



2023-2024

ANNUAL REPORT



FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Marion County First Steps:



921 children

were directly served in Marion County



969 parents & caregivers

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



139 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 MARION COUNTY

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

1,629

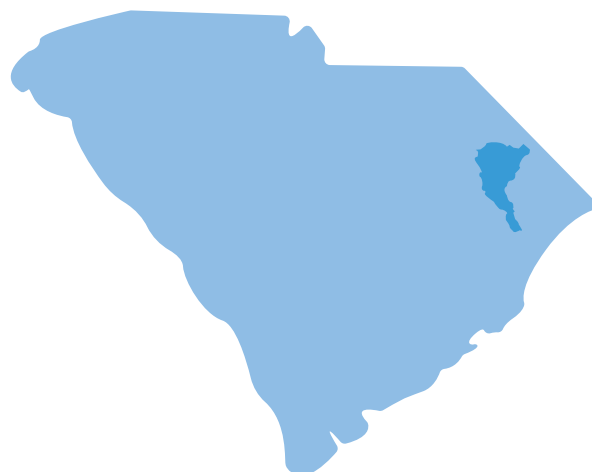
children under 6

73%

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

73%

of kindergarteners are considered "not ready" for school



OUR MISSION

To help Marion County families and caregivers prepare their children for school success by collaborating with other entities to maximize public and private community resources to deliver, enhance, and expand high-quality early childhood services.



Spencer R. Scott

Executive Director

As First Steps continues to grow, so do the programs we are proud to have launched within the community. These programs are an integral part of educating our children, as well as providing needed opportunities. The Nurturing Parenting Program has 2 parent educators that serve the county. Other programs show unprecedented growth, including Raising a Reader, Countdown to Kindergarten & Countdown to 4K. HIPPPY is one of the largest programs. We enhanced Technical Assistant and Quality Enhancement programs and training, while increasing scholarships awarded through the childcare scholarship program.

Hippy served 40 children and 38 families. Nurturing parenting services 69 families and 88 children, and Literacy catered to over 503 families & 503 children. QE program served 216 children, had 100 visits and 157 hours of training. CTK helped 60 children and 60 families, while CT4K assisted 71 children and 71 families.

We live by our mission: "Getting children ready for school."

Serving Marion County's children birth through age five.

"I've been apart of the Marion County First Steps Nurturing Parenting Program for 3 years. What I love most about this program is the way they have people come in and give us knowledge on different things in life. Marion County First Steps even inspired me to start going to school and making better choices for my kids. I also love how they love and care for our kids. My kids enjoy listening to books and stories as well as doing fun activities."

Timeria D.
Marion County First Steps parent



PROGRAMS

PARENTING

HIPPY

Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY) is a home visiting program that supports parents in their role as a child's first and most important teacher.

40 children served
24 group meetings and events
1,137 home visits

Nurturing Parenting

Designed to build nurturing parenting skills as an alternative to abusive and neglecting parenting and child-rearing practices.

88 children served
69 families served
1,090 home visits

Raising a Reader

Helps families develop, practice, and maintain home literacy habits.

64 children served
13,412 books distributed

Raising a Reader - Enhanced

Helps families develop, practice, and maintain home literacy habits.

95 children served
4 group meetings

Library-Based Programs

Connect librarians with child care programs and preschool classrooms, providing books, storytelling, and staff training.

503 children served

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Child Care Scholarships

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

68 children served
68 families served
8 providers served

Quality Enhancement

Promotes quality in child care by providing early educators with one-on-one coaching and support.

356 children served
5 providers served
157 technical assistance hours

Training & Professional Development

Certified and registered training hours for the early childhood workforce.

493 children served
21 providers served
28 certified training hours

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.

60 children served
2 schools served
344 home 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.

71 children served
4 schools served
426 home visits

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

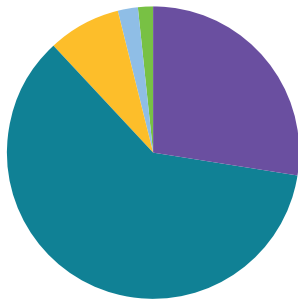


\$1 = \$5.09

Marion County First Steps leveraged \$783,245.69 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$4.09 for every state dollar invested.

EXPENDITURES

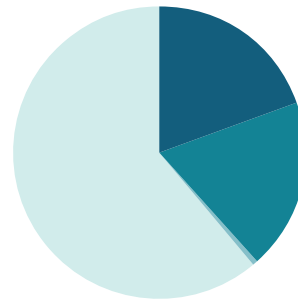
Total: \$1,065,843.90



- Parenting - \$294,251.59
- Early Care & Education - \$645,857.51
- School Transition - \$84,419.84
- Administrative - \$25,810.82
- Core Functions - \$15,504.14

FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$974,930.85



- State Funding - \$191,685.16
- Federal Funding - \$184,060.90
- Private Funding - \$4,619.59
- In-kind Contributions - \$594,565.20

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.

Dr. Farrah Woodberry Owens

Board Chair



The first five years of a child's life are important for cognitive, social-emotional, language communication, and physical development. Marion County First Steps realizes the importance of this stage of life and aims to support children, parents, caregivers, and early childhood practitioners in ensuring children are ready for kindergarten. School readiness has life-long consequences and is the cornerstone for future academic success. As a veteran early childhood practitioner and public school educator, I know the vital role of agencies such as Marion County First Steps in supporting early childhood education in this county. I am honored to have served as chairperson of this board. It has been a pleasure working with the MCFS Board, executive director, and staff who have all selflessly dedicated their time, resources, and talents to improve the lives of families.

I am grateful to the families who have utilized the services and resources provided by MCFS and to the parents, teachers, caregivers, and directors who worked tirelessly to ensure students are kindergarten-ready.

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