



2023-2024

ANNUAL REPORT



FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Lee County First Steps:



401 children

were directly served in Lee County



438 parents & caregivers

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



369 educators

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

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

THE NEED PERSISTS IN LEE COUNTY

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

888

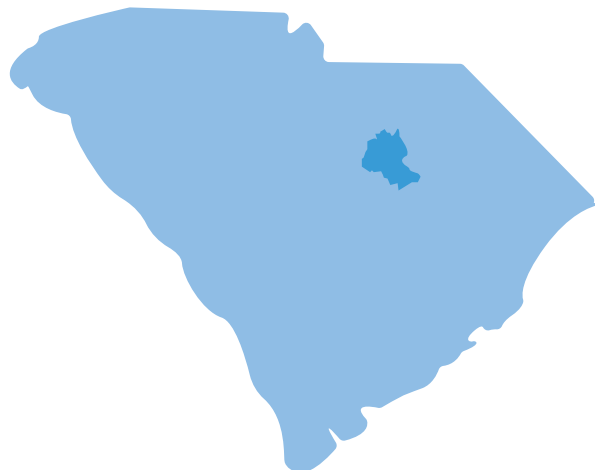
children under 6

68%

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

63%

of kindergarteners are considered "not ready" for school



OUR MISSION

Collaborating with other entities, Lee County First Steps helps South Carolina families and caregivers prepare their children for school success by maximizing public and private resources to ensure that children arrive at school healthy and ready to learn.



Alexis D. Pipkins, Sr.

Executive Director

During Fiscal Year (FY) 2024, Lee County First Steps (LCFS) continued to experience the opportunity to be even more committed to providing programs, services, and support to the children and families in Lee County and other areas by being focused and driven to meet our overarching goal to ensure that children arrive at school healthy and ready to learn. With the vision, commitment, and fortitude of the LCFS Board Members, I have been committed to ensure that our partnership is strategic and focused-driven with developing strong sustainable, collaborative partnerships that impacts Lee County, our region, state, and nation in a progressive manner. I have been committed to enhancing and strengthening our community's ability to meet and reach the goals of our comprehensive plan. In fact, we have been able to expand our Save the Children Early Steps Program with funds from SC First Steps ESSER Parenting Competitive Grant Funds, and READY Grant Funds Award. During FY2024, LCFS has had the privilege to be one of three Local Partnerships to be the recipients of a multi-year \$200,000 SC First Steps Carolina Collaborative for Innovation Grant which will allow us to assess the implementation of parenting programs and school transition through the lens of a "Theory of Change." Also, LCFS has been able to expand the Strengthening Family Programs in Lee, Florence, Sumter, Williamsburg, and Darlington Counties. Also, Lee County First Steps is in the final year of the SC First Steps ESSER-3 Parenting Grant which provided the opportunity for expansion of parenting programs and child care services in Lee County. Also, Save the Children continued to provide support for LCFS to host a local Parenting, Family, and Community Summit, and the 2024 Early Childhood Summit Gala. Also, LCFS was able to continue implementation of Family Café the Be Strong Parent Café Model. LCFS has received the opportunity to participate in a five-year project that will yield \$100,000 to the local partnership from Morehouse School of Medicine Project Impact, which will test the implementation of preconception counseling in community-based settings to improve cardiovascular health outcomes before and during pregnancy in order to improve maternal health outcomes among black women.

Our leadership has solidified our long-standing collaboration with SC First Steps, Lee County School District, Children's Trust of SC, Save the Children, Bishopville-Lee Child Development, Wateree Head Start-Bishopville Site, Kiddie Land Family Day Care, Darlington-Lee County Adult Education, and now Morehouse School of Medicine. I am grateful for having an awesome team- LEE TEAM, our employees, consultants, contractors, AmeriCorps Members, collaborating partners, and volunteers who have been consistent with their work ethic to help us meet the needs of our children and families in such a dedicated manner. LEE TEAM's work ethic and commitment is intricately weaved throughout this FY 2024 Annual Report I would also like to salute all of the children, parents, grandparents, caregivers, Early Childhood Staff that have been enrolled in our programs and allowed us to be part of their families' life in such a meaningful manner.

Serving Lee County's children birth through age five.

Mrs. Hammett is so grateful for the staff for Lee County First Steps for being so gracious and kind to help her with her son Braylee who needed help with building his communication skills, fine and motor gross skills, problem solving skills and personal social skills. The child was able to receive a child scholarship from Lee County First Steps. Now at the age of 4 he is learning how to write his name, reading and learning sight words and learning his colors.



PROGRAMS

PARENTING

Early Steps to School Success

Designed to provide high-quality early childhood development serves to young children and families living in under-resourced and underserved communities.

134

children served

109

families served

1,786

home visits

Motherad/Fatheread

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

24

children served

24

families served

11

parent workshops

Strengthening Families

Parents and children attend 14 weekly group sessions, learning parenting and life skill both separately and together.

