are elated and grateful, we recognize the funding needs remain great if we are to truly raise our children's kindergarten readiness scores. As you read this Annual Report, please consider joining with this Board in raising awareness of the needs of the families and children our county. Can we count on you for your continued support?

## Our Local Supporters

Bob and Ally McCaughlin  
Carolina Kids, Inc.  
Children's Group  
Darlington County School District  
Darnell Byrd McPherson  
Dollar General - Lamar  
Dr. Tracey King  
Genesis Health Care, Inc.  
Humana Health Care  
Monica Micol  
Mr. & Mrs. DeQuincy Walker  
Mrs. Carlita King  
Ms. Rudell DuBose  
Penelope Kids  
Rachel Ingram  
Senator Gerald Malloy  
Sisters of Charity of SC  
SPC Credit Union  
United Way of Hartsville

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## CONTACT US

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