



2023-2024

ANNUAL REPORT



FIRST STEPS IS HERE

Last year, because of Laurens County First Steps:



2,329 children

were directly served in Laurens County



3,018 parents & caregivers

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



290 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 LAURENS COUNTY

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

4,550

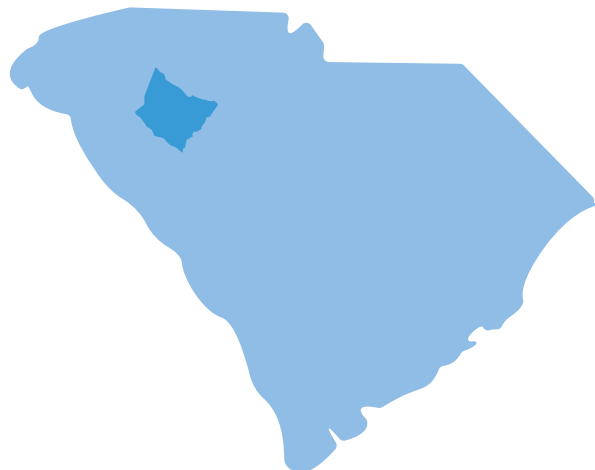
children under 6

51%

of young children live in poverty or low-income households

55%

of kindergarteners are considered "not ready" for school



OUR MISSION

To find and empower parents and caregivers to effectively serve as their child's first teacher, increasing their potential to succeed in school and beyond.



Toni Able Executive Director

Laurens County First Steps has had a remarkable year, characterized by significant progress in our mission to empower parents and caregivers to effectively serve as their child's first teacher, thereby increasing their potential to succeed in school and beyond. Through collaborative partnerships, innovative programs, and a steadfast commitment to early childhood development, we have continued to create a lasting impact in our community.

Program Achievements: This year, Laurens County First Steps served over 1,100 families, providing critical resources and support through home visits, parent education, and early learning initiatives. Our implementation of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library for children zoned for Laurens County School District 56 provided 405 children with books to help to prepare them for academic success. LCFS provided STEAM education programming to 723 children through our childcare providers and child development centers. We are thrilled to bring STEAM back to the classrooms this year for our 3, 4, and 5-year-olds.

Partnerships: We expanded our partnerships with all childcare providers, local schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations, fostering a robust network that allowed us to better address the diverse needs of families. By working together, we can increase access to early childhood education and family support services.

Looking Ahead: As we move forward, Laurens County First Steps remains committed to building on this year's successes. We will continue to adapt and innovate, ensuring that every child in Laurens County can thrive, both in school and in life.

Together, we are building a brighter future for our children and our community.



Kena Cox Board Chair

As Board Chair of Laurens County First Steps, it is with great pride that I reflect on the past year's achievements and the incredible strides we have made in our mission to prepare every child in Laurens County for success in school and beyond.

This year has been one of growth, innovation, and impact. Our dedicated staff, in partnership with all childcare providers, local schools, healthcare providers, and community organizations, has touched the lives of countless families, providing critical early childhood education services and resources. We have expanded access to high-quality early learning programs, offered essential parent education, and delivered much-needed support to families across Laurens County. These efforts have directly contributed to improved kindergarten readiness and greater parental involvement for the children we have served, two pillars of our long-term strategy for empowering children and their families.

Among the many highlights of this year's work, we are especially proud of the success of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library, which has provided hundreds of children age-appropriate books. Thus, increasing pre-literacy and social-emotional skills necessary for a strong start in school. In addition, LCFS, in partnership with the Joe Adair Outdoor Education Center, installed the first ever StoryWalk® Trail. A StoryWalk® Trail is a fun, educational activity that places the pages from a children's story along a trail in a community. It is for children of all levels to enjoy the outdoors and read a book with their family and friends. A StoryWalk® Trail helps build children's interest in reading while encouraging healthy outdoor physical fitness. Local schools, and even childcare providers, can also use this trail for educational and physical fitness purposes.

Partnerships remain at the core of our success. Our collaborations with local stakeholders have allowed us to leverage resources, expand our reach, and address the diverse needs of our community. Whether through our work with local childcare providers, community health agencies, or the many volunteers who lend their time and talents, we have seen the powerful results that come from working together with a shared vision.