25

children served

25

families served

14

group meetings and events

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.

54

children served

38

families served

14

group meetings and events

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Training & Professional Development

Certified and registered training hours for the early childhood workforce.

9,671

children served

200

providers served

42.5

certified training hours

Child Care Scholarships

Eligible children receive tuition-free enrollment at quality child care centers.

56

children served

56

families served

HEALTH

Health Services

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

19

children served

38

client visits

Reach Out and Read

Free, high-quality books provided by a child's pediatric provider during doctor's visits.

31

children served

62

book 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.

86

children served

4

schools served

510

home/school visits

Countdown to 4K

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

47

children served

5

schools served

282

home/school visits

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

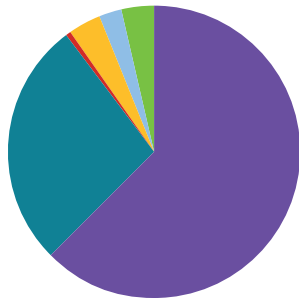


\$1 = \$6.92

Lee County First Steps leveraged \$1,773,810.98 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$5.92 for every state dollar invested.

EXPENDITURES

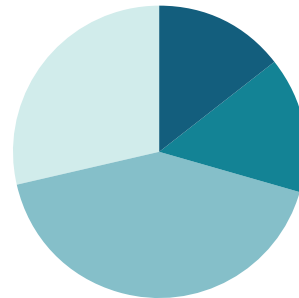
Total: \$1,911,581.06



- Parenting - \$1,197,604.82
- Early Care & Education - \$520,904.24
- Health - \$9,357.68
- School Transition - \$67,911.64
- Administrative - \$48,019.92
- Core Functions - \$67,782.76

FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$2,073,310.98



- State Funding - \$299,500
- Federal Funding - \$316,407.47
- Private Funding - \$867,642.88
- In-kind Contributions - \$589,760.63

FUNDING SUPPORT BY SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS

- State Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funding
- State READY Funding*
- Federal AmeriCorps Service Site
- Federal Preschool Development Grant Funding**
- Federal ESSER Funding***
- Enterprise Holdings Foundation ROAD Forward Grant
- State Income Tax Check-off and Private Donations to SC First Steps

*Resources for Early Acceleration and Development in Youth (READY) Proviso 1.105

**Preschool Development Grant Birth through Five Initiative (PDG B-5), Grant Number 90TP0080-01-00 from the Office of Child Care, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, awarded to the South Carolina Department of Social Services, Division of Early Care and Education

Federal AmeriCorps funding awarded to SC First Steps from the SC Service Commission at the United Way Association of SC

***American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, awarded to the South Carolina Department of Education

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.



Andrew Moses

Board Chair

I am excited that in FY2024 Lee County First Steps has continued to provide high quality services for the children in our community and surrounding counties. Our Executive Director and the Staff have really made a positive impact by being a vibrant force to provide quality services and programs that work and improve the quality of life for those we serve. Knowing that we have had one of the largest boards and most active Local Partnership Boards in the state, I believe that in itself speaks to our commitment as a Board to advocate to provide high quality child care, parenting, child care training for child care providers, and to provide core services in Lee County and the state. Also, I want to thank all of our partners for helping us to expand our reach and provide more comprehensive services because truly their investment in Lee County has helped us to be a leader in the region and state to provide expanded services to children and families.

Our Local Supporters

SC First Steps
Children's Trust of SC
Save the Children
Morehouse School of Medicine Project Impact
Be Strong Families
CareSouth Carolina
Elder Alexis D. and LaDonna B. Pipkins, Sr.
Mount Calvary Missionary Baptist Church
Tomorrow' Leaders, LLC.
Smith Funeral Home
Wealth Builders CDC
FTC (Farmer Telephone Company)
Bishop and Mother Kenneth J. Swaringer, I
Draper Myers Mortuary, LLC
Lee County Public Library
St. Mark Missionary Baptist Church (Bishopville)
BSG Diversified Services
Pee Dee Community Action Partnership Head Start

The Honorable Jacqueline Josey- Lee County Council
Bishopville Lee Child Care Center
Gloria M. Burris
Sheila Robinson
Felicia Evans
Danielle Boyd
D& R Barr and Grill
M&D Unlimited Care, LLC
Miriam's P.A. Resources & Services
Donnie and Sheila Moses
M. Deloris LeGrant
The Honorable Grady and Mrs. Laura Brown
Kiddieland Family Daycare
Alexis Jr., Brooke, Thomas L., and A'Mari (UhMaree Styles) Pipkins
Finklea, Hendrick, & Blake , LLC Attorneys and Counselors at Law
Communi-Pro, LLC

Board of Directors

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David "Keel" Addison
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Jeanette Isaac
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Jarrell Rogers
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