Looking ahead, we remain committed to building on this year's successes. We recognize the challenges that still lie ahead—particularly in closing opportunity gaps for our most vulnerable children—but we are confident that through continued collaboration, innovation, and investment in early childhood education, we will rise to meet these challenges. Our children deserve nothing less than our best efforts to provide them with the foundation they need for lifelong success.

On behalf of the entire Board, I want to extend my deepest gratitude to our staff, partners, and supporters for their unwavering commitment to the mission of Laurens County First Steps. It is because of your dedication and passion that we can make a lasting difference in the lives of so many children and families.

Together, we are creating brighter futures for the children of Laurens County.

PROGRAMS

PARENTING

Parents as Teachers

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

16

children served

20

group meetings
and events

215

home visits

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library

Free, high-quality books mailed to the home of children from birth until age five.

431

children served

273

families served

2,570

books distributed

EARLY CARE & EDUCATION

Training & Professional Development

Certified and registered training hours for the early childhood workforce.

2,054

children served

8

providers served

20.5

certified training
hours

Child Care Scholarships

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

16

children served

6

providers served

HEALTH

Reach Out and Read

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

1,422

children served

2,858

book distributed

FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

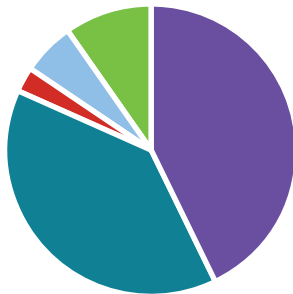


\$1 = \$2.30

Laurens County First Steps leveraged \$222,412.41 from sources outside of state government, providing a match of \$1.30 for every state dollar invested.

EXPENDITURES

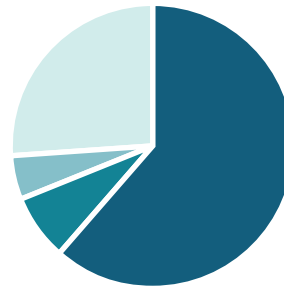
Total: \$446,777.92



- Parenting - \$191,171.47
- Early Care & Education - \$173,816.04
- Health - \$13,030.61
- Administrative - \$26,372.29
- Core Functions - \$42,387.51

FUNDING SOURCES

Total: \$394,096.67



- State Funding - \$171,684.26
- Federal Funding - \$15,604.55
- Private Funding - \$25,277.76
- In-kind Contributions - \$181,530.10

FUNDING SUPPORT BY SOUTH CAROLINA FIRST STEPS

State Education Improvement Act (EIA) Funding
 State READY Funding*
 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

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.

Serving Laurens County's children birth through age five.

"First Steps is a true blessing to our family! They have been great supporters and offered endless help and love to me with my girls years ago and now again to my daughter and granddaughter. I would tell any mother/father needing help to step into their program and expect great things to happen!"

P. Taylor
Laurens County First Steps parent



Our Local Supporters

Angela Compton
Ashley Smith
Betsy Washam
Betty Gardiner
Beverly Powell
Bryan Able
Calvin Whitmire
Carolina Panthers Charities
Donor Advised Fund at the
Foundation for the Carolinas
Childrens Trust of SC
Eddie Marshall
Edith Davis

Elizabeth Able
Elizabeth Washam
Ellenor Holland
Greenville Technical College
Jackie Riegel
James Brown
Janice Farmer
Jen Williams
Jennifer Davis
Jervelle Fort
Kathryn Meadows
Kena Cox
Kerry Stubbs

Laurens County Fair Association
Laurens County Community
Foundation
Laurie Counterman
LaVerne Roberts
Lisa Crisp
Michelle Stallworth
Nancy Watson
Renita Barksdale
Rosemary Patterson
Sandy Cole
Scarlett Moore
Toni Able

Board of Directors

Kena Cox	Michelle Stallworth
Jervell Fort	Amanda Brewington
Laurie Counterman	Janice Farmer
Renita Barksdale	Beverly Powell
J.C. Whitmire	Betsy Washam
Jennifer Davis	Angela Compton
Olivia Crotts	Laverne Roberts

CONTACT US

1029 West Main Street Laurens, SC 29360 | 864-984-8130 | laurensfirststeps.org